

M I S A I M I N G S

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

Misaiming concerning the Assurance of Salvation

Misaiming: “The child is taught the Bible’s gospel instead of popular superstition. The child is taught that his prayer for salvation is heard when the Lord gives him supernatural power to keep the Commandments better and better....The children are told that the Lord can give them a new heart. This new heart will cause them to want to obey the Bible’s Commandments. This new heart they are told can only be given by the Lord’s choice and the Lord’s choice can only be known by an increase in ability to obey the Commandments better and better. In other words, assurance of salvation is founded on the bedrock of Scripture that the love of God is the keeping of the Commandments and finding those Commandments are not grievous, but instead a delight (1 John 5:1, 2)” (*Chalcedon Report*. No. 377, December, 1996, pp. 11, 12).

Truth: Relying on a few verses from 1 John, this article seems to link the *assurance* of salvation with the *condition* of the Christian’s walk after salvation. Words such as *abide*, *walk*, and *practice* are used in this Epistle thirty-two times. The apostle John’s main emphasis in 5:1-2, and in the majority of the Epistle as well, is on the condition of the believer in his living and walk. The believer’s assurance of salvation should never be based on his variable condition, such as the consistency of his ability to obey the law, but on the Savior’s unchanging ability to save him “to the uttermost” (Heb. 7:25). Our assurance rests not on what we can do but on what Christ is and what He has done.

A careful reading of 1 John provides ample biblical evidence of the blessed assurance of salvation found in the Savior and His work. First John 1:9 promises that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Christ, not the repentant sinner, is the faithful One. Our assurance rests on *His* faithfulness to forgive and accept us eternally, not on our faithfulness to repent and increasingly obey His commandments. Notice also that Christ is the righteous One. Any commandment-keeping righteousness of our own is unreliable, sinking sand as far as the assurance of salvation is concerned. In verse 7 *His* blood cleanses us. In 2:1-2 *His* advocacy with the Father and *His* propitiation for our sins save us, and in

2:12 He forgives us when we believe because of *His* name. Thankfully, Scripture divorces the assurance of our salvation from the condition of our Christian walk. It is *His* blood, faithfulness, righteousness, advocacy, propitiation, and name that comprise the bedrock upon which the sin-confessing believer’s assurance rests.

It is a travesty to teach repenting children that they have no assurance that their prayers for salvation have been heard unless they manifest “an increase in ability to obey the Commandments better and better.” How much is “better and better”? At what level of obedience can they be certain they are saved? This fallacy compels these children to seek proof of salvation through works, endlessly polishing their conduct in hopes of being awarded the “elusive” prize of eternal security. Undeniably, the believer’s condition is vital to his walk and service, and according to the Scriptures merits reward or punishment for a time, but it is not vital or even relevant to eternal salvation. A believer in Christ, by virtue of rebirth, can never lose his status as God’s son, even though he may bring dishonor to his Father’s name through his unsanctified condition.

A final fallacy in this article’s interpretation of the gospel is in giving the salvation-seeking child the impression that despite his prayer of repentance, the Lord may or may not choose to save him. According to this article, the child can be made aware of the Lord’s choice only by the presence (or absence!) of his increased ability to keep the commandments. This conditional salvation condemns the child of weak character to a welter of perpetual doubt due to his fluctuating behavior. This torment is not only needless but groundless, for the Bible reveals that the Lord Jesus has chosen to drink the cup for us by His crucifixion (John 18:11). This saving act opened the life-gate for all who would enter in—to every one who believes and to whomever calls upon the name of the Lord (John 3:16; 1 John 5:1; Rom. 10:13). God “desires *all* men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4). We should teach our children the gospel instead of popular superstition. The good news is that Christ saves any who would simply repent and believe in Him. When our children ask us what they must do to be saved, we should respond as the apostle Paul did: “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and

you shall be saved” (Acts 16:30-31). We can then nurture their spiritual growth without introducing torturous, unresolvable, and unscriptural doubts about their salvation. Spiritual progress may well be difficult and lifelong, but eternal salvation is simple, a free gift (Rom. 6:23), and once for all.

Misaiming concerning the Oneness of Believers

Misaiming: “But is [a] notion of visible unity what Jesus intended in his high priestly prayer in John 17? Our Lord’s concern, as Robert Lewis Dabney pointed out last century, is for spiritual unity. The demand for visible unity is not only quite foreign to the text, it constitutes, in the words of Dabney, an enormous blunder. It is, in fact, an idol that is used to stifle any legitimate dissent, and, let me add, it is positively deadly to the health and welfare of the church” (*Modern Reformation*, September/October, 1996, p. 18).

Truth: In order to accurately discern Jesus’ intention in His prayer in John 17, we must examine what He actually said. In verse 21 He prayed, “That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You...*that the world may believe* that You have sent Me,” and in verse 23 He declared, “I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, *that the world may know* that You have sent Me” (emphasis added).

Even a casual reading of these verses reveals that the Lord’s prayer was for both spiritual and visible oneness among His believers. The most striking goal of this oneness is “that the world may believe” and “that the world may know.” How can we expect unbelievers to perceive a “spiritual” oneness that is invisible? Shaking hands over the fences may offer a semblance of oneness but convinces no unbelievers; they see the fences, not the spiritual oneness. First Corinthians 2:14 delimits the spiritual capabilities of those who are alienated from the life of God: “But a soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually.” It is therefore impossible for unbelievers in the world to discern spiritual, invisible oneness. In full awareness of this need, our Lord prayed for a visible testimony of oneness capable of convincing the world.

To consign our Lord’s desire to a union which is merely spiritual and not visible is more than an innocent misunderstanding of the truth; more seriously, it is an excuse for division cloaked in spirituality and originating from an unwillingness to conform to God’s Word. It is a convenient interpretation for those who, for whatever reason, maintain divisions, but it is not faithful to the scriptural requirement of oneness. As

long as Christian teachers resist taking God’s Word in simplicity and instead cleave to interpretations which accommodate and are accommodated by the present condition of the church, the desire of the Lord expressed in His prayer will continue to be frustrated.

John 17, standing alone, plainly and definitively shows God’s desire for both spiritual and visible oneness among believers. Nevertheless, it does not stand alone; the testimony of the entire New Testament flatly precludes the excuse that invisible (and frankly, often merely imaginary) unity adequately satisfies the Lord’s desire for His Body. Consider the situation addressed in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 where visible division among the believers was not only unacceptable but constituted evidence that they were “fleshy” and “infants in Christ.” Conversely, visible oneness bears witness of both maturity and genuine spirituality. In fact, to conform to the biblical standard for authenticity, true spiritual oneness must be manifested in visible oneness. In 1:13 Paul protested, “Is Christ divided?” According to the context, he was decrying the visible segmentation of the believers into four camps: namely, of Paul, of Cephas, of Apollos, and of Christ. The apostle evidently realized the unreliability of mere claims of spiritual unity apart from a tangible and visible manifestation.

Perhaps the most conclusive demonstration of the need for both spiritual and visible oneness is found in Ephesians 4. Verse 3 charges the believers to be “diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace.” Believers possess spiritual oneness because of the Spirit. We simply need to diligently guard what we already have. Verse 13 continues, “Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man.” Here is a visible oneness, a oneness at which we must arrive. We obtain this sorely-needed oneness by uniquely holding “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and by refusing to base our oneness on minor doctrines, those not essential to the common faith. Hence, this oneness is called “the oneness of the faith” (Eph. 4:13). We arrive at this visible oneness by maturing in Christ, which is why Paul, in the same verse, uses the phrase “the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man” (4:13). The more spiritual a believer becomes, the more visible is the oneness he maintains, for there is no genuine spiritual oneness apart from what is manifested in an increasingly visible way. The scriptural demand for visible oneness is neither “foreign to the text” nor an “enormous blunder.” Far from being “an idol” that is “positively deadly to the health and welfare of the church,” proper visible oneness, based on the common Christian faith and resulting from the believers’ maturity in Christ, is both the apogee and

the genuine expression of the oneness of the Spirit among the believers.

Misaiming concerning the Goal of Regeneration

Misaiming: “We Christian reconstructionists—unlike liberals of all sorts, and unlike pietists who abhor the Christian task of social change—support social change as the result of godly regeneration. For us, long-term social transformation operates from the individual outward to society, from the bottom to the top. Secularists do not grasp the salient point that *by the time Christianization redeems the state, the transformation will be almost complete*” [*italics theirs*] (*Chalcedon Report*, No. 377, December, 1996, p. 3).

Truth: The teaching of Christian Reconstructionism has completely missed God’s eternal purpose and ultimate goal—the building up of the church as His kingdom for His eternal expression. Instead, it focuses on the attempt to reform society by returning to some type of Puritan, Knoxian, or Constantinian government where Old Testament law and Christian standards are societally imposed. No doubt the current moral climate of society and government make this tenet initially palatable, but its lack of biblical soundness makes it ultimately bitter in the believer’s stomach, for it is grounded in historic sentimentality, not in the Bible. Proponents of a Christian reconstruction of society have idealized certain historical eras, imagining that Constantine’s Roman Empire, Calvin’s Geneva, Knox’s Presbyterian Scotland, and Puritan America somehow represented the kingdom of God on the earth (e.g., 14, 21). In actuality, the church, through regeneration, is the reality of God’s kingdom on earth in the present age (John 3:3, 5; Matt. 16:18-19; 1 Cor. 4:20; Rev. 1:9; Rom. 14:17). Governments, in God’s eyes, are simply “human institution[s]” (1 Pet. 2:13).

Since God’s purpose is accomplished “through the church,” the believers’ energy and service should logically and reasonably be focused not on transforming society and government, but on edifying the church, as the apostle Paul exhorted: “seek that you may excel for the building up of the church” (1 Cor. 14:12). To take the re-Christianization of all society as the field and goal of our labor is a significant distraction from God’s goal, causing believers to misaim concerning God’s kingdom.

The Lord Jesus will return by the church’s faithfulness in living the kingdom life in the midst of secular and sometimes hostile societies and governments, not by the Christian reconstruction of these societies. When “His wife has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7), the millennium of the kingdom’s outward manifestation will

begin. Since the church is the bride of Christ, His work in this age is to nourish, cherish, and sanctify her in preparation for His coming, ushering in the next age (Eph. 5:29-32). As the church lives the kingdom life in its present reality, she makes herself ready for His return by reaching maturity. It is at this juncture and not before that the angel announces, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). For this reason, our energies in this age should be consecrated to the building up of the church for our Lord’s satisfaction. Christ redeemed the church, not the state. Christ loved the church, not secular governments or societies, and gave Himself up for her that He might present the church to Himself glorious (Eph. 5:25, 27).

Admittedly and wonderfully, the church can influence society and governments in the present age, not by attempting to “redeem the state” or by training future generations for secular leadership positions (22), but by praying for those in authority and by being the salt of the earth and the light of the world (1 Tim. 2:1-3; Matt. 5:13-14), that is, by faithfully living the kingdom life within a godless society. The church is a blessing to society through testifying by word and deed, and the prayer of God’s kingdom, and by “awaiting the blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Misaiming concerning Unbelievers in the Church

Misaiming: “The visible church contains tares along with wheat, goats along with the true sheep.” (R. C. Sproul, *The Soul’s Quest for God*, p. 215).

Truth: Christ never taught, nor does the Bible anywhere imply, that the church contains tares. This misconstrues the Lord’s parable in Matthew 13:24-30 in an effort to justify the presence of unregenerated, nominal Christians. Though tares certainly typify counterfeit believers (in that, for example, tares are indistinguishable from wheat until fruition), the Lord never acknowledged that they were sown by the evil one *into the church*; rather, He stated clearly that they have been sown by the evil one into “*the world*” (Matt. 13:38). The church as revealed in Scripture is not the farrago of genuine and spurious believers, but is rather the very Body of Christ constituted with His life-element (Eph. 5:29-30) Since unregenerates, by definition, do not possess the divine life, they should never be recognized as members of Christ, comprising a “visible church.” The doctrine of an essentially distinct “visible and invisible church” is nothing but a convenient contrivance to excuse the muddled, compromised condition of today’s Christianity. The New Testament, however, presents

the visible church as being a local expression of the invisible, universal, church. Here false brethren, far from being tolerated, are tested and exposed (1 Cor. 5:11-13; Rev. 2:2), because the church is bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh (Eph. 5:29-30; cf. Gen. 2:23).

There is reference to the Lord's prophecy concerning the sheep and the goats to substantiate this point (Matt. 25:31-46), but it overlooks the first verse of this prophecy which plainly states that this separation will take place after the second coming, at the end of the great tribulation and the onset of the millennial kingdom (v. 31). Again the Bible clearly interprets itself, explaining that both the unbelieving sheep and goats will comprise *the nations* in the millennial kingdom and on the new earth (v. 32), not the recently harvested church. The sheep are here defined as those among the nations who shelter the believers remaining on the earth during the tribulation, while the goats are those who ignore the believers during their trial (vv. 35-46). These *sheep* will then be shown mercy and will become *the nations* dwelling outside the new Jerusalem who walk by its light and whose kings bring their glory into it (Rev. 21:24). They will be the nations who are healed by the leaves of the tree of life and whose tears will be wiped away by God (22:2; 21:4). Yet, as unregenerates, God's divine, eternal life does not indwell them. Hence, they cannot be the church, which consummates as "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). The church, both locally in expression and universally in constitution, is composed uniquely of genuine believers who have received the divine life and nature (1 John 5:12; 2 Pet. 1:4).

Misaiming concerning Patron Saints

Misaiming: "Joseph is the patron saint of the fathers of families" (*Christianity Today*, Dec. 11, 1995).

Truth: The concept of "patron saints" is entirely unbiblical and was, in fact, nonexistent in church history until the Nicene Age. During the church's first three centuries, the martyred saints were simply held in honor for their sacrifice. However, by the fourth century this high regard had evolved into a form of hero-worship, in which believers routinely adopted the practice of choosing a martyr as their personal "patron," or protector and intercessor, to whom they would pray, which would cause the patron saint to intercede on their behalf to Christ. The structure of these prayerful appeals was closely modeled on those of the secular Roman patronage system, in which village patrons were officially petitioned for assistance. Believers were evidently influenced by this Roman system of village patrons as well

as by the concept of guardian angels; they gradually came to believe that martyrs could not only hear their prayers but also offer special favors and protection. The martyrs, then, became the patron saints and, Christianity, hence, degenerated into a form of polytheism with Peter, Paul, and Laurentius becoming the patrons of Rome; James of Spain; Andrew of Greece; John of the theologians; Luke of painters; Phocas of seamen; Ivo of jurists; Anthony against pestilence; and Apollonia against toothaches (Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 3, pp. 430-434). By the sixteenth century, this concept had fully matured, wherein these "saints" became mediators between the common believer and God, as evidenced by the following decree of the Council of Trent (AD 1563):

[The priest] implores their [the saints'] patronage, that they may vouchsafe to intercede for us in heaven, [and] ... the holy bodies of holy martyrs, and of others now living with Christ—which bodies were living members of Christ— ... are to be venerated by the faithful; through which [bodies] many benefits are bestowed by God on men. (Schaff's *Creeeds of Christendom*, Vol. II, pp. 180, 201).

The Scripture forbids the worship of any creature (Col. 2:18, Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8-9; Acts 14:13-15) and does not furnish a single example of a believer praying to men, whether living or dead. Rather, believers are directed to the "one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus," (1 Tim. 2:5). Furthermore, to honor departed saints as "patrons" preposterously ascribes to them divine omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, thus enabling them to hear all prayers worldwide as well as to provide universal protection at all times. However, Luke 16:25-31 invalidates this apocryphal notion by proving that departed saints are in Paradise, powerless to leave or provide assistance to those still alive and remaining on the earth.

Finally, the concept of a superior class of believers, living or dead, who alone qualify for sainthood nullifies the Bible's consistent revelation that all believers are saints, though none are "patron" saints. The English word *saint* derives from the Latin *sanctus* and appears in the New Testament, with this precise denotation, sixty-one times. According to Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, (Vol. 4, pp. 2, 785): It is an appellation of all Christians as Christian. On becoming Christians, they become "saints." While all believers are saints, none are ever recognized as "patrons," with special intercessory or mediatorial powers. Our prayers and petitions should be offered directly to Christ, who "lives always to intercede" for us (Heb. 7:25).

The Editors