

MISAIMINGS

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

Misaiming concerning Returning to Jewish Festivals

Misaiming: “Most of these Holy Days are often neglected in most of Christianity, which all too often has torn itself away [from] these Biblical Feasts as being ‘Old Testament.’ Too bad. There were the Feasts that were celebrated in the early church. Holidays such as Easter and Christmas are man-made inventions which occurred hundreds of years after the time of Yeshua.

The Disciples were observing the Feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) when the outpouring of the Ruakh HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) occurred in Acts. [sic] ch. 2. Rav Shaul (Paul) observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Shavuot. Acts 20:6, 16. The early Corinthian church celebrated Passover. 1 Cor. 5:7-8. There is now a renewed interest in the Feasts of Israel in the Christian church. Many Christians are studying the Feasts, and some are even observing them. This enriches their faith” (Richard Chaimberlin, “Passover—Traditional and Messianic,” *The Messianic Jewish World*, April 1998, p. 1).

Truth: While this is riddled with inaccurate biblical interpretations, its most notable misaiming is its significant deviation from the centrality and universality of Christ. To the believer in the New Testament age with its new covenant, Christ Himself is all in all. We should not look for spiritual blessings in the form of outward feasts or holidays. Ephesians 1:3 affirms that we are already blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.” Our real blessings in this age are not of the earth, but heavenly, and not in outward practices, but in Christ. They are *spiritual* blessings, the dispensing of God Himself in Christ into us.

There is no justification for the error of reverting to or re-assimilating Old Testament feasts and holidays. This replaces the believers’ spiritual experience of Christ with outward practices, thus distracting them from the rightful preeminence of Christ in their lives. Paul warned the Colossians that the still-popular old covenant feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths were “a shadow of the things to come, but the body [substance, reality] is of Christ” and further admonished them, “Let no one defraud you” (2:16-18). In Paul’s view, for Christians to revert to Judaism with its ritualistic

observances is for them to be defrauded of the experience of Christ.

This misaiming executes a great leap of imagination in concluding from the verses cited that the Jewish feasts were an integral part of the early church. For example, this article conjectures that the disciples were observing the feast of Pentecost in Acts 2. In fact, they had gathered for ten days of prayer—coincident with the dates of the feast of Pentecost—having just witnessed the Lord’s ascension. The occasional mention of Jewish feasts in Acts, however, was intended to provide simple chronological references, not to ordain their perpetuation in the church. The Scripture mentions the feast here as a mere calendar reference, giving no indication that the new believers were observing it. Luke refers to “the days of Unleavened Bread” in Acts 20:6 to establish a time reference for their sailing journey. He makes no mention of celebration by believers. When Luke chronicles Peter’s arrest, he mentions parenthetically, “Now those were the days of Unleavened Bread” (Acts 12:3), clearly intending only to establish a time reference.

First Corinthians 5:7-8 is also distorted to support the contention that the Corinthian church kept the Passover. Yet even a casual look at these two verses makes it clear that Paul’s intention—far from promoting the Passover—was to very emphatically replace the Passover with Christ: “Our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed” (v. 7). In verse 8 he went on to charge us to “keep the feast,” that is, keep feasting on Christ—no longer with physical bread, “but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

As New Testament believers, we should reject every regression toward outward Judaistic practices and should continually exercise to maintain our focus on God’s new creation, “where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision...but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11).

Misaiming concerning the Relationship between the Gospel and Architecture

Misaiming: “Architecture for churches is a matter of gospel....A church that is interested in proclaiming the

gospel must also be interested in architecture, for year after year the architecture of the church proclaims a message that either augments the preached Word or conflicts with it” (Donald J. Bruggink and Carl H. Droppers, quoted in *Modern Reformation*, May/June 1998, p. 9).

Truth: There are three errors here. The first is mistaking the church for the physical structure in which believers may meet. One with a view of the church as the organic Body of Christ, composed of regenerated believers, would never use a phrase such as *the architecture of the church*. Rather, the church is an *ecclesia*, a gathering of the called-out ones (1 Cor. 1:2). It is composed exclusively of the living branches of Christ as the vine (John 15:5). It is the corporate bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25) and the household of God (Heb. 3:6). It is always organic, composed of human beings who have received Christ as their life (1 John 5:12). It is *never* referred to in Scripture as a physical building.

Second, the Bible never even remotely suggests that “the architecture of the church proclaims a message.” This thought is based on human tradition and is not alluded to in the New Testament. The early believers did quite well proclaiming the gospel in their homes, in the streets, upper rooms, prisons, catacombs, and coliseums. The message of the gospel did not then and does not now need architecture to augment it.

The third error is one of omission. This misaiming has overlooked the most troubling issue with architecture in Christian places of worship. It voices the concern that architecture may either “augment” or “conflict” with the preached Word. The more likely concern, however, is that architecture can serve to displace the gospel message. This misaiming would have us recreate foreboding, awe-inspiring gothic settings designed to evoke a sentimentally devotional image of God.

In effect, ornate buildings with elaborate stained-glass windows and distracting images are set up as the center of attention, in conflict with the preeminent Christ. While, the article criticizes amphitheater-style buildings electronically outfitted for Christian entertainment as conflicting with the preaching of the Word, in reality “gothic” settings likewise can serve to distract attendants from the Word. In summary, the New Testament ascribes little, if any, importance to the physical worship site, and if any architectural style is implied at all, it is one of simplicity, allowing the worshippers’

focus to remain on our unrivaled Christ. “Gathered in Thy name, Lord Jesus, / Losing sight of all but Thee, / O what joy Thy presence gives us, / Calling up our hearts to Thee!” (*Hymns* 188).

Misaiming concerning Attending the Lord’s Table

Misaiming: “Should the ability to articulate an understanding of God’s love and grace be the key to the gate surrounding the table? More to the point, should there be a gate at all?...We do not wait until our children can articulate an understanding and acceptance of the biological system and how it processes food before we feed them....Why would we treat the spiritual food for our eternal life any differently?” (Timothy J. Mulder, “Adding a Leaf to the Table,” *Reformed Worship*, June 1998, p. 40).

Truth: This misaiming represents a recent trend to bring toddlers and young children to the Lord’s Table to partake of the elements. It illustrates what can happen when the authority of God’s Word is compromised and diminished, dethroned by human reasoning. The

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article argues from a human analogy that since we do not wait for our children to understand the biological system before feeding them, we should not wait for them to accept the gospel before allowing them to partake of the table. In contrast, the Bible simply does not recognize this practice. Paul ad-

vises the believers that it is possible to partake of the elements “in an unworthy manner” (1 Cor. 11:27) and that each one should “prove himself” before he eats the bread and drinks the wine (v. 28). He also warns that one can eat and drink “judgment to himself if he does not discern the body” (v. 29) and that “because of this many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep” (v. 30). Astonishingly, this misaiming poses as its focal question, “Should there be a gate at all?” In solemn contrast, the Bible pointedly charges us to discern both the Body of Christ and ourselves before we eat and drink the Lord’s supper (vv. 29, 31).

Those of the reformed tradition should not be overly shocked that their followers might promote the participation of toddlers at the Lord’s table. It is a logical extension of infant baptism. It should be no surprise that those who ignore the Bible’s injunction that belief should *precede* baptism would also promote infant communion. If a child needs no faith to be baptized, why should he need faith to partake of the bread and wine? A flagrant disregard for the scriptural mandate of discernment concerning the table is

not only misleading but pernicious. Its proponents as well as its followers risk incurring the Lord's judgment by failing to maintain and observe this divinely restricted access to the most precious and holy communion between the Lord Jesus and His redeemed and regenerated believers.

Misaiming concerning the Means of God's Grace and Presence

Misaiming: "When Luther talks about the 'spiritual' presence of God, he does not mean 'immaterial,' for God chooses very material things as the means of his presence....Christians have also believed that in Jesus, God truly took flesh, assumed a very physical presence....Nevertheless, the history of the church chronicles one group after another which has sought to 'spiritualize' God, unable as they were to confess any manner of God's revelation of himself except in a nebulous, non-physical manner....God has shown himself to be merciful and gracious in that he has made accommodations; he has used material things as gifts of his presence among his people" (Michael S. Horton, *Modern Reformation*, May/June 1998, pp. 14-15).

Truth: God's consistent revelation of Himself, as well as the means of His presence among His New Testament believers, centers in His spiritual essence. "God is *Spirit*." Moreover, "those who worship Him must worship in *spirit*" (John 4:24, emphasis added). The New Testament believer has been blessed "with every *spiritual* blessing" (Eph. 1:3, emphasis added), which consummates all-inclusively in "the Spirit of reality" who abides in the believer (John 14:17). It is a serious misaiming to direct Christians to physical items as a "means of his presence," with a corresponding but erroneous expectation of finding Him. The New Testament instead points us to His ultimate accommodation to man—that now to us "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17) and "the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). Simply put, to experience Christ is to experience the Spirit, for they are one. Similarly, to receive God's gracious life-imparting is also to experience the Spirit because God in Christ, through the process of His incarnation and resurrection, has reached us as the "life-giving Spirit." Thus, believers need not and should not look to physical objects of the old creation to find God's presence and grace. We may well enjoy His creation, but we should not revere it as an item of worship—we worship God, who is Spirit, in our spirit. We enjoy Him "in spirit and truthfulness" (John 4:24), as the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), and as the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). His Spirit with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22) is the marvelous means and the gracious gift of His presence within His New Testament believers.

Misaiming concerning the Soul after Death

Misaiming: "When we die, our souls (the immaterial, invisible part of a human being) go immediately to heaven. A believer's body rots in the grave, but it will be raised from the dead and reunited with its former tenant's glorified soul. Resurrection happens to the body, not to the soul" (*Today in the Word*, Oct. 1997, pp. 12-13).

Truth: The thought expressed here is a prevalent error inherited from the traditional concept of the Dark Ages. According to the light of Scripture, however, what actually happens to the soul after death is that it enters into Paradise, which is not synonymous with heaven. We know this because Paul distinguishes between these two places in 2 Corinthians 12. In verse two, he speaks of being caught away into the third heaven while in verse four, referring to a subsequent event, he speaks of being caught away into Paradise.

This raises a key question: If Paradise is not in heaven, where is it? An analysis of several verses helps to clarify this. First, the Lord told His disciples that during the interlude between His crucifixion and His resurrection, He would "be in *the heart of the earth* three days and three night" (Matt. 12:40, emphasis added). When this verse is compared with Luke 23:43 where the Lord promised the thief on the cross, "*Today* you shall be with Me *in Paradise*," it becomes evident that Paradise must be situated in the heart of the earth. This interpretation is confirmed by Luke 16 where Abraham and Lazarus, both in Hades, are separated from the tormented rich man by a chasm, yet they are close enough to converse. According to this context, Paradise must be a pleasant section of Hades where the redeemed souls rest and are comforted until the day of resurrection (John 5:28-29). Further confirmation is found in Revelation 6:9 where "the souls of those who had been slain" are not in heaven, but rather "underneath the altar." The Old Testament altar was in the outer court of the tabernacle, and the outer court typifies the earth. Hence, those under the altar are in the region under the earth, not in heaven.

Finally, Acts 2:31 affirms that "concerning the resurrection of the Christ...neither was He abandoned to Hades." Although Christ resurrected from Hades and ascended to the heavens, verse thirty-four states that "David did *not* ascend into the heavens." By this we understand that David along with all of God's Old and New Testament redeemed are not in the heavens, but in the pleasant section of Hades until the Lord comes, when "the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16).

by the Editors