

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## Tithing in Scripture

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**I**s tithing commanded in Scripture? Absolutely — If you are one of the children of the nation of Israel under the old covenant. So what about those of us in the new covenant in Christ? Is it commanded of us?

First, let's examine the difference between a tithe and an offering or love offering, and why tithes existed. Deuteronomy 14:22-29 is probably the best explanation in the Scriptures to start with. The word "tithe" in Hebrew means "tenth," and as the above passage indicates, it was grain, oil, wine, and animals (herds and flocks) — i.e., meat, *not* money. The entire purpose of the tithe is found in verses 27-29: to provide for the Levites (who had no inheritance), and the stranger, orphan, and widow (who would obviously be lacking too). Examine a map of ancient Israel's tribes divided in the Promised Land, and you will note that there was no land for the tribe of Levi.

Deuteronomy 18:1-6 gives further instruction, and verse 5 points out the purpose of the concept well: God chose the Levites to minister in God's name. If we think of all the duties the Levites had back then under the old covenant law (cleansing, ceremonial temple or tabernacle duties, healing, animal sacrifices, etc.), it was a full-time job. Even singers and gatekeepers received tithes (see Neh. 10:38-39, 12:44, and 13:3-5, 10-13). Numbers 18:20-30 is useful too, in showing that even the Levites offered a tenth of the tithe (or tenth of the tenth) in a raised offering to God.

There is no modern Levite/Priest who needs our income to survive because of their lack of inheritance in the land. Instead, just as the priesthood was the Levites in ancient Israel under the Law, today the priesthood is those of us walking holy and blameless before God in Christ today, or as Peter said in 1 Peter 2:5-9, we are "living stones" (part of the temple of which Christ is the cornerstone); we are a "holy priesthood"; now we offer "spiritual sacrifices" to God through Jesus. And why do we do this? The answer is in verses 9-10: "so that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." This centers directly on the Gospel, and the question is: Do we as this priesthood need to receive people's money to offer these sacrifices and proclamations? Do we need to give

money to fund a building with electricity, air conditioning, carpets, etc., when the Almighty does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48)?

As we obtained mercy for our past sins, and grace or favor/help to overcome temptation so that we no longer continue in sin as a child of God, we are no longer in darkness but walk in light. Is not 100% of our "time, talents, and treasures," as some say, the Lord's, and aren't we willing to give all, not just 10%? Should we not give this "all" as His Spirit leads, *not* as directed by some religious person or pastor? Many try to guilt people out of money by using Malachi 3:8: "Will a man rob God?" sermons, to convince people that they are sinning if they don't give 10% of their paycheck to a building/congregation/pastor, etc. An examination of the context in Malachi will show that much of God's rebuke was against the priests, and it was meat, not money, that they were to bring into the storehouse.

But shouldn't we give to those in need? Certainly! We are more than happy to help those in need, or a missionary or evangelist who lives and preaches the true Gospel of the Kingdom foundation and true Christ (2 Tim. 2:19: "turn away from evil"), but we should refuse to support a missionary or a congregation who preaches the wrong Gospel that comforts those in sin, or has no faith in God's power over sin for our individual lives. This is difficult to decipher, and one should err on the side of caution, giving only when the Spirit shows us the true Gospel being preached, and give as much as God leads.

Freewill or love offerings from a willing heart are what God wants from His children today. Even for the widow and her two mites, the context of Luke 21:4 is "put in offerings" in Jesus' own words (Mark says "the offering box," Mark 12:41). So it wasn't a "tithe." It could have been comparable to Exodus 25:1-9, where even the first tabernacle received "gold, silver, and bronze," but note that verse 2 calls it an "offering," not a tithe, and it is "willingly with his heart" that everyone should give. As Exodus 35:21 states, "everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing."

Even the temple tax, Jesus (and Peter) paid "**so that we don't offend them**" (Matt. 17:27). This doesn't mean we need to cater to every religious person's demands though; as Jesus said in response to the disciples' claim that the Pharisees were "offended," we should "leave them alone. They are blind leaders of the

blind. And if a blind person leads a blind person, then they will both fall into a pit" (Matt 15:14).

I have seen terrible examples of the mishandling of money. I saw one pastor fleece his congregation relentlessly for months to pay for a "better" plot of land in the town more centrally located "for the people" to meet more "conveniently." After over a million dollars, it was reasoned, they would have their new land and building built. Another pastor was much more frugal. His congregation met in a movie theater, yet he pushed for tens of thousands of dollars for a sound and video system so that his image and words (sermons) could be projected to an additional theater across the hallway when the congregation grew larger. In both situations, it was justified, of course, as an "act of worship," and as a means to "further the gospel" more adequately. How craftily Satan disguises appeals to the flesh!

Traveling from city to city in Asia and Greece was undoubtedly costly, and collections were certainly taken up for this and other gifts to other cities in need, such as the collection for the saints in Jerusalem in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 (see also 2 Cor. 9). But Paul was not, "as so many, peddling the word of God" (2 Cor 2:17); in other words, marketing it for profit, as we see happen in our day as well.

It is clear that Paul and others believed in working a trade (Acts 18:1-3), his own hands providing necessities (Acts 20:33-35). He was no hypocrite, as he exhorted others to work with their own hands to have "something to give those who are in need" (Eph 4:28). See also 1 Thessalonians 4:11. In Thessalonica, Paul and the others apparently did not "eat anyone's food free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day" so as not to be a burden, and to be an example (2 Thess. 3:8). Do we see any suggestion of any tithing here?

Some suggest that tithing is just a good principle based on Scripture and the old covenant, and that God will bless us for doing it. After all, they reason, even before the Law, Abraham and Jacob paid tithes, didn't they? Yes, they did. Abraham gave Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, king of Salem, king of peace, king of righteousness, a tithe, or tenth of all (see Heb. 7:1-2). A careful look at Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7 shows that this was "of the spoils" of war, and that the Hebrew writer mentions it *not* to command tithing under the new covenant (as many suggest from 7:9-10), but to show the superiority of Jesus' priesthood in the order of Melchizedek, over the Levitical priesthood in the order of Aaron under the Law (as verses 7:11-19 show).

And Jacob, after his dream of the ladder to heaven in Genesis 28, awoke and made a vow to God based on the promise God gave him in his dream, to "surely give a tenth to You" (verses 20-22). Under the Law, the Pharisees tithed "mint, dill and cumin" according to

Jesus who stated they still "ought to have done" this, without neglecting justice, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23). But his point was to show that they lacked the weightier matters of the Law, not to teach tithing under the new covenant.

So will God bless us for it as a principle? Well, God loves a non-grudging, cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7), and it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35); we should clothe the naked, feed the hungry (Matt. 25:35-36); care for orphans and widows (James 1:27); give material possessions to Christian brothers and sisters in need (1 John 3:17), giving well beyond 10% as the Spirit leads, and we will indeed be blessed (mostly non-materially). "So then, whenever we have an opportunity we should do good to all, especially to those of the family of the faith" (Gal. 6:10). Just keep in mind two things:

1) People need more than a physical drink when thirsty. They need the water that becomes in them a spring welling up to the life of the age to come (John 4:14); they need to know how to take up their cross and overcome every temptation; to treasure the words of God's mouth more than necessary food (Job 23:12). As a brother once said, "Those we are feeding will eventually die. What spiritual food are they getting?" Do they have the same food as Jesus, to "do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34)?

2) *Don't* believe that a new covenant child of God is required to give 10% of their income to some "official" organization by some command of God, despite some pastors saying "God said..." And *don't* strengthen the hand of the wicked (see Ezek. 13:22-23), financially or ideologically, by supporting the growing, false church system which seems to spread either legalistic traditions of men as God's commands, or its cheap grace and easy-believe doctrines, its forgiveness without true repentance false "gospel." ✧

## The Obedience of Faith

Disobedience is "refusing to believe the Christian message (*kerygma*); for **faith is obedience to the divinely appointed order of salvation**. Hence 'disobeying' (*apeithein*) often stands in **antithesis** to 'believing' (*pisteuein*), Acts 14:1ff; 1 Pet. 2:7ff; John 3:36. **Disobedience is also synonymous with unbelief** (*apistia*)...We may have disobedience to the word (1 Pet. 2:8; 3:1), disobedience to the Gospel (1 Pet. 4:17), disobedience to the Son (John 3:36)" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 6, p. 11).

## Faith, Works, and Doctrine

My purpose in this short article is to bring some clarity to the popular discussion about how we are to be saved. The use of certain “buzz words” tends to cloud otherwise simple issues. “Doctrine” is often thought of today as a bad word. But the word really means nothing else than “teaching.” If “teaching” is a bad thing, then Jesus was at fault when he told the church to go and “teach everything that he taught” (Matt. 28:19-20). “Doctrine” is therefore a most essential and biblical concept. The whole Bible is a teaching and therefore a doctrinal book. One has only to look up the scores of references to “preaching” and “teaching” (these two words are not clearly distinguished in meaning in the NT) to see that without such doctrinal activities there would be no Christian faith.

“Heresy” in the NT is simply false teaching, which causes a division in the united church. Peter says, “There will be **false teachers** among you who bring in destructive **heresies**” (2 Pet. 2:1). When Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets” (Matt. 7:15), he could just as well have said, “Beware of those who teach falsehood or heresy.”

It is popular today to decry “proof-texting.” This usually actually means, “I don’t like the way you are using the texts of Scripture to prove your point.” Anyone who teaches from the Bible uses texts to prove his assertions. The Bible writers did it all the time. Look for example at Hebrews 1 where a whole lot of “proof-texts” are used to support an argument about the role of the Messiah.

It is also popular today to say that the early Christians had very little systematized doctrine. Scholars recognize this to be untrue. Paul speaks about “the **standard** of sound words” which Timothy was to hold on to (2 Tim. 1:13). This word means “pattern,” “form” or “shape.” It signifies a system. It is hard to see how any unified system of teaching can proceed if there is no recognized standard. When the Bible writers speak of “knowing **the truth**” (1 Tim. 4:3) or “coming to a knowledge of **the truth**” (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7), they obviously have a certain body of Christian information and teaching in mind (see synonyms p. 4).

We sometimes hear that “propositional” theology is a bad thing. The cry is for “heart knowledge,” not “head knowledge.” The distinction between head and heart reflects the vocabulary of our western world, but not that of the Bible, where the heart is often a synonym for what we call the mind. All propositions in the Bible are addressed to the whole person. Belief and faith are inevitably based on some propositions to be believed. Believing propositions inevitably involves the intellect (often another “dirty” word in the contemporary

discussion). But Jesus’ purpose was to give us “an **understanding**” in order that we know God (1 John 5:20). No wonder Jesus rejoiced that the disciples were those to whom “**the knowledge** of the revealed secrets of the Kingdom of God” had been given (Matt. 13:11).

We often hear that “works” play no part in salvation. This statement contradicts what James said: “You see that a person is made right by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). James was an immensely important person in the early church. Having known Jesus as his half-brother, he was well placed to speak for him. Jesus taught that failure to use one’s talent for him results in exclusion from salvation (Matt. 25:25-30). Notice that it was Christian talent which went unused. Insofar as the use of talent is “work,” it follows that without such work you cannot be saved. Paul also said that failure to measure up to certain standards results in exclusion from salvation (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5; Gal. 5:21). It is by “patient continuance in doing what is good” that we will enter the Kingdom of God (Rom. 2:7). Doing well certainly implies work. It is by grace that we are empowered to do work for God.

I suspect that a lot of the confusion in the contemporary debate stems from a confusion of biblical dogmas and post-biblical dogmas. By “dogma” I mean a firm basic creedal statement. The Bible is full of dogma in this sense. When Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah, it was on this confessional, doctrinal statement that Jesus said he would found his church (Matt. 16:16).

In post-biblical times a lot of dogmas were introduced which were not based on the Bible. These were false dogmas which cannot be found in the Bible. “The doctrine of the Trinity,” says *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (1993) “cannot be clearly detected in the canon of Scripture.” The idea that man is immortal and survives as a disembodied soul at death is another unbiblical dogma, often thought to be Christian, while it is actually Platonic and philosophical in origin. The teaching that the church is to be led by a single “monarchical” pastor, rather than a plurality of experienced “elders/pastors” is also not found in Scripture. It dates along with other “dogmas” from the second century.

Christians cannot shirk the responsibility of believing the right “doctrines.” The alternative to believing true teachings is to believe false ones. The mind cannot be a vacuum. Paul knew well that creed leads to conduct. Creed is most important and is integrally related to the right Christian walk. Paul believed that failure to believe Truth was the same as unrighteousness and wickedness (2 Thess. 2:12). How important then is Truth?

The only right place to start in the quest for Truth and true teaching is the teaching of Jesus himself. The

constitution of the New Testament church goes back to Jesus and the traditions inherited from him (Heb. 2:3; 1Tim. 6:3; 2 John 7-9). Jesus has the final word in the debate about what we should do to be true disciples. He began by commanding “repentance and belief in the Gospel about the Kingdom of God” (Mark 1:1, 14-15). This was an urgent call for a wholehearted response to a proposition which demanded intelligent belief and action. Jesus did not call for a vague change of heart in regard to certain sins. He called for belief in a specific Gospel Message about the Kingdom of God. This pattern of preaching was carefully followed by the New Testament church. They had a well-recognized pattern of instruction (not steamrolled into a written code which had to be followed like a rule-book). The basis of New Testament teaching is summarized in a form which some scholars recognize as an early creed: “When they believed Philip as he proclaimed the Gospel about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus the Messiah, they were being baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Baptism in water was of course an essential part of the pattern of apostolic teaching. It was commanded by Jesus and, following him, by Peter (Matt. 28:19; Acts 10:48). After the Gentiles received the gift of the spirit, Peter was unable to stand in God’s way (Acts 10:47; 11:17). That is why he proceeded to baptize them as a sign of their membership in the body of Christ.

It is good for us to remember that evangelism as done by Paul involved a lot of “proof-texting,” the use of Scripture to explain, even argue the faith. Note a typical example of what Paul did in Rome for two years. Paul “solemnly testified about the Kingdom of God and tried to persuade them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the prophets from morning till evening. And some were won over to his point of view, but others **would not believe**” (Acts 28:23-24). This tells us what it means to believe: to be won over to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles about the Kingdom of God.

Notice what an excellent model of service Paul presents. He followed his master, the lord Jesus exactly: “Jesus welcomed them and began speaking about the Kingdom of God” (Luke 9:11). “Paul welcomed everyone who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the lord Jesus Messiah” (Acts 28:31). The Kingdom of God Gospel was the same message for Jews and Gentiles alike (Acts 28:28).

Who can say that “doctrine” is unimportant? The question is, are we teaching and believing the *right* teachings, those which originated with Jesus and his preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43, etc.)? ✧

## Synonyms for the Whole Body of Established Christian Doctrine in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus

(Note that Christian teaching is not just one doctrine, not a single issue!)

### The defining text:

1 Tim. 6:3: “**Health-giving words – namely the teachings given by our lord Jesus Messiah**” = the **Gospel about the Kingdom**

### Synonyms:

**The faith:** 1 Tim. 1:2; 1:19; 3:13; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10; 6:12; 6:21; 2 Tim. 3:8; 4:7; Titus 1:1; 1:4; 1:13; 3:15

**The truth:** 1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5; 2 Tim. 2:18; 2:25; 3:7-8; 4:4; Titus 1:1; 1:14

**The health-giving (sound) teaching** (or words): 1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 1:13; 2:1-2; 2:8 (sound message)

**The revealed truths** (mystery) of the faith: 1 Tim. 3:9; 3:16

**The Gospel of the glory of God** = the Gospel of the **Kingdom** of God: 1 Tim. 1:11

**The Gospel:** 2 Tim. 1:8; 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2:8

**The word (Gospel) of the truth:** 2 Tim. 2:15

**The word (Gospel) of God:** 2 Tim. 2:9; Titus 2:5

**The word (Gospel):** 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:3; 1:9

**The words of the faith and good doctrine:** 1 Tim. 4:6

**The standard (pattern) of health-giving words:** 2 Tim. 1:13

**The treasure (deposit) entrusted to you:** 2 Tim. 1:14 (see also v. 12: “what has been **entrusted** to me” and 1 Tim. 1:11, 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:3)

**The teaching of God:** Titus 2:10

**The teaching** (“Christian teaching,” NET Bible): 1 Tim. 6:1

## Everything Sad Is Going to Come Untrue

“In J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, when Samwise Gamgee wakes up having been rescued from the fires of Mount Doom and he sees Gandalf still alive, he realizes what has happened. He says, ‘Gandalf, I thought you were dead. But then I thought I was dead. **Is everything sad going to come untrue?**’

“**The whole Bible** says that’s essentially what Jesus is going to do in the end. We’re not going to be taken out of this world into heaven, but heaven is going to come down...to renew this world. Every tear will be wiped away. In essence, **everything sad is going to come untrue. That’s what he came to do.**” [See Luke 4:43]

— Timothy Keller, *Encounters with Jesus*, 2015, p. 64-65

## The Kingdom of God Will Be Revealed

The following passages of Scripture have an illuminating comment in the Jewish Targums (commentaries), showing that the Kingdom of God was expected as a divine intervention at the end of the age. As *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says, “The words ‘The Lord shall be King’ are translated in the Targum, ‘**The Kingdom of God shall be revealed**’; and the ancient liturgy culminates in the prayer that ‘God may establish His Kingdom speedily’ (Kaddish prayer).”<sup>1</sup> This throws light on Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:1, 14-15, etc.). It also echoes the Lord’s Prayer, which is Kingdom-centered and reminds us of 1 Chronicles 29:10-13.

**Exodus 15:18:** “The Lord will reign forever and ever.” *The Kingdom of God will be revealed.*

**Isaiah 24:23:** “The moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the Lord of Hosts will reign on Mount Zion in Jerusalem in the presence of His assembly, in majestic splendor.” *The Kingdom of God will be revealed.*

**Isaiah 31:4:** “The Lord of Hosts will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its hill.” *The Kingdom of God will be revealed.*

**Isaiah 40:9:** “Go up on a high mountain, bearer of Good News to Zion. Shout out loudly, bearer of Good News to Jerusalem. Shout, don’t be afraid! Say to the towns of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’” *The Kingdom of God will be revealed.*

**Isaiah 52:7:** “How delightful it is to see approaching over the mountains the feet of a messenger who announces peace, a messenger who brings Good News [Gospel], who announces deliverance, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” *The Kingdom of God is revealed.*

**Ezekiel 7:7, 10:** “Doom is coming upon you who live in the land. The time is coming; the Day is near” (cp. Mark 1:14, 15). *The Kingdom of God is revealed.*

**Obadiah 21:** “Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion in order to administer Esau’s mountain, and the Kingdom will be the Lord’s.” *The Kingdom of the Lord will be revealed upon all inhabitants of the earth.*

**Micah 4:7-8:** “I will make the lame into a remnant, and those far off into a mighty nation. The Lord will reign over them on Mount Zion from that day forward and forever. As for you, tower for the flock, fortress of Daughter Zion, your former dominion will be restored, the sovereignty that belongs to Daughter Jerusalem.” *The Kingdom of God will be revealed.*

**Zechariah 14:9:** “The Lord will then be king over all the earth. In that Day the Lord will be seen as the only one, and His name the only one.” *The Kingdom of God will be revealed.*<sup>2</sup> ✧

## God’s Heart

The Bible presents God as “the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loyal love and truth, who keeps loyal love for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. Yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” (Exod. 34:6-7).

God, in the Bible, has a heart which is the center of His personality, His character and mind. We, too, made in His image, have a heart, which is equivalent to our inner man, the control center of our being.

God’s heart or mind is very close in meaning to God’s spirit. The spirit is in our heart (2 Cor. 1:22) and it is a downpayment, a first installment and guarantee, a pledge of a much greater amount of spirit which will be ours at the resurrection. Paul several times refers to the holy spirit as a downpayment. It is a business term transferred to God’s precious gift to Christians who have believed in the Gospel of the Kingdom and the truth about Jesus and have been baptized (Acts 8:12).

A Christian is to share God’s heart and spirit. That spirit, mind and heart is revealed to us in the pages of the Bible, which is God’s love letter to the human race. God extends His spirit to us and works with us to form godly thinking and character. We must think right before we act right. Genesis 6:5 tells us that “the wickedness of humankind had become great on the earth. Every inclination of **the thoughts of their hearts** [minds] was only evil all the time.” It is in our heart that we make our plans and do our thinking. Notice God’s reaction to the rampant evil on earth at the time of the flood. “The Lord regretted that He had made humankind on the earth, and He was grieved in His **heart**” (Gen. 6:6). We all remember that the New Testament warns us not to grieve the **spirit** of God (Eph. 4:30). This shows us an important link between the heart and the spirit.

<sup>1</sup> “Kingdom of God,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1901.

<sup>2</sup> See also Ps. 22:28; 29:10; 103:19; 145:11-13; Dan. 4:3 (Dan. 2:44; 7:14, 18, 22, 27).

When Solomon dedicated his great temple God promised to put His name, His eyes, and His heart there perpetually (1 Kings 9:3). God's presence and His interest and attention would be focused on the Temple. Today the church of baptized believers in the Kingdom Gospel teaching of Jesus receives God's constant attention. His heart and His spirit are with us.

God's plans and purposes are formed in His heart. In 2 Kings 10:30 Yahweh says to Jehu: "Because you have done well in performing what is right in My eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to **everything that was in My heart**, your sons to the fourth generation will sit on the throne of Israel."

God's thoughts reveal His great plan for us personally and for the world — what we might call God's "Operation Kingdom." God has intended from the beginning to restore peace to our tortured earth. This will eventually occur when Jesus comes back to rule and reign with his saints in the Kingdom on earth (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10; 1 Cor. 4:8; 6:2). Adam failed, and Jesus, the second Adam, is repairing that failure.

God's innermost thoughts are revealed to us believers through the medium of the spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:9 Paul speaks of "things that no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, things which have not occurred to human minds; all these God has prepared for those who love Him." Then he says that God has revealed these hidden secrets to us "through the spirit, because the spirit searches all things, even the depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Receiving the spirit, Paul goes on to say, enables us to "know the things that are graciously given to us by God...But the unconverted person [the person whose mind has not been touched by the spirit of God] does not accept the things of the **spirit** of God...and he cannot understand them. For 'Who has known the **mind** of the Lord, so as to teach Him?' But we have the **mind** of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:12-16).

Paul was impressed with that verse in Isaiah 40:13 (he quoted it also in Rom. 11:34). Isaiah had spoken of the **spirit** of God as containing God's thoughts and plans. Now Paul says that being a Christian means having access to that treasure house of knowledge. Christians can actually know the **mind** of God — His **spirit**. (God's spirit and the Messiah's spirit interchange here as in Rom. 8:9-11). God's heart is thus exposed to us. God takes us into His confidence and speaks "heart to heart," "spirit to spirit" with His children. This is what all good fathers do.

If the heart of God is parallel to the mind and spirit of God, it is easy to understand how one day God is going to give Israel "a new heart and a new spirit...I will put My spirit within you" (Ezek. 36:26-27). At that time Israel will become submissive to their God.

Meanwhile Christians must also undergo a renewing of the mind which enables us to know the will of God (Rom 12:2). We are to be a new creation under the influence of divine spirit, which is the heart of God Himself, the extension of His personality and His operational presence among us.

God desires "truth in the innermost part," so that we should "know wisdom." God intends to create a clean heart and a new spirit through the presence of His spirit with us. Then we will be able to teach wrongdoers God's ways (Ps. 51:6, 10-13).

"The plan of the Lord stands forever; the **plans of His heart** from generation to generation" (Ps. 33:11). God's plans or thoughts "are very deep" (Ps. 92:5), but they are accessible to us through His spirit. No wonder then that "Wisdom" — God in His wisdom — calls out to people: "I will pour out **my spirit** on you; I will make **my words** known to you" (Prov. 1:23). The New Covenant is Jesus promise to "**covenant** a Kingdom to us as God **covenanted** the Kingdom to him." That is genuine Christianity!

What a blessing to be able to share the mind of God by knowing what is in His heart. Christians are those who have "the **mind** of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). God and His Son, of course, think alike (John 10:30). ✧

### A Useful Definition of Holy Spirit

The Spirit "is not merely God's breath, but his self-awareness, his mind, his inner being. This may be the source or seat of God's vitality, but it is more. It is his self-consciousness, his very being, the center of his 'person,' as we might say. Just as a man's spirit is his ultimate reality, when he is stripped of all that is accidental to his being, so God's Spirit is his inner self" (Cyril Richardson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 1958, p. 50).

*The spirit of God is not a "third person," but God or Jesus in their operational presence.*

### The Immortality of the Soul

"Perhaps the biggest obstacle to our seeing the judgment of Jesus as the grand sacrament of vindication is our **unfortunate preoccupation with the notion of the immortality of the soul**. The doctrine is a piece of non-Hebraic philosophical baggage with which we have been stuck ever since the church got out into the wide world of Greek thought. Along with the concomitant idea of 'life after death,' it has given us almost nothing but trouble: both concepts militate against a serious acceptance of the resurrection of the dead that is the sole basis of judgment.

"Consider their effects. If you take the view that there is some imperishable part of you that will go on willy-nilly after you die, you come up with two pieces

of bad news. On the one hand, if you think that your immortal soul is all covered with dirty deeds from its trip through life, you are forced to conclude that it will come before Jesus at the last day in very unforgivable shape indeed: the resurrection will give you back your body, but you will still be as guilty as ever in your soul... On the other hand, if you think your immortal soul is squeaky clean and needs only fitting out with a new body to do it justice, you make Jesus practically unnecessary. What do you need him for? All he becomes on that basis is some kind of celestial mechanic who bolts new bodies onto old souls....

“But if you are willing at least momentarily to suspend your attachment to the idea of a soul that lives after death, you will finally be able to see the Good News, which is that Jesus came to raise the dead. Not just dead bodies, but dead souls as well...”

“And that... is why we look forward with joy to his coming — why we are able to stand with confidence at his *parousia*. By the power of the Resurrection who works in our total death, none of our garbage goes with us into the new creation. Lose your immortal soul, then, and you’ll get an everlasting life that’s worth living.”

— Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of Judgment*, 1993, p. 71-72

## The Kingdom Will Be a Place!

“Since [Jesus] gave no explanation of the meaning of the kingdom in His early proclamation, it seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus assumed that His audience knew the meaning of this term...”

“While it is common to point to the root meaning of [kingdom], that is, to the **abstract concept of kingship or reign**, as the meaning of ‘kingdom’ in Jesus’ proclamation, both the Old Testament prophecies and the statements of the angel and of Zacharias [Luke 1:32-33, 71, 77] **prohibit such a limited meaning**. Moreover, it is **impossible** to reduce the kingdom concept to the idea of dominion or reign without including the *realm* in which that reign is exercised. Ridderbos declares such a limitation ‘untenable, for the reason that in the nature of the case a dominion to be effective must create or maintain a **territory** where it can operate. So the absence of any idea of a **spatial kingdom** [a place!] would be very strange.’”

— Robert Saucy, “The Presence of the Kingdom and the Life of the Church,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Jan-Mar 1988, p. 33

## Comments

• “I really enjoyed the article about repentance (October). This is a topic that is vital because salvation and forgiveness are fundamentally relational, not a cold

bureaucratic transaction. Much of the current salvation teaching avoids repentance because it is wrongly categorized as ‘works.’ There is such an aversion to works that people are afraid of the topic. Thank you for the effort to put out the monthly paper.” — *Texas*

• “I want to express my thanks to you for your teachings I have recently come across online, and they have been a blessing. I’ve been a committed Christian for just over 2 years. I’ve been in the Church of England, then the Seventh Day Adventist church and 12 months ago started attending a reformed evangelical church. But then 2 months ago I started to question the doctrine of the Trinity and came across your videos and J. Dan Gill and others. Now I have come to a personal realisation after studying, and have now rejected the Trinity and become a biblical unitarian. So I have now left my Trinity teaching church. I have never heard till recently anything about the Gospel of the Kingdom. What a joy and hope I found in the Kingdom message and the millennium hope.” — *England*

• “I have been challenged by the lectures on ‘Platonic Christianity’ by Edward Acton (August and September). I set about on a Google search trying to find a book or ‘Cliff notes’ version of Plato’s writings, only to discover he had ‘conversations.’ I’m rereading your *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven* book. It seems like I’ve spent the last several years ‘recalibrating’ my faith. Just as public education today is simple indoctrination, it seems like much of church is indoctrination vs. Christian education. It’s just a matter of a handful of verses to support a favored doctrine, as opposed to a comprehensive Genesis to Revelation to build an entire biblical context. Once again thanks for your dedication to true scholarship!” — *Missouri*

• “We are continuously enjoying our study of the Scriptures through the benefit of *The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation: New Testament with Commentary*. Indeed this is the only version of the Sacred Scriptures in existence today that has a vocabulary and grammar system that are consistent throughout and defending the biblical unitarian doctrine. What a flood of light is shed when it is recognized for what it is in its microscopic perfection as found in the original languages of inspiration. I thank God for this unitarian version (truly what we need in these times of much apostasy and error). With real gratitude to God, we join you in the blessed charge to make known the truth of the Gospel of Kingdom of God and the amazing truth of the biblical unitarian doctrine of God as they are faithfully found in the Scriptures. We truly count it a great privilege to extend the Restoration Fellowship witness here in our areas. To God’s Name alone be all the glory.” — *Philippines*