

The Christianity of Jesus and of the Bible is Not So Complicated

It is a constant puzzle to me as to why most churchgoers seem to reflect so little (if at all!) on the belief system they are getting week after week in church. Americans are tremendously interested in what goes on in current politics — what is happening with taxes, with health care; who is the best candidate to fix the mass of problems society is faced with. Granted that readers of this magazine (monthly, now in its 19th year) are convinced that only the Messiah Jesus (Luke 2:11: “the Messiah lord”) can ultimately reorganize society successfully so that nations will never again imagine destroying each other — men, women, and children — in war, using terrifying weapons of mass murder. Only Jesus (barring some unforeseen outcry even now) will ultimately and successfully ban the wanton destruction of human life in the womb. Only Jesus will have the power to convince every living person that a fetus is a human being and that to stop a beating heart is murder. Only the intervention of the Messiah at his one and only spectacular arrival, his future, post-Great Tribulation **Second Coming** will put an end to the devastating deceptive powers of the evil angel the Devil (the SATAN). According to Revelation 12:9 “the Devil is currently deceiving the whole world”; “the whole world lies in his appalling grip” (1 John 5:19). When the future first stage of the Kingdom of God on earth comes at the return of Jesus, “the Devil will no longer be able to deceive the nations” (Rev. 20:3). The Devil patently cannot both be “deceiving the whole world” *and* “deceiving the nations no longer” — at the same time! Amillennialism is thus proven false.

The Millennium (Rev. 20:1-6) will introduce a brand new world order on earth, the “inhabited earth of the future,” which is a major theme of the Gospel (Heb. 2:5). At the resurrection of all the faithful only, destined to occur at the one visible return of Jesus, the world will experience, after reeducation, a splendid world peace and security. The saints or holy people of all the ages, then immortalized, will rule the world along with Jesus (Rev. 2:26-27, etc.). Revelation 5:10 is one of many **perfectly clear** verses announcing the future Kingdom in which the saints will administer and govern the new society of that time (1 Cor. 6:2: “govern and manage the world”).

None of this information is complicated, provided the straightforward, central Bible verses are not disposed of by silence or twisting! Revelation 5:10 informs us that Jesus has been assembling an international company of priests and kings, as formerly the nation of Israel was intended to be (Ex. 19:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:4-10). They will rule on the earth with Jesus.

Here is Peter’s inspired description of the identity of true believers. To those emerging from the clutches of the Watchtower control, which denies Christian identity to millions of JW’s, these verses will have brilliant significance and promise of Life, now and in the future:

“So as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but chosen and priceless in God’s sight, you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it says in Scripture, ‘Look, I lay in Zion a stone, a chosen and priceless cornerstone, and whoever believes in him will never be put to shame.’ So you who believe have this honor, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stumbling-stone and a rock to trip over. They stumble because they **disobey the word**, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. You once were not a people, but now you are God’s people. You were shown no mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet. 2:4-10).

The **great honor** promised to true believers is to be co-governors with Jesus at the Second Coming. They will assist the Messiah in the process of reeducating the whole world. A few mortal survivors at the future Day of the Lord (Isa. 24:6) will be there to form the nucleus of a new mortal society, just as Noah and a few emerged from the ark after the flood. That society will quickly increase, and across the world survivors of all the nations will learn “righteousness” (Isa. 26:9), i.e. how to live and think rightly. They will be freed from the crippling falsehoods which now imprison them and poison their minds and lives. I am thinking of the current 10 million Jehovah’s Witnesses who have been forced into some very unbiblical teachings, by a controlling and not very biblically literate Watchtower. Until liberated, a Jehovah’s Witness

has been taught to imagine that the Watchtower is an infallible authority never to be questioned! No one should accept without question such mind control. Nor should 20 million Seventh Day Adventists whose leader, Ellen White, prevailed on them to believe that no mortals would be left on earth when Jesus comes back. To do this she deceptively left out the words “few men are left” in Isaiah 24:6!¹

The same status of complete authority is accorded to the Watchtower “governing body” as is granted by Roman Catholics to the Pope when he speaks officially. But what about other Protestants? They have submitted themselves, often unknowingly, to a set of creeds and beliefs which date not from the Bible (which is then very inconsistently said to be the “sole authority”). The post-Bible creeds of Protestants commit them to believing that God is **three in one**. Jesus did not believe this. Jesus agreed with a Jew in Mark 12:29 that God is a single Divine Person, the Lord God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of David and the God of Jesus. There is only one Person who is YHVH, the Father (John 17:3), and this is the central truth by which the universe is, or ought to be, controlled. Jesus called this belief in the One God of Israel the “greatest command” (Mark 12:28ff). Are you hearing clear sermons on this “Greatest Command” of Jesus?

As outlined in the introduction to my translation of the NT (*The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation* with commentary, from Amazon.com or Atlanta Bible College, 800-347-4261), *from the second century AD onwards*, believers became confused under the influence of Greek philosophy introduced by “converts” who came into the church without fully abandoning their former pagan understandings. Gradually the definition of the biblical faith was transformed into a belief system which was strangely alien to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. God was turned into a mysterious three-in-one God, whom Jesus did not acknowledge (John 17:3; Mark 12:29; Deut. 6:4). The human Jesus, supernaturally brought into existence by miracle in Mary (Matt. 1:20: “begotten, fathered in her”; Luke 1:35: “the child begotten”), was replaced by a **second, non-fully human, i.e. preexisting Person**, either an angel, Michael as Jehovah’s Witnesses now claim (their founder Russell did not!), or a second “Person” of the Godhead, a second Deity.

British historian Winwood Reade in his *Martyrdom of Man*, 1892, reports the shocking facts: “The Church diverged in discipline and dogma more and more widely from its ancient form, till in the second century the Christians of Judea, who had faithfully followed the customs and tenets of the twelve Apostles, were informed that they were heretics. During that interval a new religion had arisen. Christianity had conquered paganism and paganism had corrupted Christianity. The legends which belonged to Osiris and Apollo had been applied to the life of Jesus. The single Deity of the Jews [Mark 12:29] had been exchanged for the Trinity...The man who had said ‘Why do you call me good? There is none good but one, that is God,’ had now himself been made a god, or the third part of one” (p. 230).

It is an amazing miracle to many of us that church members seem to know or care so little about this amazing alteration of “the faith once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Paul had warned strongly against what would happen after his death. Jesus sounded the alarm frequently by teaching the grim reality that many would claim in the future to be his followers, while in fact they were and are not (Matt. 7:21ff). They had never actually been his true followers, and they had not paid enough attention to his teachings — which tradition had swamped. “In vain they worship,” Jesus complained, “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9).

How to Avoid Deception

How can we successfully read the Bible, not neglecting, ignoring, its foundational teachings? Quite easily, using good common sense. Start with Jesus. Paul was an Apostle and true follower of Jesus, of course, but as Peter warned, Paul can be difficult for beginners (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul absolutely was not the originator of the Christian Gospel! It is essential to start by defining the Gospel **as Jesus defined it**. Don’t believe me, but put this question to the test. Ask your friends at every opportunity: “What is the Christian Gospel?”

¹*The Great Controversy*, p. 739.

You may be shocked and surprised at the reply. It is highly unlikely that they will respond to this utterly basic question by citing the answer provided by Jesus! It is highly unlikely that they will reply with the perfectly obvious answer: that the Gospel to be believed is firstly the **Gospel about the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14- 15)**. Jesus' teaching is lucidly clear: he began his public ministry by announcing what he called God's Gospel (there is no higher authority than that!). The subject matter and content of that saving Gospel is, Jesus said: "The Kingdom of God is near: Repent and believe the Good News," i.e. about the Kingdom of God.

Do you hear the phrase **Gospel of the Kingdom** constantly on the lips of those who instruct you? If you do, your teachers sound like Jesus. If not, they do not sound like Jesus. Your task is to discern using your God-given, critical (in the best sense) intelligence. The possibility of being deceived, hood-winked, is very great, Jesus warned. You really owe it to yourself and your family to make certain that you are getting constant instruction on **the Gospel of the Kingdom**. It is that Kingdom Gospel and believing and obeying it, which will lead to salvation. Nothing else will. It is understanding and believing Mark 1:14-15 which puts you on the path of the journey which leads to immortality, the life of the Age to Come (poorly and vaguely translated as "eternal life").

That is why **Hebrews 5:9** is a primary and startlingly instructive verse: "salvation is granted to those who obey Jesus." Jesus' words say the same thing: "he who believes in the Son has the life of the age to come; those who **disobey the Son** — the wrath of God hangs over them" (John 3:36). No wonder then that the voice of God from heaven announced, "This is my **Son**. Listen to him" (Mark 9:7). There is no other way of finding favor with God or Jesus. That verse about listening to the Son is a sort of "Hear, O Israel" (Deut. 6:4). The one thing we do at our peril is to ignore the words of God who spoke in OT times in various ways, but only when Jesus came did God speak finally (Heb. 1:1-2). That final command was: "Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14-15).

As you learn this and teach others, you can turn to the amazing verse in **Acts 8:12**, which shows how faithfully the NT evangelists echoed and repeated the words of Jesus: "When they believed Philip as he preached **the Gospel about the Kingdom of God** and the things concerning the name [the authority and program] of Jesus, they were getting baptized in water, both men and women." Water baptism is the official, standard and commanded public ceremony by which believers seal their covenant with God and Jesus. It is not an option, but a direct command, and we remember that salvation is achieved by obedience to Jesus. **Hebrews 5:9**, John 3:36, 1 Timothy 6:3, and 2 John 7-9 are fair warning against false teaching.

God's Fascinating Planting Seed Program

The One God of Israel, the Father, called God 1300 times in the Greek NT, has a massively interesting **planting program** in progress. He used His uniquely procreated, begotten = **brought into existence** (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35) Son Jesus to announce this great Plan, called the *logos* or word (John 1:1). This is the great Kingdom plan/Gospel and program. It is the Christian Gospel. Jesus preached it always (**Mark 1:14-15**). As a kind of shorthand, known to the writers of the NT but mostly not understood by today's churchgoers, the Kingdom of God Gospel message is simply called the "word." Mark 4:14 and Matthew 13:19 define it beautifully for us as the Word of, or about, the **Kingdom of God**. God's objective from the start was to create a human society which would actually work!

Today's societies under the deceptive falsehoods of the Devil (Rev. 12:9; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 John 5:19) do not work well! God's plan for the *future* of the world is encapsulated in the phrase "Gospel of the Kingdom," and Jesus announced this as the basis of his ministry in **Mark 1:14-15**. Our task as students of Jesus' teaching is to repent, change our minds and lives, and believe that Gospel of the Kingdom message. That is Jesus' first command to us. This puts us in line with God's great purpose for mankind and the world. The Kingdom Gospel is God's and Jesus' manifesto. The Kingdom Message was sown as seed in the great parable of the sower. By believing that seed Gospel/Message of the Kingdom, sown first by Jesus in Mark 4, Luke 8 and Matthew 13, we begin to take part in God's magnificent "sowing, planting" program, which promises peace on earth, a new government and immortality for all true believers! This is the only political/spiritual issue which *ultimately* counts.

The governments of the present evil age (Gal. 1:4) make all sorts of promises (many not kept!) to better our lives now for a brief span of 80 years! But Jesus “**abolished death** and brought Life and immortality to light in the Gospel” (2 Tim 1:10). Did you catch that? Please read it again, and make it the subject of profound meditation. Take that truth into your system and let it drive your life. Let it flow constantly in your spiritual “bloodstream.” Jesus offers you immortality. He knows how death can be abolished. He shares that secret with us who choose to believe him! This does not mean that you need not die the physical death which ends this life. It *does* mean you can gain immortality by being raised, resurrected, the whole you, to immortality when Jesus comes back (1 Cor. 15:23; Luke 14:14; Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:1-6). You must receive the downpayment, the pledge of that future immortality now, by repenting and believing in the Gospel of the Kingdom as commanded by Jesus in **Mark 1:14-15**; **Acts 8:12**; 19:8; 28:23, 31. We must of course all also believe in the substitutionary death of Jesus for our sins. And we must repent and be baptized in water (Acts 2:38). Salvation is granted to “those who obey Jesus,” not to those who disobey him (Heb. 5:9; John 3:36; John 5:24). The command is to believe God’s Gospel of the Kingdom of God, the “word” announced by Jesus (Luke 4:43; Acts 8:12; Heb. 2:3; Matt. 13:19).

In the marvelous parable (illustration by comparison) of the sower (Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8), Jesus went out to the public **to sow the seeds of the future world government** to be introduced worldwide on earth at the Second Coming. Jesus was planting the Kingdom of God as had been promised in the OT, the Hebrew Bible. **Jeremiah 32:41**: “I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully **plant** them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.”

Jesus and the apostles, our mentors, set the example by preparing for the coming Kingdom (“Your Kingdom come!” cp. Micah 4:8). They were seeking and finding the members of the world government of that future Kingdom. Paul was frustrated that some of his congregations did not know the elementary fact that “the saints are going to manage and govern the world” (1 Cor. 6:2), and even administer angels (v. 3). Do you want to be like Jesus? Have you read Revelation 2:26-27: “To the one who overcomes, I will give authority over the nations to rule and shepherd them with a rod of iron, just as I Jesus received that authority from my Father.” Yes, Jesus and God want to use your God-given talent (what talent do you have which God did not give you?!). Our urgent task is to be fully using our talents and other resources to further the immortality Gospel of the Kingdom, Gospel of God and of Jesus. We are saved by responding obediently to Jesus (**Heb. 5:9**). Compare: “By his knowledge my righteous servant [the Messiah] will make many right” (Isa. 53:11). Jesus saves by his knowledge, as well as by his atoning death! The death and resurrection of Jesus are quite obviously of central importance in the Gospel. Paul preached these as “among things of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3). They were not the whole of the Gospel. Jesus had preached the Kingdom of God as Gospel long before he ever spoke a word about his death (Matt. 16:21).

This is the Christian task we are to be engaged in joyfully, knowing that we are co-workers with God and Jesus on the great immortality and peace on earth program announcing the worldwide, coming Kingdom. Our heart breaks for the stragglers, the starving, the murdered babies, the sick (who frequently in ignorance have had a part in causing their own distress by mis-education in matters of health). The ills are going to be righted in the future, and of course God can right some of them now if we seek Him. Christianity is to be a whole new lifestyle, requiring continued repentance. We are to be modeling to the world a way of life which pleases the Creator and His Son Jesus and reflects their combined Kingdom Gospel message.

Jesus gave a solemn warning that many would think they were following him, but had been inadvertently deceived by false teachings and traditions (Matt. 7:21-27; Luke 13:22-30; read this several times!).

Along with **Acts 8:12**, a brilliant summary by Luke of the whole Christian faith and its content, remember to show your friends **Luke 8:12** (easily remembered). That parable of the sower Mark notes is the most important parable, without which no parable can be understood (Mark 4:13). Luke 8:12 is an essential “John 3:16” verse designed to open the mind of the inquirer as to how the quest for immortality works. In verse 8 we learn that Jesus customarily raised his voice and shouted as he delivered this parable. Jesus knew that the issue of immortality was at stake in our reception or refusal of the sower parable. The disciples, as good students in the classroom of the master teacher, were invited to interact. Rabbi Jesus

explained that to the elect few the secret of immortality in the coming Kingdom of God on earth had been graciously granted by God (v. 10). Those who failed to grasp the Kingdom Gospel were blind. They heard the words but did not understand their meaning (v. 10). In verse 11 Jesus defined the seed of the sower as the **word of God**, i.e. the word **about the Kingdom** (see Matt. 13:19). In verse 12 (Luke 8:12) we learn that the Devil, who is intent on blocking our opportunity to live forever, comes and snatches away the Kingdom Gospel message from the minds of the audience, “so that they will **not believe it and be saved.**” Salvation according to Jesus is here made dependent on an intelligent grasp of the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Devil, knowing this, does his best to remove that Message of the Kingdom from the minds of those exposed to it, “so that they may not believe it and be saved”!

This one text and many others ought to be proof positive against the false idea that salvation is dependent only and exclusively on believing that Jesus died for sins and rose! Certainly the death and resurrection are essential elements in the Gospel, but so is an intelligent grasp of the Kingdom of God, tasted now in the spirit and fully experienced as immortality only when Jesus returns. Without the Kingdom of God as central and basic to the Gospel, the Gospel is gutted and partial. Worst of all Jesus is ignored and disobeyed. The one thing we cannot risk is ignoring Jesus and of course later Jesus-in-Paul. The whole Bible is our counsel, and the New Covenant in the Greek New Testament Scriptures is the final revelation. The Law of Moses in the letter has been superseded by the final word in the Son of God. The glory of Sinai, glorious as it was, has now been surpassed by the glory of the New Covenant in Jesus (for this read 2 Cor. 3). The Torah of Jesus, the law of Messiah, is now the gold standard, and that teaching of Jesus is summed up in the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Torah of Christ is not the same as the Torah of Moses in the letter (see Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21).

The intelligent believer must avoid the two fatal errors on each side of the Truth. Disobedience to the commands of Jesus leads us away from immortality and salvation. Obedience to the wrong commandments, those of the Old Covenant in the letter, will have the effect of putting us back in the shadows (Col. 2:16-17; Eph. 2:14-15) and away from the risen Jesus Messiah.

Much contemporary “church” makes nothing at all of the Gospel as defined by Jesus starting with **Mark 1:14-15**. A misleading form of the Gospel appears when **only certain verses** from Paul are cited. Thus the public is often offered a twisted Paul and a neglected Jesus. **Acts 8:12 and Luke 8:12** along with Mark 1:14-15 can bring us back on track. Equally important are all the Gospel of the Kingdom texts in Acts (1:3; 1:6, 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:24-25, where the “Gospel of the grace of God” is exactly the same as “the Gospel of the Kingdom”; 28:23, 31).

The foundation in Jesus’ teaching must never be neglected. Jesus spoke of the need to be **born again** to gain salvation (John 3:3-8). Peter explained the very same process of rebirth when in 1 Peter 1:22-23 he wrote, “In obedience to the truth [the saving Gospel]...you have been born again.” It was **the seed of the parable of the sower** which caused that rebirth (1 Pet. 1:23 = Luke 8:11). That seed was contained in the word which was preached to you as Gospel (v. 25). What perfect simplicity and harmony between Jesus and his apostolic students and teachers. Then never forget that “some **believe for a while**” (Luke 8:13). Salvation requires persistence through trial and tribulation until the end.

After the fiery testing of our faith, parallel to the testing of gold, we can expect to hear these congratulatory words: “Well done, good and faithful servant; take charge of ten cities” (Luke 19:17). The testing of our faith “will result in praise and honor and glory **for you** at the future revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7).

Is this Gospel clear to you, and are your friends being exposed to it all regularly? If not you can change all this by good clear teaching at every opportunity. You will be like Paul who entered the market place on a regular basis (Acts 17:17) (the internet today?) and spoke to all who would listen to the good news of how to gain immortality and govern the world with Jesus. No wonder then that Paul urged believers to “seek for glory and honor and immortality” (Rom. 2:7; cp. “seek first the Kingdom of God,” Matt. 6:33).

What we propose in this free magazine *Focus on the Kingdom* is nothing new. What we are presenting is recognized by many who fully see that church and its traditions can easily be at variance with the Bible. **Mark 12:29 and Mark 1:14-15, Acts 8:12, Luke 8:12** are indispensable, basic verses to work from.

Amongst many most encouraging letters from earlier radio listeners (our 260 15-minute radio programs on the Kingdom are archived at restorationfellowship.org), I received this from a Roman Catholic professor of theology and author:

“I think it is relevant for me to say that I am a professor of theology and of New Testament at a Roman Catholic institution...and that I think that your publication *Focus on the Kingdom* is theologically important, however much it may be neglected by the sector that I thus represent. **You address radically important issues in Christian theology which are entirely appropriate because in fact the theological exercise is only adolescent and in need of further guidance.** I think you are doing a good work that I hope will eventually have an impact on my own Roman Catholic Church tradition. There is much work to be done before we can, collectively, think clearly, and I am glad your **honesty** about these things is so unflinching.”

— **Professor John C. Meagher (1935-2003)**, professor Emeritus of English and Religion at the University of Toronto (St. Michael’s College) and the Toronto School of Theology. ✧