

To God Be the Glory

by Joel Hemphill

A Review by Barbara Buzzard



Though much better known as a gospel singer/songwriter (and an enormously successful one who with his family has received 8 Dove Awards), Joel Hemphill is now finding another outlet for his talents. In his book *To God Be the Glory* you will soon see that he has a new passion.

“If you see and embrace the truths found herein *you must speak out*...This is God’s message, and there is nothing as powerful as a truth whose time has come...It calls for some fundamental adjustments in our thinking, but it must be dealt with on an emotional level as well...The best teacher is a good example...The challenge is to awaken the goats without harming the sheep and lambs” (emphasis mine). When I find such gems in the introduction I know that they are there to entice us to read further. I have the same purpose — to goad you into reading this book.

Joel Hemphill’s appeal to speak out is part and parcel of the price of “seeing.” One must surely, at some stage, stand and be counted. Otherwise, what testimony does one give to the Truth? Hemphill’s song *The Cost of the Call* also speaks to this point. I very much appreciate the compassion of Hemphill’s intent when he speaks of awakening the goats without harming the lambs.

The author begins by reminding us of Jesus’ words in John 8:32: “And ye shall know the truth.” This immediately connects us to John 4:24 where we are told that we “must worship in spirit and in truth.” Our responsibility to make ourselves acquainted with Truth is grave and great and it should be a life-long search. We are warned that “*when truth is mixed with error, truth is destroyed!*” Scripture paints so many word pictures of the search for truth, e.g. selling everything one has in order to obtain it, searching for it as one would a lost coin. So very much is predicated on searching for and then finding the Truth. In fact, I am reminded of the way we were taught to memorize prepositions, and I find that all revolve around the Truth rather better than they did around the barrel: IN the Truth, THROUGH the Truth, BY the Truth, BECAUSE of the Truth, FOR the Truth, OF the truth, etc. Truth cannot, I think, be overemphasized as long as we have that accompanying companion — speaking the Truth in *love*.

Hemphill examines the Godhead with reverence and a devotion to Truth, rather than tradition. He finds that “Trinitarians and Oneness alike have long ago left behind the biblical view of who God is, and have tried to force the Holy Scriptures into the mold of our preconceived ideas.” He then gives us the history of the invention of the Trinity. (I so wish it could be listed in the history books — right there with the invention of the printing press, light bulb, cotton gin, etc.) This “invention” led to yet another wonder of man’s furtive imagination — the creeds. “At the end of the Creed, the Council attached a written condemnation of anyone denying its conclusion, especially those who believed that Christ did not exist in all eternity. The fourth-century Church father Athanasius

summed it up with these words: ‘*God was made man that we might be made gods.*’ This is not Bible doctrine, but Greek and Roman thinking.” It is more than telling that one of the delegates from Antioch who had signed this creed later protested in writing, saying that he had “committed an impious act, Oh Prince, by subscribing to a blasphemy from fear of you.”

“Everyone knew that the decision of the council had been *arbitrary*. Constantine had determined what the Council should decide, yet the decrees of the Council were recognized as *authoritative Christian pronouncements*. Thoughtful leaders pondered this new development. They began to believe Christian *motives and conduct were secondary*; their goal was to attain authoritative decisions. Many of the later universal councils reached their decisions through *physical coercion* and rough-and-tumble tactics. It is difficult to see what part genuine Christianity had in some of these councils... The development that began with the first world council at Nicea in 325 led *directly to the Roman Catholic Church*” (*A Summary of Christian History*, Robert Baker and John Roberts, emphasis Hemphill’s).

The Encyclopedia of Catholicism: “Today, scholars generally agree that *there is no doctrine of the Trinity* as such in either the O.T. or the N.T. It would go far beyond the intention and thought-forms of the O.T. to suppose that a *late-fourth century Christian doctrine* can be found there. Likewise the N.T. does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity.” How very honest this statement is! How seriously we err in ignoring it.

“From the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther, John Calvin and other Protestants continued to speak this heresy [anti-Semitism] ‘without serious examination.’ Every doctrine bears fruit and this one bears bitter fruit. It is a matter of record that Adolf Hitler quoted some of the vile statements made by Luther as justification for his hatred of the Jews, which led to the slaughter of six million in the Holocaust.” Hemphill notes that the statements of those known as the early church fathers are quoted as if they were “junior apostles” and warns us that they were seriously in error with reference to hatred of the Jews and also to the identity of Jesus. He points out that if Jesus is “co-equal” or “co-eternal” with the Father, Peter and Paul did not know it. And Jesus did not know it: “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). Hemphill says, “We look at the Jews with dismay because they cannot see that Jesus is their Messiah, and they look at us with dismay because we have taken ‘a man’ and made him ‘God.’”

William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania: “Know then, my friend, that the Trinity was born above three hundred years after the ancient Gospel was declared; it was conceived in ignorance, brought forth and maintained by cruelty.” I believe that one of Hemphill’s many strengths is that he has had to search for Truth. The views that he now espouses were not handed down to him, but rather dug out on close examination of the Scriptures. He struggled for Truth and had to sacrifice cherished tradition and error taught by beloved parents. This gives him not only validity but believability and I believe his research bespeaks an honest heart.

The author boldly asserts that “The incarnation as taught in modern theology is an invention of men, a fable, and is not a doctrine taught in God’s Holy Bible. Jesus as a person did not preexist his mother and is not as old as his Father.”

“We dare not make him more than the Bible says he is, using non-biblical terms such as ‘God the Son,’ ‘the eternal Son,’ ‘the preexistent Son,’ ‘God’ (as in Lord God – Jehovah Elohim), ‘King of Heaven’ and ‘the second person of the triune God.’ The Bible does not apply these terms to the Son and for us to do so borders on idolatry.” One piece of evidence against the Trinity actually comes from Trinitarian James Hastings in the *Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible*: “It may be that St. Paul nowhere names Christ ‘God’...No candid exegete will deny that over and over again Christ is somehow given a place inferior to God.” And Hemphill adds that Jesus is “mighty” but never “the Almighty.” He also wisely reminds us that the purpose of John’s entire gospel was so that “we might believe that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God” (John 20:31). How devastating to think that Son of God = God, when, in fact, it means not God.

The New International Encyclopedia states: “At the time of the Reformation, the Protestant Church took over the doctrine of the Trinity without serious examination.” It is that serious examination which Hemphill is urging upon us now, for as Thomas Jefferson admitted: “I never had sense enough to comprehend the Trinity, and it has always appeared to me that comprehension must precede assent.”

There is a very interesting chapter entitled “What Is God’s Name?” Though one might fill chapters and whole books on God’s name, you will never find that Jesus is God’s name. A challenging chapter follows that one asking “Does Jesus Have a God?” This point is so revealing that it has caused “the lights to come on” for some. Others are governed by unknowable motives and yet it does seem as if they have glued their eyes closed. Joel Hemphill makes a trenchant point when he states that in Hebrews 5:7 Jesus “was heard in that he feared.” What sense would this make of the “co-equal” claim: Surely we would not say that God also fears His Son! It is not as though we do not have a directive on this. We do: God has a Son and that Son has a God!

You won’t want to miss Appendix C: “101 Bible Reasons Why Jesus Cannot Be God or the Second Person of a Triune God.” These are all points worthy of meditation and deep reflection. Dare I say it — even conversation starters?

At the beginning of each chapter there are stunning quotations from encyclopedias and Bible dictionaries, former statesmen and writers. These by themselves are compelling but when amassed together provide enough evidence to put an end to any configuration of the Godhead other than that outlined in 1 Timothy 2:5: “There is one God and one mediator between God and humans — Christ Jesus, himself human.”

My earnest thanks for your courage, Joel, in standing and being counted; for your example in diligently weighing the evidence and putting it before us, asking us to do the same. May Truth prevail.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Buzzard