

M I S A I M I N G S

“Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” –2 Tim. 2:18

Misaiming concerning “the Son of Man”

Misaiming: “The son of man sometimes refers not just to Jesus but also to another heavenly being at the right hand of God...When Jesus refers to the Son of Man in this way, he is thinking not simply of himself, but mainly of the figure in the heavenly court....So who is this Son of Man? ‘The Son of Man’ was Jesus’ way of talking about himself as a person who had access to the very throne of God, the place of another, angelic person” (Bruce Chilton, *Bible Review*. August, 1996, pp. 35, 45, 46).

Truth: This author addresses the most critical, pivotal question ever asked of mankind: “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?” (Matt. 16:13). In his answer, he identifies the Son of Man as an angelic person rather than Jesus Christ Himself. He refers to Ezekiel 1:26-28 and Daniel 7:13-14, which speak of “a man” or “a Son of Man” on the throne of God, receiving a kingdom “which will not pass away.” These are well-known prophecies concerning the reigning Christ and not merely references to “another heavenly being at the right hand of God.” The subject of Christ in His statuses pervades the Old Testament. The Gospels document over seventy Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the coming of Christ, of which these are but two examples. Many prophecies refer to Christ as a man and as the Son of Man, and in the Gospels the Lord Jesus reinforced this connection by repeatedly referring to Himself as that Son of Man.

The failure to identify this prophetic Son of Man as Christ may stem from a limited understanding of the nature of time and eternity. For example, according to our finite human thinking we know that Christ was slain nearly two thousand years ago. The Bible corroborates this view in Revelation 5:6, which portrays the newly ascended Christ at the throne as “a Lamb standing as having just been slain.” But to the consternation of the temporal human mind, the same book also tells us that Christ is “the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world” (13:8). To the natural mind, this is an irreconcilable contradiction; to the enlightened mind, however, this is a further, richer unveiling of the eternal nature of God (Deut. 33:27), unbound by the confines of time and space. In God’s eyes, Christ was slain (which presupposes incarnation) from the beginning of creation. Since the author cannot conceive of Christ appearing as a man before the time of

incarnation (e.g., Gen. 18:1-21; 32:1-28; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 13), he is compelled to identify the “Son of Man” in these verses as a plausible contemporary, an angel. Angels are ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14), lacking flesh and blood, while Christ as the Son of Man possessed genuine flesh and blood (John 1:14; 19:34).

Since Christ is prophetically referred to as the Son of Man and since He often referred to Himself as such, a more critical question arises: Why does the Bible call Him the Son of Man? If He had been prophesied only as the Son of God, there would have been no ground for this author to mistake Him in His Old Testament identity for an angelic being. It is also quite significant that Christ is designated not only as a “man” but, even more specifically, as the “Son of Man.” Being a son connotes full involvement and interrelation. The Lord Jesus came not only as a man but also as the Son of Man, involved with a real family, having a lengthy genealogy and complicated family history, reared in a real neighborhood, involved with His neighbors (Matt. 13:55-56), and living in a real country under an established political system with authorities to submit to. Christ was no stranger. He was thoroughly and intimately involved with the human race He came to save. This is the wonder of incarnation! Both Old and New Testament verses concerning Christ as the Son of Man reveal the details of all that He is in His humanity for His involvement with us. Our need as human beings is not “another, angelic person” but this thoroughly human yet gloriously divine Son of Man. Since He has “been made like His brothers in all things” (Heb. 2:17), “He is able to help those who are being tempted” (v. 18) and “is able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him” (7:25).

Misaiming concerning Faith and Regeneration

Misaiming: “Regeneration precedes faith....After a person is regenerated, that person cooperates by exercising faith and trust. But the first step is the work of God and of God alone. The reason we do not cooperate with regenerating grace before it acts upon us and in us is because we cannot. We cannot because we are spiritually dead....Unless regeneration takes place first, there is no possibility of faith” (R. C. Sproul, “Regeneration Precedes Faith.” *Tabletalk*. February, 1997, p. 35).

Truth: The essence of this misaiming lies in an inadequate understanding of regeneration. Regeneration involves the impartation of God's divine life into man in response to man's faith in the gospel. When man believes, God regenerates him, and he is born anew (John 3:3), born of the Spirit (v. 6), even born *of God* (1:13). Faith does not come by regeneration; on the contrary, regeneration is God's life-imparting response to faith. Those who receive Christ, those who believe in His name, are born of God to become genuine children of God, possessing the life and nature of God. As Ephesians 2:8 declares, "you have been saved *through faith*" (emphasis added). Reversing this scriptural and spiritual sequence by placing regeneration before faith implies that God is willing to impart His life into someone who has no faith. Thankfully, nowhere does Scripture imply that regeneration precedes faith or that our faith is the result of God's regenerating work. Instead, the Bible clearly explains that "faith comes out of *hearing*, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17, emphasis added). *When the gospel is properly preached, the preciousness of Christ is infused into the hearer, producing a response of faith.* Faith is both the spontaneous result of and the normal response to the hearing of God's Word, the "hearing of faith" (Gal. 3:2).

Faith is not initiated by the will of man. If it were, faith would be a work, annulling salvation by grace and making salvation a matter of works. The Bible says that no one can come to the Lord unless the Father draws him (John 6:44), that believing is a gracious grant from God (Phil. 1:29), and that faith comes (Gal. 3:25) by hearing the word of Christ. Yet faith's coming is neither a matter of coercion nor of total passivity. Man's volition is involved in the responding to the Father's drawing. As such, faith is a matter of obeying as much as a matter of believing (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). By God's sovereign grace and by a God-given ability to believe, we first believe into Christ and then we receive eternal life through regeneration.

The misaiming cited above reflects the Presuppositionalist view of the total depravity of man. In its extreme, this doctrine completely denies fallen man's ability to understand and respond to the gospel, dismissing him as so utterly damaged by the fall as to have lost even the capacity to reason or believe. According to this view, man has no means of responding to God or to His Word; therefore, God must first "regenerate" man before he can believe. From both Scripture and experience, however, we know that God does not share this view of mankind. In God's wisdom and mercy, the fall has not rendered us incapable of understanding with our mind and believing in our heart what He has said. This view actually credits more power to the effects of sin than to the word of Christ, the One who destroyed sin and death on the cross.

While sin has negatively affected our thoughts and concepts, we are not so utterly ruined as to have lost all rational capabilities. The doctrine that undergirds this misaiming fails to distinguish between the human spirit (certainly deadened by the fall and in need of God's regenerating work) and the human soul (with the sin-damaged yet functional mind, emotion, and will). Fallen man is spiritually dead yet psychologically alive, although impaired and encumbered by the effects of the fall. Sin has separated man from God so that man is incapable of saving himself by good works. In this sense fallen man is totally depraved and in desperate need of a Savior. But concluding that man can no longer believe God because of the fall contradicts the consistent testimony of Scripture. After Adam and Eve's horrific failure, God reasoned with Adam and clothed him with the skin of a redemptive sacrifice. Even though he was not regenerated, Adam demonstrated his faith in God's promised redemption by calling his wife Eve, meaning "Living," and by teaching his children to follow the God-ordained way of salvation. Further, Abraham believed God (Gal. 3:6) and was called "the father of all those...who believe" (Rom. 4:11), even though he lived two thousand years before the Lord told Nicodemus that he must be born anew (John 3:7).

Further, to maintain that God regenerates an unbeliever *before* he has faith is to assert that God regenerates an unbeliever before he becomes a believer. If this were the case, it would mean that the righteous God sends His holy, life-giving Spirit into sinners before they have been justified by virtue of their faith in Christ. Romans 10:10 firmly refutes this error: "With the heart there is believing unto righteousness, and with the mouth there is confession unto salvation." Here the imputation of righteousness and the impartation of salvation clearly *follow* not *precede* the unbeliever's inward believing and outward confession of faith. Romans 1:17 confirms the proper order—faith, followed by God's impartation of life: "But the righteous shall have life and live by faith." This verse does not say, "Have faith by life," but, "Have life...by faith." When the unregenerated Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "What must *I do* to be saved?" the response was not, "You can do nothing. Wait for God's 'regenerating grace,' and you will believe." Instead, Paul charged, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you *shall be saved*" (Acts 16:30-31, emphasis added). Passages such as these make it clear that when the Word of God is preached and, through God's sovereign grace, the unbeliever responds to the gospel, he need not wait for God to take a further step. Through receiving God's Word, he is spontaneously endowed with the ability to believe and thereby enjoys God's instantaneous response to his faith—justification and regeneration. Through faith, the spirit becomes life because of righteousness.

The Editors