

MISAIMINGS

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

Misaiming concerning Christ’s Deity, Savior-status, and Resurrection

Misaiming: “I don’t believe Jesus was God...I don’t believe Jesus is the only way to God. I don’t believe he rose from the dead as scientific fact. I don’t know whether these things happened. It’s an irrelevant question” (Bill Phipps, recently elected “moderator,” the highest office of the United Church of Canada—the largest Protestant denomination in that country, as quoted in the *Ottawa Citizen*, “The immoderator,” *World*, March 7, 1998, p. 18).

Truth: The loss of faith in the Bible as God’s infallible Word often begins with some small compromise on a minor point (e.g., relegating certain truths to a distant culture and time as anachronistic). This first step then can lead the Christian—even one in a position of authority—onto a slippery slope toward the depths of apostasy as evidenced in the above-cited denial of the work and person of Christ.

Jesus Christ is God (John 1:1, 14; Matt. 1:23; Heb. 1:8), His resurrection is documented (Matt. 28), and He is mankind’s only way to God (John 14:6). These truths are lucid, even axiomatic to the Christian faith. Not only are these truths grounded in Scripture, but they have also become well established throughout the centuries as essential to the Christian faith. It is incredible that a denial of such cardinal truths has issued forth from the highest office of the largest Protestant denomination in Canada!

Dismissing such vital truths as “irrelevant” eviscerates the Bible. It is the *resurrection* of Christ that gives the Christian faith its unique vitality and distinguishes it from false religions. It is both by means of and because of His resurrection that Christ is able to dispense the divine, eternal, regenerating life into His believers. Further, denying the *deity* of Christ robs the gospel of its unique message: that God loved man enough to become man and die in his stead for man’s redemption (2 Cor. 5:21). It reduces Christ’s status to that of a human martyr.

Even more, denying Christ’s identity as the unique *Savior* and Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5)

opens the gates of the church to any and every philosophy and salvation strategy imagined by the vanity of the fallen human mind. Such a denial negates the gospel message, making it virtually interchangeable with pagan systems. In short, to deny these truths is to rob the church of its spiritual heart and soul.

Misaiming concerning the Basis of Christian Fellowship

Misaiming: “Rarely, if ever, do we use doctrinal standards to exclude anyone from the circle of belonging” (United Church of Canada General Council’s public response to their moderator’s heresy, “The immoderator,” *World*, March 7, 1998, p. 18).

Truth: The “doctrinal standards” referred to here are the deity of Christ, the unique status of Christ as the only way to God, and the resurrection of Christ. These matters are intrinsic to the Christian faith; without them the church becomes feckless in word and testimony. While broad-minded statements such as the above may be applauded by some as politically palatable, they effectively “desalinate” the church and its testimony.

The Scriptures provide numerous examples that speak of the need for adherence to basic tenets of the faith. For instance, if a man did not acknowledge the deity of Christ, he was considered a heretic, excluded from fellowship after two admonitions (Titus 3:10), and guarded against for opposing the apostles’ words (2 Tim. 4:15). Teachers not holding the faith were those “whose mouths must be stopped” (Titus 1:11). These were *not* admitted into the fellowship of the church.

Other than the major tenets of the faith, such as the lordship and deity of Christ, His work of redemption, salvation by grace, the Trinity, and the inerrancy of Scripture, the Bible teaches us to allow differing viewpoints on the many minor issues. The Scripture says concerning these less important doctrines and practices, “Let each be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5) and, “Therefore whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Thus, Scripture permits a broad range of liberty of conscience and inclusivity concerning

smaller points. Nonetheless, when it comes to the central, vital articles of the faith, the Bible is exclusive and uncompromisingly circumscriptive as to its “circle of belonging.”

Misaiming concerning Rituals and Observances

Misaiming: “On this past Ash Wednesday I imposed the ashes upon foreheads of all shapes and sizes....I saw how the ashes quieted the agitation of an older woman....How disturbing are the ashes upon our foreheads. They strip away our vanity....They force us to recognize our mortality. They rip away our false securities” (Brett Webb-Mitchell, “The Disturbing Ashes of Lent,” *The Christian Ministry*, March-April 1998, p. 7).

Truth: Given the fallen human tendency toward idolatry, Christ Himself is often replaced with a ritual which is apparently related to Christ. The above statement vividly illustrates the reason the New Testament wisely restricts the regular use of outward symbols. While the first-century church may have occasionally practiced outward forms such as foot-washing (John 13) and the casting of lots (Acts 1:26), the only repetitive practices commanded by the New Testament are the Lord’s table (1 Cor. 11:24-26) and baptism (Matt. 28:19).

In fact, any emphasis on ritual in the New Testament is conspicuously absent; what is prominent is worship in spirit. The Lord signaled this change from outward form to the reality of the Spirit in John 4:24 in His prophetic response to the Samaritan woman: “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness.” She sought a definitive answer from the Lord as to the proper worship site—the mountain or Jerusalem. His answer pointed to neither; instead, He foretold of the monumental change from the outward, ritualistic Old Testament realm to the genuine worship in spirit, which more accurately corresponds to God who is Himself Spirit.

In light of this change, it is no wonder that the New Testament makes no mention of the proliferation of rituals prevalent in today’s Christianity. Instead, it assures us that “every spiritual blessing” is “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Nonetheless, according to this misaiming, it is neither Christ, nor the Spirit, but the personified ashes applied to the believers’ forehead that quiet our agitation, “strip away our vanity,” and “rip away our false securities.”

In actuality, it should be solely the Christian’s own daily contact with the Lord in his spirit which affords him these—and all other—genuine experiences of

growth and transformation. When we properly worship Him in spirit and walk in spirit, we receive the totality of every spiritual blessing in our subjective experience of Christ.

Misaiming concerning the Importance of Scripture

Misaiming: “In...the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience...Scripture is the longest side of the four sides on almost every issue. However, there are times when reason and experience overrule Scripture and tradition” (James Young, quoted in “We shall overturn,” *World*, Feb. 21, 1998, p. 18).

Truth: Scripture, existing as the Word of God, stands uniquely on its own merit, distinct and apart from tradition, reason, and experience. Just as “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16) and, as such, is based on the holy character of its Author, so human tradition, reason, and experience originate from their own tainted authors. Scripture is not merely one side, even the longest side, of a quadrilateral. It is at once both the foundation of and the yardstick by which to gauge tradition, reason, and experience.

Our tradition, reason, and experience are often proved to be befuddled, unreliable, and illusory, but Scripture remains lucid, constant, and substantial. Throughout history, tradition, reason, and experience, while seemingly noble and rational, have fluctuated wildly—often with horrific consequences, especially when they overruled Scripture.

Society has often erred. Cherished, long-standing traditions are regularly overturned or abandoned, majority reason has been consistent only in its inconsistency, and human experience is characterized by incongruity and evanescence. Only Scripture has demonstrated eternal veracity. It is thus better and safer to view Scripture as the Lord Jesus did in Matthew 7:24-27: as the rock upon which to build one’s house.

All tradition, reason, and experience must proceed from and be established upon His Word as the solid foundation. If not, the foundation will crack and crumble, being built upon the shifting sand of human opinion. In fact, when founded on Scripture, the mind with its reasoning is renewed (Rom. 12:2), tradition is measured and either retained or discarded, and experience is authenticated and guided. Tradition, reason, and experience, in their proper perspective and function, are always subservient to the Word and are never its equal.

by the Editors