

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

Misaiming concerning the Application of the Word

Misaiming: “Christian moral formation aims at forming disciples of Jesus Christ. It is our response to St. Paul’s exhortation ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:5). Since grace builds on nature, moral formation must include satisfying the basic demands of authentic human development. More specifically, the process of moral formation engages many aspects of moral agency—affections, dispositions, intentions, perspectives, intuitions, memory, and imagination as well as moral reasoning, decision-making, and acting. My particular interest in moral formation is the imagination, for it has a special role in the way we might see, judge, and act in the spirit of Jesus... Whether we satisfactorily respond to St. Paul’s exhortation, ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:5), will be determined in the end by how we affect the quality of life and love in the world” (Richard M. Gula, “Let the Mind of Christ Be in You: Moral Formation and the Imagination,” *Theology Digest*, 51.4, Winter 2004, pp. 315-316, 325).

Truth: On the night of His arrest prior to His crucifixion, the Lord prayed for the equipping of His disciples as He prepared to send them out into the world, saying, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As you have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sake I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. And I do not ask concerning these only, but concerning those also who believe into Me through their word” (John 17:17-20). The principal means to equip a Christian to be sent as a disciple into the world to testify of the Father’s sending of the Son is, as the Lord prayed, the sanctifying element of truth and reality that is conveyed in the Lord’s word. This word is contained in and imparted through the written Word of God. When the Lord’s word is received as spirit and life (6:63), it sanctifies and separates the believers because the very life and element of the sanctified Christ are imparted and applied. Only the living and operative word can join us to the mind of Christ by joining us to Christ. The extent to which we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly is the extent to which we can let the mind of Christ be in us (Col. 3:16; Phil. 2:5).

The above quotation misaims not so much by presenting an errant interpretation of the truth as it does through a misapplication of the truth (and does so in the service of that which is good but which is also utterly devoid of the living God). The title of the ten-page article prominently points to a significant phrase in the New Testament *the mind of Christ*, creating an expectation that there will be a meaningful explication of this profound thought. In fact, the phrase is referenced only at the beginning and end of the article. The two references serve merely as decorative bookends for an argument in support of applying imagination, which is defined as “the capacity of the human mind to interpret experience by means of images or metaphors, to enter another’s world empathetically, and to explore mentally new possibilities for one’s life,” to the “moral formation” of a disciple of Christ (316, 315). The article offers no insight into how a believer can experience the organic operation of the living Christ, whose living thoughts truly issue in a living counsel (Rev. 3:18). Paul declared that he had the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16); he did not employ this phrase merely as a cosmetic descriptive of his self-imagined and self-determined metaphors for living. He had the mind of Christ! He did not have to ponder what Jesus would do; rather, his renewed mind was aligned with the inward parts of Christ in his organic union with Him (Phil. 1:8). Christ was his living source, not simply a focal point in his human imaginations.

It is difficult to place much stock in the power of the human imagination to serve as a source for moral formation, when, according to God’s evaluation, that is, God’s mind, every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart is only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). This misaiming misapplies the sanctifying Word for cosmetic purposes. The author could just have easily evoked the mind of Confucius as a source for moral formation. It is in this misapplication of the truth that this article fundamentally misaims.

It is easy to see through and ridicule much of the “Christianization” of popular culture and merchandising. Many imagine, regrettably, that their worldly pursuits and, yes, lusts, are somehow sanctified by associating their endeavors with a verse or by purchasing a material product that is branded with a religious symbol.

For golf lovers, Christianity can be comfortably transformed into “Christian tee” with the justification that golf balls with verses can provide an opportunity to speak of the Lord on the golf course. A piece of candy with a verse can be transformed into a “Testamint,” and the same content of self-help “moral formation” messages somehow can take on a Christian character when a few verses are added. It is easy to avoid being overly swayed by these Christianized makeovers in our popular culture, but when the Word itself is used to denude the element of truth from the Word, there is a great potential for damage. For those who genuinely desire to follow the Lord and to lead others to follow the Lord, the encouragement to lean on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5), however it may be reimagined through the metaphorization of the Word, is a deceptive detour.

The smooth words in this article deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:18). It is laudable to desire to affect the “quality of life and love in the world” (325) through our moral formation, but to suggest that our own imaginations can accomplish this goal is laughable. Two brief allusions to a verse in the Bible do not imbue a teaching and exhortation with truth; neither do they impart the living and operative word. With this approach, the Word of God, which can impart the living word in reality, becomes only a source for “Christian metaphors” that serve as “hermeneutical keys to interpreting our world and shaping our response in moral action” (325). Sadly, such interpretations will not come from the mind of Christ but from the vain thoughts of the wise (1 Cor. 3:20).

Misaimings concerning Heaven

Misaiming: “Heaven is our home” (Randy Alcorn, *In Light of Eternity: Perspectives on Heaven*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 1999, p. 6).

Truth: *In Light of Eternity* (hereafter, *LE*) strongly and repeatedly asserts that a literal, physical dwelling place in heaven is the believers’ eternal home. Sadly, such an assertion misaims in at least two ways concerning the divinely revealed truth in the Scriptures related to the eternal habitation prepared by God in Christ for the believers in Christ.

Those who know the Lord and His Word realize that our home, our dwelling place is, first, God Himself: “O Lord, You have been our dwelling place / In all generations” (Psa. 90:1). As our experience of the Triune God deepens, we take Him as our dwelling place. Thus, our house, our true home, is the Triune God as our Lord. According to the revelation in Psalm 91, we dwell in God by being identified with Christ in His taking God as His dwelling place, and in this way the Most High

God becomes our habitation (vv. 1, 9). This is confirmed by the Lord’s word in John 14, a chapter concerned not with heaven but with the Father’s house, His spiritual building. By His coming in incarnation, the Lord Jesus brought God into man to live as a man on earth, and by His going in death and coming again in resurrection, He brought man into God, making it possible for the believers to enter into God, to be one with God, and to live in God. Because Christ, the Son, is in the Father and we are in Christ, we are in the Father by being in the Son (vv. 10-11, 20). This thought is developed further in 1 John 4:15: “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.” To abide in God is to remain in Him, to dwell in Him. Our true dwelling place, therefore, is God Himself.

Because the Lord Jesus through His death and resurrection has given us a standing in God and has opened the way for us to dwell in God, we may dwell in the house of God—the Father’s house with its many abodes—which is the church of the living God, becoming a dwelling place of God in spirit (Eph. 2:21-22). This means that our home is both God and the house of God, that is, both the Father and the Father’s house. Ultimately, this house will be enlarged and consummated to become the New Jerusalem, a corporate, living, organic entity where all the believers in the Triune God will dwell in Him as the temple and where the Triune God will dwell in the believers as the tabernacle (Rev. 21:22, 3). This mutual abode, the holy city, will be our eternal home. Hence, our eternal home is not a physical building constructed in the heavens by the Lord as a carpenter; our eternal home is God Himself, and the New Jerusalem is not a physical city but a corporate person constituted of the Triune God dwelling in the believers and the believers dwelling in the Triune God.

Misaiming: “Through his death and resurrection the Carpenter flung open the door to heaven” (*LE*, p. 163).

Truth: In responding to this most regrettable misaiming, we need to consider the status in which the Lord Jesus died and the purpose for which He died. As every reader of the New Testament knows, the Lord Jesus in His human living was raised in the home of a carpenter and was Himself a carpenter. This is an undeniable fact. However, it is a serious mistake to declare, as *LE* does, that it was as a carpenter that our Lord died on the cross for our redemption and then was resurrected for our regeneration. The Gospel of John shows that Jesus died as the Lamb of God (1:29), as the fulfillment of the type of the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses in the wilderness (3:14), and as the grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died to release the

divine life from within Him to produce many grains as the reproduction and multiplication of Himself (12:24). The Lord Jesus' death did not reflect His human status as a carpenter. Rather, He was crucified in the threefold status as the Lamb of God, as the reality of the type of the bronze serpent, and as the grain of wheat who fell into the ground and died so that the life in Him could become the life in us. If we would be true and faithful to the Gospel of John, we need to testify that Christ died as a divine and human person with such a threefold status. To speak of His dying as a carpenter is to deviate from, if not actually to demean, the truth concerning the person of Christ in His death and resurrection.

LE teaches its readers that through His crucifixion and resurrection "the Carpenter flung open the door to heaven." This may be the traditional, religious view of the goal of Christ's redemption and resurrection, but it is not in keeping with the divine revelation. The Bible does not teach that Christ died for us so that we might enter a mansion in heaven. On the contrary, the Scriptures reveal that Christ died to take away our sin and to remove all the barriers between us and God so that God in Christ could enter into us and so that we in Christ could enter into God for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ with His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified elect. Whereas *LE* claims that the Carpenter flung open the gate of heaven, the New Testament presents the marvelous truth that Christ, in His death and resurrection, has become the way for His believers to enter into God and into the house of God the Father. The Lord Jesus, therefore, is the unique way not to a place but to a wonderful person—the true and living God, who is our eternal dwelling place.

Misaiming: "Our home is being built for us by the Carpenter from Nazareth. Building is his trade...Jesus didn't say to his disciples, 'I've already prepared a place for you in heaven,' but, 'I am going there to prepare a place for you.' This means heaven has undergone some remodeling between the time he spoke and the time we join him there" (*LE*, p. 36).

Truth: By inserting the words *in heaven* in its paraphrase of John 14:2-3, *LE* advocates the erroneous view that the Lord's speaking here had heaven in view (4). Elsewhere *LE* asserts, "*Home* as a term for heaven...describes an actual, physical place" (12). On page 58 *LE* offers further elaboration: "All heaven will be our special home...Place is singular, but rooms are plural. This suggests Jesus has in mind an individual dwelling for each of us, which is a smaller part of the larger place and is home to us in the most unique sense." According

to *LE*, heaven has been undergoing remodeling for nearly two thousand years, for, as the book supposes, the Carpenter has been exercising the tools of His trade to construct literal, physical rooms in which each believer will live cozily. The truth, which stands in sharp contrast to this misaiming, is revealed clearly in Matthew 16 and John 14. After Peter received the revelation from the Father that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus prophesied, saying, "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). To be sure, the church that He is building is not a physical structure but, as Peter tells us, a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5). The Father's house in John 14 is this church, this spiritual house, in which all the believers have a place. Our abode, our home, is not a physical room in heaven—it is the place prepared for us in the Father by the Lord. Because we are in God as our eternal dwelling place, we are spontaneously in the building of God—the Father's house, the Body of Christ—as our eternal dwelling place. Far from spending centuries to remodel heaven in a physical way to make it a suitable dwelling place for us, the Lord in His present, heavenly ministry is building the church, which is His Body, of which we are members, and God's house, in which we dwell (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 2:21-22; 1 Tim. 3:15). To teach, as *LE* does, that the Lord Jesus is remodeling heaven by making physical improvements is to distract the believers from the central thought of God revealed in the Scriptures—that God in Christ is building Himself into us and building us into Himself to produce the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem.

Misaiming: "The New Jerusalem is heaven's capital city" (*LE*, p. 127).

"The city is not the whole of heaven, but merely its center...Perhaps it will be a center for arts and culture and large gatherings and events...and maybe some great restaurants, since we know that in heaven we'll be eating and drinking (Luke 22:30) and even 'feasting' (Matthew 8:11). Heaven's capital city will have all the advantages we associate with earthly cities but none of the disadvantages. No crime, no litter, no smog, no sirens, no seaminess and corruption. The streets can be walked safely" (*LE*, pp. 30-31).

Truth: The major error here is the assumption, made without biblical basis, that the New Jerusalem is a literal, physical city. If the book of Revelation is read with spiritual understanding, as a book of signs (1:1), we will realize that the holy city, the city of God, is not a material structure but a person—the bride, the wife of the Lamb (21:9-10). To state the obvious, the Lamb, the redeeming God, will not take a physical metropolis as His counterpart. What a strange marriage that would be! The Lamb must, and will, marry a corporate person.

The New Jerusalem is this corporate person, a living composition of all God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified people.

Although it is accurate to say that the New Jerusalem is the center of the new heaven and the new earth, it is misleading to claim that it is the capital city of heaven and that from this so-called capital the believers may visit and rule over planets and cities elsewhere in the universe. Yet this notion is actually suggested in *LE* in its understanding of the morning star (127). To the one who overcomes, the Lord Jesus says, "To him I will give the morning star" (Rev. 2:28). Although the Lord's own word in 22:16 reveals that He Himself is "the bright morning star," *LE* offers the following absurd interpretation: "The 'morning star' was the name for the planet Venus. Perhaps this suggests God's servants will reign not only over this world but others" (127). Whereas the Lord Jesus presents Himself, the morning star, as a reward to His overcomer, *LE* offers the planet Venus or other celestial orbs as a prize. Supposedly, from the New Jerusalem as the capital city, the Lord's servants are to traverse the universe to rule over other worlds. Apparently, it will not be sufficient for them to reign over the nations on earth. Perhaps some readers of *LE* will hope to receive planet Venus as the morning star—we prefer Christ as the bright morning star, who even now rises in our hearts (2 Pet. 1:19) as, in the dark night of this evil age, we await His secret coming as the morning star promised to His watchful overcomers.

According to *LE* the New Jerusalem, as a physical city, "will have all the advantages we associate with earthly cities"—including great restaurants—"but none of the disadvantages." "The streets," we are assured, "can be walked safely." Note the use of the word *streets* and compare it with Revelation 21:21 and 22:1: "The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass," and "He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street." *The street and its street* prove conclusively that in the New Jerusalem there is only one street, not many streets that can be "walked safely." To speak of *streets* instead of *street* is to distort the truth of God and to mislead the people

of God. The one street is not a literal avenue or boulevard—it is the divine nature, the nature of God as our unique pathway. As we dwell in God as our eternal home, we will forever walk in Him as our way, enjoying the river of water of life and the tree of life. The street, the river, and the tree—this is the Triune God in Christ as our eternal portion for our eternal enjoyment.

Misaiming: "The greatest weakness of the western church today is arguably our failure to think of the long tomorrow—to take seriously the reality that heaven is our home" (*LE*, p. 6).

Truth: Any reader of *LE* who believes this statement will be distracted from God's will and good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ (Eph. 1:9; 3:11). For *LE* "the greatest weakness of the western church" is the failure to take heaven seriously. Actually, the greatest weakness of the church is the failure to take God and His purpose seriously. All things were created because of God's will (Rev. 4:11), and God's will is to have many sons as the members of the Body of Christ which, as the organism of the Triune God, will consummate in the New Jerusalem, an eternal, divine-human, corporate person. This corporate person is produced by the Triune God's dwelling in us and our dwelling in the Triune God. In this age we may dwell in the church as the Body of Christ and the spiritual house of the living God. For eternity, we will dwell in God and in (and also as) the New Jerusalem. This marvelous, corporate, organic, personal, spiritual entity is not the physical capital of heaven; on the contrary, the New Jerusalem is actually a universal couple—the redeeming, regenerating, transforming Triune God and the redeemed, regenerated, transformed tripartite man dwelling in each other mutually and living together delightfully for eternity. This reality, neglected in *LE*, should be taken seriously by all those who believe in the Lord Jesus, who seek Him for His satisfaction, and who love Him with a pure heart as the Builder of the church and as their eternal Husband.

by the Editors

Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him" (John 14:23).

abode: This is one of the many abodes mentioned in v. 2. It will be a mutual abode, in which the Triune God abides in the believers and the believers abide in Him.