



VERITAS

Equipping Christians to live by truth—*veritas*—from God.

A Biblical Question We Need to Answer in Our Time

by O. S. Hawkins

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Dr. O. S. Hawkins is the president of GuideStone Financial Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. GuideStone, with assets of more than \$9 billion, manages the retirement accounts of 175,000 ministers and employees of churches, agencies, and institutions. Dr. Hawkins is a frequent speaker at pastors' conferences, conventions, and churches across the nation.

From 1993–1997, Dr. Hawkins served as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. Previous to this, he was pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, from 1978–1993.

Dr. Hawkins was named Clergyman of the Year by the Religious Heritage of America and served as president of the National Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference. He is the author of more than 20 books, including *Getting Down to Brass Tacks: Advice from James for Real World Christians*, *Tearing Down Walls and Building Bridges*, and *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*.

Dr. Hawkins and his wife, Susan, have two daughters, Wendy and Holly. He has three earned degrees (B.B.A., M.Div., D.Min.) and three honorary degrees (S.T.D. and two D.D.s) from Texas Christian University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Luther Rice Seminary, Southwest Baptist University, Dallas Baptist University, and Criswell College.

This message is taken from a chapel address Dr. Hawkins delivered to the Dallas Seminary student body in fall of 2006.



The 21st century presents us with incredible challenges and opportunities. Wherever God calls you to serve in the days ahead, I believe that the question all of us must answer in the next generation is the question Jesus posed to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi: “Who do you say I am?” (Matt. 16:15). I am convinced this is the question of our time for the church.

In a day when pluralism and inclusivism have infiltrated the Western world and even the church, we are called to publicly affirm, profess, and proclaim the exclusivity of the gospel and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The issue is that Christ is who He said He is, “the way and the truth and the life” apart from whom no one can come to the Father (John 14:6).

Answering Jesus' question “Who do you say I am?” in the

(continued on next page)

21st century demands true leadership from those of us who are called to wage this battle for truth. There are two kinds of leadership evident to me in Matthew 16. The first kind is leadership by public consensus and the second is leadership by personal conviction. These two kinds of leadership are very pertinent to the way we answer Jesus' question, and they are the points I want to develop in my message to you.

Leadership by Public Consensus

First of all, there are those who lead by public consensus. So often we see this kind of leadership in the political arena, perhaps because it is much more apparent when leaders who are in the public eye and whose faces appear in the pages of our newspapers exercise leadership by consensus.

These are the people who stick their finger into the wind to see which way it is blowing or consult the latest opinion polls before they state their view on a subject. But the political world does not have a corner on this market. Leadership by public consensus, by majority opinion, is also evident in business, in the home, and

even in the church—wherever we find people who refuse to take a stand on an issue, or more important lead the way on an issue, until they have done their “homework” and found out what the people are saying and what they want to do.

A Question of Public Consensus

This kind of leadership is implied in an earlier question Jesus asked the apostles on their journey north to Caesarea Philippi: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matt. 16:13).

Jesus knew how prone the disciples would be to leave their personal convictions about Him when faced with a world in which the public consensus about Jesus was not in line with the truth. We face that same tendency and temptation today as we face a culture in which the public consensus is that Jesus is not the Son of God and not the exclusive way to God.

It's interesting that Jesus took the disciples away from the Galilean crowds to deal with the question of His true identity. They had been immersed in those crowds in Galilee. People had been pulling on them, and the disciples were being

physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally drained. So Jesus marched the disciples 25 miles north, all the way up to the headwaters of the Jordan River at the foothills of Mount Hermon.

Around the fire that night, Jesus asked the disciples what the crowds were saying about Him (Matt. 16:13). Today the question might be asked this way: “What do the latest opinion polls say about who Jesus is?” In a lot of places, people who claim to be leaders would consult the polls before answering this question because what people say is far more important to them than what God says.

What did the disciples do when Jesus asked, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They got together in a little “holy huddle” and began to compare their polling data. They had been among the people, and they knew what the people had been saying. So they offered Jesus the latest opinions: “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (Matt. 16:14).

It’s interesting that things haven’t changed much in 2,000 years—because people haven’t changed. Ask our Islamic

friends today, and they will tell you that Jesus was just one of the prophets, a great man but not as great as the prophet Mohammed.

So here is the question of public consensus. There are two problems that inevitably arise in the church culture when we never get out of Matthew 16:13—that is, when we become more concerned with what people say than with what God says.

The first of these is pluralism, which is where so much of our Western world and even the Christian world are today. Pluralism is the idea that there are many ways to God, and it really doesn’t matter which way you take because all roads

lead to heaven. So the Buddhists take their road, the Hindus go on their road, our Jewish friends take yet another road, Islam follows its road, and other groups take still other roads, while born-again believers follow Jesus. According to pluralism, everyone is heading in the same direction, so any road will do.

Second, focusing on the word of men more than the Word of God also gives rise to inclusivism, the idea that

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everyone is included in the redeemed. I am amazed at how much this idea has infiltrated the church culture today.

Why should we be concerned about pluralism and inclusivism? Because they dramatically alter the nature of our faith. Pluralism affects our doctrine, because if we believe there are many roads that all lead to heaven, then there is no reason to insist on the virgin birth of Christ or His sinless life.

Inclusivism affects our duty, our very mission, because if inclusivism is true then there is no need for evangelism and missions. The reason some of the mainline denominations don't emphasize evangelism or missions anymore is because they no longer hold to a Christology that says Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. But this is not some idea that was made in America and that we are trying to perpetrate on the world. The doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ was made in heaven and delivered to the world 2,000 years ago. Public consensus does not determine whether Jesus is God in the flesh.

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Leadership by Personal Conviction

The second kind of leadership that I believe is evident in Matthew 16 is leadership by personal conviction. In contrast to those who lead by popular consensus, those who lead by personal conviction have at the very core and fiber of their being a conviction about right and wrong, and they lead that way.

There is all the difference in the world between these two leadership styles. Those who lead by public consensus lead people to do what they *want* to do. But those who lead by personal conviction lead people to do what they *need* to do. Jesus' desire to see

His disciples lead by personal conviction is revealed in the question of Matthew 16:15, "Who do you say I am?" This is the question of our time.

The Question of Personal Conviction

Jesus' question in Matthew 16:15 takes us away from the realm of public consensus to that of personal conviction. Jesus looked His disciples in the eyes and said, "What I really want to know is what

you say. Who do you, as opposed to the crowds, say that I am?" There is an alternative and an antidote to such things as pluralism and inclusivism, and it is this: the exclusivity of the gospel of Christ.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, it looked for a while as if mercy drops of revival were falling on America. But I was recently with one of your Seminary graduates, Joe Stowell, the former president of Moody Bible Institute, who made an astute observation about those days.

Joe said that when they held that service in the National Cathedral a few days after 9/11, the president and members of Congress were there along with all the military leaders. They sang the great hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

But as Joe observed, the second verse of that hymn was omitted. What does that verse say? "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing. Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He. Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same. And He must win the battle." References to Jesus' deity were omitted

because He has no place in much of our culture today.

If you doubt this is true, go into a coffee shop in Dallas one morning. Sit down with someone and begin explaining that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven and that nobody is going to get there except through Him. Some people will look at you as if you are speaking a foreign language. For others, saying that Jesus is the only way to God is like waving a red cape in front of a raging bull in a Madrid bullring. This is the way our culture deals with Jesus today.

So here in our text Christ asks the question that is, I believe, the question for our time. It is emphatic in the Greek, as I already alluded to. The word "you" is in the emphatic position in the sentence structure. The idea is, "What do *you* disciples believe about Me?" Peter does the same thing in his answer in Matthew 16:16. He puts "you" in the emphatic position: "You, Lord, and You only, You and no one else, are the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God."

What motivated Simon Peter to make that great confession and, years later, to accept a martyr's death? Did he give his life because he

believed there were many roads to heaven, of which Jesus was only one? No, Peter gave his life because he insisted on and believed in the exclusivity of the gospel of Christ. If Simon Peter could come to the church today and testify to us, he would say the same thing he said in Acts 4:12: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

We could ask the same question of the apostle Paul. What motivated him to meet a martyr’s death? Paul was willing to die for the gospel because he believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that there is no other way to heaven except through Jesus. If Paul were here today, he would affirm: “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal. 1:8).

When we go out into the world teaching the exclusive gospel of Christ in answer to the question of our time, we are called narrow-minded.

But that is the very nature of truth. All truth is narrow. Mathematical truth is narrow:

Two plus two equals four. Geographical truth is narrow: Texas and Oklahoma are bordered by the Red River, not the Mississippi River. Historical truth is narrow: John Wilkes Booth shot Abraham Lincoln in the Ford Theater in Washington. He didn’t stab Lincoln in the back in lower Manhattan.

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So why should we be surprised that theological truth is also narrow? Christ is the only way to eternal life. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one will come to the Father except through Him. The question Jesus asked of His disciples in Matthew 16 is the same question being asked today that we must answer.

As you go out to minister in the name of Jesus Christ, the question that is going to be most pertinent and applicable in our pluralistic, inclusivistic culture is, “Who do you say I am?” Your answer to this question will shape and define your ministry.

Answering the Key Question of Our Time

It is always a blessing when Dallas Seminary is able to host a Christian leader and Bible teacher who has valuable insights from God's Word to share with our Seminary family.

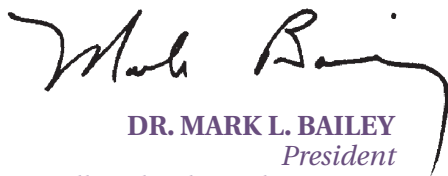
We had that privilege this past school year when Dr. O. S. Hawkins spoke in a chapel service. Dr. Hawkins was a pastor for almost two decades, including his service at the great First Baptist Church here in Dallas.

The message Dr. Hawkins brought was very timely, given the sudden force with which the church is being hit by *The Da Vinci Code* and other current attacks on our faith. Of course, the questions that recent books and films have raised are not new—and the fact is that God anticipated the need of the church in every age to teach and defend the truth.

One way that Jesus prepared His people to stand for the truth was by asking penetrating, timeless questions that must be answered in each generation. The right answers to the questions Jesus asked will serve the church well throughout her history, whether the issue is *The Da Vinci Code* or any other attack on our faith.

Paul's statement that the trumpet must "sound a clear call" (1 Cor. 14:8) is relevant to us today. Dr. Hawkins is sounding a clarion call for a clear presentation of the gospel, which brings us back to the heart of the training at Dallas Seminary. It has never been more important to be clear about what Jesus claimed for Himself and the church!

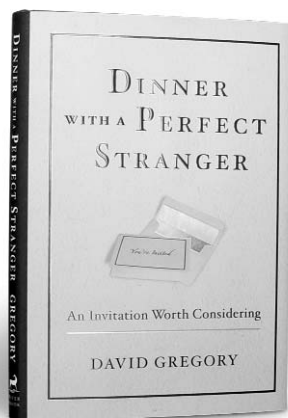
It is a delight to put tools like *Veritas* into your hands to help you prepare "to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pet. 3:15). Your prayers and financial support of Dallas Seminary are the "tools" that enable us to equip God-called leaders who can engage our culture while teaching and strengthening God's people. Thank you for all that you mean to this ministry.



DR. MARK L. BAILEY
President
Dallas Theological Seminary



Eavesdrop on a 'Conversation' That Could Change You!



Dinner with a Perfect Stranger tells the fictional account of a startling dinner conversation that businessman Nick Cominsky has with a man who claims to be Jesus. Nick is amazed by how much this man knows and how deeply he cares about Nick's successful yet unsatisfying life.

Will Nick mark this night up to “strange coincidence” and carry on with his life, or will he be eternally changed by this encounter? The answer is in this fascinating book, written by Dallas Seminary graduate David Gregory. This could be anyone's “dinner conversation” with Jesus. This book is a great evangelistic tool—so read it and let it change you, then pass it on to an unsaved friend.

Well-known Christian author Mike Mason says, “There's just one thing people need in order to live a happy, abundant life: to be convinced that God loves them. Want to be convinced? Read *Dinner with a Perfect Stranger*. The author deftly anticipates and answers every question. I predict this little book will become a classic—one of a handful of modern books (like *Mere Christianity*) that people read to kindle or rekindle faith.”

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