

# Focus on the Kingdom

## Jesus — Son of God or God the Son?

We have in our possession a family Bible dating from 1869, presented to a great grandmother of mine by her grateful Sunday school class on the occasion of her wedding. Such tomes remain as ornaments rather than study Bibles. But I pulled it down (it weighs 15 lbs) and glanced at the notes to Psalm 110:1. It reminds us that Luther called this Psalm “the true high, main Psalm of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ.” It points out also that “no portion of the Old Testament is so often quoted and echoed in the Christian volume and applied to the great Redeemer of our race.”

This is very true. Psalm 110 finds a citation or echo in the New Testament about 33 times, and its *first verse* appears in quotation or allusion no less than 23 times. These statistics should alert us to the tremendous value of the revelation provided by this remarkable “divine oracle” (as the opening of verse one reads). Jesus argued brilliantly from Psalm 110:1. He confounded the opposition by demonstrating that as Messiah he was both the son of David and his lord. The Pharisees, unlike David, had failed to accept him as the Messiah and lord. Jesus’ argument was a stinging rebuke. His opponents were silenced (Matt. 22:41-46).

This Psalm, when accurately translated and read, has explosive implications today for our understanding of who Jesus is in relation to the Father.

Amazingly in contemporary preaching and teaching Psalm 110:1 receives almost no attention. There may be good reason for this: the information contained in verse 1 provides a bombshell sufficient to shock readers into the realization that the proposition “Jesus is God” is fundamentally false to these precious words of David — as well as to the rest of Scripture.

I am convinced that Psalm 110:1, which holds the record for the most frequently quoted verse in the New Testament, announces that the Messiah is a distinct, separate, subordinate, individual person — clearly distinguished from Yahweh who addresses him. If ever there were a passage of Scripture which might

demonstrate the Trinity, this verse would be it. One member of the Godhead, it has been proposed by many, is seen talking to another person. But who is addressed? No one disputes the fact that the “my lord” addressed is prophetic of the coming Messiah (Jesus and the rabbis so recognized it, Matt. 22:41ff.). No one disputes that the person addressed is elevated to a position uniquely supreme, next to God Himself. But who is this Messiah in relation to God? Here, if ever, Trinitarians might expect Yahweh to be addressing another who is *coequal and coeternal with Himself*. Here, if ever, the Trinity would find its support in a verse in which Yahweh addresses someone else who is *also Yahweh*. (Let it not be forgotten that this is what the Trinity, written into the creeds of nearly all contemporary churches, proposes: Jesus is Yahweh!)

The fact is that we find no such proposition in this divine oracle. The “lord” who is both David’s son and his “lord” is carefully *distinguished from God* and categorized as a member of the human race. Our Jewish friends will concur that the idea that the Messiah would be “God the Son” (a member of a Triune Godhead), clothing himself with humanity and coming to earth, is entirely alien to their thinking — and with good cause. The Hebrew Bible on which Jesus was reared positively excludes and forbids the notion that God was to be born as a baby, much less that the immortal God could come and die.

It is a rather simple matter of investigation to establish that the masoretic text of the Bible painstakingly distinguishes between the Lord God and all human or angelic “lords.” There is an important biblical word to describe the Supreme Lord God. It is *adonai* (rhyming with El Shaddai). This word occurs alone or in combination with the Divine personal name Yahweh. *Adonai Yahweh* or *Yahweh adonai* thus describe the One God of biblical monotheism. In all the word *adonai*, meaning the Supreme Lord, is found 449 times in the Old Testament. In English versions

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the word *adonai* appears with a capital L, followed by lower case “o-r-d.”

Psalm 110:1, the verse to which every part of the New Testament alludes, gives us a brilliant account of the destiny of the Messiah. He is to be installed at the right hand of the Father until the time comes for his enemies to be subdued. (Psalm 2 provides a companion and equally valuable prediction of the Messianic program.)

Who then is this “lord” in relation to the One God, Yahweh? Certainly not Yahweh, and certainly not His coequal. Quite deliberately the word in the Hebrew text which identifies the Messiah is a word which *in none of its 195 occurrences ever means “God.”* The word for David’s lord, the Messiah, is *adoni*, “my lord.” With characteristic meticulousness the Hebrew Bible provides a special form of the word for lord to distinguish it from the Divine reference, *adonai*. The sacred and the secular, the divine and the human lords, are non-confusable categories in Scripture. God is never addressed as *adoni* (my lord). However much an angel or a chosen human being may reflect the Deity, he is nevertheless never to be confused with the Deity Himself, who is the unique, uncreated personage commanding our ultimate respect and worship as LORD (Yahweh).

Jesus the Messiah is elevated to the position of supreme human ruler, but he is not God Himself. The fullness of the divine spirit resides in Jesus, but he is distinct from the one God who brought him into existence as the Son of God (Luke 1:35; Acts 13:33, where the *begetting* of the Son refers to his entrance upon life and existence). Gabriel’s words should have blocked the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Gabriel declared that the Son of God is so called because of the creative miracle wrought in Mary. Jesus is not, according to Luke and Gabriel, an eternal Son of God *becoming human*. Gabriel spoke with crystal clarity as well as conciseness. “The power of the Most High will overshadow you [Mary], and that is precisely the reason why [*dio kai*] the one being begotten in you will be called the Son of God.” There is no eternal Son in this description of the creation of the Messiah and thus no Trinitarian Jesus. (Note that the KJV is very slightly misleading with its “therefore also.”)

Psalm 110:1 prevented (or should have prevented) a binary or Triune doctrine of God. The Messiah was to be “lord” not “the Lord God.” The pressure of doctrinal tradition has unfortunately weighed too heavily on the editors of modern Bibles. Although *adoni* (“my lord”) appears 194 times correctly in

English as “sir,” “master,” or “my lord,” readers are misled when in Psalm 110:1 they encounter “my Lord” (with capital L) in many of their translations. The RV, RSV, NRSV and NEB corrected the misleading capital letter which confused the reader into believing that the Messiah was God Himself (*adonai*, which everywhere appears as Lord). Remove the capital from “my lord” and the non-Trinitarian Christology of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament shines out with brilliance. The whole point, after all, of Jesus is that he is the Son of Man, mortal man. Being man, he is capable of death, death for the sins of the world. Were he God, he could not by definition die: there would be no Savior. If Jesus had come into existence first as a created angel (Arianism, and currently the teaching of Jehovah’s Witnesses), he would likewise be incapable of death. Immortal, holy angels do not die (Luke 20:36). The transformation of the human Messiah into a “Second Member of the Trinity” is responsible for a theological chaos from which we need to recover with urgency.

The rather elementary information we are providing here has been available for centuries. A distinguished Lutheran professor of the Bible was writing on Matthew’s and Jesus’ use of our Psalm. (Incidentally, Jesus’ quotation of this Psalm 110:1 put an end to his opponents objections, Matt. 22:46.) In his *Notes on Difficult Passages of Scripture* (1666), Theodore Hackspace observed of Trinitarian apologists that “some found an argument for the Deity of Christ in Psalm 110:1 because Christ is here called *Lord*, equally with God the Father...But it ought to be known that when the Hebrew word is used for the true God, it is written *adonai*, with the vowel kametz; but here in Psalm 110:1 it is simply *adoni*, from which *nothing can be concluded in favor of Christ’s Deity....*” He wrote as a believer in the Trinity.

The celebrated *International Critical Commentary* provides one of the most comprehensive guides to the words of Scripture. Charles Bigg of Christ Church, Oxford, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History, noted that Paul and all the Jewish Christians of New Testament times speak of Jesus as the “one Lord” (I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5). He then says: “**We are not to suppose that the apostles identified Christ with Yahweh.** There were passages of Scripture which made this impossible, for instance Psalm 110:1...It was God who gave Jesus the ‘Name which is above all names’ (Phil. 2:9) and who ‘made’ Jesus Lord (Acts 2:36)” (*Commentary on I Peter*, p. 99). Jesus could not therefore possibly be the Lord God.

The professor demonstrates the impossibility of identifying the Messiah as Yahweh Himself. He thus pronounces the Apostles as incapable of Trinitarianism, unable to make the confession “Jesus is Yahweh.” The professor’s point is simply that Psalm 110:1 places the Messiah in the category of human person, not the Divine Lord God.

In modern times, commentary is awakening to the fact that the proposition “Jesus is God” falsifies the Bible. The highly respected British scholar James Dunn asks the question as to whether in earliest Hellenistic Christianity Jesus was confessed as *God*. “That would be to claim too much. The emergence of a confession of Jesus in terms of divinity [he does not mean Deity] was largely facilitated by the widespread use of Psalm 110:1 from very early on (Mark 12:36; Acts 2:34ff.; I Cor. 15:25; Heb. 1:13): ‘The Lord says to my lord, “Sit at my right hand...”’ Its importance here lies in the double use of *kyrios*, lord. Paul calls Jesus lord *but he seems to have marked reservations about calling him ‘God’*... Similarly he refrains from praying to Jesus. More typical of his attitude is that he prays to *God through Christ*. For at the same time that Paul affirms ‘Jesus is Lord,’ he also affirms that ‘God is one’ (I Cor. 8:5-6; Eph. 4:5-6). *Here Christianity shows itself as a developed form of Judaism*, with its monotheistic confession as one of the most important parts of its Jewish inheritance; for in Judaism the most fundamental confession is ‘God is one,’ ‘There is only one God.’ Hence also Rom. 3:30; Gal. 3:20; I Tim. 2:5 (cf. James 2:19). Within Palestine and the Jewish mission such an affirmation would have been unnecessary — Jew and Christian shared a belief in God’s oneness. But in the Gentile mission this Jewish presupposition within Christianity would have emerged to prominence, in face of the wider belief in ‘gods many.’ The point for us to note is that Paul *can hail Jesus as Lord not in order to identify him with God, but rather, if anything to distinguish him from the One God*, cf. particularly I Cor. 15:24-28” (*Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, p. 53).

It seems to us a tragedy that fundamentalist Christians continue to insist on a confession of Jesus as God — as identified with Yahweh. This is plainly to ask more than the Bible asks. It is to disrupt and deform the first principal of true religion as Jesus taught it: that God is one Person (John 17:3; 5:44; Mark 12:28ff.) and that the Messiah is to be distinguished from that One God as the *adoni*, “my [human] lord” of Psalm 110:1.

For the great cardinal truth of monotheism to be reestablished we encourage our readers to see that there has been an extraordinary carelessness in reporting the significance of the title “lord” as applied to Jesus. Mesmerized, as it seems, by a fear of any departure from belief in Jesus as “God,” authorities with otherwise impeccable credentials have consistently misrepresented the awkward fact that the Messiah is not God, according to Psalm 110:1. Gordon Fee discusses Paul’s credal statements in I Corinthians 8:4-6 (*New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 1987, p. 375): “Although Paul does not here call Jesus God, the formula is so constructed that only the most obdurate would deny its Trinitarian implications. In the same breath that he can assert that there is only One God, he equally asserts that the designation ‘Lord,’ which in the Old Testament belongs to the One God, is the proper designation of the divine Son.” Professor Fee fails to observe that the title “Lord” is a Messianic title drawn from Psalm 110:1. It is true that Lord refers to God, but it is equally true that “Lord” is the title par excellence which belongs to Jesus as *the Messiah* of Psalm 110:1 where the Lord Messiah is carefully distinguished from and *subordinate to* the One God. Jesus, for Paul, is not to be confused with the Lord God, who is one, not two or three. Jesus is by contrast the *Lord Messiah*. Paul’s traveling companion and student, Luke, introduces the Savior by giving him precisely the same royal, messianic title “The Lord Messiah” (*christos kurios* — Luke 2:11) and reports that Elizabeth rejoices with Mary who is “the mother of my lord,” the Messiah of Psalm 110:1 (see Luke 1:43). (Contrast the unbiblical title given to Mary by Roman Catholics, “the mother of God.”) Luke with an eye for precision and detail also reminds us that Jesus is “the Lord’s [Yahweh’s] Messiah” (Luke 2:26). Jesus is not God, but God’s unique Son.

It is a major tragedy that in today’s America such a confession of Jesus as the unique Son of God and Messiah, but not God Himself, is enough to have one removed from the books and branded as a cultist! Truly Canon Goudge assessed the degeneration of theology as it departed farther and farther from the Bible: “When the Greek and Roman mind came to dominate the church, instead of the Hebrew mind, there occurred a disaster in doctrine and practice from which we have never recovered” (*Essays on Judaism and Christianity*). ✧

## John 1:1-14

Readers of standard translations are frequently unaware that their version of certain key passages of Scripture may hide a strong bias on the part of the translators. John 1:1-2 is the classic example of “loaded” translation. Paraphrase versions of Scripture can be most vivid and helpful as they draw out further depths of meaning from the original text. But they can also be disastrously misleading. Take for example the version which reads “Before anything else existed, there was Christ with God. He has always been alive and is Himself God. He created everything there is — nothing exists that He did not make” (John 1:1-3, Living Bible).

This rendering forces on the text what is not there. John, echoing Genesis, spoke of the “word of God” in the beginning. The word of God had appeared in the Hebrew Bible, John’s sacred text, 1455 times and never on any occasion did it mean a Person distinct from God. Never did it mean the *Son* of God. John therefore did not open his account of the faith by saying “In the beginning [i.e., before the Genesis creation] there was the Son of God.” To jump from word to Son at this stage of John’s prologue is to assume what needs to be proved — that John believed in the “eternal Son” of later Trinitarian, conciliar theology.

A scientific, open-minded approach to John’s meaning must not begin by reading the later theology into John. John had never heard of the Councils of Nicea (325 AD) or Chalcedon (451 AD) at which the Trinitarian dogma was formulated and enforced.

Here are our reasons for suggesting that John had no knowledge of a Jesus who was the *eternal, uncreated Son of God*.

First, none of the other gospel writers (John’s brothers in the one faith) show any evidence at all for believing that the Son of God existed before his conception in the womb of his mother. Luke quite deliberately (1:35) defines the Son of God as the person created supernaturally by God around 2 BC. Nothing in the words of Gabriel to Mary could possibly have suggested that Mary was taking into her womb a previously existing, non-human Son of God. Neither Mary, nor Gabriel who spoke to her, could have subscribed to the doctrine of the Trinity, which requires the existence in eternity of the Son of God who is coequal with his Father.

Matthew also gives a detailed report on the origin of Jesus — his *genesis* (Matt. 1:18). Many commentators point out that the best manuscripts,

with the word *genesis*, present us not just with the *birth* of Jesus (in Greek *genesis*, with double “n”), but with his *origin, how Jesus came into existence as Son of God*. All-important for Matthew is Jesus’ lineage from King David. Equally important is the supernatural creative act of God by which this lineal descendant of David, through Mary, was miraculously generated. Matthew records the angelic announcement to Joseph: “What is *begotten* in Mary is from the holy spirit” (Matt. 1:20). Notice specially that this is not just a commentary on Mary’s *conception*. More specifically the angel informs us that the Father supernaturally *begat his Son*, not in eternity, but in history and in Israel, and in the womb of one whose ancestry was traced to David.

Neither Luke nor Mary know anything about a Son begotten mysteriously in eternity. Their Jesus is a human person, originating as every human being does in the womb of his mother — yet by miracle under the direct creative intervention of God.

Common sense would dictate that John did not disagree so radically with his contemporary Christian brothers as to launch us into the speculative world of metaphysics, according to which the Son was not the product of a miracle in Mary, but of an “eternal begetting” by which he qualifies as an equal partner in the Triune Godhead. (Note how the Trinitarian account of the eternal begetting of the Son removes the event from history into endless eternity!) The Son of God of the Bible is not a prehistoric figure, but one born in due time, in the midst of human history.

Translators do not always make John a believer in an “eternally preexisting Son of God.” Take for example the Simple English Bible which reads “In the beginning was the Message...” That does not sound automatically as though there was a Son of God at the beginning. Equally valuable is the J.B. Philips paraphrase: “In the beginning God expressed Himself...” This also does not leave us with the impression that God produced a Son in eternity. It does, however, tell us that God *spoke; God gave expression to His intention and promise*. According to Philips’s paraphrase, God did not exist alongside a Son from the beginning. Rather He expressed *Himself*. A Son is obviously another “self.” But God merely expressed at the beginning His *own thought*, an utterance derived from Himself.

Some translations are cautious about how they deal with the opening words of John. They leave the word “word” untranslated as “logos.” This is a wise policy, which allows the reader to understand that

John did not mean that the “logos” was at the beginning, in eternity, the Son of God.

The background to John’s treatise on Christianity is thoroughly Hebrew in its orientation. He wrote, in company with the other gospel writers, with one overarching concern: “These things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” (John 20:31). The Messiah is a Hebrew concept, through and through. The pages of the Hebrew Bible give us the unfolding history of Israel. Running as a golden thread through that dramatic history is the divine promise that to Israel *in the future* (not to God in eternity!) there will be born a Son: “To us [Israel] a child *will be* born, to us a Son will be given...” (Isa. 9:6). This magnificent promise confirmed the covenant made with David which guaranteed that the distinguished descendant of that king would be also the Son of God. “I will be [in the future] a Father to him and he will be a Son to Me” (II Sam. 7:14; Heb. 1:5). Again, the birth of the Son is to be an event in the future of Israel. There is no “eternally begotten Son” here. Readers of this passage should not miss the point that a Son to be born in the future is not the One God of Israel. As reflecting his Father Jesus deserves divine titles, but this is because the spirit of God was uniquely in him, not because he *was* God.

It would be impossible for a Jew who understands the sacred oracles of the Hebrew Bible to expect a Messiah who was *already in existence* as the Son of God before Genesis. Such a Messiah would scarcely fit the description laid out for him in the sacred writings of Israel. A claimant to Messiahship who maintained that he had been alive as Son from eternity would have to be refused. Such a person could not be the Jewish Messiah. A genuine Messiah could indeed claim to have been appointed, foreknown, planned from eternity. His Messianic mission could have “existed” in typical Jewish ways of thinking within God’s sacred counsels from the beginning. But the Messiah’s actual existence as Son was clearly promised for a moment in the future (and realized around 2 BC).

Was John, then, launching into the uncharted waters of theological speculation when he described the word as existing from eternity?

Not at all. John was reflecting a central theme of his Hebrew Bible. The word of God had been mentioned constantly in the Hebrew Bible. Never once did “word” (*davar*) ever mean a Person distinct from God. Word in the Hebrew Bible refers exclusively to the utterance or promise of God or to His creative tool

at work in the world. But God did not work through the Messiah in Old Testament times. In fact He created all things “unaided and by Himself” (Isa 44:24). There is not the faintest hint in the Hebrew Bible that the Messiah, Son of God was active in the Genesis creation. How could he be, when his birth — his entrance upon existence — was the great event anticipated by the faithful who knew of God’s promise in regard to the Son of David — who would also be the Son of God. The prophecy was perfectly fulfilled when, in history, God worked a creative miracle in the womb of Mary. It was then that God produced His unique Son. The Son dates from a time some 2000 years ago.

What John wrote in his prologue was: “In the beginning there was the word....” The word is the sum of all the Messianic promises. The word is the self-expression of God. The word is God’s design for the human race. The word is God’s blueprint. The word is God’s promise from the beginning to bring into being His Son. But God’s promise that He would beget a Son in the future is no promise at all, if the Son was already in existence.

According to John the word of God, His divine utterance, was “with God.” How can that be? Does not the fact that the word was “with God” tell us that the word must have been a Person?

Certainly not. The Bible was not written in English, and translations must be sensitive to the Hebrew thought-world and idioms of its writers. John was thoroughly steeped in Hebrew, Old Testament ways of thinking.

In English it makes very little sense to say that “your word is with you.” A literal translation is therefore useless and misleading. If we take note of the “wisdom literature” of the Old Testament and John’s Jewish environment we will find that the word’s being “with God” makes perfect sense. In Job 23:14 Job observed of God that “He performs what is appointed for me, and many such plans are *with Him*.” What God plans, in Hebrew idiom, is “with Him.” Lange’s commentary most helpfully brings out the sense of this Hebrew form of expression: “Truly He will accomplish my destiny — what has been decreed, ordained by Him, that which lies in His purpose” — in the Hebrew, “with Him” (*Commentary on Job*, p. 499). In Job 9:35 we discover that what a person has “with himself” is simply what he has “within himself,” “in his consciousness.” Again in Job 10:13 “God hid these things in His heart: I knew that this was in Your mind” — literally “with You.”

John, then, in describing the word as being “with God” (John 1:1) conveyed in a brief phrase the fact that the word was hidden in God’s heart. The word was God’s determination for the world, His decree which provides the ultimate meaning of life. As the index of God’s eternal counsel and wisdom, the word “was God,” meaning that it was a precise expression of Himself. “As a man thinks, so is he,” says the Proverb. In the same way God’s word *is* Himself. God’s word reveals His character and purpose. God’s word is the key to His heart and mind. The wisdom of God is very close in meaning to His word. In Proverbs 8 we read of God’s wisdom that it was “with God” (Prov. 8:30). Wisdom here, of course, is not a preexisting Son. Wisdom is a personification, not a Person, just as Lady Folly and Lady Prudence (Prov. 8:12, 9:13) are personifications, not literal persons.

John’s Hebrew background gives us another clue to his brief words about “the word.” We should of course remind readers that there is no justification in the Greek text for putting a capital W on word. Translations do this because they have already assumed (due to tradition) that the word is the Son before his birth. But the Son of God does not appear until John 1:14. At that point God’s wisdom/word/promise becomes for the first time fully and uniquely embodied in the human being, Jesus. “All things were made through IT,” says John, “and without IT [the word of God] nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3).

The translation we give here is the one which appeared in English versions of the Bible prior to the KJV in 1611. “Through IT,” not “through Him” is a perfectly possible rendering of the original. It is an assumption, unproved, that John meant the Son at that stage. What he wrote was the “word,” not yet the Son.

Jesus is the final embodiment of God’s word to the world. The Jews had thought of the Torah (which was not a Person!) as “lying on God’s bosom” (cp. “with him”) and as “divine” (cp. “the word was God,” in His self-expression). John takes this very Jewish theme and proceeds to tell us that this word of God, God expressing Himself, finally became a human person, finally became the Son of God, when Jesus was brought into existence (John 1:14). Jesus is “full of grace and truth,” not because he has been in existence from eternity, but because he is the fulfillment of God’s eternal promise to reveal Himself in a human being. “God was in Christ...,” Paul says (2 Cor. 5:19). But he did not say God *was* Christ or Christ *was* God!

The origin of the Trinitarian “God the Son” lies in philosophical mysticism. Note the words of a distinguished expert on the history of Christian thought:

“First we must see how the Trinitarian problem developed after Origen. Origen’s Christology [understanding of who Jesus is] was so impregnated with mystical piety that his statements could become the formula of a creed. We must not forget that when the Greek thinkers [the so-called Church Fathers] produced a confession or a creed, it may seem like abstract philosophy to us, but to them it was the mystical intuition of essences, of powers of being. For instance in Caesarea a creed was used in baptism which had added mystical formulae from Origen: ‘We believe in Jesus Christ, the Logos of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life, firstborn of all creatures, *generated out of the Father before all generations.*’ This is both philosophy and mysticism. It is Hellenistic Greek philosophy. Hellenistic philosophy was united with the mystical traditions of the East. Therefore seemingly abstract philosophical concepts could become mystical confessions” (Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, p. 68).

There are many fine accounts available today of the way in which mystical tendencies are becoming confused with Biblical Christianity (see for example Dave Hunt’s *Occult Invasion*, Harvest House Publishers, 1998). What most churchgoers are unaware of is the fact that philosophical, mystical influences were responsible for bringing into being the doctrine of the Triune God. This has been called by churchmen an “awful mystery.” The Bible knows of no such incomprehensible doctrine of God. Thousands of churches meet under the banner of the doctrine of the Trinity (though the average congregation member has no idea as to how to explain this inscrutable creed). Churchgoers thus commit themselves to the belief that the Godhead exists as One Essence manifested in three coequal and coeternal Persons. In an attempt to make this historic creed accessible to ordinary believers, one popular Christian apologist says that “God is One ‘What’ in three ‘Who’s.’” The “One what” of this definition is the One Essence (in Greek *ousia*) or Being of God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the three “who’s.”

Sober reflection will reveal that this cannot possibly be the creed of Jesus and the Bible. God is presented in Scripture not as a “what” but as a single Person. The Single Person, who is the God of the Bible, is designated by singular pronouns and singular verbs thousands and thousands of times. When the

Son appears (in the New Testament) he is always a separate and distinct Person. He speaks of his Father and himself as “us,” using the same universal laws of grammar by which the Father speaks of Himself as “I.” Jesus refers to his Father as “the only one who is truly God” (*ho monos alethinos theos* — John 17:3). When challenged, he denies that he is God, by arguing that he is the supreme example of a divinely commissioned *agent* of God. In his defense Jesus reminded the people that the judges of Israel were addressed by God as “gods” (*theoi* — John 10:35, 36). In that case he, being the final accredited spokesman of the One God, was entitled to be called “the Son of God.” If Jesus had thought he was God, his argument from Psalm 82:6 would have been pointless. ✧

## The Challenge

Jesus gave his most severe warning to the public when he stated that “many will say, in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not delivered inspired preaching in your name, in your name exorcised demons and in your name done many miraculous works?’” Jesus will respond to these claims by saying: “I never recognized you” (Matt. 7:22, 23) Paul is often cited with these words: “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved...If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9, 13, New Jerusalem Bible).

Paul neither contradicted nor watered down Jesus’ sayings. The key to reconciling these passages is to note that calling Jesus Lord implies obeying his commands, the first of which is to believe the Gospel about the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, 15).

Secondly, Paul did not necessarily say everything about salvation in one passage. A classic example of twisting Paul is to use I Corinthians 15:1-3 to show that the Gospel consists of belief only in the death and resurrection of Jesus and not in his Kingdom. But Paul said that he had preached the facts about Jesus’ death as “amongst things of first importance” (I Cor. 15:3). It was not the whole of his Gospel. If Paul had not preached the same Gospel about the Kingdom as Jesus always did, he would have put himself under his own curse for preaching another gospel! (Gal. 1: 8, 9).

Jesus had preached the Gospel and called it the Gospel about the Kingdom for years without *at that stage* including a word about his death and resurrection. Thus the biblical Gospel is more than facts about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus

did not come “to do three days work.” He came to preach the Gospel about the Kingdom for some three years (Luke 4:43). This preaching of the Kingdom of God is throughout the New Testament called the preaching of “the word” (see Luke 5:1).

Christians should cling to that “word” of Jesus, the Gospel of the Kingdom, not excluding, of course, belief that he died and rose again. ✧

## Comments

“Your radio broadcast on the Kingdom has had a permanent, measurable, transforming effect on me. Experience has made me somewhat of a skeptic, but I find myself listening with an open mind and heart to your words. Not only are your arguments exegetically sound and well-articulated, they also have a cordiality in them that is disarming.

“The material in your program has become the subject of daily conversation at work, personal reflection and study at home with my wife. My friend and I plan to conduct a Bible study on the kingdom and employ your study guide. Although we touched on one area of disagreement (i.e. Christology) when we spoke, I welcome continued dialogue with you on the subject. Interestingly, several months ago I purchased your work on the Trinity from International Scholars Press.” — *Washington*

“I am enjoying your books very much — I’ve gleaned much from your insight. I am a little over the halfway mark with *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven* and I have learned lots. I think this one is speaking volumes to me...It has been your writings on the gospel of the Kingdom of Yahweh, with all this implies, that has drawn my attention to the missing piece of the puzzle. This understanding has brought into focus the total picture. As the last piece of the puzzle was set in place, a master view appeared and my beliefs have forever been changed.” — *North Carolina*

“I think it is relevant for me to say that I am a professor of theology and of New Testament at a Roman Catholic institution...and that I think that your publication is theologically important, however much it may be neglected by the sector that I thus represent. You address radically important issues in Christian theology...and I am glad that your honesty about these things is so unflinching” — *Canada*

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