

Focus on the Kingdom

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Platonic Christianity (Part 2)

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A Brief Historical Outline of the Platonization of Christianity

Eventually, Christian doctrine was articulated in Platonic terms. For example, we quoted Plato as saying, “The soul is immortal.” This statement comes from the *Handbook of Doctrine* of a prominent evangelical denomination: “The soul is immortal; that is, it will live on after the death of the body.” The same source states, “Death...is the separation of the soul from the body.” Compare Plato’s statement: “Death...is it anything more than the separation of the soul from the body?”

We have attributed the traditional belief in instant heaven and endless hell to Plato’s teaching on the immortality of the soul. Note that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul did not originate with Plato. The ancient civilizations of Egypt and Babylon made provision for the after-death experiences of their deceased, as exemplified by such things as boats, hunting equipment, and provisions in the pyramids.

But earlier than the earliest recorded civilizations we have a documented record of belief in the immortality of the soul — from the first two chapters of the Bible. In the Garden of Eden was a tree called the Tree of Life. This name obviously referred to eternal life (immortality) since they were already living! It is therefore clearer to call it the Tree of Immortality. Confirmation comes from God’s statement that, if they took of the fruit of this tree, they would live forever (Gen. 3:22). Adam and Eve had permission to eat from it. Immortality was available (Gen. 2:8-9).

Did they partake of it? No! When they were cast out of the garden, God placed cherubim at the entrance. They were cast out “Lest [they] take of the Tree of Immortality, and eat, and live forever” (Gen. 3:22). The cherubim were placed at the entrance to guard the way to the Tree of Immortality (v. 24). What could be clearer than the fact that now the opportunity for immortality was forfeited! Not until the “Restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) including Eden will the Tree of Immortality be available again, and given to the “Overcomer” (Rev. 2:7) who will “enter in through the gates into the city and have the right to the Tree of Immortality” (Rev. 22:2, 14).

We have still to identify the originator of the fable that man “will not surely die.” The false assurances came from the mouth of the serpent.

From the Garden of Eden the road of religious philosophy “forked.” Two religious philosophies have been formulated. The first, God’s, stated, “You will surely die” (Gen. 2:17); the second, Satan’s, stated, “You will not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). Every religious system, philosophy, denomination, creed, or cult follows one or the other of these branches of theology: either God’s (man is mortal) or Satan’s (man is immortal). The historical glimpses below will give examples of these choices.

A few followed God’s fork. Consider Abraham who testified, “I am nothing but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27). His philosophy of death, resurrection, and reward is illustrated by his purchase of burial property in the land he is to possess (Gen. 23:4-9). Following his faith and example, Jacob insisted on being buried in the promised land to be ready and on the spot for the resurrection and inheritance (Gen. 49:29-33). Subsequently, Joseph made the children of Israel swear an oath that they would carry his bones back to the promised land, when God opened up the way for their return (Gen. 50:25). We have earlier quoted the testimony of Job (33:4; 27:3; 34:14; 14:12, 14), revealing in a remarkable fashion his clear understanding of the nature of man, of death, and of the future resurrection.

Note now some historical highlights concerning those who chose Satan’s fork. We have already spoken about the early civilizations of Egypt and Babylon. Continuing down this fork, we are told of the “wisdom-lovers” (philosophers) of Greece, including Plato, who admired, studied, then embraced the “wisdom” of Egypt. Soon they were influential proponents of the immortality of the soul, its flight at death to the heavenly realm, and other fallacious outgrowths.

One more item of historical news appears before we actually come to the adoption of Platonism by Christians. Some Jews, God’s own chosen people, followed the wrong fork. The late George Park Fisher, once esteemed professor of Ecclesiastical History at Yale University, makes this observation:

“At Alexandria arose a peculiar type of Jewish theology, in which the Platonic philosophy was curiously blended with Old Testament teaching!”¹

One of the Jewish philosophers influenced by Platonic philosophy was the renowned Philo, who taught in the University of Alexandria:

“blending Plato’s teaching with the doctrine of Moses and the prophets, and producing what is called the ‘Alexandrian theology,’ by which the Old Testament had been made to echo with a modified sound the teaching of the Greek schools of thought.”²

The more contemporary voice of Kenneth Scott Latourette confirms this observation as follows:

“Platonism had a marked influence on Christianity. It entered from many channels, among them the Hellenistic Jew Philo, who was utilized by some early Christian writers.”³

As the Christian community grew in Alexandria, the “Alexandrian theology,” according to Fisher:

“made the first serious attempts among those who adhered to the great facts and truths of the gospel, to adjust the relations of Christian doctrine to reason and philosophy.”⁴

As we move into the second and third centuries of the Christian era, we find Platonism increasingly accepted. The majority of scholars almost unconsciously espoused and taught Platonic doctrine. Mention of two outstanding teachers will help to reinforce the seriousness of the situation. Tertullian (c. 160-230 AD) was a highly educated scholar of Carthage and the first author of significant Christian writings in Latin. Here are his words:

“I may use the opinion of Plato, when he declares that ‘every soul is immortal.’”⁵

Origen (185-254), a pioneer in systematic theology, wrote “Christian Platonists of Alexandria.” How would a treatise on “Christian Platonists of America be received today? According to the *Encyclopedia Americana*, Origen’s “one achievement

was to give philosophy a place in the creeds of the Church.”

Dr. George Park Fisher remarks that Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430), was “steeped in the Platonic spirit.”⁶ The *Encyclopedia Britannica* states:

“His mind was the crucible in which the religion of the New Testament was most completely fused with the Platonic tradition of Greek philosophy.”

His mind was also the conduit by which the product of this “fusion” was transmitted to the Christendoms of medieval Catholicism and Renaissance Protestantism.

The world has expanded considerably, and missionaries, many with Augustine’s Platonic Christianity alloy, have reached its extremities. All around us is heard and read — from pulpit, seminary podium and television; in books, magazines, and Sunday school quarterlies — this very same Platonic Christianity. The fusion of Plato and the Bible, and the diffusion of the alloy thus produced, have resulted in confusion, the appalling ignorance concerning the nature and destiny of man.

Augustine is said to have shaped the basic Western concept of the soul. Since it was thus shaped more than 1500 years ago, is there any hope of reshaping it according to the biblical pattern?

The Seriousness of the Issue

From many aspects we believe that Platonized Christianity is a very serious issue. Its threat to this point has gone largely unheeded. The philosophy of Plato was more to be feared by the Christian Church of the early centuries than was Judaism. Since it constituted the culture of such a high percentage of Christians, it was not likely to be considered an enemy. The last thing we would want to be warned about would be our traditional beliefs. It is hard to admit that we, our parents, our teachers, our textbooks, or our denomination might be wrong.

Paul, who understood this situation perfectly, warned of it specifically: “Beware that no one take you captive through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men” (Col. 2:8).

Paul warned Timothy, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...They will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn to fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). It is astonishing to note how few preachers, teachers, and writers have carefully studied,

¹ George Park Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, 1893, p. 15.

² Ibid., p. 71.

³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 1975, Vol. 1, p. 260.

⁴ Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, p. 122

⁵ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, ch. 3.

⁶ Ibid.

with unbiased mind, such subjects as the nature and destiny of man; the meaning of “soul,” “spirit,” “death”; the intermediate state; the time, place, and nature of the reward of the believer, and the punishment of the lost. Sermons, Sunday school material, magazine articles, Christian books and tapes display this tragic ignorance. In such a situation, what hope has the average Christian, who never studies the Bible for himself but drinks in Platonic philosophy as Gospel truth?

When “blind leaders of the blind” are contacted concerning their unbiblical teaching, they refer to the doctrinal statements of their denomination as the ultimate criteria of truth. We need to write in letters of fire across the evangelical sky, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (Isa. 8:20).

Neglect is serious, leaving us open to error. Note something more serious than neglect. It is the reversal of Scripture to line up with our Platonic theology. Personally we would rather someone neglect what we say than to propagate as from us something we did not say, or even the reverse of what we said. If this is unacceptable on the human level, how can we estimate the gravity of treating Scripture in this fashion? Yet this is done on several basic doctrinal issues.

For example, the Christian is to “Wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:10), but the message of today’s Gospel is to GO to His Son TO heaven (Plato). While we are told specifically, “The dwelling of God will be with men,” Platonic preachers tell us that the dwelling of men will be with God! Apparently rejecting Jesus’ teaching that “The Son of man will come... **then** he will reward each person” (Matt. 16:27), and his message in Revelation 22:12, “Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me,” many departed believers are said to have “gone to their reward”! They are also spoken of as being “with the Lord,” in spite of Paul’s clear statement and his expressed prayer that we “not be ignorant concerning those who are asleep” (1 Thess. 4:13); after which he points out that they and we “will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord [for the first time], and so [at that time] will we ever be with the Lord” (v. 17).

Very little is preached concerning the resurrection of believers at Christ’s return. Since the invention of “heaven,” this is no longer the believer’s greatest anticipation, as it was Paul’s (Phil. 3:10-11). With the emphasis on heaven, the redemption of creation, the “restoration of all things,” has largely faded into insignificance.

The “gospel of heaven” has just about replaced the biblical “Gospel of the Kingdom” which will bring the King back, for “then will the end come” (Matt. 24:14) and the King! Some seem to have little interest in this, so long as they can “make heaven.” Others want to combine the two — let him come back and take us to heaven.

A new philosophy easily identifiable as Platonic teaches that the material, eternal, great planet earth is “not my home; I’m just a-passing through,” and it makes us forget the Creator’s expressed intention. It makes us forget such specific statements as: “He set the earth on its foundations; it cannot be moved” (Ps. 104:5), and Peter’s expressed anticipation that “We are looking forward to renewed heavens and a renewed earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13), as well as his reference to “the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21).

Dr. Eugene E. Carpenter, in an admirable treatise on “Cosmology,” points out:

“As to the original creation, God is its perfect Creator; as to the restoration and redemption of that original creation, he becomes its new Creator or, as more commonly termed, its Redeemer. God’s new creation, as we shall see, is very much related in nature, purpose, and goal to his first creation...God did not create arbitrarily; he created the material in the beginning that would be receptive to his further designs and goals.”⁷

This is indeed a cause for serious concern. Any tradition may be domineering and enslaving. Theological tradition can be an iron fetter. Anthropological, thanatological, and eschatological traditions are like the inner cell of the Philippian jail (Acts 16:24-26) — nothing but an “earthquake” will release us. Experience of a geo-physical or of a mental (theological) earthquake is not very pleasant; but it may have to come.

We need to recognize a milder way whereby God’s truth may enter a prejudiced heart. Just ten verses earlier in this account, and in the same city of Philippi, we read of Lydia “whose heart the Lord opened” (v. 14). This does not suggest an earthquake. It may have been the open-mindedness of the women’s Bible class described in this context which made Lydia willingly yield to the influences of the Holy Spirit, through Paul’s preaching. But there are more cases of hardheartedness and closed-mindedness, requiring an earthquake, than there are of the Lydia type.

⁷ Eugene Carpenter, *Cosmology: A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, 1983, p. 163, 176.

Will Durant in his monumental works accuses Plato of placing man's destiny, the "Ideal State," "somewhere in heaven...eternally with God," or "in perpetual torment with the devil."⁸ No one will deny the "Extent and Dominance" of such beliefs, even if they are unaware of their Satanic origin. Their dominance is further encouraged through their acceptance by such outstanding church leaders as Thomas Aquinas, John Wycliffe, Jan Hus and John Calvin, quoted by Will Durant.⁹ These views are passed down to subsequent generations by preaching (church, radio, TV, tape-ministry), Christian literature (commentaries, Bible notes, stories, allegories), and by an abundance of devotional publications. Christian periodicals abound in Platonic propaganda, but probably the most powerful influence is our hymnology, of which a great percentage of hymns "take us to heaven" in the last verse!

Kenneth Scott Latourette, "prince of church historians," not only emphasizes the effect of Platonism (or Neoplatonism, as it was later called) on Christian theology, but also stated his fear that:

"Much that passes as Gospel has sacrificed the essential features of the Gospel."¹⁰

How can we persist in calling ourselves "Protestant," when we no longer "protest" against the Platonic doctrine of the Church of Rome? Luther points out that it was the Pope, not the Bible, who taught the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. And Adam Clarke, acknowledged "prince of commentators," states that a doctrine that is not found in the Bible is not a biblical doctrine. Yet the editor's preface to his abridged Commentary gives the date when he "left for his eternal reward"! We don't think Adam Clarke found this in the Bible.

Some ignore the issue by refusing literature, ignoring correspondence, or avoiding constructive argument. Others present a lame excuse that they don't believe all that we say or "our interpretation." The fact is that their very words betray them as those who, contrary to the Thessalonians, "when they received the word of God which they heard from us, they received it not as the word of God, which it is in truth, but as the word of men" (see 1 Thess. 2:13).

Another common attitude is procrastination — "A thief of our time, their time, and God's time." They put the pressing issue "on the back burner" and never turn the gas on! They imitate Felix's remark: "When I have a convenient time, I will call for you" (Acts 24:25). It

is taking some people a long time to find a "convenient time"!

Many Christians testify to receiving "fresh light" from the Scriptures very frequently, yet when light on such primordial subjects is revealed to them, they reject it and bring deeper darkness upon themselves, as the Scripture warns: "Walk while you have the light, or darkness will come upon you" (John 12:35).

The form and measure of rejection varies. Some will use strong terms such as "error," "heresy," and "unbiblical," without pointing out what they think is error, let alone discussing it with an open Bible. Others take the time to sincerely list, for example, passages which they think "prove" that we go to heaven, but will not discuss these passages, which are obviously taken out of context and misinterpreted. We suppose that the extreme attitude toward truth-bearers would be the classifying of them as "cultist," sometimes mentioning the very cult they have in mind. Such malediction for such blindness and ignorance.

Summary

When God says, "You are dust," Plato says, "You are spirit," and the Christian Church sides with Plato; when God says, "You will surely die," Plato says, "Is there such a thing as death? Is it anything more than the separation of the soul from the body?" and the Christian Church accepts Plato; when the Bible says that the Christian's future depends on the resurrection, Plato teaches "instant heaven," and the "Christian" creed acknowledges Plato; when Scripture teaches destruction, annihilation of the wicked, Dante passes them through successive phases of endless torment, and the Christian Church accepts Dante; we have, not only an unprecedented, unsurpassingly tragic situation, we have also a challenge!

Note that the prevalence of Platonism represents a failure to heed Paul's warnings against the threatening inroads of Platonic philosophy. It indicates neglect and ignorance of the teaching of Scripture on these particular subjects, related to the nature and destiny of man. It includes the preaching as Gospel truth things which the Scriptures do not say; and many times turning Scripture around to suit popular tradition.

It downgrades the material — the human body, and our eternal, great planet Earth. It denounces truth-bearers as heretics, without being willing to engage in prayerful, open-minded Bible study of the issues under consideration. It replaces the "Gospel of the Kingdom" which will bring back the King, by the Gospel of "heaven." ✧

⁸ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, 1953, Vol. 4, p. 73

⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁰ Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, Vol. 1, p. 122.

A Threat and a Promise

When Jesus embarked on his intensive evangelistic campaign in Galilee in about 27 AD, he summoned his audience to a radical change of heart based on the national belief that God was going to usher in the worldwide Kingdom promised by Daniel and all the prophets. In other words, becoming a Christian *begins* with believing the Gospel about the coming Kingdom (Mark 1:1, 14, 15; Heb. 2:3). Intelligent belief in the promise of the Kingdom is to be the disciple's *first* step, coupled with a major U-turn in lifestyle. In this way men and women can align themselves with God's great purpose for the earth.

The nature of Jesus' activity was that of a herald making a public announcement on behalf of the one God of Israel. The thrust of the message was that each individual should undertake a radical redirection of his life in face of the certainty of the coming Kingdom of God. This was, and still is, the essence of the Christian Gospel. How can it be otherwise, when it is the Gospel message which comes from the lips of the Messiah himself? (Luke 4:43).

It is a matter of common sense to recognize that by using the term "Kingdom of God" Jesus would have evoked in the minds of his audience, steeped as they were in the national hope of Israel, a divine worldwide government on earth, with its capital at Jerusalem. The writings of the prophets, which Jesus as a Jew recognized as the divinely authorized words of God, had promised the arrival of a new era of peace and prosperity. The ideal Kingdom would endure forever. God's people would be victorious on a renewed earth. Peace would extend across the globe (Dan. 2:44; 7:1-27).

Thus to announce the coming of the Kingdom involved both a threat and a promise. To those who responded to the message by believing it and reordering their lives accordingly, there was a promise of a place in the glories of the future divine rule (Rev. 5:10; 1 Cor. 6:2). To the rest the Kingdom would threaten destruction, as God executed judgment upon all found unworthy of entering the Kingdom when it came. This theme governs the whole New Testament. In the light of this primary concept the teaching of Jesus becomes comprehensible. It is an exhortation to win immortality and rulership in the future Kingdom and to escape destruction and exclusion from the Kingdom.

In 1924 P.E. More, a Yale Professor of Church History, complained about "theology's" strange treatment of our Messianic documents:

The "straightforward understanding of Christ's eschatological meaning has not been, and still is not, acceptable to a tender orthodoxy, for the sufficient reason that the promised event did not take place. And so **our commentaries are full of attempts to explain away perfectly clear and concrete statements by allegorizing them into a prophecy of the Church which should gradually extend itself over the world...** From the beginning, when Amos uttered his warning: 'Prepare to meet your God, O Israel,' to the days when St. Paul comforted the Christians who grieved for those who had died before the expected appearance of the Lord, **the note of immediacy is the same. Always the reckoning is at hand...** Paul was merely repeating the eschatology of the prophets, and between him and them Christ uttered exactly the same warning: The kingdom was approaching... **The importance of that continuity cannot be too much emphasized.**"¹¹

Professor More then spoke of the familiar opposition between what has been rather disparagingly called the popular Jewish hope and Christ's supposed insistence on a "spiritual" reign of God in the hearts of men: "There was no such opposition as theology loves to draw. The kingdom preached by Christ was at once **political and spiritual**; and that unquestionably was the form in which it came to him from the moulding hands of prophecy."¹²

Professor Sanders in his well-known *Jesus and Judaism* senses the same tension between the Jewish Jesus and what long-standing non-Messianic tradition has tended to make of him, when he offers us this remarkable admission:

"I am a liberal, modern, secularized Protestant, brought up in a church dominated by low christology and the social gospel. I am proud of the things that that religious tradition stands for. I am not bold enough, however, to suppose that Jesus came to establish it, or that he died for the sake of its principles."¹³

Our biblical heritage continues to urge Bible readers to recognize the Kingdom of Heaven/God in Jesus' Gospel, not as a Gnostic "second level" to which we ascend at death, but as the renewed earth under the leadership of the Davidic Messiah. Such a concrete empire of the future will still be spiritual, just as the risen and immortalized Messiah, invested with a spiritual body, was palpable and enjoyed a breakfast of fish by a lake (John 21:9-14). ✧

¹¹ P.E. More, *The Christ of the New Testament*, Princeton University Press, 1924, p. 67-68.

¹² Ibid., p. 69-70.

¹³ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 1985, p. 334

“The Kingdom will be the LORD’s” (Obadiah 21)

“What fullness of brightest morning glory after a long night of blackest darkness! The kingdom longed for, the kingdom prayed for, the kingdom promised, the kingdom prophesied of, will be the kingdom *come*.

“*The kingdom*. Not many kingdoms, but one. Now there are many, and these diverse from each other, and often at war one with another. The Prophet Daniel spoke of this when he said, ‘The Lord God will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed’ (Dan. 2:44). The fulfillment is presented to us in Rev. 11:15, ‘The seventh angel sounded; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he will reign forever and ever.’

“‘The kingdom will be *the Lord’s*.’ Now the world lies in the wicked one. The kingdom is Satan’s. Look at its sins, its miseries, its darkness, its degradation, its ruin. The kingdom is Satan’s. See the heathen world bowing to wood and stone...Look at the vast millions carried away by the Mohammedan delusion. Turn to the multitudes hardened by Jewish infidelity. View so-called Christendom, with teeming myriads rejecting the truth. See also the millions that have not so much as the profession of any religion. Is not Satan the prince of this world? Is not the great enemy of souls usurping the seat of power?...As we think of the infidelity and ignorance which stalk abroad in the professing Church and in the world; as we think of war and bloodshed deluging the earth; as we think of nations discomfited by the frailties of human governments; as we think of the Church torn by contentions; as we think of Rachels weeping for their lost ones; as we think of the tears which bedew the cheeks of orphans and widows; as we think of the sorrows in our hospitals; as we think of the bitter poverty in our large cities; as we think, too, of the groans of the poor brute creation; and as we think of the sad partings, the great disappointments, the strong animosities, and the cruel wrongs common to earth — shall we not pray for the fulfillment of our text? Shall we not cry, ‘Thy kingdom come’? Shall we not exclaim, with St. John, ‘Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly’? It is a cry for the end of toil, the end of suffering, the end of tears, the end of temptations, the end of sin, the end of gloom, the end of darkness, the end of death. It is a loud cry for the song of heaven to be heard, ‘Now has come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of God, and the power of his Christ.’ It is an earnest longing to join in the Hallelujah chorus of the great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!’”

—*Pulpit Commentary on Obadiah*, 1899

Earnestly Contend for the Truth!

“The great Apostle [Paul] never confines himself to mere positive statements but often indulges, because he feels that he must do so, in arguments, in polemics. I make this point because I think there is a great deal of very loose and very false and flabby thinking on the whole question of polemics and of argumentation at the present time. The attitude of many seems to be, ‘We do not want these arguments. Give us the simple message, the simple Gospel. Give it to us positively, and do not bother about other views.’ It is important that we should realize that if we speak like that we are denying the Scriptures. The Scriptures are full of arguments, full of polemics...

“Disapproval of polemics in the Christian Church is a very serious matter. But that is the attitude of the age in which we live. The prevailing idea today in many circles in the Church is not to bother about these things. As long as we are all Christians, anyhow, somehow, all is well. Do not let us argue about doctrine, let us all be Christians together and talk about the love of God. That is really the whole basis of ecumenicity. Unfortunately, that same attitude is creeping into evangelical circles also and many say that we must not be too precise about these things....‘Ah, but you are beginning to argue now,’ they say. ‘You must not argue, that is upsetting, that is going to divide people.’

“What I am trying to show is that if you hold that view you are criticizing the Apostle Paul, you are saying that he was wrong, and at the same time you are criticizing the Scriptures. The Scriptures argue and debate and dispute; they are full of polemics. You cannot read this Epistle to the Romans, or the Epistle to the Galatians, or indeed any one of these Epistles, without seeing that very clearly. Let us be clear about what we mean. This is not argument for the sake of argument; this is not a manifestation of an argumentative spirit; this is not just indulging one’s own prejudices. The Scriptures do not approve of that, and furthermore the Scriptures are very concerned about the spirit in which one engages in discussion. No man should like argument for the sake of argument. We should always regret the necessity; but though we regret and bemoan it, when we feel that a vital matter is at stake we must engage in argument. We must ‘earnestly contend for the truth,’ and we are all called upon to do that by the New Testament. The Apostle Paul thanks the members of the church at Philippi, and thanks God for them, because they have stood with him from the very beginning in the ‘declaration and defense of the truth.’ And there is nothing that is so utterly contrary to the New Testament method as to say, ‘Let us be positive, let us forget the negatives, let us never argue about these things.’ While men and women are

not clear in their minds as to the truth, while they are liable to be carried away by that which is false, we must contend for the truth; we must engage in the type of argumentation that we have illustrated.”

— Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: Atonement and Justification*, 1971, p. 113-114

Comments

• “Both July and August issues are great. Surprising sound doctrine coming forth. I should rather say, staying sound. My start in the Kingdom message started with those that know who true Israel is in the past, present and future. The older leaders have died out and a new crop of maligners has come in, bringing in various other doctrines and most often switching the Kingdom message to a Preterist position. Very saddening, but it is reality and I’ve seen it happen over the past forty plus years. The instructions of Proverbs 23:23: ‘Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding’ has gotten lost in that field of once understanding the true message. May the Father bless and protect you in this world that has truly gone insane.” — *Canada*

• “I came to accept Jesus as my King and saviour in my late thirties. I have been associated with Quaker, Brethren, Baptist and reformed churches. I had always been uncomfortable with the Trinity doctrine, but it didn’t cause any serious issues until I was in membership with an independent reformed church. I wondered how ‘reformed’ a church was that still clung to Catholic/Platonic creeds! The controversy that followed resulted in myself and my wife being forced out. I am currently in a Baptist church which, although Trinitarian, seems nominally so, as no one talks about it much, and I don’t think anyone understands it anyway. My experience with the reformed church caused me to do some research into Trinitarian thinking, and this is where I found the Restoration Fellowship website which proved very helpful. It seems to me that Scripture nowhere teaches a Trinitarian doctrine; it is inferred from selected scriptures. A more natural reading of Scripture speaks of Jesus as God’s Son, especially those verses which describe the Father as the God of Jesus. As for non-scriptural efforts to describe the doctrine: 1+1+1=1? ‘Three who’s in one what’ (four entities?) Surely in that way madness lies. I commend Restoration Fellowship for its anchor in Scripture and your readiness to engage with criticism and alternate views instead of ‘cancelling’ them. Surely this is the way to win people over. This is what Jesus did; He listened with respect and then backed up the truth with Scripture. Thank you for the magazine, the YouTube presence and the work that Carlos puts into that.” — *England*

• “I conclude that you are not among those who say the kingdom of God is already here on earth. The world sure doesn’t look or behave like God’s Kingdom is here...and neither do those who claim that it is here, even those who say it’s here in a spiritual sense disconnected from reality. But the kingdom is a time of universal peace that will reflect something of God’s glory when creation is restored to what God always intended it to reflect. It’s a beautiful hope.” — *Washington*

• “I was raised as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The trauma I had experienced as a child coupled with their claim to be God’s mouthpiece on earth caused me to lose my faith in my early 20’s. I dove headfirst into the world with a chip on my shoulder towards Christianity, treating sin like a bucket list. I spent the entire duration of my 20’s progressively getting more and more corrupt as I chased the things of this world, and little by little those things made me feel emptier and more depressed than I ever had been before. In the beginning of 2021 I sank into a deep depression as my second marriage was falling apart and I started to recognize my need for God. I was truly spiritually bankrupt and I said to myself, ‘If God isn’t real, there is no hope for me.’ The year that followed was the darkest of my life as I began a desperate scramble to search for spiritual truth. I unfortunately sought that out through witchcraft. When I realized the powers I was dealing with were demonic, the spiritual reality of life came crashing down on me. I prayed to God to save me from the evils I had brought upon myself, began reading the Bible and seeking Him and haven’t turned back since. I got baptized in the summer of 22, at which point God helped me overcome my addictions to a host of ungodly things I had become a slave to. I spent 6 months in a Trinitarian church as I continued my first read-through of the Bible, learning all the doctrines of ‘non-denominational’ Christianity. It was during my second read-through as I studied deeper that the Bible started to become increasingly confusing to me. The more I read it, the less it made sense. This went on for a few weeks before I realized what was getting in the way. The Trinity isn’t in there. Since then I have spent the duration of 2023 deconstructing all the false doctrines the church taught me (immortality of the soul, eternal torture, etc.) and have grown more spiritually on my own than I ever did in church. My search for fellow believers who see the truth as I do is what led me to Restoration Fellowship and others.” — *Colorado*

• “I cannot adequately express my thanks in words to you and Kegan Chandler through your writings for exhorting and encouraging us to keep on! At times I get to feeling low, and you send *Focus on the Kingdom* to perk me up again. That means more to me than I am able to express.” — *Philippines*