

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

Misaiming concerning the Efficacy of the Redemption and Blood of Jesus

Misaiming: “I believe some will go to hell (see Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31), but since the gates of hell will not prevail (see Matt. 16:18), the only people who will spend eternity there are those whom Jesus failed to redeem—those whom His blood was too weak to reach and wash (see 1 John 2:1-2; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 1 Cor. 5:5)” (Carlton Pearson, “Confessions of an ‘Inclusionist,’” *Charisma*, April 2003, p. 70).

Truth: This passage errs in ascribing an inherent weakness to the redeeming blood of Jesus in order to account for the suffering that awaits unbelievers in the lake of fire for eternity. Any failure in this regard, however, must be attributed to human unbelief, not to either the power of the blood or the heart of our Savior God. Paul tells us that as “the Savior of all men,” God desires “all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 4:10; 2:4). To fulfill this desire, He sent His only begotten Son to save “the world”—sinful, fallen people (John 3:17). Christ Jesus, the “Savior of the world,” gave Himself as a ransom to accomplish redemption for all men (4:42; 1 Tim. 2:6). Unveiling Christ as a sacrifice for propitiation, John emphatically declares, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Isaiah tells us that when Christ was crucified, God caused “the iniquity of us all” to fall on Him (53:6). Twice Paul states that in His crucifixion Christ “died for all” (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Hebrews 2:9 goes so far as to declare that Christ tasted death “on behalf of everything,” accomplishing His redemption not only for people but for everything created by God. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world to accomplish His eternal redemption, by which He reconciled the world to Himself (John 1:29; Heb. 9:12; 2 Cor. 5:19). All these verses reveal that the provision of Christ’s redemption is available to all human beings through all time, in order that all human beings may have the opportunity to be saved.

Despite the universal availability of His redemption to all human beings, to experience its efficacy one must receive the Lord by believing into Him. Faith constitutes the bridge between Christ’s accomplishment of

His redemption and our experience of its efficacy. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son—yet only those who receive Him by believing into Him will not perish in the lake of fire but obtain His eternal life to be His sons. One must have “the obedience of faith” by believing into Christ to enjoy the benefits of His redemptive death (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Peter thus speaks of the “obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2). Here Christ’s redemption is signified by the sprinkling of His blood, through which He obtained an eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). To receive the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, that is, the application of the redemption of Christ, one must repent and believe into Him. At the tremendous cost of His death on the cross, Christ’s redemption, once for all, has been made available to all men; now human beings must bear the responsibility and consequence of either receiving or rejecting Him. Whoever believes into Him will receive the eternal life and be saved; whoever does not believe will suffer the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (John 3:18; Matt. 25:41). Therefore, the unbelievers will perish in the lake of fire for eternity, not because of any inadequacy on the part of Jesus’ redemptive blood but because they failed to believe into Him to enjoy the efficacy of His redemption.

The root cause of this misaiming is an utter depreciation of the power of the blood of Jesus by positing that it is “too weak to reach and wash” the people who will spend eternity in the lake of fire. In contrast, the New Testament attests to the power of the blood of Jesus—its efficacy is all-prevailing in space and everlasting in time. Colossians 1:20 reveals the all-encompassing effectiveness of the blood of Jesus: Through the blood of His cross, Christ made peace, reconciling *all things* to Himself—which refers to not only human beings but also to all creatures. So far-reaching is the blood of Jesus that Hebrews 9:22-24 unveils that by His own blood—the blood of better sacrifices, which are His sacrifices—Christ purified the heavens and all things in the heavens that were defiled by the rebellion of Satan and the fallen angels. In order to enjoy the efficacy of His precious, all-encompassing, and far-reaching blood, we must exercise our “faith in His blood” (Rom. 3:25). Therefore, the unbelievers will suffer eternal perdition in the lake of fire because of their failure to exercise

faith in the blood of Jesus, not because of any inherent weakness of His blood to reach and wash them.

Misaiming concerning Divisions

Misaiming: “For pastors who desire to prevent divisions from occurring, I make the following...suggestions:... Provide a clear understanding of the spiritual authority structure in your church....Make sure you understand where the final authority resides in that church....Be accountable to a board or to the leadership team....

As support ministers and congregation members, there are basic steps we can take to distance ourselves from being a part of a division...: Respect the position of the senior pastor....Don't sow criticism against the pastor....Don't talk negatively about the pastor.... Understand the unique authority structure in your congregation....Pray the vision of the senior church authority” (Francis Frangipane, “How to Prevent a Church Split,” *Ministries Today*, May/June 2002, pp. 24-26).

Truth: This passage correctly cautions believers against the sin of division and offers a number of remedies. In doing so, however, it makes two central errors. First, the solutions offered as prescriptions to counter division repeat the same far-reaching mistake that Ignatius made in the second century. Having witnessed a decline in church unity in his own time, Ignatius advocated an extra-scriptural notion of church authority which eventually came to be known as the bishopric system. In so doing, he disregarded the model which the New Testament apostles established under the Spirit's inspiration. These apostles appointed elders to oversee each local church. In order to address the increasing in-fighting that he saw among local elders, Ignatius formally elevated one elder above the others. Eventually, the authority of those “bishops” grew to encompass several local churches. An inorganic, systematized hierarchy resulted, which eventually came to be commonly accepted as the clergy/laity system. The Episcopal and Anglican denominations, for example, proudly trace their bishopric administration not to Scripture but to Ignatius. The article also suggests the following possible causes of division: “Confusion concerning church governments,” uncertainty as to which person has “final authority in a congregation,” and “misguided ambition in associate leaders” (23). Hence, some of the author's preemptive strategies are to give the members “a clear understanding of the spiritual authority structure in your church,” instructing them to know “where the final authority resides,” to “be accountable to a board or to the leadership team,” to “respect the

position of the senior pastor,” and to “pray the vision of the senior church authority.” In other words, Ignatius's well-intended but fundamentally misguided teaching is replicated by stressing hierarchical organization and authoritative discipline as the solution to division. While a certain level of order can be imposed and maintained through a controlling, authoritative hierarchy, such a means will never produce the scriptural, organic oneness of the Body of Christ. The oneness of the Body of Christ is spontaneous, vital in the divine life, and headed up by Christ Himself, not by a system of hierarchy.

The second serious error in this misaiming is one of omission. Not a single solution offered here mentions the surest—and scriptural—way of avoiding division and maintaining oneness: the experience of the cross of Christ. It is the believers' subjective experience of turning to the indwelling Christ in the midst of offenses which applies a spiritual “antidote” to the element of division. Divisions and sects are “works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-20), and the Spirit's unique answer to the flesh is to bring the believers into the instant experience of being crucified with Christ (2:20). When it is “no longer I but...Christ” living in us, the divisive factor in our flesh is effortlessly, spontaneously subdued. Unforgiven offenses, unfulfilled ambitions, gossiping, misunderstandings, and all the other breeding grounds of division are nullified when the believer is in the Spirit. To turn one's heart to the Lord in the midst of an offense or misunderstanding is the unique solution to the problem of division. The expansion of divisions is simply symptomatic of a carnal condition. The cross of Christ is experienced only when we are willing to deny the self and live in the Spirit. Only then will we not be a factor of division within the church.

Misaiming concerning Law and Gospel

Misaiming: “We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church with great diligence as an especially brilliant light, by which, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God is rightly divided” “Epitome of the Formula of Concord, Section V, Of the Law and the Gospel, Affirmativa,” as presented in *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: German-Latin-English*, St. Louis, 1921).

Truth: In referencing 2 Timothy 2:15, which says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth,” the Formula of Concord for the Lutheran Church upholds the distinction between the law and

the gospel as the fundamental hermeneutic for scriptural understanding; that is, that all Scripture can be divided into either an instance of law or an instance of the gospel. This approach to the Scriptures, however, is shortsighted, perhaps drawing too heavily upon a tradition of interpretation that was developed in response to the very real need at the time of the Reformation to make a clear break from an understanding of salvation based upon works rather than faith.

At a time when, according to the biblical record (Rom. 7:13), there was an utter inability on the part of humanity to recognize its total alienation from God due to sin and sins, the law was given to serve as a child-conductor back to the Savior (Gal. 3:24), both in type through the sacrifices and in reality through the saving grace of our Lord and Redeemer, Christ. And in the history of the church, when there was a misplaced confidence in the ability of the works of the flesh to satisfy the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory, the preaching of the absoluteness of God's law as the standard of righteousness surely helped bring in a recovery of the truth of salvation by faith alone by grace alone through Christ alone.

Even with a proper understanding of and appreciation for the law as a child-conductor unto Christ, its utility should not be unduly extended to account for the totality of the divine revelation contained in the Word of God. To do so places the redemption of Christ, and by definition the object of His redemption—the elimination of the barrier of sin between God and humanity—as the principal aim of the economy of the Triune God. Before there was sin or sins, however, God was motivated by the higher and the eternal desire to have many sons who would be conformed to the image of His Son. God desires an expression of Himself that is possible only by imparting His life and nature into humanity; He does not desire simply a reconciliation with humanity. After the fall, reconciliation was necessary for the impartation of the divine life, but it was never the initiating impulse for God's economical interaction with humanity. The law is useful in helping to secure the necessary reconciliation, but the law is not able to give life (Gal. 3:21). The claim that the entirety of Scriptures can be divided into either law or gospel ignores both the unfolding of the divine revelation in Genesis, in which while sin was not even present until chapter three, the divine intention related to the impartation of the divine life was unveiled in earlier chapters (1:26; 2:9), as well as the clear testimony of the Scriptures themselves. The law was added after the promise of the Spirit as the blessing of Abraham was given (Gal. 3:14, 17-19), and it entered in alongside, as an adjunct for the accomplishment of

God's central purpose (Rom. 5:20). In order to uphold the law and the gospel, particularly the demand of the law rather than the supply of the divine life, as the organizing principle of the Word of God, one must, although probably unwittingly, also ascribe some eternal element to the existence of sin because the Word of God reveals not only the actions and intentions of God after the fall but also His actions and intentions before there was even a realm of time and space in which the fall could occur.

The law is spiritual and holy, and it has served a purpose in conducting God's chosen to Christ, but it has a limited interpretative utility that does not embrace the full compass of God's economy. God's life, rather than man's sin, alone can account for the totality of the revelation contained in the divine Scriptures.

Misaiming concerning the Yardstick for Faithful Doctrine

Misaiming: "I want to engage in a brief conversation with F. Schleiermacher, and especially his explicit statement regarding the relation of theology and the Bible which appears at the head of his discussion of 'The Formation of the Dogmatic System': *'All propositions which claim a place in an epitome of Evangelical (Protestant) doctrine must approve themselves both by appeal to Evangelical confessional documents, or in default of these, to the New Testament Scriptures, and by exhibition of their homogeneity with other propositions already recognized'*" ("Scripture and Theology: Compass Points in the Current Discussion," *Catalyst*, February 2002, p. 1).

Truth: If one were to embrace Schleiermacher's test for fidelity in Christian teaching summarized above, he would find himself committing several errors which would limit his own understanding of Scripture as well as that of those who heed him. We have seen these deviations before; they repeat themselves periodically throughout the histories of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches. First, Schleiermacher's yardstick for truth ignores a fundamental principle of Bible exegesis, that is, that Scripture invariably interprets itself (2 Pet. 1:20-21); explanations of problematic portions of Scripture can always be found in other portions of the Bible. Instead of referring his readers to God's authoritative Word, Schleiermacher turns us to historical confessions (though he does not tell us which ones). Incredibly, this Protestant theologian surpasses the boldness of the Roman Church by not only *equating* these confessions with Scripture but also *elevating* them to a higher status than the Word of God! Schleiermacher would have us test a doctrine's veracity *first* by comparing it

to a historical confession and then, only “in default,” to the Scriptures. The Scriptures are thus demoted to second place. This is even worse than the very misguided principle of *equating* confessions with Scriptures, against which the early Reformers struggled, often at the cost of their lives. If Christians follow this unscriptural truth test, their error will be greater than that of Medieval Catholicism.

Second, these historical confessions at times err, are often incomplete, and sometimes contradict each other. Schleiemacher does not identify for us which confessions are inerrantly inspired—and thus qualified to be the acid test for all doctrine that would follow. The Lutheran Concordant differs from the Westminster Confession, which in turn differs from others. For example, the Scottish Church underwent protracted and painful conflicts in its attempts to merge with the Anglican Church. The problem was due to certain articles of the Westminster Confession and the required Book of Common Prayer. Today many Christians cannot in good conscience follow some of the pronouncements contained in such historical documents, which at the time seemed infallible to those who held them dear. Therefore, Schleiemacher’s suggestion of seeking approval for one’s teaching by “appeal to Evangelical confessional documents” is a pernicious reintroduction of an ancient error.

Third, Schleiemacher requires new teachings to exhibit “homogeneity with other propositions already recognized.” This error leads to two mistakes: It stymies critical reflection on past documents and precludes new scriptural insight and light that the Lord would like to give to the church. If we make these documents the yardstick for truth and thereby elevate them above Scripture, no one would dare, or perhaps even desire, to question them. Inadvertently, these documents are accorded a status of infallibility and inerrancy. Furthermore, there is much truth in the Word of God which is never addressed by these confessions. For example, significant subjects such as dispositional sanctification, the seven Spirits in Revelation, and the New Jerusalem are slighted, even ignored. These revered documents are not only fallible; they are also incomplete. If one applies Schleiemacher’s test to contemporary teachings, he will be inclined to quickly pronounce new insight as heretical or unorthodox.

The real test of any new doctrine is its faithfulness to Scripture alone. While historical understanding of Scripture can be helpful and should be consulted; this resource in and of itself has been weighed in the balance and found wanting, being incomplete, contradictory, and at times erroneous. Scripture alone

is the acid test of any teaching’s truthfulness. We can at times receive much help from the writings of Christian authors as well as from corporate creedal expressions, yet these should never be elevated to a status that is equal to or higher than the Bible. Christian confessions and historical documents may help explain and expound Scripture, but they should never expand it, and they most certainly should never usurp its rightful place of divine preeminence.

Misaiming concerning the Law

Misaiming: “...the later Gentile Church teaching that Jewish Christians were ‘freed’ from these [biblical purity and dietary] laws on the basis of Mark 7:19b...is spurious. Such a break with Judaism—on the part of Jewish Christians—would have been a distortion of Jesus’ own vision and intention.” (“Jesus and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* Vol. 74, No. 4, October 2002).

Truth: These laws were part of the law of the commandments in ordinances (Eph. 2:15), which was a middle wall of partition, a great enmity, between the Jews and Gentiles (v. 14). Therefore, on the cross Christ abolished them, wiped them out, and nailed them to the cross (v. 15; Col. 2:15), in order to create the two peoples in Himself into one new man (Eph. 2:15). In this corporate new man, there cannot be Greek and Jew, but Christ is all and in all, that is, He is every person and in every person (Col. 3:11). Jewish believers who observe these written ordinances deny Christ’s work on the cross (Gal. 2:21), damage the oneness of the church and its expression as the one new man, and cut themselves off from the all-inclusive Christ (5:2), the reality (John 4:24) and fulfillment of all the types in the Old Testament (Rom. 5:14; Heb. 9:9; Col. 2:17).

This teaching disregards three principles of biblical interpretation: first, to distinguish between the old covenant and the new covenant, whereby, to establish the new, the old is taken away (Heb. 10:9); second, to acknowledge the unity between the Lord’s teaching in the Gospels and the apostles’ teaching in the Epistles, the latter both complementing and completing the former (John 16:12-13; Col. 1:25; 1 Tim. 6:3); third, to recognize that the Lord and His disciples were in a period of transition between the two dispensations, which lasted from the Lord’s incarnation to His resurrection (Gal. 4:4-5). This deformed teaching will keep believers in the physical, earthly realm of God’s old creation and prevent them entering into the divine, mystical and heavenly realm of God’s new creation (6:15).

by the Editors