

Focus on the Kingdom

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I am working on a new book on our Christian faith, as seen from an Abrahamic, Davidic and (we might say) Jesuanic point of view. The first half of the book consists of nine short chapters. The language is simple, and I hope that the substance of what we believe Jesus taught as the faith will come over to any average reader. I had in mind those many seekers after the meaning of life whom we have met in various parts of the world, especially in Malawi. I remember well meeting a young housekeeper in the motel in Blantyre, Malawi whose English was good, and who loved to read. She wanted to know what Jesus had really taught about being saved. This book is designed to meet her needs as a candidate for the Kingdom.

In previous months I offered our readers the first two chapters of the book and here is the third. I think that only when the “heaven for souls” tradition is abandoned by churches they will begin to grasp the grand Kingdom plan represented by Jesus and the Apostles.

I had in mind as I wrote the amazing statistic that in London, where seven million people live, only about 2% of the population attend church with regularity. The rest show up in church about three times in their lives: to be “hatched, matched and dispatched,” and possibly, in a good year, for a Christmas service. It is hard to believe that “the faith of Jesus” (Rom. 3:21, 26) makes such an incredibly feeble impact on them. I think they have not heard it clearly from the pulpit. And I doubt if they are examining the Scriptures!

A number of readers have written with suggestions and encouragement. I think the book will be ready by our conference in April (21-23 — more on that later in the magazine). By April we will also have available a new book by Greg Deuble, of Australia, showing his amazing rethinking of the faith he had been taught from childhood. He offers us a powerful account of the “Abrahamic” Christianity he now holds to with passion. The lady who is working professionally at indexing the book told us that she was having a struggle sticking to her job, because she found the book so fascinating. It is so good to have more literature to support our “restorationist” version of Jesus and his teachings.

Following is chapter 3 of *The Aims and Claims of Jesus: What you Didn't Learn in Church*.

Chapter 3: Jesus Is Coming Back to the Earth

If your church has been telling you that your objective as a Christian, your goal, is “heaven,” I believe they have been making the Bible a confusing book for you! If at funerals they have been dispatching the dead to heaven, alive and glorified, they have been offering you a pagan, philosophical concept, not the teaching of Jesus.

The fact is that the Bible says nothing about going to heaven as a “soul” when you die. Nothing at all. What Jesus and the Bible do teach is that everyone who dies as a successful Christian will be *brought back to life* again at what is called the resurrection. And that resurrection is going to happen when Jesus comes back to begin his new government or Kingdom on earth. You can establish this simple system and program once and for all by reading I Corinthians 15:22-28. Paul is here discussing the sequence of events in regard to the resurrection. Only one person has been already resurrected, brought back from death to *permanent* life. That is Jesus. The Christians of all the ages will be resurrected at Jesus’ future coming. Here are Paul’s words: “In Christ all will be made alive, but each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits; then, at his [second] coming, those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15:22, 23).

The plan for resurrection is not complex: Those who are Christians will be raised to life, resurrected, at the coming of Jesus.

I think you will not find it hard to understand that it is fearfully confusing to point you in one direction, “heaven at death,” when the Bible points you in a completely different direction. We all know how devastatingly frustrating it is to be told that a certain event is going to happen at a particular place and time, when that event is to be held at a different time and at a different place. While Jesus points you towards the Kingdom of God to be established on earth *when he comes back*, the church has been promising you a place in “heaven” the moment you die. The place is wrong. You are not going to heaven. The timing is wrong. You are not going anywhere, alive, the moment you die. You are going to be asleep in the grave for however much time elapses between your death and the future arrival of Jesus to bring in the Kingdom on earth.

This is the biblical program from start to finish. This is the framework of the whole Bible story, the outline of God’s great Plan. You are alive now. If you are a true believer when you die, you will “go to sleep” in death and

rest in the grave until Jesus comes back. The R.I.P statement is correct. The dead are “resting in peace.” When Jesus comes back he will bring all the faithful dead out of their graves, making them alive again and giving them immortality and a place in his royal government — the Kingdom of God, the subject of his Gospel.

This is essentially a simple and comprehensible story. It is confirmed throughout the Bible. Try reading the New Testament with this “model” in mind and see if it does not make perfect sense. I believe that all the New Testament writers shared this straightforward account of God’s immortality program.

When Job asked the great question about “life after death,” he said: “If a person dies, will he live again?” Notice he did not say, “If a person dies, will he *go on* living?” That is quite a different question. Job did not expect to go on living after he was dead. This would be a confusing contradiction. A person who is continuing to live does not have to be “made alive” at the resurrection (I Cor. 15:22). But the Bible teaches that the dead are to remain dead until they are made alive at the resurrection which Jesus will bring about when he returns. This is a simple and coherent program of events. We all need to live in the certain knowledge that this is what God intends to do, using Jesus as His human agent.

“The dead know nothing at all,” says Scripture (Ecc. 9:5). “The dead Lazarus is asleep and I am going to wake him up and call him out of his tomb,” says Jesus (John 11:11, 14). But churches have demonstrated their impatience with Jesus and his viewpoint. They have wanted to “jump the gun” and promise their adherents an immediate conscious presence in heaven the moment they die and not a moment later!

The survival of an “immortal soul” is not a biblical teaching at all, but rather an import from pagan philosophy. Paul warned against philosophy in Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy.”

You can see what happens when the Bible’s hope is replaced with a non-hope invented by church tradition. If we are to go to conscious glory the moment we die, what possible sense is there in Jesus coming back to restore the dead to life? And what need is there for a Kingdom following that resurrection? Resurrection means “standing up again from the condition of death.” Why would we need to come back to life if we are *already alive* before that time? It makes no sense at all. (Note: the various religious groups seem to be mesmerized by the idea of spirit beings. Jehovah’s Witnesses say that Jesus was a spirit, angel-being and thus not really human. Mormons hold that Jesus was the spirit-brother of Satan, and that God chose Jesus to come down to the earth. Other churches tell their adherents to pray to invisible

spirits of departed saints. The Anglican Church thinks of departed saints as somehow in communion with the living.)

The most spectacular event of the whole of human history will be the Second Coming of Jesus. Jesus was here once. He was born the Son of God, by a miraculous generation and conception in Mary. He died in his thirties. He now sits with God in heaven (the only one who has gone to heaven). Jesus is now immortal, the pioneer and forerunner of the whole of God’s immortality program. Jesus is waiting now at the right hand of God, a position of supreme authority next to God, until he is given the signal to leave heaven and return to the earth. Angels said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched him go into heaven.”

And when he comes he is going to bring the faithful dead back to life, back to life from death. They are going to live again, and when they do, for them it will seem as if no time has passed since they closed their eyes in death. Together with the Christians who survive until Jesus comes the resurrected Christians will be united with Jesus forever and they will take part in restoring sanity to our shattered world.

I Thessalonians gives us one of Paul’s clearest descriptions of the future return of Jesus to raise the Christians who will have died before then: “And now, brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back [“bring to life,” NEB] with Jesus all the Christians who have died. I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. So comfort and encourage each other with these words” (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The picture here gives us the following facts. Jesus is going to reappear in the sky and the dead Christians will be resurrected back to life. Together with the Christians still alive they will be caught up (“raptured”) to meet the Lord Jesus in the air and then escort him down to the earth where he will take up his position as rightful ruler of the Kingdom of God.

The popular idea that Jesus will come back secretly seven years before he comes back in power and glory has no foundation in the Bible. It is an invented myth. When Jesus arrives the event will be spectacular and visible. Jesus is returning to the earth. He is certainly not going to snatch the Christians away to heaven! This would not be a second coming at all, but a sort of “drive by.” When someone says that they are going to the store and “will be back in a few moments,” we have no difficulty understanding plain words. Nor should we have any problem with Jesus’ promise that he is going to come back to the earth and reside here. If he does not, then there will be no real second coming and no Kingdom on the earth with Jesus as King in Jerusalem.

I am sure you can see how important it is to know that the dead Christians are not now alive! If we know that the dead are presently unconscious, in their graves, peacefully “asleep,” we immediately concentrate our attention on the future wonderful moment when Jesus reappears in the sky and comes down to the earth. And once we concentrate on that mighty event, we immediately center our entire interest on the Kingdom of God which is going to begin on earth worldwide when Jesus comes back.

“Going to heaven when we die” is simply a clever diversion, which confuses and distracts us from the biblical story and Jesus’ Good News about the Kingdom. “Heaven at death” makes intelligent Bible reading almost impossible because our church story is not the story of the Bible. There are two incompatible stories, which cannot be harmonized. The whole great Kingdom plan becomes a huge muddle in the minds of churchgoers, once the ultimate goal, the Kingdom at Jesus’ return, is abandoned in favor of a “comforting” promise that our souls are with Jesus long before the Kingdom comes.

Paul gave a strong warning against any who taught that one can be alive before the resurrection. He even named two men: “Their teaching will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are an example of this. They have wandered away from the truth by saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they have overthrown the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:17, 18).

Churches have proposed a similar mistake, by claiming that the dead are alive before the future resurrection.

But it is cold comfort to offer someone a hope which is not in the Bible. The hope of going to heaven is absent from Scripture. It is a later invention of man and of churches. The church’s story contains a dreadful dislocation of the Bible’s story. Jesus had learned the Bible story very well. He looked forward to the Kingdom of God, of which he is to be the King, when he comes back. At that moment of future arrival in triumph, Jesus

will call back to life all those who have died following him. It will be one huge collective return to life, every one of the believers together in one mass. Not individual departures of “souls” to heaven, but a collective coming back to life of all the faithful at one wonderful moment.

Try reading the Bible and especially the New Testament with that sequence of events in mind. See how beautifully it will fit and how it will make sense of the whole Bible story from Genesis to Revelation. In this way you will be grasping the Christian hope and believing the Gospel about the Kingdom which “God promised to those who love him” (James 2:5).

When Jesus comes back to raise the dead and reward them for their service in his Kingdom Gospel mission, the world will gradually experience a wonderful restoration. A major factor in that new age coming is that Satan, who is currently deceiving the whole world, will be put out of commission. At the arrival of Jesus to rule in his Kingdom an angel will arrest the Devil, bind him and imprison him for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3).

At that time the faithful will begin to reign with the Messiah on a renewed earth. Here is one of the clearest and most important Bible verses outlining God’s great Plan for you and for the world: “They sang a new hymn: ‘Worthy are you [Jesus] to receive the scroll and to break open its seals, for you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation. You have made them to be a Kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth’” (Rev. 5:9, 10).

The event of the Second Coming means a severe judgment on those who have refused to take part in God’s immortality program through Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom. I advise you to consult the amazing words of the great prophet Isaiah. In his Kingdom vision he saw what God intends to do to our present evil governments and people. Let me rehearse these words for you. You have here an advance picture of the state of affairs which accompanies the future intervention of Jesus at his second coming:

“Look! The LORD is about to destroy the earth and make it a vast wasteland. See how He is scattering the people over the face of the earth. Priests and laypeople, servants and masters, maids and mistresses, buyers and sellers, lenders and borrowers, bankers and debtors — none will be spared. The earth will be completely emptied and looted. The LORD has spoken! The earth dries up, the crops wither, the skies refuse to rain. The earth suffers for the sins of its people, for they have twisted the instructions of God, violated His laws, and broken His everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse consumes the earth and its people.

“They are left desolate, destroyed by fire. Few will be left alive. All the joys of life will be gone. The grape harvest will fail, and there will be no wine. The merrymakers will sigh and mourn. The clash of tambourines will be stilled; the happy cries of celebration will be heard no more. The melodious chords of the harp will be silent. Gone are the joys of wine and song; strong drink now turns bitter in the mouth. The city writhes in chaos; every home is locked to keep out looters. Mobs gather in the streets, crying out for wine. Joy has reached its lowest ebb. Gladness has been banished from the land. The city is left in ruins, with its gates battered down.

“Throughout the earth the story is the same — like the stray olives left on the tree or the few grapes left on the vine after harvest, only a remnant is left. But all who are left will shout and sing for joy. Those in the west will praise the LORD’s majesty. In eastern lands, give glory to the LORD. In the coastlands of the sea, praise the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. Listen to them as they sing to the LORD from the ends of the earth. Hear them singing praises to the Righteous One! But my heart is heavy with grief. I am discouraged, for evil still prevails, and treachery is everywhere. Terror and traps and snares will be your lot, you people of the earth.

“Those who flee in terror will fall into a trap, and those who escape the trap will step into a snare. Destruction falls on you from the heavens. The world is shaken beneath you. The earth has broken down and has utterly collapsed. Everything is lost, abandoned, and confused. The earth staggers like a drunkard. It trembles like a tent in a storm. It falls and will not rise again, for its sins are very great. In that day the LORD will punish the fallen angels in the heavens and the proud rulers of the nations on earth. They will be rounded up and put in prison until they are tried and condemned.

“Then the LORD Almighty will mount His throne on Mount Zion. He will rule gloriously in Jerusalem, in the sight of all the leaders of His people. There will be such glory that the brightness of the sun and moon will seem to fade away” (Isa. 24:1-23).

This is a vivid picture straight from the pen of one of the great Bible prophets, Isaiah. You will see that he describes a calamity and catastrophe of which we have seen the like in our days. We all know about the destructive tsunami and the terrifying hurricanes which destroyed so many people, so much property. Such events show that God’s power, as He has ordained it in nature, can be devastating. The Second Coming of Jesus is compared in the prophets to an earthquake and a powerful storm. We are meant to learn from what we are now seeing: that God can and will express His displeasure at sin and bring us to our knees. He will do this deliberately on what is called the Day of the Lord. A

vast depopulation of the world will occur. This is the future and final intervention of God when He sends His beloved Son back to earth. That day is described in the long passage we just cited above. There will be international confusion, destruction and despair. It will affect all types of people.

But note the piece of positive news. “A few persons will be left,” when the Day of the Lord is over. Isaiah 24:6 says this expressly. Please take careful note of the fact that not every human person will be wiped out. That would leave the world vacant and there is actually a large denomination which has misleadingly taught that not a single person will be left alive on earth. That is plainly not true. There is an exact parallel here with the flood of Noah’s time. A tiny fraction of the human population emerged unscathed from the protective ark. Noah and his wife and three sons and their wives escaped death at that time. The rest of mankind was drowned in a colossal judgment event, which Jesus said is parallel and similar to his own coming. Listen to the words of Jesus: “As in a thunderstorm the bright light coming from the east is seen even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man” (Matt. 24:27).

That is the good news. But what about the bad news which precedes it? Jesus said: “In those days before the Flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the Flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes. Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left. So be prepared, because you don’t know what day your Lord is coming. Know this: A homeowner who knew exactly when a burglar was coming would stay alert and not permit the house to be broken into. You also must be ready all the time. For the Son of Man will come when least expected” (Matt. 24:37-44).

Paul’s most vivid and powerful description of the Second Coming of Jesus is found in II Thessalonians 1:7, 8: “God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

I think you are getting the picture of the future clear. First the bad times, the destruction of the careless and unprepared, then the survival of a few, and then the Kingdom of God which will reconstruct humanity beginning with the surviving remnant.

Remember that your part in this process is to prepare in advance for the Kingdom, to escape the judgment (not by being taken to heaven!) and then to gain immortality and rule with Jesus in the Kingdom he is going to put in place when he comes. ✧

15th Theological Conference

We invite everyone to come to Georgia April 21-23, 2006 for our Theological Conference. It is a unique gathering of Abrahamic believers, bringing people together from various countries. A number of speakers will present papers on subjects of interest to us all, with time for questions following. The conference is a rich time of fellowship and an opportunity to meet and encourage others of "Abrahamic" persuasion. There will be opportunities, as usual, for shorter "faith story" presentations. This is not an "academic" occasion, for specialists only! It is a meeting for Christian education and fellowship to further the great truths of Scripture. Many of the participants have newly discovered the Abrahamic faith and are excited to meet others of similar persuasion.

Accommodation is available as usual at the Hampton Inn in McDonough, GA where the telephone number is 770-914-0077. A block rate of \$75 per night is available. This includes continental breakfast. Transportation to the meeting place at Cornerstone Bible Church will be provided and the conference is \$105, which includes five meals.

The Godhead Is Not a Family

Members of the Worldwide Church of God founded by Herbert Armstrong were unfortunately offered a very misleading teaching about who God is. "*Yahweh*" (occurs nearly 7,000 times), it was said, is a family consisting of two: the Father and Jesus, the Son. Both are called *Yahweh*.

This is a radical and alarming departure from the monotheism of the Apostles and of Jesus himself. The word *Elohim*, "God" (some 3,500 times in the OT), is never a *collective* noun. Lexicons never list *Elohim* as a collective noun. Moderns scholars of Hebrew could not imagine *Elohim* to mean a family of two (or more). *Elohim*, when used of the One God, is a "plural of majesty" and the One God is a single Person. This is shown by the singular verbs which accompany *Elohim* when it refers to the One God, and by *thousands of singular personal pronouns*, which tell us in no uncertain terms that God is a single Person.

It really is not difficult to understand the function of a singular personal pronoun. It describes a single person or thing. In the case of God, He is a Person, never a thing. God is a "Who" and not a "What." The fact that He is called Father should be enough to establish this as fact. "Do we not all have one Father? Has not One God created us?" (Mal. 2:10).

It is therefore a serious confusion of the Bible's monotheistic teaching to tell people that *Elohim* is a collective noun, like "team" or "family," and that God consists of two eternal Members.

I even heard it said recently that "God" is like the United States. There are 50 states but only one United States. So there is one God, but consisting of two who are each God, in the one God-family. Or it is like this, said this exponent: you have in nature a helix which is really two helixes — a double helix.

The problem is that the analogy is false. First show that *Elohim* is a collective noun like "United States." Where is "God" in the Bible analogous to the "double helix"?

Lexicons of Hebrew do not list *Elohim* as a collective noun. Its usage shows that it never means a combination of *many in one*. *Elohim* of course can mean "gods" when it refers to pagan deities. It can also refer to a single pagan god, like Milchom or Chemosh. As a royal title it can mean the single person, the Messiah (Ps. 45:6). Moses is also called *Elohim* (Exod. 7:1), but Moses was not plural, and certainly not a family. *Elohim* never once refers to a group of gods as one.

The "Armstrong" definition of God was simply an error. The error was compounded by the impossible notion that Jesus was the *Yahweh* of the Old Testament. Such an idea is refuted easily: "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob glorified His servant Jesus" (Acts 3:13). Thus the God of Abraham was not Jesus!

At a recent conference on the issue of "the One God" an audience member produced a piece of Hebrew text from Genesis 1. She maintained that in the Hebrew word *et*, the letters *aleph* and *tav* refer to the name of God, as in "alpha and omega," "first and last."

In fact *et* is a Hebrew particle which indicates a direct object and is not translatable into English, which has no corresponding equivalent. Thus "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" contains the word *et* twice, before "the heavens" and "the earth." It is quite untrue that this is a cryptic reference to God.

What is surprising is that people who are unable to read either Greek or Hebrew sometimes confidently propose "facts" about the meaning of those languages which defy the whole of scholarship by professional lexicographers. This is part of the mentality which afflicts some, that Herbert Armstrong or other group leaders are some sort of apostolic figures "dropped from heaven" and equipped to make authoritative statements in fields in which they have no formal training. They are so special that they simply bypass the need to study and understand the languages of the Bible.

On a recent tape on the Godhead by a speaker for the Church of God International, it is encouraging to hear the

teacher admit that the word *logos* in John 1:1 does not mean “spokesman.” Worldwidars accepted for decades a wrong definition of *logos* (word) as a preexisting Jesus, who was said to be God’s spokesman. In all of its hundreds of occurrences in the Old Testament *logos* or its Hebrew equivalent *davar* (word) never meant a person or spokesperson. The definition “spokesman” was simply an error and it is surprising how uncritically it was accepted. No lexicon offered any support for *logos* meaning spokesman.

Equally mistaken was the confident assertion repeated by thousands of Worldwidars and later splits from Worldwide that *Elohim* was the name of the two individual members of the “God-family,” as well as the family name of the God-family. None of this could have been said by anyone with even moderate skills in Hebrew. Is there not a kind of arrogance in the supposition that we can bypass language facts, known to professional linguists and recorded in standard authorities?

In John 1:3 it is now being more widely recognized that “all things were made through him” (that is, a preexisting Son, Jesus) is a biased translation. English Bibles before the KJV read “all things were made through **it** [the *logos*].” That translation is valid. It depends on what one thinks *logos* means. Since it never means a person in the Old Testament background to John, why would we suddenly change its meaning in John 1:1? Why call *logos* a person when a word is not a person?

The idea that John wrote “In the beginning was *the Son*” cannot, however, be rescued by claiming that “the word was with God” means “the word was *face to face* with God,” and thus that the Godhead must be a community of at least two. The Greek word *pros* translated “with” in John 1:1 does not have to mean “face to face.” In Galatians 2:5 Paul did not say that the Gospel was “face to face” (*pros*) with the believers. In fact, as a scholar pointed out in a professional journal, John tends to use the word *para* when he speaks of one *person* with another. But in John 1:1 he did not use that preposition.

Several times in the Bible’s “wisdom” literature the preposition “with” means “in one’s heart” or “in one’s intention or purpose.” This fits well with John 1. The word was the self-expression or mind of God — not another Person!

Equally important is John’s own commentary on John 1:1 in his first epistle. There John spoke five times of “what” the disciples had seen. It was a “what,” not a “who,” which existed “with God.” John here explains what was “with God” (*pros ton theon*). He says that “the life” was with (*pros*) God and it would hardly be right to translate this as “face to face with God.” John defines the word or life which was “with [*pros*] the Father.” He tells

us also what he meant by God in John 1:1. It was the Father.

Our observation of many years is that some people when faced with a crisis in their long-held understandings will opt for “the easy way out.” Because friends and even family may be threatened by a correction of previously held doctrinal mistakes, some choose to “lie low” for the sake of peace. Or they conduct their studies in a way which will provide the “correct” answer. But what drives the studies in this case is not really language facts, but a desire to maintain the status quo. The plea that *pros* in John 1:1 has to mean face to face is an example of this tendency. It enables the exponent not to have to give up his error that God is a community of two Members. The thousands of pronouns describing God as a single Individual are simply ignored. And the predictions of the origin of Messiah given in the Old Testament and confirmed by Matthew and Luke are left out of account. It makes little sense to argue for the God-family almost exclusively from John!

But John is no help to the “God is a family” school. In John 17:3 Jesus, as a Jew following the biblical unitarian creed of Israel, defined God as “the only one who is truly God.” In any other setting, no one has the slightest difficulty understanding that “the only one who is truly God” excludes any others from the Godhead.

Can language say more clearly that only the Father is God? Jesus here made a unitarian statement, precisely. He said that the Father is the only one who is truly God. That is unitarianism, plainly and simply.

But for the persistent, whose real agenda is not to rock any boats or disturb the accepted status quo, there must be a way out! Paul is then twisted to support the “God is a community of two” concept. Paul addressed head-on the issue of God and true monotheism in a famous creedal declaration in I Corinthians 8:4-6. Here he discusses pagan systems with “many so-called gods and lords.” By contrast, “to us Christians there is one God, the Father.”

If that is not a clear statement, it is hard to see what could be said to teach that God is a single Person. But the “God-family” exponent finds an ingenious way out. Paul went on to speak of “one Lord Jesus Christ.” So then, if Jesus is one Lord he must be God! And this despite Paul’s declaration in the same passage that “There is no God except one...there is one God, the Father.”

Jesus is indeed Lord in the New Testament. But he is not the Lord *God*. Would it not be fair and reasonable to consult Paul’s companion Luke for a clarification. Luke introduces the Son of God as the miraculously begotten Son, the one who comes into existence as Son precisely because of the miracle in Mary (Luke 1:35; Gabriel could

not have been clearer about the basis for the title “Son of God”).

Not only this. Luke defines the term Lord as appropriate for Jesus. He tells us what it means to call Jesus “lord.” He calls him “the Lord Messiah” in Luke 2:11. This title is entirely right for Jesus who is the second “lord” in Psalm 110:1, which is so often quoted in the New Testament. That second “lord” in Psalm 110:1 is translated from the Hebrew word *adoni*, a form which in all of its 195 occurrences designates a “lord” who is not God, but a human superior (occasionally an angel). *Strong’s* will not show you this important distinction. It should but it does not.

So then, in I Corinthians 8:4-6, when Paul calls Jesus the “one Lord Jesus Messiah,” he merely confirms what is obvious from the rest of the New Testament: Jesus is the Lord *Christ*. He called him just that. “One Lord Christ, Jesus” or “one Lord Jesus Christ.” For Paul Jesus is lord because he is the Christ. Jesus had said that he would found his church on the understanding that he, Jesus, was the Christ. And Jesus never said “I am God.”

“There is no God but the one God, the Father,” Paul says. “There is one God and one mediator between God and man, *the man* Messiah Jesus,” he later wrote (I Tim. 2:5). In these biblical monotheistic statements he was only echoing the massive testimony to biblical monotheism taught by the “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is *one Lord*.” (Does anyone not understand that “one Yahweh” here means one Person and not one family?!).

Jesus affirmed this unitarian creed of Israel in a very important interchange with a Jewish scribe. Mark 12:28-34 should forever settle the Christian view of who God is. Jews were of course unitarians and Jesus did not disagree with them about who God is. Jesus’ agreement with the scribe simply confirms the creedal statement of Jesus that the Father is “the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3).

A paralyzing blow was struck by misleading leaders who persistently claimed that God is really a community of two or three. Not only are ordinary Bible readers misled. A billion Muslims and millions of Jews are prevented from hearing that Jesus was the greatest exponent of the unitary monotheism of the Bible, that God is a single Person (the word “one” in Hebrew and English means “one single”).

The completely mistaken view that “one,” *echad*, means more than one would lead to a breakdown of communication. It’s rather like saying that a nickel is really a dime. Impossible! One means one and never more than one. “One flesh” does not mean “two fleshes,” and “one family” does not mean “two families.” The Hebrew numeral “one” (as in “one, two, three...”) works exactly like the English word “one.” The word “one” in “one God family” still means “one single.”

A top British scholar, John Blanchard, wrote a book with an interesting title, *Does God Believe in Atheists?* He was arguing for the existence of God from the marvels of creation. On page 450 he took time to refer to the Trinity. He said: “The Trinity may seem to contradict the bedrock monotheistic statement, ‘The Lord our God, the Lord is one,’ but it does exactly the opposite, as the word ‘one’ used to express this fundamental doctrine is the Hebrew *echad*, which means not one in isolation but one in unity. The word stresses unity while recognizing diversity within that oneness.”

I challenged this amazing statement. A few weeks later I received this gracious reply: “Following our recent correspondence, I have taken theological and academic advice and it seems clear that my comments on the word *echad* are inaccurate. I am very grateful to you for pointing this out and assure you that in future printings of the book the paragraph concerned will be replaced by one that uses other OT arguments for the plurality of Yahweh’s being.”

We can be sure that arguments based on the Hebrew word for “one” will not reappear. It is time to bury an unfounded claim about the meaning of the simple word “one.” A return to the simplicity of the biblical creed is long overdue. It is really the stranglehold of the cult leader (even long after he is dead) that prevents this. And pressures sometimes of job, family and other agendas. Or simply the reluctance to admit that one has been scammed on the most basic of all doctrines.

What this whole theory of a plural God does is to make it impossible for God to magnify the work of his chosen MAN. It constantly tries to get rid of the *man* Messiah and substitute a second *Yahweh*. This produces a rival to *Yahweh*, and erases the human agent of God, the man Jesus. The whole point of the Messiah is that he is a member of the human race. The verses which directly address the relationship between God and Son of God and Messiah must solve the problem (Jn. 17:3; I Cor. 8:4-6; I Tim. 2:5).

Where in the Bible is President Bush addressed? Where in the Bible does Bush speak? Nowhere. Where in the Bible does the double *Yahweh* speak? Where is He addressed? The investigator has 7,000 *Yahweh* words, 3,500 occurrences of *Elohim* and 1300 occurrences of the Greek word for God, *theos*, to choose from to produce a sample. Can he find one? Do any of these mean “God in two Persons”? On 12,000 occasions the Bible spoke of God and never meant by this “God in two Persons.”

If this evidence, plus repeated singular pronouns, cannot restrict God to one Person, what evidence could? The whole fabric of intelligent discourse breaks down. And this is really what has happened in the current claims that God is a family of two. ✧