

Focus on the Kingdom

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Hang in There: Be Tenacious with Biblical Truths!

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Embracing genuine biblical truth in our modern world is certainly not the task of uncommitted cowards! We certainly live in times when unclear ideas are adamantly propounded as valid among those who go with the flow of hazy 21st-century theologies and philosophies. For example, misled religious folks might quite easily jump on the popular bandwagon of an easy-going, got-it-made mindset, by extracting a few Bible verses out of context and promoting a “positive thinking” model. Careful, loving rebuttal can often be of vast, life-saving rescue to such misinformed people.

In the first paragraph, I mentioned the concept of “extracting a few Bible verses out of context.” Maybe I can clarify this widespread dilemma by expounding briefly on what it means to study the Scriptures in context. There is a historical context of Scriptures involving the setting of events from over two thousand years ago. Nowadays, one can look up who were Sadducees, Pharisees, the Herod family, and Romans in Palestine in Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, or classic books like *New Testament History* by F.F. Bruce. How did ancient Jews go within a couple of centuries from being under Seleucid (Greek) rule, to a condition of relative independence, to eventual subjugation? On top of that, a cultural context indicates how people lived and thought. Good studies about Bible manners and customs can be very helpful. Also, literary context compares biblical writing to other literature from the ancient world, as well as noting the types of figurative language that abound so frequently in Scriptures.

Along these lines, a prime factor is this: the true context of Scripture is not church history from the second century CE onward, but rather it is the specific context of first-century writers. Church history may surely provide us with interesting developments that fuel modern, Western, religious debates, but it would be extremely anachronistic to read such history back into the mentality of the first-century writers of the New Testament (or to the Old Testament writers who preceded them). Sadly, one can be a very good 21st-century reader — while failing to grasp the detailed context of the Scriptures!

With these contextual realities carefully taken into account, we can overview the importance of enduring throughout life’s events and decisions, according to a consistent Scriptural emphasis. Early on, when Jesus began to herald about a response of a change of focus and life direction (or repentance) to believe the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15), he began to discuss the urgent need to persevere in the message with a proactive, strenuous effort. In Jesus’ vocabulary, “faith” or “belief” (*pistis* in Greek) did not merely mean holding a casual, mental agreement regarding certain ideas or facts. Genuine biblical faith connotes faithfulness, allegiance, and devotion, coupled with obedient thinking, words, and actions (Rom. 1:5, 16:26). Such is the authentic context!

Jesus’ primary parable, as required to understand all his parables (i.e. the parable of the sower: Mk. 4:13), about responding to the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19) demonstrates that the only successful type of listener to the Kingdom-Gospel (category #4) is one who listens with “a good and honest heart,” grasping the vital message with conscientious perseverance, while continually producing fruit. Such bona fide listeners don’t:

- (1) allow the message to get stolen from their minds (by Satan) before really believing it, or
- (2) only receive it quickly with joy, but very temporarily (due to persecution), or
- (3) allow pressures and pleasures to choke the Gospel so that no fruit is produced (Luke 8:11-15).

This abounding context of ongoing commitment is also reflected in many of Jesus’ heartfelt encouragements and stark warnings: “A large crowd was traveling with Jesus. So, turning to them he said, “Those who come to me and don’t ‘hate’ [hyperbolically meaning to have less devotion toward] their own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even their own lives, cannot be my disciples! Anyone who doesn’t persevere in ‘carrying his own cross’ [a symbol for carrying out an unselfish responsibility] cannot be my disciple!” (Luke 14:25-27).

Jesus follows up this stark exhortation by challenging his audience to carefully “count the cost” (v. 28-32), like a man preparing to build a tower (which might be expensive!), or a king with 10,000 men preparing to face a dangerous enemy, an army of 20,000! Jesus said, “In the same way, none of you can

be my disciples if you do not give up everything!” (v. 33).

In a quite similar fashion, Jesus rebukes. in a predictive, future scenario, those who will be sincerely saying, “lord, lord” very confidently, due to having evidenced spiritual gifts (i.e. prophesying in his name, casting out demons, etc.). Jesus sternly rejects such folks from even entering the Kingdom — because of disobedience to his words (Matt. 7:21-27).

In light of this challenging context throughout the four gospels, evident in many vivid ways, it would be absurd to try to convert Jesus into a modern icon of easy-go-lucky, pop culture spirituality! Jesus never even implied, “You are now free to relax and ‘rest on your laurels.’” Because of a moment’s sincerity of believing in me (Jesus), you have permanently arrived on ‘Easy Street.’” After all, being set on a “cruise control” mode, or being already “saved by grace” surely implies sheer effortlessness — while one can smugly disregard his/her own actions (referred to as “works”).

Even superficially, it is quite obvious that this brash example (in the paragraph above), symptomatic of the context of many current religious mindsets, is in severe contrast with the context of Jesus’ urgent commands, like Matthew 7:13-20 about carefully avoiding the deceit of false prophets and the bad fruit coming from bad trees. Luke 13:24 says, “Keep making strenuous efforts to get in through the narrow door” (so as to eventually enter the Kingdom of God, the wider context of Luke 13:24-30). Unfortunately, some early Protestant norms might be tied to the confusing formulae cited nowadays about “grace,” “faith,” and “works” (see more on p. 4). Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, vocabulary debates in later church history do not at all reflect the 1st century CE context of word usage in new covenant writings!

Encouragement to Persevere

The stern tone of the overall Gospel calling (which we have seen so far) to strict standards of faithful obedience and enduring allegiance to Jesus’ words is certainly not meant to discourage us or dissuade us (as if we were dealing with demands which are impossibly difficult). After all, Jesus himself comforted his dedicated followers by stating, “Come to me, all you who are getting weary and burdened, for I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and place it on yourselves, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. You will find rest and refreshment for yourselves. Truly, my yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

In Psalm 103, merciful blessings are poured out lavishly toward those who revere Yahweh (v. 18), who keep His covenant and remember to do His

commandments: “As a father shows compassion to his children, so Yahweh [the LORD] shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (v. 13-14). Our awesome Creator intimately knows our human frailties; even so, He gets deeply involved in rescuing our lives! Further details of God’s lovingkindness permeate the Psalms.

In addition to the bold, compassionate encouragements mentioned above, one can see in the flow of Scriptures that God keenly desires that all humans be saved and arrive at the full knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Also, God is not slow in bringing about His ultimate Kingdom promises, but He is extremely patient for our sakes, while deeply wanting everyone to repent (or turn to Him with a changed mindset) (2 Pet. 3:9). God’s judgements will even be truly fair to those who never were really exposed to knowing the genuine Gospel message (according to Rom. 2:12-16).

Along with such dynamic incentives to “hang in there” and not give up are the very practical promises of forgiveness described in 1 John 1:5-2:2. Effectively, even if a true believer gets sidetracked to the degree of “walking in darkness,” he/she can heed wake-up calls and be restored completely to the “light,” by honestly confessing his/her errors to God (instead of staying in denial). Thus, one is strongly assured of being forgiven for all sins, and totally cleansed of all wrong-doing. The substitutionary, atoning merits of Jesus’ loving, voluntary death are pervasive enough to deal with all the sins of humanity throughout the whole world! How extensive is the overall, redemptive love of the Father God who sent Jesus?

Also, we can constantly keep in mind strong directives which seemed like “tough love” — meted out for a time by our often-faulty earthly parents. So why not put up with the wisely offered discipline from our perfect heavenly Father? He always has our best interests at heart, so that we can grow up and share in His holiness (see Heb. 12:4-11). We certainly dare not water down God’s exacting requirements, as announced so precisely by Jesus, by exchanging his loving commands for the positive-sounding, pious platitudes of irresponsible, manmade religion!

Ongoing Endurance

After briefly perusing the emphasis in the four gospels on concerted, devoted perseverance toward Jesus’ pioneering Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Heb. 2:1-3), we can view how many other passages throughout the new covenant writings corroborate what we have seen so far about the theme of ongoing endurance. The requirement to persevere in what’s right is a constant condition attached to promises of true, biblical hope.

At times a brief passage (Col. 1:21-23) reminds us of the biblical theme of the need to persist in faithfulness. Sometimes, a longer passage (2 Peter 1:1-12) reiterates this theme of active endurance. Even whole books, like the book of Hebrews, might weave in this perseverance theme as an integral part of understanding its broad message.

For example, in Colossians 1:21 it is seen that we had previously been enemies of God through evil behavior. “But now [v.22-23] he has reconciled you in the body of his [Messiah’s] flesh through his death, in order to bring you into his presence holy, blameless, and irreproachable. This is conditioned, of course, upon you keeping firmly in the faith, being solidly grounded and established, and not shifting away from the hope of the Gospel you heard. This Gospel was proclaimed [or announced] in all creation under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.”

2 Peter 1:1-12 provides a dynamic checklist, so to speak, of desirable attributes with which to supplement our faithfulness with diligence (while straining every fiber of our being). This is in the context of how God grants us everything necessary for life and godliness, of being called to God’s own glory and excellence, and of His precious and exceedingly great promises — so that we share the divine nature, having escaped the world’s corruption due to excessive desires.

So, in terms of the list of virtuous qualities, we are exhorted to earnestly strive to add to our faith moral excellence (like God’s own “virtue”); to moral excellence, knowledge, to knowledge, self-control, to self-control, perseverance (or patience); to perseverance, godliness; to godliness, brotherly affection; to brotherly affection, love.

I would say that building such attributes in life correspond to developing a rich, faithful life of prayer, according to Scriptural norms. I would also say that if one is honest with this “checklist,” it helps to correct natural, erroneous tendencies. For example, if one gradually drifts into becoming unforgiving, doubtful, sloppy, edgy, arrogant, neglectful, apathetic, impatient, uncaring, unfriendly, etc., one can then perceive such personal “red flags” and diligently get back on board with this list of godly qualities!

“For if you have these qualities in plentiful supply and grow [increase] in them, they will assure that you do not become wasteful or fruitless in terms of the full, practical knowledge of Jesus, the Messiah” (2 Pet. 1:8). One who lacks these qualities is warned of becoming doubly blind and terribly forgetful! “Therefore, my dear family members, be full of effort [or be diligent] to confirm that God has called you and chosen you. If you practice these things [from the list of godly qualities] you will never trip up, and in this way the entrance into the Kingdom of God’s Coming Age, the

Kingdom of our lord and savior, Jesus, the Messiah, will be richly provided for you. So, I intend to continue reminding you of these things, even though you know them and have been firmly established in the truth you now have” (2 Peter 1:10-12).

A passage in 1 John 2:28-3:3 also reminds us that while we await his coming, there is supreme value in staying active (persisting) in doing what is right! “Now, little children, abide [remain] in him, so that when he is revealed we will have boldness and not shrink from him in shame at his royal arrival. If you know that he is righteous, you also know that everyone who does what is right has been fathered by him” (1 John 2:28-29). Our born-again status of really being “children of God” is linked to practicing faithfully what is right! “All who have this hope in him [the returning Jesus] make themselves pure, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3).

Encouragement and Warnings in Hebrews

In closing, in the book of Hebrews there is a dynamic interplay between inspiring encouragement (2:17-18 and 4:12-16) and stark warnings. For example, believers are sternly advised to be careful not to fall into the same types of costly unbelief and disobedience which overcame the Israelites with Moses: Hebrews 3:12 -4:11. Believers are furthermore exhorted not to fall away (6:4-12), becoming useless, nor to turn their backs on the value of Jesus’ blood sacrifice by habits of deliberate sin, thus shrinking back (10:19-39) from living by faithfulness!

Within this context of the book of Hebrews, which is parallel in many ways to the balance of beautiful words of comfort and strong admonitions in the four gospels, I will briefly highlight a few short passages which really illustrate the broad theme of the ever-present need to endure and persevere in light of the blessed hope: Jesus’ return to raise the dead and usher in God’s Kingdom on earth. Such loving encouragement is totally congruent with Jesus’ basic parable of the sower and the four soils. Once again, it is those who receive the Kingdom-Gospel with good and honest hearts, while persisting in faithfulness (continuing to produce fruit) who are rewarded.

“But the Messiah is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold tightly to the boldness and confidence of the hope firmly to the end” (Heb. 3:6).

“We have become sharers of the life of the Messiah if we keep a firm, tight grip on our original assurance right through to the end” (Heb. 3:14).

“We encourage each one of you to show the same diligent energy for bringing your hope, your goal, fulfilled to the end, so that you will not become lazy and sluggish, but rather imitate those who through

faithfulness and perseverance inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:11-12).

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses [in reference to the examples of faith listed in chapter 11], let us lay aside each weight, and the sin which gets in the way so easily. We must run with perseverance the race that lies before us, focusing our eyes on Jesus. He is the one who initiated and brought to completion our faith. For the joy which was awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding [or taking lightly] its shame, and has now taken his seat at the right hand of God’s throne. Consider what he put up with, the severely enormous degree of opposition from sinners, so you don’t grow weary and give up. In your struggles against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Heb. 12:1-4).

We have merely scratched the surface here of what it means to continue in loving, fruitful ways of endurance, but we have perused enough of some key contextual indicators to see that faithful perseverance is not only encouraged as a major tenet throughout Scriptures, but it is required — if our faith is to be authentic! We have also briefly overviewed the truth that there are fabulous, merciful incentives pointing to an ultimate goal and hope attached to this pervasive theme of not giving up.

A Note on Grace, Faith, and Works

Sadly, there is currently some confusion regarding the biblical usage of “grace,” “faith,” and “works.”

The phrase “works of the Law” is repeated eight times in the Bible, and it clearly indicates a standard of legal rules, involving required circumcision, old covenant calendar observances (like strict Sabbath keeping), Levitical food laws, and other details which would have been formerly enforced to distinguish Jews from non-Jews. Galatians, Hebrews, and many new covenant passages make it clear that these particular “works” are now abolished (Eph. 2:14-16) and are no longer required of anyone.

Sometimes the word “works” by itself is most likely a type of shorthand for the phrase “works of the Law,” such as in Romans 4:2, 6; 9:11, 32 and 11:6. Perhaps when Ephesians 2:8 speaks of us being “saved by grace and not by works,” it might very well be a reference to the now abolished “works of the Law” (due to the ensuing “Law” context in Eph. 2:14-16). But another contextual possibility is that the 2:8 statement has reference to the fact that previous “works” when one was formerly “dead in sins” (2:1-5) do not save us. By the way, Titus 3:5 also mentions not being saved by previous “works.” Whether Ephesians 2:8 refers to “works of the Law” or previous, useless, works (or actions), the context (v. 10) then speaks of now being

“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we would walk in them.” To infer that such prepared good works are merely optional (or not really required) truly contradicts the thematic flow of all new covenant Scriptures (as seen in part in this article).

Along with the thesis of this study (involving required perseverance until the end), one might want to read and reread the following passages in which “works” obviously refer to vital, obedient actions — **not** outdated old covenant “works of the Law” or defective, previous actions (noting the brief exception of the Titus 3:5 phrase mentioned above):

- Matthew 24:42-25:46: noticing Jesus’ panoramic view of judging both believers and unbelievers, clearly by their actions,
- James 2:14-26: James should never be disparaged as an “epistle of straw” or an inferior piece of revelation!
- Titus 2:7-3:8 and 3:14: observing that “good works” should be sought enthusiastically!

Obviously, considering the passages recommended above, “good works” as obedient, faithful actions that correspond to genuine “faith” are to be heartily embraced! They are never, ever to be downplayed through a deceptive, manmade “faith vs. works” doctrine! We are not to frivolously disparage the vital importance of obedient actions as if they are the mere, disposable “works” which have nothing to do with our salvation!

An example to carefully consider for those who might still be stuck in a “once saved, always saved” paradigm (in which all “works” or actions are carelessly deemed irrelevant) is in Luke 12:35-48. The believing household servant in the parable who keeps doing what his master requires (such as faithfully feeding others) will be commended and rewarded. On the other hand, if that same servant, “says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming back,’ and begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to feast and get drunk,” he will be judged as an unbeliever! Notice that it is the *same* servant (while obviously still making free will choices) who can consistently continue to do good, honest, helpful things and end up being commended! Or he (that same servant) can get distracted by wrong thinking and begin to selfishly mistreat others and get into personal excess, and end up being judged negatively as an unbeliever! ✧

Exceptional Stewardship

by Barbara Buzzard

We are living in Babylon, but we are on business for the King and that is why our stewardship of Jesus and his Father's plans must be exceptional. That is why we must be *undefiled* by the world around us and its morals, values, and customs. Is our world a playground or a battleground? "Undefiled" is a beautiful word; we recognize it in Daniel 1:8 where Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food. It is used more often with a moral flavor to it. Scripture often advises us to "see to it": "See to it that you are not defiled" (Heb. 12:15b; 12:25); "See to it that you are not deceived" (Matt. 24:4). Watch out; don't let anyone deceive you! As we are told to study to see if these things are true (Acts 17:11), we are also told (commanded) not to be deceived. It is not only a sin to deceive but *to be* deceived (2 Tim. 3:13). "Undefiled" is what we must be as Kingdom-worthy and as exceptional stewards.

The word "undefiled" is mentioned only four times in the New Testament: Jesus as our high priest was undefiled (Heb. 7:26). Marriage should be undefiled (Heb. 13:4). Our promised inheritance of the land is undefiled (1 Pet. 1:4). Religion must be undefiled (James 1:27).

As Jesus had to qualify for his role as King, so too must we be tested and found worthy. The importance of our roles under Jesus must not be diminished or minimized. And that is why our performance and our characters must be of sterling quality. That is why our stewardship must be exceptional. That is why we must continually analyze and evaluate our performances/actions/beliefs. We are not in the same position/situation as Adam and Eve; Jesus has come as the spirit of Truth and through that spirit will lead us and direct us. We have the foresight of Scripture to pave the way and to guide us in wise paths and actions.

Grafting

Those of us who are Gentiles are enormously blessed to be grafted in, to be allowed to take part in God's plan of blessing. This is one of our Father's most staggering provisions. I view it as the purest mercy, an extension of God's plan to extend His blessings, which at one time were reserved for Jews only — but now include Gentiles. And of course, it doesn't stop with just us. He has further plans for the inclusion of nations which might at present be our enemies.

As a plant enthusiast I once enrolled in a workshop to learn grafting techniques. It is not easy! We listened carefully to the instructions from an expert; we brought in rootstock on which we struggled to make cuts so that the Meyer lemon trees we were trying to graft would

"take." We wrapped and secured our trees with their newly grafted branch. And then we waited. There was 100% failure! Why? Because our instructor had been wrong about one of the steps in the process. He apologized (his first time at teaching this skill) but we were left with our disasters. Our grafting projects were destroyed for lack of knowledge. In a much more serious context, God's people may be destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). Exceptional stewardship may well have prevented this.

Beware!

So, in the wider context, do I have anything to do with my own personal grafting into the family of God? Much in every way. I had the option of accepting this gift which would mean living the life of a redeemed person, or I could reject the great gift and carry on my life as before. This is where Calvinism is so very dangerous, because it maintains that I cannot make that decision, that it has already been made and that there is nothing whatsoever I can do to change it. Beware Calvinism as you would a savage wolf! It is utterly distorting of God's Truth, His Plan, and your future. It is a scourge and a scandal, turning a beautiful promise of grace and mercy into ugliness and death. As dedicated believers in Scripture, we do not subscribe in any way to the grim Calvinist picture which has got to come from the evil one. And we mustn't forget that Calvinism states that Jesus did *not* die for all, but only for the predestined! On the contrary, we have this hugely generous promise: "Since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their children will also be holy. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too" (Rom. 11:16).

Satan's efforts to keep us from observing and reflecting are massive. In fact, it seems that everything is siding against us to keep us from thinking, questioning, analyzing. There is wickedness in high places, from government to church. Does it not feel sometimes that we are living in a world described by George Orwell's book *1984*, with spiritual and moral decline the likes of which we have never seen? It feels like living in a world for which we were not born. Is it a flashback to Sodom and Gomorrah or are we, in fact, living in a Sodom and Gomorrah world with only a veneer of biblical moderation? As Churchill said, "We must not be lulled into a false sense of security; the crisis is upon us."

We are done a great biblical disservice when we are told that all we must do is "accept Jesus." *We are to present to God a heart of wisdom* (Ps. 90:12). We seldom hear this, nor is it "top of mind" on our Kingdom "to do" lists. Let us add it as a priority. God does not leave us wondering and this is not a mystery. This surely parallels the subject of the minas in Luke

19:11-27. The ones who invested their coins wisely were regarded as the faithful and were highly praised.

One of the reasons that exceptional stewardship must be involved in this life exercise is that the stakes are so very high. Nothing less than immortality. In this first round, i.e. our testing phase (Act 1, as it were), we are not *seen* by the world to be winning. Rather, we will be viewed as heretics, scum, unworthy, etc. Only when Jesus comes will the whole story be told (Act 2). When primitive tribes in New Guinea were first made aware of the difficult aspect of salvation, some couldn't accept or handle it and left. They had been fine with the facts of God's love and compassion and the loving and sacrificing character of Jesus. All was rosy then. But when the story "turned" for them and they no longer saw victory in the near future, but rather scorn and "being hated for my name's sake," some turned and ran. And when the command to love one's enemies was addressed, it was like a double whammy.

In the West not only are we subject to such weakness, but we have our ways around it, including the teaching of avoiding tribulation with a pre-tribulation rapture.

How Do We Win?

Keep talking about Jesus. And we do win — have you read to the end of the story?! We have a thrilling story to tell about Jesus, "our man" in heaven. As one songwriter said, "One of my beliefs is that I have to talk about my beliefs." Acts 18:9 encourages us to do just that. A moral reframing may be necessary. "What are you doing?" is a question asked in Ecclesiastes 8:4 — a good question practically and in terms of the direction of our lives. Also this: what are you equipped to do in that promised reign of Jesus? We must become incorruptible and live out the things we believe. How do we do that? One way is by speaking of them. Feeble and feckless responses will achieve nothing. "Save us from weak resignation!"¹ "Lukewarm" has no part here. *It wasn't meant to be easy!* The only thing for it is to **set our minds like flint** (Isa. 50:7b).

Our Father has an unwavering dedication to truth. We are advised and required to have that same quality (2 Thess. 2:10). A more compelling purpose than to be with Jesus in the Kingdom I cannot imagine. Our commitment to Truth must be with that same unwavering tenacity. Our stewardship of God's Truth is the task at hand. As "keepers," "handlers," perhaps even "preservationists," our job is both solemn and enormous, requiring exceptional stewardship. We are to *strive* to enter the kingdom. It is not for cowards. A life "worthy of the calling" will require that we stay the

course, that we "contend for the faith," and that we seek it like silver. ✧

"Judge"?

by Anthony Buzzard

The Bible promises that in the future the saints will "judge" the world (1 Cor. 6:2; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; Rev. 20:4: "authority to judge"). An adjustment of this misleading word "judge" is needed. To judge in the Bible is not simply to pronounce sentence and condemn the evil. That is only one function of the judge. "Judging" encompasses a much wider idea. It means to exercise administrative office as of course the "judges" of the book of Judges did (they "led"; see Judges 3:10; 10:2-3). They were in fact political leaders of Israel, and so the saints are designated for a similar office in the coming age of the Kingdom.

Friberg's Lexicon says of the Greek word *krino*, often translated "judge," that it is "Hebraistically, in a broader sense, *rule, govern*." Similarly the Louw-Nida Greek Lexicon notes that "the corresponding Hebrew term [*shaphat*] likewise involved **far more than merely making judicial decisions**."

A few translations have rescued the real meaning from the obscure translation "judge." I think you will agree that this rendering has life and meaning: "Do you not know," Paul chides the Corinthians, "that the saints are going to manage the world? And if the world is to come under your jurisdiction..." (1 Cor. 6:2-3, Moffatt). The International Standard Version reads: "You know that the saints will rule the world, don't you? And if the world is going to be ruled by you, can't you handle insignificant cases?"

To inherit the Kingdom is to become part of the executive administration of the Kingdom, to become a king with Jesus. Erich Sauer captured the idea beautifully when he wrote that "the church is thus the ruling aristocracy, the official administrative staff, of the coming Kingdom of God."²

I am amazed that almost nothing is made of these extraordinary promises in preaching. Of course the whole idea of the royal future of believers comes out of Daniel 7, where some three times it is said that the "time is going to come when the saints possess the Kingdom, and all nations are going to serve and obey **them**" (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27, NRSV, CEB, GNT, etc.).

Politically dangerous material, you would think. No wonder, then, that Jesus expected one day to say to those who had used their talents successfully in his service, "Be promoted and take your position as leader over five or ten cities" (Luke 19:17-19). ✧

¹ Hymn: "God of Grace and God of Glory"

² *From Eternity to Eternity*, 1994, p. 93.

Comments

• “I just wanted to introduce myself. I live in Poland. I believe in One God — the Father, and I believe that Jesus Christ is the man, through whom the work of salvation was accomplished and for this reason he was exalted by the Father and is now the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God and Jesus in the believers. I do not believe in the pre-existence of Jesus. These truths are in the Bible and are consistent with my experiences. My understanding of the Kingdom of God before the email from you was more or less like this: The Kingdom of God is in the midst of believers, I am a citizen of it through the Spirit, and after the Parousia it will come physically for a thousand years on earth, after which there will be ‘a new heaven and a new earth.’ However, the issue of the physical Kingdom of God after the Parousia was much less important to me than the spiritual issue. I just can’t believe what a mistake that was! How clearly I can read Isaiah and Ezekiel now! I also noticed that the gospel of the Kingdom is received with more curiosity by my interlocutors (in the evangelism I am conducting on a modest scale) than, for example, the saving power of the cross or the falsehood of the Trinity. In my family and among my friends, I have Catholics and atheists. Polish Catholicism is very pagan; there is a strong Marian cult; Pope John Paul II was Polish and was already revered by fellow countrymen before the Roman Catholic Church declared him a saint. Faith in the intercession of saints and miraculous images is common.” — *Poland*

• “I have been watching videos from 21stcr.org recently and I believe that I can say with great certainty that in the arrogance of my youth, I had no idea how blessed I was to sit in your class and dip from the fountain of your wisdom, which has become even more painfully clear when I contrast it with some of the things I’ve heard recently from the pulpit at a couple of my local (and decidedly Trinitarian) churches. Thank you very much for your continued efforts to preach the One true God to a stubborn and stiff-necked people. It is very encouraging to me, as in my location I feel adrift in a sea of Trinity. I continue to lovingly but persistently correct wrong terminology or phrasing during Sunday school class, and the churches I attend here also know that I am a Biblical Monotheist, which has opened up some interesting conversations. I have not yet been cast out as a heretic, though I expect that when the torches and pitchforks are gathered my house will be the first one visited. I now have a gentleman who will correct brothers who say ‘God’ in reference to Jesus to ‘Son of God’ as it is accurately written, out of courtesy to me (and probably to prevent me from

saying it). I have humbly and politely asked a few times for the believers in a couple of the local churches I attend to show me the erroneousess of my beliefs through Scripture, but as of yet have not found anyone willing. I know it will eventually happen though, and I look forward greatly to my day of educational ‘correction.’ Thanks to you and others for the excellent videos in the meantime.” — *Tennessee*

• “I’ve been studying the videos and *Focus on the Kingdom* monthly newsletter for about 6 years. I thank Carlos and Anthony for the work you have done to enlighten and restore the truth about God and the Gospel of the Kingdom. I did not grow up in church. When I was in my mid 20’s I attended a Oneness Pentecostal church for a few years but looking back I really didn’t study. I had questions that the church could not or would not answer. They had their doctrine and I was to believe it or leave. I left. When I was about 60 years old after some personal problems due to a family tragedy, I needed God in my life and began to seek him. I was open to Oneness and/or the Trinity. I searched for a church and began to search the internet and You Tube videos of debates. There was a guy with the last name of Brown and he used a catchy phrase: ‘God is complex in his unity.’ Since no one as of that time was able to explain or answer my questions about God, I agreed that God is complex, so I watched Brown and White debate Anthony Buzzard and another man. I thank God for Brown’s catchy phrase because he led me right to Anthony who answered all my questions. I was a disciple from then on. I studied for hours; being retired gave me that luxury. I have been planting seed and witnessing as much as I can and started a Bible study with a few other men.” — *California*

God’s “Name”

“When Jesus speaks about revealing to his disciples God’s ‘name’ (John 17:6; cf. 17:11-12), this encompasses **who God is in his character**, his essential nature. Because his name is glorious, God wants it to be made known (e.g. Ps. 22:22; Isa. 52:6; Ezek. 39:7). The notion that Jesus reveals the Father in his whole person, both **works and words**, is foundational to John’s Gospel (e.g. 1:18; 8:19, 27; 10:38; 12:45; 14:9-11). In the OT God’s name is put in the central sanctuary (Deut. 12:5, 11), and knowledge of his name implies **life commitment** (Ps. 9:10). In John’s Gospel, likewise, Jesus’ revelation of God’s name must be met with **obedience**, and Jesus is shown to replace both tabernacle and temple, having become the ‘place’ where God has put his name (see also Isa. 62:6; 65:15-16).”

Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 2007, p. 498