



The
Root
Problem
with
“Progressive
Christianity”
is

**Self-
Righteousness**

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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Preface

Throughout human history, there have always been people – seemingly, a majority - who do not receive God’s inspired written words as truth, or His Spirit as life. Scripture describes these people as being “futile in their speculations”¹ which “exalt themselves against the knowledge of God”². They are “darkened in their understanding”³, and put forth “philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ”⁴. Rather than petitioning the Holy Spirit to help them pursue the mysteries of God in the scriptures, they *move off the ground of truth* and fabricate human interpretations of the things of God.

Along with missing out on eternal life, there are a number of other sad and unfortunate things about this: These people may call themselves Christians and believe that they are Christians. They may be sincerely

¹ Romans 1:21

² 2 Corinthians 10:5

³ Ephesians 4:18

⁴ Colossians 2:8

motivated, or at least as sincere as any of us fallen creatures can be. They are often very intelligent people. They may be very loving people. They may be family members and friends. The people I am referring to in this article are known as “Progressive Christians” – religious Progressives.

Introduction

While it is more commonly known as “*Progressive Christianity*”, in this article, I will be referring to it as a “religion” as it does not represent authentic biblical Christianity. The purpose of this article is to establish why I believe it is a true to state that Progressive Christianity is not authentic biblical Christianity.

To begin, we need to define the subject matter. By its very nature, character, tenets, and practices, this religion embraces Progressive politics. Therefore, I believe defining Progressive Christianity in terms of how it intersects with Progressive politics is an accurate way to introduce our subject matter.

Religious and political progressivism intersect primarily with their common focus on the issues of social justice, the marginalized, and inclusivity in society. Religious Progressives view political activism as an outworking of one’s faith. Consequently, religious Progressives advocate for political parties and governmental policies

and programs which are concerned with social justice, the marginalized, and inclusivity in society.

Often citing parts of the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament and some of the teachings of Christ in the gospels, religious Progressives endeavor to procure political means to work towards social and economic justice in society.

Also, modeling Old Testament prophets, religious Progressives endeavor to *“speak truth to power”*, focusing on “systemic inequality”. These things mimic the rhetoric and activities of progressive politics which also seeks to use government enforced legislation to address poverty, health care, inequality, discrimination, and immigration.

Emphases of progressive religion are diversity and inclusivity focusing on what are considered “marginalized” identities and groups in society. With an emphasis on *“love one another”*, politically, this

translates into advocating for the rights of racial and sexual minorities.

Progressive religion also concerns itself with the stewardship of the creation. Politically, this aligns with “Climate Change” and Environmental agendas and efforts.

Historically, religious Progressives were dedicated to peace-making, non-militarism, and non-violence. This remains to be true for only certain groups today.⁵ Generally speaking, religious Progressives no longer refrain from discord and violence but are identified with what is called a “Cancel Culture”, as well as public demonstrations which often morph into rioting and political violence. The connection with progressive political emphases on peaceful, non-violent, diplomatic solutions no longer is a tenet of progressive religion in general.

⁵ Primarily denominations rooted in the Anabaptist tradition, like the Amish, Mennonites, Hutterites, and also Quakers and Brethren.

Religious Progressives see political activism as the main vehicle for systemic change and reform in institutions and society. Research suggests that **religious Progressives tend to be engaged in *a broader range of political issues*** than religious Conservatives.⁶

Historically religious Progressives have stood for “separation of Church and State”. It is true that many – maybe most - religious Conservatives are seen as wanting a return to a connection between Church and State in that they believe America’s Constitution was founded on Christian principles, a “Manifest Destiny”, “American Exceptionalism”, and is therefore “a Christian Nation”. I have written extensively why I believe these perspectives and “Christian Nationalism” is a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Kingdom of God.⁷ But the fact is, religious Progressives

⁶ Center for American Progress (2008), “On the Left and Right, Activists are Driven by Religious Convictions” (2009), and Public Religions Research Institute’s Economic Values Survey (2013).

⁷ [*“The Way of God & The Way of Humanity”*](#), [*“IN the World, But Not OF the World”*](#), [*“How Does God Govern Fallen Humanity?”*](#), [*“Church, Culture, & The Ekklesia”*](#), [*“Do Not Be Entangled”*](#).

are likewise guilty of the very same merging of Church and State in their political pursuits of enforced legislation, political policies, and government programs in accord with their particular religious and political preferences and emphases. Suffice to say here, God's Heavenly Kingdom which Jesus of Nazareth and His apostles preached is a Third Way essentially and altogether different from *both* "Progressive Christianity" and "Christian Nationalism".

Missing the Atonement

A Case Study – Walter Rauschenbusch

Hopefully the **Introduction** will suffice for an initial definition of Progressive Religion. But now, let's look at the roots of Progressive Religion in order to get more insight into its nature, character, tenets, and practices.

Most likely a very intelligent and loving person, I think the man named Walter Rauschenbusch may be a good example or case in point of someone whom I believe *moved off the ground of truth*, rejected the inerrancy of the scriptures⁸, rejected the biblical efficacy of the atonement⁹, and in the end, fabricated a human interpretation of the things of God, which became known as “The Social Gospel”. Because I have befriended a number of religious Progressives, I have been interested enough to do some research on this

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inerrancy_of_the_Bible In this message, I will be footnoting links to articles on Wikipedia. My purpose here is to simply and briefly provide a convenient overview of a term or topic. In no way do I consider Wikipedia the “final authority” on a subject, nor do I necessarily subscribe to all that is posted there. Regarding any term or topic mentioned in this message, I recommend further personal research and study.

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atonement_in_Christianity

man who was a key figure in the Social Gospel movement in the USA.

Rauschenbusch lived in the late 1800s and early 1900s¹⁰ – a postmillennial¹¹ season in church history prior to World War 1. Like many other theologians at this time (as well as now) he most likely found resonance with particular theologians from earlier in church history. A prime example would be Peter Abelard (1079-1142) who proposed what became to be known as his *Moral Influence Theory*.¹² In a nutshell, this atonement theory states that *Christ died to influence humanity toward moral improvement*. This theory denies that Christ died to satisfy any principle of divine justice but teaches instead that His death was designed to greatly influence mankind with a sense of God's love, resulting in softening their hearts and leading them to repentance. **Thus, the Atonement is not directed towards God with the purpose of satisfying His**

¹⁰ Rauschenbusch was born on October 4, 1861 in Rochester, New York (my hometown) and died July 25, 1918.

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmillennialism>

¹² See Addendum: Historical Theories of the Atonement

righteousness, but towards human beings with the purpose of influencing them towards a just and moral society.

Abelard's *Moral Influence Theory*, along with Charles Sheldon's "Christian Socialism" and novel, *"What Would Jesus Do"* (1891), were significant influences on Walter Rauschenbusch. At age 17 he experienced a personal religious conversion, but later felt that this experience was incomplete, as it focused on repentance from personal sins but not from social sins. Rauschenbusch later wrote: *"Because the Kingdom of God has been dropped as the primary and comprehensive aim of Christianity, and personal salvation has been substituted for it, therefore men seek to save their own souls and are selfishly indifferent to the evangelization of the world."*

When he attended Rochester Theological Seminary, now called Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School¹³ where his father was a professor, Walter's earlier

¹³ This school, located in Rochester, New York (my hometown), was originally founded in 1850, and is today a bastion of progressive theology known for its propagation of feminist views, support for the ordination of women, as well as its affirmation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender ministers.

beliefs were challenged. He learned of the Higher Criticism¹⁴, which led him to later comment that his *"inherited ideas about the inerrancy of the Bible became untenable."* **He also began to doubt the substitutionary atonement**; in his words, *"it was not taught by Jesus; it makes salvation dependent upon a trinitarian transaction that is remote from human experience; and it implies a concept of divine justice that is repugnant to human sensitivity."*

One can see that Rauschenbusch was intelligent and motivated by love for Humanity. His formative ministry experiences played on these traits and served to draw him in a particular theological direction, particularly with regards to the Atonement and the Kingdom: *"In the 1880s Walter Rauschenbusch was a Baptist pastor in the Hell's Kitchen district of New York City, where he served a poor, hurting, immigrant congregation and where he converted to the social gospel. His searing encounter with urban poverty, especially the funerals that he performed for children, drove him to political activism and a social-progressive understanding of Christianity."*

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_Criticism

“Rauschenbusch had preached the liberal idea, derived from Albrecht Ritschl¹⁵, of Christianity as an ellipse with two centers: eternal life as the goal of individual existence and the kingdom of God as the goal of humanity. The old pietism and the social-ethical Jesus of modern theology folded together. But while in Germany in 1891, it occurred to Rauschenbusch that Jesus had one center, the kingdom of God. Jesus proclaimed and launched a postmillennial idea of the coming reign of God; and the church was supposed to be a new kind of community that transformed the world by the power of Christ’s kingdom-bringing Spirit.”¹⁶

In 1907, he wrote the classic, *Christianity, and the Social Crisis*, and in his *Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917), he wrote that for John the Baptist, the baptism was “not a ritual act of individual salvation but **an act of dedication to a religious and social movement.**”

Rauschenbusch defined sin as betrayal of the bonds of care among human beings. He believed that the root of sin is not rebellious refusal to obey God, but a deep-seated selfishness. He saw selfishness as more than a personal failing – it was a transpersonal evil,

¹⁵ A German theologian (1822-1889)

¹⁶ *Rauschenbusch's Christianity and the Social Crisis* by Gary Dorrien
<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3501>

institutionalized in social systems that benefit some individuals while exploiting and oppressing many others.¹⁷

As a consequence of his theological evolution, Rauschenbusch did not view Jesus' death as an act of substitutionary atonement but in his words, he died "*to substitute love for selfishness as the basis of human society.*"¹⁸ This perspective, in turn, shaped his understanding of the kingdom. As I said, this is a good example or case in point of *moving off the ground of truth* and fabricating human interpretations of the things of God.

¹⁷ Rauschenbusch also devoted considerable effort to explicating the problem of evil, which he saw embodied not in individuals, but in "suprapersonal entities", which were socio-economic and political institutions. He found four major loci of suprapersonal evil: militarism, individualism, capitalism and nationalism. To these he juxtaposed four institutional embodiments of good: pacifism, collectivism, socialism and internationalism.

¹⁸ He cited these six "social sins" which according to him, Jesus bore on the Cross: Religious bigotry, the combination of graft and political power, the corruption of justice, the mob spirit (being "the social group gone mad") and mob action, militarism, and class contempt.

The Mysteries of God

People may label themselves as “Christian”; and they may be intelligent, sincerely motivated, and loving; but the simple and harsh reality is this: What is not Biblical is not Christian. If one rejects the Canon of Scripture as the inerrant written word of God, one is also rejecting the Author of those scriptures – the Holy Spirit.

According to the apostle Paul, when we are merely “natural” and not “spiritual”,¹⁹ and are not grounded in the scriptures, we will be subject to “every wind of doctrine”²⁰, even “doctrines of demons”²¹.

Edith Stein (1891-1942), a German, Jewish philosopher who converted to Christianity, made this statement:
*“The Christian mysteries are an indivisible whole...If we become immersed in one, we are led to all the others...from the crib to the Cross.”*²²

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 2

²⁰ Ephesians 4:14

²¹ 1 Timothy 4:1. Cf. [*“Deconstruction, deconversion, & the Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”*](#).

²² *The Writings of Edith Stein*, p.31. Please note: I find this a useful quote; but do not necessarily identify with all of Edith Stein’s perspectives on the Christian mysteries.

When we look into the mystery of the Incarnation which took place at the birth of Christ, we are led to the mystery of the Atonement which took place at His crucifixion on the Cross.

The mystery of the Incarnation is that which John referred to in his gospel.²³ It is “the mystery of Christ” which Paul referred to in his epistles²⁴, and more specifically, “the mystery of godliness”:

“And without controversy
great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.”
1 Timothy 3:16 NKJV

In the verse just before this, Paul referred to “the household of God”, “the Church of the Living God” as “the pillar and the ground of truth”. Then in this verse

²³ John 1:1, 14

²⁴ Colossians 2:2; 4:3 and Ephesians 3:4

he gives us a summary of that truth – “God was manifested in the flesh....”

In addition to the many psalms in the Old Testament, there are canticles recorded in the gospels²⁵. And along with the “spiritual songs”²⁶ Paul refers to in his epistles (which were likely spontaneously improvised songs²⁷), there are also hymns recorded in his epistles which the early Church used to sing – rehearsing the foundational doctrines of Christ in their gatherings.²⁸ This passage in 1 Timothy 3:16 is an example of such a hymn.²⁹

Now, when Paul wrote the words, “without controversy”, he certainly was not saying that this mystery had not created controversy – for it certainly had created much controversy. What he was saying is this: *“There’s no argument here – we must confess that the mystery of godliness is very profound.”* Or in different

²⁵ Luke 1:46-55; Luke 1:68-79; Luke 2:14; Luke 2:29-32

²⁶ Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19-20.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:32

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:26; Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19-20.

²⁹ Other New Testament hymns: Ephesians 5:14; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:3.

words: *“We must admit, we can see how the mystery of godliness would be extremely difficult for non-Christians to accept.”* This sentiment comes through in J.B. Phillips translation in Modern English: “No one would deny that this religion of ours is a tremendous mystery, resting as it does on the One Who showed Himself as a human being.”

For a certainty, the idea that God became a human being and then was crucified on a cross for the atonement of sin was very difficult to embrace by many in the first century, throughout church history, and still today. John’s gospel opens with these statements: “In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God.... And the Logos became a human being....”³⁰ The concept of Logos as the mind and message of God was not and still is not at all controversial; it is, in fact, widely accepted under

³⁰ John 1:1 and 14 specify that the Word became flesh – a human being. Later at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) it was further specified that in taking humanity upon Himself, Christ did not experience a loss of His divine nature in any way but continued to be fully God as He was fully human and lived a truly human life. (The doctrine of the hypostatic union) This was necessarily specified in order to address Gnostic heresies challenging the humanity of Christ.

various names by various philosophies and religions³¹. But the idea of the Logos having to be born a Human Being, always has and still is resisted and rejected except by Biblical Christianity. And that is a primary goal of this article: To define those aspects of the mysteries of the Incarnation and Atonement which makes Biblical Christianity distinct from all other forms of philosophies and religions, including those which freely use the label of “Christian”, but are in fact, not biblical and therefore not authentically “Christian”.

³¹ The Hebraic concept of “wisdom” is equivalent to the Greek concept of “logos”. Philo, a Greek-speaking Jew in Alexandria, Egypt, utilized the Greek term “logos” in his definition of God and exploration of the connections between Platonic philosophy and Judaism.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philo's_view_of_God#The_Logos Some examples of the concept of “logos” embraced by other non-Christian philosophies and religions are: Higher consciousness of [Yoga](#), Objective consciousness ([Gurdjieff](#)), Buddha consciousness of [Theosophy](#), Cosmic consciousness or [God-consciousness](#) of [Islam](#) and [Hinduism](#), Christ consciousness of [Christian Mysticism](#). Other examples can be found in a Glossary of New Thought terms: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_New_Thought_terms

The Incarnation – Atonement Connection

The issues being investigated here can be voiced with the following questions³²:

- *“Couldn’t the logos just be a message to be communicated in a variety of formats - why did it have to become a human?”*
- *“Couldn’t the Christ have been a spirit being like an angelic messenger, or a spirit guide, or a spiritual force like ‘Christ Consciousness’ - why did the Christ have to be born as a human being?”*
- *“Couldn’t the one mediator between God and man had been an angel - why did it have to be the Man, Christ Jesus?”³³*
- *“Couldn’t the availability of the ‘Christ Consciousness’ have been the ‘good news’ - why did Paul insist on the gospel being ‘Christ crucified’?”³⁴*

The message of the Cross is that Jesus was crucified to atone for the sins of humanity, which, by the way, is based on the presuppositions of both Sin and the Fall. If from the first century up to today most people find the

³² I have also addressed these issues in my book, [“The Spirit of the World”](#), Part 2: “Do Not Believe Every Spirit”.

³³ 1 Timothy 2:5

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:3

message of the Cross to be either an offense or foolishness, why does Paul insist that it is, in fact, “the power and wisdom of God”?³⁵

It is impossible to understand the mysteries of God without the written words of God and their Author, the Spirit of God. An insufficient biblical understanding of the Incarnation will lead to an unbiblical understanding of the Atonement. Let’s look at some “Incarnational” scriptures with a view to seeing how they relate to the Atonement. What will emerge clearly is that “the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world”³⁶ was born to die.

“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” 1 John 4:2-3

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:18, 24

³⁶ Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8

From these verses, we see that the spirit of the Antichrist attacks the Incarnation, that is, the humanity of the Christ, and has been doing this since the birth of Christ³⁷, during the days of the Early Church³⁸ and throughout church history, even to the present.

The Church is called to preach the gospel – in words and deeds. Paul tells us that “God has committed to us the word of reconciliation”,³⁹ but people are, in fact, reconciled to God only as Paul said: **“in (Christ’s) fleshly body through (His) death”**.⁴⁰ Not even the

³⁷ Matthew 2:16-17

³⁸ An example is **Gnosticism** (from the Greek: *gnosis* meaning *knowledge*.), a philosophic movement influenced by the Greek mystery religions that challenged Biblical Christianity with teachings of the need for special spiritual enlightenment, and a mis-guided emphasis on the spiritual realm with a view that the material realm was evil. The Canon of Scripture was developed out of necessity as the response of the early church to the various Gnostic heresies. John’s 1st Epistle was written to address the roots of these Gnostic heresies which were influencing some in the Church: viz. The view that the Christ had not come in the flesh – as a human being. Because the Gnostics had a problem with the humanity of Christ i.e. that He had come in the flesh – as a human being, they devised various heresies to explain away His humanity. e.g. *Docetism* (from the Greek: *dokein* meaning *to seem*.) was a teaching which held that Christ only *seemed* to have a genuine body of flesh and to suffer and die. Another theory suggested that the Christ, who was spirit, took *on* the body of Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21) shortly before he was crucified.

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:19

⁴⁰ Colossians 1:22

death of a martyr, or a Gandhi, or a Martin Luther King Jr. can reconcile someone to God.

And Peter concurs when he tells us that the Christ “suffered in the flesh”⁴¹, and was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.” – that is, He “died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God.”⁴² Only the death and resurrection of Christ bring people to God. The good works of Christians, no matter how moral or “sacrificial” will never bring anyone to God. A line from a song of the sons of Korah says: “No man can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him.” David sang: “Salvation belongs to the Lord.”⁴³ And God has ordained that salvation be affected only by the birth and death of Christ – the Incarnation and the Atonement of the Cross.

“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.” Romans 8:3

⁴¹ 1 Peter 4:1

⁴² 1 Peter 3:18

⁴³ Psalm 3:8

This verse tells us how God ordained to deal with the Problem of Sin: The verse mentions the word “flesh” three times. As the Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson, explains: *“He condemned the sin of men, and the condemnation took place in the flesh of Jesus.”* The sin was Humanity’s sin, for Jesus was without sin.⁴⁴ The sin was in Humanity, but the condemnation was in the fleshly body of Jesus.⁴⁵ The Christ had to become human in order to take on the condemnation of sin in His human body. God overcame sin through the Incarnation and the Atonement of the Cross.

The following verses describe the High Priest God ordained for that sacrifice:

¹⁷ “He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (Hebrews

⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁴⁵ Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 784

2:17-18)¹⁴ "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:14-15

The High Priest God ordained for this sacrifice had to be both the Son of God and the Son of Man in order to perfectly fulfill His unique ministry.⁴⁶

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin⁴⁷ on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Corinthians 5:21

In "the righteousness of God",⁴⁸ only One who was both fully God and fully human could pay the price for Humanity's sin. Only a human being, like ourselves, who was tempted with sin, yet without sin, could both identify with the human condition yet also provide a solution to the human condition.

⁴⁶ Matthew 3:15

⁴⁷ 1 Peter 2:22

⁴⁸ Romans 1:17; 3:22; Philippians 3:9

His Kingdom & His Righteousness

Many who are sincerely motivated to work for the betterment of the human condition and alleviate human suffering site Jesus' words, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...", saying that the kingdom of God is a kingdom in which exists justice, equal opportunity, human rights, freedom from poverty, etc.

"His Kingdom"

But, what *on this earth* – not in the "new heavens and new earth"⁴⁹ - but what *on this earth* is this kingdom? This is what Jesus said about His kingdom:

"²⁰Now He was questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, and He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs that can be observed; ²¹nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.' ²²And He said to the disciples, 'The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³And they will say to you, 'Look there,' or 'Look

⁴⁹ Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13

here!’ Do not leave, and do not run after them. ²⁴For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day.’” Luke 17:20-24

Basically, Jesus said to the Pharisees that His kingdom is invisible, at least on this present earth – “no signs to be observed”. It is not limited to a physical location – “not here, and not there”. Yet he was also said to the Pharisees the kingdom is here and visible because He Himself was there and visible. Unfortunately, they *did not* recognize Him as the Christ of the kingdom. But He also said to His disciples, who *did* recognize Him as the Christ of the kingdom, that when the time came that He was no longer on the earth, they again wouldn’t be able to visibly see the kingdom – implying they would have to look “within” their hearts. Interestingly, Greek scholars are divided down the middle with regards to whether the statement should be translated “The kingdom of God is **in your midst**.”⁵⁰ Or “The kingdom of God is **within you**.”⁵¹ However this particular

⁵⁰ F.B. Meyer and Robert Trench, *New American Standard Version*

⁵¹ F.F. Bruce and A.T. Robertson, *New International Version*

passage should be translated, taking Scripture as a whole, both aspects are true of the kingdom of God.

Jesus said the kingdom had come because He, the King, was in their midst, yet, except for the Romans, everyone else lived in a world full of injustice and human suffering. If **“righteousness”** is a just and moral human society, it was not seen on the earth even when **Christ Jesus was here**. In this age, He said that **“His kingdom is not of this world”, “not from here”, “not of this realm”**⁵² - **it is a spiritual kingdom existing in the hearts of His true disciples.**

“His Righteousness”

But what does the Lord mean by **“His righteousness”**? The biblical understanding of **“righteousness”** is rooted in terms of covenants and relationships, that is, *what God does* in fulfillment of the terms of the covenant that He establishes with His people.⁵³ This is summed up in the declaration: **“The Lord our righteousness.”**⁵⁴ The

⁵² John 18:36

⁵³ 2 Chronicles 12:6; Psalm 7:9; Jeremiah 9:24; Daniel 9:14

⁵⁴ Jeremiah 23:6

heart of New Testament teaching about righteousness is the New Covenant concept of “the righteousness of God”.⁵⁵ These are the things Paul taught: “The righteousness of God is the righteousness which comes through faith in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁶ “Faith is credited as righteousness.”⁵⁷ And, “the righteous shall live by faith.”⁵⁸

The “righteousness of God” – “the righteousness that comes from God”⁵⁹ is being in right-relationship with God through faith in the Jesus Christ – that is, faith in His Incarnation and Atonement on the Cross.⁶⁰ A “righteousness” that doesn’t acknowledge sin, and the need for Atonement of Sin is not “His righteousness”.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Matthew 6:33; Acts 17:31; Romans 1:17; Ephesians 4:24; James 1:20

⁵⁶ Romans 3:22

⁵⁷ Romans 4:4; James 2:23

⁵⁸ Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11

⁵⁹ Romans 1:17; 3:22; Philippians 3:9

⁶⁰ 1 Peter 2:24

⁶¹ Such is the case with of the first and second centuries, as well as its re-emergence throughout the centuries, even today in the New Age movement. Because the early Gnostics viewed the material realm as being evil, some of their teachings asserted that sin is not a moral failing but a problem arising from the mixing of the spiritual and material realms. (*The Gospel of Mary*) It may be that those who left the Johannine community valued the spiritual realm and despised the material realm in such a way that it led them to lay all their emphasis on the heavenly Christ rather than the human Jesus. A misguided emphasis on the spiritual, led them to believe that salvation was being set free from the evil material realm, ultimate redemption would do away with the material realm, it

We cannot have peace with God without coming into right-relationship with God through faith in Christ.⁶² In the same way, neither can there be the “shalom” of world peace with a just and moral society without coming into right-relationship with God through faith in Christ, the Prince of Peace⁶³.

Isaiah prophesied:

¹⁵ Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high¹⁷ And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness, and confidence forever. ¹⁸ Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation, and in secure dwellings and in undisturbed resting places. Isaiah 32:15, 17-18

I do believe that in “the new heavens and new earth” “righteousness will dwell” in the sense of a just and moral society. But as Peter explains, that will be after

therefore didn’t really matter how they behaved in this material realm, and that whatever they did in their bodies could not be considered sinful. A modern-day example of a sect that holds to and practices this teaching is the *New Apostolic Church*. Indeed, in a Gnostic document it is stated that “we have not sinned”. (*Second Treatise of the Great Seth*) In his epistle, John addressed exactly this perspective: I John 1:8-10

⁶² Romans 5:1

⁶³ Isaiah 9:6

“the heavens pass away, being destroyed by burning”, and after “the elements are destroyed by melting with intense heat”, and after “the earth and its works are burned up” – in other words not on this present earth.⁶⁴

People may be sincerely motivated to work towards a just and moral human society, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that motivation, as long as we realize that these human efforts do not establish the kingdom of God. If we say, “*This is the kingdom of God.*”, we are not only deceiving ourselves, but also others – giving them “a different gospel”, leading them to believe they actually have the kingdom and the righteousness. That is not only spiritually dangerous, but also blasphemous in that it denies Christ’s Incarnation and Atonement for sin through the death of His human body on the Cross. I use the word “denies” in that it would render these mysteries redundant. And that denial is what the apostle John identified as the spirit of error and the spirit of the anti-Christ.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ 2 Peter 3:10-13

⁶⁵ 1 John 4:1-3

“That is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason, God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false.” 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11

There are two reasons why people “believe what is false”:

- 1) “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ”⁶⁶ ... and he is able to do so because ...
- 2) they love something more than the Truth – specifically, pride in their own righteousness.

This is exactly what caused most of Israel to reject Jesus as the Messiah the first time He came to earth. They didn’t understand the mystery of the Incarnation. And the mystery of the Cross was an offense.

⁶⁶ 2 Corinthians 2:4

The gospel of the kingdom is that through Christ's Incarnation and Atonement on the Cross, "God demonstrated *His* righteousness"⁶⁷, not that Humanity can demonstrate our righteousness here on this earth. Those who would establish a kingdom on this present earth by their own righteousness seek a city whose builder and maker is Humanity. That is Babylon.⁶⁸ But those who "confess that they are strangers and exiles on this earth" – "those of whom the world is not worthy" – "say such things making it clear that they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Romans 3:25-26

⁶⁸ Genesis 11; Revelation 14-18

⁶⁹ Hebrews 11:13-16 and v. 38

Addendum

Theories of the Atonement

The Incarnation, by God's design leads to The Atonement, which in turn has implications regarding His Righteousness and His Kingdom. Each of these mysteries warrants its own exposition. But at the center of this "equation" is the Atonement. As I mined the treasury of Scripture in the writing of this article, it seemed that the main vein I found myself excavating was that of the Atonement. So, I thought it would be good to include as an Addendum the development of the theories of the Atonement throughout church history. What follows is a slightly edited version of [*"The Atonement of Christ"*](#) from Theopedia.com The editors of Theopedia are from a Calvinistic background, but their article maintains an objectivity which would also accommodate the Arminian perspective of "Unlimited Atonement". (See "The Extent of The Atonement" below.)

Historic Theories

- **The Ransom Theory:** The earliest of all, originating with the Early Church Fathers, this theory claims that Christ offered himself as a ransom (Mark 10:45). Where it was not clear was in its understanding of exactly to whom the ransom was paid. Many early church fathers viewed the ransom as being paid to Satan.
- **The Recapitulation Theory:** Originated with Irenaeus (125-202 AD). He sees Christ as the new Adam, who systematically *undoes* what Adam did. Thus, where Adam was disobedient concerning God's edict concerning the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Christ was obedient even to death on the wood of a tree. Irenaeus is the first to draw comparisons between Eve and Mary, contrasting the faithlessness of the former with the faithfulness of the latter. In addition to reversing the wrongs done by Adam, Irenaeus thinks of Christ as "recapitulating" or "summing up" human life.⁷⁰
- **The Satisfaction (or Commercial) Theory:** The formulator of this theory was the medieval theologian

⁷⁰ http://www.theopedia.com/Recapitulation_theory_of_atonement

Anselm of Canterbury (1034-1109), in his book, *Cur Deus Homo* (lit. *Why the God Man*). In his view, God's offended honor and dignity could only be satisfied by the sacrifice of the Godman, Jesus Christ. "Anselm offered compelling biblical evidence that the atonement was not a ransom paid by God to the devil but rather a debt paid to God on behalf of sinners." Anselm's work established a foundation for the Protestant Reformation, specifically the understanding of justification by faith.⁷¹

- **The Penal-Substitution Theory:** This view was formulated by the 16th century Reformers as an extension of Anselm's Satisfaction theory. Anselm's theory was correct in introducing the satisfaction aspect of Christ's work and its necessity; however, the Reformers saw it as insufficient because it was referenced to God's honor rather than his justice and holiness and was couched more in terms of a commercial transaction than a penal substitution. This Reformed view says simply that Christ died for man, in man's place, taking his sins and bearing them for him.

⁷¹ http://www.theopedia.com/Satisfaction_theory_of_the_atonement

The bearing of man's sins takes the punishment for them and sets the believer free from the penal demands of the law: The righteousness of the law and the holiness of God are satisfied by this substitution.

- **The Moral-Example Theory (or Moral-Influence Theory):** Christ died to influence mankind toward moral improvement. This theory denies that Christ died to satisfy any principle of divine justice but teaches instead that His death was designed to greatly impress mankind with a sense of God's love, resulting in softening their hearts and leading them to repentance. Thus, the Atonement is not directed towards God with the purpose of maintaining His justice, but towards man with the purpose of persuading him to right action. Formulated by Peter Abelard (1079-1142) partially in reaction against Anselm's *Satisfaction theory*, this view was held by the 16th century Socinians. Versions of it can be found later in F. D. E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Horace Bushnell (1802-1876).⁷²
- **The Governmental Theory:** God made Christ an example of suffering to exhibit to erring man that sin is

⁷² http://www.theopedia.com/Moral_Influence_theory_of_atonement

displeasing to him. God's moral government of the world made it necessary for him to evince his wrath against sin in Christ. Christ died as a token of God's displeasure toward sin, and it was accepted by God as sufficient; but actually, God does not exact strict justice. This view was formulated by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and is subsequently found in Arminianism, Charles Finney, the New England Theology of Jonathan Edwards (the younger), and Methodism.⁷³

Modern Theories

- **The Declaratory Theory:** A version of the Moral Influence theory, wherein Christ died to show men how greatly God loves them. This view held by Albrecht Ritschl (1822-89).
- **The Guaranty Theory:** Reconciliation is based not on Christ's expiation of sin, but on His guaranty to win followers and thus conquer human sinfulness. This view held by J. C. K. von Hofmann (1810-77).

⁷³ http://www.theopedia.com/Governmental_theory_of_atonement

- **The Vicarious Repentance Theory:** by John McLeod Campbell (d. 1872). It assumes that a perfect repentance is sufficient to atone for sin. In his death, Christ entered into the Father's condemnation of sin, condemned sin, and by this, confessed it.
- **The 'Christus Victor' or Dramatic Theory:** by G. E. H. Aulén (1879-1977). The atonement is viewed as divine conflict and victory over the hostile powers that hold humanity in subjection. This is a modified form of the classic Ransom theory with the emphasis on Christ's victory over evil.⁷⁴
- **The Accident Theory:** Christ's death was an accident, as unforeseen and unexpected as that of any other victim of man's hatred. This view is usually found outside of mainstream Christianity.
- **The Martyr Theory:** Christ gave up His life for a principle of truth that was opposed to the spirit of His day. This view is usually found outside of mainstream Christianity.

⁷⁴ http://www.theopedia.com/Christus_Victor

The Sufficiency of Christ's Person and His Atoning Death

The deity of Christ establishes the infinite intrinsic value of his person. Since Jesus Christ is the Godman, truly God and truly man, his death is also of infinite intrinsic value and all-sufficient as a sacrifice. The book of Hebrews clearly says that the sufficiency of Christ's death negated the need for additional sacrifices. The biblical word translated *once for all* (Greek *ephapax* in Rom. 6:10; Heb. 9:26, 28; 10:10) is clearly a contrast with the Old Testament yearly sacrifice on the Day of Atonement and declares the complete sufficiency of Christ's death.

The infinite intrinsic value and all-sufficiency of Christ's death is a doctrine maintained in the Reformed tradition. The Canons of Dort formulated at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), state: This death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sins, of infinite value and worth, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole

world. This death is of such great value and worth because the person who submitted to it is not only a true and perfectly holy man, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for these qualifications were necessary for our Savior. Further, this death is of such great value and worth because it was accompanied by a sense of the wrath and curse of God, which we by our sins had deserved, (Second Head, Articles 3 & 4). John Owen (1616-1683) echoes the same position, "It was then the purpose and intention of God that his Son should offer a sacrifice of infinite worth, value, and dignity, sufficient *in itself* for the redeeming of all and every man, if it had pleased the Lord to employ it to that purpose. . . . Sufficient we say, then, was the sacrifice of Christ for the redemption of the whole world, and for the expiation of all the sins of all and every man in the world," (*Works*, vol. 10, pp. 295, 296).

The Extent of The Atonement

Did Christ intend to accomplish redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation for every man? Did He intend to make salvation possible for all men?

Calvinism: The design of the atonement was to redeem the elect. i.e. “Limited Atonement”.⁷⁵

Arminianism: The design of the atonement was to make all men savable. i.e. “Unlimited Atonement”.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ http://www.theopedia.com/Definite_atonement

⁷⁶ http://www.theopedia.com/Universal_atonement

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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