

A Critique of the Word of the Kingdom teaching

Outlining three critical objections

By Mark Adams

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Addressing the great controversy of his day, the apostle Paul wrote, “Yet having come to see that it is not by works done in obedience to the law but by faith in Jesus Christ that a man is accepted as righteous, we, too, have learned to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be accepted as righteous because of our faith in Christ, not because of works done in obedience to law” (Gal. 2:16)¹. The influx of Gentiles into Christianity brought to bear the single greatest issue of the faith: the mode by which people are saved. A sect of believers, called the circumcision party, argued Gentiles must become Jews, that males must undergo circumcision. Observance of the law was also necessary, they argued, for Christ had taught that “not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”²

The so-called Gentile question had been forced on the Church by divine mandate. Peter, without direction or authority from the elders, preached the good news to a Roman citizen named Cornelius, a centurion by trade. He extended the hand of fellowship to Gentiles, baptizing the soldier and his household. When called upon to explain his actions, Peter replied, “Well then, if God made them the very gift as he made us when we came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, and what power did I have, to stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:17).³ The gift of the Spirit was the sure sign that God embraced Gentiles in his plan of salvation. Further, as the Spirit was given before water baptism or even circumcision (which was never administered) no doubt remained.

“When they heard this, they kept their peace, extolling God in these words: ‘This is how it is, then: the Gentiles, too, have received from God the gift of life-giving repentance’” (vs. 18).

That the Gentile mission should have caused disputes among the first Christians is something of a mystery. Jesus received Gentiles. His own encounter with a centurion prompted this observation, “Indeed, I can give you solemn assurance of this. I have not found faith as great as this in anyone in Israel” (Matt. 8:10). By this pronouncement, Jesus affirmed that Jew and Greek would be saved in the same manner. Wonderfully compact, this teaching expresses in a sentence or two what men in later ages would achieve in long treatises. Peter affirmed Christ’s words, saying, “The truth is that we are convinced that we shall obtain our salvation in precisely the same way as they will: through the gracious favour bestowed by the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11).

At the council of Jerusalem, the apostles and elders agreed that they should not “trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God” (vs. 19). The mission to the Gentiles had been established by God and according to his plan. Acceptance was to be unconditional. Consequently, as the number of non-Jews increased, transforming Christianity from a distinctly Jewish faith to a distinctly catholic⁴ faith, the hope of salvation for Jews ever increased (cf. Rom. 11:11-36). The redemptive histories of Jew and Gentile are inextricably tied.

The circumcision party dissented. They broke fellowship. They disrupted church meetings. They even persuaded some to abandon the faith.

By inspiration of the Spirit, the apostle Paul provided yet another witness – the same witness that would move Augustine to faith and inspire Martin Luther to grace. Citing a passage from Habakkuk, Paul declared, “The righteous shall live by faith.”⁵ Christ, he taught, was the end or *fulfillment* of the law. What men failed to achieve by obedience to the law, Jesus achieved in his death and Christians by faith in the finished work of Cross. Paul rejected, abhorred, and condemned anything that diminished the glory of the Cross.

His stance was so absolute, some mistook his meaning. If by grace *only*, they answered, one is free to continue in sin. Paul’s denunciation was immediate. “How can we who died to sin still live in it?”⁶ No, freedom from the law did not imply freedom to sin. “Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:13-14). Scripture teaches us that we are to speak and act as those under the

law of liberty⁷, compelled by grace to walk in the works which God laid down for us at the foundation of the world. This is the Gospel of Grace.

The other gospel, which Paul mentions in Galatians, is called “Christ plus” by modern scholars. *Christ-plus* diminishes the Gospel of Grace by interposing further requirements for righteousness. In the earliest days of the church, the Christ-plus model *du jour* was *Christ plus circumcision*, *Christ plus law*. Insidiously, these things do not appear to diminish the Gospel of Grace. Only, by adding to the gospel, Jesus is reduced. Soon, the Christ-plus gospel reveals that though Jesus’ work is finished, ours is not. This slight of hand did not fool Paul who knew that this was inherently a contradiction in terms. A work could not be finished and yet unfinished. It was one or the other. To the Ephesians, he explained: “And indeed, it is by grace that you have been saved, with faith as its instrument. It is not anything coming from ourselves; it was God’s gift. And it is not the result of works performed by us, so that there should be no reason for boasting on anyone’s part. For we are God’s handiwork, created as men who have their being in Christ Jesus, in order that we should give ourselves up to the performance of good works which God has prepared beforehand, so that we might enjoy our lives in the doing of them.”⁸

Evangelicals recognize only the Gospel of Grace – grace apart from works. Any gospel predicated upon works of man is a false gospel. Are we commanded to work? Emphatically, yes. Are we commanded to love one another? Yes. Do these works, or does this love save us? Most emphatically, no. The greatest a man can do on earth is the least he can do before God in heaven. That, fundamentally, is the chief objection to the Christ-plus model.

The Word of the Kingdom

A dispute has arisen between evangelicals and advocates for a teaching called the Word of the Kingdom.⁹ The “Kingdom” perspective, as it is sometimes known, is a form of dispensational theology that maintains one aspect of salvation is by works. The Word of the Kingdom accepts salvation by grace, but limits grace to a single aspect of a person’s being: the spirit. The salvation of the soul is “works-based”.¹⁰ This doctrine is maintained by a wide array of dispensational theologians whose disparate understandings can be, at times, bewildering. The form described in this critique emanates from Cornerstone Christian Fellowship in Jacksonville, Florida, its pastor John Herbert, and the teachings of Arlen L. Chitwood and Cindy Ziegler.

The purpose of this critique is not to condemn, but demonstrate how the Word of the Kingdom departs from traditional evangelical Christianity. The hope is not that evangelicals should prevail, but that Christ prevail over all. As such, the door to further discussion is not closed, but open.

This critique consists of three critical objections¹¹:

1. The Word of the Kingdom advocates salvation by works;
2. Leaders and lay leaders of the Word of the Kingdom have broken fellowship with evangelicals, and have condemned, out of hand, all Christians who reject their doctrine;
3. The Word of the Kingdom alters the meaning of scripture through faulty methods of biblical interpretation.

First objection – *Salvation by works*

Advocates for the Word of the Kingdom teach that man is tripartite, consisting of spirit, soul and body, and further, that the soul is saved by works. The first claim is not wholly supportable, and the second, plainly unscriptural. The combination of these ideas constitutes the principal objection to the Word of the Kingdom teaching.

The threefold view of man is actually quite common among religious and secular authorities. In antiquity, Socrates envisioned humans as possessing triune souls, which he allegorized through the depiction of a chariot.¹² The driver represented man’s rational aspect, a white horse his moral aspect, and a dark horse his passions. (Later, Freud would construe these as id, ego and superego.) Christian authorities include the body in their understanding of man, as all things (material and nonmaterial) are God-made and thus good at

their origin. Gnostics, however, adopted the Platonic view, teaching that the world was the product of an evil demigod. This heresy was condemned by the early church (cf. 1 John 5:1-12), and represented a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of the physical world. The orthodox Christian view is that man is physical and non-physical.

That man has several aspects is evident in scripture. In some instances, Paul says “body and spirit” (cf. 1 Cor. 7:34 and 2 Cor. 7:1), representing a bipartite view of man. In other instances, Paul says “spirit, soul and body” – *once* – in 1 Thess. 5:23, representing the tripartite view of man. The unknown author of Hebrews depicts humans as having “joints and marrow” and “spirit and soul,” representing two aspects of man (Heb. 4:12-13). In the gospels, Jesus appears to adopt a fourfold view of man, commanding us to worship God with “all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37, cf. Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27 add “with all your strength”). The question is *do any of these instances, or all, constitute an explicit teaching on the being of man?* Or, is something else in view?

Note that the *wholeness* of man is emphasized in each passage:

1. “You should love the Lord your God with *all*...” (Matt. 22:37).
2. “Let us cleanse ourselves from *every* defilement...” (2 Cor. 7:1).
3. “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you *completely*, and may your *whole* spirit and soul and body be kept blameless...” (1 Thess. 5:23).
4. “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but *all* are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13).

If Paul or Jesus or the author of Hebrews intended to convey an explicit teaching on the various aspects of man, they might have done so. As it is, it is difficult to derive from these passages a specific doctrine about man’s being. This is not to say that a study on this topic is irrelevant, but to state dogmatically one thing or the other is not useful. Perhaps the solution rests in viewing man as having several aspects, not expressly defined in scripture, and that the work of salvation is comprehensive, *affecting the whole person*.

Leon Morris, in his commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, writes: “Paul is not at this point giving a theoretical description of the nature of the human constitution, but engaging in prayer. We can no more take his words here to mean that our nature is threefold than we can take some of his words elsewhere to indicate that we are twofold (body and spirit, 1 Cor. 7:34), or those of Jesus in Mark 12:30 to show that we are fourfold (heart, soul, mind, and strength). Paul simply uses this graphic form by way of insisting that the whole person, and not some party only, is involved. All our powers of whatever sort are to be sanctified, entirely set apart for God. This totality is brought out in another fashion in that the verb ‘kept’ and the adjective ‘entire’ are both singular, though they clearly are intended to apply to all three.”¹³

The simple point is that one cannot state dogmatically man is tripartite any more than one can say he is bipartite. To base a doctrine on the testimony of one verse, variously interpreted, is extraordinary.

Advocates for the “Kingdom” perspective demur. They point out that 1 Thess. 5:23 expressly states that man has three parts: spirit, soul and body. Further, they maintain Heb. 4:12 is a tripartite reference – “joints and marrow” equaling one thing (the body) and “spirit and soul” indicating separate things.¹⁴ The passages in first and second Corinthians do not describe *being* at all. In those instances, spirit is employed in the same sense as *attitude*. This view is not objectionable, but insubstantial. Advocates for the Word of the Kingdom necessarily interpret man as a tripartite being because they hold there are three works of salvation, not because it is expressly stated in scripture.

This critique centers on the so-called second work of salvation, and as the other two works of salvation are less problematic, they are not discussed in this analysis.

Soul salvation, as it is called, is novel. It runs counter to centuries of Protestant thought and also the plain meaning of scripture. The idea that one part of a man is saved by grace and that another is saved by works is exceptional. *There is no direct reference to soul salvation in scripture*. It is possible, however, to string together an array of Bible passages, provide an interpretation of that array, and claim the soul is saved by works, but this method reduces scripture to a series of proof texts (discussed in the third objection).

Advocates for the Word of the Kingdom cannot demonstrate that such a thing as “soul salvation” exists in scripture.

Another gospel?

Kingdom-believers view salvation as a successive work. A person is saved eternally when they come to faith in Christ. This is *spirit salvation* or salvation by grace. Salvation of the soul is earned, and constitutes a sort of second act of grace. It is “works-based.” Finally, a person receives a new body at the resurrection and after the millennial rule of Christ. According to the teaching, soul salvation is determined by a Christian’s faithfulness to the purposes of the kingdom. The unfaithful or non-overcoming *Christian* will be cast into the lake of fire for one thousand years. Thus, through fire, he too will receive soul salvation. Advocates for the Word of the Kingdom assert that while soul salvation is “works-based,” these works are “motivated by the love of Christ and faith in God’s word.”¹⁵

There are profound difficulties in this presentation of salvation. For example, how is a deceased Christian to rule with Christ or else to suffer 1,000 years of punishment? Is his body to be resurrected at the start of the millennial period and then resurrected again at the rapture? Or does the soul exist apart from the body during the millennial period? Note: Redemption of the body is placed directly after the 1,000-year rule. Answers in reply are so varied and complex no single explanation suffices.

Cornerstone Christian Fellowship of Jacksonville, Florida, offers this statement regarding the three works of salvation¹⁶:

We believe that Man is a tripartite being – Spirit, Soul and Body – and that Christ's finished work on the cross has provided for the redemption of all three parts of Man's being. Redemption has always been provided through death and shed blood.

- *The free gift of eternal life relates to the spirit and is secure and irreversible and is completely apart from works.*
- *The salvation of the soul will be realized at the Judgment Seat of Christ and is determined by works. This salvation may be gained or lost and is millennial and not eternal in scope.*
- *The body will be transformed from corruptible to incorruptible at the resurrection/rapture. Those realizing the salvation of their soul will have a body covered with glory.*

The Christ-plus dimension of this teaching is problematic. The “finished work” of the cross is yet “determined by works” of man? Advocates for Word of the Kingdom circumvent this difficulty by distinguishing between the salvation of the spirit (grace) and salvation of the soul (works). Further, these works “must be motivated by the love of Christ and faith in God’s Word or they are void.”¹⁷ But, unless this motivation is irresistible (as in Calvinism) these works emanate from man, not God, and Paul states that nothing “coming from ourselves” saves a man. Simply relegating these works to one aspect of a person’s being does not diminish the objection.

Lay leaders play an important role in the dissemination of the “Kingdom” teaching, so I include in this critique an analysis of a handout entitled, “Basic Tenets of the ‘Kingdom’ Perspective,” which is circulating in the mountain community of Los Gatos, California.¹⁸ It provides three possible references to soul salvation: Matt. 7:21-23, James 2:17, and Col. 3:23-25, none of which actually mentions the soul. Kingdom-believers argue those references must certainly apply to the soul and what follows is basically Word of the Kingdom dogma. Tautologies of this sort are frustrating. Not having established that there is such a thing as soul salvation, apologists for the “Kingdom” perspective “fit” together a vast array of scripture to demonstrate their point.

Insisting that soul salvation is implicitly meant is no substitute for the plain meaning of scripture, and critics are justified in insisting upon at least one direct reference.

Evangelicals maintain that salvation is comprehensive, that the whole person (body, spirit and soul) is affected by the finished work of Christ, including the “past, present and future” aspects of human existence.

A scripture reference in the “Basic Tenets of the ‘Kingdom’ Perspective” makes this very point. The handout states that man is “born ‘dead’ and needs redemption (salvation) of all three parts.” Romans 5:12 is given to affirm this tenet. What’s interesting is that Paul goes on to say that salvation is a single act, not three successive ones. “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so *one act* of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (Rom. 5:18). One cannot conclude from the plain meaning of scripture that God redeems “all three parts differently and at different times,” as the handout claims.

Let’s assume, for the purposes of discussion, that “works-based” salvation is scriptural. What are these works? Depending on which document one reads, these works are all or one of the following: good deeds, faithfulness to God in tasks given us, abstaining from immorality, or commitment to the Word of the Kingdom. Apart from the last (which is self-serving), none of these ideas is objectionable. That any of these merits favor from God is unscriptural. Further, there is a question – *unanswerable* – as to what happens when a person fails in even one instance. Advocates for the Word of the Kingdom explain that only God knows who is faithful, but that statement suggests human judgment and runs contrary to the explicit teaching of scripture. What does scripture say? *To fail God in even one instance is to fail him completely* (cf. James 2:10). Does Word of the Kingdom excuse even the smallest act of faithlessness? Rationally and scripturally, I cannot think of one justification. If soul salvation is “works-based,” we all stand rightly condemned, and none, except the sinless, will reign with Christ in the millennial rule. (Some say that it is only unconfessed sin that will be judged in this situation. They cite 1 John 1:9 in support of this claim. But, again, soul salvation is never mentioned in these references.) “Works-based” salvation is simply not contemplated in scripture.

Had Paul distinguished between works of the law and works “motivated” by grace – *as modes of salvation* – Word of the Kingdom would have something to recommend it. But Paul demolishes the idea that any deed from man can earn him favor in God’s eyes. Two things are always true in Paul’s writings: works do not save, and works are expected. Intellectually, this may seem a contradiction, but for Paul, no such contradiction exists. Faith and works constitute a reality, not a theological dilemma. “Indeed, it is God himself who is at work within you, as regards both will and deed, in pursuit of his gracious design” (Phil. 2:13). The general Protestant view is that God will complete his work through grace, not human effort.

Second objection – *Rejection of the Body*

Early in the seventeenth century in Augsburg, a Lutheran pastor named Peter Meiderlin wrote, “We would be in the best shape if we kept in essentials, Unity; in non-essentials, Liberty; and in both, Charity.”¹⁹ Evangelicals and advocates for the Word of the Kingdom disagree on key points of the gospel, but this should not deter us from moving toward reconciliation. The process begins with love. Unhappily, “Kingdom” apologists actively condemn non-kingdom-believing Christians and reject, out of hand, fellowship with other believers. Rejection of fellow believers is categorical.

Pastor John Herbert of Cornerstone Christian Fellowship taught the following, January 2005²⁰:

“Can I tell you this morning that no work other than that which is done in Boaz’s field is of any value whatsoever. Anything that is done outside of Boaz’s field is wood, hay and straw, and it will be burnt up. But we notice the progression of what we have seen here. We must determine to make this journey. We must determine to be obedient to the Word of God. We must be determined to do everything that it says, and then we start to work in Boaz’s field. Because as we begin to do this word, take it, use it, allow it to change us, see what it says and be faithfully obedient to it, we cannot help but start dying to self, we cannot not help but crucify our flesh, you can’t be obedient to this word and live in the flesh. It’s just not possible.

“And do we find there? (Ruth 2:8.) Then Boaz said to Ruth, ‘You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Will you not? You will listen. Will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here but stay close by my young women.’ We better stick around those who know something of the Kingdom and what they are talking about. Don’t go running off with any old body, just because we like the look of them. Praise the Lord.

“The scripture says we should not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. Can I tell you that’s not talking about a non-Christian. It’s talking about somebody who doesn’t get this, who’s not interested in this. They’re the unbelievers. And we are not to be unequally yoked with them. We need people around us who can support us and encourage us in this.”

Followers of the Word of the Kingdom are plainly taught that fellowship with non-kingdom-believing *Christians*, brothers and sisters purchased by the same blood of Christ, is unscriptural. To embrace Herbert’s gospel is to declare anathema brothers and sisters who do not hold to the Word of the Kingdom. These brothers and sisters, Herbert teaches, are in darkness. They are more vial than Belial. They are unclean.

One might say, in reply, that’s just John – he’s impassioned. However, a defense of this sort overlooks the severity of his comments. He is emphatic: kingdom-believing Christians should have nothing to do with non-kingdom-believing Christians. If one embraces the Word of the Kingdom, one must cut fellowship with the unbeliever.

Rejection of world-wide Christianity emanates from every echelon of leadership in the Kingdom movement. This rejection is consequentially linked to the assertion that some Christians will be cast into outer darkness for an “age-lasting” punishment. Cornerstone Christian Fellowship maintains that “the Bride of Christ will be taken from the body of Christ – not all Christians will constitute the Bride.”²¹ In the “Basic Tenets of the ‘Kingdom’ Perspective,” the ninth tenet states: “Those [Christians] who have not borne fruit will suffer loss and be consigned to ‘outer darkness’ for the duration of the 1,000 year kingdom.” Effectively, one must believe in the Word of the Kingdom to be wholly saved, and apart from *Kingdom* work, there is nothing that pleases God, only “wood, hay and straw – and it will be burnt up.” This position is called millennial exclusivism.

Arlen L. Chitwood, chief apologist for the Word of the Kingdom, warns of “dire consequences.” Non-kingdom-believing Christians are not only ignorant, he maintains, they are provoking God’s wrath through obstinacy. He takes particular aim at Christian leaders, be they pastors or Sunday school teachers. “And, bringing all of this down into Christendom, the religious leaders of today who are misleading the people relative to the proffered kingdom of the heavens will be condemned for exactly the same reason Christ condemned the religious leaders in Israel,” Chitwood writes. “Condemnation, after this fashion, will not result from fundamentalism, legalism, liberalism, or political ambitions within the present kingdom. None of these things even enters into the matter in relation to that which is in view. Rather, condemnation will result from *their having closed the door to the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Christians.*”²² Note the word *condemnation*. Non-kingdom-believing Christians will stand condemned before their God at the judgment.

He maintains that “numerous Christians – having been misled by their religious leaders – will be out of favor with God and will be set aside.”²³

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I am writing to you who believe in the Word of the Kingdom or who are investigating this teaching. Is this the gospel you first heard? Is it the one preached by Paul? Did the apostle really say that non-kingdom-believing Christians are *unbelievers*? *Partners with lawlessness*? *Worshippers of idols*?²⁴ Or, are these statements the vitriol of belligerent men who are determined to disrupt the fellowship of the Body of Christ? Wherever this teaching is taught, there is division. How can it be otherwise? Can a brother say to his sister, “Depart from me. I never knew you,” and still expect there to be a bond of peace?

Consider this excerpt from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*: “Judgement is evil because it is itself apostasy, and that is also the reason why it brings forth evil fruit in the human heart. It cannot, of course, be denied that from the psychological point of view extremely noble motives may also be disclosed as determining the thought of the man who judges, but this fact can have no bearing on the character of

judgement itself. ‘Judging’ is not a special vice or wickedness of the disunited man; it is his essence, manifesting itself in his speech, his action and his sentiment.”²⁵

James, the brother and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, also warned against passing judgment on ones brother. “The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?” (James 4:11-12). To excuse Herbert or Chitwood as enthusiastic is to gloss over the unjustness of their position.

It is the fervent desire of Christians everywhere to maintain unity in Christ, but not at any cost and not at the expense of a brother or sister whose faith may be weakened by this assault *from the Kingdom*. Blanket condemnations damage the Body of Christ. His body, having been broken once, and his blood, having been shed once, is for all who call upon his name, not only for those who preach the so-called “proffered kingdom.”

In fashioning this critique, I have no other judgment to offer than this. Bonhoeffer writes: “Jesus Christ’s judgement consisted precisely in His having come not to condemn but to save; ‘And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world’ (John 3:19. cf. verses 17 and 18), and likewise men who are reconciled with God and man in Christ will judge all things, as men who do not judge, and will know all things as men who do not know good and evil [but good *only*]. Their judgement will consist in brotherly help, in lifting up the falling and in showing the way to the straying, in exhortation and in consolation (Gal. 6; Matt. 18:15ff.), and also if the need arises, in a temporary suspension of fellowship, but in such a manner that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5). It will be a judgement of reconciliation...”²⁶

Third objection – Methodology

Advocates for the Word of the Kingdom are apt to say they seek the “whole counsel of scripture,” but often their methodology reduces scripture to a series of proof texts. A proof text is a passage taken out of its immediate context for the purpose of establishing a theological point. Generally, the idea comes first. Then, that notion is applied to scripture. Finally, select passages (now “proofs”) are used to interpret other portions of scripture. What results, generally, is an interpretation that departs from the plain meaning of scripture, and it is comprehensible only to those who know the system. Leaders and lay leaders of the Kingdom movement apply this method constantly. If what they say seems new or different, it is.

“Basic Tenets of the ‘Kingdom’ Perspective” is representative of this approach. Here are several examples:

1. Regarding *spirit salvation*: “This salvation has always been based on death and shed blood. Prior to Christ’s crucifixion it was based on faith in the passover lambs. 1 Cor. 5:7, Ex. 12:13-14”

The connection between these passages rests on the mention of the Passover lambs. In 1 Corinthians, Paul calls Jesus our Passover lamb, but he observes nothing about Passover prior to the crucifixion. That faith in Passover lambs saved Jews in antiquity is an interposition of a foreign idea. Exodus 12:13-14 merely recounts the Passover narrative; it does not describe “spirit salvation” for the Jews. Such a thing is simply not found in scripture – anywhere – and, most decidedly, not in these verses.

This interpretation ignores explicit teachings found elsewhere in scripture. For example, Hebrews 11:1-2 states: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. *For by it people of old received their commendation.*” Here, faith is the means of salvation, faith in the future sacrifice of Christ, not faith in the Passover lambs. What was promised then was held back because “apart from us they should not be made perfect” (vs. 40). But now that the perfect sacrifice has been made, these saints can receive what was promised *or had received what was promised* (cf. Heb. 11:19). There are not different modes of salvation.

2. Regarding soul salvation: “[Salvation by fruits] is a ‘works-based’ salvation, but these works must be motivated by the love of Christ and faith in God’s Word or they are void. Matt. 7:21-23, James 2:17, Col. 3:23-25”

First, none of the writers of the NT say we are saved by works. Not even James makes this claim. What James says is that “faith apart from works is dead.” He does not say “works apart from faith are dead,” as suggested in the handout (cf. James 2:26). Justification that comes by works is *belief*, and to demonstrate this point, James turns to Abraham. The father of the nations freely offered his son as a living sacrifice because he believed God could raise Isaac from the dead. According to Hebrews – the only other New Testament text to mention the binding of Isaac – Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac because “he considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead” (Heb. 11:19). So, as James interprets this event, Abraham acted on what he believed God would do: Faith was active alongside works.

Despite what appears to be a dispute between Paul and James (cf. James 2:21 and Romans 4:2), modern scholars acknowledge very different things are contemplated. Paul is speaking of works of the law, while James is discussing *faith* that is demonstrated by good deeds. It’s interesting to observe that while both Paul and James quote Genesis 15:6 – “And Abraham believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” – James states that the scripture “*was fulfilled*,” as if to suggest the credit of righteousness had some future view (cf. James 2:22-23).

This said, none of the references supplied in the handout even mentions the soul.

3. Regarding the ruler of the world: “Satan was the ruler of the original Earth, before the creation of man. Ezek. 28:13-14” & “Jesus Christ is not currently ruling. Psalm 110:1, John 14:30”

Ezekiel 28 never mentions Satan. The lamentation is addressed to the king of Tyre (cf. vs. 12). Neither is it said that Satan ruled Eden or the so-called original earth. The only way to assert kingship is to accept that it is addressed to a king, and in this case, the king of Tyre. Scripture never mentions that Satan ruled anything before the creation of man.

The further claim that Jesus is not currently ruling is heretical. First, the “until I make your enemies your footstool” clause has been fulfilled (cf. Acts 2:33 – “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God” – and vs. 36 – “God has made him both Lord and Christ”). Second, that Satan rules over earth in no way negates the authority of the Godhead. Let me offer this clear example: King Herod was indeed the ruler of Judea, but he ruled entirely at the pleasure of Rome, a point which Herod well understood.²⁷ Satan may be a ruler, and there may be principalities and powers, but God’s rule over all things is absolute. Even in his ministry, Jesus had authority to cast out demons and rebuke Satan. That Christ yielded himself to the cross was an act of obedience to the Father, not Satan.

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Interpreters of scripture must guard against the proof-text method. At the same time, they should not treat scripture as a series of unconnected, unrelated ideas. What is required is a basis for comparing passages. In this study, I quite readily compared a passage from Hebrews to a passage in James, and I feel the comparison is justified for the following reasons:

- a. These are the only New Testament passages to mention the binding of Isaac and in both passages faith is the subject.
- b. Both passages also mention Rahab. On the surface of things this point is unimportant, but in nearly every document of the early church, canonical or otherwise, a reference to the binding of Isaac is followed by a reference to Rahab. These were recognized as types of the resurrection.²⁸

One of the claims leaders of “Kingdom” theology make is that they allow scripture to interpret itself. According to Cornerstone Christian Fellowship, “Scripture is its own commentary and its own interpreter.” But in practice, these leaders regularly interpose ideas that are not present in scripture. Further, the idea that scripture is its own commentary is not precisely true. Scholars necessarily employ commentaries in order to understand the meaning of a given term in the context of a given passage. Chitwood, Herbert and Zeigler all employ word commentaries in their teachings. That scripture is its own interpreter, i.e. the sole interpreter, is unfounded.

Theology is “thinking God’s thoughts after him,” as an old professor of theology once taught, not a series of proof texts. We are commanded to hear, understand and believe, but not interpose. Nor is any interpretation of scripture the domain of a single group or body. “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

Conclusion

This critique centered on the role of works in a person’s life. The issue is not whether Word of the Kingdom *work* equals works of the law, but whether the teaching represents the Gospel of Grace. Here are the chief points of this critique:

1. The tripartite view of man cannot be asserted dogmatically
2. Soul salvation is never mentioned in scripture
3. The condemnation of the church universal undermines the moral integrity of the teaching
4. The use of proof texts introduces foreign ideas into scripture

No authority exists that allows one to add a doctrine of works to the gospel, even if that teaching is applied to only one aspect of a three-fold being. Christ possesses all. What unfortunately begins as a desire to please God devolves into fruitless works and even crassness. Word of the Kingdom simply does not represent the Gospel of Grace. Inasmuch as that is true, works espoused by this teaching do, in one sense, constitute works of the law. Herbert and Chitwood do not command believers to be circumcised or to observe obedience to the Mosaic Law, but they do command works (however construed as works motivated by grace). Essentially, what Herbert and Chitwood preach *is* salvation by works of the law, for it is something “coming from ourselves.”

Postscript

Anyone desiring to comment on this critique is encouraged to do so at Agabus.com or by e-mail to the author at netadams@gmail.com. For permission to copy, redistribute or reproduce this critique, please e-mail.

End Notes

¹ All scriptures are from the English Standard Version, except Gal. 2:16, Acts 11:17-18, Matt. 8:10, Acts 15:11, Eph. 2:8-10, Phil. 2:13, which are from Heinz W. Cassirer’s “God’s New Covenant: A New Testament Translation.”

² Matt. 5:18.

³ This assertion, that Gentiles received grace the same way Jews did, effectively united Jews and Gentiles into one body.

⁴ This term is employed in the classic sense. *Catholic* means universal; used in this paper, it does not denote a particular denomination.

⁵ Rom. 1:17, cf. Hab. 2:4

⁶ Rom. 6:2

⁷ Cf. James 2:12.

⁸ Ephesians 2:8-10

⁹ “Word of the Kingdom” seems to be the appropriate name for this teaching, as it is employed by its proponents (cf. *Run to Win*, p. viii).

¹⁰ The phrase, “works-based” salvation, is employed in “Basic Tenets of the ‘Kingdom’ Perspective” – a handout outlining the principles of the Word of the Kingdom. The same idea and phrasing is found in other documents, too.

¹¹ If anyone wishes to discuss this critique or question its claims, he or she may contact me via e-mail (netadams@gmail.com) or through my blog (<http://agabus.com>).

¹² Plato's *Republic*.

¹³ Page 182.

¹⁴ The inconsistent treatment of the pairs, "spirit and soul" and "joints and marrow," belies this view.

¹⁵ Cf. "Basic Tenets of the 'Kingdom' Perspective"

¹⁶ "Statement of Faith," <http://www.cornerstonejacksonville.com/about/statementOfFaith.php>

¹⁷ "Basic Tenets of the 'Kingdom' Perspective," third tenet.

¹⁸ Controversy over this doctrine in my own community prompted this critique.

¹⁹ "In Essentials Unity: The pre-history and history of a restoration movement slogan,"

<http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/unitas/essrev.html>

²⁰ Audio recording from a Word of the Kingdom seminar.

²¹ "Statement of Faith," <http://www.cornerstonejacksonville.com/about/statementOfFaith.php>

²² "Woe Unto You"

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Herbert cites 2 Cor. 6.

²⁵ Page 36.

²⁶ Pages 36 and 37.

²⁷ *The Life and Times of Herod the Great*, by Stewart Perowne, is a good read on this subject.

²⁸ Mark Adams, senior thesis, 1997.

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My research also included interviews conducted by e-mail with the following Kingdom advocates: Sam Ennis, <http://webpages.charter.net/ennisland/ennisland/> (relating to doctrinal points) & Roel Velema, <http://xs4all.nl> (for biographical information on Arlen L. Chitwood and questions relating to doctrinal points).