

Focus on the Kingdom

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Where's the Historical Controversy?

by Sean Finnegan, Massachusetts

Many groups do not see a need to peel back the layers of tradition in order to discover the original apostolic faith of the first century. Rather, they are content to hold fast to the beliefs and practices that the Church has bequeathed to them, regardless of whether or not they were held by Jesus and the early Christians. That is not the sort of Christian I am. Instead, I am trying to be a restorationist — someone who wants to understand and align my practice of Christianity as closely as possible with the earliest Christians. Unfortunately, many times people who belong to restorationist groups, like us, oversimplify what early Christianity looked like. We imagine that everyone got along and agreed on doctrines, that there were no major schisms or controversies until much later. Some of us probably even believe that until the fourth century when the Trinitarian controversy occurred, everything was serene and unified. But this picture, no matter how much we might want it to be true, is simply not accurate in light of the facts.

In actuality, many of the epistles of Paul deal specifically with controversial issues in the new churches. For example, in Corinth, the saints had begun to split into factions: one for Paul, one for Apollos, one for Cephas, and one for Christ. Paul responded: “Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I [personally] baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name” (1 Cor. 1:13-15).

Further controversies concerned the role of women in the meeting, which was apparently an issue in the first century (1 Cor. 14:34-36; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). Also, one of the most highly disputed issues which caused division was whether or not believers were required to keep the Law of Moses. In fact, the disagreement was so sharp and the outcome so serious that a council was held in Jerusalem with the pillars of the church in order to decide on the proper solution. The resultant letter (Acts 15:23-29) was then carried throughout the Mediterranean world by Paul and Silas to inform the churches that Gentiles were accepted without a need to become circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. Paul as a Jewish Christian did not keep the food laws (Rom.

14:14, 20) and modeled the right opinion for all believers. Later on, further controversy arose over whether or not Jews needed to keep the Law of Moses. Sadly, that issue was not resolved as quickly, though the epistle to the Hebrews certainly does make it clear that because of Christ's work Jews are equally freed from the yoke of Torah (in the letter, rather than the spirit).

My purpose in mentioning these early disagreements is simply to point out the fact that even back in the first century, in the early years of Christianity, there were plenty of controversies over all sorts of issues. Why was that the case? The answer is simple: any time someone changes their theological views on an issue and then teaches others, there will be some who resists the change. Controversy is not necessarily bad even if it is uncomfortable, because through dialog and dispute we are able to discern where we need to change. So, when there is a significant change in doctrine there are almost always growing pains as people deliberate and transition occurs.

However, once we begin to talk about the doctrine of the Trinity, we encounter a major road-block. The Trinitarian myth generally goes like this: “Jesus claimed to be God in a Trinitarian sense; he taught that he was God to his disciples who accepted it on the basis of his miracles and resurrection; it wasn't until 300 years later when the heretic Arius started spouting nonsense about Jesus being created that the Church was compelled to formulate a creed to fight him off, though the Church had unanimously believed in the Trinity all along.” Generally speaking, Trinitarian defenders will tip their hats to a historical reconstruction similar to this. If the question is asked, “Who was the first Trinitarian?” the answer is always “Jesus.” But if one asks, “Who was the second Trinitarian?” suddenly we have a major thought experiment on our hands, because nowhere in Scripture does Jesus ever teach the Trinity. So the Trinitarian is left to fumble his or her way to the answer: “Well, the Scripture doesn't say this clearly, but I'm sure the disciples believed in it.” But, isn't that just assuming the answer from the outset? Furthermore, where is the controversy?

It is absolutely critical to realize that the first generation of Christians was strictly monotheistic, in the unitary sense: God is one Person only. They were raised to believe in the *Shema*, the central creed of Judaism which teaches that Yahweh our God is one Yahweh (not two or three). From that day to today, one would be hard pressed to find a single Jew who would just go along

with the idea that the Messiah is God. [However, astonishingly, today there are Messianic Jewish, Trinitarian believers — ed.]. It's just not part of the Jewish religion. But if Jesus really was teaching that he *was God* in a Trinitarian sense to non-Trinitarian, first-century Jews, then wouldn't that be a massively significant change? Yet, as we saw just a moment ago, change generally breeds controversy. In fact, we could say that the bigger the change the more likely it is that there will be resistance.

Let's take it one step further. Let's assume that the disciples had no trouble accepting this new Trinitarian formula for defining God and they went forth proclaiming the Trinity from town to town after Jesus ascended into heaven. As they arrived at synagogue after synagogue it is easy to observe that there was significant resistance and persecution, which is what we would expect if they were teaching that God is Three-in-One rather than just one Person, the Father. Even so we must ask the question, why were the early Christians persecuted? Was it because they taught that Jesus was God or was it for other reasons?

In Judea Peter and John were persecuted by the Sanhedrin for proclaiming the resurrection of a man they had executed as a false Messiah (Acts 4:2; 5:28). Stephen was first accused of saying "that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us" (Acts 6:14). Then he called the Sanhedrin to repentance (Acts 7:51-53) which enraged them to the point that they gnashed their teeth, stopped their ears, and stoned him to death (Acts 7:54-58). Once Paul became a Christian he preached in Damascus that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God (Acts 9:20-22). He was so difficult to defeat in argument that the people decided to murder him, though he narrowly escaped when he was let down from the city wall in a basket (Acts 9:23-25). In Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were persecuted by the Jewish leadership because they were jealous that many of the Gentile proselytes and Jews gravitated towards the Christian message (Acts 13:42-45).

The early Christians in Syrian Antioch were harassed by Christian Judaizers because the Jewish Christians ate with the Gentile Christians, accepting them as full members of the people of God even though they were not circumcised and they did not keep the Law of Moses (Gal. 2:4, 11-16; Acts 15:1-2). In Philippi, Paul and Silas were seized and beaten after they had cast a demon out of a girl who was being used to make money by telling fortunes (Acts 16:16-19). The specific accusation brought against them was that they (being Jews) were throwing the city into confusion by "proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans" (Acts 16:20-21). In Thessalonica, Paul and Silas preached that the Messiah

had to suffer and rise again from the dead and that Jesus was in fact the Messiah (Acts 17:3). When a large number of God-fearing Gentiles and leading Jewish women joined Paul and Silas, the Jews became jealous and instigated a city-wide uproar. As a result they seized Jason (the one who was housing Paul and Silas) and dragged him before the city authorities saying, "These men who have upset the world have come here also... they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:6-7). In Ephesus, Paul's traveling companions — Gaius and Aristarchus — were dragged by an angry mob into the theater where they shouted out "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for hours, because Paul had been teaching that idols were not real gods (Acts 19:26).

Later on, in Jerusalem, Paul was nearly torn to pieces by a riot which broke out because they thought he had brought Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus, into the inner courts of the Temple (Acts 21:28-29). The formal accusation they brought against Paul was that they found him to be "a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ring leader of the sect of the Nazarenes. And he even tried to desecrate the temple" (Acts 24:5-6). The Roman administrator Porcius Festus summarized the accusation like this: "they [the accusing Jews] simply had some points of disagreement with him [Paul] about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive" (Acts 25:18-19).

There is no shortage of trouble the early Christians faced as they traipsed about the Mediterranean world proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom and Christ (Acts 8:12), **but isn't it telling that they never even once faced the accusation that they were redefining God?** *Never* did a riot erupt over Paul proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth was a Divine, eternal Being. *Not once* did someone say, "I can't accept Jesus as God because that would be idolatry." Yet, every single Jew today would say exactly that if they were asked to recognize Jesus as the second member of the holy Trinity.

It is preposterous to think that Jesus or his apostles redefined the concept of God from a unipersonal, monotheistic belief that "Yahweh alone is God" to a triune God of Three Persons, when there is not one New Testament book, not one chapter, not one paragraph describing such a change. There is no explanation of how the clear statements of radical monotheism found in the Old Testament could be reinterpreted in light of this new understanding of divine plurality.

We should find at least one church in either Palestine or the Diaspora that struggled to accept this new doctrine of God. To think that the early Church debated over accepting the Gentiles, keeping the Law, how to celebrate communion, the role of women in the church, yet never once had any trouble at all accepting

that God is now mysteriously Three instead of One is absurd. Would not some group of Christians resist a change of this magnitude? Yet, what we have instead is a conspiracy of silence — zero evidence that the Trinity even existed in New Testament times.

Now for some history. Eventually a controversy about whether or not Jesus was God did break out, but it was in Egypt not in Judea, in the early fourth century not in the first century. This controversy was so severe that no less than 25 councils met specifically to address this issue between AD 318 and 381. Fifteen of them found in favor of Arius who taught that Jesus was a created being and seven found in favor of Alexander and Athanasius who taught that Jesus was fully God with no beginning. (Three of them ended in stalemate.) In fact, it was not until Theodosius (the emperor who took office in AD 379) made non-Trinitarian beliefs illegal that the die was cast and orthodox Christianity cemented itself into a rigidly Trinitarian shape. The Church could just as easily have had a unitarian rather than a Trinitarian creed, but politics, in the end, were the decisive factor. Dogma and power won out, not the Bible. Had the non-Trinitarians been more successful in courting the emperor's favor everything would have been different.

So what are we to make of these facts? Controversies come about when new ideas emerge which conflict with people's long-held and cherished beliefs. The Trinity was certainly a brand new idea which nearly all scholars agree was not taught at all in the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament). Furthermore, the Trinity was totally foreign to the way first-century Jews thought about God and the Messiah. So if Jesus did come on the scene revealing this "truth" where is the evidence of it? We have no passage from the New Testament explaining or even stating the Trinity. Furthermore, there is no controversy within the church giving evidence that some Christians rejected it and needed to be persuaded otherwise. In addition, when the Christians traveled abroad as missionaries, supposedly teaching the Trinity among other things, they were met with repeated persecution for a variety of reasons, yet in not one case was there a conflict about whether or not Jesus was God. Last of all, we do find controversy over defining God, but it is not until much later. I think if we take these historical lines of argumentation together we have solid grounds for rejecting the myth that Jesus and/or the disciples believed and taught the doctrine of the Trinity. ✧

The Wisdom of Death

by Sidney Hatch, *Brief Bible Studies*, Vol.15, No. 2, p. 22

In 1782, Joseph Priestley, the famous scientist and biblical unitarian preacher, wrote to a friend reminding him that they both were now past "the meridian of life." We must, he said, submit without

reluctance to that "temporary rest in the grave" which a "wise Creator" has appointed for all men — our Savior not excepted. Priestley had suffered miserably, because of his anti-Trinitarian stance, from a violent attack on his personal library in England.

But, someone may ask, Was God "wise" in this appointment? Was it necessary for Him to decree death for all men? If, in this regard, we question the wisdom of God, let us for a moment consider the alternative that might have been: "And now, lest he [man] put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever —" (Gen. 3:22).

God never finished this statement! We have here a figure of speech called "sudden silence." Its purpose was emphasis. Better to leave unsaid what was in the mind of God. An answer would be too appalling even to consider. If the sinning Adam and Eve had gained immortal as sinners, what an unspeakable disaster that would have been.

What was God thinking, when He drew back from speaking the awful words? First, of course, was the dread decision: "I must drive man away from the tree of life, lest he eat and become immortal!"

But, again, someone may ask, What would have been wrong if Adam and his children had become immortal? For them — and for all mankind — it would have meant an eternity of heartache, strife, and sin. A wise Creator saw that there was something worse than death, and that was immortality in sin. There must be no such thing as an immortal sinner. And so He decreed that man must die and in death return to dust again (Gen. 3:19; cp. Dan. 12:2; Ecc. 9:5, 10).

But God provided another way to immortality, to a life of purity, free from sin: The man who believes in Christ and his Kingdom of God Gospel will be raised to live again. With this hope in mind, Joseph Priestley also wrote to his friend, saying, in effect, "Let it brighten the evening of our lives. Let us anticipate with joy the glorious morning of the resurrection, when we shall meet our Savior!" ✧

How Could a Good God Allow Suffering?

"The Bible teaches that the future is not an immaterial 'paradise' but a new heaven and a new earth. In Revelation 21, we do not see human beings being taken out of this world *into heaven*, but rather heaven coming down and cleansing, renewing, and perfecting this material world. The secular view of things, of course, sees no future restoration. The biblical view of things is resurrection — not a future that is just a consolation for the life we never had, but a restoration of the life you always wanted. This means that every horrible thing that ever happened will not only be undone and repaired but in some way make the eventual glory and joy even greater" (Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, p. 32).

Intellectual Inertia

by Keith Relf, New Zealand

An interesting item appeared in the Creation Ministries newsletter, describing how many ideas persist because folk won't take the time to examine the evidence for themselves. It has been said on good authority that 95% of people don't think. Many just repeat the last most convincingly presented "interpretation" they heard.

This is true in theology as it is in science; most folk are happy to accept something as truth because someone they think they can trust, often parents or a Sunday-school teachers, said so. People attach themselves easily to self-appointed gurus. The current controversy between evolution and intelligent design illustrates how this works. It is true what Stephen Hawkins said, that most theories are developed to support the author's prejudices. Then, a new generation is taught and the error becomes entrenched as they in turn infect the next generation of bright young minds.

The problem with this repeated phenomenon is that we simply go round in circles and little or no original thought is brought to bear on a problem. To make it worse, the idea is cultivated that "ordinary" people are unable to understand and must take the word of a small, self-replicating, institutionalized group of "experts." Life is busy and most are happy to follow the crowd.

This is especially true of Bible translations and the doctrines of the Church which have been perpetuated and entrenched by generations of self-replicating "scholarship." The murky beginnings of some "teachings" and those who propounded them are buried in obscure terms and convoluted argument designed to lift any controversy above the ken of the majority, while much effort is put into obtuse argument and verbally polishing the marred escutcheons of the originators of these doctrines.

The concept of "faith" is abused. Instead of our being encouraged to have faith in God, we first must have faith in those who claim editorial rights to God's word. The quotation below is a rare exception and it should be read thoughtfully. William Tyndale was martyred, burned at the stake by the Church, for his efforts to bring the Bible to every person in plain English. Tyndale earned the right to your attention. (My emphasis)

From "If God Spare My Life," William Tyndale

"The Scripture is a true light that shows us 'both what to do and what to hope'; it is a defense from all error, and a solace and consolation." This comfort, Tyndale said, was to be found in the plain text and literal sense. "**Cleave unto the texte and the playne storje,**" he advised his readers. This was a crucial point. For a thousand years and more, Christian congregations

had heard the Scripture only as a series of disconnected¹ brief texts on which their priest hung his sermon. Long discourses were spun off a verse or a parable. Scholars argued on the meanings behind the apparent meaning — "*idle disputers and brawlers about vain words,*" Tyndale said, "*ever gnawing on the bitter bark without and never attaining the sweet pith within.*" **To Tyndale, the Bible is to be read as a whole, and the words accepted for what they are; "for it tells a tale that any man or woman can understand, without being ordained or studying theology."**

What has changed? "Long discourses...spun off a verse or a parable" is still how most Christians get their Sunday doctrine. Pulpit theology! We are gullibly captivated by the presentation more than the content; impressed by the "performance" rather than the Holy Spirit.

Although oft quoted, Luke's comment about the "more noble" Bereans is worth mentioning again. "These [the Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, **and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so**" (Acts 17:11). Remember, it was the apostle Paul who was preaching, and nevertheless they checked their Bibles. How easily today believers swallow whatever comes from the platform or pulpit, is evident in the spread of religious "fads" and the mass belief in false doctrine and sanitized church history, within so-called orthodoxy. ✧

Reasoning from the Bible

Another Lesson in Connecting the Dots

Last month we suggested that the golden rule of Bible understanding is "connecting the dots." The marginal references in many modern Bibles are essential to good study. They take you from a given text to another which links up with it. Thus the Bible illuminates itself often.

We gave two examples in September. We pointed out that the "trio" of observances, which amount to a single shadow (Col. 2:17), are "annual holy days, new moons and weekly sabbaths." Some have not liked the idea that the *weekly* sabbath is listed as a *shadow* of Christ who has come. So they try to separate the weekly sabbath from the other two items. What they have done, though, is to defy common sense! Paul did not say "annual holy days, new moons, and [more] annual holy days." He did not say "Tom, Dick and Tom" or ABA. He said "ABC," listing all three observances. If we search the rest of the Bible we find exactly this same trio of observances listed together. There are some 10 examples. To break the bond between Colossians 2:16-

¹See our following article on "connecting the dots."

17 and its “colleague,” parallel verses is to throw away precious understanding. Paul did not ascribe any importance to the weekly or annual holy days, nor to the new moons. We know too that he as a Jew and Christian did not teach the food laws found in the Law of Moses (Rom. 14:14, 20). The torah *in the letter* is a shadow and not the reality of the present Christ. That is Paul’s warning to us all in Colossians 2:16-17.

Paul did not believe that the weekly Sabbath was part of an eternal “moral law.” He described it as a shadow and warned his readers not to regress into shadows and thus away from the risen Christ.

Our other example had to do with the Abomination of Desolation in Matthew 24:15. Jesus gave this Abomination the status of the **key sign** (“when you see...”) that the end-time was about to begin with intensity. What he meant by the Abomination of Desolation was most important, and Jesus referred us back to Daniel 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11; also 8:13. Connecting the dots as Jesus instructed tells us *when* the Abomination of Desolation, which triggers the great and final tribulation period, is to be expected in God’s plan.

It precedes the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21). And the great tribulation (again we connect the dots) is found just before the resurrection of the dead in Daniel 12:2. Daniel 12:1 is the proper time for locating that Great Tribulation. If we break the thread of understanding between Matthew 24:21 and Daniel 12:1, which Jesus quotes, we throw away information about Jesus’ famous prophecy.

Another example of good connections: In Acts 2 Peter explained the condition of King David at the time of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. Was David alive and well in heaven with Jesus? Obviously not. Peter said, “David did not go up to heaven...He is dead...and his tomb is with us to this day” (Acts 2:29, 34). This reflection on the state and status of David is connected directly with Daniel 12:2 where we discover *where* the dead now are and what they are doing there. They are “sleeping in the dust of the ground.” From there they will be woken up at the future resurrection of the faithful dead. “David has not gone to heaven” (Acts 2:34). “Now David, after he had served the will of God in his lifetime, **fell asleep**, was gathered to his ancestors, and did see corruption” (Acts 13:36) is exactly what we would expect based on the connection to Daniel 12:2 about the sleep of the dead until the resurrection.

Now that precious and illuminating connection is ditched if we then read 1 Peter 3:19 to mean that Jesus went and preached (*when he was dead*) to dead saints like David in Hades, and that Jesus took them out of Hades to heaven. 1 Peter 3:18 states that Jesus was first “made alive in the spirit.” Then he went and preached to “spirits.” When did Jesus do this? Only after he had been “made alive.” Connecting that important phrase

“made alive” to its companion texts (1 Cor. 15:22, 36; John 5:21; Rom. 4:17) we find that “made alive” means to be **resurrected from death**. It never means surviving death by not really dying! It refers to being resurrected out of the state of death. Jesus did nothing when he was dead. After he was resurrected he did his preaching.

The “dots” are hardly connected if we make Peter contradict himself! In Acts 2:34 David “has not gone to heaven.” Therefore Jesus could not have taken David to heaven with him, after preaching to him in Hades! It follows that it would be a misunderstanding of Peter in 1 Peter 3 to make him say that Jesus had preached to dead saints and taken them to heaven!

The solution is to understand “made alive” as “being resurrected from the dead” (joining up with John 5:21). Jesus then went and preached, not to David, but to fallen spirits or demons who had done great evil at the time of the flood. That connection is found of course in Genesis 6 and in Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4. The Sons of God (an expression in the Hebrew which invariably means angels, in this case wicked ones) had illicit relations with human females, “daughters of men.” The contrast is between angels and human females, as both church and synagogue originally understood.

The truth is essentially simple, if we first get rid of the appalling pagan doctrine that the soul of man is immortal and has to survive consciously. That belief interferes with good understanding and affects our whole reading of the Bible. Once we discard the “immortal soul” of Plato, we know that the dead are peacefully dead in the grave, or “gravedom” (Hades, Sheol). We know that the only way out of death is by a glorious resurrection which will happen at the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52, which is the seventh, post-tribulation trumpet of Revelation 11:15-18.

There is no pre-tribulation resurrection/rapture. How do we know? By connecting the dots we find out when the dead will be raptured (caught up to meet the returning Jesus). The “rapture” means the catching up and gathering of the saints to Jesus, “our gathering together” (1 Thess. 4:17). Connect that passage to Jesus’ instruction on the same subject: “Immediately **after** the tribulation of those days...he will send out his angels to gather the elect” (Matt. 24:29, 31). “Immediately after” is precisely “immediately POST-tribulation,” “the tribulation of those days” (v. 29).

Only by disconnecting Jesus from Paul can one arrive at the popular but mistaken idea that Jesus comes back to resurrect the saints PRE-tribulation. Jesus said that he would gather the elect, the Christians, POST-tribulation. Paul merely confirms this in 2 Thessalonians 1 where he specifically says that Christians will find relief from present troubles only “when the Lord Jesus is revealed in flaming fire taking vengeance.” That is no secret coming.

A very basic fact about salvation can be discerned by joining Hebrews 5:9 to Mark 1:14-15. Obedience is the key to being saved. **“Jesus is the author of salvation for those who obey him.” Why not then turn in obedience to Jesus’ first command: Repent and believe God’s Gospel about the Kingdom?** The Bible interprets itself, if we will allow it to do so. Jesus and his Gospel teachings are the key to successful understanding. ✧

Rejecting Jesus While Claiming to Accept Him

Some who claim to be students of the Bible and want to attach themselves to Jesus resist the easy biblical teaching about the Christian destiny. There is a way of hiding oneself from Jesus while *claiming* to relate to him! It is done like this: **One turns a blind eye to the primary teachings of Jesus found, three times over, in Matthew, Mark and Luke.** This exercise is a form of self-deception, in the interests of maintaining views which have not been learned from the Bible. Jesus declared the Christian destiny when he pronounced this beautiful and simple blessing on the meek (his true followers): “They are going to have **the earth** as their inheritance” (Matt. 5:5). As if this crystal clear promise were not enough (the same promise for the faithful is presented often in the Old Testament, five times in Ps. 37), Jesus repeated his teaching about our future in Revelation 5:10. The faithful of all the nations (the international “Israel of God,” Gal. 6:16) are going to **“rule on the earth.”** All the popular language about “going to heaven” either at death or at a pre-tribulation rapture or later, falsifies the straightforward teaching of Jesus. It also denies Jesus his own Second Coming. Yes, Jesus is going to *return* to this earth and live here! That is the whole point of the Second Coming, which is not a “drive-by” event. The Second Coming of Jesus is denied if one believes that Jesus is going to “visit” and then go back to heaven! It is equally denied by so-called Preterism which claims that Jesus returned in AD 70.

It is part of the unreformed legacy of the Reformation to ignore the teachings of Jesus as laid out in Matthew, Mark and Luke. This threefold repetition is there for a purpose. God knew that professed believers would risk ignoring His Son, and his words, of whom He said, “This is My Son...*listen* to him” (Matt. 17:5; Luke 9:35). That admonition is forgotten when Matthew 5:5 and Revelation 5:10 are disregarded in the interests of a cherished doctrine about “heaven.” Jesus said nothing about heaven in connection with the Christian future. Jesus will descend from heaven and meet the saints in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The saints will escort Jesus to the earth, his own destination. Jesus is now in heaven preparing our future places in the Kingdom of

God on earth (John 14:2-3). He will then return to the earth in a single Second Coming (there is no PRE-tribulation rapture in the Bible), and the faithful believers of all the ages will rule with him “on the earth.” The meek are not going to heaven; they are going to inherit the earth. If you want to be in heaven at the second coming, you will not find Jesus there! Jehovah’s witnesses, for all their talk of the Kingdom, still do not understand that immortal saints are going to be with Jesus on the renewed earth.

If one is going to argue for the truth of Jesus, start by making your point from the recorded teachings of Jesus in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Then support them also from John and the rest of the Bible. On no account ignore Jesus by ignoring his words! There is no more effective way of deceiving oneself. Of course, one may have to swim against the tide of “popular” tradition, but obeying and believing Jesus and his teachings is always the first priority (Heb. 5:9; John 3:36; 1 Tim. 6:3; 2 John 9).

Some readers are still having difficulty with Psalm 110:1. Jesus loved that verse and so should we. There is no reason for any confusion. The verse reads, “The LORD said to my lord.” “The LORD” is the Hebrew “Yahweh” and the second lord (my lord) is *adoni* (pronounced “adonee”). Note carefully that that second lord in the Hebrew is the word ADONI. It is **not, repeat not**, the word *Adonai*. *Adonai* is another title for Yahweh. If the second lord were ADONAI, then Yahweh would be speaking to ADONAI. This would present a horrifying error: conversation between God and God!

There is really no excuse for not knowing that the second lord in Psalm 110:1 is **not** ADONAI (Lord God). At least if one cannot read Hebrew it is presumptuous to repeat, as some correspondents persist in doing, the popular error that YHVH was speaking to ADONAI! He was not. The Hebrew text does not read ADONAI in Psalm 110:1.

Readers surely know that there is only one God in the Bible, not two. YHVH is the One God and He speaks in prophecy in Psalm 110:1 to the Lord Messiah, *adoni*, “my lord.” *Adoni* in all of its 195 occurrences never means GOD. It always designates a person who is not God. If you cannot read the Hebrew for yourself, consult a rabbi or other good source. That second lord looks like this in Hebrew: לַאֲדֹנָי Reading from right to left, the first letter is a lamed, like the English letter “l,” meaning “to.” Then we have the word “my lord” — *adoni*. *Adoni* is never a title for God. The dot under the fourth letter above gives the sound “ee” — hence “adonee.” ✧

Comments

"I am grateful that you answer e-mails directly and are willing to help me solve and answer these sorts of questions. I am far from a good writer and often I am sure it must bug you, the grammar, format and structure that I (mis)use. But it blesses me that you are patient and willing to write back. Your Oxford education is something I would have dreamed of when I was a boy, living on a small farm, reading old books from the library. I recognize God's goodness in training you to help such as me. I would like now to tell you how complete one of the converts has become. He has been in what is called a 'worship ministry' for many years. I worked with him for many of those years. He is a 'wannabe theologian.' But he has no strong Greek or Hebrew history (cannot read it or write it) — he just looks it up and studies real meanings.

"You should know his reactions to me have been heated — often profoundly angry. But now tears and thanksgiving. He remembers being in a Welsh church as a boy. There was a hymn that said something about "from dust we come, to dust we do return." That stuck in his mind. He finally sees that until Christ returns with his reward, we are asleep and must awake to be in his Kingdom (Dan. 12:2). The song stayed in his heart and when I presented the truths to him about the nature of man many months later, he was reminded of these things. Now he calls me nearly every day. He speaks to me like a child seeing all new things and all things new. He also runs into strong proofs of the non-Trinity doctrine. He calls me up even at work to say, "Look what I have found! Look how clear it is; I had never seen this before."

"His daughter is 15 years old. He has now told her all about these truths and she has easily accepted it, suspecting just such a thing, but afraid to say so. Now she is a much better believer in Jesus and the full path to the Kingdom. She is a brilliant thinker. His wife is a graduate and strong Trinity proponent. He has not spoken to her about this yet, as it is a very troublesome and hot issue for her. She wrote papers on the glories of the 'beloved Trinity' in Bible school. He is praying and writing songs that are in line with the Bible truth, without highlighting the Trinity, or heaven as the goal. She likes his 'new music.' There will come a time when she will have it all presented. We shall see how she reacts.

"We pray a lot and ask God to help us use the keys of the Kingdom to unlock the hearts of those who claim his name so that they can see the truth and be set free from the poison of Plato and his philosophy. There will be a day when a New Reformation will indeed come to the forefront and the Church will change again. That day is one I wait for. Imagine it from every pulpit: One God,

One Lord Messiah and one Gospel of the Kingdom. One rest in the sleep of death till the resurrection. Blessed be his name." — *California*

"I would like to thank you for steadily doing the best work available for every Christian nowadays. In the last 3 years I have started to go through all this stuff on the Internet and in books, getting more and more to the "roots." Since I don't speak Greek or Hebrew (but 5 other languages), I am glad to read about all the oldest misinterpretations, wrong translations and even simple frauds concerning the holy Scriptures. So I have removed and excluded all kinds of wrong 'dogmatics' which are in the established churches. There are more dogmatics than Christians and there are very few clear thinking Bible examiners. So one day (two years ago) I found www.bibelcenter.de in Germany (also an English version is there), where Mr. W. Schneider has some excellent Bible studies. On this webpage he offers your book about the Trinity-failure in a German translation. I had already some similar ideas about John 1:1 and other important scriptures, but your work is far better and a complete remedy for many misled Christians. Thank you once again for your work." — *Germany*

"I do not remember precisely how I found you but it was probably through Kingdomready.org, via restorationfellowship.org, via thebyteshow.com, via a general search about the Trinity. Do I share the view of one God, that being God the Father, and Jesus being His Son the Messiah? I sure do! It is an understanding I developed independently years ago and in a search for fellow believers found you. I listened to as much of the byteshow as I could, where I started listening to Sean Finnegan. That then directed me to Kingdomready.org. (One of my needling questions ended up on his blog... hooray!) I am a 10-year diligent Bible student who grew up in several churches. I just completed my 40th year here on this earth." — *Oregon*

"I just want to thank you so very much for your work on the Trinity — really changed my life, changed the way I thought and brought me into a closer walk with my Father." — *England*

If you would like to contribute to the work of *Focus on the Kingdom* we are a tax-deductible 501(c)(3) organization. We are sending our literature to some 75 countries. A number of you are encouraged by the opportunity to have a part in the propagation of the Gospel of the Kingdom. We are grateful for your participation in our collective effort to preach the Kingdom to all the nations. "Then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). Checks are payable to Restoration Fellowship, PO Box 2950, McDonough, GA 30253, USA.