

Q&A on IBEX Situation

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How did this situation begin?

Bill Schlegel called Will Varner to inform him that he could no longer sign the doctrinal statement because he denies the deity of Christ and the Trinity.

How did TMU respond?

We began a careful process to understand Bill and try to bring him to repentance and an understanding of the truth. Everything was kept secret in hopes that Bill would be restored and his reputation unharmed. After the initial conversations, Bill was suspended from teaching. Then TMU flew Bill to meet with Doug Bookman at Shepherds' Seminary. (Dr. Bookman hired Bill Schlegel to teach at IBEX in 1995.)

What happened at the meeting with Dr. Bookman?

Over the course of an entire day (March 13), Dr. Bookman and other experts explained to Bill the evidence for the deity of Christ and the Trinity. Bill refused to change his position.

What happened in California?

Bill flew to the TMU campus to meet with the administration. On Sunday evening, he met with some long-time friends, including Greg Behle, Lisa LaGeorge, Kelli Bolen, and me. The tone of the meeting was very pleasant, but Bill was adamant in denying that Jesus is God or that there are three persons in the Godhead. On Monday morning, March 19, Bill met with John Stead and Will Varner. Dr. Varner provided additional evidence for the deity of Christ, including information from Larry Hurtado's book *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. At the end, Bill refused to affirm the TMU doctrinal statement, and Dr. Stead terminated his employment and revoked his honorary doctorate.

Did John MacArthur refuse to meet with Bill?

No. Dr. MacArthur was traveling until Monday and willing to meet with Bill on Tuesday. Bill arrived in Santa Clarita on Sunday evening and met with Drs. Stead and Varner on Monday. Bill could have met with Dr. MacArthur on Tuesday, but instead he chose to drive out of town to be with family until he flew back to Israel on Friday.

Was Bill's employment concluded with a "nasty termination"?

We labored carefully and diligently for more than two weeks to convince Bill of his errors. When he refused at every turn to affirm the TMU doctrinal statement, his employment was terminated. Bill didn't offer to resign until after his termination was completed. We are

commanded by Scripture to contend for the faith, and his termination was necessary to protect our students from spiritual danger. This included alerting his present and former students to the situation and explaining that his teaching is not faithful to God's Word.

Do you believe that the process was carried out in a fair, righteous, and God-honoring way?

Yes. In the midst of this most difficult situation, one blessing was seeing my colleagues at Master's pull together in unity. I think that at every point we demonstrated love towards Bill and to our students, past and present.

What does Bill believe about Jesus?

Bill believes that Jesus is only a man. He is the most important man and he is Messiah, but he is not God and he is not pre-existent. Jesus is not the Second Person of the Trinity, and the Holy Spirit is not a person but the power of God. He thinks we at TMU worship three gods.

How did Bill get to this understanding of Jesus?

I listened to a sermon that Bill sent to me that he gave at his congregation at Yad HaShmonah in February or earlier. In it, he explains that the term "son of God" in the Old Testament refers to God's chosen agent to be heir of his creation to rule over it. So Adam is called a "son of God." And Israel is called a "son of God." And the son of David, Israel's king, is called a "son of God." This term, in Bill's view, only signifies a human king. When you get to the New Testament, when someone calls Jesus "son of God" (such as Nathanael in John 1:49), he intends only that Jesus was the Messiah, the king of Israel, the heir to rule over God's creation. Bill believes that the term "son of God" only later (in the 2nd century and on) was changed to signify divine status. The Trinity, in Bill's thinking, is a Greek philosophical construct imposed on a Jewish faith that had no concept of a divine-man. He asserts that neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament teach Jesus's deity or the concept of a Trinity.

Is there anything like this view in the history of the church?

Bill's view appears to be closest to Socinianism, a heresy that originated in the 16th century.

Was Bill influenced by others in coming to this view?

Bill told me that he figured this out just by reading the Scriptures. Then he found some videos on the internet and a book that confirmed his view. In my interaction with Bill, I suspect that Bill's memory is not accurate in this regard, given the priority that he gives in his thinking to ideas of Greek philosophy and church fathers, of which he has little knowledge and can learn nothing from studying the Bible. Others have expressed a similar view to me based on their interactions with Bill.

How do you respond to Bill's view?

TMU Bible faculty have written a 20-page summary of various lines of evidence that refute Bill's view and explain the devastating consequences. We are also preparing a transcript from a campus meeting we had in which TMU Bible faculty addressed these issues. I have written a 5-page summary providing evidence for the deity of the Messiah in the Old Testament. This is important because of Bill's contention that the OT speaks only of a human Messiah. In my conversation with him, he seemed completely ignorant, for instance, of what Isaiah says about the deity of the Messiah and the Trinity.

Can you give me a brief response?

Bill has isolated one strand of teaching about the Messiah in the OT. It is a glorious strand (the Messiah is God's king to inherit and rule the earth!). But it ignores so much other glorious truth in the OT. The psalmists and prophets paint a portrait of a divine-man who will die to save his people and then rise again to life to rule over God's creation. This is all entailed in the OT portrait of the Messiah, so that when you open the NT, the apostles have that complete understanding in mind as they follow Jesus, affirm his status as "son of God," and worship him as Lord.

Does Bill believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

Yes and no. Bill believes Jesus is the "son of God" but he defines that as strictly a human ruler. "Son of God," in his view, is equivalent to Messiah, the Davidic heir to God's land. He insists that it has nothing to do with deity, but that deity was only ascribed to the term "son of God" by Greek-influenced church fathers in the centuries after the New Testament was written. Jesus is a created human, born of a virgin, whom God chose to use, kept him sinless, raised him from the dead, exalted him to his right hand, so he can return to earth and reign as king over the earth. Bill believes he has a very high view of Jesus, but he is adamant that Jesus must not be considered divine.

Is it necessary to believe that Jesus is God in order to be saved?

Yes. Anyone who redefines God does not worship God or trust God, but a god of their own making. The Scriptures are abundantly clear that Jesus is pre-existent and he is God very God. To deny what God reveals about Jesus is to be in rebellion against God.

Did Bill reach out to you or anyone while he was contemplating this new doctrine?

No. Bill told me that he was thinking of this new view for "months" (not years). During that time he was teaching alongside Benj Foreman at IBEX. During that time he was a teaching elder at a congregation at Yad HaShmonah. During that time I was in regular correspondence with him about atlases and photos. He never raised the issue with any believers outside of his family

during that time, as far as I am aware. He never reached out to Doug Bookman, Will Varner, Randy Cook, Abner Chou, Meno Kalisher, or any of the other men who love Bill and would have been happy to sit down with him to understand the Scriptures. Bill kept his view in hiding during these months while he consulted with cultists (through videos and reading material). He only revealed it after he was absolutely convinced and unwilling to consider other evidence.

Does this mean that Bill was never saved?

Let me answer this question by affirming several truths that are clear from Scripture. First, salvation is only possible by faith in Jesus the Messiah as he is revealed in the Bible. Second, salvation involves regeneration, the giving of new life to one who is dead in sin. It is irreversible. Those whom God saves are always saved. They persevere in salvation unto the end. Third, those who refuse to repent are to be put out of the church and treated as unbelievers.

Do you pray for Bill's restoration to the truth?

I do. I have known Bill for 27 years. He was first my teacher, then he helped train me to teach, and then we taught together at IBEX for 11 years. Since then we have been in regular contact, including travel together in Israel a couple of years ago. I believe that Bill can be brought to a knowledge of the truth. Those closest to him understand that from a human perspective, it will take a miracle. We all believe in a God who does miracles. From a human perspective, I am most discouraged about Bill's allegiance to the teaching of cultists.

Can we still use the *Satellite Bible Atlas*?

This is a decision for each person to make. I personally will continue to use it. TMU leadership has decided that we can continue to use it. It was written when Bill affirmed the truth. Truth is truth. I am deeply grateful for Bill's work in creating this atlas and I believe that it can continue to serve many well.

What is the future for IBEX?

By God's grace, full-steam ahead. Dr. Varner says that our best days are ahead, and I agree with him. This semester will finish out with Benj and Dr. Varner teaching in Israel. We are in the process of interviewing a candidate to be the new full-time IBEX professor. All spots for the next semesters are full and the waiting lists are more than 10 on each.

What does Bill think about the future of IBEX?

He told me that he wants all the best for it. His spirit is sweet, and his words are supportive.

Do you know what Bill's plans are for the future?

Bill told me that he wants to continue living in Israel, but he is considering moving to the States for a time to care for his aging parents.

What about Bill's family?

Pray for them. I imagine that it must be very difficult for Stephanie and their five children. I have not had any direct contact with them since this began, so I cannot say more. We love all of them very much.

How should we pray?

Pray for Bill's repentance and restoration to the Lord Jesus. Paul instructed Timothy to be kind to everyone. "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Tim 2:25-26).

Pray for Stephanie and the children. Pray that the Lord will help them to stand strong in truth. Pray that God will give them peace in resisting what the man they so deeply love is telling them.

Pray for the messianic community in Israel, including the congregation that Bill helped to found many years ago. Pray that none are led into error. Pray that the church's testimony is bright to those who are watching.

Pray for Bill's former students. All of them who know of this situation are probably shocked now, and many will be confused. This is a man they trusted and respected. They have questions. Pray that God will draw them nearer to himself through his Word. Pray that these students are reminded that their faith is not in a man but in God. Pray that none follow Bill into this heresy. Pray that all "stand firm" in this spiritual battle (Eph 6:10-20).

Pray that God will receive great glory through all of this, as we draw near to him in praise and prayer, as we encourage one another in the truth, as we study the Scriptures in earnest to see the great glory of the Lord Jesus, God-come-in-the-flesh, Son of Man and Son of God, the true God and eternal life, worthy of all worship now and forever.