

Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 17 No. 11

Anthony Buzzard, editor

August, 2015

Christian Destiny

"I like that Anthony reminds us that we are in training for royal office in God's Kingdom on this earth. This will not be a job for the faint of heart so we should get as much training and experience as we can!" — *Youtube*

Thanks for that good comment. The plain facts of Scripture lead us to believe, in a multitude of passages, that God and Jesus are preparing for the coming Kingdom **by inviting and selecting and training the personnel who will be the Kingdom.** "Fear not, little flock, because your Father is delighted **to give you** the Kingdom" (Luke 12:32). "John the Baptist was the greatest man who ever lived, and yet he who is least in the Kingdom will be greater than John" (Matt. 11:11). Indeed, a then **immortalized** executive in the future Kingdom will be great! "Their faces will shine like the sun in its strength in the Kingdom" (Matt. 13:43, Jesus quoting Dan. 12:3; see also Dan. 7:18, 22, 27: all nations will obey the saints, RSV). Jesus will share his world government, the first ever successful one, and a **theocracy**, with the saints of all the ages. The fiercest and most terrible warning Jesus issued was this, to hostile Jews of his time, and to all who are deceived: "When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom and yourselves being cast out, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Luke 13:28; cp. Matt. 7:22-23).

Jesus was the great sower and planter (see the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8), and he well knew the passages in the Hebrew Bible which predicted that the Lord God, the Father of Jesus, would be "sowing the people" of the future Kingdom of God on earth. "I will sow her [the true people of God] for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not received mercy. And I will say to those who were not my people, 'You are my people!' and they will say, 'You are my God'" (Hos. 2:23). Now with the same object in view, note Jeremiah 31:27: "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord God, 'when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast. It will happen then that as I have watched over them to pluck them up, break them down, to destroy and afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant.'"

No wonder then that Jesus opens his campaign and ministry as God's preacher of the Kingdom of God

Gospel (Luke 4:43) by **summarizing the whole Bible message, a promise and a threat:** "Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14-15). Salvation, it should be carefully noted, is by obedience to Jesus (Heb 5:9). Only those who heed the words and commands of Jesus can hope to be saved (**John 12:44-50: these words should be read over and over to counter the false idea that the teaching of Jesus does not count!**). Obedience begins with the intelligent response to the command to "repent and believe the Gospel about the Kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14-15) and should be followed by an intelligent obedience to the greatest of all the commands, given by Jesus in Mark 12:29ff.

Many of your friends cannot define the Kingdom of God and thus cannot respond to Jesus' first command in Mark 1:14-15. Here from this week's email is a list of my suggested verses:

The Kingdom of God is defined first in Daniel 2:44 and 7:18, 22, 27 ("obey them," RSV). The saints will rule as kings with Jesus in the Kingdom, and the saints are not ruling now! (1 Cor. 4:8-13).

The Kingdom is firstly a Hebrew, Jewish, Davidic concept. It means the time when the Messiah is going to sit on the throne of David and rule the world (Luke 1:33; 2 Sam. 7:14ff).

The Kingdom of God is the heart of the Gospel before Jesus first began to mention the cross (Mark 1:14-15; Matt. 16:21: he "**began**" to speak of his death).

The Kingdom of God will be "about to come" in Luke 21:31, at the return of Jesus in the future.

The Kingdom of God is when Jesus and the 12 Apostles will administer the world (Luke 22:28-30; Matt. 19:28).

Joseph of Arimathea was "waiting for the Kingdom of God" in Mark 15:43, after the ministry of Jesus was finished.

The Kingdom of God *begins* at the future 7th trumpet in Revelation 11:15-18. This is the resurrection trumpet (1 Cor. 15:50-58).

The Kingdom of God is at the end of the age when the saints will shine like the sun in its strength (Dan. 12:3; Matt 13:39-43).

No verse says that we have already inherited the Kingdom. It is our future inheritance (Col. 3:24; Matt. 5:5).

The Kingdom of God is the time when the Lord will be king over the whole world and all will believe that Yahweh is one LORD (Zech. 14:9; Obad. 21).

Acts 8:12 defines the Gospel and shows how the holy spirit worked to bring people to conversion via the Gospel of the Kingdom.

I added this in my email:

In short your friend simply ignored Jesus and his Gospel preaching of the Kingdom! You can see how he just waffled and gave no texts! This is not Bible study; it is just words on a page!

Luke 19:11-27 is also an excellent place to start in defining the Kingdom. The Gospel about the cross and resurrection was added to the Kingdom Gospel only in Matthew 16:21! I suggest that your friend do some real analysis of the verses. Don't forget that Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 did not contradict Jesus! Paul said that the death and resurrection of Jesus were 'among items of first importance' in the Gospel, but not the whole Gospel. If Paul had not preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, following Jesus, he would have put himself under a curse for preaching the wrong Gospel (Gal. 1:6-10).◊

Vital Information on the Bible's Favorite Proof-Text (Use it Always!)

Essential facts on Psalm 110:1:

"My lord." "The Revised Version (1881) has rightly dropped the capital letter, L, as being in the nature of an interpretation [British understatement!]. 'My lord' (*adoni*) is the title of respect and reverence used in the OT in addressing or speaking of a person of rank and dignity, especially a king, Gen. 33:6; 1 Sam. 22:12; 1 Kings 1 (several times); 18:7 and frequently)."¹

Ps. 110.1. The Masoretic Hebrew text uses the phrase (*adoni*, 'my master') to denote the lord-vassal relationship between the king and his people (cf. 1 Sam. 22:12; 26:18; 1 Kings 1:13; 18:7), whereas the usual reference to Deity is *Adonai* ('Lord').²

"The form *adoni* ('my lord'), a royal title (1 Sam. 29:8), is to be carefully distinguished from the divine title *Adonai* ('Lord') used of Yahweh."³

"Lord in the OT is used to translate *Adonai* when applied to the Divine Being. The [Hebrew] word...has a suffix [with special pointing] presumably for the sake of distinction."⁴

"*Adonai* and *adoni* are variations of pointing to distinguish divine reference from human."⁵

"'The Lord said to my Lord' meant 'God said to my king'...In Hebrew the phrase says, 'Yahweh said to *adoni*' (neum YHWH *la'adoni*). *Adoni* means 'my master' or 'my lord.' The devout Jew would read this phrase by covering 'YHWH' (Yahweh), saying instead, '*Adonai* said to *adoni*.' *Adonai* (in distinction from *adoni*) means Yahweh, the God revealed to Israel...The second, apparently human 'lord' in the Psalm's second noun is distinguished from the Deity of the first 'LORD,' as strict exegesis suggests."⁶

Adoni is the critically important title for **the lord Messiah** Jesus (Luke 2:11). It is proof that he is not God, making two Gods, since the Father is God, but he is the supremely elevated man Messiah. The amazing destiny of the second Adam is to sit in heaven with God until his second coming to the earth.◊

Facing the Words of Jesus Honestly

Until people face the creed, the confession of faith, of Jesus in Mark 12:29, how can we claim to be believing and obeying Jesus? The right approach to the Bible and the faith is surely to believe and obey the truth of Mark 12:29, not replace it! Who would agree with abolishing the Lord's prayer?! No one. But why not think long and hard about **the Lord's creed?** **The Lord's creed, his definition of the true God** (Mark 12:29), his confession of faith, is being abolished among evangelicals. The words of Jesus are to judge us. We might as well face them now (John 12:48). What will you do with these words from Jesus in Mark 12:29, where he is asked to define God? Jesus is in total agreement with a friendly Jew.

One of my commentaries on Paul notes this: "For a Jew the word God could mean **one Person** only. The word 'God' used to refer to Jesus would have seemed to be an infringement of monotheism."⁷

Ponder this amazing admission. And Jesus was a Jew! As well as the fountainhead of all Christian truth.◊

To our international readers: If you are willing and able to receive *Focus on the Kingdom* by **email** each month (and save us postage), please send us an email to anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com or sign up at www.restorationfellowship.org with your name and email address.

¹A.F. Kirkpatrick, DD, Regius Professor of Hebrew, Cambridge, *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*.

²*Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

³*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "Lord," p. 157.

⁴*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, "Lord," Vol. 3, p. 137.

⁵Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, under *adon*.

⁶F.D. Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook*, Matthew 13-28, Eerdmans, 2007 p. 243-244.

⁷Dr. Whiteley, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p 106.

The Purpose of Speaking in Tongues

A Study of 1 Corinthians 14

by Mark Clarke, Washington

In considering whether the modern phenomenon of speaking in tongues is in fact the same as the New Testament gift, we must examine the Scriptural evidence and observe what the purpose of New Testament tongues was. As we examine the Scriptures we will see that “tongues” was a sign, to corroborate the Gospel message being preached and to demonstrate that the holy spirit had been received.

Contrary to this understanding, I was taught, as many are, that speaking in tongues was to be a personal prayer language to be used in one’s private prayer life. In fact I was taught that the Bible lists 11 things that speaking in tongues is good for. Several verses were quoted which state what speaking in tongues did in New Testament times, but these sources ignored the context which teaches that while tongues did these things, **it was of no profit to anyone unless it was interpreted.** We will deal with those below. However some of the verses quoted did not even say what it was claimed they were saying.

Two such misquotations were from Romans 8:16-17. It was said that the benefits of speaking in tongues included having the spirit bear witness with our spirit, providing proof that we are joint-heirs with Christ. However these verses don’t mention speaking in tongues. Verse 14 speaks of being led by the spirit of God, which works in many different ways. This is what bears witness to the fact that we are children of God.

Another one in Romans 8 is verse 26: “In the same way the spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the spirit itself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” This was claimed to be a reference to speaking in tongues, which enabled us to pray perfectly without our minds getting in the way. But how can “groanings too deep for words” be referring to speaking in tongues, if speaking in tongues consists of **words**, albeit words we don’t understand?

Another one was Ephesians 3:16: “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His spirit in the inner man.” Certainly the holy spirit of God strengthens us with power, but again, this verse says nothing about speaking in tongues.

Yet another such misquotation was that speaking in tongues was rest to the soul. This was arrived at by combining 1 Corinthians 14:21 with Isaiah 28:11-12, which is quoted in that verse. Isaiah reads, “Indeed, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue. He who said to them, ‘Here is rest, give

rest to the weary,’ and, ‘Here is repose.’” But what they failed to include was the rest of verse 12: “but they would not listen.” The passage was not saying that speaking in tongues would be rest to the soul. It was saying that his people would be spoken to through foreign languages because they would not listen to their own language. This was initially fulfilled when Israel was taken captive to foreign lands, but just as Isaiah said this before, Paul says that in his time tongues were a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:22).

This is in fact the key to the purpose of tongues in the first century. It was a demonstrable sign to all those present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). In Samaria (Acts 8) after the Apostles laid hands on those who had not received before, Simon “saw” that the holy spirit was given. He saw it by way of “signs and great miracles” (v. 13) which we can safely assume included — but was not limited to — speaking in tongues. In Acts 10, it was a sign that the Gentiles had received the holy spirit. Were it not for this sign, the disciples would never have believed that the Gentiles could be fully included. And finally, in Acts 19, after Paul had expounded the superiority of baptism in Jesus’ name over John’s baptism, speaking in tongues was again a sign that they had received the holy spirit.

Every reference in the book of Acts to speaking in tongues was clearly a sign that the holy spirit had been received. Nowhere do we read of it being for personal, private prayer, as many have so wrongly taught. If one speaks in a language he has not learned, those who hear it and understand the language can testify that it is indeed a supernatural sign. But if one speaks in tongues in private, since he does not understand it and no one else hears it, there is no proof that it is indeed an unlearned language, and therefore it does not function as a sign.

When Paul writes about speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14, it is often assumed that he is somehow speaking of a different kind of speaking in tongues from what we read about in Acts, or at least a different usage of it. But 1 Corinthians 14:22 clearly states that “tongues are a sign.” There is no Scripture that when correctly understood teaches that the gift of tongues was for anything other than a sign. Nevertheless, 1 Corinthians 14 has a number of verses that have been misunderstood and misinterpreted as saying that it was meant to be a *private* prayer language to be used in private prayer.

To begin with, verse 2 says, “One who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.” Probably the biggest reason this passage and others like it are misunderstood is the misunderstanding of “his spirit.” I was taught that “The Holy Spirit” was another name for God, and that “holy spirit” (lower case *h* and *s*) was God’s gift to us, and was now our spirit, one of the three

parts of man (spirit, soul, and body). But this actually finds no Scriptural foundation, and the gift of the holy spirit is never called “my spirit” or “his spirit” referring to the one who received it. It is the spirit of God or the spirit of Christ, at work in and through believers and in various situations, which is given as a gift. (See a detailed study of this on my website, www.godskingdomfirst.org/holyspirit)

When someone in the Bible spoke of “his spirit” it referred to his human spirit, the spirit of man, the innermost part of his being. When someone spoke in tongues, Paul said that “in his spirit” — i.e. in his innermost being — he was speaking mysteries, and thus he was speaking to God. This is not stated as a desirable condition, however, for in the context Paul is saying that it is not something they should aspire to, but rather they should prophesy, so that the Church may be blessed.

We see this misunderstanding again in verse 4. “One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.” I was taught that this means we should aim at self-edification in private, although in the Church we are to seek to edify the Church. But if speaking in tongues were for building oneself up, why would he *only* mention it in the context of *not* doing it, but rather edifying *others*? Why would there be no other section of Scripture that explicitly told us to build ourselves up by speaking in tongues? Jude 20 refers to “building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the holy spirit.” But that verse does not mention speaking in tongues; it has been read into it. Praying in the holy spirit is to pray as led by the spirit, which could include, but is not limited to, speaking in tongues. This is how we build up ourselves (not “our holy spirit”).

Besides, why would the spirit of God even *need* to be built up? Is God’s spirit not complete? I was taught that it was like a seed that needed to be nurtured and grown. But the Bible does not teach this. Furthermore, presumably this building up in the spirit was something that everyone needed, so why wouldn’t everyone be told to speak in tongues? But we saw that chapter 12 emphatically states that not everyone has the same gifts.

Verse 5 says, “I wish that you all spoke in tongues...” and we nearly always stopped there and left off the rest of the verse, “...but rather that you prophesied.” We were always told that this verse said God wants everyone to speak in tongues. But Paul did not contradict his earlier assertion that “all do not speak in tongues” (12:30). So what is the point of verse 5? It says, “Greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the Church may receive edifying.” Yet nearly every Christian who believes in speaking in tongues magnifies that gift above prophecy and the other gifts. And that might be reasonable if indeed

its purpose was to build up our spirit and pray perfectly. But again, this is not what the Scriptures teach us.

1 Corinthians 14:13 commands the tongues-gifted person to pray to be able to interpret, so that all may hear what is being said. This verse draws a blank in the minds of vast numbers of “tongues speakers.”

That tongues always required interpretation in the Church was Paul’s subject. I was taught, though, that he was saying that interpretation of tongues was more desirable in the Church, but that speaking in tongues without interpretation was desirable in private. But this was read into the Scripture; it doesn’t say that. We again have the reference to one’s spirit praying in verse 14, which was interpreted as “one’s gift of holy spirit.” But as I said, the holy spirit is never called a person’s spirit. That phrase refers to one’s human spirit, his innermost being. “If I pray in a tongue, my innermost being prays, but my mind is unfruitful.” Prayer of any kind is to come from the heart. When one spoke in tongues, he was praying from the depths of his spirit, but doing so in an unlearned language meant his mind was unfruitful (no one benefited).

Verse 15 was interpreted as saying that we can pray with the spirit in private or we can pray with the understanding in the church. But notice it doesn’t say “or.” It isn’t saying we have two options — praying with the spirit or with the mind. It’s saying we pray not only with our spirit but with our mind *also*, as opposed to speaking in tongues which was praying with our spirit *only*, and not with our mind. “I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.” Proof that this is what the passage is referring to is in the next verse: “Otherwise if you bless **in the spirit only...**” Nowhere does Paul ever say that praying with the spirit only and not also with the mind is something we should do in private.

He says “you are giving thanks well enough” in verse 17, but again he doesn’t say that that makes it desirable as long as it’s in private. The prayer in tongues was giving thanks to God well — the words that one spoke in another language were not without meaning — but the person who does not understand the meaning is not edified. Paul thanked God he spoke in tongues more than all the Corinthians, for the gift had its purpose, but in the Church he would rather speak but a few words in their language than many in an unknown language.

Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11-12 in verse 21, as mentioned above, and concludes in verse 22 that tongues were a sign to unbelievers, while prophecy was a sign to believers. This was the whole purpose of tongues in the first-century church. God never intended tongues to go uninterpreted, for unless someone was present who understood the language, there was no proof that it was a

real language, and therefore it did not function as a sign to anyone. The same is true today. Someone speaking strange syllables may sound as if they are speaking in an unknown language, but unless there is someone there to hear it and testify that it is an actual language, there is no proof and therefore it is not a valid sign to anyone. When it is falsely taught and expected that everyone should speak in tongues, the possibility of self-deception is very great. We must test the spirits (1 John 4:1), and prove all things, holding fast to what is good (1 Thess. 5:21).◊

“They began to speak in other languages’ (Acts 2:4). There can be no question in any unprejudiced mind that the fact which this narrative sets before us is that the disciples began to speak in various languages, i.e. the languages of the nations below enumerated, and perhaps others. All attempts to evade this are connected with some forcing of the text, or some far-fetched and indefensible exegesis” (Henry Alford, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 15).

Water Baptism

Acts 2:38: “‘Repent and be baptized.’ **Henceforth the universal requirement of all intending converts.** It came about very naturally. In Judaism the baptism as well as circumcision of proselytes was common, as a symbolic act of purification from heathen defilement” (*The School Clarendon Bible, Acts*, p. 104).

For our readers in Washington state who may not be aware, a congregation of the General Conference Church of God was formed a year and a half ago west of the Cascades. The Western Washington Church of God meets at the following locations once each month:

2nd Sunday: Tenino High School, 500 W. 2nd St., Tenino; 10:00 a.m.

3rd Sunday: Kent Senior Activity Center, 600 E. Smith St., Kent; 10:00 a.m.

4th Sunday: Vancouver YWCA, 3609 Main St., Vancouver; 10:00 a.m.

No Bible studies or worship services on the 1st and 5th Sundays at this time. For more information contact Pastor Robin Todd at robinsings4u@comcast.net, or call him in Olympia at (360) 701-9219. Robin also has information about others around the U.S. looking for contact with other believers. You can see a list of those contact cities/towns by going to www.scatteredbrethren.org and then clicking on the appropriate “region,” or by emailing him at the above address.

What Is the Point of a Creed That No One Understands?

— from Tom Harpur, *For Christ’s Sake*, 1993, p. 10-12

“Not long ago, I was discussing the...Apostles’ Creed with a man who has been a devout and loyal churchman for more than sixty years. He has served as a sidesman and as church warden in one of the largest Anglican cathedrals in Canada, always standing at a crisp attention whenever the creeds are said or sung. I asked him how much of it he really understood. ‘Precious little, if anything,’ he replied.

“In fact, very few preachers can give a reasonable account of either the doctrine of the Trinity or the doctrine of the Incarnation, that is, that Jesus was truly human and yet fully God. They repeat formulae that were worked out, with much quarreling and bitterness, in the fourth and fifth centuries by men whose needs, outlook, and understanding of the universe were vastly different from our own. These formulae are no longer useful — instead, they raise an insurmountable barrier for many who might otherwise become disciples of Jesus in our day.

“What is most embarrassing for the Church is the difficulty of proving any of these statements of dogma from the New Testament documents. You simply cannot find the doctrine of the Trinity set out anywhere in the Bible. St. Paul has the highest view of Jesus’ role and person, but nowhere does he call him God. Nor does Jesus himself anywhere explicitly claim to be the Second Person of the Trinity, wholly equal to his heavenly Father. As a pious Jew, he would have been shocked and offended by such an idea.

“Over the last decade or so, I have talked as long and as frequently as possible about these particular doctrines with intelligent laypeople and clergy of all denominations, and I have found widespread confusion — in itself bad enough. But there is worse to come. This research has led me to believe that the great majority of regular churchgoers are, for all practical purposes, **tritheists**. That is, they profess to believe in one God, but in reality they worship three. Small wonder Christianity has always had difficulty trying to convert Jews and Muslims. Members of both these faiths have such an abhorrence of anything that runs counter to their monotheism, or faith in the unity of God, that a seemingly polytheistic gospel has little appeal for them.

“Since writing the above, I have discussed the Church’s problem of making sense out of the traditional God-Man view of Jesus with a senior chaplain at one of Canada’s largest hospitals and with the head of one of the oldest and most respected seminaries in the country. Both said orthodox Christianity posed no difficulties for them because they took the whole body of doctrines

'symbolically' rather than literally. Asked whether their respective flocks were aware of this, they smiled and shook their heads; the answer was clearly 'no.' I mention this because it raises the key issue of the gap between clergy and congregation when it comes to matters of faith and dogma. Very few clerics ever pass on what they have learned in theological school about contemporary scholarship on the Bible — or on anything else, for that matter. Surely it is time for greater honesty from the pulpit."♦

Comments

"I'm 34 years old. I was a Trinitarian but God has opened my eyes. I prayed to God to please lead me into all Truth. For about a month now I'm a biblical unitarian. I read some articles on the Internet and watched some videos on Youtube. It was not easy to say I was wrong. The doctrine of the Trinity came from pagan Greek philosophy. Nothing to do with the Bible. I found someone in Germany with the same belief and in about a few weeks I will be baptized. I'm so thankful that God in his Grace opened my eyes to see the Truth. I have also read some articles and watched some videos from you on Youtube. I'm glad to see that there are some honest people who gave up their tradition for the truth." — *Germany*

"First off, I would like to apologize in advance for the length of this email; also, if it seems that I am giving too much information. But if this story can lead to greater understanding and possibly help someone else, then it was worth it to write. Second, I would like to thank you for the work that you do. *Focus on the Kingdom* has been a God-send for me. I have also been greatly helped by the other publications and papers on your website. I have been gradually making my way through the back issues as well. [Since 1998 at restorationfellowship.org]

"First a little of my history. I was raised as one of Jehovah's Witnesses from about the age of 4 (I am 43 now). I grew up in a divided household. My mother and I were the only JWs in our family. My older sisters were not in the least bit interested in religion, and my father was opposed. While he was a good and honest man, he had no use for religion. He did, however, respect our beliefs and never forced me to comply with anything that would violate my conscience. This became apparent when, at the age of 8 (without the knowledge of my mother) I informed him that I would no longer be celebrating any holidays. He was angry at first, but soon calmed down and told me: 'You are going to get on the phone and call all of the rest of the family and tell them the same thing you told me.' I believe that this was designed to get me to cave; I did not. My grandmothers cried and my oldest sister wanted my dad to beat me; it was a pretty rough night. Almost as bad was the night

that I invited my dad to my baptism (I was 14 at that time).

"I tell this story to illustrate a point: I was very dedicated to my God at an early age. My goal was to be faithful to him my entire life, no matter what happened. I also believed that the only way to be really faithful was to be a good Witness. I did my best to study, preach from door to door, comment at the meetings, and stand up for my beliefs when necessary.

"One day when I was about 10 years old, my mother told me something interesting; she said that she worshipped Jehovah and that she was associated with the Witnesses because she believed that they had the truth (she had looked into other churches including Mormonism which she thought was too weird), but that if they ever started teaching things not in the Bible, she would be gone. My first thought was: 'My mother is a heretic,' but that was soon followed by: 'But that will never happen because we have the truth!' My mother remained a witness until her death in 2006.

"I also remained a Witness despite some misgivings about doctrine (144,000, 1914, 'the generation' — to name a few). Also, it had always bothered me that we were told, albeit infrequently, that the Bible was actually written for the 'anointed' and it applied only by extension to the rest of us. I still remained loyal because I thought I had the truth and in order to please Jehovah I had to remain with 'his organization.'

"I still remained; even though the man that studied with me had been sexually abusing me (for years). I hesitate to bring this up, but it is an important part of why I am writing this message. For many years I dealt with the pain and shame of this and had told no one. I went on to marry and have children of my own and live a somewhat 'normal' life. However, my relationship with God had changed. I won't go into detail about that at this time but, suffice to say, I felt abandoned. For years I went through the motions of serving God because of my family and because I felt that it was the right thing to do. After several years of a mental 'living hell' I finally approached the congregation elders. While some action was taken against the man (which I appreciate), there was no spiritual help given to either me or my family. I still remained loyal to God and to the 'organization' although the ministry was especially difficult. Why? I felt that I could not in good conscience teach things as true that I did not fully believe; and how could I lead people to a congregation that was not taking care of its own? My relationship with God was also suffering. Paradoxically, I still believed and could show from the Bible that God is love, but I figured that He did not really care for me personally because I was defective somehow.

"You may or may not be aware that many abuse survivors tend to look at the world through a different

lens. What most people would consider normal or easy (especially with regard to relationships) does not come easily, or does not compute at all. The best explanation that I have heard to explain this is: Try combing your hair or brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand. You can get by, but parts of your hair just won't lie right and the dentist keeps scolding you for your sloppy brushing. No matter how hard you try, it always seems that things are off. Now imagine that you have that awkwardness with almost everything. For many, trusting in ANYONE, including God, is a monumental task. Proverbs 3:5 becomes an incredibly frustrating scripture.

"As the years went by, we had switched congregations to see if that would help (it didn't). And I talked to different elders to see if that would help (it didn't). During this time, I started to notice a distinct authoritarian bent in the literature; and try as I might, I couldn't ignore it. As all of these things were occurring, I did my best not to become bitter or angry with anyone who had either hurt or ignored me and I was constantly praying for God's direction as to what I should do. This went on for years.

"About nine months ago, I had finally had enough! What I was doing was not working. My relationship with God was not close and it felt like my mind was breaking. I decided to do the unthinkable; to look elsewhere. As you may know, Witnesses are virtually forbidden to look at other religious literature even though they (hypocritically, I think) encourage others to read theirs. I began looking cautiously. I knew that the Trinity, hellfire, immortality of the soul, etc. were not biblical. After a short period of time I stumbled on to your website. I was amazed! Try as I might, I couldn't dispute what I was finding. The articles were scholarly and the authoritarian attitude that I had become used to was not present at all. What came across was a real love for Bible truth. The Bible was opened up to me for the first time ever and my relationship with God has been improving as well. At first, the notion of Jesus' non-literal pre-existence was a bit sticky; but honestly, it makes more biblical sense and has greatly increased my appreciation for Jesus. I have to be truthful though, there is a part of me that is scared to completely let go of the Arian view (I think I now know how Trinitarians must feel).

"During this time, my wife was as supportive as she could be though she is not as convinced as I am. She still looks at the WT organization, though flawed, as 'the truth.' My adult son (who lives in another town) knew nothing of my struggle. Out of the blue, my son called and started telling me that he could not understand how I was not encouraging him in the ministry like I should and that he felt that I was being critical of the Governing Body, etc. I had no clue what to say in response as it was completely unexpected! I prayed. I then started reading to

him Romans 8 in context (Witnesses usually only focus on vs. 14-17 as it is only applied to the 'anointed'). I then went to Matthew 5 and Psalm 37, etc. He said that I was twisting the Scriptures and that he would not listen to such apostate thinking. I tried to confirm my love for God and for him, but to no avail. It's hard to explain but honestly, it did not sound like my son. After a couple of days I found out that he had called one of the elders in my congregation and tried to get a judicial hearing set up. Fortunately, this particular brother is a very loving, thoughtful, and open-minded man. He instead called me to set up a meeting between the two of us. For more than two hours he listened to my story and the doctrinal issues that I had. I explained that I loved God and had no desire to cause divisions in the congregation. To my surprise, he concluded that the issue did not need to go any further and that he would talk to my son and tell him that I was not an apostate. I am convinced that if I had met with another elder, things would not have gone so well. He also recommended that we move to another congregation to get on better spiritual footing for myself, my wife, and my daughter.

"So, while my son is talking (barely) to me again I am left with a dilemma: keep going to the Kingdom Hall and try to work patiently from the inside (Matt 10:16) and give my family some time to see my position a little clearer, or bag it and alienate everyone in the process. I have been praying constantly about this but, as I explained before, my radar is a bit off. Sometimes I think I wouldn't know God's direction if it hit me (sometimes I wish it would). At any rate, I would like you to know that you have already been immensely helpful to me for the work that you are doing. Keep it up!" — email

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