

PLAYING GAMES WITH WORDS

One of the ground rules of Biblical interpretation is that God has spoken to us in intelligent words. It is obvious that if God can mean white when He says black, the whole idea of the Bible as an intelligibly revelation to man is undermined and derailed. None of us could possibly know what God has said unless He uses words intelligibly. It is essential that God can communicate in terms we are capable of understanding, as Nigal Turner says in his book *Christian Words*: “The church today is concerned about communicating with the contemporary world and especially to speak in a new idiom. The language of the church had better be the language of the New Testament. To proclaim the gospel with new terminology is hazardous when much of the message and valuable overtones that are implicit in the New Testament are lost forever.”

In reviewing the book by Dr. Richard Rubenstein *When Jesus Became God* the subject of the kingdom is taken as an example of how the religious world has played so much with words. The subject of the Kingdom is a seriously missed and ignored basic doctrine of the revealed Word of God that isn't taught in today's churches. We have dealt many times in *The Living Waters Newsletter* noting that out of the many times the kingdom is mentioned in the Gospels and the book of Acts (over 125 times in the gospels and 8 times in Acts), yet the Kingdom is seldom mentioned in the modern pulpit. We are warned: “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the in teaching of Christ, has not God, the one who abides in his teaching has both the Father and the son” (1 Jn. 1:9). Why would a prominent preacher as the late D. James Kennedy write in *The Truth Notes*: ‘Many people today think the essence of Christianity is the teachings of Jesus, but that is not so?’ I have in my Library a book entitled *Knowing God* by Dr. Jim Packer who has a string of degrees after his name and is noted as being the author of several significant books. In *Knowing God* He has a 20-page chapter entitled “The Heart of the Gospel,” yet I could not find even one mention of the Kingdom of God, yet Jesus said, “I must preach the Kingdom of God, for I was sent for this purpose.” (Luke 4:43). We mention this to simply show that much preaching and writing today follows the example of Martin Luther, (who chose some books of the Bible and ignored others), by preaching and teaching some subjects while ignoring others. “When they had set a day for Paul, they came to his lodging in large numbers, and he was explaining to the testifying about the Kingdom of God to persuade them concerning Jesus from both the Law and the prophets” (Acts 28:23).

How could any Biblical writer write twenty pages on “The heart of the gospel” and not mention the Kingdom of God?

Playing games with words is nothing new. Kegan A Chandler in his book *The God of Jesus* quotes from Augustine, *Homilies of the Gospel of John*, Augustine took upon himself to change the text of John 17:3: “This is eternal life, that you might know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” to “The proper order of the words is: ‘That they might know Thee, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent as the only true God.’” Augustine in his quote used the same words John used, but he changes John's message by changing the order of the words and adding one extra word, the word: “as.”

In our opinion no passage of Scripture is more of an example of Biblical scholars playing games with words than Luke's record of Gabriel's announcement to Mary concerning the birth of Christ: Luke 2:35: “The angel answered her and said, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.’” Anthony Buzzard states in *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian*, that “this scripture is probably the most bypassed and neglected verse in the entire New Testament.” We list some examples taken from the texts and footnotes of Anthony Buzzard *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian* and Kagan A. Chandler *The God of Jesus*:

Dr. Charles Swindoll, chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary: “Do you see the child? What you are seeing is the incarnation---God dressed in diapers, long ago the son of God dove headfirst into time and floated along with us for 33 years. Imagine the Creator—God wrapped in swaddling clothes; God had come to earth.”

Dr. Jim Packer, whom we mentioned above: “The Word was made flesh, God became a man. The divine Son became a man, The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wiggle and make noises, needed to be fed and changed. If he is truly the Son of God, it is much more startling that he should die than he should live again. ‘Tis a mystery all, the immortal dies’ wrote John Wesley.”

Dave Hunt, in *Berean Call*: She (Mary) was the honored mother of Jesus Christ, but she was not the not the mother of the eternal Son of God who created the universe. She was not the mother of the Son of God.”

Charles Swindoll and Roy Suck, in *Understanding Christian Theology*: When the title “Son of God” is used of Christ, it has nothing to do with his birth to Mary, as the son of God he was not born; he was given.”

We close this subject with these words from Kegan Chandler's book *The God of Jesus*: "These problems reflect only a small sampling of the massive complications one produced for faith by saying that the God of the Bible turned Himself into a little baby. Yet this is the increasing practice of popular Christian voices such as Trinitarian Max Lucado. (Church of Christ preacher HB) named 'America's Pastor' by *Christianity Today* and 'The Best Preacher in America' by *Reader's Digest* writes: (what follows is an example of his writing):

"He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl. God as a fetus. Holliness sleeping in a womb. The creator of life being created, Angels watched as Mary changed God's diaper. The universe watched with wonder as the Creator learned to walk. Mary must have felt awkward teaching God how He made the worlds. When she prayed to God sleeping under her roof, she may have accidentally called her son 'Father.' God may have woken up from a bad dream, had drawn distant looks on his childish face as he silently listened to people's prayers. Jesus may have had pimples; he may have been tone-deaf. Perhaps the girl down the street had a crush on him or vice versa...The baby that Mary held in her arms was holding the universe in place."

To quote Kegan Chandler again: "This dogma is likely to be damaging, not only to Christian's personal concept of the Creator, but to the reputation of Christianity in the world. Inevitable speculations like Lucado's are bound to be welcomed by the mainstream community to tender sentiment of beauty that demonstrate the loving willingness of God to identify with His creation. However, they are only offensive and disturbing to adherents of the classic monotheism of the Bible like the Jews."

Perhaps the most overlooked passage in the Bible that illustrates the translators' games with words is John 14, translated as the believer's future home in heaven. The usual interpretation of John 14:1-3 affirms that these verses refer to heaven as the Father's house, Jesus is there now preparing a place for us which will consist of "many mansions" and He will someday come again and take us home to heaven. This passage is by and large one of the most popular texts of the Bible for funeral sermons. It has been the basis of both song and sermon to give comfort in the times of bereavement. As for songs how can we explain gospel singers who sing "I've Got a Mansion Just Over the Hilltop" then follow it with "Lord Build Me A Cabin in the Corner of Glory Land"? As to giving comfort to the grieving and questioning Disciples, how could a promise taking place thousands of years in the future be of any help to their troubled hearts?

Using Scripture to interpret Scripture let's take another look at this passage. To begin, nowhere in Scripture is it stated that heaven is the Father's house, yet the Father's house is clearly identified. In the Old Testament the temple is referred to as "the house of God" and Jesus refers to the temple as being "My Father's house" however no physical place is referred to as "the house of God" in

the New Testament. Hebrews 3:6: "Christ was faithful over His (God's) house, whose house we are." Hebrews 10:21: "...and we have a great priest over the house of God." Jesus is the high priest of the church. I Cor. 3:16: "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?" Ephesians 2:19, 22: "you are of God's household...you are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" I Timothy 3:15: "I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." The Father's house is the church. In His house are many "dwelling places" (KJV "mansions"). In verse 23 where Jesus says of those who love Him and keep His word, He and the Father will "come to him and make our abode with him." The word "abode" in this passage is the same as "mansion" or "dwelling place" in verse 2. At one time the Father had only one dwelling place on earth, His Son, now He has "many dwelling places," His church. Revelation 21:3: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold the tabernacle (dwelling place) of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.'"

"I go to prepare a place for you" (ver. 2). The place He prepared is not a place for us to live after we die, but a place for us to live now. Hebrews 9:12: "and not through ("taking" RSV) the blood of goats and calves, but through ("taking" RSV) His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all having obtained eternal redemption." We now have a place prepared for us in the holy place (heaven itself Heb. 9:24) so now we can "have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us" (Heb. 10). He has prepared a place for us in the very presence of God. We are now "sitting with Christ in the heavenlies" (Eph. 2:7). We have now access to all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3) in Christ. "I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am you may be there also (verse 3). He did not say he would receive them in heaven but "receive you unto myself." Did he come again? What did he say in verse 23 concerning the believer? "We (The Father and I) will come and make our abode with hm." The Greek word here "abode" is the same as the word "mansion" (dwelling place) in verse 2). He came as he said on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It is by the Holy Spirit that Jesus and the Father comes and makes their abode with us. This passage is not speaking of the second coming of the last day, but his coming in the Spirit to dwell in his body now. This would have been no comfort to his grieving Disciples were he speaking of an event thousands of years from them.

What causes misunderstanding of this chapter is that interpreters do not read the whole chapter. Notice verses 28 and 29: "You heard that said to you 'I go away and will come to you.'" He told them this in verse 3. "And I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to pass you may believe." Notice: *When it comes to pass you may believe.* How could they believe if it were to come to pass thousands of years beyond their lifetime? Christians should realize we do not have to die to be in the presence. of God, because we now have a place prepared for us in the real Holy of Holies. The Jews had associated the presence of God in the temple (just as today many associate the presence of God in a physical church building). Now in Jesus his Disciples had seen the ultimate of consciously dwelling in the presence of the Father and what he said in the beginning of the chapter meant that they too would have a dwelling place in the Father's house even as they had beheld him. His leaving would prepare a place for them (and us) to live in the presence of God in the Holy place not made with hands. SELAH