

Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 6 No. 12

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September, 2004

Avoiding the Humpty Dumpty Approach to the Meaning of Words

Language has certain ways of saying things which allow for no ambiguity or uncertainty. This is not true of all the words we use, of course, but some things are unambiguously clear. When we say white, we do not mean black and when we say hello, we do not mean goodbye. If we speak of hot ice cubes or square circles we make no sense — we are talking nonsense, and everyone knows we are. If we did not enjoy a common currency of meaning in the language we use the whole world would come to a grinding halt, and a massive confusion — far greater than we already witness! — would ensue.

Some of our readers will remember this humorous quotation: “‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.’”¹

Without stability in the meaning of the words we use, clarity of thought and communication is impossible. The Bible is a book of inspired words (not pictures — so a picture is not necessarily worth a thousand words). God has chosen to *speak* to us through various persons at various times, and in various ways (Heb. 1:1). He spoke finally to us through His unique Son Jesus. Our task as the human race is to listen intelligently to what God has said to us. At all costs we should avoid the Humpty Dumpty approach to the meaning of words. We are not at liberty to make up our own private meanings. To do so is to encourage an impossibly subjective approach to our Christianity, and it tends immediately to divide people against each other.

If God has not communicated to us in language that we can understand, we would have every excuse for not knowing what He has said. God could hold us responsible for nothing, if He has not expressed His will and purpose in intelligible words. The gift of information as to the reality of His Plan for the world is provided for us in Scripture. It is given in clear language. God never talks nonsense, and He cannot lie. It would be impossible, for example, for God to describe Himself as “immortal,” if He were capable of dying.

¹*Through the Looking-Glass*, ch. 5.

When Charles Wesley penned these words in his celebrated hymn, “‘Tis mystery all, the immortal dies,” it was not in fact a matter of mystery, it was nonsense. “The immortal” cannot die unless we invoke the Humpty Dumpty principle. Black is not white and two and two do not make five. If Jesus were God, and God is immortal (I Tim. 6:16), then Jesus could not die. This has not prevented intelligent church members from singing about an immortal person dying, without apparently raising any questions. Such is the power of tradition. It demonstrates the peril of “checking our brains” at the church door and of failing to examine our traditions, however cherished they may be by “good people.”

Christians say that they believe the Bible to be a verbally inspired message from God Himself. They frequently quote the words of Paul to Timothy that “all Scripture is inspired by God.” By this they mean that God’s mind and spirit were the creative force behind the words written down by the Bible writers. These “inspired” words (II Tim. 3:16) are not the opinions and speculations of various first-century men, but divinely communicated Truth to which we, the human race, ought to pay urgent and careful attention.

Although this “high” view of Scripture is widely professed by churchgoers, I think we can show that *when passages of Scripture are produced which obviously contradict some cherished church beliefs about who Jesus, the Son of God is, it is the tradition of the church which prevails and not the Bible.* In other words it is quite possible for church members *not* to accept the plain meaning of the text, when it is found to be in clear conflict with “what we have always believed,” “what the historic Church has always taught,” “what my church says,” etc.

I am impressed with the insightful words of F.F. Bruce who wrote to me many years ago:

“Evangelical Protestants can be as much servants of tradition as Roman Catholics or Greek Orthodox Christians; only they do not realize that it is ‘tradition.’ People who adhere to *sola scriptura* (as they believe) often adhere in fact to a traditional school of interpretation of *sola scriptura*” (Correspondence, June 13, 1981).

All readers of the New Testament are aware of the constant hassle Jesus experienced when he confronted the “established church,” the synagogue, and their official body of beliefs. He challenged the leaders of his

day with contravening the obvious intention of God in Scripture. God's words were being silenced. Alien ideas and practices had been imposed on the text of the Bible. The sacred writings were being made to say what they plainly did not mean. Jesus' warning is surely for us today also. "In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." By this "you are making God's Message ineffective." As one modern paraphrase has it: "But their worship is to no purpose, while they give as their teaching the rules of men" (Matt. 15:9). Are we so sure that these stinging words might not have an important application to our church of today? Examination of issues of faith may be shattering. Jeremiah's discovery of divine truth drove him to report these words of God: "Is not My word like fire? says the Lord; and like a hammer, smashing the rock to bits?" (Jer. 23:29).

Realizing the sensitivity of the question about who the Jesus of the Bible is, I want nevertheless to suggest that at the beginning of Luke and Matthew we are given a completely unambiguous definition of what it means for Jesus to be the Son of God. As with every effective textbook, God has provided us, at the *beginning* of the New Testament, with fundamental theological definitions of the major themes and persons of Christian revelation.

Surprisingly, the verses I want to bring before you seem to be almost never quoted in Christian sermons and writings. How could this be? Is there an almost unconscious fear that these precious words might somehow rock our theological boats, even revolutionize our whole view of church history, and cause some deep heart searchings about "what we have always believed"?

I am referring to the announcement to Mary of her extraordinary place in the history of mankind. To this young Jewess, probably in her teens, an angel is dispatched to conduct a private interview. During this presumably brief encounter, Gabriel, on perhaps his greatest mission ever, was charged with the responsibility of informing Mary that she was to become the only woman in history to bear a child without the benefit of a male partner. Of her firstborn son — and of course she had further children by the normal process later — she could truthfully say, "I conceived this son of mine without the participation of any man." (The biblical teaching that Mary later had other children by the normal process has been contradicted by the Roman Catholic Church which maintains that Mary remained a virgin perpetually. Protestants recognize that contradiction in another

denomination, but are they aware that they too may be victims of unexamined tradition contradicting Scripture?)

Are we suitably awed and full of praise to God as creator for the amazing miracle performed in Mary, the creation of God's own Son, which occurred only some 2000 years ago? I suspect that we have not sufficiently admired God's creative act in Mary, *because we have been taught a view of who Jesus is which actually makes the miracle as presented by Luke something quite different from what Luke actually describes.*

Our problem is that tradition has blinded us to what Luke (and Matthew) report about the *origin* of the Son of God. Matthew expressly addresses the issue of the Son's "genesis" — note carefully the Greek word *genesis* — origin — in Matthew 1:18.

At the center of traditional Christianity stands the doctrine of the Incarnation: the baby Jesus was God who had come down from an eternity in heaven. We propose that this central idea about Jesus is incompatible with the revelation given by Gabriel to Mary (and to the description of the *genesis* of the Son of God in Matthew). It is time for us to face the facts courageously. Otherwise we too may be charged by Jesus with having made meaningless God's revelation about His Plan and His Son. It is a risk which we should not take.

What Luke presents to us is the historical conversation between Mary, the fiancé of Joseph, and a super-angel. The information offered by Gabriel in a few short words is clear. It contains one of the greatest truths found anywhere in the Bible. The amazing fact is that what Gabriel taught about Jesus *as Son of God* contradicts what churches claiming to be based on the Bible have been teaching for some 1700 years.

Luke knows nothing at all, anywhere in his writings, of a personage called "God the Son." Luke's Jesus is *the Son of God* and he tells us precisely what he means by this.

We invite a close inspection of Luke 1:30ff. The arrival of a (radiant?) angel would naturally provoke fear, and Gabriel begins by calming Mary with these words: "Don't be afraid, Mariam, because you have found favor with God." Now the shocking announcement: "Listen! You are going to conceive and bear a son and you will name him Jesus. This son is going to be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God intends to give him the throne of his ancestor David. He is going to reign as king over the house of Jacob [the nation of Israel] during the coming ages, and there will be no end to his Kingdom" (Luke 1:31-33). We have here a beautifully

succinct summary of God's plan for the world in the Messiah. This is the purest Messianism. It is based on the Hebrew Bible (especially II Sam. 7 and Ps. 2, 72 and 89) and it promises a world government, with Jesus *back on earth* in Jerusalem, seated on a renewed Davidic throne. Any attempt to fritter away the divine promise leads to a very confusing form of the Christian faith.

Gabriel's summary statement of the whole structure of New Testament Christianity was firmly based on the words of the Hebrew Old Testament. From the beginning God had promised the arrival of a distinguished royal descendant of King David who would overthrow the rebellious governments of our present evil systems (Gal. 1:4; Ps. 2; Rev. 11:15-18) and establish the first world peace across the globe.

Let us look now at Mary's response to the angel's message. "Mary replied to the angel, 'How can this [the promised pregnancy] come to be, since I have no relations with a husband?'" The angel replied: "Holy spirit [no article in the Greek] is going to come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. And for that reason precisely the Son coming into existence will be called holy, the Son of God."

What Scripture presents here in the simplest language is the proposition that Mary is going to conceive and bear her first son without a husband. The role of the husband will be supplied by the creative activity of God through the operational presence of His holy spirit. God will perform, in other words, a creative miraculous act parallel to the act by which he created the first Adam whom Luke calls also "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). The result of this miracle is that the son will be God's own Son, as well, of course, as the son of Mary and, through her, the descendant of David. As descendant of David he qualifies to be the royal Messiah, the ruler of the world. Because his Father is God Himself, he is entitled to be called "the Son of God." What we learn here is revolutionary when compared with the very confusing teachings about the Son of God which in post-biblical times obscured the information presented by Gabriel to Mary — and turned Jesus into an essentially non-human person. According to the angel a brand new person is to be brought into existence. According to current theology the person of the Son did not *then* come into existence. He had already been in existence forever. A completely alien pre-historical life was invented for the Son, diverting attention away from his history on earth to a fictional existence in eternity followed by an amazing transmutation into a human being. By this process the Son was no longer

originally a human being at all. He had for eternity been a divine being, either angel or (as finally decreed by churches) God Himself.

It is against the later reinventing of the Son of God, Jesus, as an eternal being with *no origin in time* that we mount our protest in this magazine. We think it endangers faith in the human historical Messiah, Son of God, whom God created and appointed as a model for us of a human person in relation to his God. If Jesus does not *originate* as a man, he is not the "man Messiah Jesus" of Paul's creed (I Tim. 2:5), a sympathetic mediator on behalf of us struggling human beings. Because *the origin* of Jesus was transformed after Bible times, reinventing him as an uncreated, eternal being, the Roman Catholic Church eventually provided the more "accessible" and human Mary as a co-mediator between God and man. One mistake begets another.

The Bible in I Corinthians 15:45ff expressly warns against any view of Adam and Jesus which reverses their order of appearance and origin. It was *the physical man* who precedes the spiritual man, and not the other way round. If Jesus precedes Adam, God's program is sabotaged. The Son of God therefore did not precede Adam in time. The Son of God is the second Adam. "It is not the spiritual which is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual" (I Cor. 15:46).

Readers will be interested to know that in the post-biblical book, II Clement (early second century) some were beginning to turn Paul's statement on its head. II Clement 9:5 reads: "Christ, the Lord who saved us, *being first spirit became flesh...*" The famous Church historian Harnack notes: "*That is the fundamental, theological and philosophical creed on which the whole Trinitarian and Christological speculations of the Church of the succeeding centuries are built, and it is thus the root of the orthodox system of dogmatics*" (*History of Dogma*, Vol. I, p. 328, italics his).

But does Luke define Jesus as a spirit being becoming man? We think it is obvious that he does not. A dramatic change in the second century led not to the affirmation of the biblical Son of God but to his eclipse. The Son of God was replaced by "God the Son." Harnack described this fateful development as "the history of the substitution of the historical Jesus by the preexisting Christ, of the Christ of reality by the fictitious Christ in dogmatics, the victorious attempt to substitute *the mystery* of the person of Christ for the person himself. [This led to] the situation in which the laity was put under guardians by the clergy, by means of a theological formula unintelligible to the laity" (*History of Dogma*, Vol. III, p. 10).

Have we ever recovered from this departure from the New Testament?

Luke's Teaching about the True Origin and Nature of the Son of God

Two fundamentally important Christian truths emerge from Luke's transparent account. First Mary's son is also the Son of God (cp. Rom 1:4, "God's Son"). This is because he has no human father. Secondly the *explanation* and *basis* for Jesus being the Son of God are provided with complete clarity, at the beginning of the New Testament. It is "for that reason precisely" (*dio kai*) (Luke 1:35) that Jesus is constituted Son of God. For what reason? The Father's miraculous creative act which begets the Son.

Fortunately words have fixed meanings. The word *beget* means "to bring into existence," to "cause to exist," "to impart existence to." The unique Sonship of Jesus has nothing whatsoever to do with an imagined "*pre-existence*" in some other condition or realm. There is here no such being as a Son of God who *antedates* the conception in Mary's womb. The biblical Son of God *comes into existence*, is created, or procreated at a given moment in not too distant history. Of an "eternally begotten" Son who had no beginning, Luke says absolutely nothing. Equally he knows nothing of a Son of God begotten in prehistory, just before Genesis. Luke not only does not mention such a preexisting Son. He rules such a being out by telling us how and when the real Son of God began to exist. It was by divine miracle and it was long after the Genesis creation. The Son of God thus has his origin in human history, in the human biological chain. He is no visitor from outer space, transmuting himself into a human person, while remaining an eternal Person.

Gabriel thus laid the foundation of sound theology when he supplied the all important *definition* of Son of God as a human person supernaturally generated by a direct intervention of the Creator within the biological chain (which of course he had initiated in Adam and Eve in Genesis).

What we learn from Gabriel, then, is that 1. Jesus is the Son of God, 2. He is the Son of God *because God created him supernaturally in Mary*. That is the biblical definition of Jesus' title "Son of God." Reasonably enough it is provided very early on in the New Testament revelation, though the very same ideas are found in II Samuel 7, where the Messiah, David's son, is going to have God as his Father (II Sam. 7:14-16). David's son in other words is at the same time

God's son, because he is a product of Mary, a descendant of David and of God, the Father.

It is important that we stress the fact that Luke's explanation of divine Sonship excludes what later came to be church dogma. Later dogma, enforced sometimes by the sword, mandated that a miraculously begotten Son of God was *insufficient* to be the Savior. Thus a quite different account of the origin of the Son was "cobbled on" to the account in Luke and Matthew and few seemed to notice the resulting contradiction. One cannot both *come into existence* as Son of God and already *be in existence* as Son of God. To begin to exist and to preexist are mutually exclusive ideas. They cannot be harmonized. This will mean that anyone holding in his mind the concept that his Savior Jesus is both billions of years old *and* some two thousand years old retains in his head a muddle and a contradiction. Can the Son of God be both six months younger than his cousin John and also billions of years older?

Happily, leading theologians have called attention to this rather obvious fact that Luke and *later* church views of Jesus' Sonship (via Incarnation) are entirely at odds. The German systematic theologian Wolfhard Pannenberg pointed out:

"In Luke the divine Sonship is established by the almighty activity of the divine spirit on Mary (Luke 1:35). In Matthew it is apparently thought of even more emphatically in the sense of a supernatural procreation (Matt. 1:20). In Luke 1:35 **Jesus' divine Sonship is explicitly established by his miraculous birth...**as the omnipotent effect of the creative divine Spirit" (*Jesus, God and Man*, p. 120).

He says also: "[The Virgin Birth] explains the divine Sonship literally in such a way that Jesus was **creatively begotten** by the Spirit of God (Luke 1:35). Matthew defends this idea against obvious objections by reporting a special revelation to Joseph about the origin of Mary's pregnancy (Matt. 1:18-25)."

"[The Virgin Birth] stands *in irreconcilable contradiction to the Christology of the Incarnation of the preexistent Son of God...*The contrast between the idea of the Son's preexistence and the explanation of the divine Sonship by means of the virgin birth is much sharper. It is indeed compatible with the idea of a Sonship existing formerly that it only became effective and was revealed at a particular, definite point in the life of Jesus. However preexistence is irreconcilable with this: that the divine Sonship as such was first established in time. *Sonship cannot at the same time consist in preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation of Jesus in Mary.*" [You cannot

be eternally begotten as Son and be begotten as Son in the days of Herod.]

“[The Virgin Birth] seeks to express that from his birth onward Jesus has been God’s Son, because through his birth he is God’s Son” (Brunner, *Creation and Redemption*, p. 353).

“In fact the patristic [of the church fathers] confession also picked up the [doctrine of the Virgin Birth] only in a new interpretation, in connection with the concept of the Incarnation. This connection however does not correspond to the intention of the texts in Luke and Matthew...

“There is the *contradiction of preexistence* which the Patristic church apparently did not notice (Pannenberg, p. 150)...

“How did Jesus, exalted through the resurrection from the dead, become the preexistent divine being descending from heaven? This remains to the present a chief problem of the history of primitive Christian tradition (p. 151).

“In the Synoptic tradition the Son of Man does not appear as a preexistent being.”

Thus time and place, which are so crucial for making sense of things, were dissolved into timeless and placeless speculations. According to the tradition which persists in nearly all churches today Bethlehem was *not* the place of origin of the Son and he was generated outside time. Gabriel and Luke were rejected. “Eternal begetting” conveys no meaning.

Another scholar warns of the danger of losing sight of the Jesus of history and the Bible and substituting for him an invented Jesus of our own imagination. “The New Testament as a whole is quite conscious of the danger of breaking with Jesus in the name of the risen Christ. That is why the Gospels were written. Though they are not biographies of Jesus, they do refer the reader to his historical figure rather than to some figure that is or can be easily idealized or manipulated. The Gospels are conscious of the danger of ending up with a cultic deity, or maintaining the religious structure common to other religions existing at the time and simply changing the name of the worshipped deity to Jesus...Christianity has frequently taken the form of ‘religion’ rather than ‘faith’...On the theological level this has been due in the last analysis to a Christology that has preferred to focus on the risen Christ as an abstract symbol of faith rather than on the historical Jesus as the proper key to an understanding of the total Christ. The total Christ is certainly present by virtue of his Spirit. *The real question is whether this Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus or some vague, abstract Spirit that is nothing*

more than the sublimated embodiment of the natural ‘religious’ person’s desires and yearnings. If it is the latter, then it is not only different from, but actually contrary to the Spirit of Jesus” (Jon Sobrino, S.J.).

A current observer of the religion of America notes that “there is always the ‘Jesus vs. Jesus Christ’ argument. Jesus is the drop-me-through-the-goal-posts friend in my pocket. But if you take seriously the Gospels about who he is, there’s very little there to suggest he’s just a kind friend” (Mary Hess, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN).

What Is Behind All This?

Satan from the beginning hated God’s new and marvelous creation, man. He recognized that man has been created for a status superior to angels and he determined to do all he could to wreck man’s successful passage to immortality in the Kingdom — the destiny planned for man from the start. Adam, man, was placed as a king in the Garden to take care of the earth as God’s vice-regent. He fell short of the glory or kingship of God. To that kingship and glory he is invited to return and be restored by the Gospel. The Gospel is the Gospel about the Kingdom of God and the restoration of the Kingdom on earth at the return of Jesus. This process is under way now, as God through Jesus invites us by the Gospel of the Kingdom to undertake the spiritual journey which will terminate in our recovery of the glory lost in Adam and regained in Jesus.

The “psychology” of Satan, “whose devices we are not unaware of” (II Cor. 2:11) works, we think, like this. He despises man as the potential candidate for glory and immortality in the Kingdom. He does all he can, within God’s permission, to wreck the divine immortality Plan in the Son of God. “When anyone hears the word [Gospel of the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19] the Devil comes and snatches away what has been sown as seed in his heart, *so that he cannot believe it and be saved*” (see Luke 8:12).

Satan has put about a gigantic piece of propaganda that the Son of God is not essentially human but essentially God. He is God, according to the traditional creeds, but has assumed an “impersonal human nature.” Satan does not want us to believe that Jesus, the Son of God is a fully human person. He wants us to believe the Son of God *is* God. Satan’s point of view is that a man cannot be as wonderful as Jesus was and is. No man, surely, he argues, could do the miracles Jesus did. No *man*, Satan maintains, could be elevated to the highest position in the universe next to God. The Son of God must be God, so the argument goes. He is too good to be a man.

The biblical reply is that man, including Jesus, is the marvelous masterpiece creation of the One God, the Father of Jesus. Man has unheard of potential, when he learns to obey the model man, the Son of God. Satan is most unhappy with what God is doing in His new creative activity, preparing *man* for immortality and rulership in the Kingdom, along with the one man, Jesus, *the* Son of God who has already qualified, despite full temptation, for immortality and kingship in the coming Kingdom.

When we see that the origin of the Son of God is within the human chain, and that he is God's created Son (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20; I John 5:18, not KJV), we praise the God of heaven, the God of Jesus, for His marvelous intention to give immortality to mortal man, provided they obey Jesus, the model man and the Son of God (Heb. 5:9), who faithfully proclaimed the Kingdom of God as we are commanded to do also (Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20; Luke 9:60). ✧

Heart and Mouth Connection

by Martha Mattison

Have you ever considered when you are talking with others that they are hearing the overflowing of what you have chosen to put into your heart? The things that matter the most to you will soon come into the conversation. Your mind is the "engine" of your mouth. When we hear you speak we are hearing what you *are* at the core of your being.

As Christ said, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). Here we see two choices: one good, one evil. The difference depends on what has been put into the heart to cause it to overflow and come forth from the mouth. There are many verses in the Bible that show a connection of the heart and the mouth. It seems obvious that we are responsible for the things with which we chose to fill our hearts to the point of bursting forth into speech. The Psalmist wrote: "I have hid your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." We also have responsibility for what we say because we are told that a wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction (Proverbs 16:23). We are warned to think before we speak arrogantly to God in Ecclesiastes 5:2: "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." Again the good or evil in our conversations is contrasted in Proverbs in this way: "The mouth of the righteous

brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse" (10:31-32). Even our Lord Jesus taught us that what we say is very important. He said, "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean" (Matthew 15:18).

May we ask God to create in us a pure heart and a steadfast (persistent) spirit. May our mouths speak those good things which overflow from a good heart. What does our conversation reveal about us? "As water reflects a face so a man's heart reflects the man" (Proverbs 27:19). ✧

Theological Whoppers

A Miracle of Misinterpretation

The leader of the Way International, the late V.P. Wierwille, wrote the following: "The records of baptism in Acts, the book which records the events of Pentecost and immediately after, do not mention water at all; thus to say that there is water involved in baptism can only be a private interpretation" (V.P. Wierwille, *The Bible Tells Me So*, New Knoxville, OH: The American Christian Press, 1971, p. 135).

With this statement compare Acts 8:36-38: "And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?' And he commanded the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him."

And Acts 10:47-48: Peter said, "'Can any one *forbid* water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized." Peter then rehearsed this wonderful story of the water baptism of the first Gentiles and asked, "Who was I to *forbid* God?" (Acts 11:17). Peter had commanded them in the name of Jesus to be baptized in water (Acts 10:48). It would have been a serious resistance of what God had done, had Peter forbidden the Gentiles to undergo, by water baptism, the initiation ceremony into the New Testament Church ordered by Jesus in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20). Jesus had himself submitted to water baptism (Matt. 3:15). This was an act of righteousness (Matt. 3:15). It was John who wrongly tried to withhold water baptism from Jesus (3:14). Jesus baptized many disciples in water, authorizing his agents to perform the ceremony (John 4:1, 2). After giving orders that Christians are to baptize others until the end of the age (Matt. 28:19, 20), the Apostles commanded the public to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). Peter noted

that the holy spirit had been given to those who obey God (Acts 5:32). Obedience of course included submission to the apostolic practice of baptism. The book of Hebrews urges us to be aware that Jesus gives salvation “to those who obey him” (Heb. 5:9). Throughout the Book of Acts the Apostles obediently baptized the new converts, when they had understood the Gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 8:12). Those with partial understanding were rebaptized in water (Acts 19:4, 5).

In complete opposition to V.P. Wierwille’s amazing theory that water baptism was superseded by “spirit baptism,” Paul insisted on baptizing the group in Acts 19 following which they received the baptism of the spirit (v. 6). No text says that “John baptized in water but Jesus will baptize in spirit *instead of* water”! Apostolic practice demonstrates that the water baptism commanded by Jesus remains the standard ceremony of initiation in the church for believers. (V.P. Wierwille was viewed as an inspired Bible teacher by thousands of disciples who followed him in the “Way International.”) For a more detailed study of baptism, see the article “What Is So Difficult About Water Baptism” at our website www.restorationfellowship.org

Our intention above is to be constructive. We wish the most successful faith journey for all our readers. We are “nervous,” however, that former erroneous teachings are sometimes most unreasonably held on to, against the plainest testimony of the Bible to the contrary. The obedience of faith requires that we do what Jesus commands. An important command of his to us all is that we submit by baptism in water to his desire for us to express publicly our allegiance to him as Messiah and to his Kingdom Gospel. It is as simple as that. ✧

Comments

“I am writing to thank you for your excellent book *The Doctrine of the Trinity* [available from 800-347-4261]. It has been so helpful. I have been making my way very slowly through it over the past few months, and I am finding it so very enlightening. Regrettably since we have understood the appalling history of the origins of the Trinity doctrine, we have experienced severe opposition, from unexpected sources, which is why it has been so important for me personally to be sure about what we believe...There is a growing hunger in the hearts of people for truth, with many small pockets of believers all over the country considering these things.” — *England*

“This last volume of *Focus on the Kingdom*, Vol. 6 No. 11, has moved me so powerfully to just stop and celebrate God and His wonderful grace to us by Jesus Christ and his

message of the Kingdom. I thank God for such a well-defined message as we have in the Gospel of the Kingdom, and how the whole Bible harmonizes with it. I thank God that you are my brother in Christ, and that God has allowed your publication to so move me today. The particular part I am referring to was ‘Restoring the Gospel Terminology of the Early Church,’ pp. 3-6 though I enjoyed and appreciated the whole publication — your trip and experience with truth in Asia was very interesting and most enjoyable...We only did what the servant was supposed to do — but wasn’t it fun!” — *Michigan*

“Thank you so much for coming to teach us in our home. I will never forget how you impressed on us that we are ‘the lords and ladies in training for the coming Kingdom.’ I share that thought with everyone I meet and look for opportunities to do so!” — *Pennsylvania*

“I have learned so much from you as to how to handle in a courteous yet firm manner those who are so very closed minded on issues. You will never know how this has helped me in my own life. We came out of an organization which taught us to ‘boldly tell it like it is’ without regard for anyone’s feelings.” — *Missouri*

14th Theological Conference

Please do plan on attending our next Theological Conference. The dates are Friday, April 29 - Sunday, May 1, 2005. This is an international gathering of enthusiastic Bible students and truth-seekers coming together from many different backgrounds for mutual edification and encouragement. The nature of the conference as a “theological conference” definitely does not mean that it is a heavy “academic” exercise. Papers on important biblical topics are presented, there is opportunity for interaction with the speakers, and there is much scope for enjoying shorter “faith stories” from other participants. The event is held near Atlanta in a comfortable setting with easy access to the airport. The Georgia spring weather is known by all to be an experience not to be missed.

In the last *Focus* we cited the Jerusalem Bible from Ps. 2:11, 12. Though this translation offers an alternative rendering in a good footnote, the text might give the impression that the Son of God is Yahweh. The note gives a clearer version: “Serve Yahweh and kiss the feet of the Son.” The Son is the agent of Yahweh, not Yahweh Himself. Our thanks to an observant reader for this.

Some have inquired about making donations to Restoration Fellowship. These are gratefully received and are tax deductible. They may be sent to Restoration Fellowship, 175 West Lake Dr, Fayetteville, GA 30214 or through PayPal to anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com

With this issue we complete the sixth year of publication of *Focus on the Kingdom*.