

ALL YOU HERETICS SHOULD BE BURNED!

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Do you remember the occasion when “the sons of Thunder” --- James and John --- wanted Jesus “to call down fire” upon some Samaritan folk who “did not receive him” (Luke 9:51-55)?

Burn them up! Consume them! How dare these half-breeds reject Israel’s Messiah like this. James and John were incensed. They imagined their zeal was godly. Perhaps they thought they were acting with the same zeal Elijah displayed when he called down fire from heaven and consumed some insolent and disrespectful men who doubted he was a true prophet of the God of Israel(2 Kings 1)? Perhaps it is more likely they imagined that Jesus’ going up to Jerusalem would mean the inauguration of the glorious Kingdom of God when all Israel’s enemies would be judged, put in their place, so why not display a little of that ‘holy fire’ in advance?

Yes, Jesus was “steadfastly” setting his face to ascend up to Jerusalem. In fact, there must have been something quite unnerving about Jesus’ demeanour as Calvary’s cross loomed large. Luke records that Jesus, “steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” but the Greek text indicates that Jesus actually “steeled his face”.¹ Perhaps it was Jesus’ steely resolve that emboldened this fiery call from the sons of Thunder?

Now, it is true that Jesus knew the natural temperament of these brothers was impetuous and rash right from the start. Mark in his Gospel informs us that when Jesus was calling the Twelve disciples to himself in the very beginning that, “to them Jesus gave the name Boanerges, which means, ‘Sons of Thunder’” (Mark 3:17). Thunder always comes after the lightning flash!

However, on this occasion our Lord’s strong “rebuke” to James and John was, “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of” (Luke 9:55). This is cause for thought for everybody who sincerely wants to follow the Master, for it’s quite possible to truly believe one is following Jesus, yet be doing it in a wrong “spirit”. This incident tragically illustrates that those who imagine they are pleasing God, may in fact be modelling a poisonous attitude that actually repulses the Lord, being contrary to his Kingdom’s agenda.

Have you ever perpetrated this antichrist spirit upon another who has held different views or beliefs to you? Or, perhaps you have been on the wrong end and suffered stares of disapproval, ostracism, venomous words or actions of disdain because in all good conscience you beg to differ from the mainstream crowd? Well, our Lord himself has forewarned his followers to expect this.

For instance, Jesus warned that certain god-fearing people would imagine that by persecuting and even killing his disciples they would be doing God a good service:

“They will make you outcasts from the synagogue; but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. And these things they will do, because they have not known the Father or me” (John 16:2-3).

Observe the cause of this antichristian spirit: According to Jesus, his followers are mistreated because their tormentors “have not known the Father or me.” Evidently, a right knowledge of and relationship with God and His Son are critical to a right spirit.

Perhaps this is why in another place the Lord Jesus defines “eternal life” for us. In his beautifully unambiguous confession to His Father in John 17, Jesus identifies those who will enter the life of the Age to Come:

And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee (second person, singular) the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent (John 17:3).

¹ *esteerisen* ... more than likely taken from Isaiah’s prophecy that Messiah would “set his face like flint” (Is. 50: 7).

According to the testimony of our Lord himself then, entrance into the Kingdom Age depends upon a right heart and head knowledge of the Single Personal Deity Who is God the Father --- “the only true God” --- and that Jesus is himself the Christ who has been sent (commissioned, approved) by that one and only Father God.

AN ASIDE

Just by the way, this leads me to ask why my own Churches of Christ people have strayed so far from Jesus? It used to be enough that a new convert be asked to confess in front of the congregation if they believed with all their heart and confessed with their mouth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and their Lord and Saviour, and that God had raised him from the dead as Lord of all. Baptism would follow upon this faithful Biblical confession (see for example, Matthew 16:16 or any of the baptisms recorded in the Book of Acts).

These days however, it seems one (at least in the Church of Christ congregation I attend) must confess as a “Core Belief” that “God has eternally existed as Three Persons, God the Father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit” before being accepted as a new member.

My problem with this is that I can’t find a single verse anywhere in the entire Scriptural corpus that says God is Three Persons --- not in the OT or the NT! Funny thing though, I can find hundreds of verses that plainly say God is One Single Person, indeed that he is a Single “Soul” or “Self” (for example, [1 Samuel 2:35](#); [Isaiah 42:1](#)).

Furthermore, I can’t find a single word from Jesus or his apostles’ teaching that unless a believer confesses faith in a Three in One God that he or she is disqualified from membership in His Church. On the contrary, Jesus says the true worshippers --- and he includes himself as one of the true worshippers! --- will worship the Father in spirit and in truth ([John 4: 23](#)). No mention here that true worshippers adore a God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the so-called Three in One. And note that on Jesus’ authority, those who worship the Father are the ones who have “salvation” ([John 4: 22](#)). No faithful Jew confessed God is Three in One. Jesus was a faithful Jew and his “core belief” was that God is One Person ([Mark 12:29f](#)).

Hmm. Why then do those who claim to listen to Jesus and to be his followers say that I must accept as a “Core Belief” that God is Three Persons? Evidently it’s harder to become a member of their church than it is to be a member of the Kingdom of God and of His Messiah!

But back to our main story. Is it possible to find *Christians* who really believe they are serving God faithfully, yet all the while their attitudes to those who differ from their “orthodoxy” are poisonous and contrary to the God they think they serve? I venture to say that history is full of this rotten spirit.

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I was talking to a retired pastor after a church service one Sunday. I will call him Bill for anonymity. I have known Bill for decades, and even though retired from being a Pastor, he still preaches regularly, still leads home Bible studies, still visits. Well, our conversation somehow turned to the story of the martyrdom of the Spanish theologian Michael Servetus.² Bill stated he had never heard of this story, and “Why haven’t we heard it?” I could tell in his voice that he doubted that John Calvin had burned Servetus in a slow, torturous death because Servetus had written [to Calvin’s mind] an heretical book against the doctrine of the trinity.

I replied that perhaps the reason we are not familiar with the story of Servetus is because it is so embarrassing to those in power in the Church today. Calvin after all, is considered a paragon of Reformed Theology to this very day.

However, I assured Bill that Calvin had authorised Servetus’ burning (Servetus had even pleaded with Calvin for mercy by asking to be beheaded instead of torched, for he feared that under such pain he might recant). I told Bill that he should not take my word alone for it, but check it out for himself, so I scribbled out a few ideas he could look up on the web.

² I highly recommend *Out of the Flames: The Remarkable Story of a Fearless Scholar, A Fatal Heresy, And One of the Rarest Books in the World* co-authored by Lawrence & Nancy Goldstone, Broadway Books, NY, 2002, for a graphic and historical account of this remarkable murder perpetrated by none other than the Reformer John Calvin.

The next Sunday, I took my precious copy of *Out of the Flames* to loan to Bill. I happened to be speaking with another man in the foyer of the Church after the service when Bill approached us. “Hi Bill, nice to see you!” I warmly greeted him. “Did you get a chance to check out for yourself the story of Michael Servetus?”

With that Bill discharged a verbal volley ... “All you heretics who don’t believe Jesus is Almighty God should be burned!” The other man standing next to me was visibly shocked. I was shocked. But I also perceived that Bill had shocked himself with his fiery spew. I truly do not think for a moment Bill had planned on saying anything like this, nor with such a venomous attitude.

I put my hand on Bill’s shoulder in a re-affirming manner and said, “Brother Bill, you surely don’t mean that?” But it was almost like Bill could not now control himself, “I agree with Calvin. All you heretics should be burned!” I can honestly say that I don’t think Bill knew what kind of spirit was coming out of his mouth. Normally gentle and congenial, Bill was doing the equivalent of the sons of Thunder and calling down fire on somebody who in all good conscience did not hold to his brand of “orthodox” theology.

Nor is this an isolated experience either for myself or for many, if not most, of the Biblical unitarian monotheistic believers I know. I constantly receive correspondence from believers in the one God of the Bible asking advice on how to handle their ostracism from people claiming to be lovers of God and believers in Jesus Christ.

But why are we surprised?

THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST

John the apostle makes it clear that to misunderstand who Jesus is to imbibe the spirit of antichrist:

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh [*en sarki*, i.e. a true human being] is from God; and every spirit that does not confess [precisely that *en sarki*] Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist ... (I John 4:3).

The apostle informs us that the correct identification of the human Jesus who is the Messiah is of critical importance to knowing God. To misunderstand the Bible Jesus, according to John, is to be a “deceiver” and an “enemy” of Jesus (2 John 1:7) and promotes “the spirit of error” (I John 4:6), which is to be “a liar” (I John 2:22). To promote a false Jesus Christ encourages a hostile anti-christian spirit. We have Jesus’ and John’s word for that.

John tells us the Bible Jesus came *en sarki*, that is, as a real human being. Now of course, my trinitarian friends deny this verse has anything to say to them, because they loudly affirm that their Jesus “came in the flesh”. They will vociferously defend their Jesus against those who deny he was a real human being. But a little reflection on their own official dogmatic statements reveals that the Jesus of trinitarianism is not a genuine human being ... he is the God-Man. Listen to the official trinitarian teaching as to who their ‘orthodox’ Jesus is:

The kind of humanity Jesus took in the incarnation was impersonal. He did not add a human person to himself ... his humanity is not only impersonal (anhypostasis), but it’s also inpersonal (that’s what enhypostasis means), in that its personhood is in the personhood of the eternal second person of the Trinity. The fully divine Son is the person. ³

An “impersonal” man is the trinitarian Jesus! And this:

The Christological concept of the preexistent divine Son reduces the real social and culturally conditioned personality of Jesus to the metaphysical abstraction “human nature” ... Human nature, according the classical Alexandrine tradition, was enhypostatized in the divine personal subject ... According to this Christology the eternal Son assumes a timeless human nature, or makes it timeless by making it his own; it

³ Mathis, David. *Enhypostasis: What Kind of Flesh Did The Word Become?* Quoted in *Desiring God*, 25 December, 2010. Web. 27 July 2015, as quoted by Kegan Chandler in *The God of Jesus In Light of Christian Dogma: The Recovery of New Testament Theology*, Restoration Fellowship, 2016. p.90.

is human nature which owes nothing essential to geographical circumstances; it corresponds to nothing in the actual concrete world; Jesus [in this view] has not, after all, really “come in the flesh”.⁴

It goes without saying that this impersonal, non-human trinitarian ‘Jesus’ is not the Jesus the apostle John confesses. Their ‘Jesus’ is “God and man”, which is to say, their ‘Jesus’ is not **a man**.

Another trinitarian explains their teaching perfectly damningly:

Jesus has not always been *man*. The fantastic miracle is that this eternal God became man at the Incarnation approximately 2,000 years ago. That what the Incarnation was --- God the Son becoming *man*. But what exactly do we mean when we say that God the Son became man? We certainly do not mean that He turned into *a man* ... Jesus did not give up any of His divine attributes at the Incarnation[the Incarnation is God] taking *manhood* to Himself.⁵

So, official trinitarian teaching is that Jesus is man, but not a man! It goes without saying that trinitarian ‘orthodoxy’ admits the human person Jesus does not even exist! Their Jesus is, in spite of their protestations to the contrary, a Docetic Jesus only seeming to be human. The Gnostics John was opposing said Jesus Christ was **not ‘a man’**, but rather God who took on human form to Himself. Thus, today’s Christian ‘orthodoxy’ is perfectly aligned with John’s “false antichristian spirit”! They “know not what manner of spirit they are of” (Luke 9:55). And the way they have treated and still do treat the “heterodox” --- anyone who does not believe their definition of Jesus --- proves this.⁶

THE HISTORY OF THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST

It does not make for nice reading to look inside the Church’s own history to discover the immeasurable suffering and persecution the upholders of the Trinitarian Jesus forced upon those who confessed Jesus was the human Lord Messiah and not God in the flesh. But for a condensed summary try reading up on how Emperor Justinian (circa 530 A.D.) violently imposed the trinitarian Jesus upon all dissenters. In fact, Justinian was responsible for having the Church ban all recitation of the *Shema* --- the Biblical creed that the God of Israel as confessed by Jesus himself in Mark 12:29f was only one Single Person --- “He is one” --- and made the doctrine of the triune God ecumenically enforceable.⁷

But well may we ask: Did the Jesus of trinitarianism really come as “God in the flesh”? Is the Jesus of the Trinity a real human being? No human being I know is “100% God and 100% man”! John does **not** say that the pre-existent Spirit-Son came “into a human body”. It is obvious that such trinitarian doctrine disqualifies Jesus from the rest of humanity. To confess a Jesus who is not a genuine historical human Messiah is to imbibe the hostile spirit of antichrist.

Putting it bluntly, this is to say, that John does **not** say Jesus is God. The New Testament unambiguously confirms in at least three places that “no man has seen or can see God”. Significantly, one of those places is right here in the Epistle of John (I John 4:12), written after John says he and the other apostles had seen and touched and handled the Son of God (I John 1:1f). So, **Since** Jesus was a man like the rest of us ---*en sarki* --- then he’s not included in the category of being the God of the Bible, for no man has seen or can see God!

Indeed, history proves that misunderstanding the doctrine and teaching of Jesus can be dangerous and carry an anti-christian spirit. The ray of hope is that the anti-christian spirit Jesus rebuked in the sons of Thunder the day they wanted fire to consume others can be repented of and redeemed by the sacrificial spirit Jesus displayed at the cross. One glimpse of the love of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself is the antidote to the anti-christian spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ is the human lord messiah whom the Father God has provided for our salvation.

⁴ Lampe, Geoffery, *God as Spirit* (Norwich: SCM Press, 1977), p 144 as quoted by Chandler, Ibid. p 91.

⁵ Perman, as quoted by Chandler with emphasis, Ibid, p. 91-92.

⁶ For further exploration of the trinitarian non-human Jesus see my article titled “The Pseudo Man”.

⁷ For a full treatment of how the trinitarian doctrine triumphed by violence and sword in the first few centuries after Christ, I recommend Kegan Chandler’s excellent tome, *The God of Jesus In Light of Christian Dogma: The Recovery of New Testament Theology* (Restoration Fellowship, 2016) or my own *They Never Told Me This in Church!*

The spirit of Jesus is seen in the way he treated his traducers and enemies, ever kind but honest with them. He would appeal to the Scriptures with devastating logic. He would endeavour to persuade by dialogue and reason. But never once did he display personal hostility to those who did not believe him or receive him. Those in whom He lives will display the same eirenic spirit.

AND WHAT OF BILL AND CALVIN?

Oh, in case you are wondering how the conversation with my mate “Bill” ended, let me tell you. After his surprising outburst, “I agree with Calvin that all you heretics should be burned!” he asked, “So, do you think Calvin will be in Heaven?”

I asked, “Bill, it’s not up to me to determine whether a man is saved or lost. God the Judge of all the earth will do that which is right. But what does the Scripture say? The word of God is that, “we know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). That silenced Bill. But note, the first part of that verse says that “every one who hates his brother is a murderer.” May such a spirit never be found in any of us who name the name of Christ. If it has been, then like James and John, may we be corrected by the loving rebuke of the Master.

And to those believers in the One God of the Bible and in His human Lord Messiah Jesus who have felt the hot breath of those who have called down fire upon you, I invite you to be encouraged by the words of your Master:

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth ... (Jesus in Matthew 5: 10-13)