

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMSBY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

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WHERE DID THEY GET THAT?

People who adhere to belief in the Bible often adhere in fact to a traditional school of scripture. Evangelical Protestants can be as much the servants of tradition as Roman Catholics or Greek Orthodox Christians, only they don't realize it is tradition. This was a problem that both Jesus and the Apostles had to deal with, and, for the most part, is totally neglected by church leaders today. Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes is a vivid description of most modern churches today. "He said to them, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, as it is written: this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men...you nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition...thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down" (Mark 7:6-9, 13). An interesting point that is often overlooked, is the many times both in the Old and New Testaments warn against false teachers and false prophets. This was such a serious crime against God's revelation that it carried the sentence of death to the false teacher (Deut. 18: 20; Jer. 28:16). In this article we are not going to try to specifically point out modern false teachers, rather we want to point out common held convictions held sacred but not found in Scripture.

However, these sacred tendencies are not easily recognized in the church. J. Harold Ellens in *The American Library of Alexandria and Early Christian Development* quoted by Robert Hatch in *Possession and Persuasion*, stated: "The average Christian today is unaware of this staggering fact that Christianity as we know it today is a form of Greco-Roman mythology. Hatch goes on to say: "The story of how Greek mythology, with its synthesis of rationalism and mysticism, rhetorically (i.e. persuasively) penetrated and permeated the Christian tradition, forever altering Christian faith, is virtually an open secret insofar as it oozes out the pores of the literature of the church history and theology. The open secret continues to be kept, no doubt, due to its staggering implications." N.T. Wright in his book *Who Was Jesus?* states: "it is not only possible, but highly likely, that the church has distorted the real Jesus, and needs to repent of this and rediscover who the Lord really is."

Where did they get that? Perhaps the most revered, devoutly held doctrine, believed by the average Christian today and defended adamantly by the clerical intelligentsia is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It is amazing that the Scriptures never mention the subject. Jesse Hurlbert in *The Story of the Christian Church* stated: "For fifty years after St. Paul's life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about A.D. 120, with the writings of the early church fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that of the days of St. Peter and St. Paul."

The following is based upon H.G. Wells *Outline of History* and Kenneth Scott Latourette *A History of Christianity*. These authors are noted for their accuracy both in secular and religious history. In the year 325 A.D. Emperor Constantine arranged the

council of Nicea to get some unity of faith in the Church by having a standardized creed. According to Norman P. Tanner in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* the council of 318 "fathers" opened on June 19th in the presence of the emperor, but it is uncertain just who presided over the council. The aim of Constantine to present a creed that would foster unity of the faith did not work out as planned. From the beginning of the session of the developers of the creed there was much division over the statements of the creed. The Emperor Constantine had ordered the council at Nicea to resolve the difference in "the theology of the Godhead." The council developed into a heated battle that ended in a victory for the Trinitarians. The Trinitarian position was then strengthened by a new Nicene Creed that was carefully worded to prohibit any belief that was not Trinitarian and to strengthen the Trinitarian conceptions. No other views were allowed. St Augustine, a century later, developed this teaching into a doctrine of the Trinity, adding the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead, in which all three persons were separate personalities, all co-equal and co-eternal. To quote some of the creed: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and all things visible and invisible (so far so good HB) and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom are all things made..."

What do the Scriptures say about the begetting of Jesus? Matthew 1:20: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit." A literal translation of Luke 1:35 reads: "And the angel answered and said to her 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason the holy thing begotten shall be called the Son of God'" and Hebrews 1:5 quoting Psalm 2:7 states: "Thou art My son, today I have begotten Thee." The Scriptures do not say anywhere that Jesus was God, much less "very God of very God." He is always said to be, and he himself says it, the son of God. Should we really base our view of God on a doctrine that isn't spelled out in the Bible; that wasn't formalized until three centuries after the time of Christ and the Apostles; that has been debated and argued for decades; that was imposed by religious councils presided over by novices and quarreling Bishops; and a pagan Emperor who at the time had not actually been converted to Christianity?

Where did they get that? In the majority of churches today, from the traditional, the contemporary and the mega-church to the "fundamentalist Bible believing" variety, the Sunday morning "worship service" has been turned into an evangelistic service. Let's look at the Biblical pattern of evangelism and worship in the early church. The modern church's sincere efforts to evangelize the world and see the church grow have established a form of religion which is foreign to the teaching of Scripture on the purpose and conduct of the church. J. Harpe Gillis, professor of History at Grove City College, in an article in *Touchstone* magazine entitled *Mall Christianity* wrote: "There is no biblical warrant for turning Sunday worship into an evangelistic meeting."

The transformation of the main Sunday service actually began in the early nineteenth century. It was evangelist like Charles Finney and his successors who turned church worship into a revival meeting. In some respects 'seeker sensitive' advocates are simply extending the logic of this earlier innovation. The New Testament church did not show confusion about either the nature of evangelism or the proper setting. It did not provide 'excitements' other than the excitement of the Good News. The church gathered on the first day of the week to hear the word of God, for corporate prayer, and for the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42; 20:7). Significantly none of the evangelistic preaching in Acts occurs within the context of the church gathered for worship. To be sure, the early church was involved in aggressive evangelism, but it kept the gathering on Sunday for the edification of the faithful and for God's covenant people to praise the covenant God." His conclusions are borne out in I Corinthians 14:23, 24 where Paul shows it was unusual for an unbeliever or outsider to enter the place of worship. He states: "If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speaks in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say you are mad? But if all prophesy and an unbeliever or ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all; he is called into account by all." It would have been very unusual for an unbeliever to attend a Christian worship service in Paul's day. However, today most of the church's evangelism takes place by unbelievers being brought into the worship of the church. The result: the worship has been turned into an evangelistic service with most of the sermons and teaching being directed toward converting the unbeliever and most contemporary as well as traditional services are centered on the "needs" of "seekers" and non-believers. This, many times, neglects those already in the fold. This accounts for the immaturity of so many Christian people today.

In the book of Acts conversions took place in the open air meetings, in homes, on the highway, in the desert, in jails and prisons, by the riverside, in the market place and the synagogue. There is no record of unbelievers being converted in worship services. "Worship services" as we know them today were unknown to the early church. They met in homes and rented facilities. The pattern seems to be that the unbeliever is converted then brought to worship services not brought to worship services and then converted. Andre Resner wrote in *New Wineskins*: "Ever since the revivalistic camp meetings of nineteenth-century America, worship and evangelism have frequently been collapsed into one activity with a necessary confusion of what each is. When worship and evangelism are collapsed into the same activity, the net result is at least a distortion and at worst a loss of each."

Where did they get that? The popular (and sacred) belief that the soul is immortal and will never die. This popular sentiment is expressed in the very scholarly work entitled *Therefore Stand* by the late Dr. Wilber M. Smith. He writes: "Whether we believe that men have a body, soul and spirit, or simply a body and a soul, we will all agree that the soul of man never dies. The soul of Jesus did not die. Your mother and mine have not died; {they} are consciously alive, but their bodies have suffered death." Ezekiel 18:4 proves the soul does die. "The soul who sins will die" (NASV). Christ "poured out his soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12). The common belief is that man is made up of soul and body. Paul, however, states "and may your spirit, soul

and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thess. 5:23). This echoes the statement in Genesis 2:7: "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." This means man does not "have" a soul, he "is" a soul and has a spirit. The French theologian and scientist Arthur C. Custance in *The Seed of the Woman* stated: "many attempts have been made to distinguish between the terms *soul* and *spirit* as used in the Bible. The simplest summary statement is expressed most effectively in the observation that man *has* a body and *has* a spirit and *is* a soul. In effect the soul is the person, the individual, the whole of man. Unfortunately the theologians have not always respected this relationship and have spoken (and continues to speak) imprecisely, sometimes using the word *soul* where *spirit* is proper and sometimes *spirit* where the word *soul* would be more correct." In the *Jewish Encyclopedia's* article "Immortality of the Soul" we read: "The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is nowhere taught in Holy Scripture. The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principle exponent."

Where did they get that? The Rapture. (The word "rapture" means caught up). There are five basic teachings in the belief of a rapture. 1. All Christians will soon vanish from the earth and be taken into heaven in a secret rapture. 2. Seven years of terror will overtake those left behind. 3. One sinister man, the antichrist, will take over the world. 4. The antichrist will enter a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem claiming to be God. 5. The nations of the world will attack Israel in a battle of Armageddon. None of these five points is found in Scripture.

The "rapture" was not taught by the church until 1830. What brought it all about was a young Scottish girl, Margaret McDonald, went into a trance and described a vision in which she claimed to have seen the saints leaving the earth at the return of the Lord. Prior to this time the church, all the way back to the Apostles, had never preached an "escape rapture theory." It was from this the modern doctrine arose. A preacher by the name of Edward Irving preached the doctrine to the Plymouth Brethren where John Darby, along with three other preachers, Clarence Larkin, C.H. Mackintosh and C. I. Scofield (whose Bible notes popularized the new theory and is still relied upon today as proof of the rapture) endorsed his view. Darby and Scofield, along with Larkin and his charts, began to teach this new theory. In the early 1900's it reached a peak in popularity, and has been a part of the religious scene since. It is very popular among Fundamentalists and Prophecy preachers. The heretical *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye is a prime example. The term "rapture of the church" or "rapture of the saints" is not found in Scripture. In fact the word "rapture" never means the removal of Christians from the earth. The word for rapture is "harpazo" which means "snatch up" or to be "caught away" and is used 14 times in the New Testament, but never applied to the "snatching away of the church" as taught by Rapturists, although it is used one time in reference to the saints being caught up to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:13-17). Verse 17 says: "...we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." The saints are to "meet" the Lord in the air, not taken into heaven with him. *That is where they get the rapture.*