

# QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry  
for the Christian community*

**D M HERRING**  
**45 LUXBOROUGH ROAD**  
**BRIDGWATER**  
**TA6 7JN**

**01278 451297**  
**qmins@aol.com**

## WHAT IS TRUTH?

Pilate echoed a universal cry when he voiced his uncertainty in response to Jesus (John 18 v 38). In Genesis 3 v 1 Satan is recorded as creating the doubt: “Did God really say....?”, and the quest for ultimate truth has been a preoccupation of mankind ever since. This search for truth lies behind all religions and philosophies and has been the cause of much human unhappiness and conflict – one of the reasons why so many people say they reject any religion today. However, a prime conviction of true Christians is that the Christian faith is the one sure revelation of truth, but we must justify such a dogmatic position. We do this firstly by asserting that beyond any reasonable doubt a single spiritual deity, the God revealed in the Bible, is the ultimate first cause of everything. We then assert that as God is the creator and sustainer of everything, His glory is the prime purpose of the whole creation. This position is underlined by passages such as Psalm 19 v 1, John 17 v 1 – 5, Acts 17 v 24 – 25, Romans 16 v 27, 1 Corinthians 10 v 31 and Hebrews 11 v 3. Therefore, truth is to be found in those beliefs and understandings that bring glory to God. Conversely, any belief or opinion that diminishes God’s glory is not going to be the truth. Our duty, then, must be to uphold as truth those beliefs that glorify God and to reject as untrue any beliefs that fail to glorify God. In this study we consider seven areas of belief found among Christians, embracing very different points of view. It is true that on some matters Christians can agree to disagree, but on these seven issues I suggest the differences are so great that it becomes a matter of truth or error.

### 1. Origins - literal creation or theistic evolution

This is a major area of disagreement among Christians and is an issue of paramount importance. The creationist takes the view that the literal description found in Genesis chapters 1 to 3 is to be believed and accepted, and that this is confirmed throughout the rest of scripture. On this basis the whole physical universe came into existence about 6000 years ago over an intense period of divine creativity lasting six days. Each part of the creation, including all the “kinds” mentioned in Genesis chapter 1, was designed and made separately and specifically; evolution was not involved at all. The alternative view, theistic evolution, involves a measure of accommodation with the secular and materialistic worldview so beloved of much of “science” today. This broadly seeks to explain the existence of everything by chance, without reference to divine agency. Christians who hold to this position see God as having some input in the process of creation but relying on evolution in order to achieve what we see today.

So, where is God’s glory to be found in all this? If evolution took place over millions of years, even under some form of divine guidance, what does this say about God’s character and His way of working? He would have taken long periods of time to achieve the creation of humans, presiding over the destruction of countless species and untold billions of creatures along the way. He would have been the creator of a terrible process of suffering and death in order to achieve His aim of creating a people who would be His bride and eternal companion. Indeed, it is a strange God who would find it necessary to produce monkeys before He was able to go on to create human beings in His own image, especially as it was the God-given job of humans to look after the monkeys in the first place (Psalm 8 v 6). Moreover, if this was the case, He has remained completely silent about it all, as scripture says nothing about immensely long ages and evolutionary procedures. He has given us instead an explanation at the beginning of His Word which on this view is misleading, mythological, and plainly wrong. Romans 1 v 18 – 32 roundly condemns such impertinent thinking. Alternatively, He is God who, as Romans 1 v 20 states clearly, is totally capable of speaking the Word and by that means bringing about a fully functioning, totally inter-dependent universe, with Planet Earth at its centre as the jewel in the crown. It is absolutely clear that God’s greater glory is grandly demonstrated in this explanation, rather than in theistic evolution, and that the biblical record is therefore the truth of the matter.

## 2. The Flood - divine justice or accident of nature

The position taken by Christians on the Flood has a direct bearing on our views of God's judgement, both past and future. Is God capable and willing to destroy life on the planet as it was, including human life, in order to maintain His justice and righteousness? That is what he warned would happen in Genesis 2 v 17, confirmed in Genesis 6 v 5 – 17. The biblical account goes on to describe a worldwide flood which included the destruction of all life apart from the humans and animals in the Ark. Such destruction at the hands of a God of love does not sit easily with modern thinking, influenced as it is by humanism. But then, neither does the doctrine of eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire for unregenerate souls. However, 2 Peter 3 v 6 – 7 links the future judgement of the planet by fire with the judgement by water in Noah's day. In any case, the worldwide flood as described in Genesis is discounted as myth by many in the Church today, not just on the basis of doubt as to whether God would do such a thing but because secular opinion suggests that it just didn't happen, despite overwhelming geological evidence that it did.

Both the account of the flood and warnings of future judgement, for the world and for individuals, cause many Christians to question the whole biblical teaching of God's justice and punishment. So where does His glory lie in this whole area? Here the very concept of God's holiness and utter righteousness is at issue. For God to have any standard less than total perfection diminishes His glory to the capricious and debauched level of, say, the gods of ancient Greece. If we deny His sovereign right to exercise judgement over His own creation, we are in danger of creating a God who merely exists in our own image. As Abraham concluded in Genesis 18 v 25, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" God's glory is seen in His full right and duty to maintain His standards, and the Flood was a clear demonstration to all humanity throughout history that He will not be mocked. But His greater glory is also seen, from the Flood account, in that with judgement there is always an offer of mercy, and the Ark demonstrates the way of escape for the penitent. In the same manner, the cross of Jesus shows God's amazing glory in offering all of us a means of escape from the judgement to come.

## 3. Israel - faithful God or a god who changes his mind

The Old and New Testaments are full of God's promises. The basis of God's relationship with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants are the promises made to Abraham in the first instance. Not only did God make this an eternal covenant between Himself and the people of Israel (Genesis 15 v 18 and subsequently reasserted on many occasions throughout the Old Testament) but He also promised that through Israel the full messianic agenda of the restoration of everything would come (e.g. Isaiah 9 v 6 – 7, etc. See also Acts 3 v 19 – 21). He also assured them that the physical territory given to Abraham is an essential and eternal part of that covenant (e.g. Jeremiah 32 v 37 – 41, Ezekiel 38 v 8). The promise to Mary (Luke 1 v 32 – 33), Mary's song (Luke 1 v 46 – 55) and Zechariah's song (Luke 1 v 67 – 79) all refer to the birth of their sons as part of the fulfilment of His promise. At no time did Jesus ever suggest that God's covenant with Israel was to be rescinded. To give God's promises even greater importance, Jeremiah shows that His covenant with Israel is as inviolable as the fixed laws of the universe (Jeremiah 33 v 25 – 26). God's promises are part of the very foundation of creation, including those given to us living in the Church era (Ephesians 1 v 4 – 5).

The area of teaching broadly referred to as replacement theology suggests that following Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, God's eternal covenant no longer applies to the nation and historic territory of Israel. Rather, it is suggested, He has chosen a new Israel, the Church, who will inherit the blessings (and, presumably, the curses) promised to the physical descendants of Abraham. This belief, started in the Catholic Church after the adoption of Christianity by Rome, is widely accepted today. This is despite the New Testament's full confirmation that the promises of a physical Messiah reigning on David's throne from Jerusalem have not been abandoned. The Church is to consist of Jew and Gentile alike, but nowhere is the Church referred to as Israel. Indeed, there are very clear assurances that God still has a future plan for Israel (e.g., Romans 11 and Hebrews 6 v 13 - 20). God is shown throughout scripture as a faithful God and is glorified in being so. He has permitted scripture to record vast promises about the future messianic role of Israel, the throne of David, and the central importance of Jerusalem. He would need to make profuse apologies to millions who lived and died in their sure trust in the eventual and literal fulfilment of those promises if He had indeed changed His mind subsequently. If God can abandon His promises to Israel, what is to stop Him abandoning His promises to us? His great glory is seen in His faithfulness and that no work of man or Satan can thwart Him doing exactly what He has promised.

## 4. Jesus - eternally God the Son or created being

The three names most commonly used for Jesus are Lord Jesus Christ. The title Lord denotes His deity. The name Jesus denotes His humanity. The title Christ denotes His messianic status. His followers have been known since the early days of the Church by the third of those names – Christians (Acts 11 v 26). That means that Christians are

essentially a messianic people – the followers of the Christ. They believe in all the biblical prophetic promises of an age of future glory, and that is the indisputable Christian worldview. The very nature of the Messiah (or, the Christ) is that He is both God and man (Isaiah 9 v 6 – 7). The Jewish people were awaiting the Messiah and the early Christians, especially Paul, did not waste time arguing that Jesus was truly God, or even truly man, but that Jesus was truly the Christ, fulfilling all the Old Testament criteria for the Messiah. As Messiah He would automatically be both God and man. John’s prologue (John 1 v 1 – 18), written by the old apostle in the 80s of the first century, summed up exactly all that the early Church believed – Jesus was the Word, was with God and was God. The Word was made flesh and made His dwelling among us. The Word (logos) was the Greek word which referred to the most basic cause of all creation, and John confirms that nothing that has been made was made without Him. He is beyond and above creation. Throughout His earthly ministry he showed amazing signs of being more than man, and as He Himself carried out messianic miracles (miracles that only the Messiah, God, could do) most people who witnessed them came to that conclusion (John 12 v 19).

John also declares: “We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only” (John 1 v 14). Jesus was glorious in all that He did - His personality, holiness, teaching, miracles, atoning death and amazing resurrection. He did all this with a degree of glory reserved for deity alone. “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” Jesus tells Philip and the others (John 14 v 9), showing that the Word, as an attribute of deity, cannot be separated from, or be lesser than, the Father. The Holy Spirit, also as an attribute of deity (John 15 v 26), would come in Jesus’ name (John 14 v 26), i.e., with His authority. This threefold aspect of the divine being, revealed to us as the three persons of the Trinity, is foundational throughout scripture, although John perhaps had as clear an understanding as anyone. The glory of God becoming our sacrifice is the basis of the Christian hope of salvation, and this could not be so if Jesus were not divine (John 13 v 31 – 32, 2 Corinthians 5 v 19). To consider Jesus as less than divine, as some sort of mythical religious figure, is to rob Christianity of all meaning, the world of all hope, and God of all glory.

#### 5. The Church - new creation or human organisation

There are many views of what the Church is and we can be glad of the assurance that: “The Lord knows those who are his” (2 Timothy 2 v 19). Paul’s letter to the Christians in Ephesus talks a lot about the true nature of the church, and the reality at the heart of the issue is the Church as Christ’s bride (Ephesians 5 v 22 – 33). However, there has been such a growth in the institutional church over the centuries that for many the Church is seen as a body of people represented by human boundaries and legal traditions. Often the origins of the denominations were grounded in a move of the Holy Spirit and the need to rediscover lost truths, but as time has gone by these groups usually became organisations with very human concepts of membership and a downgrading of spirituality and biblical authority. Sadly, the glory inherent in such bodies becomes identified with their history, organisation, and worldly grandeur, and they end up as yet more man-made and social institutions – just an end in themselves.

The glory of the Church for which Jesus died is of a different order altogether. In terms of human organisation, it is invisible, unlimited by worldly boundaries of race, colour, geography, and time (1 Peter 1 v 3 – 9). Membership is based on God’s sovereign grace alone, established on the atoning work of Jesus, appropriated by the faith of the individual, and sealed by the inward presence of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1 v 13 – 14). The evidence is seen in each member displaying, increasingly, the fruit of the Spirit’s presence and the anointing of spiritual gifts which enables that individual freely and joyfully to fulfil his or her calling in the service of God. Within the true Church, then, there is a clear sense of God’s presence manifested in love, joy, peace and a seeking after holiness and truth (1 Peter 2 v 9 – 12). This is so other-worldly that credit for the dynamic of such glorious human living can only be attributed to God Himself. Each true Christian would heartily desire to emphasise that God’s glory is solely responsible. Indeed, no amount of human organisation and discipline would be able to achieve anything like this glorious outworking of God’s full and free salvation, as authoritarian cults constantly demonstrate. In the light, then, of the true nature of the Church, all the trappings of wealth, organisation, tradition and legalism pale into insignificance. Ultimately, the Church, being prepared as the eternal bride of the Lord of all creation, has a growing excitement, impatience even, for His return and her eternal destiny as a joint heir with Him (Romans 8 v 17, Revelation 22 v 17).

#### 6. The Bible – inerrant Word of God or questionable documents

The full canon of scripture, assembled by Old Testament prophetic guidance and New Testament councils, both processes being under the authority of the Holy Spirit, has been shown to be an exceptional book by any standard. Even translated into modern languages it has proved to be enormously powerful, as the influence of the King James Version has demonstrated in the English-speaking world over the past four hundred years. The book has been miraculously preserved in the face of the most intense opposition over and over again. Even today, after the onslaught of first the “higher critics” and more recently the humanistic atheism of modern thinking, the Bible is loved, studied,

believed and obeyed by untold millions of people worldwide. The beauty of its teaching, the truthfulness of its insights into human nature, the majesty of many of its personalities, especially Jesus, the power of its message of hope, and the amazing accuracy of its prophetic declarations, all give the book an authority which is beyond any human ability to construct. The sweep of the biblical story from before creation started until creation's final destiny is far more comprehensive than any other religious text the world has ever known. When the Bible is taught and preached truthfully a power and authority is demonstrated that has captivated vast multitudes and changed nations. Such overwhelming evidence can only bring immense glory to its author.

By contrast, the tendency to deconstruct the book, condemn great swathes of the text to the status of myth, sit in judgement on its spiritual insights and relegate the whole document to the level of an increasingly out-of-date view of life, diminishes the author to merely a teller of fairy stories. There can be no half measures with the Bible. It is either the inerrant Word of God, having arrived with His supreme authority, or it is devoid of any real relevance to life today and is best forgotten. With the marginalising of the Bible in so many churches, the glory of God as its author is greatly obscured, and a sad decline in the spiritual life and influence of the Church in the nation is the inevitable consequence.

## 7. Planet Earth - golden future or dying world

The Church is not immune from a general and increasing pessimism regarding the Earth's destiny. Population growth, climate change, gross pollution of air, land and sea, nuclear weapons, religious and political extremism, dwindling supplies of food and fuel, destruction from space, etc., all contribute to a growing sense of fear about the future. While some Christians see ultimate redemption coming through the triumph of the Church over all other faiths and issues (post-millennialism), others prefer simply to hope for the best without being sure of what may happen (pan-millennialism). Yet others see no future for this creation, no millennial golden age, just the collapse of creation into an eternally dark future, with the redeemed being rescued and taken immediately into their eternal paradise (a-millennialism).

The glory of the full messianic hope, however, is seen in God's declared promises throughout scripture that through His Christ the whole creation will be released from all the effects of the curse brought about by sin and ushered into a glorious age of renewal (Romans 8 v 19 – 23, Revelation 20 v 1 – 3). True, there will be a short, seven-year period of judgement described so graphically in Isaiah 24 and Revelation chapters 6 to 19, but God's glory will be fully displayed in His prior rapture of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4 v 13 – 18), His triumph over Satan, the restoration of His precious creation, and the reign on earth of Jesus on the throne of David. Finally, there will be the full and eternal recreation of heaven and earth (Revelation 21 and 22). Redemption fully accomplished; glory indeed!