

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## What Went Wrong?

The writers of the New Testament could not have imagined the contemporary chaos of differing Christian groupings which we now somewhat complacently take for granted.

For Paul there is one faith, one hope, one Gospel, One God and One Lord: In a solemn exhortation the Apostle speaks to us: "I implore you, my brothers, on the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same thing, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be perfectly harmonized in the same mind and the same mode of thought" (I Cor. 1:10). Paul in the same letter made it clear that the essence of the Christian life is the possession of the mind of Christ. "Who," he asks, "knows the mind of the Lord God or who has instructed Him? We have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:16). The thinking of Jesus is indistinguishable from the thinking of God the Father of the Lord Jesus, and Christians are those who have learned to think like Jesus. The bracelet slogan "WWJD?" would better reflect the wisdom of Scripture if it read "WWJT?"—"What Would Jesus Think?" Christian thinking precedes Christian action.

It is significant that Paul calls on a quotation from Isaiah 40:13 where the original Hebrew text reads "Who has known the *spirit* of the Lord?" Paul gave the right sense when he rendered "spirit" (*pneuma*) by "mind" (*nous*). Spirit and mind are on this occasion exchangeable terms for Paul. How very important that equation is as a corrective for the wild activity sometimes claimed as evidence of the spirit of God. The holy spirit means the mind and activity of God operative among believers.

A lack of unity amongst Christians points to lack of receptivity on the part of those aspiring to be Christians. What we need is the "mind/spirit of Christ" among us. Paul urged his congregations to "let the word of Messiah live in you richly" (Col. 3:16). History shows that a significant departure from the Messianic mind of Jesus occurred soon after Apostolic times. A recognition of the scope of this shift away from the thinking of Jesus will enable us to put things right. A grasp of the development of ideas in the centuries following the Bible is essential for an

intelligent assessment of the validity or otherwise of contemporary forms of Christianity.

Modern denominationalism and the broad division of Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Protestants stem from a *major paradigm shift* which began to occur as early as the second century. Most churchgoers seem to have little interest in knowing the roots of their faith. They seem comfortably satisfied that what they have received as the faith really is "the faith once and for all delivered" to God's people (Jude 3).

When the faith left the confines of Palestine, and after the death of the Apostles who had known Jesus (we include Paul amongst these heroic leaders, since his ministry was on a par with that of the twelve), Christianity passed into the hands of Gentile leadership. This was an event with ominous consequences. Experts on the writings of early post-biblical believers point to a definite loss of inspiration. The so-called church fathers are unable to match the apostolic writings. They have become legalistic as well as philosophical and speculative. And they have lost precious truth:

"Every reader of early Christian literature, unless wholly prejudiced by his dogmatic views of Christianity, must recognize the inferiority, as exponents of Christian thought, of the literary productions known to have come from the post-Apostolic age. This inferiority is not merely in literary power but of grasp on Christian ideas. When we turn from the NT to Ignatius, to the Epistle of Barnabas or Justin Martyr, we pass manifestly from the teaching of masters whose hold on Christian truth is firm and whose view of it is pure and clear to the teaching of disciples whose hold trembles and whose view is partial and dim... Their teachings are mixed with other ideas *foreign to apostolic Christianity*. The points of view from which the NT authors presented their religion had been, it would appear, frequently lost by their successors, so that apostolic phrases were often repeated *with changed meanings*" (G.T. Purves, "The Influence of Paganism on Post-Apostolic Christianity," *Presbyterian Review*, 36, Oct., 1888).

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The crux of the matter is to be found in a progressive departure from the mind of Jesus in Scripture. A heavy influx of Greek philosophical, speculative thinking overwhelmed the original Hebraic, Messianic teachings of Apostolic Christianity. This unfortunate “evolution” resulted in the historic creeds of the fourth and fifth centuries. These creeds then set the pace for the faith ever since. Today many are unable to recognize how deeply ingrained in our thinking is that post-biblical deluge of pagan, Greek ways of thought, sheltering under the Christian umbrella.

It surely ought to be of the greatest interest to modern seekers after truth to know what went wrong. Scholars of the history of ideas know. Their writings are beginning to impact the public. Their findings, we suggest, call for massive soul-searching and reformation. Churchgoers should adopt the role of “private investigators,” eager in their pursuit of original truth (Acts 17:11).

A recent publication by a professor of religion at the University of Michigan (see quotations below) echoes a long-standing theme of historians of Christianity: “Christianity today is not what it was” — that is, what goes under the name of the Christian religion today comes to us through the wringer of subtle but profound changes which began to occur shortly after the ink of the New Testament documents had dried. While Dave Hunt in an interesting book entitled *The Occult Invasion* deplors the contemporary influx into the church of paganism and gnosticism, he seems unaware that just such an invasion long ago affected and produced the very “orthodoxy” which he is at pains to defend. “Orthodoxy” in fact is not truly such. Rather, “orthodoxy” is what prevailed as a *majority* opinion, not necessarily, if church history is examined, reflective of the biblical orthodoxy of Jesus.

What we must face squarely is a “switch of labels.” Imagine looking back through centuries of time. Imagine seeing a train entering a tunnel and then visualize it emerging some centuries later. Apparently what you see emerging is the very same train you saw enter the tunnel. Unknown to you, however, is the fact that there were two tracks within the tunnel and the emerging train, though appearing to be the same, was in fact different. One train had replaced the other. What emerged was not the train which entered the tunnel, despite apparent identity.

The effects of paganism on the original faith gradually produced *another* form of Christianity. The reworked faith, now heavily endowed with the Greek

spirit, managed to assert itself as the dominant party and after much struggle suppressed its rivals and claimed to be official as well as apostolic. Evidence for the loss of the pristine form of belief may be detected, if we consider what happened to Jesus’ central and favorite topic “The Kingdom of God.” Jesus’ own Gospel suffered, in the scramble and shuffle of ideas, an almost complete eclipse. From that disaster, we suggest, it needs urgently to be recovered.

Listen first to the words of a distinguished Roman Catholic Professor of New Testament writing on *The Kingdom of God in History*:

“The impulse to write this book came from two sources. On the one hand, as a teacher of New Testament literature, especially of the synoptic gospels [Matthew, Mark and Luke], it early became obvious to me that the central theme of the preaching of the historical Jesus of Nazareth was the near approach of the Kingdom of God. Yet, to my astonishment, this theme played hardly any role in the systematic theology I had been taught in the seminary. Upon further investigation I realized that this theme had in many ways been *largely ignored in the past two thousand years, and when not ignored, often distorted beyond recognition*. How could this be?” (B.T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, Glazier, 1988, p. 9, emphasis added).

This candid statement makes our point beautifully. Jesus preached the Gospel: It was obviously always the *Gospel about the Kingdom of God*. This is a patent fact available even to a superficial inquirer. But what clergy have learned in the seminary included almost nothing about the Kingdom of God, the heart of the Gospel as Jesus preached it. In fact, for two thousand years the church claiming to represent Jesus has almost entirely ignored Jesus’ central concern and teaching. If on occasion it has used his phrase “Kingdom of God,” it has distorted it by giving it a meaning which Jesus would not have recognized.

These facts, we think, display the “problem” of contemporary Christianity. Demonstrably the faith has undergone a radical change for the worse. The loss of Jesus’ key teaching and Gospel means the loss of the mind of Jesus and the loss of his spirit. The result is a “Christianity” which in important ways has lost touch with its founder. It is sailing under false colors. The casualty in this unfortunate process is nothing less than the historical Jesus himself.

The Christian label has now been attached to a system of theology which is significantly different from the theology of Jesus. This baneful situation came about when a vast, but gradual paradigm shift caused a movement away from the Hebrew thought-

world of the Bible in favor of the thought-world of second-century Hellenistic, speculative and largely Platonic, philosophical theology.

Professor Ellens of the University of Michigan deals with another and no less central issue of faith: the matter of who God and Jesus are. He describes the source of the creeds now almost universally assumed to be Christian. He maintains that a major shift in the meaning of centrally important New Testament terms occurred:

“Unfortunately what the theologians of the great ecumenical councils [Nicaea and Chalcedon] meant by such terms as Son of God was remote from what those same titles meant in the Gospels. The creeds were speaking in Greek philosophical terms. The Gospels were speaking in Second Temple Judaism terms. The Gospels were talking about God visiting us in the man from Nazareth in a special and unique way; the creeds were talking about this man having the being of God [i.e. “the Messiah was God Himself, God the Son”]. The bishops of the councils had shifted the ground from Hebrew metaphor to Greek ontology [theory of being] and in effect betrayed the real Jesus Christ” (“From Logos to Christ,” letter to *Bible Review*, June, 1997).

This shift from one thought-world to another affected the heart of the Christian faith. The God of Jewish monotheism, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had to give way to the God of Greek speculation:

“To describe a theological connection between the text and message of the NT, on the one hand, and the fourth and fifth century formulations of trinitarian doctrine on the other, is a precarious and circuitous enterprise at best and, in the worst case scenario one might devise, it is patently impossible to demonstrate any authentic connection whatsoever...One might persuasively argue, I believe, that, taken for face value and on its own merit, independent of later philosophical developments, the text of the Bible does not make the Trinity of Chalcedon possible...The synoptics have no divine Trinity...One is still at a loss to find in Scripture a personalistic Trinity.”

A careful reading of the earliest “church fathers” shows a marked tendency to redefine God and the Son of God in terms of alien Hellenistic concepts:

“The perplexity of this problem, for a scholar who stands in the scriptural tradition of the Protestant Reformation, is greatly increased by standard patristic studies. It becomes readily apparent upon any diligent reading of the Church Fathers, both Greek and Latin, that they believed that they were struggling with more than epistemological issues. They believed that, as they pursued the slowly developing formations of trinitarian thought and divine Logos theory through the unfolding of the early Christian centuries, they were not simply dealing

with issues of rhetorical metaphor and symbolic language. They understood that their quest for understanding God had to do with describing an ultimate and objective reality. The formulators of the conciliar tradition theology, in all of its ramifications, intended to provide the Church with a description and **definition** of the nature of God’s existence and of God’s historical reification and manifestation in Jesus of Nazareth. They appealed to Scripture to accomplish this, but neither their largely allegorical exegetical method nor the integrity of their motions of evidence or documentation are persuasive. Obviously they came to their task with a *predisposed theological or philosophical bias and with arbitrarily determined method*, in consequence of which the just claims of the scriptural documents themselves were not given objective force” (emphasis added).

The process by which the loss of a biblical understanding of God and Jesus took place can be traced to the pervasive influence of Greek philosophy upon the Mediterranean world:

“The very atmosphere of the ancient world was filled with the thought forms of Greek philosophy and religion...One could not ask significant questions about life, history, knowledge, and meaning without taking into account and reflecting the thought-frames of Hellenistic method and perspective...It was the theology of Africa, particularly of Alexandria with its historic library, university center, and Catechetical School which most directly influenced the theological formulations of the councils from Nicaea to Chalcedon. Not only are the towering figures of Tertullian and Athanasius significant in this regard, but the influential role of such figures as Eusebius of Caesarea and the Cappadocian Fathers at Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), was shaped by the doctrinal tradition of Alexandria. The philosophical and theological force of Clement and Origen and their Catechetical School molded the perspective of such key figures in Africa as Tertullian, Cyprian and Athanasius, as well as the Asians: Eusebius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianz.”

Professor Ellens calls for a frank investigation of these facts with a view to “coming clean” about the real origins of much which is believed to be apostolic and Christian:

“It is time, therefore, for the Christian Church to acknowledge that it has a very special type of material which constitutes its creedal tradition. *It is not a creedal tradition of Biblical Theology*. It is not a unique inspired and authoritative word from God. It is, rather, a special kind of Greek religio-philosophical mythology. It should be candidly admitted by the Church, then, that its roots are not in Jesus of Nazareth...nor in the central tradition of Biblical Theology...Its roots are in Philonic, Hellenistic Judaism and in the Christianized NeoPlatonism of the second to the fifth centuries. Since this is so, the Church should acknowledge to the world of humans seeking Truth

and to the world of alternate religions, that the Christian Church speaks only with its own historical and philosophical authority and appeal and neither a divine authority nor a unique revelation from Jesus Christ nor from God.”

[His point is that what developed as orthodoxy is nothing more than a Christianized paganism whose roots are not truly biblical.]

“I am claiming that to ground the Christian faith in Greek philosophical speculation is fatal to the traditional formulations of the essence and warrant of the faith itself. It separates the faith from its biblical, historical foundation and from any substantial grounding in the authentic realities of the historical Jesus...It is fatal to attempt to create an ultimate footing for the traditional formulations of the Christian truth in a comprehensive Biblical Theology. What interests me here, therefore, is the fact that such early Christian theologians as Origen especially, after the example of Philo, wanted to build a biblically-based Theology and Christology but separated their theological enterprise substantially from the imperatives of Scripture to achieve the objective of systematizing their theological *Weltanschauung* [worldview] in the language and categories mandated by their cultural milieu and its Neo-Platonic philosophical imperatives and possibilities.”

Our hope is that readers will take seriously the challenge to investigate whether the alleged damage to the faith really did take place. It seems to us and to many historians of the development of Christianity that churches are less than candid with their members when they fail to point out that the Bible and traditional understanding are often poles apart.

Personal investigation in the Berean manner (Acts 17:11) is well within the reach of every churchgoer. Simply take a Bible and begin to read again the accounts of the ministry of Jesus. Ask the question: What did Jesus put before the public as the Gospel which must be believed for salvation? Was it just an acceptance of his cross and resurrection? Indeed was there even a mention of Jesus’ death and resurrection as Jesus put the Gospel to his audiences?

Such an investigation can be eye-opening and there is a certain risk attached to the discovery that Jesus’ definition of the Gospel was far removed from what today is offered by way of tract or evangelistic preaching. These facts should sound the alarm that all is not well with contemporary versions of the faith. The path to unity may well lie first in the recognition that Greek philosophy is unacceptable in the Hebrew Gospel of the Messiah. We must return to the Jewish roots of our faith and to the Messianic teaching of the Messiah. ✧

## Where Did You Get Your Gospel?

The central question in any investigation of salvation is the issue of the Gospel. The Gospel is offered in the Bible as the unique vehicle for gaining immortality. Nothing, as Paul argued passionately in Galatians 1, must be subtracted from the saving Message and nothing must be added. Distorting the Gospel means an inevitable loss of saving Truth, an unparalleled disaster.

Amazingly, churchgoers seem confident that the Gospel involves belief simply in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It seems not to have occurred to them that Jesus preached *the Gospel* for a large portion of his ministry without any mention at all of his death and resurrection. Jesus, in other words, laid the foundation of the Gospel with the Good News about the Kingdom of God which is coming. This fact can be investigated and verified easily. Simply take a Bible and start at Mark 1:14, 15 or Matthew 4:17, 23 or Luke 4:43, where it is plainly stated that Jesus urged repentance and belief in the *Kingdom of God* as the primary item on his saving agenda.

There are some 26 chapters of Gospel preaching by Jesus, the twelve and the seventy, in which the sole subject is the Kingdom of God and how it may be entered in the future (not at death), when Jesus comes back to inaugurate the promised Kingdom on the renewed earth. Only later were the death and resurrection of Jesus incorporated into the existing Kingdom Gospel. This completed Gospel gives us, for example, the early credal statement in Acts 8:12 where belief in the Kingdom of God is still the first and fundamental element in the Gospel.

But today things are different. No one speaks of the “Gospel about the Kingdom” and the historical Jesus seems thus to have been deprived of his own saving message. What counts today is almost exclusively a decision in favor of the death of Jesus for sins. The shift is part of the confusion which began to overtake the faith in the second century. At that time the Kingdom of God began to lose ground as the term to describe Jesus’ own Gospel preaching. “Kingdom of God,” rather than being the objective of world history — a real government (Dan. 2:44; 7:18, 22, 27; Micah 4:1-8; Zech. 14:9) to be established in Jerusalem with the Messiah present as world-ruler — was replaced by “heaven” as a place removed from the earth and the destination of departed “souls.” “Heaven” has ever since maintained an unshakable dominance in the language of churchgoers, though

Jesus never spoke of “heaven” as the objective of faith. By contrast he promised his followers the inheritance of the earth (Matt. 5:5, Rev. 5:10).

It is remarkable that the earliest church fathers (whatever degree of clarity they lost in their definition of God and His Son) did manage to maintain the Kingdom of God on earth as the goal of salvation, but with Origen, who imported a heavy dose of philosophy and mysticism into the faith, “heaven” at the moment of death overwhelmed the “concrete” hope of a renewed earth about which the Bible has so much to say.

Later with Constantine a further development made the Bible less and less comprehensible. Constantine’s followers actually equated the Kingdom of God with the Roman state, although there was no evidence of worldwide peace in the presence of a returned Messiah! A final stage in the collapse of the Kingdom of God as the term to describe the event of the future connected with Jesus’ return occurred when the Roman Catholic Church appropriated Jesus’ favorite term to designate the Church worldwide. Bishops were then “enthroned” to give the impression — very false to the New Testament — that they were already reigning with Christ on earth.

It seems to us that most churchgoers are not actively studying and analyzing the Bible. This task is not an impossible one. One may start with the term “Kingdom of God” and trace it through the Gospel of Mark. It will quickly become clear that Jesus had in mind a new world order based in Jerusalem to be initiated only when he returned in power and glory to suppress opposition to his rightful rule on the restored throne of David, as all the prophets of Israel had foreseen. The crowds knew well what was entailed in the explosive term Kingdom of God. They cried out with enthusiasm for the one they recognized as the Messiah: “Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father David” (Mark 11:10).

Jesus spoke of his ministry and thus of the Christian faith as “the preaching of the Kingdom of God” (Luke 16:16). He urged the young convert to “go and proclaim the Kingdom of God everywhere” (Luke 9:60). Jesus was the destined Davidic ruler of the coming Kingdom (Luke 1:32) He opened his ministry with the call to repentance and commitment to belief in the Kingdom (Mark 1:14, 15). He spoke of the Kingdom as the pearl of great price, the field which must be purchased at all costs. He described his followers as “disciples of the Kingdom” and products of the Kingdom Gospel. A Christian scribe is one who is apprenticed to the Kingdom and brings to his

understanding insights from both Testaments. Jesus prayed for the Kingdom, looked forward to reunion in the Kingdom with his disciples and inspired others to be waiting for the Kingdom. Finally, Jesus expected Abraham and Isaac and Jacob to be assembled at the banquet in the Kingdom (Matt. 8:11). In view of this “magnificent obsession” with the Kingdom Jesus gave daily seminars, after his resurrection, to his body of followers: the topic was invariably the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). The burden of his teaching obviously involved the prospect of a restored Davidic empire in Jerusalem (Acts 1:6). He and his followers anticipated ruling the world (I Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 20:1-4; 5:10; Matt. 19:28).

The mind of Jesus was Kingdom-centered. It was to the worldwide spread of the Kingdom of God Gospel that he directed all his efforts (Luke 4:43), before commissioning his followers to continue with the same work (Matt. 28:19, 20). With the return of a clear proclamation of the Kingdom of God there will come a corresponding unity amongst now divided believers. ✧

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**Claims of revival are unfounded:** “There does not seem to be a revival taking place in America. Whether this is measured by church attendance, born-again status, or theological purity, the statistics simply do not reflect a surge of any noticeable proportions” (Barna Research Group, *State of the Church*, 2000).

**Making up the faith as we go along:** “The Christian Church has never succeeded in defining the Kingdom of God, for each different age of Christianity has given to the expression that meaning which harmonizes with the aspirations of the time” (A.C. Headlam, D.D., *Jesus Christ in History and Faith*, William Belden Noble Lectures, Harvard University, 1924, p. 92).

**Why is the teaching of Plato alive and well in Christian circles?** “‘The wicked will go away into eternal punishment.’ This passage has often been cited in support of the doctrine of endless torment. But it may be questioned whether it implies more than the finality of judgment...Jesus did not teach, like Plato and others, that the soul is immortal and that it would necessarily go on after death...The phrase ‘endless sin’ does not mean an endless sin, but one which has dimensions and ramifications beyond the present life” (Professor Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 99).

The fact is that “eternal punishment” is a grave mistranslation of the original Greek. It gives comfort (if that is the right word) to those who believe that the wicked are going to be tortured in hell for endless

eternity. The Bible, however, does not present God as presiding over a perpetual torture chamber, a kind of cosmic Sadist. The point can be made very simply that in Jude 7 Sodom and Gomorrah underwent “*eternal fire*” (exactly the same word in the original as found in Matt. 25). That fire, if it was eternal, would now still be burning. But it is not. Therefore “eternal fire” conveys quite the wrong meaning to English readers. Colin Brown is right to point out first that man in the Bible does not possess an immortal soul. Since he is innately *mortal* he can go out of existence. Thus the wicked will be subject to a final death, the cessation of consciousness and existence. The punishment they will incur is “aionion” (Greek *aionios*). It will be a punishment to be meted out “in the age to come” (aionian). It is the penalty which excludes a person from the age to come or the Kingdom of God. The wicked will therefore go away into “the punishment of the age to come,” while their counterparts, the righteous, will be invited to take part in “the life of the age to come” (aionian life). That life is indeed a life of immortality as well as being life in the future age of the Kingdom of God on earth. Immortality is to be conferred on the true believers at the resurrection (I Cor. 15:50-52). At that time they will enter “the life of the age to come,” while the wicked who are alive at the return of Jesus will suffer the appalling fate of being burned up, the “destruction, punishment of the age to come.”

From John the Baptist onwards Christian preaching placed before man two destinies: the “barn” of the Kingdom of God or to burn up as chaff (Matt. 3:12; 13:30). The righteous who will at that future day shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom are those who now “understand the Message of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:23) and bear fruit from that essential saving seed (Luke 8:11, 12).

Building on any seed but the seed of the Kingdom is likely to produce the wrong fruit. Such are the laws of nature which operate with the same inexorable logic on the spiritual plane.

**Using the word “word” correctly.** “The Bible is not infrequently referred to as ‘the word of God’ by Christians. It is important to note, however, that the expression ‘word of God’ in Scripture does not usually refer to the written word at all but to God’s or His emissaries speaking and inspiration” (“Word,” *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*).

The point here is a simple one with enormous implications. The “word of God” in the New Testament refers to the Gospel as Jesus preached it. “Word of God” is not just a synonym for the Bible.

The Bible calls itself generally “the Scriptures.” “Word of God” by contrast is the technical term for the saving Gospel preached by biblical evangelists, of whom John the Baptist and Jesus were the first. It is first defined as “the word about the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19) and on many later occasions abbreviated by a kind of shorthand to “word of God” or “word,” “word of salvation,” “word of life,” etc.

**“The Old Testament’s standard way of envisaging dying and coming back to life** is by speaking of lying down and sleeping, then of waking and getting up. The former [dying] is an extreme form of the latter [lying down] (see II Kings 4:31; 13:21; Isa. 26:19; Jer. 51:39, 57; Job 14:12). Further, dying means lying down with one’s ancestors in the family tomb...So coming back to life would mean leaving such a ‘land of earth’ (cf. also Ps. 49, 73). The image presupposes a restoring to life of the whole person with its spiritual and material aspects” (*Word Biblical Commentary* on Daniel, Goldingay, p. 307).

Unfortunately this biblical view of life and death has collapsed in the minds of churchgoers, who are constantly fed a different view. Under the all-pervasive influence of the Greek philosopher, Plato, they have been indoctrinated with an idea which confuses the teaching of Jesus and the Bible. They have been told that they possess innately an “immortal soul” which, since it cannot die, must continue to exist consciously the moment the body ceases to function. This analysis of the nature of man is pagan and found in most world religions, but not in biblical Christianity. According to Jesus and the Bible the whole person ceases to exist consciously at death and he must therefore be called back to life. This is resurrection. Resurrection has happened to one man only, Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is the pattern for our own. Just as Jesus went down to the place of death (Hades/Sheol), so the Christian who dies goes to Hades/Sheol and expects to be rescued from there at the future resurrection destined to occur at the seventh trumpet to be sounded at the return of Jesus in power and glory to take over the rulership of the world (Rev. 11:15-18; I Cor. 15:23; I Thess. 4:13ff.; Luke 14:14; 20:35; Matt. 24:29-31).

**Jesus is the Son of God and the Father is the Lord and God of Jesus.** “We are not to suppose that the Apostles identified Christ with Jehovah: there were passages which made this impossible — for example Psalm 110:1” (*International Critical Commentary* on I Peter, Charles Bigg, D.D., Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Oxford, T&T Clark, p. 99).

One of the most remarkable pieces of misinformation is found in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* produced by the staff of Dallas Theological Seminary. In an effort to promote the “deity of Jesus” they assert that the title “Lord” used of Jesus means that he is God.

Commenting on Matthew 22:43-45, Luke 20:41-44 and Acts 2:36, they say: “If the Messiah were simply an earthly son of David, why did David ascribe deity to Him? Jesus quoted from a Messianic psalm (Ps. 110:1) in which David referred to the Messiah as ‘my Lord.’ ‘Lord’ translates the Hebrew *adonay*, used only of God (e.g. Gen. 18:27; Job 28:28)...David must have realized that the Son, who was to be the Messiah, would be divine, for David called Him Lord...The noun ‘Lord,’ referring to Christ, probably is a reference to Yahweh...This is a strong affirmation of Christ’s deity.”

The problem is that the facts are misstated. The Hebrew word to designate the Messiah in Psalm 110:1 is not *adonay*. If it were *adonay*, the commentary would be entirely correct. *Adonay* appears 449 times in the Old Testament and invariably refers to the Lord God. If the Messiah were addressed as *adonay*, he would indeed be God.

In fact, the inspired text gives us a designation of the Messiah which proves the exact opposite of the Dallas Theological Seminary commentary. The word for the Messiah in Psalm 110:1 is *adoni*. The word certainly means “lord” but in every one of its 195 appearances it refers to a lord who is *not* God. *Adoni* tells us that the one addressed is not in the category of deity but in the lesser class of human (or occasionally angelic) superior. *Adoni* is a title of non-deity. The exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God makes him the uniquely and supremely elevated human being, “the man Messiah” as distinct from the one God, the Father (I Tim. 2:5; I Cor. 8:4-6).

Asserting the “deity of Jesus” is most unwise. Scripture teaches us that “there is One God, the Father,” which is a very different proposition from the banner under which currently most churches gather: “There is One God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” There is only one who is Yahweh in the Bible. That One God of the Hebrew Bible and of Jesus claims His unique and unrivaled position when He speaks with singular personal pronouns thousands and thousands of times. This monumental evidence has not prevented the emergence in post-biblical times of a perversion of monotheism known as the Trinity. A learned professor at Harvard described the appalling verbal contortions which proponents of the non-scriptural concept that

God exists eternally in three Persons found necessary. The problem was to state how Jesus was both God and Man at the same time:

“The doctrine of the Communication of Properties, says LeClerc, ‘is as intelligible as if one were to say that there is a circle which is so united with a triangle, that the circle has the properties of the triangle and the triangle those of the circle.’ It is discussed at length by Petavius with his usual redundancy of learning. The vast folio of that writer containing the history of the Incarnation [how Jesus can be fully God and fully Man] is one of the most striking and most melancholy monuments of human folly which the world has to exhibit. In the history of other departments of science we find abundant errors and extravagances; but Orthodox theology seems to have been the peculiar region of words without meaning; of doctrines confessedly false in their proper sense, and explained in no other; of the most portentous absurdities put forward as truths of the highest import; and of contradictory propositions thrown together without an attempt to reconcile them. A main error running through the whole system, as well as other systems of false philosophy, is that words possess an intrinsic meaning not derived from the usage of men; that they are not mere signs of human ideas, but a sort of real entities, capable of signifying what transcends our conceptions, and that when they express to human reason only an absurdity, they may still be significant of a high mystery of a hidden truth, and are to be believed without being understood” (*A Statement of Reason for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*, 1833, Section 5).✧

### Comments

“Your book has me on my knees tonight. I probably sound like some Pentecostal or something, but the book is convincing me of how *far* we’ve come from the original message of the Kingdom — indeed, from Messiah, Himself! I knew I had crossed a gulf of deception when I realized that Christ was/is a man — not God. Now another gulf has been crossed as I understand the gospel of the Kingdom.

“I think I am beginning to feel a call that I haven’t felt for some time. The message — and the need to proclaim it — is swelling within my heart to the point of rupture. Thank you for responding to God’s guidance, and praise the Living God through Yeshua for his continued inspiration in the lives of those open and willing to serve Him in truth while openly combating the evil one. Sorry for my emotion. On second thought, I’m not sorry for my emotion. If one cannot become emotional about the Kingdom of God, he is among the walking dead.”