

MISAIMINGS

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

Misaiming concerning the Kingdom

Misaiming: “The Bible does not teach that there will be a definite 1,000-year period of time during which Christ will reign on earth visibly. Christ Himself said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36); furthermore, the Bible clearly teaches that we Christians are looking for ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (2 Pet. 3:13)” (A. L. Barry, President, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “What about...The New Millennium,” 1998, pp. 2-3).

Truth: This statement presents a half-truth regarding the coming age. The Bible assures us regarding the coming of “a new heaven and a new earth” in eternity, but just as explicitly assures us of Christ’s coming millennial kingdom on the earth. Revelation plainly says that the overcomers “lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (20:4). The Bible also presents as a matter of fact the kingdom of Christ as being *on earth*. Revelation 5:10 is unmistakably clear: “And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign *on the earth*” [italics added]. This verse is consistent with the Lord’s promise to the overcomers that they will be given “authority over the nations” (2:26; 12:5), which are on earth, not in heaven. The Bible definitely teaches us that there will be a millennial kingdom and that this reign of Christ will take place on earth. The eventual new heaven and new earth will come into existence only *after* this thousand-year earthly reign of Christ.

This misaiming also misapplies John 18:36 in an attempt to disprove the existence of Christ’s kingdom on earth. When the Lord said that His kingdom was not of this world, He was speaking of its *nature*, not its eventual manifestation. The kingdom of Christ is heavenly in nature, not worldly. It is not of this world, but of the heavens. The Lord Jesus Himself taught us to pray that His kingdom would come *on earth* as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). The Bible charges us not only to look for a new heaven and earth in eternity but, even more imminently and practically, to pray for its coming *on earth*.

Misaiming concerning the Trinity

Misaiming: “But what I want you to know is this: beyond salvation, beyond being baptized in water, beyond the

infilling of the Spirit, the ‘third Person of the Trinity’ is waiting for you to meet Him personally. He yearns for a lifelong relationship. And that is what you are about to discover...The Holy Spirit is the one who communes, who fellowships with me. Then I asked, ‘How can I fellowship with You, but not with the Son?’ And He responded, ‘That is exactly as it should be’” (Benny Hinn, *Good Morning, Holy Spirit*, 1990, pp. 49, 53).

Truth: This kind of advice poses a real danger: it reinforces tritheistic concepts subconsciously held by many believers. Tritheism is an ancient heresy which overemphasizes the distinction among the three persons of the Trinity to such an extent that one comes to believe in three separate Gods. Instead, the Scripture consistently presents to us the revelation of a *triume* God—that is, one God who is simultaneously Father, Son, and Spirit—distinct, but not separate. The three are one in substance, and they eternally coinhere one another. The Bible reveals *distinction* on occasions such as the Lord’s baptism when the Lord Jesus was baptized, the Spirit descended, and the Father spoke from the heavens (Matt. 3:16-17). Just as forcefully, the Bible reveals *coinherence* and mutual identification among the Godhead in passages such as the Lord Jesus’ declaration, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30) and Paul’s statement, “The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17). Our notion, as well as our experience of God, should line up with the Bible’s revelation of one God who is Father, Son, and Spirit—eternally distinct but never separate.

However, many believers unknowingly hold a “compartmentalized” view of the Trinity to the extent that they even wonder to whom they should direct their prayers. This erroneous notion is bolstered by statements, such as the one in this misaiming, that even after salvation, baptism, and infilling, believers need to meet the third person of the Trinity. This kind of teaching introduces a heretical separation within the Trinity. According to the Bible, when a person receives Christ, he also receives the Father and the Spirit because the three are one. It is impossible to have one of the Trinity indwelling us apart from the other two. To fellowship with the Spirit is to simultaneously fellowship with the Son and Father, because they are one and mutually coinhere. Our relationship with the Father and the Son is not separate from our relationship with the Spirit.

The second part of the misaiming quoted above says, “The Holy Spirit is the one who communes, who fellowships with me. Then I asked, ‘How can I fellowship with You, but not with the Son?’ And He responded, ‘That is exactly as it should be.’” These statements embody serious error, perhaps even heresy, concerning the relation between the Son and the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth. The claim is made that one should have fellowship with the Spirit and not with the Son and that the Spirit Himself teaches that one should commune with Him instead of with the Son, supposedly asserting that this is “exactly as it should be.” The Lord Jesus teaches otherwise in John 16. Verse 13 says that the Spirit of reality “will not speak from Himself, but what He hears He will speak.” The Spirit will not, and cannot, say that we should fellowship with Him and not with the Son. Verse 14 says, “He will glorify Me, for He will receive of Mine and will declare it to you.” The Spirit will neither glorify Himself nor draw attention to Himself; instead, the Spirit will glorify Christ and make Christ real to us experientially. Verse 15 says, “He receives of Mine and will declare it to you.” The Spirit surely will not lead us to have fellowship with Him instead of with the Son, for the Spirit does not replace the Son but comes as the Son with the Father to make the things of the Son our reality. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 1:9 Paul explicitly teaches us that God has called us “into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” To teach that the Spirit replaces Christ in the believers’ fellowship is to teach error concerning the Spirit both in the Godhead and in God’s economy, and to claim that the Spirit Himself teaches that we should commune with Him and not with the Son is to misrepresent the Spirit both in His operation and in what is alleged to be His speaking. In this misaiming, what is claimed to be the direct speaking of the Holy Spirit is used to contradict the Word of God. This kind of writing is exceedingly dangerous. In God’s economy Christ is the unique center, and the Spirit of reality will always bear witness to this divine truth and glorify God’s beloved Son, the all-inclusive Christ.

Misaiming concerning Preparation for the End Times

Misaiming: “[A] martyr...was afraid he would disgrace himself by denying the Lord when he was being taken to be burned. So he was attempting to prepare himself by holding his hand in the flame of a candle. His fellow sufferer replied, ‘Stop doing that. The Lord will give you the grace and strength to suffer for Him...’ So how do we prepare for the possible sufferings and persecution that lie ahead?...Following the counsel and practice of the Holy Fathers, we should practice fasting as prescribed by the Tradition of the Church in order to accustom our bodies to privation and to wean our

hearts away from their attachment to this world” (Father Gordon Thomas Walker, “Though Tested by Fire...How to Deal with Suffering and Persecution,” *Again*, Vol. 21, No. 3, July—Sept, 1999, pp. 10-11).

Truth: The passages excerpted above seek to prepare believers for sufferings in the end times. The New Testament, however, directs the Lord’s seekers to prepare themselves for the Lord Himself in His coming. The story of the martyrs referred to above reflects this New Testament emphasis on the believers’ experience of Christ as their grace and sufficiency in all things. Astonishingly, however, within the space of two paragraphs, the article contradicts its healthy, scriptural advice by recommending that believers adopt ascetic practices as a means of preparing for suffering.

Fasting is unquestionably a New Testament practice, but the New Testament, unlike the “Tradition of the Church” appealed to above, never associates fasting with privation or asceticism. Rather, it occurs in the context of prayer (Matt. 17:21; Mark 9:29). Many times we believers find ourselves inwardly compelled by the Lord to pray. At times, the burden of the prayer that needs to be discharged is so heavy that we temporarily forget or forego daily bread, and consequently fast in order to give full attention to prayer and petition. Fasting was never practiced in the New Testament as a form of asceticism, nor was it ever recommended as a way for Christians to prepare for tribulation or for the Lord’s coming.

How can we be prepared for what lies ahead? The Lord Jesus advises us to prepare ourselves for His coming by being “prudent” virgins (Matt. 25:2)—those who have accumulated an abundance of the Holy Spirit within our being. According to the New Testament, we should live a life in expectation of the Lord’s return. This kind of preparation also will prepare us for any kind of suffering that may come. If we live a life of being filled with the Spirit, serving in newness of life, and being thoroughly involved and incorporated with the Triune God, we shall certainly be prepared for whatever lies ahead. The Triune God Himself, who has been dispensed into our being, will be our preparation!

Misaiming concerning Romans 8:28

Misaiming: “...all things you have prayed about will work together for good. You see, the Apostle Paul is the one who wrote this verse, *and he didn’t even believe that everything which happened worked together for good....* We make a mistake when we *try* to make Romans 8:28 fit into every situation in life, when Paul used it only in reference to praying in the Spirit” (Charles Capps, *Kicking Over Sacred Cows*, 1987, pp. 184-185).

Truth: The quotation can only be described as deriving from an utter shortage of insight into God's economy, that is, His plan to accomplish His eternal purpose. His economy is especially evident in Romans 8, which concludes with the assurance that the believers are heirs of glory. All of the divine activity in our inward being, described in the first part of the chapter, will consummate in our transformation, conformation, and glorification as sons of God. The quotation, by viewing verse 28 out of context, limits the things that work for our good to only those things that we pray for in Spirit. Nevertheless, the context of all of chapter eight of Romans implies that the goal of our prayer, the "groanings which cannot be uttered" (v. 26), the interceding of the Spirit, is that we would be transformed and conformed to the image of Christ—that is, become sons of God not only positionally but also dispositionally.

The key word for understanding how "all things work together for good" is *because* in verse 29: "Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers." All things specifically work together for good to conform us to the image of His Son. *Good* does not refer to some temporal pleasure, happiness, or improvement in circumstance. If this were so, then verse 28 surely would not "fit into every situation in life." This verse is applicable only when we realize, from the perspective of God's economy, that this "good" is the result of the inward activity of the indwelling Christ who desires to spread in our being. This activity is aided by "all things," and it has the consummate goal of making us sons of God who are so constituted with Christ that we become His expression. When a believer sees the truth of God's economy, he is freed from slavery to environments, situations, and conditions. When we see that the consummate good is our conformation to Christ, then all things in our environment will serve us by helping us to rely and focus on the subjective Christ, the One who desires to "make His home in your hearts" (Eph. 3:17).

Misaiming concerning the Seven Spirits in Revelation

Misaiming: "Later in John's visions these seven spirits of God are identified with seven lamps in front of the throne of God (4:5), and with the seven eyes of the Lamb....They are part of the heavenly throne scene, but only a minor part. If they represent the Holy Spirit, it is not as the third person of the Trinity defined by later Christian theology, but as the power and voice of Jesus *within* the Christian communities to which John wrote—presumably the prophetic spirit, or voice of the Christian prophets in the congregations" (J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation, IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 1997, pp. 32-33).

Truth: This quote misaims greatly by de-emphasizing the importance of the seven Spirits in Revelation. First, it claims that the seven Spirits are not a reference to the "third person of the Trinity," but rather, only to "the prophetic spirit, or voice of the Christian prophets." Second, it relegates the seven Spirits to being "only a minor part" of the heavenly scene. Regarding the identity of the seven Spirits, it is clear from the scriptural context that they represent the Holy Spirit Himself—although in an intensified state—because they are ranked alongside the Father and Son as the source from which the divine grace flows (Rev. 1:4-5). Additionally, the seven Spirits are referred to as the seven eyes of the Lamb (5:6), indicating their organic identification with Christ. This essential identification of the Spirit with Christ also can be found in 2 Corinthians 3:17, which says, "The Lord is the Spirit." Furthermore, the seven lamps of the lampstand in Zechariah 4:6 also represent the Holy Spirit. In sum, the evidence of Scripture clearly and unfailingly identifies the seven Spirits with the Holy Spirit.

We know that in both essence and existence the Spirit is uniquely one (Eph. 4:4). Hence, the seven Spirits in Revelation 4:5 must refer more to the work, the shining, of the Spirit, than to person of the Spirit. At the end of this age, the one unique Spirit is intensified sevenfold in His activity, move, and operation. The number seven is very meaningful throughout the Bible. It signifies completion in God's move. For example, He carries out His economy at the conclusion of the church age with seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. In addition, His entire move throughout church history is represented in Revelation 2 and 3 by seven churches. In times of degradation, God moves as the Spirit in a sevenfold intensified way. This is the reason the seven Spirits are identified as belonging to the Sender of the epistle to the church in Sardis, a church living in name, yet spiritually dead (3:1).

This misaiming also errs in labeling the seven Spirits as "only a minor part" of the heavenly scene. The opposite is true. The Spirit actually plays a crucial role in the accomplishing of God's eternal economy. As "lamps of fire" burning before the throne (4:5), they enlighten and search God's people. They run to and fro on the earth, intensifying God's organic salvation in His believers and producing overcomers (Zech. 4:10; Rev. 5:6). As the eyes of the Lamb, they observe, search, convict, judge, and infuse the believers. In these last days of spiritual deadness and degradation, God has provided us with a powerful antidote—Himself as the sevenfold intensified Spirit to enlighten, infuse, and work within the believers who long to be His overcomers.

by the Editors