

“WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?”

(Matt. 22:42)

(This paper was prepared by Donald L. Canell.)

This is a question asked and related in the scriptures. We would ask, who asked the question? Why was it asked? Did it teach a lesson to those who heard it, at the time it was asked? Is it a lesson for us?

Yes surely—“ALL Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.

To answer the questions we have asked, as well as the one contained in our title, we must consider the circumstances of the title question—we must consider the context.

The question, “What think ye of Christ?” was asked by our Lord himself. It came as a result of His being asked some three questions, by various persons. Note the 15th verse of Matt. 22—“Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.”

We have an advantage here that the Pharisees did not have. Had they been in the right heart attitude, they could have had this advantage. We are aware that our Lord was a perfect man; also he was begotten of the Holy Spirit of His Heavenly Father. This 15th verse indicates to us that the Pharisees had a mission, which mission was completely impossible of fulfillment. But let us note how they completely failed of this self-made mission.

In verse 16 we read, “And they [the Pharisees] sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man; for thou regardest not the person of men.”

We understand that the Herodians were sons of Abraham through Hagar, just as Herod was, thus the term Herodians. They might also be styled Ishmaelites, since they were direct descendants of Ishmael, the son of Hagar. They took sides with Herod in believing that the Roman Empire should have complete political control. They believed in taxation, the Pharisees did not. We have two groups here at variance one with another (at least on some points) yet willing to join hands (as it were) to oppose our Lord.

Since our Lord was becoming quite popular with the common people, it was the desire of this alliance, to check his popularity. Since everyone was interested in taxation, and how it affected them, a question would be put to him, in the presence of many. “Tell us

therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" Matt. 22:17.

To them His answer would be limited. If he said "no" he would leave himself open to the charge of sedition, liable to arrest for opposing the Roman government. If he said "yes, it is lawful to pay tribute to Caesar," he would then lose his influence with at least some of the people. But our Lord gave an answer that was much broader and more comprehensive than they, or anyone else would have thought possible. We keep in mind that the enemies of our Lord had resorted to flattery. We believe the slang expression "battered him up" would fit here. Let us notice their expression again—"We know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in Truth, neither carest thou for any man." Weymouth translation says, "No fear of man misleads you, for thou regardest not the person of men."

Verse 18 of Matt. 22, reveals that Jesus was aware of the true situation, and the condition of their hearts, and he makes this known publicly—"But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" According to the original text, this expression "wickedness" pertained to something beyond the fall from original virtue. It has the thought of malice and viciousness. Can we imagine?!—the professed holy people of God, with THIS attitude!

Regardless of even this, our Lord continues according to verse 19, "Show me the tribute money, and they brought unto him a penny." (Denarius—a coin used at the time, Diaglott) Verse 20 and 21, Diaglott, "Whose likeness and inscription is this? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

This reply of our Lord has come ringing down through the age! Many people who make no profession of studying the Bible, know of this remarkable reply of our Lord. It was the perfect answer. Our Lord lifted the whole matter out of the quibbling aspect, placed upon it by the Herodians and the Pharisees.

They had not asked our Lord about their position before God, but it was a good opportunity for him to remind them of this, and he did so. Not only was Caesar's inscription and likeness stamped upon this coin, but as originally created, man bore God's image—it was stamped upon his very nature. The persons addressed in this given situation should have remembered also that God's inscription was upon them. He had accepted them as His people—Israel. We see then that the heart, the life, the affections, belong to God, and should be rendered to him. If this is done, the paying of a little tribute money to some earthly prince, passes into insignificance.

It would seem that thus far all would be impressed with our Lord's answer and the manner in which he handled the whole matter. We notice that those whom our Lord

addressed, were also impressed according to verse 22, “When they had heard these words, they marveled, [were astonished—Weymouth] and left, and went their way.” They were sidetracked for the moment, but they came again, this time the approach was made by the Sadducees who evidently were part of the (unholy) alliance formed against the Lord.

Verse 23 reveals that “The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him”—their question was to be based upon a story concerning a woman who had seven husbands. The seven husbands were brothers of one family, according to the story, and each became husband to this woman, as the previous brother died. This was in keeping with the Jewish law, as recorded in Deut. 25:5, 6.

Going on the false premise that there was no resurrection of the dead, these would quite naturally fabricate this type of story to fit their disbelief in that doctrine. Like their counterpart—the Pharisees and the Herodians—they supposed that their question was foolproof. They were certain that they had the perfect story, and a question based upon that story would prove that there was no resurrection from the dead. So after relating the story concerning this woman who had seven husbands, their question was (V. 28) “Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven?”

Our Lord’s reply to them told them that the difficulty was with them. He was telling them that there was nothing wrong with the Divine Plan, but with them. They had failed to understand the Scriptures, and also failed to properly understand the power of God. Verses 29 and 30, “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” From this we learn that sex distinctions will cease in the human race during the Millennial age. Additionally we learn that the sex function does not exist among the angels.

In this present lesson our Lord goes beyond the answer to their question and demonstrates that the resurrection is taught in the Old Testament, the only Scriptures then in existence, in spite of the fact that the word “resurrection” is not found in those Old Testament Scriptures. We should especially notice that our Lord did not refer to a scripture that states in so many words that there is to be a resurrection from the dead. He refers to Exodus 3:6 and 16, as recorded in verses 31 and 32 of Matt. 22.

“As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Our Lord was saying that God’s language with reference to the Patriarchs, implied that they are not completely blotted out of existence. We believe our Lord was saying that God would not use such language as he did, respecting those who had passed totally out of existence and were never to be in

existence again. His answer was evidently a complete one as indicated in verses 33 and 34—“And when the multitude heard this [his reference to the Old Testament scriptures] they were astonished at his doctrine.” Verse 34 reveals that He had “put the Sadducees to silence.” Evidently our Lord’s reference to those Scriptures that indirectly supported a resurrection of the dead were very potent.

Yet a third question was presented to our Lord, according to verse 35 of Matt. 22, “Then one of them [a Pharisee], which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” This question evidently involved much discussion among the Pharisees. Which was the great commandment? !! Apparently this lawyer was sincere in his request or question, according to Mark’s account of this same incident (Mark 32:28) which reads, “And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him saying, which is the first commandment of all?” We go back to Matthew’s account for the answer (Matt. 22:37), “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Again, our Lord did not point to a Scripture that directly referred to such and such a commandment as being the first and greatest. He condensed the entire law in the two commandments, the one showing man’s responsibility toward God, and the other showing his responsibility toward his fellow man. A little simple logic and reasoning would tell those who heard his words, that if a man loved his God with all heart, soul and mind, he would need no other commandments. The Lord was appealing to their reasoning ability. When we consider that our Lord would appeal to the reason of even those who opposed him, how much more would this be true of those whom he is dealing with regarding the harvest message today.

But before leaving this account in Matt. 22, we wish to consider our title question, “What Think Ye of Christ?” Our Lord had been asked these three questions: “Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar?” “Whose wife shall she be in the resurrection?” and “Which is the great commandment in the law?” Now He turns questioner: verses 41 and 42, “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.” We should keep in mind, that our Lord did not ask this question with the same motive as his enemies had asked him questions. He was not trying to trip them up, but appealed to their reason, as already mentioned.

Our Lord had no outward evidences of being able to establish a kingdom. It is true that he had performed many miracles, but in the opinion of his enemies, he lacked what they thought he should have, if he were the Messiah. They did not accept his claim of a

Heavenly origin. So when Jesus asked this question, “What think ye of Christ?” he well knew what their answer would be.

His earthly genealogy they could easily prove, and to his question, “Whose son is he?” they replied, “The son of David.” Our Lord wished to show however, from the Scriptures that the Messiah must be something more than the son of David—he must be both the son and Lord of David. Matt. 22:43, “He saith unto them [in question form, and in reply to their answer that Messiah must be the son of David] how then doth David in spirit [by inspiration] call him [the Messiah] Lord, saying (V. 44) The Lord [Jehovah] said unto my Lord [master], sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.” Here again was a Scripture, and a question based upon that Scripture, that appealed to the reason of all who heard.

In the Fifth Volume, page 129, in chapter six, this subject is treated at length—“David’s Son and Lord.” The pastor points out, from the Scriptures, how Jesus’ right to the throne of David, came about in a natural way, and as a result of his relationship to his mother Mary, and not to his foster father Joseph. Mary’s genealogy traces to David through his son Nathan. On page 134 of the Fifth Volume we quote the first two paragraphs. “We have seen how our Lord is the branch, or offspring or son of David, and the line through which his genealogy is properly to be traced, and the full accordance of the Scriptures thereto: let us now see in what respect he was David’s Lord. How could Jesus be both the Son and Lord of David?

“We answer that he is not David’s Lord by reason of anything that he was as a spirit being before he was ‘made flesh’ and dwelt amongst us;—no more than he was David’s Branch or Son in his prehuman existence. Our Lord Jesus became David’s Lord or superior, as well as ‘Lord of all’ (Acts 10:36) by reason of the great work which he accomplished as the Mediator of the Atonement. ‘To this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.’—Rom. 14:9.” We suggest a reading of the entire chapter at your convenience.

We believe it would still be in order to consider our own reply to the question, “What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?” It has been revealed to us, through the Scriptures, that he was David’s son according to the flesh, but also, and more directly the Son of God. We have the combined testimony of the Old and New Testaments concerning this. The New Testament is more directly stated. Mark 1:1, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Also Luke 1:35 and John 1:34. The Scriptures are very clear in showing that Jesus was the Son of God, one who received life from another. Not God himself, nor the Holy Spirit—“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” 1 Tim. 2:5.

Again, in reply to the question. “What think ye of Christ?”—we might also ask, was he as the Son of God, to have some special appointment over the church? Again we have plain statements of Scripture to affirm that he was. Eph. 1:22 tells us that “[God] hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.” In Eph. 4:15 the apostle states that we should “Speak the truth in love, that we may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” Col. 1:18, “And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in all things he might have the preeminence.”

“What think ye of Christ?” If he is the head of the body, the church, are we, as body members, allowing him to continue to be the head of the church? We ask this question because the Apostle also says concerning the head of the church, that some were “not holding the head”—Diaglott, “Not holding firmly the head”—Col. 2:19. The Weymouth translation of verses 18 and 19 reads, “Let no one defraud you of your prize, priding himself on his humility and on his worship of the angels, and taking his stand on the visions he has seen, and idly puffed up with his unspiritual thoughts. Such a one does not keep his hold upon Christ, the head, from whom the body, in all its parts nourished and strengthened by its points of contact and its connections, grows with a divine growth.”

Verse 18 shows that the Apostle is reproving two classes for “not holding the head.” There would be those, who would, according to Paul (Weymouth translation) “Defraud you of your prize.” There would be those who would usurp authority—“Usurp” means to take or seize authority, without a right to it. The Apostle then, is referring to, and reproving two classes of body members. First, those who would usurp the authority, and secondly, those who would allow them to do so. Note the Berean Comments concerning the words, “Not holding the head.” They read “Usurping His place in the Church, or quietly doing reverence to those who do.”

So if a body member should say, “It is not my place to usurp authority in the church, and I have no desire to do so,” such a one, must also take care that he does not allow someone else to do so, by supporting such a person. “What think ye of Christ?” Do we continue to believe in His headship to such a degree, as not to fall into either category, of NOT holding the head. In answer to the question, “What think ye of Christ?”—surely we may answer that we believe he appealed to the reasoning ability of all who heard him. How much more should he appeal to our ability to reason and to think.

We refer to ourselves as a religious body, and so we are. We trust that we all recognize that there are other religious bodies that obviously seek to restrain one’s ability to reason. There are those who appeal chiefly to the fears, the passions and the prejudices of their people. The Lord to the contrary of this, calls to us, “Come now, and let us reason together.” (Isa. 1:18) We are to think, and to reason, and we can do it together, with God,

and with one another. In order to reason together, we must of necessity have the same source of Truth, and the Scriptures lay down certain limitations. We are invited, as God's people, to reason within the lines of what is revealed. The Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 4:6 cautions the church saying, "They should learn, not to think above what has been written." (Diaglott)

From page 2890 (fourth Reprint) we quote, "Many who are awakened to independent thinking are careless of the limitations of the divine revelation, and consequently the influence of the divine Word upon them is a mental liberty and enlightenment which, lacking the divine control, is very apt to go to the extreme of license, selfishness, self-conceit and infidelity. Wherever the Bible has gone it has been the torch which has led civilization: millions have profited by its enlightening influence, though only comparatively few walk close to its light and within its prescribed limitations of reason and conduct; and these few are the true Christians—the 'wheat' of this age, 'the first-fruits unto God of his creatures,' which God is now harvesting.—James 1:18."

Whatever influence the Bible has had upon others, in order for us to have honest answers concerning what we "think of Christ," we must walk as well as reason within the limitations laid down in the Bible. In coming to the Truth (or being drawn to it) we learned after all, that the Bible was not a fiddle on which any tune could be played. Before we knew that there was such a thing as "rightly dividing the word of Truth," we looked at 2 Peter 3:7—"But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men," and we supposed from this, that the earth itself would be destroyed by fire. But no, this text must be interpreted with the Scriptures as a whole. Eccl. 1:4—"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever." In supposing that Peter spoke of the literal heavens and earth, we did violence to the text in Ecclesiastes.

These and many other seemingly contradictory and obscure passages were made clear to us. "What think ye of Christ?" Has he not revealed the Truth to us? Was it not the Lord himself who referred to a "Faithful and wise servant" and one who would "Dispense meat, or truth to the household at this end of the age?" (Matt. 24:45) "That servant" has been used as the finger of the Lord, to point to the scriptures that reveal the Truth.

We often see a sign at the end of a hallway in the shape of a human hand, pointing to an exit or an entry way. Indeed the Pastor has been used as the finger of the Lord, to help us to exit error, and enter, the Truth. He has straightened out the crooked and out-of-line doctrines of the dark ages. He has done away with the dark age confusion. We have today, what is known as a pre-cut house. This pre-cut house is ready to nail together—the pieces are numbered and a blueprint is provided to direct the one erecting the house, to the proper procedure in placing those pieces. This is the role of Bro. Russell, as it were.

He has numbered the pieces, if you will, to help us understand the great Divine Plan of the Ages.

Does it not seem logical that if the Master himself appealed to the reason of even His enemies, at His first advent, that the servant he would send would do likewise? Even much more appeal to the reason of the Lord's own people? "What think ye of Christ?" Do we not think of our "returned Lord" as being able to care for us, as He did the early church? The time is here when the Lord was to send the meat in due season. He has shown us "things to come." This has been through the six volumes of Scripture Studies, Tabernacle Shadows and the Reprints. We suggest that this is the Lord's method of bringing to us the Truth. This is the source of Truth today. We can continue to offer and recommend these, to any who have a hearing ear and are desirous of knowing something of the great Divine Plan. Colporteurs were used at the beginning of the harvest of this Gospel Age—we can be colporteurs in the sense of upholding the volumes, selling them if you please!