

MISAIMINGS

“Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Tim. 2:18

Misaiming concerning Regeneration

Misaiming: “Spiritual birth cannot be strictly and literally the same in nature and mode with natural birth. It must be a mere analogy...” (Robert Alexander Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*, pp. 184-185).

Truth: Claiming that spiritual birth (regeneration) does not involve the imparting of the life and nature of God into the believers in Christ, Webb denies the biblical truth that the believers have actually been born of God to become children of God possessing the life and nature of God (1 John 5:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:4). For Webb, regeneration is a mere analogy; for God, regeneration is a reality which involves the dispensing of the divine life and nature into the believers. Those who receive Christ, who believe in His name, have been given the authority to become children of God begotten of God (John 1:12-13). Webb has no right to regard as analogy what God regards as truth.

Misaiming: “Regeneration, or new birth, is an inner re-creating of fallen human nature” (*Modern Reformation*, September/October 1993, p. 28).

Truth: This definition of regeneration, being a natural human concept, is contrary to the divine revelation. According to the Bible regeneration involves termination and germination. In regeneration our fallen human nature is not re-created; instead, the fallen human nature, which has been poisoned with the element of Satan, is judged by God and terminated through the cross of Christ. Regeneration is also a matter of germination, because regeneration is a spiritual birth in which we receive the divine, eternal life (the life of God) in addition to our natural, human life. Through regeneration the Spirit of God brings the divine life with the divine nature into the human spirit, causing it to become enlivened. Thus, to be regenerated is to be born of the Spirit in our spirit (John 3:3-8). Our first birth—the natural birth through our parents—caused us to obtain human life; our second birth—the spiritual birth through the Spirit of God—causes us to obtain divine life. God has put His very life into our spirit—this is regeneration.

Regeneration is necessary for two reasons. The first,

and lesser, reason is that we need to be regenerated because our human life has been corrupted through the fall, having become wicked and evil, and cannot be changed or improved (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:18; Jer. 13:23). Therefore, we need to be regenerated and receive another life. The second, greater, and primary reason is that we need to be regenerated simply because, as human beings with a human life, we lack the divine life, the eternal life of God. When we were created by God, we obtained only a created life, not the uncreated life of God. Since God’s intention in His creation of man was that man would receive eternal life and fulfill His purpose by growing to maturity in this life, we would need the second aspect of regeneration even if we had not sinned and even if our life had not become corrupt and evil. Regeneration is necessary because it is the means by which we obtain the eternal life of God for the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God. To be regenerated is to receive another life—the divine, eternal, uncreated life of God—in addition to our original human life. We can obtain the life of God only by being born of God. Regeneration takes place when the Spirit of God puts the life of God into our spirit. If we see this and thereby understand what regeneration is, we will realize that we need to be born of God, regenerated, not mainly because we are sinful but mainly because we do not have God’s life. The goal of regeneration, therefore, is not primarily to deal with our fallen life but primarily to bring the life of God into us. When the Spirit of God imparts the life of God into our spirit, we are born of God and become children of God. According to the Scriptures, this is the meaning of regeneration.

Misaiming: “Is regeneration deification?...Is any child of God conscious that he ceases to be human and becomes divine when he undergoes regeneration?...The regenerated child of God is either human or divine. If he continues human, then he was not really begotten....If he becomes divine in regeneration, then conversion is the annihilation of identity...” (Robert Alexander Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*, p. 184).

Truth: Ignoring God’s economy and being devoid of the truth concerning regeneration, Webb writes as one of those who “understand neither the things that they

say, nor concerning what they confidently affirm” (1 Tim. 1:7).

Yes, regeneration is deification—in the sense of becoming divine in life and in nature but not in the Godhead nor as an object of worship. Just as a human child has the life and nature (but not the status or fatherhood) of his human father, so a child of God has the life and nature (but not the Godhead or the Fatherhood) of the divine Father. A child of man is human because, through generation, he has the human life and the human nature. A child of God is divine because, through regeneration, he has the divine life and the divine nature. In this sense we become divine through regeneration. However, we do not cease to be human when we undergo regeneration. On the contrary, we remain human, but now we have the divine life in addition to our human life, and in this way we are divine as well as human. Whereas Webb, posing a false antithesis, says that the “regenerated child of God is either human or divine,” the truth is that a regenerated child of God is both human and divine. We have been begotten of God, yet we remain human and maintain our personal human identity. Regeneration does not entail the annihilation of one’s identity as a human being. A child of God is one who has been begotten of God to have the life and nature of God. Such a God-begotten child is divine as well as human, for he has become a divinely human being—a God-man, a genuine brother of the unique God-man, Jesus Christ, the firstborn Son of God.

Misaiming concerning Loving the Lord

Misaiming: “Most men I know would feel somewhat uncomfortable singing ‘love songs’ to another man, even if he is Jesus Christ. The mystic’s love for Jesus is romantic; the orthodox believer’s love for Jesus is filial and is always linked to his saving work....Apart from his saving acts we do not have any reason to love him any more than we love any other historical figure” (*Modern Reformation*, July/August 1995, p. 28).

Truth: The Bible is a record of a divine romance between God and His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people. God in Christ is our Husband, and we, the redeemed, are destined to become His wife. For eternity the Triune God and His redeemed will enjoy a blissful married life. Since God and His people are involved in a holy, heavenly romance, it is fitting for all believers in Christ to have a kind of “romantic” love for the Lord. As virgins betrothed to Christ, we, male and female alike, should not be ashamed to express our love for Him. We may express such love in prayers, praises, and hymns written according to the divine revelation in the Scriptures.

Spiritually speaking, in relation to God in Christ as the Husband and as components of His wife, all believers in Christ are females, and in this sense our love for Him should be not only filial but also “romantic.” To be sure, our love for Him is a response to His love for us in His saving acts. Nevertheless, we love Him not only for what He has done for us but also for the surpassing worth, the supreme preciousness, of what He, the all-inclusive Christ, is in His person. As we grow in our love for Him, we experience and enjoy Him not merely as a “historical figure” but as a present transcendent yet indwelling reality. Neither religious sentimentality nor the forms of cold “orthodoxy” should hinder us from expressing our “romantic” love for our lovely Bridegroom.

Misaiming concerning Law-keeping

Misaiming: “As cars, being made as they are, only work well with gas in the tank, so we, being made as we are, only find fulfillment in a life of law-keeping. This is what we were both made for and redeemed for” (J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ*, p. 232).

Truth: Such a statement is altogether contrary to God’s economy (1 Tim. 1:3-7), which is focused on Christ, not on the law. Contrary to Packer’s claim that we were made and redeemed for a life of law-keeping, the Bible reveals that we were created by God as vessels to contain Christ and express Christ. The law was not a factor in the origination of God’s economy but was added because of the transgressions until the seed—Christ—should come (Gal. 3:19). The law is “our child-conductor unto Christ” (v. 24). Once we have received Christ and have been justified by faith in Him, we should be led by the Spirit (5:18) and walk by the Spirit (v. 16). The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled not by those who practice law-keeping; on the contrary, the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in those who walk according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). When we walk according to the spirit, we magnify Christ and express Christ. This is most pleasing to God the Father, whose intention is that Christ be revealed in us (Gal. 1:15-16), that Christ live in us (2:20), and that Christ be formed in us (4:19). Instead of trying in ourselves to fulfill the law, we should count all things loss for the sake of Christ, regarding them as refuse that we may gain Christ (Phil. 3:8) and be found in Him, not having our “own righteousness which is out of the law” (v. 9). Then Christ will become not only our objective righteousness for our justification but also our subjective righteousness in our daily living. In addition, we should allow Christ to make His home in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:17) so that Christ may be “all and in all” (Col. 3:11). We were

made for Christ; we were redeemed for Christ; and now we should live in Christ, for in “the economy of the fullness of the times” God will “head up all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). As Christians our fulfillment is found not in law-keeping but in experiencing and enjoying the all-inclusive Christ, who is the center and circumference of God’s eternal economy.

Misaiming concerning the Indwelling Christ

Misaiming: “The God and Christ outside of us (the Reformation emphasis) is replaced with God and the Christ within the individual’s heart (the medieval and gnostic emphasis)” (*Modern Reformation*, July/August 1995, p. 28).

Truth: This statement is unbalanced regarding the divine revelation in the Scriptures concerning Christ objectively in the heavens and Christ subjectively in the believers. A concept regarding the objective Christ is used to deny the biblical truth regarding the subjective Christ. The writer employs one aspect of biblical truth to deny, perhaps even to label as “gnostic,” other aspects of biblical truth.

The Bible reveals that, in relation to the believers, Christ is both objective and subjective. As the Lord of all, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, Christ is on the throne in the heavens. As our High Priest, He is at the right hand of God interceding for us. As our Advocate with the Father, Christ appeals to the Father on our behalf. These are illustrations of Christ in His objective existence outside of us. He is objectively real and true and cannot be limited to a believer’s subjective experience. Nevertheless, the very Scriptures which reveal a Christ who is outside of the believers reveal a Christ who lives in the believers. The writer of the “misaiming” printed above should consider 2 Corinthians 13:5: “Do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you...?” Many believers fail to realize that Jesus Christ is actually in them. With Paul we should not be ashamed to speak of Christ in us, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). The divine truth is twofold: Christ is both objective and subjective; He rules in the heavens and He lives in us. Instead of choosing, contrary to the Scriptures, between the objective Christ and the subjective Christ, we should believe and experience, according to the Scriptures, the objective/subjective Christ in all His marvelous aspects.

Misaiming: “Jesus is the first Paraclete, and upon His departure from this world, Jesus prays that the Father will supply another Paraclete in Jesus’ absence. The Spirit is sent to be Christ’s substitute; He is the supreme vicar of Christ on the earth” (R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, p. 121).

Truth: The writer of this statement may not be a tritheist at heart, but his words, which posit a separation of the Spirit from the Son, are loaded with tritheistic implications and deny both the presence of Christ on earth and His dwelling in the believers.

The three of the Divine Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—are inseparably one in their eternal co-existence and coinherence. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit, although distinct persons in the Godhead, do not exist in separation from one another. Where one is, there the others are also. Where Christ is, there the Spirit is, and where the Spirit is, there Christ is. It is therefore not accurate to speak of the Spirit coming “in Jesus’ absence” or of the Spirit’s being “sent to be Christ’s substitute.” This kind of language, which is contrary to the whole context of John 14—16, not only implies a separation of the Spirit from Christ but also implies a tritheistic concept of the Trinity. After speaking of another Comforter, the Spirit of reality, the Lord Jesus said, “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you” (John 14:18). This coming—the coming of Christ Himself—was fulfilled on the day of His resurrection (20:19-22). The Spirit does not replace Christ—the Spirit comes with Christ. The Spirit is not the vicar of Christ or the substitute of Christ—the Spirit is the reality of Christ.

Instead of engaging in a questionable theological discourse which implies a functional tritheism by separating the Spirit from Christ, we should believe and receive the complete divine revelation concerning the Triune God in His eternal existence in Himself and in His dwelling in the believers. Much of traditional theology denies this, but the Bible reveals it. We therefore urge every believer in Christ, every regenerated child of God, to return to and affirm the revelation of the Triune God in the Word of God.

Misaiming concerning the Father’s House

Misaiming: “When a believer dies, we say that a person has gone to heaven. The person’s spirit is with Christ in a place prepared for them by the Lord Jesus himself. ‘I am going,’ Jesus said, ‘to prepare a place for you’ (John 14:2). That ‘place’ Jesus called ‘my Father’s house’—a place of glory and blessing. Jesus has been preparing his Father’s house for two thousand years, and it’s already teeming with activity” (Douglas Connelly, *After Life: What the Bible Really Says*, p. 93).

Truth: To say that the Father’s house in John 14:2 is heaven is not what the Bible *really* says. In order to know the Father’s house in this verse, we need to consider the previous mentioning of the Father’s house in John 2. When the Lord Jesus drove the moneychangers

out of the temple, He said, “Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise” (v. 16). At that time the Father’s house was the physical temple in Jerusalem. The Jews asked for a sign and Jesus answered, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (v. 19). Here the temple to which the Lord was referring was “the temple of His [physical] body” (v. 21), because He is the embodiment of God (Col. 2:9). The Lord Jesus was indicating that the temple, the Father’s house, was now no longer a physical place—it was a person. God the Father dwelt within Him (John 14:10), in His physical body. The Lord’s physical body was destroyed on the cross, and in resurrection—“in three days”—His corporate and mystical Body, the Body of Christ, was produced. Now the temple of God, the Father’s house, is the Body of Christ. Recognizing this, Paul tells us that the church is the house of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15) and that corporately the believers are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16), and Peter says that the believers in Christ are living stones of this spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5).

In John 14:2 the Lord said, “In My Father’s house are many abodes.” *Abodes* is the correct translation here. The same word is used in the singular in verse 23 where the Lord said that He and the Father would make an *abode* with the one who loved Him. In the Father’s house, the Body of Christ, there are many abodes, many dwelling places. Each member of the Body of Christ is an abode, a dwelling place, of God. God dwells in each of us who have received Him in Christ.

The Lord Jesus went on to say, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that

where I am you also may be. And where I am going you know the way....I am the way....no one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:2-6). What did the Lord mean when He said that He was going to prepare a place for the disciples, so that where He was, they also could be? The Lord was about to go to prepare a place through His death and resurrection in God the Father. He is the way to God the Father; He is in the Father (vv. 10-11); and His desire is that we would be in the Father also (17:21). Through His death and resurrection we have been brought into the Father God. For this reason Paul addressed the church of the Thessalonians as being “in God the Father” (1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1).

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Connelly claims that Jesus has been preparing a place in heaven for us for the past two thousand years. This is totally false. For more than nineteen centuries the Lord has been building up the church as the Body of Christ, which is God’s spiritual house. When this spiritual house is fully built up through the believers’ growth and transformation in the divine life, the built-up Body of Christ will become Christ’s bride. When the bride is prepared, Christ the Bridegroom will return.

As Christians our goal must be God’s goal—to build up the Body of Christ to be the bride of Christ. This bride will be the wife of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:2 says that the New Jerusalem is “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” and verse 9 says that this holy city is “the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” The New Jerusalem is not a literal

city but a great figure, signifying the totality of all of God’s chosen and redeemed people throughout the ages who have been transformed and built up in the divine life to be His wife for eternity. God’s goal is not heaven. God’s goal is to gain the New Jerusalem, the wife of the redeeming God.