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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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The “Dirt” about the Earth

by Barbara Buzzard¹

One might ask what on *earth* I am talking about! I am talking about the very dirt under our feet — i.e. the earth.

There are well over forty Scriptures to confirm what this article says about the earth. The word “earth” has several synonyms: soil, clay, turf, ground, sod, land, dust, and of course *dirt*. And now as you see from my title, “dirt” has taken on yet another meaning: the scoop; the lowdown; the real facts; the “dirt” about something.

We use the word “earth” in different ways. We might say that someone is “down to earth,” or that they seemed to vanish from “the face of the earth.” We may even say that something costs “the earth.” But if we were to say that we filled a hole or a bucket with *earth*, we are talking specifically about that substance we call dirt.

Here are just some of the many mentions of “earth” or “land” in Scripture. It is very interesting that these Scriptures dealing with the earth also tell us about ourselves and our destiny.

Gen. 1 tells us that we were made *on* the earth.

Gen. also tells us that we were made *of* earth (2:7).

We were made to *rule* the earth (Gen. 1:28).

And we were made to *inherit* the earth (Rom. 4:13).

We will *die* on the earth (Gen. 3:19).

We will be *buried* in the earth (Dan. 12:2).

We will be *judged* on earth (Prov. 11:31).

We will be *rewarded* on the earth (Rev. 22:12).

We will be *reinstated as rulers* over the earth (Dan. 7:27).

And to repeat the staggering blessing we have in store: we will *inherit* the earth (Matt. 5:5; Gal. 3:29).²

The American explorers Lewis and Clark wrote in the most glowing terms about this land in 1804-1806. In their journals of journeys across the Western United States, what they saw sounds absolutely breathtaking.

¹ Originally a youth lesson for our weekly online church/Bible study.

The Great Plains were crowded with wildlife, and buffalo lived in herds of hundreds of thousands. When William Clark saw what he called this “paradise,” he wrote this:

“I had a most delightful view of the country...immense herds of buffalo, elk, deer antelopes feeding in one common and boundless pasture...The buffalo, elk and antelope are so gentle that we pass near them while feeding, without appearing to excite any alarm among them, and when we attract their attention, they frequently approach us more closely to discover what we are...The country is beautiful in the extreme.”

And so that was then. What about now? It is true that we have done great damage to this land through ignorance and greed. Many young people are very concerned about what people have done to the land. And of course, if you thought you were going to fly off to heaven — what would be the impetus for taking care of the earth? Christians can be some of the worst offenders in this regard. On the other hand, if this earth is to be our paradise then we should have respect for it and for its Maker.

Restoration: 3 – 2 – 1 – GO!

If we pay close attention, every spring and summer the restoration of the world is being played out. Jesus preached the restoration of all things in his preaching about the Kingdom of God (Matt. 4:23). Everything that has been spoiled or broken or damaged will be renewed to its new condition, what it was meant to be. As is said in what is called the Lord’s Prayer: “Your Kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God’s will *will* be done on **earth** (as it is in heaven). This is a given, an unbreakable promise as good as done. It couldn’t get any better than this. If our imaginations could just come close to seeing what God has in store!

Although the tree in the Garden of Eden was called the “Tree of Life,” it was actually the Tree of *Immortality* or the Tree of Eternal Life.³ This we know because Adam and Eve were already living and they had *not* eaten of it. This tree had not been forbidden to them as was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After their sin in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they were evicted from Eden, and the garden where the Tree of Immortality grew was heavily

² See Edward Acton, “Platonic Christianity, Part 1” *Focus on the Kingdom*, Aug. 2023.

³ “Platonic Christianity, Part 2,” Sep. 2023.

guarded against them. A ghastly and impossible thing would have happened if after their sin, they had eaten of the Tree of Immortality! We would have had immortal sinners. They were cast out ‘because they must not be allowed to...take also from the Tree of Life [Immortality], and eat, and live forever’” (Gen. 3:22). And thus it was that the opportunity for immortality was forfeited. Forever? No. The “restoration of all things” as we are told in Acts 3:21⁴ will make that possibility available again. What do we have to do to qualify? As God Himself tells us: “This is My beloved Son...Listen to him!” (Matt. 17:5).

Obedience to Jesus will meet the Father’s approval: “Blessed are those who wash their robes so they may have the right to the Tree of Immortality” (Rev. 22:14). The exciting reappearance of the Tree of Immortality reveals what restoration is all about. It will be forbidden no more, but openly available and having miraculous healing properties. Restoration takes us full circle from paradise lost to paradise regained.

Why is there such confusion about heaven and who will go there? One very important guideline as we study the Bible is to start with very clear statements: “thus says the LORD” statements, key truths that allow us to understand God’s Plan. We have one of these crystal clear statements about heaven. If we would always remember this, we would help ourselves and others. Here it is, your “go to” for understanding: “Heaven belongs to the LORD, but the earth He has given to humans” (Ps. 115:16).

We also have to ask this very important question: What about “Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven?” Since we place great importance on men like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who believed God and obeyed Him, we must surely be interested in their final resting places. And yet we are told that David never ascended to heaven; instead he died and was buried, as were all of the other faithful. Listen to this true statement: “All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them” (Heb. 11:13). Hebrews then explains that they knew and understood that it was not a broken promise — certainly not — but one that is to come true in the future. How? By resurrection! And that is our hope; not heaven, but the restoration of all things, and for us — resurrection.

Another key idea to remember is that the Kingdom of God *brings* restoration. We can’t speak about the earth without speaking about its restoration. Paradise — unbelievable sights and amazing beauty and thrilling things to do will all be possible; we will even be given opportunities to help bring this about. The earth is our

home. It always has been. It always will be. The earth and human beings were made for each other. So says the Creator of all things. That is God’s Plan. That is God’s Great Tomorrow. That is our hope and our tomorrow. ✧

Church Suicide Must Stop

by Anthony F. Buzzard⁵

A simple confession underlies this presentation of a theology of peace: I read the New Testament following an invitation to see what the Bible says about the use of nuclear weapons. I found a Jesus in the documents markedly different from the Jesus with whom the Anglican church had nurtured me. It was a Jesus who challenged his would-be followers with a radical demand for obedience: “Why do you address me as ‘lord’ and refuse to do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). He obviously expected the Sermon on the Mount to be taken with utmost seriousness. Something of this “naive” response to clear orders underlies Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s insistence on the Sermon on the Mount:

“Jesus knows only one possibility: simple surrender and obedience, not interpreting it or applying it, but doing and obeying it. That is the only way to hear his word. But again he does not mean that it is to be discussed as an ideal, he really means us to get on with it.”⁶

How delightfully free this is from the nightmare of theological complexity which often accompanies discussion of Christ and war.

From the vantage point that blowing your enemies to pieces is forbidden by Jesus, all arguments to the contrary look like dangerous compromises designed to interfere with the essential obedience needed for entrance into the Kingdom of God: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘lord, lord,’ will enter the Kingdom, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Jesus goes on to utter the most terrible of all his sayings. Many will protest at the judgment that they have been serving him faithfully, even to the point of preaching in his name and demonstrating their power in charismatic exploits. Yet they will fail to be recognized as other than false prophets (Matt. 7:23). The issue is plainly one of obedience through faith; and obedience must include submission to the “hard sayings” about “loving enemies” and “not resisting evil persons.”

Once the absolutist standard is adopted, the various “faiths” offered by the denominations begin to look suspiciously like counterfeits — pale reflections of the

⁴ Acts 3:21 makes a wonderful memory verse when seen in the light of a race and the starting 3 – 2 – 1 – Go! How appropriate for the Restoration of All Things!

⁵ Part of “Towards the Cessation of Church Suicide,” *A Journal from the Radical Reformation*, Vol. 5 No. 4, 1996.

⁶ *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1959, p. 218-219.

original, not too well camouflaged imitations of the real thing, but sufficiently endowed with Christian language to seem plausible. Was not an Apostle needed to warn the Corinthians that the Devil would be busy promoting his spurious versions of “Jesus,” “spirit,” and “gospel” (2 Cor. 11:1-4)? Is the Messiah Jesus of Scripture the same “Jesus” who has approved the violence of churches for some seventeen centuries? Are Christian communities which sanction the use of terrible destructive force against their enemies and fellow believers, in the name of “just war,” sailing under false colors?

Building upon naive beginnings, one is able to add substance to conviction by way of readings in theology and church history. I will construct my theology of peace with the help of those many voices which have for me the clear ring of Truth, as distinct from the tragic language of compromise and apostasy. Throughout I will take note of the persistent but, as it seems to me, misguided reasonings of the camp which seems bent upon obscuring and rendering complex an issue about which Jesus never equivocated. To one seeking the truth of Scripture, the complaint of Habakkuk appeared to speak eloquently to the Church of England’s post-war official justification of Christian participation in “just conflict”:

“Why do You make me see disaster, and make me look at destitution? Yes, devastation and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. The wicked intimidate the innocent; therefore justice is perverted” (Hab. 1:3-4).

The reaction of my devoted parents to my “idealism” was to have me examined by a psychiatrist, under whose supervision, and timed by a stopwatch, I arranged blocks according to prescribed pattern.

Recently the discovery of a British pacifist in similar surroundings has helped me to understand the revolution which the Sermon on the Mount caused in one for whom war was part of the respectable status quo:

“Let it not be forgotten that from my birth upwards all my associations and impressions were in favour not only of the lawfulness but of the glory of war... War seemed the most normal condition of man, and peace a rare and vapid exception.”⁷

A powerful argument for Christian non-participation in war may be built on early church history: believers did not apparently join the military until around 177 AD, and thereafter it was not unusual for baptism and the Lord’s Supper to be refused to those

who had shed blood. The presumption is that the early second-century church maintained a closer link with original apostolic truth. However, since it is to the Scriptures that we must appeal as the final arbiter in matters of Christian doctrine, our strongest line of defense against the post-Constantinian “just war” theory can be based on the biblical view of Christian brotherhood. (A vestige of this point of view is seen in the insistence of post-Constantinian churches that the clergy abstain from killing.)

Love One Another

The seeds of the New Testament ethic of a separated community demonstrating adherence to a priority above the state are found in the Old Testament. Hebrew Scripture establishes the principle that bloodshed in war between brethren is unthinkable (2 Chron. 11:4: “You shall not fight against your brethren”). The word of Elijah to Jehoram of Jerusalem is clear in its condemnation of fratricide: “You have walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. You have encouraged the people of Judah and the residents of Jerusalem to be unfaithful to the Lord... You have also killed your brothers, your own family, who were better than you” (2 Chron. 21:13). David’s career in the military is seen as a disqualification for building the Temple (1 Chron. 22:8). Abraham was to break ties with his country of origin as well as his natural family, in order to become the father of a new community of faith (Gen. 12:1-4). Jesus himself follows this pattern when he recognizes his real family not in Mary and Joseph, but in those who do the Father’s will (Matt. 12:46-50).

The church of the New Testament evidently includes believers of all nations, for in Christ there is neither “Jew nor Gentile, Barbarian or Scythian... but Messiah is all and in all” (Col. 3:11). The great commission, based on the covenant with Abraham, mandates an international propagation of the Good News of the Kingdom (Matt. 24:14; 28:29-30) and thus envisages the formation of a community of kings and priests “from every tribe, language, people and nation” (Rev. 5:9-10), who are to “be at peace with each other” (Mark 9:50), be salt in a putrefying world (Matt. 5:13), and “lights in the midst of a crooked society” (Phil. 2:15). The job description of the church is found in the role of Old Covenant Israel (Ex. 19:6). This is reapplied in 1 Peter 2:9 to the international true church.

The church thus constitutes the new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), designed evidently to be a microcosm of the coming Kingdom of peace on earth.

⁷ Sir L. Charles L. Brenton, son of a naval officer, who left the Church of England for the Plymouth Brethren; cited by Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe*, 1972, p. 402.

Premillennialism, based on the vision of the prophets which Jesus endorsed (Rom. 15:8), and to which Old and New Testament strain in verse after verse, holds out the hope of world peace when the nations will cease forever to learn the art of war (Isa. 2:2-5). The efficacy of Christianity is to be demonstrated now by the community of the “sons of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:38; i.e. those destined for positions as rulers in the Kingdom) who, through the visible love which they have for each other, proclaim to the world the promise of the New Age. The hope of the prophets must be realized in the believing community, at least in some measure, in “the present evil age,” though the regeneration of the world at large is expected beyond the Day of the Lord (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21). The international church is to be like an arrow pointing to the world peace of the Messianic future.

This pervasive biblical theme is dealt a lethal blow when it is proposed that believers can join in the slaughter of their brethren in other nations. Such fratricide suggests only that Christianity does not work — that the spirit is too weak to overcome the natural hostilities of the flesh. The New Testament is thus rendered pointless. Mankind, in his dealings with different peoples, is not benefited by the Messiah at all. Hatred is not replaced by love. Little wonder that we find James protesting that friendship with the world means inevitable hostility to God (James 4:4). Nowhere is this more clearly shown than when “believers” join in the killing of other members of the Body of Christ. Satan must count this his greatest triumph; for Christ is then divided against Christ, the church commits suicide, the body self-destructs, and the evidence of God’s spirit at work internationally amongst the peoples of the earth is destroyed.

This kind of argumentation supporting the case for an international Christian church does not depend for its success upon a few biblical texts. It is axiomatic throughout the New Testament that Christians are bound to a higher priority than loyalty to the individual nation-state. God has made each Christian a member of the universal body of Christ. The priority of responsibility to fellow believers, irrespective of national origin, is abundantly clear in our Christian documents. Repeated commands about gentleness, forbearance, unity in the spirit and the power of the visible witness of Christian love fill the pages of the New Testament. How can anyone imagine that bombing other Christians can be anything other than an absolute denial of the faith? I cannot see how Archdeacon Percy Harthill’s pointed protest could fall

on deaf ears, and not effect a radical repentance throughout churches:

“The Church is further proclaimed by the Creed to be ‘catholic’...It declares the Church to be universal or world-wide...not simply international but supranational...The community of the Church is something which man did not make and man must not be allowed to break...

“Obviously, therefore, any political or social allegiance of the Christian must take second place...All men are to know that we are Christ’s disciples if we love one another *as He loved us* (John 13:34, 35)...Within the Christian fellowship each is to be linked to each by a love like that of Christ for each. That is the new commandment; and obedience to it is to be the evidence to the world of true discipleship...

“Such is the quality which Christ designed for the unity of His Church. But can anything conflict more completely with such an ideal than that Christians should go to war against Christians?...Can anyone outside a madhouse suggest that when, for example, British and American Christians accepted the responsibility for dropping the atomic bomb which killed and maimed in body and soul their fellow Christians in Nagasaki, such an act could be ‘evidence’ to the world that within the Christian fellowship they were linked by a love like that of Christ for each? If anyone still doubts this, let him read *We of Nagasaki*, written by Christian survivors of the bombing.”⁸

One who did see the force of this plea for Christian non-violence was the Roman Catholic military chaplain, George Zabelka. In an interview in 1983 he confessed:

“In 1945 Tinian Island was the largest airfield in the world. Three planes a minute could take off from it around the clock. Many of these planes went to Japan with the express purpose of killing not one child or one civilian, but of slaughtering hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of children and civilians — and I said nothing...

“As a chaplain I often had to enter the world of the boys who were losing their minds because of something they did in war. I remember one young man who...told me that he had been on a low-level bombing mission, flying right down one of the main streets of the city, when straight ahead of him appeared a little boy, in the middle of the street, looking up at the plane in child-like wonder. The man knew that in a few seconds this child would be burned to death by napalm which had already been released...

“Yet I never preached a single sermon against killing civilians to the men who were doing it...Silence

⁸ Percy Harthill, *War, Communism and the Christian Faith*, 1954, p. 47-49.

in such matters, especially by a public body like the American bishops, is a stamp of approval...

"The facts are that seventy-five thousand people were burned to death in one evening of fire bombing over Tokyo. Hundreds of thousands were destroyed in Dresden, Hamburg and Coventry by aerial bombing. The fact that forty-five thousand human beings were killed by one bomb over Nagasaki was new only to the extent that it was one bomb that did it..."

"It seems a 'sign' to me that seventeen hundred years of Christian terror and slaughter should arrive at August 6, 1945, when Catholics dropped the A-bomb on top of the largest and first Catholic city in Japan. One would have thought that I, as a Catholic priest, would have spoken out against the atomic bombing of nuns. (Three orders of Catholic sisters were destroyed in Nagasaki that day.) One would have thought that I would have suggested that as a minimal standard of Catholic morality, Catholics shouldn't bomb Catholic children. I didn't.

"I, like the Catholic pilot of the Nagasaki plane, 'The Great Artiste,' was heir to a Christianity that had for seventeen hundred years engaged in revenge, murder, torture, the pursuit of power, and prerogative violence, all in the name of our Lord...I pray God forgives us for how we have distorted Christ's teaching and destroyed his world by the distortion of that teaching."⁹

These impassioned cries for the abandonment of a tradition which denies the Gospel gather strength from numerous voices in the Anabaptist tradition, demonstrating the advance of the Radical Reformation over mainstream denominations in terms of catching the spirit of authentic Christianity. In a perceptive article entitled "The Christian and War: A Matter of Personal Conscience,"¹⁰ David R. Plaster describes the pacifist argument which he himself finds compelling. This argument "emphasizes the priority of the believer's obligation to his heavenly citizenship."¹¹ He goes on to cite John Drescher: "The church is an interracial, supranational, transcultural body composed of all who put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and follow him as Lord."¹²

Plaster then refers to Myron Augsburger's development of the consequences of participation in the body of Christ: "To affirm that one is a member of the kingdom of Christ now means that loyalty to Christ and his kingdom transcends every other loyalty. This stance

goes beyond nationalism and calls us to identify first of all with our fellow disciples, of whatever nation, as we serve Christ together."¹³

Augsburger then presses the argument home as follows: "The priority obligation to obey God rather than men...does come into conflict with a believer's active participation in war."¹⁴ He advances the reasoning another step: "Since our highest loyalty is to the kingdom of Christ, and since that kingdom is global, a Christian in one nation cannot honorably participate in war, which would mean taking the life of a Christian brother or sister in another nation."¹⁵

David Plaster observes that "those allowing participation in war to the point of taking human life have not provided an answer to this problem."¹⁶ Dale Brown adds his voice to this argument when he reports that M.R. Zigler "often rose to his feet and proposed that Lutherans pledge to refuse to kill other Lutherans, Anglicans other Anglicans, etc."¹⁷

The Mennonites now distribute postcards on which is printed the slogan:

"A modest proposal for peace:
Let the Christians of the world agree that
they will not kill each other."

Concluding Recommendations

The only antidote to the centuries-long Constantinian concubinage into which churches have fallen is a strongly confessional theology of peace. The church must constantly bring to mind the horror of what is even now still contemplated as a reasonable way of effecting a permanent peace. It must insist that plans to destroy the earth invite the wrath of God, not salvation ("God will destroy those who destroy the earth," Rev. 11:18). It must urge believers to remember that Jesus said that Christians are not to be "of this world," and since "the whole world is in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19), not to join hands with it. The State is evil, under the control of the "authorities and powers and the 'cosmocrats' (*kosmokratores*) of this present darkness" (Eph. 6:12). If post-Constantinian Christianity were on the side of Jesus, it could never have contemplated the manufacture and stockpiling of weapons so powerful that they may now destroy every major city five times over.

We must never let the church forget that even in 1983 "the nuclear weapons stockpiled by the US, USSR, UK, France and China are equivalent to 1,000,000 Hiroshima bombs...The 50,000 warheads

⁹ Jim Wallis, ed., *Peacemakers*, 1983, p. 16-18.

¹⁰ *Grace Theological Journal*, 6:2, 1985, p. 435-455.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 444

¹² John Drescher, "Why Christians Shouldn't Carry Swords," *Christianity Today*, Nov. 7, 1980, p. 21-22.

¹³ Cited by David Plaster, *Grace Theological Journal* 6:2, p. 444.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Dale Brown, *Biblical Pacifism*, 1986, p. 8.

and bombs in nuclear arsenals today include 17,400 weapons in the strategic forces of the superpowers. Their range is intercontinental. Each weapon is powerful enough to destroy a large city — if there were that many cities in the world...The MX missile, officially called Peace-maker, carries ten independently targeted warheads and has a destructive power over 300 times as powerful as Little Boy, which killed or maimed 200,000 civilians at Hiroshima.”¹⁸

We end as we began, with the confident assertion that only the “Anabaptist” refusal to take life does justice to the mandate of Jesus to his church. Even though the theory of the “lesser of two evils” has made its appeal to the vast majority of those who have claimed to be Christians, “sober reflection, however, will indicate at once that such an ethic moves on an entirely different level from that proclaimed by Christ.”¹⁹ The same booklet says so eloquently that:

“For Christians to allow themselves to be drawn into taking sides in war is a denial of the unity of the Body of Christ. The Christian Church is not provincial or national, it is universal. Therefore every war in which churches on each side condone or support the national effort becomes a civil war within the Church. Is not this state of affairs where Christian kills Christian an even greater breach of ecumenical fellowship than the deplorable confessional differences that have rent our unity? Indeed, can we as Christians expect the Lord to restore our unity in worship as long as we put one another to death on the field of battle? Therefore we humbly submit: The refusal to participate in and to support war in any form is the only course compatible with the high calling of the Church of Jesus Christ.”²⁰

Amen! But will they hear? Bonhoeffer was not heard by the ecumenical church when he issued a prophetic call for repentance and obedience. We end with his words which reflect an urgently needed theology of peace-making:

“Our task as theologians consists only in accepting the commandment of peace, not as a question open to discussion. Peace on earth is not a problem, but a commandment given at Christ’s coming. There are two ways of reacting to this command from God: the unconditional, blind obedience of action, or the hypocritical question of the Serpent: ‘Yea, hath God said...?’ This question is the mortal enemy of obedience, and therefore the mortal enemy of all real peace...”

“The brothers and sisters in Christ obey his word; they do not doubt or question, but keep his commandment of peace. They are not ashamed, in defiance of the world, even to speak of eternal peace. They cannot take up arms against Christ himself — yet this is what they do if they take up arms against one another!”²¹

A practical plan for the recovery of pre-Constantinian faith would be:

1) A concerted effort by the peace churches to call their own membership back to a united, vigorous peace position.

2) A campaign to make this position known within all denominations, thus calling together a nucleus of non-violent believers.

3) The preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom everywhere according to its original Messianic meaning, with peace as an essential requirement of discipleship — peace now between all believers, as necessary preparation for entrance into the Kingdom of God, through survival until the Parousia or by resurrection at that time (1 Cor. 15:23).

4) The reinstatement of eschatology (without retreat from biblical apocalypticism) as the first locus of dogmatic theology, with ethics and ecclesiology as a close second, followed by an examination of other damage done to biblical Christianity by the overlay of Greek philosophy. ✧

“If the centrality of the Kingdom in Jesus’ preaching is so obvious, why then do I belabor the point here? The reason is that the Kingdom of God lost its centrality in the preaching of the Church. Further, when it was referred to in religious education, Matthew’s phrase *Kingdom of heaven* was favored, and the meaning proposed for it was exclusively otherworldly...”

“One of the most fruitful developments in contemporary theology, then, is the insistence that the Kingdom of God is central to our understanding of the Christian faith, and it cannot be reduced to meaning only a ‘place for souls later on’...The development can be stated thus: *There is an essential link between preaching Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and preaching the Kingdom of God, so that to preach Jesus as the Christ requires that we preach what Jesus preached — the Kingdom*” (Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, 1982, p. 42-43).

¹⁸ Ruth L. Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures*, 1983, p. 13ff.

¹⁹ *Peace Is the Will of God: A Testimony to the World Council of Churches*, by the Historic Peace Churches and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1953, p. 13.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

²¹ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes*, 1928-1942.

Jesus Practiced What He Preached

by Carlos Xavier

Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus practicing what he preached and commanding his listening audience to do the same. For example, in Mark 7 Jesus uses his criticism of the tradition of the Jewish elders to make a further teaching about the Old Testament food laws:

“Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. All of you listen,” he said, “and try to understand. It’s not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart” (Mark 7:14-15. Note that some manuscripts add verse 16: “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”) As a result, Mark later says that by saying these things “Jesus had made all foods clean” (Mark 7:19).

Also Jesus is seen eating with “sinners,” a word that can only apply to two classes of people: non-religious Jews or Gentiles. Similarly, his Apostle Peter later ate regularly with Gentiles (Gal. 2:12; Acts 11:3).

In addition, the Apostles likely did not keep the annual fast on the Day of Atonement from Leviticus 16. In Mark 2:19 Jesus clearly says, “They cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them.” And we all know that the ministry of Jesus lasted for at least 3 years.

In Numbers 5:1-2 God commands the Israelites to expel from the camp people with certain illnesses “so that they will not defile their camps.” In Numbers 9:10 God commands anyone who has touched a dead body to delay observing the Passover for a month. Yet Jesus and his followers are recorded as often touching the sick, demonized, and even the dead, in order to heal them.

In Matthew 12:1-6 and John 5:17-19 we see Jesus and his followers breaking the Sabbath, yet they are innocent, i.e., not sinning!

Under the Law of Moses a certificate of divorce was granted (Deut. 24:1-4), but under Jesus divorce is allowed for only one reason (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-12).

Lastly, under Moses one could kill his enemy or an intruder (Lev. 24:20; Ex 22:2), but under Jesus we are commanded unconditionally to love our enemies (Matt. 5:38-39; cp. Luke 6:28-29).

The point is that Jesus was sent to preach and practice New Covenant Law (Heb. 9:15; 12:24). As a result, Jesus was under his own Law, what Paul later calls the “Law of Messiah” (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21). This is not the same as the Law of Moses! Paul clearly says, “Imitate me as I imitate the Messiah” (1 Cor 11:1). Though we know that both Paul and Jesus were “born under the Law” of Moses, that doesn’t mean that they remained Torah-observant for the rest of their lives! ✧

Comments

• “I really enjoyed the sharp writing style of Barbara in ‘A Squandered Heritage’ (January). Her ‘once upon a time’ lead set up her theme of biblical truth which is needed now more than ever. As she said eloquently, once we got truth in church, on the gospel, in daily activities, and in the community. Now all we get is an incomplete gospel with the Kingdom and pure eschatology missing, replaced with ‘nexting’ and DEI, at the expense of a hunger for justice. Also Anthony’s article ‘The Shocking Truth about the Saints and their Destiny’ from Daniel 7:27 was most memorable, with the stress of *those in the kingdom reigning over the nations.*” — *Florida*

• “I just finished reading January *Focus on the Kingdom*. Thank you for your passion for the truth, and spreading the truth for all these years. Words cannot express my appreciation for what you and your supportive family are doing for those seeking the truth. May God continuously bless you, your family and your ministry.” — *England*

• “I am in an institution as an inmate, where my religious activities and support is limited more than my thirst for the truth is being quenched. I was raised Episcopalian and never felt comfortable with the church tradition of the ‘Trinity.’ Since meeting a biblical unitarian inmate, my beliefs have become solid standing, holding on to the hand of my Savior, Jesus Christ.” — *North Carolina*

• “I grew up in the Jehovah’s Witnesses (JW) family and became a very dedicated JW. I then attended a JW missionary school. During the next 15 years, I had many assignments, including work as a translator for almost 7 years. However, as a translator I learnt that there were many serious flaws in JW theology and practices. Therefore, I faced a crisis of faith, and I started to do my own research. While doing my research, I found your YouTube channel *Focus on the Kingdom*. I was thrilled to learn that Jesus was fully human. I must admit, JW’s concept of Jesus never made sense to me. Therefore, I was happy to understand Jesus’ role according to the Scriptures. Of course, I learnt many other things, and your YouTube channel and books were very helpful in that. Therefore, I sincerely want to thank you for saving my faith and helping me to grow faith in the Messiah.” — *Finland*

• “I was raised Jewish, then found myself in Trinitarianism, in which I acquired three Doctorates, pastored a little bit, evangelized and sang, but always with my Jewish upbringing at the base. This left me very conflicted for what became 46 years. Recently I discovered unitarianism and found the writings of other unitarians such as yourself.” — *Indiana*