

MISAIMINGS

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

Misaiming concerning Holiness

Misaiming: “We are called to holy living. To live in the city of God means to live by a different standard—the standard of God’s law....What areas in your life are most obviously not transformed to the holy behavior God has called you to?” (“Set Apart as God’s People,” *Tabletalk*, May 1999, p. 29).

Truth: Believers do well to consider the significance of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, as it pertains to our living, one that should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:27). The New Jerusalem is absolutely holy; it is even called the holy city (Rev. 21:2, 10). The holy nature of the New Jerusalem, however, is not produced by attempting to conform our behavior to the law, even though the law is holy (Rom. 7:12). Instead, holiness is produced by partaking of His holiness in His divine life (Heb. 12:10). While the old covenant stressed living according to the law, the new covenant, enacted by Christ’s redemption and operating according to the power of an indestructible life (7:16), emphasizes living by Christ Himself as our life (Col. 3:4; John 14:6). This reality is borne out in the description of the New Jerusalem in the Bible’s final two chapters, which make no mention of God’s law. Instead of the law, the river of water of *life* and the tree of *life* are paramount. Partaking of the tree of life is presented as a goal of redemption in Revelation 22:14, which says, “Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of *life*.” Similarly, the final call of the Bible is to “take the water of *life* freely” (v. 17). The law can never fulfill God’s plan to produce a holy living because the law is not able to give life (Gal. 3:21). Believers become holy by continually receiving Christ as life. Only the divine life within the believers can fulfill God’s plan.

Exhortations to live according to the standard of the law, such as the one above, also convey a mistaken notion that the object of God’s transforming work is simply improved behavior. This thought logically follows from the mistaken view that God’s law is the way for New Testament believers to live. Nevertheless, the object of transformation is not our *external behavior*, but our *intrinsic being*. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that we ourselves, not our behavior, “are being transformed,” and Romans 12:2 indicates that this

transformation transpires primarily by the renewing of the mind. Since Scripture clearly targets our inner being as the locus of God’s transforming work, our attention should correspondingly be focused on yielding to His inward working, not on adjusting our outward behavior.

Misaiming concerning Not Acknowledging Jesus as God

Misaiming: “And when you hear (as you can hear every hour of the day in North American media-Christianity!) that “Jesus is God,” you should remember the source of that declaration: it is not “the Bible,” as is usually claimed, but the metaphysical reasoning of post-biblical Christian doctrine (Douglas John Hall, “Thinking Biblically about the Trinity,” *The Living Pulpit*, April–June 1999, p. 13).

Truth: This quotation demonstrates a better knowledge of North American media than of the Bible, especially in its use of the shock tactics of modern media to garner attention. Whether intentional or not, such tactics cannot build up; they can only stumble those who are “weak in faith” (Rom. 14:1). The fact that Jesus is God is not only declared but also consistently implied throughout the Bible. John unequivocally reports that “the Word was God” (John 1:1) and that “the Word became flesh” (v. 14). Hebrews 1:8 identifies Jesus as God: “But of the Son, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.’” Matthew 1:23 states that Jesus is “God with us.” In John 8:58 Jesus declared, “Before Abraham came into being, I am,” identifying Himself with the eternal Jehovah to the amazement of the Jews. In John 2:19-21 the Lord Jesus challenged the Pharisees, “Destroy this temple, and in three days *I* will raise it up,” prophesying that it was He Himself who would raise His body (emphasis added). Acts 2:24, however, declares that it was *God* who raised Him from the dead, equating Jesus with God. The truth of Jesus’ designation as God in Scripture is by no means undermined simply because these words, per se, are not cited. The only thing that is undermined by such statements is the living and operative faith of genuine believers, which is trivialized by associating this fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith with a “post-biblical Christian doctrine” of the “North American media-Christianity,” rather than with the Bible.

Misaiming concerning Life Abundant

Misaiming: “God’s way for humanity is life abundant. Human beings are meant to flourish in all dimensions of life: biological, social, cultural, mental, emotional, moral, spiritual, and existential” (Ralph Underwood, “God’s Life-giving Ways: Practical Principles for Healing Ministry,” *Insights*, Spring 1999, p. 4).

Truth: This passage alludes to John 10:10 where the Lord Jesus proclaims, “I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly.” However, it misaims by defining “life abundant” as the flourishing in all dimensions of life. What precisely is this life that God wants us to have abundantly? To understand this, it is necessary to realize that the New Testament uses three distinct Greek words for *life*. *Bios* refers to the physical life (Luke 8:14); *psuche* denotes the psychological or soulish life (Phil. 2:30; Rev. 12:11; Matt. 16:25-26); and *zoe* designates the divine life of God (Col. 3:4). It is *zoe* which is used in John 10:10 as abundant life. Christ declared Himself to be the life: “I am...the *zoe*” (14:6). John also speaks of *zoe* in 1 John 5:11-12: “God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” It is the divine life of God, conveyed to us in Christ as the “life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45) that is the life that is really life (1 Tim. 6:19).

“Life abundant,” therefore, should not be reduced to just a physical or psychological dimension. Rather, it speaks of God’s desire and purpose in coming to mankind. His “way for humanity” is that we would have His own *zoe* life and have it abundantly. The mission of Christ is not to give us a flourishing biological life. If it were, then He has failed, because all men eventually die. History, replete with examples of severe persecution of Christians, also demonstrates that He never intended to guarantee a flourishing social life in this age. Neither is God’s intention vested in human culture. In fact, He annulled all cultural distinctions on the cross (Eph. 2:15). In the church there is no longer Greek, Jew, barbarian, or Scythian, but “Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11). God’s way involves only the operation of His life.

God’s intention is to give humanity *zoe*, His divine life. Without a doubt, God’s divine life has an impact on the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of those who receive it, as well as an indirect influence on society and culture. Nonetheless, God’s eternal purpose is absolutely vested in the dispensing of Himself as *zoe* into His chosen and redeemed people. This produces the church, the Body of Christ, as God’s expression on the earth.

Misaiming concerning the Mission of the Church

Misaiming: “In addition to these health promotion ministries, new healing and wholeness services promise to enrich the church’s witness to God’s life-giving ways....Accordingly, to serve the God of life, the mission of the church is to promote wholesome living as well as to pray for healing” (Ralph Underwood, “God’s Life-giving Ways: Practical Principles for Healing Ministry,” *Insights*, Spring 1999, pp. 3, 7).

Truth: Throughout church history an incredible assortment of missions has been concocted for the church in the name of good intentions, but many disregard the Bible. The Word of God never commissions the church with such agendas as the promotion of “wholesome living” in the sense of healthy lifestyles and diet. To discern the church’s true mission, we need to see the scriptural revelation concerning the church. At its most basic level, the church is revealed as the *ekklesia* (1 Cor. 1:2), the ones called out by God to gather into His name. The church is separate from the world—in it, but not of it. In its most elevated status, the church is “His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). As such, it should express the life of Christ in plenitude. The church also is the “one new man” (2:15), expressing not only the life but also the person of Christ. As the one new man, the church is an expression in resurrection of the cross’s work to annul every cultural difference and establish Christ as all in all (vv. 13-17; Col. 3:10-11). The church is “His masterpiece” (Eph. 2:10), commissioned to exhibit “the multifarious wisdom of God” and thereby fulfill God’s eternal purpose (3:10-11). The church is also God’s kingdom on the earth (2:19; Rom. 14:17; Rev. 1:6), representing and exercising God’s authority within the fallen world and cooperating with God to advance His administration. In its intimate aspects, the church is God’s household, His family (Eph. 2:19). As a living, organic entity, it is both being built up as God’s building (v. 21) and growing into a dwelling place of God in spirit (v. 22). In addition, the church is the bride of Christ (5:25-27). Because the church is planted in a world oppressed by God’s enemy, she is also a corporate warrior, fighting by means of the word in prayer for God’s interests on earth (Eph. 6:12-18). Further, the church is unveiled in Revelation as the lampstand (Rev. 1:20) shining forth as the testimony of Jesus (v. 9). God’s enemy is actively engaged in thwarting the church’s unique mission not only through overtly malicious means but also by seemingly innocuous and well-intentioned diversions. In order to be preserved as a “pure virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2), we need to see Christ’s view of the church and exercise to be faithful to this governing vision.

by the Editors