

Who Do You Say that I AM?

Neil Girrard

“Who do you say that I am?” (Mt. 16:15) This is the question Jesus put to His disciples – and the right answer, given by Peter but shared by all of them, that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, is what Jesus said would be the foundation of the ekklesia, His people called out of this world’s darkness to be citizens of and family within His kingdom of light.

At the time that Peter gave this “right answer,” however, he did not really have the right answer. In his mind, the Messiah was surely going to rise up with military power and destroy the Romans, conveniently leaving Peter sitting in the second-most powerful position in the world.

At the time that Peter gave this “right answer,” an answer made possible only by receiving spiritual revelation from God (Mt. 16:17), he was miles ahead of the multitudes who superstitiously believed Jesus to be the reincarnation of John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. (Mt. 16:14) But even in his rightness, Peter still held false beliefs about the true nature and mission of the Messiah. Being set free from these cherished beliefs, expectations and hopes in the Messiah would require great encounters with the realities of the depths of his own sinful nature and a complete breaking of Peter’s desire to be something great, something self-defined and designed and crafted. Peter, as Jesus came to know, needed to know that participation in godliness is not a thing that can be grasped but must be received. (Phlp. 2:6)

Asking who we say that Jesus is may produce the right answer – but it does not guarantee that we are free of deception about who Jesus is and what He requires of us. Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn. 8:31-32) The Jews to whom He said this did not abide in His word, they were not His disciples, they did not know the truth and they were not free – they conclusively demonstrated this by trying to kill Jesus for the crime and sin of blasphemy. (Jn. 8:59)

His disciples did remain in His word, they were His followers (even when they did not understand or totally agree), they came to know the truth (when the Spirit of truth was poured out upon them) and they became free.

This is the process we must all go through. It is not enough to know that Jesus is the Messiah – that is only the first step and a baby one at that. It is not enough to know all the “right answers” – we must be filled with the Spirit of Christ and God and we must follow Him by His Spirit if we are to truly be sons of the living God. (Rom. 8:14) It is not enough to trust in the mere fact that we know enough to say or sing, “You are my God” – we must progressively come to know Him (as He truly is and not how we want or believe Him to be) and worship Him in spirit and truth. When we have only a flawed understanding of who Christ is and what He requires of us, having “the right answer” but not the Spirit who gives us the right “substance,” only guarantees that our expression of ekklesia (the Greek word misrendered “church” in modern English translations) is also flawed and misguided.

Only when we are free from our own flesh- or sin-generated or contaminated notions of who Christ is and what He requires of us will His promise of liberty be fulfilled in our lives. Until such time, we will remain under the sway and power of the evil one because we have not left the realms of religious bondage so as to come into the glorious liberty of being the saints (the holy, set apart ones) of God. Until the power of God’s people – that is, the power each individual has to control and rule over his own life – is broken and that power placed totally and only into the hands of Christ and God, we will continue to mistakenly believe that dead works

and religious requirements (“church”) are God’s plan for our lives and that fleshly religious façade and mere form of godliness is the “abundant life” that accompanies salvation instead of it being the very thing from which we should turn away and flee out from. (2 Tim. 3:5, 2 Cor. 6:17)

The way of the Messiah is truth, light, liberty, love, holiness and righteousness. All else, even when practiced in the name of Christ and God, is still merely a deception engineered by the devil so as to divert unwary souls from the way that leads to life. (Mt. 7:14)

Let he who has ears hear.

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