

Focus on the Kingdom

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Evangelical Muddle over the Content of the Gospel and Christian Destiny

Dismay and amazement from a professor of world mission about the “no-Kingdom Gospel”:

Charles Taber, Professor Emeritus of World Mission, Emmanuel School of Evangelism, Johnson City, Tennessee, expressed his amazement at “evangelical dogma” on the definition of the Christian Gospel. *Christianity Today* (Feb. 7th, 2000) had offered its readers statements from nine leading evangelicals defining the Gospel.

“I read with the greatest interest the nine statements attempting to answer the question, ‘What is the Good News?’ I am amazed and dismayed to find not even a passing mention of the theme which was the core of Jesus’ Gospel in three of the four accounts: the Kingdom of God. Every one of these statements reflects the individualistic reduction of the Gospel that plagues American evangelicalism. In addition to being biblical, founding one’s understanding of the gospel on the Kingdom of God bypasses two false dilemmas that have needlessly troubled theologians for several centuries: the either-or between individual and systematic salvation, and the either-or between grace and works. On the one hand God intends to rescue the entire cosmos from the bondage to decay; on the other hand how can one claim to be saved who does not make every effort to do God’s will?”

Churchgoers who sit regularly in a church assembly make a number of assumptions. One of these is that what their church tells them about the Gospel is really the Gospel as Jesus preached it. But is this so?

In an extensive *Introduction to Evangelism* by Alvin Reid, author and co-author of many books on evangelism and professor of evangelism at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, we read this:

“The noun *euangellion* is found seventy-six times in the New Testament. It can be translated ‘gospel,’ ‘good news,’ or ‘evangel.’ It emphasizes not just any good news but a **specific message**. Paul particularly used this term a great deal. *Our primary message is*

the specific good news that Jesus died and rose again. Paul told the Corinthians: ‘Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you’ (1 Cor. 15:1-3).”

This statement is typical of hundreds available in Christian bookstores and sermons. Jesus, however, when defining the core purpose of his mission and that of his followers would have rejected the popular current definition of the saving Gospel as inadequate: “I came to preach the Good News (Gospel) **of the Kingdom of God** to the other cities. It was for this that I was sent” (Luke 4:43). And he did not include in *the Gospel* until much later any word about his death and resurrection (see Matt. 16:21ff.). Matthew, in fact, every time he writes the word “Gospel” carefully adds its definition: It is **the Gospel of the Kingdom** (4:23; 9:35; 24:14). This is so well known that the same Message can simply be called “this Gospel” (26:13).

Today things are very different. They are in a state of severe muddle when it comes to the most basic question of all. The confusion over the content of the saving Christian message is rooted in a parallel confusion over the nature of man and Christian destiny. Teachers with enormous influence on Christian thinking have often promoted Greek Platonism in place of Scripture.

Billy Graham and Francis Schaeffer

Billy Graham writes: “The Bible teaches that you are an immortal soul. Your soul is eternal and will live for ever. In other words, the real you — the part of you that thinks, feels, dreams, aspires, the ego, the personality — will never die. The Bible teaches that your soul will live for ever in one of two places — heaven or hell” (*Peace with God*, p. 61).

Francis Schaeffer seems to have been caught in the same philosophical trap. He cites with approval (in *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, pp. 106, 107) a Dr. Singer who doubts whether the “sanctity of human life” as an idea can be recovered. He says:

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“We can no longer base our efforts on the idea that human beings are a special form of creation, made in the image of God, singled out from all other animals, *and alone possessing an immortal soul.*” Unfortunately, with his last phrase, the writer echoes Plato, not Jesus. In the Bible it is God *alone* who has immortality (I Tim. 6:16), and Christians will acquire it in the future resurrection (I Cor. 15:53, 54). To say that man *already* has immortality is to deal a blow to the biblical scheme of salvation. The whole point of the biblical view of man is that he does *not have immortality* innately and that he must seek for it (Rom. 2:7). He must acquire it through rebirth, belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom preached by Jesus, the model evangelist (Mark 1:14, 15; 4:11, 12; Heb. 2:3), and resurrection (I Cor. 15:54).

The “liberal” scholar is often in advance of the evangelical in his grasp of Scripture on this issue of who man is. John Robinson says:

“In our Western tradition there has been a vastly exaggerated focus on death and the moment of death. It began when the pages of the New Testament were hardly dry, and it is one of the most remarkable silent revolutions in the history of Christian thought.” Bishop Robinson then went on to remind Englishmen (only about 5% of whom ever attend church except to be “hatched, matched and dispatched”) about what they had been taught to think about death:

“1) The whole of our teaching and hymnology has assumed that you go to heaven — or of course, hell — when you die.

2) In consequence, death is the decisive moment. Though you go on after that, on one road or the other, it is your life up till then which determines your destiny.

3) We do not, of course, these days believe in anything so crude as the resurrection of the body; but if there is to be any other form of existence, it is at death that we enter it.

“Now I believe [Bishop and Professor Robinson continued] that each of these propositions is in clear contradiction with what the Bible says...**First the Bible nowhere says that we go to heaven when we die, nor does it ever describe death in terms of going to heaven...**The notion that a man’s destiny is decided at death [rather than at a future resurrection] is one for which there is no real support in the biblical imagery. It is in **Greek mythology** that the fates operate at death with their scissors and scales... Observe once more the influence of the classical mythology in the Charon myth: the baptizing of it in Wesley’s [founder of Methodism] words: ‘Bid

Jordan’s narrow stream divide and bring us safe to heaven’ **has no biblical basis.** Indeed it would be interesting to know at what stage the Styx first became the Jordan.”

Do Methodists realize the extent of the paganism offered them in their tradition?

“The second point is that the Christian hope is not so much a hope for heaven as a hope *from* heaven: ‘from heaven we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.’ According to the dominant Christian tradition, the world is regarded as a vast transit camp, in which the Church’s job is to issue tickets for heaven and pack people off to Paradise...But according to the Christian Gospel God has prepared some better thing for the work of his hands. The Gospel of the reign [Kingdom] of God is not the salvaging of souls...” (*On Being the Church in the World*, pp. 129-134).

Bishop Robinson ends by speaking of “the pagan notion, endorsed by so much Christian spirituality.” He means the unbiblical teaching current in churches that souls go to heaven or hell the moment they die.

Back to the Kingdom of God. One error leads to another. The loss of concentration on the future resurrection of the whole man, and the substitution of “heaven when you die,” has wreaked havoc on the principal theme of **the Gospel — the Kingdom of God.**

It is quite clear that leading Christian spokesmen have abandoned the Gospel as preached by Jesus and Paul (Luke 4:43, etc.; **Acts 20:25**; 28:23, 31; 19:8).

“Let me ask: When is the last time you heard a sermon on the Kingdom of God? Frankly, I’d be hard put to recall ever having heard a solid exposition of this theme. How do we square this silence with the widely accepted fact that the Kingdom of God dominated our Lord’s thought and ministry?

“My experience is not uncommon. I’ve checked this out with my colleagues. Of course, they readily agree they’ve often heard sermons based on bits and pieces of Jesus’ parables. But as for a solid sermon on the nature of the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught it — upon reflection they too began to express surprise that it is the rare pastor who tackles the subject” (A.F. Glasser, *Missiology*, April, 1980).

Glasser described the coming Kingdom well with this observation: “It is only through a final and universal crisis that **the Kingdom, as a visible and all-conquering reign of Peace and salvation,** will bring to fruition the new heaven and new earth.”

After Pentecost the term “**Kingdom of God**” in **Acts is equated with “the Gospel of the grace of God”** (Acts 20:24, 25: the Gospel of the Kingdom is

identical to the Gospel of Grace) and embraces **the whole redemptive purpose of God (20:27)**. It is frequently supplemented with references to Jesus (8:12; 28:23, 31). It is a common but very serious misunderstanding to suppose that the Gospel as Paul preached it became something *other than* the Gospel as Jesus had preached it. The Kingdom in Paul's preaching was the basis of the Gospel as it had been for Jesus.

Even when Jesus' favorite term Kingdom of God does receive a mention today (and this is almost never true in connection with the Gospel), Kingdom of God is often reconceptualized to reduce God's Good News to a present social activism. Sometimes it is reduced to "the rule of God in the heart." Sometimes it is stripped of all contemporary significance and applied to an unbiblical "heaven" for souls. Quite simply the problem is this: Christians have dropped the main word from Jesus' favorite phrase. They speak of "heaven" instead of the *Kingdom* which will come from heaven to the earth. They speak of the death and resurrection of Jesus as though this is the whole of the Gospel (cp. Billy Graham: "Jesus came to do three days work").

It is easy to document the "Kingdomless" gospel of modern evangelism:

Tom Sine points out that "the victory of the future of God was the central theme of the ministry of Jesus." Then he adds: "Michael Green asked during the Lausanne International Conference on World Evangelization in 1974, 'How much have you heard here about the Kingdom of God? Not much. It is not our language. But it was Jesus' prime concern'" (*The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*, pp. 102-3).

Peter Wagner, celebrated church planter, writes that he "has never preached a sermon on the Kingdom." A Roman Catholic writer admits that "although there is a great divergence among Scripture scholars and theologians today **about the meaning** of the Kingdom of God, there is also a basic agreement that **it is the central theme of the Gospels and that Christian living must be in response to that Kingdom** [whatever it is!]."

A German Bible scholar says that "the notion of a purely transcendent kingship of Yahweh limited to the heavenly realm, was quite foreign to Israel. Thus the Israelites could pray, 'O God, my King from of old, you doer of saving deeds **on earth**' (Ps. 74:12)" (Schnakenberg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, p. 19).

There is a general consensus about what drove the whole career and mission of Jesus. **The central theme**

in the preaching and life of Christ was the Kingdom of God.

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God to come, with the present taste of Kingdom life in the spirit, contains plain information about the future of the earth. There is to be a millennial Kingdom, as the first stage of the Kingdom to be inaugurated worldwide at the coming of Jesus (Rev. 11:15-18; 5:9, 10; 20:1-6).

Some of the most amazing evasions in the history of commentary have arisen when Bible readers do not care to embrace the promise of a coming Messianic worldwide society supervised by the returning Jesus and the (then) immortalized believers. Revelation 20:1-6 describes a vision of the resurrection of previously beheaded believers, who "come to life" and "begin to reign with the Messiah for a thousand years." What John saw was the return to life from death of people who had been martyred, as well as other saints. They are to be resurrected from the grave to take their place in Messiah's Kingdom. The language is utterly clear: "those who had been beheaded came back to life and began to reign with the Messiah."

The passionate protest of Henry Alford, celebrated commentator on the Greek New Testament, deserves the widest hearing.

"I have again and again raised my earnest protest against evading the plain sense of words, the spiritualizing in the midst of **plain declarations of fact**. That the Lord will come in person to this our earth: that his resurrected elect will **reign here with him** and judge, that during that blessed [millennial] reign the power of evil will be bound, and the glorious prophecies of peace and truth on earth will find their accomplishment — this is my firm persuasion and not mine alone, but that of multitudes of Christ's waiting people, as it was of his primitive apostolic Church, before controversy **blinded the eyes of the Fathers** to the light of prophecy.

"On one point I have ventured to speak strongly, because my conviction on it is strong, founded on the rules of fair and consistent interpretation. I mean, the necessity of accepting **literally the first resurrection** and the millennial reign. It seems to me that if in a sentence where two resurrections are spoken of with no mark of distinction between them (it is otherwise in John 5:28 which is commonly alleged for the view which I am combating) — if in a sentence where, one resurrection having been related, the 'rest of the dead' are afterwards mentioned — we are at liberty to understand the former resurrection *figuratively and spiritually*, and the latter resurrection *literally and materially*, **then there is an end of all definite**

meaning in plain words and the Book of Revelation, or any other book, may mean anything we please. It is a curious fact that [amillennialists and so-called ‘gospel millennialists’], studious as they generally are to uphold the primitive interpretation, are obliged, not only to wrest the plain sense of words, but to desert the unanimous consensus of the primitive Fathers, some of whom lived early enough to have retained apostolic tradition on this point” (*Greek Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 252, 259).

Henry Alford’s vision of the brilliant era of peace and harmony destined for our distracted earth remained strong. It is otherwise when those precious words of Jesus in Revelation are dissolved into a description of conversion (as in amillennialism), rather than **resurrection**. That Kingdom to come was the principal subject of the Gospel as Jesus preached it. Paul was no less a tireless protagonist of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 20:25). Had he preached a gospel other than the Gospel as Jesus had preached it, he would have put himself under his own curse (Gal. 1:8, 9). ✧

Ground Rules for Intelligent Bible Study

It appears from surveys that few churchgoers *study* the Bible. They may take comfort from selected verses, but very seldom do they engage the text of Scripture in a sustained effort to learn its meaning.

From various quarters come reports that most churchgoers do not in fact **investigate Scripture** with the object of finding out whether what they have been taught is true or false. There is an alarming acceptance of tradition unexamined.

The *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, “How to Read the Bible with Understanding,” (p. 1515) remarks that:

“The Bible belongs to the whole world as no other book does. Parts or the whole of it are available in more than a thousand languages. Christians everywhere pay lip service to it as the supreme authority for their faith. Phrases from its pages have become current speech, and allusions to its stories are widely understood. Yet relatively few people are familiar with it as a whole, and acquaintance for the most part is limited to a small section of passages.”

A writer in the *Los Angeles Times* reminds us that:

“The Bible is the biggest seller in the history of the planet. It recounts gripping stories of sin, sex,

brutal violence, awesome miracles, divine compassion and the faith and the redemption of the fallen and the flawed. Its larger than life characters defeat giants, part seas, get swallowed by large fish, suffer horrible deaths, spring back to life. The Book is a cornerstone of Western civilization, inspiring the art of Michelangelo, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of John Steinbeck and the films of Hollywood. Its ethical standards have launched freedom movements worldwide. Its prose has enlivened our language: Salt of the earth. Wolves in sheep’s clothing. Both cultural icon and spiritual touchstone, the Bible is revered by three major world faiths with billions of believers. But in a paradox to tax the wisdom of Solomon, *it is widely unread*.

“According to one religious research firm, two-thirds of Americans do not regularly read the Bible or know the names of the four gospels. More than half of Americans surveyed cannot name even five of the ten commandments. The majority say they find the Good Book irrelevant. The widespread Bible illiteracy comes despite the fact that Bible sales are booming, up 50% over the past years at some publishing houses. According to the Barna Research Group in Ventura, CA, 91% of Americans own an average of three versions.”

Albert Nolan in a book with a most perceptive title, *Jesus Before Christianity*, observes:

“Many millions throughout the ages have venerated the name of Jesus, but few have understood him and fewer still have tried to put into practice what he wanted to see done. His words have been twisted and turned to mean everything, anything and nothing. His name has been used and abused to justify crimes, to frighten children and to inspire men and women to heroic foolishness. Jesus has been more frequently honored for what he did not mean than for what he did mean.”

There is a good reason for the widespread ignorance of what Scripture teaches. The Bible is a Hebrew book. Its authors were natives of Israel, Luke being a probable exception (but Luke’s thinking is Hebrew to the core). The thought-world of the Bible is intensely Jewish. If we want to make sense of the Bible it is necessary to know something of the language and vocabulary of the Jewish world of the prophets and of Jesus whom the New Testament claims was the *ultimate prophet* (Jesus was the promised prophet, like Moses but superior to Moses, Deut. 18:15-18, quoted of Jesus in Acts 3:22 and 7:37).

If I as a native of the UK tell you that “I am mad about my flat,” you may very well misunderstand me,

though we share the same English language. If you are familiar with British usage of words, my meaning will be clear. If not, you will imagine that “I am upset and angry about my flat tire.” Actually that statement, in British English, means “I am thrilled about my apartment.” Without a sympathetic understanding of my culture, you will fail to grasp what I have in mind.

So it is with the Bible. There are certain ground rules for reading the vocabulary of the Bible with clarity. There are a number of false meanings which have been attached to biblical words. We suggest the following as keys to right understanding:

Soul. This is a very common biblical word. The Hebrew, Old Testament word is *nephesh*. Its equivalent in the New Testament Greek is *psyche*. If you start with the notion that “soul” means a part of man which goes on living in consciousness in heaven or hell, after a man dies, you will gain a completely false impression. In the Bible “soul” means firstly a “living creature,” both human and animal. The whales are “living souls” (Gen. 1:21) and so were Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:7). Very frequently, then, “soul” means “person.” Eight “souls” — persons — survived the flood (I Pet. 3:20). A secondary and extended meaning of “soul” is “life.” A man is a “soul” but the Bible says also that he *has* “soul.” A third meaning of “soul” has to do with the mental or emotional life of man. **What “soul” never means in Scripture is a bodiless person surviving death in a conscious state.** Unfortunately — and this has been the case for centuries — “soul” has come to mean in “church-speak” (as distinct from “Bible-speak”) a conscious part of man which is really the man himself, without a body, in a post-mortem state. To read that non-biblical meaning into the Bible is to make nonsense of the text, to alter its meaning.

When we read that Mary’s soul glorified God and her spirit rejoiced (Luke 1:46, 47), this was nothing to do with a post-mortem, disembodied condition. When eight “souls” survived the flood, it meant eight real, breathing embodied persons. When John saw the “souls of those who had been beheaded come to life and begin to reign as kings with the Messiah for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4), John was talking about “persons,” certainly not about *disembodied* entities. What John saw was simply **individuals** who had had their heads chopped off. They returned to life in the resurrection and began to reign in the millennium. It would be to introduce confusion into the text to apply a non-biblical meaning of “soul” here and make John say what he did not say. John never thought of “soul” as a conscious person, without a body. Unfortunately

churchgoers have been miseducated for so long in the meaning of the Bible’s key words that a conscious relearning must take place.

Spirit. This all-pervasive Bible word needs careful handling. Its root meaning (*ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek) is invisible power, sometimes breath. “Spirit” is the word which firstly denotes “life-energy.” When God had formed man, composed of dust from the ground, he animated him by infusing “the spirit of life” into him. Man thus became a “living (rather than an inert) soul.” Secondly, spirit has the extended meaning of mind, the higher intellectual life of man. “Soul” and “spirit” sometimes overlap: When Mary’s soul magnified God and her spirit rejoiced, we are not to make the mistake of trying to analyze or pick apart Mary’s inner life. Both spirit and soul here denote the thinking person, mind and emotion. So then the spirit of God is God’s heart, mind and even soul. The spirit of God is His “atmosphere.” Spirit is the word to describe the “inner life” both of God and of man. God’s spirit is most often the word to describe God’s “operational power and presence” acting in various ways on His creation. It was the spirit of God which brought into existence the creation. Spirit is the invisible energy of God. It is also His character, mind and heart, the center of His being. Man also has “spirit,” his mind and inner life. The great purpose of God for us humans is that the spirit of God, the divine mind and character, should interact with our spirit. I Corinthians 2:10-16 is one of the most beautiful and instructive passages of the Bible to define spirit, both God’s and ours. To have God’s spirit/mind is to know Him.

God pours out His spirit on human beings, just as wisdom poured out hers in Proverbs 1:23. Wisdom, of course, is not another person than God. “Wisdom” is a personification (treating some *thing* or attribute *as if it were a person*, when it is in fact a quality or attribute of a person). When “Lady Wisdom” pours out her spirit on man, she makes known her words and transmits her thoughts (see Prov. 1:23, NASV and NIV). This is a most instructive passage to define spirit. It is the inner self-consciousness of God and man, and when we take in God’s spirit we are able to tap into His inner being and thus enjoy an intimate relationship with Him, mind to mind, heart to heart. We learn to get “on God’s wavelength.” Spirit can often be interchanged with “mind.” A fine example of this is found in I Corinthians 2:16 where Paul quotes an Old Testament verse referring to **the spirit** (*ruach*) of God. Paul renders the word as “mind.” He saw no essential difference.

Spirit, like soul, *never ever* means a departed, conscious human being without a body. When the spirit of men and animals returns to God at death (Ps. 104:29; Ecc. 3:19, 20; 12:7), this positively does not mean that either man or animal survives in consciousness. What happens at death is that the animating principle of life is removed and the person/animal ceases to function or think. He is dead, not living somewhere else!

Neither “soul” nor “spirit” means in Scripture a dead person who is really alive without a body! To speak that sort of language is to enter the world of psychics and séances, ghosts and phantoms. Human beings when they die, in the Bible, are always dead, until the future resurrection. The classic text on the state of the dead is that “they do not know anything...there is no activity in Sheol/Hades, the world of the dead or the state of the dead, to which you are going.” As the celebrated commentators on the Old Testament (Keil and Delitzsch) pointed out, Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10 which say that “the dead have no consciousness of anything” “and that there is no knowledge of anything in the place of the dead” are representative of the entire Hebrew Bible’s point of view on what the dead are doing, and where they are doing it. They are without consciousness and they are in the dust of the ground, “asleep” (Dan. 12:2). They are not alive in heaven or hell!

Lord. It is easy to get into a muddle over this very common biblical word. Once again traditional “church-speak” must be distinguished from the language of the Bible. Human superiors are called “lord.” Angels are called “lord.” God is also called Lord. But there is a great difference. That difference is found in the Hebrew text and sometimes it is not clearly shown in English translations. When the One God is called LORD (all capitals in most translations), we are to understand that the word in the original is the divine name Yahweh (6700 times in the Hebrew Bible, always, of course, with singular verbs and pronouns since God in the Bible is **one singular Divine Person**). But there is another word translated and written in many English versions “Lord.” It is the Hebrew word *Adonai*, and in all of its 449 occurrences it refers *also* invariably to the one Lord God. It is thus a title for Yahweh. Yahweh is the personal name for God. *Adonai* (pronounced “adon-eye”) refers to Him as the (supreme) Lord.

What about the relationship of God to Jesus? Firstly God and the Messiah are **two distinct personal beings**. They are separate personal beings — as distinct as any father and son. They are

presented as two individuals. Psalm 110:1 demonstrates this beyond any argument. Here Yahweh (the LORD) speaks in a prophetic oracle to someone else. That other person is called “my lord.” Jesus and the rabbis and the whole New Testament interpret this to be an oracle delivered by the LORD God to the Messiah. In order to make sure that we would not confuse the supreme, unique status of the LORD with His servant the Messiah, Psalm 110:1 uses the word *adoni* (my lord) to designate the Messiah. *Adoni* is a specific form of the word “lord.” It never refers to the Lord God, but always and only to lords who are **not God**, i.e., to *human* or occasionally angelic superiors. Psalm 110:1 tells us therefore, in the clearest terms, that the Messiah, the Son of God, is *not God Himself*, but another person, a superior lord certainly, but not the ultimate Lord *God*. This is one of the great keys to identifying the leading persons of the biblical story. There is one Lord God: Yahweh, the LORD, *Adonai*. There is also one lord Messiah, who is Jesus. He is David’s lord (“my lord”) and he is thus “our lord Jesus Christ.” We have deliberately written this “lord” with a small letter (as correctly in the RV, RSV and NRSV, Jerusalem Bible and New English Bible). This shows that the lord Messiah (Luke 2:11; 1:43) is not to be confused with the Lord God. If we do not observe this important distinction, we are liable to embrace a major confusion: we are likely to suppose that Jesus *is* Yahweh. The fact is that Jesus is the Lord **Messiah**, *not* the Lord Yahweh. It is very common to hear churchgoers confuse God and Jesus, as though they are somehow the same Person! However, that is to destroy the evidence of Psalm 110:1, Psalm 2, and all the many Messianic prophecies, in which the Messiah is obviously and unarguably a person different, distinct and subordinate to the Father, who is Yahweh the LORD God.

Worship. It is not uncommon to hear churchgoers declare that “Jesus *is* God” because in the Bible Jesus is worshiped and only God can be worshiped. This sort of statement demonstrates an unfamiliarity with biblical language and usage. The word worship in the Greek New Testament is *proskuneo*. It is used — as is also its equivalent in Hebrew — to describe an activity which can be performed in honor of God *and before human beings*. In old English the town mayor was called “his worship the mayor.” He was worthy of “worship.” But we would not say that today. We now use the word “worship” almost invariably to define service rendered to God. But in the Bible — and remember the usage is that of Jews, not 21st-century westerners — “worship” can be offered to God *and*

man. It is thus fundamentally false and illogical to say “Jesus is worshiped; therefore Jesus is God.”

The fallacy is simply this: In the Bible David and Daniel were worshiped (I Chron. 29:20, LXX; Dan. 2:46, same word in the original). The saints are going to be worshiped (same word in the original, Rev. 3:9; see also Luke 14:10, and Matt. 18:26, KJV). When Cornelius worshiped Peter (Acts 10:25), no one imagines that Cornelius thought Peter was God!

Now Jesus is of course an incomparably superior authority, as far as humans are concerned. He is not “a mere man,” if by that you mean just any man! He is worthy of “worship” as the unique, virginally conceived sinless Savior and the one Mediator between God and man, *the man* Messiah (I Tim. 2:5). But “there is only one God — the Father” (I Cor. 8:4-6), the one whom Jesus called “the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3; cp. 5:44).

It will be of interest to readers to note that there is another Greek word *latreuo* which refers strictly to *worship of God — religious service of God* and no other. **In all of its 21 New Testament occurrences it is never used of the worship of Jesus, only of his Father.** This fact speaks eloquently for the uniqueness of the Father as the one and only God. ✧

More on the Soul

The Biblical Versus the Pseudo-Christian Meaning of the Word (We are indebted to Richie Temple for much of the following)

A good summary of the ancient Greek and biblical views on this subject is found in *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, “Immortality,” p. 518).

“The question of human immortality inevitably involves a comparison of biblical and Greek views of the subject. The Greek view, expounded classically in **Plato’s *Phaedo***, is based on an anthropological dualism of *body and soul*. The body is gross, corruptible, subject to illusion. The **soul, on the other hand, is immortal**, eternal, essentially divine, and in a sense infallible, belonging properly to the realm of the ideal. In this life **the soul is imprisoned in the body**, which easily tyrannizes over the soul. Hence life ought to be a process of liberation, the weaning of the soul away from alien matter through engagement with the **eternal ideas** that lie behind material things. **Death is the culmination of the process, the final liberation of the soul from the body**, and thus is a friend and not an enemy; through death the soul is released from the prison of the body to its true home. This view is

noble, full of apparent light, answers to an important dimension of human experience (the sense of alienation), and is attractive. It has influenced both Hellenistic Judaism **and the history of Christian thought**. Indeed, the salvation of the “immortal soul” has sometimes [almost invariably!] been a commonplace in preaching, **but it is fundamentally unbiblical**. Biblical anthropology is not dualistic but monistic: human being consists in the integrated wholeness of body and soul, and **the Bible never contemplates the disembodied existence of the soul in bliss [but this pagan idea can be heard promoted in almost every obituary notice and funeral sermon in churches]**. Death is the enemy of this integrity and not the friend of the soul. Immortality, in Greek thought, is of the nature of the soul, which is essentially unaffected by death except insofar as it is liberated. This involves no conflict, but rather is a peaceful escape from creation. **Biblical immortality, on the contrary, is an end, which is achieved through a dramatic conflict with death and involves a new creation in which the integrity of body and soul is restored and perfected.**

“Since **Hebrew thought has no concept of the independent existence of the soul**, it is natural that the hope for eternal life should eventually be recognized as a hope for resurrection...The idea becomes fully visible in Daniel, where eternal life [the Life of the Age to Come] is seen to entail a double bodily resurrection of ‘some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt’ (Dan. 12:2). Daniel’s doctrine of eternal life is hardly, as some have maintained, influenced by the Greek view of the immortality of the soul; it is the reawakening of those ‘who sleep in the dust of the earth’ and therefore, in keeping with Hebrew anthropology.

“**Paul speaks of immortality only in connection with the resurrection of the body.** The presence of the Spirit within the believer now, in fact, is the guarantee of the ultimate reclothing of the resurrection body (2 Cor. 5:5), which Paul likens to Christ’s “glorious body” (Phil. 3:21) — a “spiritual” body (I Cor. 15:44) now animated by the power of the Holy Spirit rather than subject to the power of sin and death. What is sown perishable, dishonored, weak, physical, and mortal is to be **raised** imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual, and immortal (vv. 42-44, 53). Mortality is not so much left behind as ‘swallowed up by life’ (2 Cor. 5:4).” [This process of immortalization cannot happen before the resurrection at the Second Coming — **I Cor. 15:23.**] ✧