

Unbelieving Believers?

Why is it that most Christians today hold on to ideas that are clearly contrary to the plain teaching of the Lord Jesus?

Take for example the generally held view that the dead are already in heaven or hell, whereas Jesus taught that the only life beyond the grave must await the day of resurrection. Four times in John 6:39-54 Jesus says of those who believe in Him, *"I will raise him up at the last day"*. The Jews had no expectation of being in heaven as soon as they died. When Lazarus died his sister Martha said to Jesus *"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day"* (John 11:24). Again in John 14:3 Jesus said to his disciples, *"I will come again and receive you unto myself"* He did not say *"you will die and come to me"*.

But, most Christians protest, Jesus said to the dying thief *"I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise"* Well, if that *is* what Jesus said then it contradicts everything else that he taught; there must be a better understanding of it; There is, and it is very simple. Written Greek does not use punctuation marks, they are put there by the translators of our English versions according to their understanding of the text. In this case the comma is simply misplaced. The verse should read, *"I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise"*, 'today' relating to when the promise was made not to when it will be fulfilled. This simple explanation removes any apparent contradictions in the teaching of the Lord. When Christ's kingdom is eventually set up on earth the repentant thief will definitely be in it as the Lord promised.

Another passage often referred to is that of the rich man and Lazarus recorded in Luke ch. 16. This passage is worthy of a book of its own but here a brief synopsis will have to suffice. This story, if taken literally, raises many questions, e.g., 'What or where is Abraham's bosom?' We never read of it anywhere else in Scripture. 'Can the dead in Hades really see and converse with saints in heaven and get answers?' 'Will the rich be damned and the poor saved?' 'Can the dead in heaven see their loved ones suffering in hell?' That doesn't sound much like heaven to me. Who would want to go from a place of bliss to a place of torments, as the passage suggests?

All these things are found, not in scripture, but in the Pharisees own rabbinical writings called, *The Talmud*, and in fact have their origins in the ancient pagan religions of Egypt and Babylon. Josephus, the first century historian, a Pharisee himself, also writes in his *History of the Jews* of supposed conditions in hades.

Jesus in this narrative in Luke 16 is using the Pharisees traditional beliefs to show to them the folly and error of their own teachings. This is why He finishes His discourse with the words *"They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."* The Lord referring of course to the Old Testament Scriptures.

The whole passage is prophetic and parabolic and shows that the Pharisees, represented by the rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, speaking figuratively of their position of rulers and religious leaders of Israel, a combination which was strictly forbidden under law, were so covetous and greedy they had total disregard for the poor among them. In fact their greed was so great the Lord challenged them for breaking the fifth commandment, because they would not even help their parents when they were in need (Matt. 15:1-6). The beggar represented this needy class, and the dogs, referring to gentiles, were often

more considerate to poor Jews than they were, even though the law of Moses demanded that they were to be kind and benevolent.

Angels carrying anyone to heaven was a figment of their Talmudic writings and not a word of such a thing is to be found in our Bibles neither does Scripture anywhere refer to a place with two compartments separated by a great gulf.

Just as He had confronted them in Luke 14 about their pride and in Luke 15 about their self righteousness, the Lord is here in chapter 16 chastising them for their false views and teachings on the after life. Interestingly instead of realising the error of the Pharisees, their erroneous views are being perpetuated by preachers and ministers today.

The main focus of this article is on the teachings of the Lord Jesus but we must not ignore what is one of the most misquoted verses in Scripture. We are frequently told that Paul said "*absent from the body, present with the Lord*". That is *not* what Paul said. Read it again. 2 Cor. 5:8 "*. . . to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*". To see this passage in its proper context you need to read from v.14 of the previous chapter. You will see that the subject Paul is addressing is that of resurrection and the coming of the Lord, when He shall "*. . . change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body . . .*" (Phil. 3:20,21). Paul knew that after death, though centuries may have intervened, his next conscious moment would be in the Lord's presence. There is nothing whatsoever here about dying and going to heaven immediately.

Let's now go back to what Jesus said, after all, if we cannot accept His word on the matter we need hardly dwell on what Paul had to say. In Luke 20:27-40. Jesus is confronted by the Saducees regarding resurrection. Bear in mind that the Saducees did not believe in resurrection, but they did profess to believe the books of Moses.

In vs. 34-36 Jesus quickly answers their hypothetical question and then immediately gets to the heart of the matter, the subject of resurrection. He goes on to explain that Moses believed in resurrection. He refers to the incident at the burning bush and to avoid any confusion the Lord says "*Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord, The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.*" (37,38). Jesus was certainly not teaching here that these Old Testament saints were still alive in some other realm, but rather that since God is going to raise them to life again they are alive unto Him. Otherwise Jesus argument would not in any way have proved resurrection. This answer given by Jesus was powerful enough to shut the mouths of these ungodly men "*for after that they durst not ask Him any question at all.*"

Today we present the same argument, the same logic and reasoning that the Lord used, amazingly we are not trying to convince unbelieving Saducees or sceptical Pharisees, no, we are trying to convince the Lord's own people, those who profess to believe Him and to love and serve Him, and yet openly contradict what He clearly taught on this subject. Unbelieving believers indeed!

In conclusion I submit that no genuine believer in Christ can in any way assert that the dead are anywhere other than in the grave awaiting resurrection.

