

M I S A I M I N G S

Misaiming concerning the Yardstick of Truth

Misaiming: "...more than ever, a yardstick of truth is needed by which to judge these [religious] groups. This yardstick is the Orthodox Church...Ultimately, then, the one thing necessary to expose the phony religious systems which have grown up around us is this: know and follow the teachings of the Orthodox Christian Church..." (Fr. Jack Sparks. *Again*. Vol. 19, No. 3, 1996).

Truth: The Bible, the Word of God, is the Christian's only "yardstick" for measuring truth. The proper yardstick against which the truth of any Christian teaching or practice should be measured is the Scriptures alone. The author's yardstick appears to be found in the historic councils and creeds. This, however, conveniently overlooks the fact that this yardstick is flawed in several key respects: these creeds often contradict one another, and even more, they were never intended to be considered a detailed, comprehensive exposition of God's Word.

The yardstick of the teachings of the Orthodox Christian Church often sanctions extra-scriptural yet "historic" teachings that bear no trace of scriptural authority. The worship of Mary, the use of icons, and the practice of asceticism clearly have no place in biblical worship, yet to some these teachings and practices have attained a circular validity. They have become accepted teachings simply because they have been accepted. Their validity is in their acceptance, not in their alignment with the Scriptures.

The Bible is our only source of revelation, light, and truth. In striking confirmation of this devotion to scriptural authority, the apostle Peter, having observed the Lord's transfiguration on the mount, considered the written Scriptures as a "more firm" confirmation of the truth than the supernatural scene he had personally witnessed there (2 Pet. 1:19). To Peter the Scriptures were more reliable than his own vision and experience, even though these were unquestionably from God. We also should measure every teaching, practice, and experience by Scripture alone.

Those seeking to justify the use of extra-scriptural authorities as "yardsticks" for measuring truth often respond by saying that believers need some safeguard against false teachers who misuse the Scriptures for

their own ends. This is not a misplaced concern because many so-called teachers misapply verses from the Bible to support their claims. The Lord Jesus warned us that false prophets would come (Matt. 7:15), and the apostles, such as Peter, warned that some would "twist" the Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:16). Since the Bible clearly conveys the warnings of the Lord and His apostles that some would misrepresent Scripture to advance their own agenda and notions, one should correctly expect that the Bible itself would also contain adequate safeguards against such heresies. It does. Some of these safeguards include:

1) *Interpreting Scripture by Scripture*, since "no prophecy of Scripture is of one's own interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20). Allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible is certainly a safeguard from one individual's tangential or extreme interpretation. All biblical truths are invariably confirmed by other portions of the divine revelation.

2) *Divine enlightenment contained in the Word of God*. Peter tells us that the Word is "a lamp shining in a dark place...your hearts" (2 Pet. 1:19). Every genuine believer has experienced divine enlightenment from Scripture safe-guarding his heart from false teaching. The shining Word will enlighten the believer, exposing the false teaching.

3) *The Lord's personal deliverance*. In 2 Peter 2:1-9 Peter warns of false prophets and teachers, but concludes with the reassurance that "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of trial." He promises to deliver from error those who live a godly life. In the Lord's own words, "If anyone resolves to do His will, he will know concerning the teaching, whether it is of God..." (John 7:17).

4) *The evidence of fruit in the life of the teaching one*. Evil lifestyles expose false teachers, and godly living affirms teachers of the truth. Eventually, the fruit in daily living will manifest the source of every teaching (Matt. 7:15-18).

5) *The fruit of the Spirit in the life of the one being taught*. According to Galatians 5:22-23, the Spirit has a definite expression in our daily lives. Therefore, if a teaching that we are following is from God, it should produce the recognizable hallmarks of the Holy Spirit in our living. Therefore, not only should the teaching ones produce "good fruit" in their own lives, but their

teaching should produce the Spirit's fruit in the ones being taught as well.

6) *Inward discernment by the indwelling Spirit's witness.* While discussing the public speaking in a Christian meeting, Paul advises that, "...two or three should speak, and the others discern" (1 Cor. 14:29). This implies that we should not automatically assume that all believers' teaching is from God. Yet it also indicates that by virtue of our rebirth, we have the inward ability to discriminate between truth and error. Thus, Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit."

The Christian's only "yardstick" for measuring truth is the Word of God. Every teaching, whether spoken or written, should be measured according to the Bible to see if it is solidly grounded there. As to false teachers attempting to misguide us by abusing the Bible, the Scriptures themselves reveal that our Lord has provided the adequate safeguards in His Word and through His personal shepherding. Thus, Christians need not—and dare not—depend on the often errant, contradictory, and incomplete teachings for their discernment of a truth's accuracy or for their safeguard from error, for "we have the prophetic word made more firm" (2 Pet. 1:19).

Misaiming concerning the Similarity of the Soul and Spirit

Misaiming: "When a person dies there are only two parts, not three. The corpse is one part. The other part might be called soul, spirit, I, inner person, or the subjective narrator. But it is only one entity. The soul does not fly off in one direction and the spirit in a different direction. Therefore there is no ontological basis for distinguishing between soul and spirit, only a functional basis" (Jeffrey H. Boyd, "The Soul As Seen through Evangelical Eyes." *Psychology & Theology*. Vol. 23, No. 3, Fall 1995, p. 153).

Truth: The Bible makes an unmistakable and vital distinction between the human soul and the human spirit. Speaking of the sanctification of the Christian's entire being in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul states, "The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit *and* soul *and* body be preserved complete" (emphasis added). Here Paul explicitly mentions three parts—spirit *and* soul *and* body; his pointed repetition of the conjunction implies a clear, intrinsic distinction among all three parts. Hence, *spirit* and *soul* should not be considered merely synonymous, any more than *soul* and *body* are.

Hebrews 4:12 also makes a graphic ontological distinction between the two: "The word of God is...piercing

even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow." Like the joints and marrow, the soul and spirit are very close; the spirit is concealed within the soul just as the marrow is encased by the joints. Thus, while the body is a vessel to contain the soul (the self), the soul is the vessel to contain the human spirit, the deepest part of man's tripartite being. Yet the above verse emphasizes the distinctness of the soul and spirit and the need for the two to be "surgically" separated within us by the living and operative Word of God. The very fact that our spirit and our soul can be thus divided denotes their uniqueness.

Luke 1:46-47 likewise shows the distinction between the two, both in function and in nature: "And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior." Mary's spirit was filled with joy, and her soul expressed that joy by magnifying the Lord. Without the conjunction *and*, one could argue that *my spirit* is in apposition to and equivalent to *my soul*. Again, the use of *and* emphasizes the distinction between the two.

The human spirit and the human soul are not merely variant denotations of the same organ, identifying its different functions. When we read 1 Corinthians 14:15, for example, we see the spirit and the mind (the leading part of the soul) clearly distinguished, yet with the same function—here, singing and praying. "What then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray also with the mind; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing also with the mind." The use of *and* and *also* reveals that the apostle was describing distinct but not unrelated parts of his being.

The notion of man's tripartiteness is not new to modern expositors. Even before the new testament age, the Jews, based on Genesis 2:7, believed that man was composed of a spirit, soul, and body. Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, writes "that God took dust from the ground, and formed man, and inserted in him a spirit and a soul" (*Complete Works*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 25). The footnote on the same page says, "We may observe here that Josephus supposed man to be compounded of spirit, soul, and body, with St. Paul (1 Thes. 5:23) and the rest of the ancients." "The ancients" seem to have been more enlightened about man's ontology than many modern Bible expositors.

Why is it important to recognize the human spirit as an organ distinct from the soul? This is not a merely academic discussion of inconsequential terms, for Scripture repeatedly links the human spirit with many aspects of the Christian life. For example, Paul said that he served in his spirit (Rom. 1:9), set his mind on the spirit (8:6), prayed in spirit (Eph. 6:18), and that the

church was being built up in spirit (Eph. 2:22). John said that we must worship in spirit (John 4:24) and that he was in spirit when he had revelation (Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Paul also warned us of the dangers of being a “soulish man” rather than a “spiritual man” (1 Cor. 2:14-15). All of these experiences ultimately relate to our experience of the economy of God, which is that we would be organically joined to the Triune God in our spirit, enabling the life of God to saturate and renew our soul and finally to be expressed in our body, even our mortal body (Rom. 8:11).

Misaiming concerning the Church and the Kingdom

Misaiming: “...the church is a new community that God has chosen to signal or point to the coming Kingdom. The church is not the Kingdom of God. Historically, whenever the two have been confused, the church has brought grief upon itself and the world. The Kingdom will not be brought in by our efforts; it comes when God brings it in” (Charles Colson, *The Body*. Word Publishing, 1992, p. 121).

Truth: According to the testimony of the Scriptures, the church is the kingdom of God on the earth today. To affirm this is not to “confuse” the two but rather to realize that the kingdom of God has two aspects: its present reality and its later manifestation. The aspect of the kingdom in its future, outward manifestation is clearly evident in Scripture. The Lord will establish it over the entire earth upon His return. This is the only aspect being referred to in the quotation above.

Less obvious, but equally substantiated in the Word is the aspect of the reality of the kingdom of God, expressed today in the church age—not openly, but more mysteriously and intrinsically through the lives of the Lord’s regenerated believers. In this aspect, the kingdom is by definition the church. This present-day expression of the kingdom—in the church—is possible because the essence and life-pulse of the kingdom is Christ Jesus Himself, our Savior and life. Consider the Lord’s exhortation to the Pharisees, referring to Himself, that “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:21). Christ *is* the kingdom life. The more the church lives by His kingdom life, the more the kingdom of God grows and is established until, eventually, the Lord will return and inaugurate the outward manifestation of His kingdom across the globe. Our blessed portion today, as the church, is to participate in the kingdom life and execute God’s authority *before* the Lord returns. It is for this reason that the Lord has given the keys of the kingdom to *the church* for binding and loosing *on earth* (Matt. 16:18-19).

As further evidence of the present reality of the kingdom, Romans 14:17 states, “The kingdom of God is

not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The context surrounding this verse is a discussion of the present church life, not the kingdom in the next age. Paul makes it clear in this passage that where there is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” there is the kingdom. Yet these fruits of the Holy Spirit are not reserved for the next age alone; they are clearly intended for the church age as well (Gal. 5:22). Thus the kingdom of God not only *can* be but *should* be seen today in the church.

Paul also links the kingdom to the practical, present-day church in announcing to the Corinthians that he would come to them to ascertain the power of those who were speaking: “The kingdom of God is not in speech but in power” (1 Cor. 4:20). Paul directly implies here that the authority and power of the kingdom should be evident in the church’s speaking.

John also refused to separate the church from the kingdom. In Revelation 1:9 he says, “I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus.” John indicated that being brothers, having tribulation, and needing endurance surely pertain to this age. It is illogical to think that John would interpose the kingdom here if the kingdom were not a matter of his experience in the present age. John evidently considered himself and all his brothers to be already living within the kingdom of God. Even more clearly, he states in verses 5 and 6 that, after releasing us from our sins by His blood, Christ “made us a kingdom, priests to His God.” Peter likewise affirms that the church is a “royal [kingly] priesthood” for *this* age, to “tell out the virtues of Him” (1 Pet. 2:9). Furthermore, Paul addressed his co-workers as “my fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11). Their work for the kingdom was in this age, advancing the kingdom of God among their own generation. Perhaps most conclusively, Paul says, “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints” (Eph. 2:19). *Citizens* denotes the kingdom of God, and it is experienced in the present age, not just in that which is to come, for Paul does not say “you *will be* citizens” but “you are.”

Although the kingdom will be revealed and manifested to the fullest extent when the Lord returns (and in that sense, the kingdom will come with Him), its reality should be seen in the church today. As Christians living in the church age, it is crucial that we see and appropriate this truth, for it is the church’s faithfulness to live the kingdom life which both expresses its living King today and hastens the coming of that day (2 Pet. 3:12).

The Editors