The Real Christ

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Foreword

Our modern civilization with its addiction to money and power has left so much unaddressed; our need for beauty, for poetry, for art, for mystery and dreams, to find love, the meaning of life, for personal contact with God. The rush of modern life has left each of us with the niggling conscience that this is the sort of life we want to have, indeed, that we ought to follow. But not only do we not follow our conscience; we don't know where to find something, some philosophy, some religion, which somehow synthesizes all these needs together. People today- young people especially- are so often asking the ultimate questions, looking for the right things, but in the wrong places. The metanarrative of modern art, in all its forms from movies to songs to novels, records the distraughtness of humanity, our malaise, the hidden longing for deliverance and redemption which there is not far beneath the surface of us all. But with all due respect to the forms in which this is expressed- the fineness of the art, power of the wordsmithing, the screenplay. . . modern men and women are groping like the blind in search of a wall of support, desperate for some familiar guide towards the true path. The self-introspection of internet blogs, humanity's increasing preoccupation with itself, is the result of a failure to find that path. They rage in vain against a society which has lost its spiritual roots.

But I'm bold enough to suggest that in God and in His Son Jesus, as the Bible reveals them, stripped of all the theology of men, the accretions of nominal Christian culture… we find just what we need and were unconsciously looking for, even longing for, all our lives. I can only say 'taste and see…'. For all other commentary or persuasion would be bathos compared to the real Christ and the real God as they truly are. To write a book about the Lord Jesus Christ is not to be approached lightly. The more one comes to know Him, the more cautious one becomes to ensure that we speak and write of Him with an appropriate honour and correctness in every sense. Given the frailty of human understanding and how we labour "under the tyranny of words", this has thrown me back as never before upon the Bible as God's word; seeking to underpin all I may think and say and teach of the Lord Jesus in the words of God rather than of men. If this task weren't so crucially important, I wouldn't have attempted it. But quite simply, the Bible predicates the life eternal upon 'knowing Christ'. Therefore understanding Him assumes a vital place in human life, both now and eternally. For as Paul succinctly put it: "To live is Christ".

And so I set out in Part 1 to analyze Bible teaching about the nature of God and His Son, the Lord Jesus. At times I pause to bring out the practical importance of these matters. And then in Part 2 I seek to build upon that foundation, in considering who Jesus was as a person, as a character, attempting as it were an archaeology of an ancient personality. I do this because He is now the risen and exalted Lord of Heaven and earth, and His spirit of being and living, His way, His personality- is very much alive today. And we are called to be like Him. He wasn't a Divine comet that sped to this earth for 33 years and then zoomed off again. He was truly one of us, not a puppet, no actor on a stage, but the ultimate human hero- who not only saved us, but set us the ultimately true example, an image to which we should conform ourselves. His path to glory is very much our realistic example.

All through this enterprise, I am keenly aware that I am at odds with popular Christian theology about the Lord Jesus. In some ways this book is a deconstruction of Trinitarian dogma, and the notion that the Lord Jesus somehow pre-existed His birth in a personal form. But that's done from a motive of wanting to present the real Christ in all His transforming power, which I believe He is somewhat robbed of by false theories about Him. The mission of true theology, true understanding, is the radical transformation of human life in practice. And this is what I'm about, rather than deconstructing one school of thought for the sake of it. And so in Part 3 I consider how the real Christ was lost to the creeds of a corrupted Christendom; and in the Appendix I consider Scriptures which have been wrested to this end. It may come as a surprise to some to realize that what I'm teaching is not in fact unique to me by any means, but many others from various backgrounds have come to the same conclusions. And so this volume references those writers- not because they of themselves are any ultimate authority, but to provide a comfort zone to those whose hand may shake a little in signing up to a position on Christ which they may (wrongly) perceive is shared by virtually nobody. But ultimately, the Bible as God's word is our basis of appeal. We may stand with our backs to the world, but we must let God be true and every man a liar. I am no great fan of Martin Luther, but I can say with him: "Here I stand, I can do no other".

Finally. Pray for guidance on this subject. Try to come to the Bible as if for the first time, a 'born again virgin' in spiritual terms, with a second naivety; give each Divine word its true weight, meet it as if it's totally unknown and unfamiliar to you, stripped of all the background assumptions we tend to bring with us to anything we read, the freight we attach to words we assume we have long ago understood. Along with

you, I *try* to do this; and I hope you can do better than me. For it's not easy. But if we can achieve even something of it, we will then 'meet Jesus again for the first time'. The real Christ will make us real people, humanity as God intended, and thereby real Christians, assured of the eternal life that is in Christ and which will be revealed at His return to earth, when His resurrection shall become ours.

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Contents

1-1 The Personality of God

It is a majestic, glorious theme of the Bible that God is revealed as a real being. It is also a fundamental tenet of Christianity that Jesus is the Son of God. If God is not a real being, then it is impossible for Him to have a Son who was the "image of His *person*" (Heb. 1:3). The Greek word actually means His "substance" (RV). Further, it becomes difficult to develop a personal, living relationship with 'God', if 'God' is just a concept in our mind. It is tragic that the majority of religions have this unreal, intangible conception of God.

As God is so infinitely greater than we are, it is understandable that many people's faith has balked at the clear promises that ultimately we will see Him. It is impossible for sinful man to see God (Ex. 33:20 RSV) - although this implies that were it not for our sinfulness, God is indeed a being who can 'be seen'. Israel lacked the faith to see God's "shape" (Jn. 5:37). Such faith comes from knowing God and believing His word:

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:8).

"His (God's) servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name (God's name - Rev. 3:12) shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. 22:3,4).

Such a wonderful hope, if we truly believe it, will have a profound practical effect upon our lives:

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

We should not swear oaths, because "he that shall swear by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him that sits upon it" (Mt. 23:22).

"We shall see him as he is (manifest in Christ). And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure" (1 Jn. 3:2,3).

In this life our understanding of the heavenly Father is very incomplete, but we can look forward, through the tangled darkness of this life, to meeting Him at last. Our 'seeing' of Him will doubtless be matched by our greater mental comprehension of Him. Thus from the absolute depths of human suffering, Job could rejoice in the totally personal relationship with God which he would fully experience at the last day:

"Though after my death worms shall destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:26,27).

And the apostle Paul cried out from another life of pain and turmoil: "Now we look in a glass mirror, with a poor image; but then face to face" (1Cor. 13:12).

Old Testament Evidence

These promises of the New Testament build on a considerable Old Testament backdrop of evidence for a personal God. It cannot be over stressed that it is fundamental to appreciate the nature of God if we are to have any true understanding of what Bible based religion is all about. The Old Testament consistently talks of God as a person; the person-to-person relationship with God of which both Old and New Testaments speak is unique to the true Christian hope. The following are strong arguments in favour of a personal God:

- "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Thus man is made in the image and likeness of God, as manifested through the angels. James 3:9 speaks of ". . . men, which are made in the similitude of God. " Our creation in the image of God surely means that we can infer something about the real object of which we are but an image. Thus God, whom we reflect, is not something nebulous of which we cannot conceive. Ezekiel saw God enthroned above the cherubim, with the silhouette of "the likeness of a man" (Ez. 1:26; 10:20); it is God Himself who is located above the cherubim (2 Kings 19:15 RV). All this has a practical import; because we are in the image of God, because it is imprinted on every part of our bodies, we must give that body to God, just as men were to give the penny which had Caesar's image on it to Caesar (Lk. 20:25). Commenting on this matter in relation to Gen. 1:26,27, Risto Santala writes: "There are two Hebrew words here, *tselem*, 'image' (in modern Hebrew 'photograph'), and *demuth*, 'figure' or 'similitude'… these expressions are very concrete. God is a person and he has a definite form and being" (1).
- "He (God) knows our frame" (Ps. 103:14); He wishes us to conceive of Him as a personal being, a Father to whom we can relate.
- Descriptions of God's dwelling place clearly indicate that He has a personal location: "God is in heaven" (Ecc. 5:2); "He has looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth" (Ps. 102:19,20); "Hear in heaven your dwelling place" (1Kings 8:39). Yet more specifically than this, we read that God has a "throne" (2 Chron. 9:8; Ps. 11:4; Is. 6:1; 66:1). Such language is hard to apply

to an undefined essence which exists somewhere in heavenly realms. God is spoken of as "coming down" when He manifests Himself. This suggests a heavenly location of God. It is impossible to understand the idea of 'God manifestation' without appreciating the personal nature of God.
- Is. 45 is full of references by God to His personal involvement in the affairs of His people: "I am the Lord, and there is none else. . . I the Lord do all these things. . . I the Lord have created it. Woe unto him that strives with his maker. . . I, even my hands have stretched out the heavens. . . look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth". This last sentence especially shows the personal existence of God - He desires men to look to Him, to conceive of His literal existence with the eye of faith.
- God is revealed to us as a forgiving God, who speaks words to men. Yet forgiveness and speech can only come from a sentient being, they are mental acts. Thus David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), showing that God has a mind (heart), which is capable of being replicated to some limited degree by man, although man by nature is not after God's heart. Passages like, "The Lord repented that He had made man. . . and it grieved Him at his heart" (Gen. 6:6), reveal God as a feeling, conscious being. This helps us to appreciate how we really can both please and displease Him, as children can a natural father.

If God Is Not Personal. . .
If God is not a real, personal being, then the concept of spirituality is hard to grapple with. If God is totally righteous but is not a personal being, then we cannot really conceive of His righteousness manifested in human beings. Once we appreciate that there is a personal being called God, then we can work on our characters, with His help and the influence of His word, to reflect the characteristics of God in our lives. God's purpose is to reveal Himself in a multitude of glorified beings. His memorial name, Yahweh Elohim, implies this ('He who shall be revealed in mighty ones', is an approximate translation). The descriptions of the reward of the faithful in God's coming Kingdom on earth show that they will have a tangible, bodily existence, although no longer subject to the weaknesses of human nature. Job longed for the "latter day" when he would have a resurrection of his body (Job 19:25-27). Abraham is one of the "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth (who) shall awake. . . to everlasting life" (Dan. 12:2) so that he can receive the promise of eternal inheritance of the land of Canaan, a physical location on this earth (Gen. 17:8). "Saints shall shout aloud for joy. . . let them sing aloud upon their beds. . . and execute judgment upon the nations" (Ps. 132:16; 149:5,7). A failure by both Jew and Gentile to appreciate passages like these, as well as the fundamentally literal, physical import of the promises to Abraham, has led to the wrong notion of an "immortal soul" as the real form of human existence. Such an idea is totally devoid of Biblical support. God is an immortal, glorious being, and He is working out His purpose so that men and women might be called to live in His future Kingdom on this earth, to share His attributes, expressed in a bodily form. The faithful are promised that they will inherit God's nature (2 Pet. 1:4). **We will be given a body like that of Jesus** (Phil. 3:21), and we know that he will have a physical body in the Kingdom. The doctrine of the personality of God is therefore related to the Gospel of the Kingdom.

There can be no sensible concept of worship, religion or personal relationship with God therefore until it is appreciated that God is a real being and that we are made in His image. We need to develop His mental likeness now so that we may be made fully like Him in the Kingdom of God. So much more sense and comfort can now be gained from the passages which speak of God as a loving Father, chastening us as a Father does his son (e. g. Dt. 8:5). In the context of Christ's sufferings we read that, "It was the Lord's will to bruise Him" (Is. 53:10); although he "cried unto God: he heard my voice. . . and my cry came before him, even into his ears" (Ps. 18:6). God's promise to David of a seed who would be God's Son required the miraculous birth of a human being who was truly in the image and likeness of his father.

A correct understanding of God is a key which opens up many other vital areas of Bible doctrine. But as one lie leads to another lie, so a false concept of God obscures the truth which the Scriptures offer. If you have found this section convincing, or even partly so, the question arises: '**Do you really know God**?' We will now further explore Bible teaching about Him.

The Unity Of God
There is really repeated Biblical emphasis upon the unity of God, that Yahweh God of Israel, "the Father", is the one and only God: "**Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh**" (Dt. 6:4 New Jerusalem Bible). **He swears that there will be no God formed after Him** (Is. 43:10). The birth and exaltation of His Son, whatever exalted language is used about, was therefore in no way the forming of

another God. If the Lord Jesus knew there to have been a trinity, it's somewhat strange that He fails to correct the man who commented: "Teacher, you have truly stated that [God] is one; and there is none else besides Him" (Mk. 12:32). The record presents an obviously monotheistic Jewish scribe as being in complete agreement with the Lord Jesus about the unity of God. The Lord Jesus evidently supported the Old Testament's strict monotheism. When Jesus speaks of His Father as "**the one who alone is God**" (Jn. 5:44 NRSV), He is evidently alluding to the classic statement of monotheism in Dt. 6:4- that Yahweh is the one God. And the inspired writers of the New Testament did the same thing. **James commented to Jews upon their belief in one God: "You believe that God is one. You do well**" (James 2:19). He doesn't seek to correct their monotheism. Why, if the issue was so utterly vital and obvious? Moses had spoken of the future Messiah as being "a prophet *like me* from among your brothers" (Dt. 18:15)- and both Peter and Stephen apply this to the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:22; 7:37). Neither they nor Moses could surely have used that kind of language if they considered Messiah to be God Himself. David in Ps. 110:1 calls this future Messiah *adoni*, Lord, rather than *adonai*, the Lord God. If David understood Messiah to be God, then why this choice of word? And if David didn't think Jesus was God- why should we? And this Psalm 110 is referred to about 33 times in the New Testament as proof that the Old Testament prophesied about Jesus! Why didn't the inspired writers "correct" David if indeed he had it so wrong about the nature of Messiah? In passing, I have noted several trinitarian commentaries (e. g. Bullinger's *Companion Bible*)that carelessly claim that David uses the Hebrew word *adonai* for "Lord" in Ps. 110:1, thus implying that Messiah would be "Lord God". But David doesn't. Again, the intellectual desperation of trinitarianism is revealed. Quite simply, how come those who were inspired by God to write about the Lord Jesus didn't make it clear that He was God Himself? And why in fact do they stress just the opposite- just consider how Peter preached about "Jesus. . . a *man* attested by God. . . *this man*" (Acts 2:22,23). And why does **Paul speak of "the man Christ Jesus" even *after* the ascension of Jesus to Heaven (1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 5:15)?** Why do the accounts of the birth of Jesus emphasize the humanity of Mary, speak of the Lord's conception in quite simple terms, and give no hint whatsoever that a pre-existent being was entering a woman, who was to be the mother of God?

Notes

(1) Risto Santala, *The Messiah In The Old Testament In The Light Of Rabbinical Writings* (Kukkila, Finland: BGS, 1992), p. 63.

1-2 Implications Of The Unity Of God

A Demand For Our All

That God is one is not just a numerical description. If there is only one God, He therefore demands our *all*. Because He is the One God, He demands all our worship; and because He is One, He therefore treats all His people the same, regardless, e. g. , of their nationality (Rom. 3:30). All true worshippers of the one God, whether Jew or Gentile, are united in that the one God offers salvation to them on the same basis. The fact there is only one Lord Jesus implies the same for Him (Rom. 10:12). Paul saw these implications in the doctrine of the unity of God. But that doctrine needs reflecting on before we come to grasp these conclusions. Christ taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:27,28: "*this* do…" . If God is one, then our brother bears the one Name of God, and so to love God is to love our brother (cp. 1 Jn. 4:21). And because there is only one God, this demands *all* our spiritual energy. There is only one, the one God, who seeks glory for men and judges them (Jn. 8:50)- therefore the unity of God should mean we do not seek glory of men, neither do we judge our brother.

That God is one is a command, an imperative to action (Mk. 12:28,29). It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, you shalt keep *therefore* his laws" (Dt. 4:39,40). The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope.

Dt. 6:4 is far more than a proof text. Indeed God is one; but consider the context. **Moses has set the people up to expect him to deliver them a long list of detailed commands; he has told them that God told him to declare unto them "all the commandments…that they may do them…you shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God has commanded you…you shall walk in all the ways which the**

Lord your God has commanded you…now these are the commandments…that you might do them… ***hear therefore O Israel and observe to do it*** **[singular]…". Now we expect him to reel off a long list of commands. But Moses mirrors that last phrase with simply: "*Hear, O Israel*, the Lord our God is one"** (Dt. 5:31-6:4). And in this context he gives no other commandments. "Observe to do *it*" is matched with "The Lord our God is one" . This is the quintessence of all the commands of God. And he goes straight on to say: "And these words…shall be in your heart" and they were to talk of them to their children in the house and by the way, bind them upon their hands and on the posts of their homes. It was the unity of God and the imperative from it to love Him with all the heart which is what was to be programmatic for their daily living. This is why it was Jewish practice to recite the *shema* several times a day, and also on their deathbed.

Dt. 6:1 RV reads: "Now this is *the commandment* [singular], the statutes and the judgments…the Lord our God is one". And then they are told to write the statutes on their door posts etc. It would have been hard to literally write all 613 of them there. Yet the whole way of life for Israel was epitomized in the single command…that God is one. It was and is a *command*; not a mere statement. The Jewish zealots who died at Massada had as their battle cry "the Lord our God is one!", and some time later Rabbi Akiba was flayed alive by the Romans, crying as the skin was stripped from his bones: "The Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (1). And there are many accounts from the Nazi Holocaust of similar things. We do not have two masters; only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this, the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25).

No Idolatry

There is a religious impulse within all men, a desire to serve someone or something. Generally, men and women sink this in the worship of the many idols of this materialistic age. But for us, there is to be one God, one channel alone for our devotion; for God is one. When Israel rejected the fountain of Yahweh, they hewed out many other fountains, in the form of idols (Jer. 2:13). The urge to worship is there within all men and women. We are asked to concentrate and consecrate that passion solely for the one God- not to share it between the many things that demand it. Romans 1 goes so far as to condemn men because they worshipped the created things *besides* (Gk.) the creator. *All* their adoration should have gone to the one God Himself. And there will come a day when all the world realizes that God is one (Is. 37:20 Heb.)- **in that they will realize that He alone is God and all else is pure vanity**. Because God alone is holy, only He will be worshipped then (Rev. 15:4). "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Is. 2:11,17). Our worlds, our lives and hearts, are full of potential idols. And what, in the most fundamental essence, is wrong with idolatry? It seems to me that idolatry *trivializes* this wonderful God of whom we have spoken. It makes the Almighty God into a piece of wood or stone, or into a smart career or new house. And so *anything* that reduces the majesty, the surprise, the passion, the vitality in our relationship with God is an idol. Time and again in our lives, God is edged out by petty distractions- a car that needs repair, a blocked chimney, a broken window. One could almost weep for the frequency and the way in which all this occurs, so tragically often.

Repentance

When Israel repent, they will know "that I am the Lord your God and that there is none else" (Joel 2:27 RV). Israel has always accepted, theoretically, the unity of God; theologically, they have been fierce monotheists. But after repentance we perceive in personal reality that there is indeed only God.

Faith

The unity of God is related to His sovereign power in our lives: "He is one [and therefore] what his soul desires, even that he does. For he performs that which is appointed" (Job 23:13,14 RVmg.). The idea of truth is often linked with the fact there is only one God (Is. 45:5,6,14,18,21,22). This means that all He says is the total Truth; for there is no other God. Thus one God has given us only one faith, hope etc (Eph. 4:4-6). Other belief systems can't be acceptable with us. Such was the crucial importance of the unity of God; and likewise it should influence our lives, hourly. David had to remind himself: "My soul, hope only upon God [one-ly upon the one God]; for my expectation is from him [i. e. Him alone]" (Ps. 62:5). There is only

one God, one source of help and power- and thus the oneness of God inspires our faith in Him. This motivated Asa to cry unto Yahweh in faith: "LORD, there is none beside you to help…help us , O LORD… for we rely on you" (2 Chron. 14:11 RV). Summing up, James 2:14-18 speaks of the connection between *faith* (believing) and *works* (doing). It is no co-incidence that 2:19 then says in this context: "You *believe* that God is one; you *do* well" (RV). To have *faith* in the unity of God will lead to *works*, 'doing well'. God would not be inquired of by Israel, i. e. He would not answer their prayers, because they worshipped other gods, whereas God is one (Ez. 20:31). Prayer and wholeheartedly requesting things from the one God, relying on nothing and nobody else, is thus a form of worship of the one God. If we are truly believing in one God, then we shouldn't feel awkward about asking Him for things- it's a form of worshipping Him.

Unity

Paul, writing to those who thought they believed in the unity of God, had to remind them that this simple fact implies the need for unity amongst us His children, seeing He treats us all equally as a truly good Father: "If so be that God is one. . . he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and [likewise] the uncircumcision through faith" (Rom. 3:30 RV).

Notes

(1) See L. Finkelstein, *Akiba: Scholar, Saint and Martyr* (New York: Atheneum, 1975) p. 277.

1-3 God Manifestation

The name of God can be carried by anyone through whom He chooses to 'manifest' or reveal Himself. So men and **angels as well as Jesus can carry God's name**. This is a vital principle which opens up so much of the Bible to us. A son especially may carry the name of his father; he has certain similarities with his father, he may have the same first name - but he is not one and the same person as the father. In the same way a representative of a company may speak on behalf of the company; he may telephone someone on business and say, 'Hello, this is Unilever here'; he is not Mr. Unilever, but he carries their name because he is working on their behalf. And so it was with Jesus.

Angel's Carrying God's Name

We are told in Ex. 23:20,21 that God told the people of Israel that an angel would go ahead of them; "**My name is in Him**", they were told. The personal name of God is 'Yahweh'. So the angel carried the name of Yahweh, and could thus be called 'Yahweh', or 'The LORD', in small capitals, as the word 'Yahweh' is translated in the N. I. V. and A. V. We are told in Ex. 33:20 that no man can see the face of God and live; but in Ex. 33:11 we read that "The LORD (Yahweh) spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend" - i. e. directly. It could not have been the LORD, Yahweh, Himself in person, who spoke to Moses face to face, because no man can see God Himself. It was the angel who carried God's name who did so; and so we read of the LORD speaking face to face with Moses when it was actually an angel who did so (Acts 7:30 33). There are other examples of the words 'God' and 'LORD' referring to the angels as opposed to God Himself. One clear example is Gen. 1:26: "And God (the angels) said, Let us make man in our image".

Men With God's Name

One of the passages which is most helpful in demonstrating all this is John 10:34-36. Here the Jews made the mistake which many do today. They thought that Jesus was saying he was God Himself. Jesus corrected them by saying, "Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods? If He called them 'gods'. . . why do you say of (me). . . 'You blaspheme!' because I said, I am the Son of God?'. Jesus is really saying 'In the Old Testament men are called 'gods'; I am saying I am the Son of God; so why are you getting so upset?' Jesus is actually quoting from Ps. 82, where the judges of Israel were called 'gods'. The full name of God in Hebrew is 'Yahweh Elohim' - implying 'He who will be revealed in a group of mighty ones'. The true believers are those in whom God is revealed in a limited sense in this life. However, in the Kingdom, they will be 'mighty ones' in whom the LORD will be fully manifested. This is all beautifully shown by a comparison of Is. 64:4 and 1 Cor. 2:9. "Men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, besides you, what He has prepared for him that waits for him". Paul quotes this in 1 Cor. 2:9,10: "It is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit". The

passage in Is. 64 says that no one except God can understand the things He has prepared for the believers. However 1 Cor. 2:10 says that those things have been revealed to us.

The priests were God's representatives, and for a man to 'appear before the Lord' effectively referred to his appearance before the priest. When we read of "men going up to God at Bethel", the 'house of God' (1 Sam. 10:3), we aren't to think that God Himself lived in a house in Bethel. **The reference is to the priests,** his representative, being there. **Not only is the Name of God carried by people, but language and actions which are specific to God are sometimes applied to humans who manifest Him**. The daughter of Pharaoh who saved baby Moses is described in the very terms with which God is described as saving His people Israel 'out of the water' just as Moses was saved. She came 'came down', 'sees' the suffering child, hears its cry, takes pity, draws him out of the water, provides for him (Ex. 2:23-25; 3:7,8). The parallels are surely to indicate that God was willing to show Himself manifest in that Gentile woman in the salvation of His people. And of course the whole practical idea of 'God manifestation' is that we consciously try to reflect the characteristics of God- for His Name is in fact a summary of His characteristics and personality (Ex. 34:4-6).

Jesus and the Name of God

It is not surprising that Jesus, as the Son of God and His supreme manifestation to men, should also carry God's name. He could say "I am come in my Father's name" (Jn. 5:43). Because of his obedience, Jesus ascended to heaven and God "gave him a name which is above every name" - the name of Yahweh, of God Himself (Phil. 2:9). So this is why we read Jesus saying in Rev. 3:12: "I will write upon him (the believer) the name of my God. . . and I will write upon him my new name". At the judgment Jesus will give us God's name; we then will fully carry the name of God. He calls this name, "My new name". Remember, Jesus gave the book of Revelation some years after his ascension into heaven and after he had been given God's name, as explained in Phil. 2:9. So he can call God's name "**My new name**"; the name he had recently been given. We can now properly understand Is. 9:6, where concerning Jesus we are told, "His name (note that) shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father. . . ". **This is a prophecy that Jesus would carry all the titles and Name of God - that he would be the total manifestation or revelation of God to us** (1). It was in this sense that he was called 'Emmanuel', meaning, 'God is with us', although He personally was not God (2). Thus the prophecy of Joel 2 that men would call on the name of Yahweh was fulfilled by people being baptised into the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:21 cf. 38). This also explains why the command to baptize into the name of the Father was fulfilled, as detailed in the Acts record, by baptism into the name of Jesus.

The Jews were fierce monotheists, any idea that there was any God apart from God the Father was to them blasphemous. And yet their own writings have no problem in using the language of 'God' in relation to men and Angels- e. g. **Ezra addresses the Angel Uriel as God Himself** (2 Esdr. 5:43). It is this idea of 'God manifestation' in a person or Angel which is so common in the Bible, and which inevitably at times is used about God's own Son, Jesus. But the use of such language doesn't mean that Jesus is God Himself in person.

Language Of God Used About Jesus: Some Background

We need to appreciate the extent to which the first century Middle East understood a messenger as being the very person of the one who sent him. R. J. Z. Werblowski and Geoffrey Wigoder in *The Encyclopedia Of The Jewish Religion* speak of "the Jewish Law of Agencies" or 'Schaliach', as: "The main point of the Jewish law of agency expressed in the dictum, "**A person's agent is regarded as the person himself**". Therefore any act committed by a duly appointed agent is regarded as having been committed by the principle". The Mishnah states: "A man's agent (*shaliah*) is like to himself" (*Bereshit* 5. 5, in H. Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 1933) p. 6). G. R. B. Murray comments that: "**One sent is as he who sent him**. . . The messenger [the Shaliach] is thereby granted authority and dignity by virtue of his bearing the status of the one who sent him. This is the more remarkable when it is borne in mind that in earlier times the messenger was commonly a slave" (3). Bearing this background in mind, it isn't surprising that language specific to God is used about His Son and messenger.

The idea is sometimes expressed that calling Jesus "Son of God" somehow makes Him God. Apart from the illogicality of this [a son isn't the same being as his father], the language of "Son of God" is used in the Old Testament of men. Even the term "God" is used of *men* (Ps. 45:6; 82:6; Ex. 21:6; 22:8). The first century mind was quite used to men being called 'god' or Divine. The Jews were strongly monotheistic, paranoid of

any implication that Yahweh was not the only God; and yet they were happy to use the word "god" about men. Philo [a Jewish writer] spoke of Moses as "appointed by God as god" and "no longer man but God" (4). And of course the Greek and Roman rulers, both local and otherwise, were described with 'Divine' language- e. g. Antiochus Epiphanes means 'God made manifest'. There was no understanding that these 'divine' titles therefore made these men to be God Himself in person. Apollonius explains that "every man who is considered good is honoured with the title of "god"" (*Apollonius Of Tyana* 8. 4). Indeed any hero, leader of King was addressed as 'God' (5). We can see from Acts 14:11-13 and Acts 28:6 how easily first century folk were inclined to call a man "God" if he did miracles. I remember clearly in my early days of missionary work in Africa being called "Wazungu" or "Mazungu" by fascinated children who'd scarcely seen a white man before. And I recall my shock on discovering that this term means both "white man" and "God" (and is frequently used as such in translations of the Bible into Central and East African languages). But this is actually what was going on in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. And so when Divine language was applied to Jesus, there is no reason to think that the first century mind would've concluded that therefore Jesus was God Himself in person, just as those fascinated kids calling out "Wazungu! Wazungu!" as I walked by were hardly understanding me as God Himself in person. Here we have one of the most glaring examples of problems arising from not reading God's word with an appreciation of the context in which it was spoken and written. In European culture, it would be unheard of, or blasphemous and at best inappropriate, to call any man "God" or "Son of God". But this wasn't the case in the first century world. In that world- and it was against the background of that world that the New Testament was written- the use of Divine language about a person, or about Jesus the Son of God, didn't make them God Himself in person.

Again and again we have to emphasize that we read the Biblical documents at a great distance from the culture in which they were first written. It was quite understandable for a person to carry the name of their superior, without being that superior in person. And so it was and is with the Lord Jesus. To give just one of many possible confirmations of this: "[In 2 Esdras 5:43-46]. . . God's spokesman, the angel Uriel, is questioned by Ezra as though he were both Creator and Judge [which God alone is]. Ezra uses the same style of address to Uriel ("My lord, my master") as he uses in direct petition to God. This practice of treating the agent as though he were the principal is of the greatest importance for New Testament Christology [i. e. the study of who Christ is]" (6). The acclamation of Thomas "My Lord and my God!" must be understood within the context of first century usage, where as Paul says, many people were called Lord and "god" (1 Cor. 8:4-6). If we're invited by our manager "Come and meet the president", we don't expect to meet the President of the USA. We expect to meet the president of the company. The word "president" can have more than one application, and it would be foolish to assume that in every case it referred to the President of the USA. And it's the same with the words "Lord" and "God" in their first century usage. Hence a Jewish non-trinitarian like Philo could call Moses "God and king of the whole nation" (Life Of Moses 1. 158)- and nobody accused him of not being monotheistic! Significantly, there is in the New Testament the Greek word *latreuo* which specifically refers to the worship of God- and this is always [21 times] applied to God and not Jesus. The worship of Jesus that is recorded is always to God's glory, and is recorded with the same words [especially *proskuneo*] used about the worship of believers (Rev. 3:9, Daniel (Dan. 2:46 LX), kings of Israel etc. (1 Chron. 29:20 LXX). The word means essentially 'to kneel' and this is how it's translated in Mt. 9:18 ESV: "A ruler came in and *knelt* before him". The Septuagint uses the word without implying that the person being bowed down to is God. Two clear examples: " And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming . . . He himself went on before them, *bowing himself* to the ground seven times, . . . Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and *bowed down*. Leah likewise and her children drew near and *bowed down*. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they *bowed down* (Gen. 33:1-7). And then 2 Kings 5:17–18: "Then Naaman said, “If not, please let there be given to your servant two mules’ load of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD. In this matter may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon *to worship* there, leaning on my arm, and I *bow myself* in the house of Rimmon, when I *bow myself* in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter”.

Notes

(1) The way the Lord Jesus is given the title "**Everlasting father**" or 'father of the eternal age' has been confusing to some. But note that this is a *title* which He is given, not the Name itself. The term "**father" is used in Semitic languages to mean a leader**- Jesus will be leader of the future, eternal age. Note how the term is used in Esther 3:13; 8:12 LXX, where Haman is called "father" of the Persian king; a Levite priest

was 'father' to some Danites (Jud. 18:19); Elijah was 'father' to Elisha (2 Kings 2:12); Eliakim was 'father' to the people of Jerusalem (Is. 2:21). Joseph was 'father' to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8), and it has been commented that "There is no title "father to Pharaoh" in Egyptian; and the closest parallel *it-ncr*, "god's father", is something of an embarassment. . . being an appellative granted. . . to the progenitor of a dynasty"- Donald Redford, *The Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) p. 191. Thus the title "Father" used about the Lord Jesus shouldn't lead us to think that Jesus "is" God the Father. "Father" is being used in Is. 9:6 in a manner consistent with other Old Testament usage to denote a leader, a great one- **but not God Himself in person.**

(2) It should be noted that "Many think that the list of titles in Is. 9:5 was borrowed from the traditional titles of the monarchs of other countries, especially of the Egyptian pharaoh. . . the title applied to the king of Judah portrays him as one specially favoured by God, e. g. "the divine mighty one" or "divine warrior"- Raymond Brown, *An Introduction To New Testament Christology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994) p. 187.

(3) George R. Beasley Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology In The Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Mass. : Hendrickson, 1991), p. 18.

(4) Citations in James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 17.

(5) For documentation, see D. Cuss, *Imperial Cult And Honorary Terms In The New Testament* (Fribourg: Fribourg University Press, 1974) pp. 134-140.

(6) G. B. Caird, *The Language And Imagery Of The Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 181.

1-4 God's Spirit

As God is a real, personal being with feelings and emotions, it is to be expected that He will have some way of sharing His desires and feelings with us, His children, and of acting in our lives in a way that will be consistent with His character. God does all of these things by His "spirit". If we wish to know God and have an active relationship with Him, we need to know what this "spirit of God" is, and how it operates.

It isn't easy to define exactly what the word "spirit" means. If you went to a wedding, for example, you might comment, "There was a really good spirit there!" By this you mean that the atmosphere was good, somehow everything about the wedding was good; everyone was smartly dressed, the food was nice, people spoke kindly to each other, the bride looked beautiful, etc. All those various things made up the "spirit" of the wedding. Likewise the spirit of God somehow summarises everything about Him. The Hebrew word translated "spirit" in the Old Testament strictly means "breath" or "power"; **thus God's spirit is His "breathing", the very essence of God, reflecting His mind**. We will give examples of how the word "spirit" is used about someone's mind or disposition in Study 4. 3. That the spirit does not just refer to the naked power of God is evident from Rom. 15:19: "the power of the spirit of God".

It is a common Bible teaching that how a man thinks is expressed in his actions (Prov. 23:7; Mt. 12:34); a little reflection upon our own actions will confirm this. We think of something and then we do it. Our 'spirit' or mind may reflect upon the fact that we are hungry and desire food. We see a banana going spare in the kitchen; that desire of the 'spirit' is then translated into action - we reach out for the banana, peel it and eat. This simple example shows why the Hebrew word for 'spirit' means both the breath or mind, and also power. Our spirit, the essential us, refers to our thoughts and therefore also to the actions which we take to express those thoughts or disposition within us. On a far more glorious scale, God's spirit is the same; it is the power by which He displays His essential being, His disposition and purpose. God thinks and therefore does things. "As I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Is. 14:24).

THE POWER OF GOD

Many passages clearly identify God's spirit with His power. In order to create the earth, "the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:2,3). God's spirit was the power by which all things, e. g. light, were made. "By His spirit He has created the heavens; His hand has formed the crooked serpent" (Job 26:13). A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that "the finger of God" and "the spirit of God" are parallel - **God in action is His spirit**. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth" (Ps. 33:6). God's spirit is therefore described as follows.

- His breath

- His word
- His finger
- His hand

It is therefore His power by which He achieves all things. For example, **believers are born again by God's will (Jn. 1:13), which is by His spirit (Jn. 3:3-5).** His will is put into operation by the spirit. Speaking of the entire natural creation, we read: "You send forth your spirit, they are created: and (thereby) you renew the face of the earth" (Ps. 104:30). This spirit/power is also the sustainer of all things, as well as the means of their creation. It is easy to think that this tragic life stumbles on without this active input of God's spirit. Job, a man who became weary of this life, was reminded of this by another prophet: "If he (God) gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust" (Job 34:14,15). When pulling out of a similar trough of depression, David asked God to continue to uphold him with this spirit, i. e. to preserve his life (Ps. 51:12).

We shall see in Study 4. 3 that the spirit given to us and all creation is what sustains our life. We have "the breath of the spirit of life" within us (Gen. 7:22 A. V. mg.) given to us by God at birth (Ps. 104:30; Gen. 2:7). This makes Him "the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num. 27:16 cf. Heb. 12:9). Because God is the life force which sustains all creation, His spirit is present everywhere. David recognised that through His spirit God was constantly present with him wherever he went, and through that spirit/power He was able to know every corner of David's mind and thinking. Thus God's spirit is the means by which He is present everywhere, although He personally is located in heaven. "You know my sitting down and standing up, you understand my thought far off. . . Where shall I go from your spirit? or where shall I flee from your presence? If I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there. . . your right hand (i. e. through the spirit) shall hold me" (Ps. 139:2,7,9,10).

A proper understanding of this subject reveals God to us as a powerful, active being. Many people have grown up with a vague 'belief' in God, but in reality 'God' is just a concept in their minds, a black box in part of the brain. An understanding of the true God and His very real presence all around us by His spirit can totally change our concept of life. We are surrounded by the spirit, constantly witnessing its actions, which reveal God to us. David found the encouragement of all this absolutely mind-blowing: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Ps. 139:6). Yet responsibilities come with such knowledge; we have to accept that our thinking and actions are totally open to God's view. As we examine our position before Him, especially when thinking about baptism, we need to bear this in mind. God's majestic words to Jeremiah apply to us, too: "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? says the Lord. Do not I fill (by the spirit) heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:24).

The Holy Spirit

We have seen that God's spirit is a vast concept to grasp; it is His mind and disposition, and also the power by which He puts His thoughts into operation. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7); and so God is His thoughts, in that sense He is His spirit (Jn. 4:24), although this does not mean that God is not personal. To help us grapple with this vastness of God's spirit, we sometimes read of His "Holy Spirit". The phrase "Holy Spirit" is to be found almost exclusively in the New Testament. In the A. V. the name "Holy Ghost" is often used, but it should always be translated as "Holy Spirit", as modern versions make clear. This is equivalent to the Old Testament phrases "the spirit of God" or "the spirit of the Lord". This is clear from passages such as Acts 2, which records the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Peter explained that this was a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel, in which it is described as the pouring out of "my (God's) spirit" (Acts 2:17). The main fulfilment of this will be when Jesus returns (Is. 32:15,16). Again, Lk. 4:1 records that Jesus "being full of the Holy Spirit" returned from Jordan; later in the same chapter Jesus links this with Is. 61: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me". In both cases (and in many others) the Holy Spirit is equated with the Old Testament term "the spirit of God".

Notice, too, how the Holy Spirit is paralleled with the power of God in the following passages.

- "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you (Mary), and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you" (Lk. 1:35)
- "The power of the Holy Spirit. . . mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the spirit of God" (Rom. 15:13,19)
- "Our gospel (preaching) came. . . in power, and in the Holy Spirit" (1Thes. 1:5).

- The promise of the Holy Spirit to the disciples was spoken of as their being "endued with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49).
- Jesus himself had been "anointed. . . with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38).
- The "promise of the *Holy Spirit*" (Acts 1:5) is defined as "*power* from on high" in Lk. 24:49. Hence the disciples received *power* after the *Holy Spirit* came upon them (Acts 1:8).
- Paul could back up his preaching with undeniable displays of God's power: "My speech and my preaching was. . . in demonstration of the spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4).

1-5 Is the Holy Spirit a Person?

Study 1-4 gave ample evidence that God's spirit refers to His power, which reflects His "mind" in a very broad way. Because the way God's spirit acts is such an accurate reflector of the essence and personality of God, some have argued that God's spirit is a person who is also God. A careful re-reading of the previous sections will show that God's spirit is His mind and power. Electricity is an unseen power that can produce results for the person controlling it, but it cannot be a person. Love is a part of someone's character, but it cannot be a person. God's spirit includes His love, as part of His character, and also refers to His power, but in no way can it refer to a person who is separate from Him. It is a tragedy to me that this mistaken view (of the spirit being a person)is believed by the majority of Christians, seeing that they believe in the doctrine of the 'trinity'. This effectively states that there are three gods who are somehow also the same - God the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus.

There is good reason to believe that the 'trinity' was fundamentally a pagan idea imported into Christianity - hence the word does not occur in the Bible. If we accept this idea that God is a trinity, we are then driven to reach the conclusion that somehow God's power/spirit is a person, who is also God, although not God the Father. When confronted with the illogicality of their position, the most popular escape route is for such people to claim that God is a mystery, and that we should accept such things in faith without requiring a logical explanation. This pointedly overlooks the references in the New Testament to the mystery of God being revealed through the word and work of Christ.
- "I would not, brothers, that you should be ignorant of this mystery" (Rom. 11:25).
- "The preaching of Jesus. . . the revelation of the mystery" (Rom. 16:25).
- "I shew (explain to) you a mystery. . . " (1 Cor. 15:51).
- "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will" (Eph. 1:9; 3:3).
- Paul's preaching was "to make known the mystery of the Gospel" (Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3).
- "**The mystery. . . now is made manifest to his saints**" (Col. 1:26,27).

With all this emphasis - and it is that - on there not now being any mystery attached to fundamental doctrines, it will only be someone still in darkness who will claim that there is. And does such a person not worry that the Bible's name for "Babylon", the system of false religion described in Revelation, is "Mystery" (Rev. 17:5)? The obvious implication is that this system proclaims that its beliefs are a mystery; but the true believers understand the mystery of that woman (Rev. 17:7).
Such hazy reasoning arises from having an understanding of God which is based upon subjective things like human experience, or the sense we have of church traditions. If we are expected to be truly humble to the teaching of God's Word, it follows that we are also required to use basic powers of reasoning and deduction in order to discover its message.

Never did any preacher of the Gospel recorded in the Bible resort to saying, 'This is a complete mystery, you cannot begin to understand it'. Instead, we read of them appealing to people through reason and drawing logical conclusions from Scripture. In his preaching of the type of Gospel fundamentals which we are considering in these Studies, Paul "reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, … that Christ needed to have suffered, and risen again" (Acts 17:2,3). Here was systematic, logical Bible reasoning par excellence; and the record prefaces this sentence with, "Paul, as his manner was. . . reasoned. . . ". This was, therefore, his usual style (see also Acts 18:19). In keeping with this, during the great campaign at Corinth, Paul "*reasoned* in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews. . . (but) when they opposed themselves. . . " (Acts 18:4-6). Those who were converted went through a process of persuasion by Paul's Bible-based reasoning.
Notice, too, that the inspired record makes an appeal to logic and rationality, by pointing out that they "opposed themselves". Likewise at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas "speaking (the word) to them, persuaded

them. . . " (Acts 13:43). Their next stop was Iconium, where they "so spake, that a great multitude. . . believed" (Acts 14:1). As he stood trial for his life a while later, the same glorious logic continued to inspire Paul's sure hope for the future: **"He *reasoned* of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come" with such penetrating clarity that even his cynical, laid-back judge "trembled" (Acts 24:25).** Because our conversion should be based on such a process of reasoning, we should be able to give a logical Biblical account of our hope and doctrine. "Be ready always to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). To talk in a sober voice about one's personal experiences, valid testimony as this can be, is not the same as the Gospel. We must be ever giving a reason of the Gospel hope. Such personal anecdotes must not be allowed to conflict with the words of Paul: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ" (2 Cor. 4:5) - and that from a man who 'had a personal relationship with Jesus' more than most.

The logical, Biblically reasonable manner of our conversion should set the pattern for our wider relationship with God through the rest of our days. Our examples, as always, are the first Christians who used "reason" to figure out the solutions to their problems of administration (Acts 6:2). The New Testament letters also assume their readers' acceptance of using Biblical logic. Thus "by reason of" what the High Priests were like under the Law of Moses, we can understand details about the work of Christ (Heb. 5:3). Having spoken of the surpassing love of God in Christ, Paul urges that it is "your reasonable (Greek 'logikos' - i. e. logical) service" to totally dedicate ourselves to Him in response (Rom. 12:1). The word ''logikos' is derived from the Greek 'logos', which is the word normally translated "the word" with reference to God's Word. Our "logical" response in Biblical terms is therefore one which is derived from God's Word.
If we cannot draw logical conclusions from the Scriptures, then all Bible study is vain, and there is no need for the Bible, which can be treated just as sweet platitudes or a piece of fascinating literature. This is all it seems to be on many bookshelves.

However, to their credit, there are many earnest Christians who believe that the spirit of God is a person, and they do try to give Biblical reasons. The verses quoted are those which speak of God's spirit in personal language, e. g. as "the comforter" (See Peter study) in Jn. 14:16, or reference to the spirit being "grieved". We demonstrated earlier that a man's "spirit" can be stirred up (Acts17:16), made troubled (Gen. 41:8) or happy (Lk. 10:21). **His "spirit", i. e. his very essence, his mind and purpose,** which gives rise to his actions, is therefore spoken of as a separate person, but, of course, this is not literally so. God's spirit, too, can be spoken of in the same way. **It must also be understood that the Bible often uses the language of personification when talking about abstract things, e. g. wisdom is referred to as a woman in Prov. 9:1**. This is to demonstrate to us what a person who has wisdom would be like in practice; 'wisdom' cannot exist except in someone's mind, and so this device of personification is used. For more on this, see the study on "The Principle of Personification".
Paul's letters contain opening salutations which refer to God and Jesus, but not to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Philemon 3). This is strange if he considered the Holy Spirit to be part of a godhead, as the 'trinity' doctrine wrongly supposes. *Some* of the Holy Spirit was poured out on men (Acts 2:17,18; the same Greek construction is found in Mk. 12:2; Lk. 6:13; Jn. 21:10 and Acts 5:2). **How can we receive part of a person?** We are given "of His [God's] spirit" (1Jn. 4:13). **This is nonsense if the Holy Spirit is a person**. Another serious nail in the coffin of the proposition that the Holy Spirit is a person is the fact that the Holy Spirit is described in the Greek text with a neuter gender (*pneuma*), as reflected in the AV of 1 Jn. 2:27, where it is called "it". This means that when we read passages which speak of the Holy Spirit as "he", we are surely seeing a personification of a power, not a reference to an actual person. It needs to be noted, especially in considering the personification of the Holy Spirit as "the comforter" in Jn. 14-16, that gender in grammar doesn't always reflect the gender of the thing described or referred to in practice. Thus in German "girl" (*mädchen*) is by gender neuter, requiring the neuter pronoun "it" (*es*). The Greek noun *parakletos* translated "the comforter" is a masculine noun and therefore has masculine pronouns (e. g. "he"). The actual gender of a person must be determined by how it is described, not by what pronouns it takes ("he", "it", "she" etc.).
Throughout Revelation- which was given *after* the ascension of Christ- we have visions of the throne room in Heaven. We see the Father with the Son at His right hand. Not only does that indicate the relationship of the Father to the Son even now; but it's highly significant that the Holy Spirit is absent in those visions. There's no third person or being present as surely would be required if the Trinity is a reality.

1-6 The Principle of Personification

It is a recognised feature of the Bible that inanimate or non-living things such as wisdom, riches, sin, the church are personified, but only in the case of the devil is some fantastic theory woven around it. The following examples will illustrate the point.

WISDOM IS PERSONIFIED

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man that gets understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the profit thereof than fine gold. *She* is more precious than rubies: and all the things you could desire are not to be compared unto *her*" (Prov. 3:13-15).

"Wisdom has builded *her* house, *she* has hewn out *her* seven pillars" (Prov. 9:1).

These verses, and indeed the rest of the chapters in which they appear, show that wisdom is personified as a woman, but because of this, no-one has the idea that wisdom is a literal beautiful woman who roams around the earth; all recognise that it is a very desirable characteristic which all people should try to acquire.

RICHES ARE PERSONIFIED

"No man can serve two *masters*: for either he will hate the one, and love the other: or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [riches]" (Mt. 6:24).

Here, riches are likened to a *master*. Many people strive very hard to gain riches and in this way they become their master. Jesus is here telling us that we cannot do that and serve God acceptably at the same time. The teaching is simple and effective, but no-one assumes from this that riches is a man named Mammon.

SIN IS PERSONIFIED

". . . Whoever commits sin is the servant of sin" (Jn. 8:34). "Sin has *reigned* unto death" (Rom. 5:21).

"Don't you know, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, *his* servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16).

As in the case of riches, sin is likened here to a master and those who commit sin are its servants. No reasonable reading of the passage justifies assuming that Paul is teaching that sin is a person.

THE SPIRIT IS PERSONIFIED

"When *he*, the spirit of truth, is come, *he* will guide you into all truth: for *he* shall not speak of *himself*. . . " (Jn. 16:13). (Jesus is the Holy Spirit)

Jesus is here telling His disciples that they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:3-4, where it is stated that "there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit", which gave them remarkable power to do wonderful things to prove that their authority was from God. The Holy Spirit was not a person, it was a power, but when Jesus was speaking of it He used the personal pronoun "he".

DEATH IS PERSONIFIED

"Behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death" (Rev. 6:8).

THE NATION OF ISRAEL IS PERSONIFIED

"Again I will build you, and you shalt be built, *O virgin of Israel*; you shall again be adorned. . . " (Jer. 31:4). "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning *himself* thus; You have chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn me, and I shall be turned; for you are the Lord my God" (Jer. 31:18).

Adapted from "*Christendom Astray*" by Robert Roberts.

1-7 The Promise In Eden

The story of humanity's fall is related in Genesis chapter 3. The serpent was cursed for misquoting God's word and tempting Eve to disobey it. The man and woman were punished for their disobedience. But a ray of hope comes into this dark picture when God says to the serpent. "I will put enmity (hatred, opposition) between you and the woman, and between your descendant and her (special, notable) descendant; it (the woman's descendant) shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This verse is highly concentrated; we need to carefully define the various things involved. We will see later that Abraham's

special descendant was Jesus (Gal. 3:16), but that if we are in Jesus by baptism, then we also are the "descendant" (Gal. 3:27-29). This word "descendant" is translated "seed" in some versions, as it also refers to the idea of sperm (1 Pet. 1:23); so a true 'seed' will have the characteristics of its father.
The seed or descendant of the serpent must therefore refer to that which has the family likeness of the serpent.
- distorting God's Word
- lying
- leading others into sin.
We will see in Study 6 that there is not a literal person doing this, but that within us there is.
- "our old man" of the flesh (Rom. 6:6)
- "the natural man" (1 Cor. 2:14)
- "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22)
- "the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9).

This "man" of sin within us is the Biblical "devil", the serpent.
The descendant of the woman was to be a specific individual - "you (the serpent) shalt bruise *his* heel" (Gen. 3:15). This person was to crush permanently the serpent, i. e. sin - "it shall bruise your head". Hitting a snake on the head is a deathblow - its brain is in its head. The only person who is a candidate for the descendant of the woman must be the Lord Jesus.
- "Jesus Christ, who has (by the cross) abolished death (and therefore the power of sin - Rom. 6:23), and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).
- "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin, in the flesh", i. e. the Biblical devil, the serpent (Rom. 8:3).
- Jesus "was manifested to take away our sins" (1 Jn. 3:5).
- On the cross, it was by His being 'bruised' [an allusion to Gen. 3:15] that we find forgiveness (Is. 53:5 AVmg.).
- "You shalt call his name Jesus (meaning "Saviour"): for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21).

Jesus was literally "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). He was the son of Mary, although God was his Father. Thus in this sense he was the descendant of the woman but not the descendant of a man as he had no human father. This descendant of the woman was to be temporarily wounded by sin, the serpent - "you shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). A snakebite on the heel is normally a temporary wound, compared to the permanence of hitting the snake on the head. Many figures of speech have Biblical roots: "knock it on the head" (i. e. completely stop or end something) is probably based on this prophecy of Jesus hitting the snake on the head. The condemnation of sin, the serpent, was through Christ's sacrifice on the cross - notice how the verses quoted above speak of Christ's victory over sin in the past tense. The temporary wound to the heel suffered by Jesus is therefore a reference to his death for three days. His resurrection proved that this was only a temporary wound, compared to the deathblow that he gave sin. It is interesting that non-Biblical historical records indicate that victims of crucifixion were nailed through their heel to the stake of wood. Thus Jesus was "wounded in the heel" through his death. Is. 53:4,5 describes Christ as being 'bruised' by God through his death on the cross. This plainly alludes to the prophecy of Gen. 3:15 that the serpent would bruise Christ. However, ultimately God worked through the evil which Christ faced, *He* is described here as doing the bruising (Is. 53:10), through controlling the forces of evil which bruised His Son. And so God also works through the evil experiences of each of His children.

The Conflict Today
But the question may have arisen in your mind: "If Jesus destroyed sin and death (the serpent), why are those things still present today?" The answer is that on the cross Jesus destroyed the power of sin in himself: the prophecy of Gen. 3:15 is primarily about the conflict between Jesus and sin. Now this means that because he has invited us to share in his victory, eventually we, too, can conquer sin and death. Those who are not invited to share in his victory, or decline the offer, will, of course, still experience sin and death. Although sin and death are also experienced by true believers, through their association with the descendant of the woman by being baptised into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29), they can have forgiveness of their sins and therefore eventually be saved from death, which is the result of sin. Thus in prospect Jesus "abolished death" on the cross (2 Tim. 1:10), although it is not until God's purpose with the earth is completed at the end of the Millennium that death will never again be witnessed upon earth. "For he must reign (in the first

part of God's Kingdom) till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:25,26). If we are "baptised *into* Christ" then promises about Jesus, like that in Gen. 3:15, become personal to ourselves; no longer are they just interesting parts of the Bible, they are prophecies and promises which involve us also! Those who are properly baptised into Christ by dipping under water, associate themselves with his death and resurrection - symbolised by the rising up from the water (see Rom. 6:3-5).
If we are truly in Christ, then our lives will reflect the words of Gen. 3:15 - there will be a constant sense of conflict ("enmity") within us, between right and wrong. The great apostle Paul described an almost schizophrenic conflict between sin and his real self that raged within him (Rom. 7:14-25). Paul Tournier aptly described it as "the violence within".

After baptism into Christ, this conflict with the sin that is naturally within us should increase - and continue to do so all our days. In a sense it is difficult, because the power of sin is strong. But in another sense it is not, seeing that we are *in* Christ, who has already fought and won the conflict. The very first descendant of the serpent was Cain. Unlike the serpent who had no understanding of morality, Cain did understand what was truth and what was lies, and he understood what God required of him, yet he chose to follow the thinking of the serpent which led him into murder and lying. As the Jews were the people who actually put Jesus to death - i. e. bruised the descendant of the woman in the heel - it is to be expected that they were prime examples of the serpent's descendant. John the Baptist and Jesus confirm this.
"When he (John) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees (the group of Jews who condemned Jesus) come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of (i. e. gendered by, created by) vipers (snakes), who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Mt. 3:7). "Jesus knew their (the Pharisees') thoughts, and said. . . O generation of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things?" (Mt. 12:25,34). The world has these same serpent characteristics. How Jesus treated the people who were the serpent's descendant or family must be our example.
- He preached to them in a spirit of love and true concern, yet
- He did not let their ways and thinking influence Him, and
- He showed them the loving character of God by the way in which He lived.
Yet for all this they hated him. His own effort to be obedient to God made them jealous. Even his family (Jn. 7:5; Mk. 3:21) and close friends (Jn. 6:66) put up barriers and some even went away from him physically. Paul experienced the same thing when he lamented to those who had once stood with him through thick and thin. "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:14-16). The truth is never popular; knowing it and living it as we should will always create some form of problem for us, even resulting in persecution. "As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit (by true knowledge of God's Word – 1Pet. 1:23), even so it is now" (Gal. 4:29). "An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is an abomination to the wicked" (Prov. 29:27). There is a mutual antagonism between the believer and the world. If we are truly united with Christ we must experience some of his sufferings, so that we may also share in his glorious reward. Again Paul sets us a matchless example in this. "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him (Christ), we shall also live with Him: if we suffer (with Him), we shall also reign with him. . . therefore I endure all things (2Tim. 2:10-12).
"If they have persecuted me (Jesus), they will also persecute you. . . all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake" (Jn. 15:20,21).

Faced with verses like these, it is tempting to reason, "If that's what being associated with Jesus, the woman's descendant, is all about, I'd rather not". But of course we will never be expected to undergo anything which we cannot cope with. Whilst self-sacrifice is definitely required in order to unite ourselves fully with Christ, our association with him will result in such a glorious reward "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us". And even now, his sacrifice enables our prayers for help through the traumas of life to be especially powerful with God. And add to this the following glorious assurance. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good hope: I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

1-8 The Promise to Abraham

There's a connection between the promise in Eden and the promises to Abraham. Abraham was promised the very things which were lost in Eden. A land flowing with milk and honey (cp. the garden of Eden); a nation without number (cp. "be fruitful and multiply"), and kingship (cp. "subdue it and rule…", Gen. 1:28). We can see here the golden thread of God's purpose developing a link further- His intention, revealed through the promises, was to enable His people to have again what had been lost in Eden. The Gospel taught by Jesus and the apostles was not fundamentally different from that understood by Abraham. God, through the Scriptures, "preached before the gospel unto Abraham" (Gal. 3:8). So crucial are these promises that Peter started and ended his public proclamation of the Gospel with reference to them (Acts 3:13,25). If we can understand what was taught to Abraham, we will then have a very basic picture of the Christian Gospel. There are other indications that "the gospel" is not something which just began at the time of Jesus.

- "We declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise which was made unto the (Jewish) fathers, God has fulfilled" (Acts13:32,33).
- "The gospel of God, which he had promised afore by his prophets (e. g. Abraham, Gen. 20:7) in the holy scriptures" (Rom. 1:1,2).
- "For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead" (1Pet. 4:6) - i. e. believers who had lived and died before the first century.
- "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them" (Heb. 4:2) -i. e. Israel in the wilderness.

The promises to Abraham have two basic themes.
(1)things about Abraham's special descendant and
(2)things about the land which was promised to Abraham.
These promises are commented on in the New Testament, and, in keeping with our policy of letting the Bible explain itself, we will combine the teachings of both Testaments to give us a complete picture of the covenant made with Abraham.

Abraham originally lived in Ur, a prosperous city in what is now Iraq. Modern archaeology reveals the high level of civilisation that had been reached by the time of Abraham. There was a banking system, civil service and related infrastructure. Somehow Abraham was aware of the Lord and of His Word, but he was the only faithful one in Ur (Is. 51:2; Nehemiah. 9:8). Then the extraordinary call of God came to him - to leave that sophisticated life and embark on a journey to a promised land. Exactly where and exactly what was not made completely clear. All told, it turned out to be a 1,500 mile journey. The land was Canaan - modern Israel.
Occasionally during his life, God appeared to Abraham and repeated and expanded His promises to him. Those promises are the basis of Christ's Gospel, so as true Christians that same call comes to us as it did to Abraham, to leave the transient things of this life, and go forward in a life of faith, taking God's promises at face value, living by His Word. We can well imagine how Abraham would have mulled over the promises on his journeys. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out (from Ur) into a place (Canaan) which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8). As we consider God's promises for the first time, we, too, can feel that we do not know exactly what the promised land of God's Kingdom will be like. But our faith in God's Word should be such that we also eagerly obey. Abraham was no wandering nomad with nothing better to do than take a chance on these promises. He was from a background which, in fundamental terms, has much similarity with our own. The difficult decisions he faced were similar to those we may also have to face as we consider whether to accept and act on God's promises - the strange looks from business colleagues, the sly look in the eye from the neighbours ("He's got religion!") . . . Abraham would have known these things. The motivation which Abraham needed to go through with it all must have been tremendous. The only thing that provided that motivation throughout his long travelling years was the word of promise. He must have memorised those words and daily meditated upon what they really meant to him. By showing a similar faith and acting upon it, we can have the same honour as Abraham - to be called the friends of God (Is. 41:8), to find the knowledge of God (Gen. 18:17) and to have the sure hope of eternal life in the Kingdom. Again we emphasise that the Gospel of Christ is based on these promises to Abraham. To believe truly in the Christian message, we too must believe firmly the things promised to Abraham. Without them our faith is not faith. With eager eyes we should therefore read and re-read the dialogue between God and Abraham.

The Land

1. "Get out of your country. . . unto a land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1).
2. Abraham "went on his journeys. . . to Bethel (in Central Israel). And the Lord said unto Abram. . . Lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where you are northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your **descendant** for ever. . . walk through the land. . . for I will give it unto you" (Gen. 13:3,14-17).
3. "The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, Unto your **descendant [singular- i. e. one special descendant]** have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18).
4. "I will give unto you, and to your **descendant** [singular- i. e. one special descendant] after you, the land wherein you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Gen. 17:8).
5. "The promise that he (Abraham) should be the heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13).
We see here a progressive revelation to Abraham.
1. 'There is a land which I would like you to go to'.
2. 'You have now arrived in the area. You and your children will <u>live here forever</u>'. Note how this promise of eternal life is recorded without glamour or emphasis; a human author would no doubt have jazzed it up.
3. The area of the promised land was more specifically defined.
4. Abraham was not to expect to receive the promise in this life - he was to be a "stranger" in the land, although he would later live there forever. The implication of this is that he would die and then later be resurrected to enable him to receive this promise.
5. Paul, under inspiration, evidently saw the promises to Abraham as meaning his inheritance of the whole earth.
Scripture goes out of its way to remind us that Abraham did not receive the fulfilment of the promises in his lifetime.
"By faith he sojourned (implying a temporary way of life) in the land of promise, as in a strange country, living in tents" (Heb. 11:9). He lived as a foreigner in the land, perhaps with the same furtive sense of insecurity and mismatch which a refugee feels. He was hardly living with his descendant in his own land. Along with his descendants, Isaac and Jacob, (to whom the promises were repeated), he "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and (they) were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). Notice the four stages:
- Knowing the promises - as we are doing through this study.
- Being "persuaded of them" - if it took a process of persuasion with Abraham, how much more so with us?
- Embracing them - by being baptised into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29).
- Confessing to the world by our way of life that this world is not our real home, but we are living in hope of that future age to come upon the earth.

Abraham becomes our great hero and example if we appreciate these things. The ultimate recognition that the fulfilment of the promises lay in the future came for the tired old man when his wife died; he actually had to buy part of the promised land in which to bury her (Acts 7:16). Truly God "gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession" (Acts 7:5). The present spiritual children / descendants of Abraham may feel the same incongruity as they buy or rent property - on an earth which has been promised to them for their personal, eternal inheritance!
But God keeps His promises. There must come a day when Abraham and all who have those promises made to them will be rewarded. Heb. 11:13,39,40 drives home the point: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect". All true believers will therefore be rewarded at the same point in time, i. e. at the judgment seat at the last day (2 Tim. 4:1,8; Mt. 25:31-34; 1 Pet. 5:4). It follows that to be in existence in order to be judged, Abraham and others who knew those promises must be resurrected just before the judgment. If they have not now received the promises and will only do so after their resurrection and judgment at Christ's return, there is no alternative but to accept that the likes of Abraham are now unconscious, awaiting the coming of Christ. Yet stained glass mosaics in churches throughout the world have been known to depict Abraham as now in heaven, experiencing the promised reward for a life of faith. Thousands of people for hundreds of years have filed past those pictures, religiously accepting such ideas. Will you have the Bible-based courage to step out of line?

The Descendant

As explained earlier, the promise of a descendant applies primarily to Jesus and, secondarily, to those who are "in Christ" and therefore are also counted as the descendant of Abraham. .

1. "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you. . . and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2,3).
2. "I will make your descendant as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall your descendant also be numbered. . . all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your descendant for ever" (Gen. 13:15,16).
3. "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if you be able to number them. . . So shall your descendant be. . . Unto your descendant have I given this land" (Gen. 15:5,18).
4. "I will give unto. . . your descendant[s] after you. . . the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8).
5. "I will multiply your descendant as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and your descendant shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in your descendant shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:17,18).

Again, Abraham's understanding of the "descendant" was progressively extended.

1. Firstly he was just told that somehow he would have an extraordinary number of descendants, and that through his "descendant" the whole earth would be blessed.
2. He was later told that he would have a descendant who would come to include many people. These people would spend eternal life, along with himself, in the land at which he had arrived, i. e. Canaan.
3. He was told that his descendant would become as many as the stars in the sky. This may have suggested to him that he would have many spiritual descendants (stars in heaven) as well as many natural ones (as "the dust of the earth").
4. The previous promises were underlined with the additional assurance that the many people who would become part of the descendant could have a personal relationship with God.
5. The descendant would have victory against his enemies.

Notice that the descendant was to bring "blessings" to be available to people from all over the earth. In the Bible the idea of blessing is often connected with forgiveness of sins. After all, this is the greatest blessing a lover of God could ever want. So we read things like: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Ps. 32:1); "The cup of blessing" (1 Cor. 10:16), describing the cup of wine which represents Christ's blood, through which forgiveness is possible. The only descendant of Abraham who has brought forgiveness of sins to the world is, of course, Jesus, and the New Testament commentary on the promises to Abraham provides solid support:

"He (God) doesn't say, 'And to descendants', in the plural, but in the singular, 'And to your descendant', which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

". . . the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in your descendant shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus (i. e. the descendant), sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:25,26).

Notice here how Peter quotes and interprets Gen. 22:18:

The descendant = Jesus

The blessing = forgiveness of sins.

The promise that Jesus, the descendant, would have victory over his enemies now slots more neatly into place if this is read with reference to his victory over sin - the greatest enemy of God's people, and therefore of Jesus, too.

BECOMING PART OF THE DESCENDANT

By now it should be clear that Abraham understood the basic elements of the Christian Gospel. But these vital promises were to Abraham and his descendant, Jesus. What about anyone else? Even physical descent from Abraham would not automatically make someone part of that one specific descendant (Jn. 8:39; Rom. 9:7). Somehow we have to become intimately part of Jesus, so that the promises to the descendant are shared with us as well. This is by baptism into Jesus (Rom. 6:3-5); frequently we read of baptism *into* his name (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). Gal. 3:27-29 could not make the point any clearer. "As many of you (i. e. only as many!) as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek (Gentile), there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one (through

being) in Christ Jesus (by baptism). And if you be Christ's (by baptism into him), then are you Abraham's descendants, and heirs according to the promise".

The promise is of eternal life on earth, through receiving the "blessing" of forgiveness through Jesus. It is by being baptised into Christ, the descendant, that we share the promises made to him; and so Rom. 8:17 calls us "joint heirs with Christ". People from all nations "bless themselves" by becoming part of that descendant through baptism into Him- they thus appropriate to themselves the promised blessings (Gen. 22:18 RVmg.). Remember that the blessing was to come on people from all parts of the earth, through the descendant; and the descendant was to become a worldwide group of people, like the sand of the shores and the stars of the sky. It follows that this is due to their first receiving the blessing so that they can become the descendant. Thus the (singular) descendant "shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation" (i. e. many people; Ps. 22:30). We can summarise the two strands of the promises given to Abraham.

1. The Land
Abraham and his descendant, Jesus, and those in him would inherit the land of Canaan and by extension the whole earth, and live there forever. In this life they would not receive it, but would do so at the last day, when Jesus returns.

2. The Descendant
This was primarily Jesus. Through Him the sins ("enemies") of mankind would be overcome, so that the blessings of forgiveness would be made available world-wide. By baptism into the name of Jesus we become part of the descendant promised to Abraham.

These same two threads occur in New Testament preaching, and, not surprisingly, it is often recorded that when people heard them taught, they were then baptised. This was, and is, the way through which these promises can be made to us. We can now understand why, as an old man faced with death, Paul could define his hope as "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20): the true Christian hope is the original Jewish hope. Christ's comment that "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22) must also refer to the need to become spiritual Jews, so that we can benefit from the promises of salvation through Christ which were made to the Jewish fathers.
We read that the early Christians preached:-
1. "The things concerning the Kingdom of God
and
2. the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12).

These were the very two things explained to Abraham under slightly different headings.
1. Promises about the land
and
2. Promises about the descendant.

Note in passing that "the things" (plural) about the Kingdom and Jesus are summarised as "preaching Christ" (Acts 8:5 cf. v. 12). At times, this has taken to mean "Jesus loves you! Just say you believe he died for you and you're a saved man!". All of which is valid in some sense. But the phrase "Christ" clearly summarises the teaching of a number of things about him and his coming Kingdom. The good news about this Kingdom which was preached to Abraham played a big part in the early preaching of the Gospel.
In Ephesus, Paul was "three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8; 20:25); and his swan-song in Rome was the same, "He expounded and testified the Kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus. . . out of the law. . . and out of the prophets" (Acts 28:23,31). That there was so much to talk about shows that the basic Gospel message about the Kingdom and Jesus was not simply and only a matter of saying "Believe on Jesus". God's revelation to Abraham was more detailed than that, and the things promised to him are the basis of the true Christian Gospel.

We have shown that baptism into Jesus makes us part of the promised descendant and therefore able to inherit the promises (Gal. 3:27-29), but baptism alone is not enough to gain us the salvation promised. We must remain in the descendant, in Christ, if we are to receive the promises made to the descendant. Baptism is therefore just a beginning; we have entered a race which we then need to run. Don't forget that just

physically being Abraham's descendant does not mean that we are acceptable to God. The Israelis are Abraham's descendants but this does not mean that they will be saved without being baptised and conforming their lives to Christ and the example of Abraham (Rom. 9:7,8; 4:13,14). Jesus told the Jews: "I know that you are Abraham's descendants; but you seek to kill me. . . If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (Jn. 8:37,39), which was to live a life of faith in God and Christ, the promised descendant(Jn. 6:29).

The descendantor "seed" must have the characteristics of its ancestor. If we are to be the true descendant of Abraham we must therefore not only be baptised but also have a very real faith in God's promises, just as he had. He is therefore called "the father of all them that believe. . . who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had" (Rom. 4:11,12). "Know therefore (i. e. really take it to heart!) that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). Paul is alluding here to the practice of Gentile converts to Judaism ["proselytes"] taking the name *ben Avraham*, son of Abraham. The real conversion to the hope of Israel, Paul is saying, is not through joining Judaism but through faith and baptism (Gal. 3:27-29).
Real faith must show itself in some sort of action, otherwise, in God's eyes, it isn't faith (James 2:17). We demonstrate our belief in these promises that we have studied by first being baptised, so that they come to apply to us personally (Gal. 3:27-29). This is even an Old Testament idea- for David says that the true believer will share the promise to Abraham that "his descendant shall inherit the land", and thus God will make us know personally His covenant with us (Ps. 25:13,14 RVmg.). So do you really believe God's promises? This is a question we must continually ask ourselves all our lives long.

The Old And New Covenant
It should be evident by now that the promises to Abraham summarise the Gospel of Christ. The other major set of promises which God made were with the Jews in the context of the law of Moses. These stated that if the Jews were obedient to this law, then they would be physically blessed in this life (Dt. 28). There was no direct promise of eternal life in this series of promises, or "covenant". So we see that there have been two "covenants" made.
1. To Abraham and his descendant, promising forgiveness and eternal life in God's Kingdom when Christ returns. This promise was also made in Eden and to David. This is the "new covenant". When this "new covenant" is made with Israel when Christ returns, it will include the promise to Abraham that "I will be their God" (Jer. 31:33 cf. Gen. 17:8).
2. To the Jewish people at the time of Moses, promising them peace and happiness in this present life if they obeyed the law which God gave to Moses.
God promised Abraham forgiveness and eternal life in the Kingdom, but this was only possible through the sacrifice of Jesus. For this reason we read that Christ's death on the cross confirmed the promises to Abraham (Gal. 3:17; Rom. 15:8; Dan. 9:27; 2 Cor. 1:20), therefore his blood is called the "blood of the new testament" (covenant, Mt. 26:28). It is to remember this that Jesus told us to regularly take the cup of wine, symbolising his blood, to remind us of these things (see 1 Cor. 11:25): "This cup is the new testament (covenant) in my blood" (Lk. 22:20). There is no point in "breaking bread" in memory of Jesus and his work unless we understand these things.
The sacrifice of Jesus made forgiveness and eternal life in God's Kingdom possible; he therefore made the promises to Abraham sure; he was "a surety of a better testament" (Heb. 7:22). Heb. 10:9 speaks of Jesus taking "away the first (covenant), that he may establish the second". This shows that when Jesus confirmed the promises to Abraham, he did away with another covenant, that was the covenant given through Moses. The verses already quoted about Jesus confirming a new covenant by his death, imply that there was an old covenant which he did away with (Heb. 8:13). This means that although the covenant concerning Christ was made first, it did not come into operation until his death, therefore it is called the "new" covenant. The purpose of the "old" covenant made through Moses was to point forward to the work of Jesus, and to highlight the importance of faith in the promises concerning Christ (Gal. 3:19,21). Conversely, faith in Christ confirms the truth of the law given to Moses (Rom. 3:31). Paul sums it up: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). It is for this purpose that the law through Moses has been preserved, and is still beneficial for us to study.

These things are not easy to understand at first reading; we can summarise as follows.
§ Promises concerning Christ made to Abraham - New Covenant.

§ Promises to Israel associated with the law given to Moses - Old Covenant.
§ Death of Christ - Old Covenant ended (Col. 2:14-17); New Covenant came into operation.
For this reason things like tithing, Sabbath-keeping etc. , which were part of the Old Covenant, are not now necessary. The New Covenant will be made with natural Israel when they repent and accept Christ (Jer. 31:31,32; Rom. 9:26,27; Ez. 16:62; 37:26). Of course any Jew who does that now and is baptised into Jesus, can immediately enter the New Covenant (in which there is no Jew/Gentile distinction - Gal. 3:27-29). Truly appreciating these things makes us realise the certainty of God's promises. Sceptics unfairly accused the early Christian preachers of not giving a positive message. Paul replied by saying that because of God's confirmation of His promises on account of the death of Christ, the hope they spoke of was not a touch-and-go affair, but a totally certain offer: "As God is true, our word (of preaching) toward you was not yes and no. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us. . . was not yes and no, but in him was yes. For all the promises of God in him are yes, and in him, Amen" (2 Cor. 1:17-20). Surely this torpedoes the attitude of, 'Well, I suppose there *might* be some truth in all that. . . '?

"I will be with you"
There are two other things promised to Abraham and his descendants: "I will be their God…I will be with you" (Gen. 17:8; 26:3; 28:15 cf. Ex. 6:7). The Lord Jesus Christ is 'God with us' (Emmanuel, Is. 7:14). For those of us who have part in these promises concerning Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, God will be with us and guide us to that happy end. Time and again God's people in their times of desperation have come back to these promises to Abraham, in their realisation that truly God *is* with us (e. g. 2Chron. 32:7,8). Covenant relationship with God means that He will give us foretastes of His future salvation by being our God *now* and going with us in salvation *now* (Ps. 111:9). And we will respond to this, and fulfil the truth of 2 Cor. 1:20, which says that the sure outworking of God's promises to us results in us glorifying Him.

1-9 The Promise To David

David, like Abraham and many other recipients of God's promises, did not have an easy life. He grew up as the youngest son in a large family which, in the Israel of 1000 B. C. , meant looking after the sheep and running errands for his older brothers (1 Sam. 15-17). During this time he learnt a level of faith in God which few men have since approached. The day came when Israel were faced with the ultimate challenge from their aggressive neighbours, the Philistines; they were challenged to let one of their men fight the giant Goliath, the Philistine champion, on the understanding that whoever won that fight would rule over the losers. With God's help David defeated Goliath by using a sling, which earned him even greater popularity than their king (Saul). "Jealousy is cruel as the grave" (Song 8:6), words which were proved true by Saul's persecution of David chasing him around the wilderness of southern Israel.

Eventually David became king, and to show his appreciation of God's love toward him during the wilderness of his life, he decided to build God a temple. The reply from God was that David's son, Solomon, would build the temple and that God wanted to build *David* a house (2 Sam. 7:4-13). Then followed a detailed promise which repeats much of what was told Abraham, and which also filled in some other details.
"And when your days are fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your descendant after you, which shall proceed out of your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you: your throne shall be established forever" (v. 12-16).

From our previous studies we would expect the "descendant" to be Jesus. His description as the Son of God (2 Sam. 7:14) confirms this, as do many other references in other parts of the Bible.
- "**I am the. . . offspring of David", Jesus said (Rev. 22:16).**
- "(Jesus), made of the family [AV "seed"] of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3).
- "Of this man's descendants (David's) has God, according to His promise, raised unto Israel a saviour, Jesus" (Acts 13:23).

- The angel told the virgin Mary concerning her son, Jesus: "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father (ancestor) David. . . and of his Kingdom there shall be no end" (Lk. 1:32,33). This is applying the promise of David's descendant, in 2 Sam. 7:13, to Jesus.

With the descendant firmly identified as Jesus, a number of details now become significant:

1. The descendant

"**Your descendant. . . which shall proceed out of your body. . . I will be his father, and he shall be my son.** " ". . . of the fruit of your body will I set upon your throne" (2 Sam. 7:12,14; Ps. 132:10,11). Jesus, the descendant, was to be a literal, bodily descendant of David, and yet have God as his Father. This could only be achieved by the virgin birth as described in the New Testament; Jesus' mother was Mary, a descendant of David (Lk. 1:32), but he had no human father. God acted miraculously upon Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit in order to make her conceive Jesus, and so the Angel commented: "Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35). The "virgin birth" was the only way in which this promise to David could be properly fulfilled.

2. The house

"He shall build an house for my name" (2 Sam. 7:13) shows that Jesus will build a temple for God. God's "house" is where He is willing to live, and Is. 66:1,2 tells us that He will come to live in the hearts of men who are humble to His word. **Jesus is therefore building a spiritual temple for God to dwell in, made up of the true believers**. Descriptions of Jesus as the foundation stone of God's temple (1 Pet. 2:4-8) and of Christians as the temple stones (1 Pet. 2:5) now slot into place.

3. The throne

"I will stablish the throne of his (Christ's) kingdom for ever. . . your (David's) house and your kingdom. . . your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:13,16 cf. Is. 9:6,7). Christ's kingdom will therefore be based on David's kingdom of Israel; this means that the coming kingdom of God will be a re-establishment of the kingdom of Israel - see Study 5. 3 for more on this. To fulfil this promise, Christ must reign on David's "throne", or place of rulership. This was literally in Jerusalem. This is another proof that the kingdom must be established here on earth in order to fulfil these promises.

4. The kingdom

"Your house and your kingdom shall be established for ever before you" (2Sam. 7:16) suggests that David would witness the establishment of Christ's eternal kingdom. This was therefore an indirect promise that he would be resurrected at Christ's return so that he could see with his own eyes the kingdom being set up world-wide, with Jesus reigning from Jerusalem.

These things which were promised to David are absolutely vital to understand. David joyfully spoke of these things as "an everlasting covenant. . . this is all my salvation and all my desire" (2 Sam. 23:5). These things relate to our salvation too; rejoicing in them should likewise be all our desire. As with the promises to Abraham, **if we are in Christ, all that is true of the promised descendant of David is in some way true of us if we are in Christ** (Is. 55:3 cf. Acts 13:34). So again the point is made that these doctrines are so important. It is a tragedy that parts of Christendom have adopted doctrines which flatly contradict these marvellous truths.

- If Jesus physically "pre-existed", i. e. he existed as a person before he was born, then this makes nonsense of these promises that Jesus would be David's descendant.

- If the kingdom of God will be in heaven, then Jesus cannot re-establish David's kingdom of Israel, nor can he reign from David's "throne" or place of rulership. These things were literally on the earth, and so their re-establishment must be in the same place.

Fulfilment In Solomon?

David's son, Solomon, fulfilled some part of the promises to David. He built a temple for God (1 Kings 5-8), and he had a very prosperous kingdom. Nations from all around sent representatives to pay respect to Solomon (1 Kings 10), and there was great spiritual blessing from the use of the temple. Solomon's reign therefore pointed forward to the much greater fulfilment of the promises to David which will be seen in the kingdom of Christ.

Some have claimed that the promises to David were completely fulfilled in Solomon, but this is disallowed by the following.

- Abundant New Testament evidence shows that the "descendant" was Christ, not Solomon.
- David seems to have connected the promises God made to him with those to Abraham (1 Chron. 17:27 = Gen. 22:17,18).

- **The kingdom of the "descendant" was to be everlasting - which Solomon's was not**.
- David recognised that the promises were concerning eternal life, which precluded any reference to his immediate family: "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant" (2 Sam. 23:5).
- The descendant of David is the Messiah, the Saviour from sin (Is. 9:6,7; 22:22; Jer. 33:5,6,15; Jn. 7:42). But Solomon later turned away from God (1 Kings 11:1-13; Neh. 13:26) due to his marriage with those outside the hope of Israel.

As a footnote, it's interesting that the genealogy of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 1 frames Him as the product of 42 generations, divided into three groups of 14. The numerical value of 'David' is 14 [D = 4; w = 6; d = 4]. The emphasis is therefore on the fact that Jesus was so very intrinsically a descendant of David- and not, therefore, a pre-existent being.

1-10 Old Testament Prophecies of Jesus

Earlier studies have explained how God's purpose of salvation for men was centred in Jesus Christ. The promises which He made to Eve, Abraham and David all spoke of Jesus as their literal descendant. Indeed, the whole of the Old Testament points forward to, and prophesies about, Christ. The Law of Moses, which Israel had to obey before the time of Christ, constantly pointed forward to Jesus: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. 3:24). Thus at the feast of Passover, a lamb in perfect condition had to be killed (Ex. 12:3-6); this represented the sacrifice of Jesus, "the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). The spotless condition which was required for all the animal sacrifices pointed forward to the perfect character of Jesus (Ex. 12:5 cp. 1 Pet. 1:19). Throughout the Psalms and prophets of the Old Testament there are countless prophecies about what Messiah would be like. They particularly focus on describing how he would die. Judaism's refusal to accept the idea of a Messiah who dies can only be due to their inattention to these prophecies, a few of which are now presented.

Old Testament Prophecy	Fulfilment in Christ
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1)	These were the very words of Jesus on the cross (Mt. 27:46)
"I am despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him" (Ps. 22:6-8)	Israel despised Jesus and mocked him (Lk. 23:35; 8:53); they shook their heads (Mt. 27:39), and said this as He hung on the cross (Mt. 27:43)
"My tongue cleaves to my jaws…they pierced my hands and my feet" (Ps. 22:15,16)	This was fulfilled in Christ's thirst on the cross (Jn. 19:28). The piercing of hands and feet refers to the physical method of crucifixion used.
"They parted my garments among them, and cast lots upon my clothing" (Ps. 22:18)	The precise fulfilment of this is found in Mt. 27:35.
Note that Ps. 22:22 is specifically quoted as applying to Jesus in Heb. 2:12	
"I am become a stranger unto my brothers, and am an alien unto my mother's children. For	This well describes Christ's feeling of estrangement from his Jewish brethren and his

the zeal of your house has eaten me up" (Ps. 69:8,9)	own family (Jn. 7:3-5, Mt. 12:47-49). This is quoted in John 2:17.
"They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Ps. 69:21)	This happened while Christ was on the cross (Matt. 27:34)
The whole of Isaiah 53 is a remarkable prophecy of Christ's death and resurrection, every verse of which had an unmistakable fulfilment. Just two examples will be given.	
"As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opens not his mouth" (Is. 53:7)	Christ, the Lamb of God, remained silent during his trial (Mt. 27:12,14)
"He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death" (Is. 53:9)	Jesus was crucified along with wicked criminals (Mt. 27:38), but was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Mt. 27:57-60).

It is little wonder that the New Testament reminds us that the "law and prophets" of the Old Testament is the basis of our understanding of Christ (Acts 26:22; 28:23; Rom. 1:2,3; 16:25,26). Jesus himself warned that if we do not properly understand "Moses and the prophets", we cannot understand him (Lk. 16:31; Jn. 5:46,47). That the Law of Moses pointed forward to Christ, and the prophets prophesied of him, should be proof enough that Jesus did not exist physically before his birth. The false doctrine of the physical 'pre-existence' of Christ before birth makes a nonsense of the repeated promises that he would be the *descendant* of Eve, Abraham and David. The early preachers emphasized that Jesus was "of David's posterity" [Gk. *Spermatos*- Acts 2:29-31; 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8]. If he were already existing up in heaven at the time of these promises, God would have been incorrect in promising these people a descendant who *would be* Messiah. The genealogies of Jesus, recorded in Mt. 1 and Lk. 3, show how Jesus had a pedigree which stretched back to those people to whom God had made the promises.

The promise to David concerning Christ precludes his physical existence at the time the promise was made: "I *will* set up your descendant [singular] *after* you, which *shall* proceed out of your body. . . I *will be* his father, and he *shall be* my son" (2 Sam. 7:12,14). Notice the future tense used here. Seeing that God *would be* Christ's Father, it is impossible that the Son of God could have already existed at that point in time when the promise was made. That this seed "*shall proceed out of your body"* shows that he was to be a literal, physical descendant of David. "The Lord has sworn in truth unto David. . . Of the fruit of your body will I set upon your throne" (Ps. 132:11). Solomon was the primary fulfilment of the promise, but as he was already physically in existence at the time of this promise (2 Sam. 5:14), the main fulfilment of this promise about David having a physical descendant who would be God's son, must refer to Christ (Lk. 1:31-33). "I ***will*** raise unto David a righteous Branch" (Jer. 23:5) - i. e. Messiah. Similar future tenses are used in other prophecies concerning Christ. "I ***will*** raise (Israel) up a Prophet like unto (Moses)" (Dt. 18:18) is quoted in Acts 3:22,23, which defines the "Prophet" as Jesus. "A virgin (Mary) *shall* conceive, and bear a son, and ***shall*** call his name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14). This was clearly fulfilled in Christ's birth (Mt. 1:23).

1-11 The Virgin Birth

The record of Christ's conception and birth does not allow for the idea that he physically existed beforehand. Personal pre-existence is surely precluded by Heb. 2:11: "For he who sanctifies [Jesus] and those who are sanctified [us] have all one origin [*ek evos pantes*- lit. 'out of one, all'; "are of the same stock"]". The Lord Jesus had an origin- a hard concept to apply to God Himself. And further, that origin

was the same origin as we have. Perhaps the reference is to Adam, or maybe to God. But the point is, our origin is that of Jesus.
Those who hold the doctrine of the 'Trinity' are driven to the conclusion that at one moment there were three beings in heaven, and one of them then became the child in Mary's womb, leaving just two in heaven. We are therefore left to conclude from the 'pre-existence' belief that Christ somehow came down from heaven and entered into Mary's womb. All this complex theology is quite outside the teaching of Scripture. The record of Christ's beginning gives no reason whatsoever to think that he left heaven and entered into Mary. The lack of evidence for this is a big 'missing link' in trinitarian teaching.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary with the message that "you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest. . . Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? (i. e. she was a virgin). And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit **shall** come upon you, and the power of the Highest **shall** overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Lk. 1:31-35). **Twice it is emphasized that Jesus *would be* the Son of God on his birth; evidently the Son of God did not exist before his birth**. Again, the many future tenses need to be noted - e. g. "he *shall be* great". If Jesus were already physically in existence as the angel spoke those words to Mary, **he would already have been great**. Jesus was the "offspring" of David (Rev. 22:16), the Greek 'genos' implying Jesus was 'generated from' David. He was born "of" Mary (Lk. 1:35).

The Conception Of Jesus

Through the Holy Spirit (God's breath/power) acting upon her, Mary was able to conceive Jesus without having intercourse with a man. Thus Joseph was not the father of Jesus. **It must be understood that the Holy Spirit is not a person (see *Bible Basics* Study 2); Jesus was the Son of God, not the Son of the Holy Spirit.** Through God's use of His spirit upon Mary, "*therefore* also that holy thing" which was born of her was "called the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35). The use of the word "therefore" implies that without the Holy Spirit acting upon the womb of Mary, Jesus, the Son of God, could not have come into existence.
That Jesus was 'conceived' in Mary's womb (Lk. 1:31) is also proof that he could not have physically existed before this time. If we 'conceive' an idea, it begins within us. Likewise Jesus was conceived inside Mary's womb - he began there as a foetus, just like any other human being. Jn. 3:16, the Bible's most famous verse, records that Jesus was the "only *begotten* Son" of God. Millions of people who recite this verse fail to meditate upon what it implies. If Jesus was "begotten", he 'began' (a related word to "begotten") when he was conceived in Mary's womb. **If Jesus was begotten by God as his Father, this is clear evidence that his Father is older than he** - God has no beginning (Ps. 90:2) and therefore Jesus cannot be God Himself.

It is significant that Jesus was "begotten" by God rather than being created, as Adam was originally. This explains the closeness of God's association with Jesus - "**God was in Christ**, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2Cor. 5:19). Christ being *begotten* by God, rather than just created from dust, also helps explain his natural aptitude for the ways of God his Father. Is. 49:5,6 contains a prophecy concerning Christ as the light of the world, which he fulfilled (Jn. 8:12). He is described as meditating on "the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant". **Christ was therefore "formed" by God in Mary's womb, through the power of His Holy Spirit. Mary's womb was evidently the place of Christ's physical origin**. We have seen earlier that Psalm 22 prophesies Christ's thoughts on the cross. He reflected that God "took me out of the womb. . . I was cast upon you from the womb: **you art my God from my mother's belly**" (Ps. 22:9,10). In his time of dying, Christ looked back to his origins - in the womb of his mother Mary, formed by the power of God. The very description of Mary in the Gospels as Christ's "*mother*" in itself destroys the idea that he existed before his birth of Mary.

Mary was an ordinary human being, with normal human parents. This is proved by the fact that she had a cousin, who gave birth to John the baptist, an ordinary man (Lk. 1:36). The Roman Catholic idea that Mary was not of ordinary human nature would mean that Christ could not truly have been both "Son of man" and "Son of God". These are his frequent titles throughout the New Testament. He was "Son of man" by reason of having a totally human mother, and "Son of God" because of God's action on Mary through the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:35), meaning that God was his Father. This beautiful arrangement is nullified if Mary was not an ordinary woman. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. . . What is man, that he

should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?. . . how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 14:4; 15:14; 25:4). This puts paid to any idea of an immaculate conception being possible, either of Mary or Jesus. Mary being "born of a woman", with ordinary human parents, must have had our unclean, human nature, which she passed on to Jesus, who was "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The language of his being "*made*" through Mary's agency is further evidence that he could not have physically existed without his birth by her. The Diaglott renders Gal. 4:4: "Having *been produced* from a woman". The Saviour was to be "the seed of the *woman*" (Gen. 3:15) - which promise occurs in the context of the record in Genesis of many *male-based* genealogies.

The Gospel records frequently indicate Mary's humanity. Christ had to rebuke her at least thrice for a lack of spiritual perception (Lk. 2:49; Jn. 2:4); she failed to understand all his sayings (Lk. 2:50). This is exactly what we would expect of a woman who was of human nature, whose son was the Son of God, and therefore more spiritually perceptive than herself, although he, too, shared human nature. Joseph had intercourse with Mary after Christ's birth (Mt. 1:25), and there is no reason to think that they did not have a normal marital relationship from then on. The mention of Christ's "mother and his brethren" in Mt. 12:46,47 would therefore imply that Mary had other children after Jesus. Jesus was only "her *first* born". The Catholic teachings that Mary remained a virgin and then ascended to heaven therefore have absolutely no Biblical support. As a human being of mortal nature, Mary would have grown old and died; apart from this we read in Jn. 3:13, "no man has ascended up to heaven". The fact that Christ had human nature (see Heb. 2:14-18; Rom. 8:3) means that his mother must have had it too, seeing his Father did not have it. She saw herself as "the handmaid [female servant] of the Lord" (Lk. 1:38 cp. Ps. 86:16) - not 'the mother of God'.
The whole record of the virgin birth makes a nonsense of the claim that Jesus pre-existed as a person before His birth. This has even been recognized by theologians: "Jesus' virgin birth stands in an irreconcilable contradiction to the Christology of the incarnation of the preexistent Son of God" (1). James Dunn likewise denies the literal pre-existence of Jesus: "There is no evidence that any NT writer thought of Jesus as actively present in Israel's past, either as the angel of the Lord, or as "the Lord" himself" (2). A pre-existent Jesus is merely a continuation of the old pagan idea that the gods came to earth and had relations with innocent women (cp. Acts 14:11). Or take C. F. D. Moule: "There is no doctrine of Christ's pre-existence in Acts, though there is ample stress on foreknowledge and God's predetermined plan (see, e. g. , Acts 4:28; 9:15; 10:42; 13:27,48; 16:14; 17:31). Neither is such a doctrine entertained in the Gospel: the Lucan allusions to the virgin birth certainly do not imply it" (3).

The Genealogies Of Jesus
The genealogies of the Lord Jesus given at the beginnings of Matthew and Luke are surely impossible to square with the idea of His personal pre-existence before birth. How ever could the Gospel writers have seriously believed that, and yet written such genealogies? Are we really to imagine that they intended us to believe in the Lord's pre-existence when they wrote up the genealogies as they did? Marshall Johnson comments on them: "Jesus is Son of God not through the categories of pre-existence or metaphysical relationship between Father and Son, but through the line of OT patriarchs. . . Conzelmann seems correct when he describes Luke's conception of the title, Son of God, as connected with a subordinationism that reveals in itself a complete lack of the idea of pre-existence" (4). Or again: "**Luke never suggests that Jesus existed before his birth, as a divine being or otherwise. . . Luke explicitly states that he wrote in order to confi rm what his readers had already been taught (Luke 1:4).** If they had been taught that Jesus was a pre - existent divine being like God, this would seem an important teaching for Luke to confirm" (5).

Notes
(1) W. Pannenberg, *Jesus- God And Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) p. 143.
(2) J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (London: SCM, 1980) p. 158.
(3) C. F. D. Moule, *Forgiveness And Reconciliation* (London: S. P. C. K. , 1998) p. 74.
(4) Marshall Johnson, *The Purpose Of The Biblical Genealogies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002) pp. 237,8.
(5) Delbert Burkett, 'Jesus in Luke-Acts' in Delbert Burkett, ed. , *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) pp. 48,61.

1-12 Christ's Place In God's Plan

God does not decide on His plans on the spur of the moment, devising extra parts to His purpose as human history unfolds. God had a complete plan formulated right from the beginning of creation (Jn. 1:1). His desire to have a Son was therefore in His plan from the beginning. He loved that Son before he was born, just as parents may love a child still in the womb. The whole of the Old Testament reveals different aspects of God's plan of salvation in Christ. We have frequently demonstrated that through the promises, the prophecies of the prophets, and the types of the Law of Moses, the Old Testament is constantly revealing God's purpose in Christ. It was on account of God's knowledge that He would have a Son that He brought creation into existence (Heb. 1:1,2, Greek text; "by" in the A. V. is better translated "on account of"). It was on account of Christ that the ages of human history were allowed by God (Heb. 1:2 (Greek). It follows that God's revelation to man down through the years, as recorded in the Old Testament, is full of references to Christ. The supremacy of Christ and his fundamental importance to God is difficult for us to comprehend fully. It is therefore true to say that Christ existed in God's mind and purpose from the beginning, although he only came into existence physically through his birth of Mary. Heb. 1:4-7, 13,14, stress that Christ was not an angel; whilst in his mortal life he was less than angels (Heb. 2:7), he was exalted to a far greater honour than them seeing he was God's "*only begotten Son*" (Jn. 3:16). Christ did not exist as a 'spirit' before his birth.

1Pet. 1:20 sums up the position: Christ "was foreordained before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last times". Jesus was the central pivot of the Gospel, which God "had promised afore by his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his son, Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made (created by begettal) of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:1-4).
This summarizes the history of Christ.
1. Promised in the Old Testament - i. e. in God's plan;
2. Created as a physical person through the virgin birth, as a seed of David;
3. Due to his perfect character ("the spirit of holiness"), shown during his mortal life
4. He was resurrected, and again publicly declared to be the Son of God by the apostles' spirit-gifted preaching.
The Lord Jesus was the promised descendant of Abraham. Mic. 5:2 speaks of Him as having these very "ancient origins". The same Hebrew term used there is to be found in Dt. 32:7; Mic. 7:14; Amos 9:11; Is. 63:9,11 with the same connotation. As the *Cambridge Bible For Schools And Colleges* comments: "['origins'] refers to his descent from the ancient Davidic family- cp. Amos 9:11, where 'the days of old' evidently refers to the reign of David". We must see this within the context of how contemporary society would've perceived this statement. "One of the notable phenomena of Near Eastern society in the first century BC is the interest taken by families of social standing in their distant ancestry. . . the practice was followed of appending to one's name not only one's father's name, but also the name of the remote ancestor from whom one claimed descent" (1).

The Foreknowledge Of God
We will be greatly helped in appreciating how fully Christ was in God's mind at the beginning, while not physically existing, if we can come to terms with the fact that God knows *all* things which will occur in the 'future'; He has complete 'foreknowledge'. God can therefore speak and think about things which do not exist, as though they do. Such is the totality of His knowledge of the future. **There is strictly no Hebrew word for 'promise'- only a 'word'; so sure is God's word of promise of fulfilment**. What He says is as if it has happened. Thus God "speaks of those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). He can therefore declare "the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:10). Because of this, God can speak of the dead as if they are alive, and can speak of men as if they were alive before birth. He can speak of a day coming as if it has come (Is. 3:8; Ez. 7:10,12). The "counsel", or word of God, had prophesied Christ from the beginning; he was always in God's purpose or "pleasure". It was therefore certain that at some time Christ would be physically born; God would fulfil His stated purpose in Christ. The certainty of God's foreknowledge is therefore reflected in the sureness of His word. **Biblical Hebrew has a 'prophetic perfect' tense, which uses the past tense to describe future things which God has promised**. Thus David said, "This *is* the house of the Lord God" (1Chron. 22:1), when as yet the temple was only promised by God. Such was his faith in that word of promise that David used the present tense to describe future things. Scripture abounds with examples of God's foreknowledge. God was so certain that He would fulfil

the promises to Abraham, that He told him: "Unto your seed *have* I *given* this land. . . " (Gen. 15:18) at a time when Abraham did not even have a seed. During this same period before the seed (Isaac/Christ) was born, God further promised: "A father of many nations *have I made you*" (Gen. 17:5). **Truly, God "calleth those things which be not as though they were**". Thus Christ spoke during his ministry of how God "*has given* all things into his (Christ's) hand" (Jn. 3:35), although this was not then the case. "You *have* put all things in subjection under (Christ's) feet. . . but now we see not yet all things put under him" (Heb. 2:8).

God spoke about His plan of salvation through Jesus "by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began" (Lk. 1:70). The prophets "have been since the world began" (Acts 3:21 RV). Because they were so closely associated with God's plan, these men are spoken of as though they literally existed at the beginning, although this is evidently not the case. Instead, we can say that the prophets were in God's plan from the beginning. Jeremiah is a prime example. God told him: "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet" (Jer. 1:5). Thus God knew everything about Jeremiah even before the creation. In like manner God could speak about the Persian king Cyrus before the time of his birth, using language which implies he was then in existence (Is. 45:1-5). Heb. 7:9,10 is another example of this language of existence being used about someone not then born. **In the same way as Jeremiah and the prophets are spoken of as existing even before creation, due to their part in God's plan, so the true believers are spoken of as existing then**. It is evident that we did not physically exist then except in the mind of God. God "has saved us, and called us with an holy calling. . . according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). God "has chosen us in (Christ) before the foundation of the world. . . having predestinated us. . . according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:4,5). The whole idea of individuals being foreknown by God from the beginning, and being 'marked off' ('predestinated') to salvation, indicates that they existed in the mind of God at the beginning (Rom. 8:27; 9:23).

In the light of all this, it is not surprising that Christ, as the summation of God's purpose, should be spoken of as existing from the beginning in God's mind and plan, although physically he could not have done so. He was "the lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Jesus did not die then literally; he was the "Lamb of God" sacrificed about 4,000 years later on the cross (Jn. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). In the same way as Jesus was chosen from the beginning (1 Pet. 1:20), so were the believers (Eph. 1:4; the same Greek word for "chosen" is used in these verses). Our difficulty in comprehending all this is because we cannot easily imagine how God operates outside of the concept of time. 'Faith' is the ability to look at things from God's viewpoint, without the constraints of time.

Notes

(1) Donald Redford, *The Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) p. 5.

1-13 Did Jesus Create The Earth?

"The firstborn of every creature: for by (Jesus) were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead. . .** " (Col. 1:15-18). This is typical of those passages which can give the impression that Jesus actually created the earth.

1. If this were true, then so many other passages are contradicted which teach that Jesus did not exist before his birth. The record in Genesis clearly teaches that God was the creator. Either Jesus or God were the creator; if we say that Jesus was the creator while Genesis says that God was, we are saying that Jesus was directly equal to God. **In this case it is impossible to explain the many verses which show the differences between God and Jesus (see Study 8. 2 for examples of these).**

2. Jesus was the "*firstborn*", which implies a beginning. There is no proof that Jesus was God's "firstborn" before the creation of the literal earth. Passages like 2 Sam. 7:14 and Ps. 89:27 predicted that a literal descendant of David would *become* God's firstborn. He was clearly not in existence at the time those passages were written, and therefore not at the time of the Genesis creation either. Jesus became "the Son of God with power" *by* his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). God "has raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, You are My Son, *this day* have I begotten you" (Acts 13:32,33). Thus Jesus

became God's firstborn by his resurrection. Note too that a son standing at his father's right hand is associated with being the firstborn (Gen. 48:13-16), and Christ was exalted to God's right hand after his resurrection (Acts 2:32 R. V. mg. ; Heb. 1:3).
3. It is in this sense that Jesus is described as the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), a phrase which is parallel to "the firstborn of every creature" or creation (Col. 1:15 R. V.). He therefore speaks of himself as "the first begotten of the dead. . . the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). Jesus was the first of a new creation of immortal men and women, whose resurrection and full birth as the immortal sons of God has been made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus (Eph. 2:10; 4:23,24; 2 Cor. 5:17). "In Christ shall all (true believers) be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:22,23). This is just the same idea as in Col. 1. **Jesus was the first person to rise from the dead and be given immortality, he was the first of the new creation, and the true believers will follow his pattern at his return.**
4. The creation spoken about in Col. 1 therefore refers to the new creation, rather than that of Genesis. Through the work of Jesus "were all things created. . . thrones. . . dominions" etc. Paul does not say that Jesus created all things and then give examples of rivers, mountains, birds etc. The elements of this new creation refer to those rewards which we will have in God's Kingdom. "Thrones. . . dominions" etc. refer to how the raised believers will be "kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). These things were made possible by the work of Jesus. "In him were all things created *in the heavens*" (Col. 1:16 R. V.). In Eph. 2:6 we read of the believers who are *in* Christ as sitting in "heavenly places". If any man is *in Christ* by baptism, he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). By being *in* Christ we are saved by His death (Col. 1:22). The literal planet could not be created by being *in* Christ. Thus these verses are teaching that the exalted spiritual position which we can now have, as well as what we will experience in the future, has all been made possible by Christ. The "heavens and earth" contain "all things that needed reconciliation by the blood of (Christ's) cross" (Col. 1:16,20), showing that the "all things. . . in heaven" refer to the believers who now sit in "heavenly places. . . in Christ Jesus", rather than to all physical things around us.
5. If Jesus were the creator, it is strange how He should say: "…from the beginning of the creation God made them…" (Mk. 10:6). **This surely sounds as if He understood God to be the creator, not He Himself. And if He literally created everything in Heaven, this would include God**.

1-14 Jesus Didn't Pre-Exist: And So What?

2 Jn. 11 speaks of how teaching that Jesus was not truly human is associated with " evil works" . Surely the implication is that good works are inspired by a true understanding of the Lord's humanity, and evil works by a refusal to accept this teaching. The tests of genuineness which John commanded centred around two simple things: Do those who come to you hold true understanding of the nature of Jesus; and do they love. The two things go together. And they are a fair test even today. For where there is no love, the true doctrine of Jesus is not truly believed, no matter how nicely it is expressed in words and writing.

Bold Prayer And Witness

Therefore in the daily round of life, He will be a living reality, like David we will behold the Lord Jesus before our face all the day. We will really believe that forgiveness is possible through the work of such a representative; and the reality of his example will mean the more to us, as a living inspiration to rise above our lower nature. Appreciating the doctrines of the atonement enables us to pray acceptably; " we have boldness and access with confidence by *the* Faith" - not just 'by faith', but as a result of *the* Faith (Eph. 3:12). Hebrews so often uses the word " therefore" ; *because of* the facts of the atonement, we can *therefore* come boldly before God's throne in prayer, with a true heart and clear conscience (Heb. 4:16). This " boldness" which the atonement has enabled will be reflected in our being 'bold' in our witness (2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4); our experience of imputed righteousness will lead us to have a confidence exuding through our whole being. This is surely why 'boldness' was such a characteristic and watchword of the early church (Acts 4:13,29,31; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:13; Heb. 10:19; 1 Jn. 4:17). Stephen truly believed that the Lord Jesus stood as his representative and his advocate before the throne of grace. Although condemned by an earthly court, he confidently makes his appeal before the court of Heaven (Acts 7:56). Doubtless he was

further inspired by the basic truth that whoever confesses the Lord Jesus before men, He will confess him before the angels in the court of Heaven (Lk. 12:8).

The connection between the atonement and faith in prayer is also brought out in **2 Cor. 1:20 RSV: " For all the promises of God in him are yea.** That is why we utter the Amen through him" . The promises of God were confirmed through the Lord's death, and the fact that He died as the seed of Abraham, having taken upon Him Abraham's plural seed in representation (Rom. 15:8,9). Because of this, " we utter the Amen through [on account of being in] Him" . We can heartily say 'Amen', so be it, to our prayers on account of our faith and understanding of His atoning work.

Love

The fact the Lord Jesus didn't pre-exist as a person needs some meditation. The kind of thoughts that come to us as we stand alone at night, gazing into the sky. It seems evident that there must have been some kind of previous creation(s), e. g. for the creation of the Angels. God existed from infinity, and yet only 2,000 years ago did He have His only and His *begotten* Son. And that Son was a human being in order to save humans- only a few million of us (if that), who lived in a 6,000 year time span. In the specter of infinite time and space, this is wondrous. That the Only Son of God should die for a very few of us here, we who crawled on the surface of this tiny planet for such a fleeting moment of time. **He died so that God could work out our salvation; and the love of God for us is likened to a young man marrying a virgin (Is. 62:5)**. Almighty God, who existed from eternity, is likened to a first timer, with all the intensity and joyful expectation and lack of disillusion. And more than this. The Jesus who didn't pre-exist but was like me, died for *me*, in the shameful way that He did. Our hearts and minds, with all their powers, are in the boundless prospect lost. His pure *love* for us, His condescension, should mean that we also ought to reach out into the lives of all men, never thinking they are beneath us or too insignificant or distant from us. No wonder 1 Jn. 4:15,16 describes believing that Jesus is the Son of God as believing the love that God has to us.

True Christianity holds that personal relationships matter more than anything in this world, and that the truly human way to live is- in the last analysis- to lovingly, constantly, unreservedly give ourselves away to God and to others. And yet this is ultimately rooted in the fact that we are seeking above all else to follow after the example of Jesus(Led by the Spirit). This example is only real and actual because of the total humanity of Jesus. As He taught these things, so He lived them. **The word of love was made flesh in Him**. At the deepest level of personhood, **His was the one perfect human life which this world has seen. And exactly because of His humanity, exactly because He was not " very God" but " the man Christ Jesus**" , because Jesus didn't pre-exist, we have the pattern for our lives and being. **To claim Jesus was " God" is to depersonalize Him; it destroys the wonder of His character and all He really was and is and will ever be.**

The Reality Of Judgment

We will be judged in the man Christ Jesus (Acts 17:31 R. V. Mg.). This means that the very fact Jesus didn't pre-exist and was human makes Him our constant and insistent judge of all our human behaviour. And exactly because of this, Paul argues, we should right now repent. He is judge exactly because He is the Son of man.

Conclusion

John makes such a fuss about believing that Jesus came in the flesh because he wants his brethren to have the same Spirit that was in Jesus dwelling in *their* flesh (1 Jn. 4:2,4). He wants them to see that being human, being in the flesh, is no barrier for God to dwell in. As Jesus was in the world, so are we to be in the world (1 Jn. 4:17 Gk.). ***This* is why it's so important to understand that the Lord Jesus was genuinely human.**

1-15 Differences Between God And Jesus

There is a fine balance to be drawn between those passages which emphasise the degree to which "God was in Christ", and those which highlight his humanity. The latter group of passages make it impossible to justify Biblically the idea that Jesus is God Himself, "very God of very God", as the doctrine of the Trinity wrongly states. (This phrase "very God of very God" was used at the Council of Nicea in 325 A. D. , where the idea of God being a 'trinity' was first promulgated; it was unknown to the early Christians.) **The word 'trinity' never occurs in the Bible.** Study 9 will delve further into Christ's total victory over sin, and God's part in it. As we commence these studies, let us remember that salvation depends upon an acceptance of the real Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:36; 6:53;17:3). Once we have come to this true understanding of his conquest of sin and death, we can be baptised into him in order to share in this salvation. One of the clearest summaries of the relationship between God and Jesus is found in 1 Tim. 2:5: "There is ***one*** God, *and* one ***mediator*** between God and men, the ***man*** Christ Jesus". Reflection upon the highlighted words leads to the following conclusions:

- **As there is only *one* God, it is impossible that Jesus could be God**; if the Father is God and Jesus is also God, then there are two Gods. "But to us there is but one God, the Father" (1 Cor. 8:6). 'God the Father' is therefore the only God. It is therefore impossible that there can be a separate being called 'God the Son', as the false doctrine of the trinity states. The Old Testament likewise portrays Yahweh, the one God, as the Father (e. g. Is. 63:16; 64:8). The Bible also say many times that Jesus is seated next to the Father in Heaven,

if you say Jesus is God then you are worshipping two Gods.

- In addition to this one God, there is the mediator, **the man Christ Jesus** - ". . . *and* one mediator. . . ". That word "and" indicates a difference between Christ and God.

-As Christ is the "mediator" it means that he is a go-between. A mediator between sinful man and sinless God cannot be sinless God Himself; it had to be a sinless man, of human nature. "The *man* Christ Jesus" leaves us in no doubt as to the correctness of this explanation. Even though he was writing after the ascension of Jesus, **Paul does not speak of "the God Christ Jesus"**.

Several times we are reminded that "God is not a man" (Num. 23:19; Hos. 11:9); yet Christ was clearly "the Son of man" or, as he is often called in the New Testament, "the *man* Christ Jesus". The Greek text calls him "son of *anthropos*", i. e. of mankind, rather than "son of *aner*" [husband, man]. In Hebrew thought, "the Son of man" meant an ordinary, mortal man (Is. 51:12). "For since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Jesus] came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:21). Yet He was also "the Son of the Highest" (Lk. 1:32). God being "*the* Highest" indicates that only He has ultimate highness; **Jesus being "the *Son* of the Highest"** shows that he cannot have been God Himself in person. The very language of Father and Son which is used about God and Jesus, makes it obvious that they are not the same. **Whilst a son may have certain similarities to his father, he cannot be one and the same person, nor be as old as his father**.

In line with this, there are a number of obvious differences between God and Jesus, which clearly show that Jesus was not God himself.

GOD	JESUS
"God cannot be tempted" (James1:13).	Christ "was in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb. 4:15).
God cannot die - He is immortal by nature (Ps. 90:2; 1 Tim. 6:16).	Christ died and was in the grave for three days (Mt. 12:40; 16:21). He was once under the "dominion" of death (Rom. 6:9).
The time of Christ's return is known only by God (Acts 1:7)	Christ didn't know the time of His return (Mt. 24:36)
God cannot be seen by men (1Tim. 6:16; Ex. 33:20).	Men saw Jesus and handled him (1Jn. 1:1 emphasises this).

When we are tempted, we are forced to choose between sin and obedience to God. Often we choose to disobey God; **Christ had the same choices,** but always chose to be obedient. He therefore had the possibility of sinning, although he never actually did. **It is unthinkable that God has any possibility of sinning.** We have shown that the seed of David promised in 2Sam. 7:12-16 was definitely Christ. Verse 14 **speaks of Christ's possibility of sinning: "*If* he commit iniquity, I will chasten him**". The Centurion

reasoned that because he was under authority, he therefore had authority over others; and he applies this very same logic to the abilities of the Lord Jesus. Because He was under *God's* authority, therefore and thereby He would have the power to have other things under His authority. And the Lord commended the Centurion for that perception. Clearly the Lord Jesus is to be understood as under the Father's authority; and it is only because He is in this subordinate position, that He has authority over all things now.

1-16 The Nature of Jesus

The word 'nature' refers to 'fundamental, essential being'. The Bible speaks of only two natures - that of God, and that of man. By nature God cannot die, be tempted etc. It is evident that Christ was not of God's nature during his life. He was therefore of human nature. From our definition of the word 'nature' it is evident that Christ could not have had two natures simultaneously. It was vital that Christ was tempted like us (Heb. 4:15), so that through his perfect overcoming of temptation he could gain forgiveness for us. "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like us" (Heb. 4:15) expresses a truth negatively. The passage suggests that even in the first century there were those who thought that Jesus "cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities"; the writer is stressing that this is *not* the case; Jesus *can* be touched in this way. **These incipient tendencies to wrong understanding of the nature of Jesus came to full fruit in the false doctrine of the trinity**. The wrong desires which are the basis of our temptations come from within us (Mk. 7:15-23), from within our human nature (James 1:13-15). It was necessary, therefore, that Christ should be of human nature so that he could experience and overcome these temptations.

Heb. 2:14-18 puts all this in so many words: "As the children (us) are partakers of flesh and blood (human nature), he (Christ) also himself likewise partook of the same (nature); that through death he might destroy. . . the devil. . . For truly he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the (nature of the) seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it was appropriate that he be made like unto his brothers, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest. . . to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help them that are tempted". **This passage places extraordinary emphasis upon the fact that Jesus had human nature:** "He *also himself likewise*" partook of it (Heb. 2:14). This phrase uses three words all with the same meaning, just to drive the point home. He partook "of the *same*" nature; the record could have said 'he partook of *it* too', but it stresses, "he partook of the *same*". Heb. 2:16 similarly labours the point that Christ did not have Angels' nature, seeing that he was the seed of Abraham, who had come to bring salvation for the multitude of believers who would become Abraham's seed. Because of this, it was necessary for Christ to have human nature. In *every* way he had "to be made like unto his brothers" (Heb. 2:17) so that God could grant us forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice. To say that Jesus was not totally of human nature is therefore to be ignorant of the very basics of the good news of Christ. Eph. 5:30 makes the amazing statement that even now, "We are of members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones". In a very detailed study of this language, the Catholic theologian Henricus Renckens concluded: "In Israel, in order to say that someone was a blood relation, one said: "He is my flesh and my bones" (Gen. 29:14; Jud. 9:2; cp. Gen. 37:27; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:13 ff. ; Is. 58:7)" (1). This is how close we are to the Lord Jesus- blood relatives. This language could in no way be justified if Jesus were God Himself in person.

Whenever baptised believers sin, they can come to God, confessing their sin in prayer through Christ (1 Jn. 1:9); God is aware that Christ was tempted to sin exactly as they are, but that he was perfect, overcoming that very temptation which they fail. Because of this, "God for Christ's sake" can forgive us (Eph. 4:32). It is therefore vital to appreciate how Christ was tempted just like us, and needed to have our nature for this to be possible. Heb. 2:14 clearly states that Christ had "flesh and blood" nature to make this possible. "God is spirit" (Jn. 4:24) by nature and as "spirit" He does not have flesh and blood. **Christ having "flesh" nature means that in no way did he have God's nature during his mortal life.**

Previous attempts by men to keep God's word, i. e. to overcome totally temptation, had all failed. Therefore "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and by a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin, in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3).

"The wages of sin is death". To escape this predicament, man needed outside help. By himself he is incapable of perfection; it was and is not possible for us as fleshly creatures to redeem the flesh. God

therefore intervened and gave us His own Son, who experienced our "sinful flesh", with all the temptation to sin which we have. Unlike every other man, Christ overcame every temptation, although he had the possibility of failure and sinning just as much as we do. Rom. 8:3 describes Christ as being in the likeness of sinful man- not that He was personally sinful, of course. A few verses earlier, Paul spoke of how in the flesh "dwells no good thing", and how the flesh naturally militates against obedience to God (Rom. 7:18-23). In this context it is all the more marvellous to read that Christ had our "flesh" in Rom. 8:3. **It was because of this, and his overcoming of that flesh, that we have a way of escape from our flesh; Jesus was intensely aware of the potential to sin within his own nature.** He was once addressed as "Good master", with the implication that he was "good" and perfect by nature. He responded: "Why do you call me good? There is none good but one, that is, God" (Mk. 10:17,18). The Lord Jesus was alluding here to Ps. 16:2: "I say to the Lord, You are my God; **I have no good apart from You**" (R. S. V.). And it seems Paul had the Lord's words of Mk. 10:18 in mind when he said that no "good" thing dwelt in his flesh (Rom. 7:18)- showing how Paul appreciated that he shared the same nature as that of the Lord Jesus in His mortality. On another occasion, men started to testify of Christ's greatness due to a series of outstanding miracles which he had performed. Jesus did not capitalise on this "because he knew all, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:23-25, Greek text). **Because of his great knowledge of human nature** ("he knew *all*" about this), Christ did not want men to praise him personally in his own right, he was aware of his own nature. All this can seem almost impossible to believe; that a man with our weak nature could in fact be sinless by character. It requires less faith to believe that 'Jesus was God' and was therefore perfect. Hence the attraction of this false doctrine. Those who knew the half-sisters of Jesus in first century Palestine felt the same: "…his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then has this **man** these things? And they were offended in him" (Mt. 13:56,57). And countless others have likewise stumbled in this way.

Note
(1) H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 228.

1-17 The Humanity Of Jesus

The Gospel records provide many examples of how completely Jesus had human nature. It is recorded that **he was weary**, and had to sit down to drink from a well (Jn 4:6). "**Jesus wept**" at the death of Lazarus (Jn. 11:35). Most supremely, the record of his final sufferings should be proof enough of his humanity: "Now is my soul troubled", he admitted as he prayed for God to save him from having to go through with his death on the cross (Jn. 12:27). He "prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup (of suffering and death) pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as you will" (Mt. 26:39). This indicates that at times Christ's fleshly desires were different from those of God. However, during his whole life Christ always submitted his own will to that of God in preparation for this final trial of the cross. "**I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me" (Jn. 5:30).** This difference between Christ's will and that of God is proof enough that Jesus was not God. Throughout our lives we are expected to grow in our knowledge of God, learning from the trials which we experience in life. In this, Jesus was our great example. **He did not have complete knowledge of God poured into him any more than we have. From childhood "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature (i. e. spiritual maturity,** cp. Eph. 4:13), and in favour with God and man" (Lk. 2:52). "The child grew, and became strong in spirit" (Lk. 2:40). **These two verses portray Christ's physical growth as parallel to his spiritual development; the growth process occurred in him both naturally and spiritually.** If "The Son is God", as the Athanasian Creed states concerning the 'Trinity', this would not have been possible. Even at the end of his life, Christ admitted that he did not know the exact time of his second coming, although the Father did (Mk. 13:32). He asked questions of the teachers of the Law at age 12, eager to learn; and often He spoke of what He had *learnt* and *been taught* by His Father.

Obedience to God's will is something which we all have to learn over a period of time. **Christ also had to go through this process of learning obedience to his Father, as any son has to. "**Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience (i. e. obedience to God) by the things which he suffered; and being *made* perfect (i. e. spiritually mature), he became the author of eternal salvation" as a result of his completed and total spiritual growth (Heb. 5:8,9). Phil. 2:7,8 (further commented on in the Appendix) records this same

process of spiritual growth in Jesus, culminating in his death on the cross. He "*made* himself of no reputation, and *took upon him* the form (demeanour) of a servant. . . he *humbled himself* and *became* obedient unto. . . the death of the cross." The language used here illustrates how Jesus consciously grew spiritually, humbling himself completely, so that finally he "*became* obedient" to God's desire that he should die on the cross. Thus he was "*made* perfect" by the way he accepted his suffering. It is evident from this that Jesus had to make a conscious, personal effort to be righteous; in no way was he automatically made so by God, which would have resulted in him being a mere puppet. Jesus truly loved us, and gave his life on the cross from this motive. The constant emphasis upon the love of Christ for us would be hollow if God compelled him to die on the cross (Eph. 5:2,25; Rev. 1:5; Gal. 2:20). If Jesus was God, then he would have had no option but to be perfect and then die on the cross. That Jesus *did* have these options, enables us to appreciate his love, and to form a personal relationship with him.

It was because of Christ's willingness to give his life voluntarily that God was so delighted with him: "Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life. . . No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (Jn. 10:17,18). That God was so pleased with Christ's willing obedience is hard to understand if Jesus was God, living out a life in human form as some kind of tokenistic association with sinful man (Mt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). These records of the Father's delight in the Son's obedience, is proof enough that Christ had the possibility of disobedience, but consciously chose to be obedient.

Christ's Need Of Salvation

Because of his human nature, Jesus was mortal as we are. In view of this, Jesus needed to be saved from death by God. Intensely recognising this, Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him (God) that was able to save him from death, and was heard for his piety" (Heb. 5:7 A. V. mg.). The fact that Christ had to plead with God to save him from death rules out any possibility of him being God in person. **After Christ's resurrection, death had "*no more* dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9), implying that beforehand it did.** Many of the Psalms are prophetic of Jesus; when some verses from a Psalm are quoted about Christ in the New Testament, it is reasonable to assume that many of the other verses in the Psalm are about him too. There are a number of occasions where Christ's need for salvation by God is emphasised:

- **Ps. 91:11,12** is quoted about Jesus in Mt. 4:6. Ps. 91:16 prophesies how God would give Jesus salvation: "With long life (i. e. eternal life) will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation." Ps. 69:21 refers to Christ's crucifixion (Mt. 27:34); the whole Psalm describes Christ's thoughts on the cross: "Save me, O God. . . Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it. . . Let your salvation, O God, set me up on high" (vs. 1,18,29).
- **Ps. 89** is a commentary upon God's promise to David concerning Christ. Concerning Jesus, Ps. 89:26 prophesies: "He shall cry unto me (God), You art my father, my God, and the rock of my *salvation*."
- Christ's prayers to God for salvation were heard; he was heard because of his personal spirituality, not because of his place in a 'trinity' (Heb. 5:7). That *God* resurrected Jesus and glorified him with immortality is a major New Testament theme.
- "*God*. . . raised up Jesus. . . Him has *God* exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour" (Acts 5:30,31).
- "*God*. . . has glorified his Son Jesus. . . whom *God* has raised from the dead" (Acts 3:13,15).
- "This Jesus has *God* raised up" (Acts 2:24,32,33).
- **Jesus himself recognised all this when he asked *God* to glorify him** (Jn. 17:5 cp. 13:32; 8:54).

If Jesus was God Himself, then all this emphasis would be out of place, seeing that God cannot die. Jesus would not have needed saving if he were God. That it was God who exalted Jesus demonstrates God's superiority over him, and the separateness of God and Jesus. In no way could Christ have been "very and eternal God (with) two. . . natures. . . Godhead and manhood", as the first of the 39 Articles of the Church of England states. By the very meaning of the word, a being can only have one nature. We submit that the evidence is overwhelming that Christ was of our human nature.

The Relationship Of God with Jesus

Considering how God resurrected Jesus leads us on to think of the relationship between God and Jesus. If they are "co-equal. . . co-eternal", as the trinity doctrine states, then we would expect their relationship to be that of equals. We have already seen ample evidence that this is not the case. The relationship between God and Christ is similar to that between husband and wife: "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the

woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). As the husband is the head of the wife, so God is the head of Christ, although they have the same unity of purpose as should exist between husband and wife. Thus "Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:23), as the wife belongs to the husband. **God the Father is often stated to be Christ's God.** The fact that God is described as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 1:17) even after Christ's ascension to heaven, shows that this is *now* their relationship, as it was during Christ's mortal life. It is sometimes argued by trinitarians that Christ is only spoken of as less than God during his life on earth. The New Testament letters were written some years after Christ ascended to heaven, yet still God is spoken of as Christ's God and Father. **Jesus still treats the Father as his God.**
Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, was written many years after Christ's glorification and ascension, yet it speaks of God as "his (Christ's) God and Father" (Rev. 1:6 R. V.). In this book, the resurrected and glorified Christ gave messages to the believers. He speaks of "the temple of **my God**. . . the name of my God. . . the city of **my God**" (Rev. 3:12). This proves that Jesus even now thinks of the Father as his God - **and therefore he (Jesus) is not God**. During his mortal life, Jesus related to his Father in a similar way. He spoke of ascending "unto my Father, and your Father; and to **my God, and your God**" (Jn. 20:17). On the cross, Jesus displayed his humanity to the full: **"My God, my God,** why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46). Such words are impossible to understand if spoken by God Himself. The very fact that Jesus prayed to God "with strong crying and tears" in itself indicates the true nature of their relationship (Heb. 5:7; Lk. 6:12). God evidently cannot pray to Himself. Even now, Christ prays to God on our behalf (Rom. 8:26,27 N. I. V. cp. 2 Cor. 3:18 R. V. mg.).

1-18 The Victory Of Jesus

The previous Study has demonstrated how the Lord Jesus had our human nature and was tempted to sin just like us. The difference between him and us is that he completely overcame sin; whilst having our *nature*, he always exhibited a perfect *character*. The wonder of this should endlessly inspire us as we increasingly appreciate it. There is repeated New Testament emphasis upon Christ's perfect character:-
-He was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).
-He "knew no sin". "In Him there is no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John3:5).
-"Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth"(1 Peter 2:22).
-"Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26).
The Gospel records demonstrate how his fellow men recognized the perfection oozing from his character, shown in his words and actions. Pilate's wife recognized that he was a "just man" (Matt. 27:19), undeserving of punishment;the Roman soldier who watched Christ's demeanour whilst hanging on the cross had to comment, **"Certainly this was a righteous man"** (Luke 23:47). Earlier in his life, Jesus challenged the Jews with the question: "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46). To this there was no reply.
As a result of His victorious perfection in every way, Jesus of Nazareth was *raised above* the Angels (Heb. 1:3-5REB). He was given an exalted name (Phil. 2:9), which included all the Angelic titles. "His name *will be* called Wonderful [cp. Jud. 13:18], Counsellor [2 Kings 22:20]" (Is. 9:6). Evidently this high position was not possessed by Jesus before His birth and death; the idea of Him being exalted *to* this position rules this out.

Due to his perfect character, Jesus was the manifestation of God in flesh (1Tim. 3:16); **He acted and spoke as God would have done had He been a man**. He was therefore the perfect reflection of God - "the *image* of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Because of this, there is no need for mortal men to physically see God. As Jesus explained, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, '**Show us (physically) the Father?'" (John 14:9)**. The repeated Biblical emphasis is that God the Father was manifest in Jesus Christ His Son (2 Cor. 5:19; Jn. 14:10; Acts 2:22). The doctrine of the trinity teaches that the Son was manifest or 'incarnate' in Jesus; but the Bible teaches that God was manifest ['incarnate' if we must use the term] in Jesus. **The word *became* flesh** (Jn. 1:14), **rather than the word entering into a fleshly form**.
Living in a sinful world, beset by sin and failure in our own lives, it is hard for us to appreciate the totality and immensity of Christ's spiritual supremacy;that a man of our nature should fully reveal the righteousness of God in his character. Believing this requires a more real faith than just accepting the theological idea that Christ was God Himself;it is understandable that the false doctrine of the trinity is so popular.
Christ willingly gave his perfect life as a gift to us;he showed his love for us by dying "for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3), knowing that through his death he would gain us eventual salvation from sin and death (Eph. 5:2,25;Rev. 1:5; Gal. 2:20). Because Jesus was perfect in character he was able to overcome the result of

sin by being the first person to rise from the dead and be given immortal life All those who identify themselves with Christ through baptism and a Christ-like way of life therefore have hope of a similar resurrection and reward. In this lies the glorious significance of Christ's resurrection. It is the "assurance" that we will be resurrected and judged (Acts 17:31), and if we have been truly like him, share his reward of immortal life, "*knowing* (confidently) that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:14;1 Cor. 6:14;Rom. 6:3-5). As sinners, we deserve eternal death (Rom. 6:23). Yet, on account of Christ's perfect life, obedient death and his resurrection, God is able to offer us the *gift* of eternal life, completely in accord with all His principles.

To displace the effects of our sins, God "credits righteousness" (Rom. 4:6NIV) to us through our faith in His promises of salvation. We know that sin brings death, therefore if we truly believe that God will save us from it, we must believe that He will count us as if we are righteous, although we are not. Christ was perfect;by **being truly *in* Christ, God can count us as if we are perfect,** although personally we are not. God made Christ "who had no sin, to be a sin offering for us, so that *in* him we might become the righteousness of God " (2 Cor. 5:21), i. e. being *in* Christ through baptism and a Christ-like life. Thus for those "in Christ Jesus", " (1 Cor. 1:30,31);the following verse therefore encourages us to praise Christ for the great things he has achieved: "In the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith" (Rom. 1:17 NIV). All this was made possible through Christ's resurrection. He was the "firstfruits" of a whole harvest of human beings who will be made immortal through his achievement (1 Cor. 15:20), "the firstborn" of a new spiritual family who will be given God's nature (Col. 1:18,19 cp. Eph. 3:15). Christ's resurrection therefore made it possible for God to count believers in Christ as if they are righteous, seeing that they are covered by his righteousness. Christ "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom. 4:25 NIV), a word meaning 'to be righteous'.

It takes a conscious, meditated faith in these things to really be convinced that we can be counted by God as if we are perfect. Christ can present us at the judgment seat "*faultless* before the presence of His glory", "holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight" (Jude v. 24;Col. 1:22 cp. Eph. 5:27). Given our constant spiritual failures, it takes a firm faith to really believe this. Just putting our hand up at a 'crusade' or making an academic assent to a set of doctrines is not related to this kind of faith. It is a proper understanding of Christ's resurrection which should motivate our faith:"God. . . raised Him from the dead . . . *so that* your faith and hope (of a similar resurrection) are in God" (1 Pet. 1:21). It is only by proper baptism into Christ that we can be "in Christ" and therefore be covered by his righteousness. By baptism we associate ourselves with his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5), which are the means of our deliverance from our sins, through being 'justified', or counted righteous (Rom. 4:25). The marvellous things which we have considered in this section are quite out of our grasp unless we have been baptized. At baptism we associate ourselves with the blood of Christ shed on the cross;believers wash "their robes and (make) them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). Figuratively, they are then clothed in white robes, representing the righteousness of Christ which has been counted ('credited') to them (Rev. 19:8). It is possible to make these white clothes dirty as a result of our sin (Jude v. 23); when we do this after baptism, we must again use the blood of Christ to wash them clean through asking God for forgiveness through Christ.

It follows that after baptism we still need to strive to remain in the blessed position which we then entered. There is a need for regular, daily self-examination, with constant prayer and seeking of forgiveness. By doing this we will always be humbly confident that, due to our covering with Christ's righteousness, we really will be in the Kingdom of God. We must seek to be found abiding *in* Christ at the day of our death or at Christ's return, "not having (our) own righteousness . . . but that which is throughfaith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phil. 3:9). The repeated emphasis on *faith* resulting in imputed righteousness, **shows that in no way can we earn salvation by our works;salvation is by grace**:"For by grace you have been saved through faith,and that not of yourselves;it is the gift of God,not of works" (Eph. 2:8,9). As justification and righteousness are 'gifts' (Rom. 5:17), so, too, is salvation. Our motivation in doing any works of Christian service should therefore be that of gratitude for what God has done for us - counting us as righteous through Christ, and thereby giving us the way to salvation. It is fatal to reason that if we do works we will then be saved. We will simply not succeed in gaining salvation if we think like this;it is a *gift* which we cannot earn, only lovingly respond to in deep gratitude, which will be reflected in our works. Real faith produces works as an inevitable by-product (James 2:17).

1-19 The Blood Of Jesus

It is very often stated in the New Testament that our justification and salvation is through the blood of Jesus (e. g. 1 John 1:7;Rev. 5:9;12:11;Rom. 5:9). To appreciate the significance of Christ's blood, we must understand that it is a Biblical principle that "the life of every creature is its blood" (Lev. 17:14 NIV). Without blood a body cannot live;it is therefore symbolic of life. This explains the aptness of Christ's words, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Sin results in death (Rom. 6:23),i. e. a pouring out of the blood, which carries the life. For this reason the Israelites were expected to pour out blood each time they sinned, to remind them that sin resulted in death. ". . . according to the law (of Moses) almost all things are purged (cleansed mg.) with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission (forgiveness mg.)" (Heb. 9:22). Because of this, Adam and Eve's covering of themselves with fig leaves was unacceptable;instead, God killed a lamb to provide skins to cover their sin (Gen. 3:7,21). Similarly, Abel's sacrifice of animals was accepted rather than Cain's offering of vegetables, because he appreciated this principle that without shedding blood there could be no forgiveness and acceptable approach to God (Gen. 4:3-5). Not only did he appreciate it, he *had faith* in that blood, and on this basis God accepted his offering (Heb. 11:4). These incidents point forward to the supreme importance of the blood of Christ. This was especially foreshadowed in the events of the Passover, at which God's people had to place the blood of a lamb on their doorposts to gain salvation from death. This blood pointed forward to that of Jesus, with which we must cover ourselves. Before the time of Christ the Jews had to offer animal sacrifices for their sins, according to God's law through Moses. However, this shedding of animal blood was only for teaching purposes. Sin is punishable by death (Rom. 6:23);it was not possible that a human being could kill an animal as a substitute for his own death or as a true representative of himself. The animal he offered had no appreciation of right or wrong; it was not fully representative of him:"It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Heb. 10:4).

The question therefore arises, Why did the Jews have to sacrifice animals when they sinned?Paul sums up the various answers to this question in Gal. 3:24:"The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ. "The animals which they killed as offerings for sin had to be spotless - without blemish (Ex. 12:5;Lev. 1:3,10 etc.). These pointed forward to Christ, "a lamb without blemish" (1 Peter 1:19). The blood of those animals therefore *represented* that of Christ. They were accepted as sacrifices for sin insofar as they pointed forward to Christ's perfect sacrifice, which God knew he would make. On account of this, God was able to forgive the sins of His people who lived before the time of Christ. His death was "a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant" (Heb. 9:15 NIV), i. e. the law of Moses (Heb. 8:5-9). All the sacrifices offered under the law pointed forward to Christ, the perfect sin offering, who "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26;13:11,12; Rom. 8:3 NIV cp. 2 Cor. 5:21). The whole of the Old Testament, particularly the Law of Moses, pointed forward to Christ. Under that Law the way of approach to God was through the High Priest; he was the mediator between God and men under the Old Covenant as Christ is under the New Covenant (Heb. 9:15). ". . . the law appoints as high priests men who are weak;but theoath . . . appointed the Son, who has been made perfect for ever" (Heb. 7:28 NIV). Because they themselves were sinners, these men were not in a position to gain true forgiveness for men. The animals which they sacrificed for sin were not truly representative of the sinners. **What was required was a perfect human being, who was in every way representative of sinful man, who would make an acceptable sacrifice for sin which men could benefit from by associating themselves with that sacrifice.** In a similar way, a perfect High Priest was required who could sympathize with the sinful men for whom he mediated , having been tempted just like them (Heb. 2:14-18).

Jesus fits this requirement perfectly - "Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure . . . " (Heb. 7:26 NIV). He does not need to continually sacrifice for his own sins, nor is he liable to death any more (Heb. 7:23,27) In the light of this, the Scripture comments upon Christ as our priest: "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25 NIV). **Because he had human nature,** Christ, as our ideal High Priest, “can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since *he himself is* (was) *also* beset by weakness” (Heb. 5:2). This recalls the statement regarding Christ, “*He Himself* likewise" shared in our human nature (Heb. 2:14). As the Jewish high priests mediated for God's people, Israel, so Christ is a Priest for spiritual Israel - those who have been baptized into Christ, having understood the true Gospel. He is “a high priest over the *house of God* ” (Heb. 10:21), which is comprised of those who have been born again by baptism (1 Peter 2:2-5),

having the true hope of the Gospel (Heb. 3:6). Appreciating the marvellous benefits of Christ's priesthood should therefore encourage us to be baptized into him; for we must enter into His "house" or family if He is to be our High Priest.

Having been baptized into Christ, we should eagerly make full use of Christ's priesthood; indeed, we have certain responsibilities with regard to this which we must live up to. "By Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God " (Heb. 13:15). God's plan of providing Christ as our priest was in order that we should glorify Him;we should therefore make constant use of our access to God through Christ in order to praise Him. Heb. 10:21-25 (NIV) lists a number of responsibilities which we have on account of Christ being our High Priest:"We have a great priest over the house of God:

1. Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water". Understanding Christ's priesthood means that we should be baptized into him ("our bodies washed"), and we should never let a bad conscience develop in our minds. If we believe in Christ's atonement, we are made at one with God ('AT-ONE-MENT') by his sacrifice.
2. "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. . . "We should not deviate from the true doctrines which have brought about our understanding of Christ's priesthood.
3. "Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together". We should be lovingly bound together with others who understand and benefit from Christ's priesthood; this is particularly through meeting together for the communion service, by which we remember Christ's sacrifice.
Appreciating these things should fill us with humble confidence that we really will reach salvation, if we are baptized and abide in Christ:"Let us *therefore* approach the throne of grace *with confidence*, so that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16 NIV).

1-20 Jesus And The Law Of Moses

Jesus being the perfect sacrifice for sin and the ideal High Priest who could truly gain forgiveness for us, the old system of animal sacrifices and high priests was done away with after his death (Heb. 10:5-14). "The priesthood being changed (from the Levites to Christ), of necessity there is also a change of the law" (Heb. 7:12). Christ "has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry (i. e. just because a man was a descendant of Levi he could be a priest), but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life", which he was given due to his perfect sacrifice (Heb. 7:16 NIV). Therefore, "the former regulation (i. e. the law of Moses) is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope (through Christ) is introduced" (Heb. 7:18,19 NIV). It is evident from this that the law of Moses has been ended by the sacrifice of Christ. To trust in a human priesthood or to still offer animal sacrifices means that we do not accept the fullness of Christ's victory. Such beliefs mean that we do not accept Christ's sacrifice as completely successful, and that we feel that works are necessary to bring about our justification, rather than faith in Christ alone. "No one is justified by the law in the sight of God . . . for, The just(ified) shall live by *faith*" (Gal. 3:11 cp. Hab. 2:4). Our own steel-willed effort to be obedient to the letter of God's laws will not bring us justification;surely every reader of these words has disobeyed those laws already.

If we are going to observe the law of Moses, we must attempt to keep *all* of it. Disobedience to just one part of it means that those who are under it are condemned: "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'" (Gal. 3:10 NIV). The weakness of our human nature means that we find it impossible to fully keep the law of Moses, but due to Christ's complete obedience to it, we are freed from any obligation to keep it. Our salvation is due to God's gift through Christ, rather than our personal works of obedience. "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man, to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man . . . " (Rom. 8:3 NIV). Thus "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13) Because of this, we are no longer required to keep any part of the law of Moses. The New Covenant in Christ replaced the Old Covenant of Moses' law (Heb. 8:13). By his death, Christ cancelled "the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us (by our inability to fully keep the law); he took it away, nailing it to the cross . . . Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow

of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Col. 2:14-17 NIV). This is quite clear - because of Christ's death on the cross, the Law was taken away so that we should resist any pressure put on us to keep parts of it, e. g. the feasts and the sabbath. Like the rest of the Law, the purpose of these things was to point forward to Christ. After his death, their typical significance was fulfilled, and there was therefore no further need to observe them.

The early Christian church of the first century was under constant pressure from the Orthodox Jews to keep parts of the Law. Throughout the New Testament there is repeated warning to resist these suggestions. In the face of all these, it is extraordinary that today there are several denominations who advocate partial obedience to the Law. **We have earlier shown that any attempt to gain salvation from obedience to the Law must aim to keep the *entire* Law, otherwise we are automatically condemned for disobedience of it (Gal. 3:10).**

There is an element within human nature which inclines to the idea of justification by works;we like to feel that we are *doing* something towards our salvation. For this reason, compulsory tithing, wearing a crucifix, reciting set prayers, praying in a certain posture etc. are all popular parts of most religions, Christian and otherwise. Salvation by faith in Christ *alone* is a doctrine unique to true Bible-based Christianity. Warnings against keeping any part of the Law of Moses in order to gain salvation, are dotted throughout the New Testament. Some taught that Christians should be circumcised according to the Mosaic law, "and keep the law". James flatly condemned this idea on behalf of the true believers:"*we* gave no such commandment" (Acts 15:24). Peter described those who taught the need for obedience to the Law as putting "a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (as opposed to their works of obedience to the law) we shall be saved" (Acts 15:10,11). Under inspiration, Paul is equally outspoken, stressing the same point time and again:"A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ . . . that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law;for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified . . . no one is justified by the law . . . by (Christ) everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Gal. 2:16;3:11;Acts 13:39).

It is a sure sign of the apostasy of popular Christendom that many of their practices are based upon elements of the Law of Moses - despite the clear and laboured teaching considered above that Christians should not observe this Law, seeing that it has been done away in Christ. We will now consider the more obvious ways in which the Law of Moses is the basis of present 'Christian' practice:-

Priests

The Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican churches openly use a system of human priesthood. The Roman Catholics see the Pope as their equivalent of the Jewish high priest. There is "*one* Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). It is impossible, therefore, that the Pope or priests can be our mediators as the priests were under the Old Covenant. Christ is now our High Priest in Heaven, offering our prayers to God. There is absolutely no Biblical evidence that the authority possessed by the Spirit-gifted elders of the first century - e. g. Peter - was passed on to successive generations or to the Pope in particular. Even if the possibility of this were admitted, there is no way of proving that the Pope and priests personally are those upon whom the spiritual mantle of the first century elders has fallen. The miraculous Spirit gifts having been withdrawn, all believers have equal access to the Spirit-Word in the Bible. They are therefore all brethren, none having any more spiritually exalted a position than another. Indeed, *all* true believers are members of a new priesthood by reason of their baptism into Christ, in the sense that they show forth the light of God to a dark world (1 Pet. 2:9). They will therefore become the king-priests of the Kingdom, when it is established upon earth at Christ's return (Rev. 5:10). The Catholic practice of calling their priests 'Father' (the 'Pope' means 'father' too) is in flat contradiction to Christ's clear words, "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Mt. 23:9). Indeed, Jesus warned against granting any fellow man the sort of spiritual respect demanded by modern priests:"But you, do not be called 'Rabbi' (teacher),for One is your Teacher, the Christ,and you are all brethren" (Mt. 23:8).

The ornate robes worn by priests, bishops and other clergymen have their basis in the special clothing worn by the Mosaic priests and high priest. This clothing pointed forward to the perfect character of Christ, and, as with all the Law, its purpose has now been fulfilled. It is indeed heartbreaking, that clothing which was

intended to extol the glory of Christ, is now used to advance the glory of the men who wear it - some of whom admit that they do not accept Christ's resurrection or even the personal existence of God. The Catholic idea that Mary is a priest is grossly wrong. Our requests are in *Christ's* name, not Mary's (Jn. 14:13,14;15:16;16:23-26). Christ is our only High Priest, not Mary. Jesus rebuked Mary when she tried to get him to do things for others (Jn. 2:2-4). God, not Mary, brings men to Christ (Jn. 6:44).

Tithing

This, too, was part of the Mosaic Law (Num. 18:21), whereby the Jews were to donate a tenth of their substance to the priestly tribe of Levi. Seeing that there is now no human priesthood, **it can no longer be obligatory to pay a tithe to any church elders**. Again, one false idea (in this case concerning priests) has led to another (i. e. tithing). God Himself does not *need* our offerings, seeing that all belongs to Him (Ps. 50:8-13). We are only giving back to God what He has given us (1 Chron. 29:14). It is impossible for us to gain salvation as a result of our material offerings, e. g. in financial terms. In gratitude for God's great gift to us, we should not just offer a tenth of our money, but our whole lives. Paul set an example in this, truly practising what he preached:". . . offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship" (Rom. 12:1 NIV).

Food

The Jewish Law categorized certain foods as unclean - a practice adopted by some denominations today, especially regarding pork. Because of Christ's removing of the Law on the cross, ". . . do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink" (Col. 2:14-16 NIV). Thus the Mosaic commands concerning these things have been done away, seeing that Christ has now come. **It was he to whom the 'clean' foods pointed forward.**

Jesus clearly explained that nothing a man eats can spiritually defile him;it is what comes out of the heart which does this (Mark 7:15-23). "In saying this, Jesus declared *all* foods 'clean'" (Mark 7:19 NIV). Peter was taught the same lesson (Acts 10:14,15), as was Paul:"I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14). Earlier, Paul had reasoned that to refuse certain foods was a sign of spiritual weakness (Rom. 14:2). Our attitude to food "does not commend us to God" (1 Cor. 8:8). Most incriminating of all is the warning that apostate Christians would teach men, "to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3).

1-21 Jesus As Our Representative

We have seen that the animal sacrifices were not completely representative of sinful men. **Jesus *was* representative of us, being in all points "made like his brethren" (Heb. 2:17). "He suffered death . . . for everyone " (Heb. 2:9 NIV).** When we commit a sin - e. g. we are angry - God can forgive us if we are "in Christ" (Eph. 4:32). This is because God can compare us with Christ, a man like us who was tempted to sin - e. g. to be angry - but who overcame every temptation. Therefore God can forgive us our sin - of anger - on account of our being in Christ, covered by his righteousness. Christ being our representative is therefore the means by which God can show us His grace, whilst upholding His own righteous principles. **If Jesus was God rather than being solely of human nature, he could not have been our representative**. This is another example of where one wrong idea leads to another. Because of this, theologians have developed many complex ways of explaining Christ's death. The popular view of apostate Christendom is that man's sins placed him in a debt to God which of himself he could not pay. Christ then cleared the debt of each believer by his blood, shed on the cross. Many a Gospel Hall preacher has expressed it like this:"It was as if we were all lined up against a wall, about to be shot by the devil. Jesus then rushed in; the devil shot him instead of us, so we are now free. "

These elaborate theories are without any firm Biblical support. There is the obvious contradiction that if Christ died *instead* of us, then we should not die. As we still have human nature, we must still die; salvation from sin and death will finally be revealed at the judgment (when we are granted immortality). We did not receive this at the time Christ died. Christ's death destroyed the devil (Heb. 2:14) rather than the devil destroying him. The Bible teaches that salvation is possible through Christ's death *and* resurrection, not just by his death. Christ "died for us" once. The theory of substitution would mean that he had to die for each of us personally. The English preoposition “for” (as in “Christ died for us”) has a much wider range of meaning than the Greek word which it translates. If Christ had died *instead* of us, the Greek word *anti*

would have been used. But never is this word used in any Bible passage which says that Jesus died for us. If Christ paid off a debt with his blood, our salvation becomes something which we can expect as a right. The fact that salvation is a gift, brought about by God's mercy and forgiveness, is lost sight of if we understand Christ's sacrifice as being a debt payment. It also makes out that an angry God was appeased once He saw the physical blood of Jesus. Yet what God sees when we repent is His Son as our representative, whom we are striving to copy, rather than we connecting ourselves with Christ's blood as a talisman. Many hymns and songs contain an incredible amount of false doctrine in this area. Most false doctrine is drummed into people's minds by music, rather than rational, Biblical instruction. We must ever be on the watch for this kind of brain-washing.

Tragically, the simple words "Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8) have been grossly misunderstood as meaning that Christ died instead of us. There are a number of connections between Romans 5 and 1 Cor. 15 (e. g. v. 12 = 1 Cor. 15:21;v. 17 = 1 Cor. 15:22). "Christ died for *us*" (Rom. 5:8) is matched by "Christ died for our *sins*" (1 Cor. 15:3). His death was in order to make a way whereby we can gain forgiveness of our sins;it was in this sense that "Christ died for us". The word "for" does not necessarily mean 'instead of';Christ died "for (because of) our sins", not 'instead of' them. Because of this, Christ can "make intercession" for us (Heb. 7:25) - not 'instead of' us. Neither does "for" mean 'instead of' in Heb. 10:12 and Gal. 1:4. If Christ died 'instead of us' there would be no need to carry His cross, as He bids us. And there would be no sense in being baptized into His death and resurrection, willingly identifying ourselves with Him as our victorious representative. The idea of substitution implies a short cut to glorification with Him which simply isn't valid. Understanding Him as our representative commits us to baptism into His death and resurrection, the life of cross-carrying along with Him, and realistically sharing in His resurrection. His resurrection is ours; we were given the hope of resurrection because we are in Christ, who was raised (1 Pet. 1:3). The Lord Jesus lived and died with our nature, in all its waywardness, in order to be able to come close to us and to enable us to identify ourselves with Him. By appreciating this doctrinally, we enable Him to see the result of the suffering of His soul and be satisfied. There is a nice little cameo of this when the Lord dealt with the man whose tongue wasn't functioning properly. Because the tongue controls swallowing, surely the man was frothing in his own spittle. And yet the Lord spits and puts His spittle on that of the man, to show His complete ability to identify with the human condition.

To put it mildly, the 'substitution' idea reflects careless thought and a wrong use of language. The sacrifice of Jesus was made *by* God, and not *to* Him, let alone to appease Him. In the death of Jesus, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19)- not paying blood to Himself nor to Satan.
It's interesting to note that there are others who've seen through the 'substitution' theory. John A. T. Robinson, one-time Bishop of Woolwich, wrote: "The New Testament writers *never* say that God punishes Christ. Christ stands as our representative, not as our replacement; his work is always on behalf of us (*hyper*) not instead of us (*anti*); he died to sin, not so that we shall not have to (as our substitute), but precisely so that we can (as our representative)" (*Wrestling With Romans* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 48). See too Dorothee Soelle, *Christ The Representative* (London: SCM, 1967).

1-22 The Meaning Of Christ's Resurrection For Us

Preaching

If we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, we will preach it world-wide. He died and rose as the representative of all men; and therefore this good news should be preached to all kinds and all races of people. Men from all nations were in prospect sprinkled by His blood (Is. 52:15); and therefore we must extend the knowledge of this to all men, both in our collective and personal witness. Lk. 24:48 simply comments that the disciples were witnesses to the resurrection and the fact that forgiveness and salvation was therefore potentially available to all men. The parallel records in Mt. and Mk. say that they were told to go out and witness to the resurrection world-wide. Putting them together it is apparent that if we are truly witnesses of the resurrection in our own faith, then part and parcel of this is to take this witness out into our own little worlds.

Christ's resurrection is an imperative to preach. When Peter is asked why he continues preaching when it is forbidden, he responds by saying that he is obeying God's command, in that Christ had been raised (Acts 5:29-32). There was no specific command from God to witness (although there was from Christ); from the

structure of Peter's argument he is surely saying that the fact God raised Christ is *de facto* a command from God to witness to it which must be obeyed. **The resurrection of Jesus is itself the command to preach.** Yet reading carefully, Peter says that he is a witness not only of the resurrection, but of the fact that Jesus is now at God's right hand and from that position of power has enabled forgiveness. How could Peter be a witness to *that*? For he hadn't been up to Heaven to check. Quite simply, he knew the extent of his own forgiveness. And so he therefore knew that truly, Jesus had ascended and was there in a position of influence upon Almighty God, to enable forgiveness. His own cleansed conscience was the proof that his belief in the Lord's ascension was belief in something true. And yet we ask: does our belief that Christ ascended really have this effect upon us?

Because the Lord's resurrection enabled forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:17), Peter therefore on this basis makes an appeal for repentance and appropriation of the Lord's work for men through baptism into His death and resurrection (Acts 2:31-38; 3:15,19 "therefore"). And Paul likewise: "He, whom God raised again. . . through [on account of] this man [and His resurrection] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:37,38). Because of the Name the Lord has been given, salvation has been enabled (Acts 4:12 cp. Phil. 2:9). "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26); "**the God of our fathers raised up Jesus…exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give (i. e. inspire) repentance to Israel, and forgiveness**" (Acts 5:30,31). The fact of the Lord's resurrection has assured forgiveness of sins for all who will identify themselves with it through baptism into Him; and this is why it is thereby an imperative to preach it, if we believe in it. The disciples were told to go and preach of the resurrection of Christ, and *therefore* of the required responses this entails: repentance, acceptance of forgiveness and baptism (Lk. 24:46). Preaching is motivated by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14). Baptism saves us "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21 cp. Rom. 4:25; Col. 2:13).

Confession Of Sin

We who were dead in sins were "made alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). If we believe in Christ Jesus' resurrection, we will therefore repent, confess our sins and know His forgiveness. Thus believing in His raising and making confession of sin are bracketed together in Rom. 10:9,10, as both being essential in gaining salvation. Because He rose, *therefore* we stop committing sin (1 Cor. 6:14). We can't willfully sin if we believe in the forgiveness His resurrection has enabled. Men should repent not only because judgment day is coming, but because God has commended repentance to us, He has offered / inspired faith in His forgiveness *by the resurrection of Christ* (Acts 17:30,31 AV mg.). The empty tomb and all the Lord's glorification means for us should therefore inspire personal repentance; as well as of itself being an imperative to go and share this good news with a sinful world, appealing for them to repent and be baptized so that they too might share in the forgiveness enabled for them by the resurrection. Because the Lord was our representative, in His resurrection we see our own. We are therefore born again unto a living and abounding hope, by our identification with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3). The Ethiopian eunuch read of his representative Saviour as also being childless, and being as he was, in the midst of a wilderness; and realizing this, he desired to be baptized into Him. Grasping the representational nature of the Lord's death inspires response in baptism, and yet the motivational power of this fact continues afterwards.

Peter knew Jesus had risen, and he had met him and been "glad" when he saw the Lord, and in some form had joyfully proclaimed the news to the others. But "when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea" (Jn. 21:7), and then meets the Lord and as it were they settle the score relating to his denials. Again by a fire, the three fold " lovest thou me?" probed Peter's denials, and the threefold commission to "feed my sheep" confirmed his total re-instatement to grace. The whole flavour of this record would make it seem that this was the first time Peter had met the risen Lord. But it clearly wasn't. Surely the point is that like us, we can know theoretically that Christ rose; we can be sure of it. But the personal implications in terms of confession of sin and service to that risen Lord can be lost on us, to the point that we *don't really accept* that Christ is risen, even if in theory we do know and confess it.

Labour For Him

Because Christ rose, we have not believed and preached "in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). Because He rose, therefore " awake to righteousness and sin not" (15:34)- for He is our representative. We labour for Him

because our faith in His resurrection is not "in vain". Our faith in His resurrection is not in vain (:2,14), and our labour is therefore not in vain (:58) because it is **motivated by His rising again.** The grace of being able to believe in the resurrection of Jesus meant that Paul "laboured abundantly" (:10). And he can therefore bid us follow his example- of labouring abundantly motivated by the same belief that the Lord rose (:58). Paul exhorts that prayers be made "for all men", just because " Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all", and He thereby is the one and only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:1-6). Because of what He enabled for all, we should pray for all, that somehow circumstances might be allowed which enable all men's salvation in Jesus to indeed spread to all men.

Forgiving Others

Atonement means 'covering'. Because God covers our sins, we ought to cover those of others. The simple statement "love covers all sins" (Prov. 10:12) comes in the context of appealing for God's people not to gossip about each others' failures. And the passage is most definitely applied to us in the NT (1 Pet. 4:8; James 5:20; 1 Cor. 13:7 RVmg. "love covereth all things"). "He that goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit conceals the matter" (Prov. 11:13). Our natural delight in telling or brooding on the moral failures of others, as if life is one long soap opera, will be overcome if we have personally felt the atonement; the covering of our sins. "He that covers his [own] sins shall not prosper: but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). The opposition is between owning up to our sins, and trying to cover them for ourselves. If we believe in the covering work of God in Christ, then we will own up to our sins the more easily, confident in His atonement.

Use Our Bodies Properly

The classic chapter about the resurrection of body, 1 Cor. 15, is also about the resurrection of Jesus. And it is not just a doctrinal treatise which Paul throws in to his letter to the Corinthians. It must be viewed in the context of the entire letter. He has been talking about the correct use of the body- not abusing it, defiling it, in whatever way. And he has spoken specifically about sexual issues. And then in summary, at the end of his letter, he speaks at such length about the resurrection of the body. Seeing that God intends resurrecting our body, our body means so much to Him that Christ died and rose again to enable our bodily resurrection, therefore it matters a lot what we do with our body right now!

1-23 Christ Died For Me: So What Should I Do?

Freedom From Sin

And so I too must surrender all, I will willingly strive to do this, for the glorious wonder of knowing this Man who died for me to enable such great salvation. He died and rose so that He might be made Lord of His people (Rom. 14:9); if we believe in His resurrection and subsequent Lordship, He will be the Lord of our lives, Lord of every motion of our hearts. We are yet in our sins, if Christ be not risen (1 Cor. 15:17). But He has risen, and therefore we are no longer dominated by our moral weakness. Because baptism united us with His resurrection, we are no longer in our sins (Col. 2:13). Therefore the baptized believer will not "continue in sin" if he really understand and believes this (Rom. 6:1 and context). Ours is the life of freedom with Him, for He was and is our representative [note that He represents us now, in His freedom and eternal life, just as much as He did in His death].

We died and rose with Christ, if we truly believe in His representation of us and our connection with Him, then His freedom from sin and sense of conquest will be ours; as the man guilty of blood was to see in the death of the High Priest a representation of his own necessary death, and thereafter was freed from the limitations of the city of refuge (Num. 35:32,33). Because Christ really did rise again, and we have a part in that, we must *therefore* abstain from sin, quit bad company and labour with the risen, active Lord (1 Cor. 15:34,58). The representative nature of the Lord's death means that we are pledged to live out His self-crucifixion as far as we can; to re-live the crucifixion process in our imagination, to come to that point where we *know* we wouldn't have gone through with it, and to grasp with real wonder and gratitude the salvation of the cross. "As one has died for all, then all have died, and that He died for all in order to have the living live no longer for themselves but for Him who died and rose for them" (2 Cor. 5:14,15 Moffat). It has been powerfully commented: "To know oneself to have been involved in the sacrificial death of Christ, on account of its representational character, is to see oneself committed to a sacrificial life, to a re-enactment in

oneself of the cross" (1). Such is the power of a true, lived-out baptism and faith that we have found freedom from sin. **If we have really died and resurrected with the Lord, we will be dead unto the things of this world (Col. 2:20; 3:1)**. This is why Paul could say that the greatest proof that Christ had risen from the dead was the change in character which had occurred within him (Acts 26:8 ff.). This was "the power of his resurrection"; and it works within us too. The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth aren't just facts we know; if they are truly believed, there is within them the power of ultimate transformation.

True Faith

Nearly everyone in the first century believed in the God-idea. There were very few atheists. Hence the radical nature of statements like 1 Pet. 1:21: we "through him [Jesus] are believers in God", **because God raised Jesus from the dead.** The resurrection of the Lord inspires faith in the Father to such an extent that anyone whose faith in 'God' is not based on the risen Jesus does not actually count as a believer in God.

Selfless Service

The wonder of the resurrection would totally affect our attitude to asking for things, the Lord taught in Jn. 16:23,26. "In that day [of marvelling in the resurrected Lord], you shall ask me nothing…if you shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you [RV]…in that day you shall ask in my name…". What are we to make of all this talk of asking and not asking, in the 'day' of the resurrected Lord Jesus? My synthesis of it all is this: Due to the sheer wonder of the resurrection of the Lord, we will not feel the need to ask for anything for ourselves. The gift of freedom from sin is enough. Because if God gave us His Son and raised Him from the dead, we will serve for nothing, for no extra 'perks' in this life; and yet, wonder of wonders, *if* we shall ask, in His Name, we will receive. But we must ask whether the implications and wonder of the fact of the Lord's resurrection have had such an effect upon us…?

Generosity

To put it mildly, our experience of His death for us should lead us to be generous spirited in all ways. In appealing for financial generosity to poorer brethren, Paul sought to inspire the Corinthians with the picture of Christ crucified: "For you know the grace [gift / giving] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor [Gk. a pauper], that you through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). In the light of this, we should not just be generous from the abundance of what we have; we should become as paupers in our giving. By this I don't mean we should get to the position where there are no rich people amongst us- this is clearly not the church scene imagined in passages like 1 Tim. 6. But the image of the pauper is the one that is impressed upon us. The Lord's giving wasn't financial; it was emotional and spiritual. And so, Paul says, both materially and in these ways, we should likewise respond to our brethren, poorer materially or spiritually than we are. "The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:14 Philips; it "urges us on", NRSV).

Living Like Jesus

By God's grace, the Lord tasted death *for* (Gk. *huper*) *every man*, as our representative: "in tasting death he should stand for all" (NEB). In His death He experienced the essence of the life-struggle and death of every man. The fact the Lord did this *for us* means that we respond *for Him*. "To you it is given *in the behalf of* (Gk. *huper*) Christ, not only to believe on Him [in theory], but to suffer *for his sake* (Gk. *huper*)" (Phil. 1:29). He suffered *for us* as our representative, and we suffer *for Him* in response. This was and is the two-way imperative of the fact the Lord was our representative. He died *for all* that we should die to self and live *for Him* (2 Cor. 5:14,15). "His own self bare our sins [as our representative] in his own body [note the link "*our* sins" and "his *own* body"] that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24,25). We died with Him, there on His cross; and so His resurrection life is now ours. He is totally active for us now; His life now is *for us*, and as we live His life, we should be 100% *for Him* in our living. He gave His life *for* us, and we must lay down our lives *for* Him (1 Jn. 3:16). **There are about 130 reference to being "in Christ" in the NT. But if any man is truly in Christ, he is a new creature, and the old things pass away; it must equally be true that "Christ [is] in you". If we are in Him, He must be in us, in that we live lives around the principle of "what would Jesus do?". His spirit becomes ours.** Because of the nature and extent of His sufferings and experiences, the Lord is able to meaningfully enter into the human experience of us all. Yet we feel so often helpless as we watch the sufferings of others- as we watch their facial features contort, as we listen to their complaints. We are deeply aware of the huge gulf

between us and them. We cannot penetrate their suffering- or so we think. Yet the Lord Jesus, on the basis of the extent of His love and the depth of His experience, *can* make this penetration. And it is not impossible that we ourselves can do far better than we think in achieving deep solidarity with others in their sufferings.

Preaching

2 Cor 5:14-21 urges us to preach the salvation in Christ to all men, because He died for us, as our representative. He died *for* [the sake of] all (5:14,15), He was made sin *for* our sake (5:21); and therefore we are ambassadors *for* [s. w.] His sake (5:20). Because He was our representative, so we must be His representatives in witnessing Him to the world. This is why the preaching of Acts was consistently motivated by the Lord's death and resurrection for the preachers. Phil. 2 draws out the parallel between the Name of Jesus, in which all the names of those in Him find a part, and the need to confess this in preaching. By baptism into the name of Jesus, men confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. There was and is no other name given under Heaven by which men can be saved; "every name" under the whole Heaven must take on the name of Jesus in baptism. This is why Acts associates His exaltation (Acts 2:33; 5:31) and His new name (Acts 2:21,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,18,30; 5:40) with an appeal for men and women to be baptized into that Name. Realizing the meaning of the Name of Jesus and the height of His exaltation meant that they realized how "all men" could have their part in a sacrifice which represented "all men". And thus they were motivated to preach to "all men". And thus Paul's whole preaching ministry was a bearing of the Name of Jesus before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Paul in 1 Cor. 15 lists ten serious consequences of failing to believe that Christ rose. One of these is that there was no reason for him to constantly risk his life to preach the Gospel if Christ was not risen. It stands to reason that the fact Jesus *has* risen is an inspiration to risk and give our lives, time and again, in an all out effort to spread that good news of freedom from sin to others.

Note

(1) W. F. Barling, *The Letters To Corinth* (Birmingham: C. M. P. A. , 1961).

1-24 The Inspiration Of The Cross In Daily Life

The love of Christ in the cross is to have a continual inspiration upon us- endless love, countless moments of re-inspiration, are to come to us daily *because of the cross*. This is how central it is to daily life. We are to love each other in on ongoing way, as Christ loved us in His death in that once-off act (Jn. 15:12,17). The combination of the present and aorist tenses of *agapan* ['to love'] in these verses proves the point. Thus our obedience *to* Christ in loving each other is exemplified by the obedience *of* Christ (Jn. 15:10). Quite simply, something done 2000 years ago really does affect us *now*. There is a powerful link across the centuries, from the darkness of the cross to the lives we live today in the 21st century. "**By his knowledge", by knowing Christ as He was there, we are made righteous (Is. 53:11).** As Israel stood before Moses, they promised: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do". When Moses then sprinkled the blood of the covenant upon them- and this incident is quoted in Hebrews as prophetic of the Lord's blood- they said the same but more strongly: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do *and be obedient*" (Ex. 24:3,7). It was as if their connection with the blood inspired obedience. Likewise the communication of God's requirements was made from over the blood sprinkled mercy seat (Ex. 25:22)- another foretaste of the blood of Christ. Quite simply, we can't face the cross of Christ and not feel impelled towards obedience to that which God asks of us.

The image of soldiers in their time of dying has often been used afterwards as a motivation for a nation: "Earn this" is the message their faces give. And it is no more true than in the death of the Lord. "The love of Christ", an idea elsewhere used of His death (Jn. 13:1; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; Rom. 8:32,34,35; Eph. 5:2,25; Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5 cp. 1 Jn. 4:10), *constrains us*; it doesn't force us, but rather shuts us up unto one way, as in a narrow, walled path. We cannot sit passively before the cross of the Lord. That "love of Christ" there passes our human knowledge, and yet our hearts can be opened, as Paul prayed, that we might know the length, breadth and height of it. The crucified Son of God was the full representation of God. The love of Christ was shown in His cross; and through God's enlightenment we can *know* the height, length, breadth of that love (Eph. 3:18,19).

Nothing, whatever, not even life, our sins and dysfunctions of human life, can separate us from the love of Christ towards us in His death (Rom. 8:35). His cross is therefore the constant rallying point of our faith, in whatever difficulty we live through. The resolve and strength we so need in our spiritual path can come only through a personal contemplation of the cross. Do we seek strength to endure unjust treatment and the grace to submit cheerfully to the loss of what we feel is rightfully ours? Be it discrimination in the workplace, persecution from the Government, perceived abuse or degradation by our partner or family. . . ? Let the cross be our endless inspiration: "For it is better, if the will of God be so [a reference to the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane being our struggle], that you suffer for well doing. . . *for* Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:17,18). Remember how under persecution, the faithful love not their lives unto death because of their experience of the blood of the lamb shed for them (Rev. 12:11).

Or do we live in the loneliness of old age or serious illness, fearing death and the uncertainty of our brief future? Again, the cross of Jesus is our rallying point. "For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" (1 Thess. 5:8-10). Because we are in Christ, His death was not an isolated historical event. **We also are weak with Him (2 Cor. 13:4 RV),** such is the identity between us and Him. When Paul reflected upon his own sickness [which the RVmg. calls his stake / cross in the flesh], he could say in all sober truth that he gloried in his weakness, because his identity with the weakness of Christ crucified also thereby identified him with the strength and power of the risen Lord (2 Cor. 11:9).

Do we feel that life is just pointless, an endless round of childcare, working all day doing in essence the same job for 30 years, a trudging through an endless tunnel until our mortality catches up on us? We were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ from the "vain way of life handed down from the fathers" (1 Pet. 1:18), from the frustration of this present life . The word used for "vain" is that used by the LXX for the 'vanity' of life as described in Ecclesiastes, and for idol worship in Lev. 17:7 and Jer. 8:19. We have been redeemed from it all! Not for us the life of endlessly chasing the rainbow's end, slavishly worshipping the idols of ever bigger homes, smarter technology. . . we were redeemed from the vanity of life "under the sun" by the precious blood of Christ. We were bought out of this slavery, even if in the flesh we go through its motions. Knowing this, we the redeemed, the bought out from vanity, shouldn't spend our hours in front of the television or doing endless crosswords, or frittering away the time of life as the world does. James foresaw that a man could appear to be religious, and yet have a religion that was "vain" (James 1:26)- because he didn't appreciate that the cross has bought him out of vanity. His death was *so that* He might deliver us from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4); because of the Lord's crucifixion, Paul saw himself as crucified unto the world, and the world unto him (Gal. 6:14). The Lord Jesus looked out across the no man's land between the stake and the crowd; He faced the world which crucified Him. We simply *cannot* side with them. To not separate from them is to make the cross in vain for us; for He died to deliver us out of this present world. The pull of the world is insidious; and only sober reflection upon the cross will finally deliver us from it. It's a terrifying thought, that we can make the power of the cross invalid. It really is so, for Paul warned that preaching the Gospel with wisdom of words would make "the cross of Christ. . . of none effect" (1 Cor. 1:17). The effect of the cross, the power of it to save, is limited in its extent by our manner of preaching of it. And we can make "Christ", i. e. His cross, of "none effect" by trusting to our works rather than accepting the gracious salvation which He achieved (Gal. 5:4).

Do we feel simply not appreciated? As a hassled and harried mother, as a hard working dad who toils to provide for the family he rarely sees, as the person who feels their ideas and abilities are always trashed…? The tragedy of the Lord's death was that when He died, there was nobody to recount His life, as there usually was at a funeral (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). The greatest life that was ever lived was so misunderstood and unappreciated and hated and hurriedly buried, that there was nobody even to give Him an appreciative funeral speech. In our struggle to feel appreciated, we share both His and His Father's sufferings and pain. The cross was the ultimate example of a Man being misjudged and misunderstood and condemned unjustly. When we feel like that, and the nature of our high speed, superficially judging society means that it seems to happen more in this generation than any other [and with deeper consequences]… then we know we are sharing the sufferings of the Lord. Are we just caught up in our daily work, slave to the corporations who employ us? 1 Cor. 7:23 begs us not to become the slaves of men, because Christ bought us with His blood. Young people especially need to be influenced by this as they chose their career path and employers. Through the cross of Christ, the world is crucified to us (Gal. 6:14 RV).

Do we struggle to live the life of true love, to endure people, even our brethren; are we simply tired of people, and living the life of love towards them? Does the past exist within us as a constant fountain of bitterness and regret? "Let all bitterness, and wrath and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake [the sake of His cross] has forgiven you. . . walk in love, *as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us*" (Eph. 4:31-5:2). His cross affects our whole life, our deepest thought and action, to the extent that we can say with Paul, in the silence of our own deepest and most personal reflection: **"I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).**

Do we find a true unity with our brethren impossible? He died *that* He might gather together into one all God's children (Jn. 11:52). Before His cross, before serious and extended personal meditation upon it, all our personal differences will disappear. A divided ecclesia is therefore one which is not centred upon the cross. Whether or not we must live our church experience in such a context, the barriers which exist within us personally really *can* be brought down by the humbling experience of the cross, and the way in which we are forced to see how that death was not only for us personally. The wonder of it was and is in its universal and so widely-inclusive nature.

Is humility almost impossible for us, lifted up as we may be by our own sense of worth and achievement? Is a true service of *all* our brethren almost impossible for us to contemplate? Consider Mt. 20:26-28: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister. . . your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many". This is our pattern- to give out, with no expectation of appreciation or response. And the cross of Christ alone can inspire us in this.

Do we struggle with some secret vice, in the grip of habitual sin? The cross convicts of sin, for we are impelled by it to follow Christ in going forth "without the camp" (Heb. 13:13), following the path of the leper who had to go forth without the camp (Lev. 13:46). He "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that *we might die to sin* [Gk.] and live to righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24). He died for our sins, there all our weakness met their death in His death- so close was the association between Him and our sins. Our response to that is to put those sins to death in *our* bodies, as He put them to death in His on the tree. Speaking of the cross, the Lord said that for our sakes He sanctified Himself [as a priest making an offering], that we might be sanctified in truth (Jn. 17:19). Quite simply, if we behold and believe the cross, we will respond. He mused that if He didn't allow Himself to fall to the ground and die, no fruit could be brought forth (Jn. 12:24). The fact He did means that we will bring forth fruit. It could be that the reference in Jn. 7 to the Holy Spirit being given at the Lord's death (His 'glory'), as symbolized by the water flowing from His side, means that due to the cross we have the inspiration to a holy, spiritual way of life. It is not so that His death released some mystical influence which would change men and women whether or not they will it; rather is it that His example there inspires those who are open to it. We have been reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus, and yet therefore we must be reconciled to God, and take the message of reconciliation to others. What has been achieved there in prospect we have to make real for us, by appropriating it to ourselves in repentance, baptism and a life of ongoing repentance (2 Cor. 5:18-20 cp. Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:14,15).

Perhaps we feel that our preaching somehow lacks a sense of power and compulsion of others. Try explicitly telling them about the cross. The apostles recounted the fact of the cross and on this basis appealed for people to be baptized into that death and resurrection. There is an impelling power, an imperative, in the wonder and shame of it all. **Joseph saw the Lord's dead body and was compelled to offer for that body to be laid where *his* dead body should have laid. In essence, he lived out the message of baptism. He wanted to identify his body with that of the Lord.** He realized that the man Christ Jesus was truly his representative. And so he wanted to identify with Him. And properly presented, this will be the power of response to the preaching of the cross today. "Through one act of righteousness [the cross] the free gift came unto all men to justification of life" (Rom. 5:18)- yet "all men" only receive that justification if they hear this good news and believe it. This is why we must take the Gospel "unto all men" (surely an allusion to the great commission)- so that, in that sense, the wondrous cross of Christ will have been the more 'worthwhile'. Through our preaching, yet more of those "all men" who were potentially

enabled to live for ever will indeed do so. This is why the Acts record so frequently connects the preaching of the cross with men's belief. Negatively, men do not believe if they reject the "report" of the crucifixion (Jn. 12:38,39).

Do we struggle to be truly generous to the Lord's cause, and to turn our words an vague feelings of commitment into action? Corinth too were talkers, boasting of their plans to give material support to the poor brethren in Jerusalem, but doing nothing concrete. **Paul sought to shake them into action by reminding them of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9).** Corinth had few wealthy members, but Paul knew that the cross of Christ would inspire in them a generous spirit to those even poorer than they. The richer should be made poor by what the Lord did, Paul is saying- not harmlessly giving of their pocket money. For He gave in ways that hurt Him, ways that were real, meaningful and thereby effective and powerful.

Do we struggle with the ultimate fairness of God? For all we have written about the problem of suffering, it seems to me that no intellectual answer is enough when one personally experiences real tragedy. The sending of Jesus to die in the way that He did was surely one form of God's response to it. In the death of the cross, God showed His entering into our suffering and sense of loss and hurt.

Do we fear that we lack a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus? Do we read of Him, but rarely if ever *feel* Him? Reflection upon His cross should elicit in us an up welling of pure gratitude towards Him, an awkwardness as we realize that this Man loved us more than we love Him. . . and yet within our sense of debt to Him, of ineffable, unpayable debt, of real debt, a debt infinite and never to be forgotten, we will have the basis for personal response to Him as a person, to a knowing of Him and a loving of Him, and a serving of Him in response. If we feel and know this, we cannot but preach the cross of Christ. But do we feel ashamed that we just don't witness as we ought to? There is no doubt that the cross and baptism into that death was central to the preaching message of the early brethren. Knowing it, believing it, meant that it just had to be preached. The completeness and reality of the redemption achieved is expressed in Hebrews with a sense of finality, and we ought not to let that slip from our presentation of the Gospel either. There in the cross, the justice and mercy of God are brought together in the ultimate way. There in the cross is the appeal. Paul spoke of "the preaching of the cross", the word / message which *is* the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). Some of the early missionaries reported how they could never get any response to their message until they explained the cross; and so, with our true doctrinal understanding of it, it is my belief that the cross is what has the power of conversion. A man cannot face it and not have a deep impression of the absoluteness of the issues involved in faith and unbelief, in choosing to accept or reject the work of the struggling, sweating, gasping Man who hung on the stake. It truly is a question of believe or perish. Baptism into that death and resurrection is essential for salvation. Of course we must not bully or intimidate people into faith, but on the other hand, a preaching of the cross cannot help but have something compulsive and urgent and passionate about it. For we appeal to men on God's behalf to accept the work of the cross as efficacious for them. Our preaching will then never fail in urgency and entreaty. It will concern the Man who had our nature hanging there perfect, full of love, a light in this dark world. . . . and as far as we perceive the wonder of it all, as far as this breaks in upon us, so far we will hold it forth to this world. The Lord wasn't preaching good *ideas*; He was preaching good *news*. The cross means that we have a faith to share which is a faith to live by all our days; not just a faith to die by, a comfort in our time of dying, as we face the endgame.

The cross alone can shake people out of their indifference, and force them to make some election in this world, instead of sliding dully forward as in a dream. Life is a business we are all apt to mismanage; either living recklessly from day to day, or suffering ourselves to be gulled out of our moments by habits, the TV, life. . . There is something stupefying in the recurrence of unimportant things. <u>And it is only through the provocations of the Lord and His cross that we are lead to take an outlook beyond daily concerns, and comprehend the narrow limits, and great possibilities of our existence.</u> It is the power of the Lord and His cross to induce such moments of clear insight. He, there, is the declared enemy of all living by reflex action. He, there, can electrify His readers and viewers into an instant unflagging activity of service. Those who ignore the challenge of the cross turn to their "own way" (Is. 53:6)- the Hebrew means a custom, habitual way of life. This is what stops us responding to the radical challenge of the cross- our basic conservatism, our love of what we know and are used to. Yet the cross can shake us from this.

Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record. Philo describes him as "ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for "frequent executions without trial" (1). Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds (2). Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was "amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: "Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of "inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for "abusive behaviour… and endless savage ferocity"(3). Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke's record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times.

Do we feel so hurt by others that we find forgiveness impossible, sensing an ever-encroaching bitterness always getting closer to gripping our whole lives? All around this sad world, there seems an endless round of revenge being danced out. The knock someone receives is paid back by them on someone else, and often this ends up in another person being made a scapegoat, someone incapable of defending themselves, who must take all the knocks when they can't pay them back. People subconsciously are obeying a compelling law- to get even. To pay back the hard words the postman gave you with hard words to the girl in the supermarket, and then to scapegoat [say] a child at church for messing up the church service… But the point is, the Lord Jesus is set up as the one and only scapegoat for human sin. On the cross He was the ultimate One who took all the knocks without paying back. For those who truly believe this to the point of feeling it deep within them, they are freed from the law of revenge- and thus they become free to live life spontaneously, for fun, to not be ashamed of fulfilling life's natural needs. The cycle of revenge and paying back has to be resolved in sacrifice- many societies have shown that. I was a few times in far northern Russia, and it was fascinating to hear the traditions of the Chukchi people. In the past, they say, when a big crime was committed and the criminal convicted, an *innocent* person had to be sacrificed. The study of primitive societies reveals this basic human need for a scapegoat. There was a psychological value to the Mosaic rite of the scapegoat (Lev. 16:10). All the sins, all the grudges that called for revenge, were to be placed upon that animal, and it was released into the desert. They could watch it scampering away into the bush. This is how we are to understand the placing of human sin- yes, the sins committed against you this day by others- upon the Lord as He hung on the cross. And we must remember that "Vengeance is *mine* [not ours, not the state's], and requital" (Dt. 32:35). That taking of vengeance, that requital, was worked out by God on the cross. There the Lord Jesus was clothed with the 'garments of vengeance' (Is. 59:17); the day of the crucifixion was "the day of vengeance" (Is. 63:4). This is one reason why God doesn't operate a tit-for-tat requital of our sins upon our heads- because He dealt with sin and His vengeance for it in the cross, not by any other way. Hence David calls God the "God of revenge", the one *alone* to whom vengeance belongs (Ps. 94:1,3). Our response to all this is to believe that truly vengeance is God and therefore we will *not* avenge ourselves (Rom. 12:19). I take this to apply to all the micro-level 'takings of vengeance' which we so easily do in our words, body language, attitudes etc. , in response to the hurt received from others. The cross alone enables us to break the cycle.

Finally, and, I think, most relevantly. Do we, as men and women all too taken up with our lives, raising families, earning money. . . lost in the absorption of our daily work, as computer programmers, drivers, factory workers, housewives, business executives. . . do we in our heart of hearts feel that we just don't have the faith to believe that truly we are forgiven, and will be saved? I know I am talking to the heart of every reader here. Are we like that? I am, and I suspect most of us are. Not that this makes me feel any better about my own inadequacy of faith. Again, let the cross of Christ be our inspiration. For there, "when we

were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly". He gave His life there, in the way that He gave it, without any consideration for our personal merits. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". The Lord gave His all for us, the totally unworthy. And with abounding and matchless logic, Paul continues: "Much more then, being now justified by his blood [i. e. no longer being so worthless and undeserving, but counted as so much better through the atonement He achieved], we *shall be saved from wrath* through him". In this knowledge we can truly have as an helmet the hope of sure salvation. If God gave His Son, and *so* gave His Son, how much more shall He not with Him freely give us all things?

The knowledge and experience of the love of Christ is the end result of all our Bible searching. There's a well known story about the great theologian Karl Barth, who probably penned more words of theology than any other writer in the 20th century. Towards the end of his life, he gave a lecture and invited questions. He was asked something to the effect: 'After a lifetime of Biblical study, what's your single greatest theological insight?'. After a pause he replied, to a hushed audience: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so'. To know that love of Christ, with the full assurance of salvation which it involves, is the end result of all our questioning, our study, our Bible searching, our hunting through concordances, listening to talks, reading studies.

Notes

(1) Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 301-2, Loeb edition, vol. 10, translated by F. H. Colson (London: Heinemann, 1962).

(2) Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18. 63, Loeb edition, Vol. 9, translated by L. H. Feldman (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965).

(3) See James M. Robinson, *The Problem Of History In Mark* (London: SCM, 1957) and T. J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions In Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

Part 2: The Real Christ

2-1 Images Of Jesus

It becomes apparent from any reading of the Gospels that the Lord Jesus sought (and seeks) to radically re-orient the thinking of His followers to be centred around Him as a person. They are to see Him as their leader, the one they follow, the light of their world. All that they have seen and know of Him is to be the centre of their lives and very consciousness as human beings. The only foundation for spiritual life is the man Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 3:11). To be like Him (Christ is in us He wants to live our lifes) is to the aim of our lives to which all else is bent: "Until we all reach. . . to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. . . to grow in every way into him which is the head, that is, into Christ" (Eph. 4:12-16). The most essential error, practically or doctrinally, is to "lose connection to the head [Jesus], from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together. . . grows" (Col. 2:19). The Lord Himself taught that what Paul called 'growing up into Him who is the head'. He commented that the end goal for His disciples was that "every one [i. e. disciple, in the context] when he is perfected shall be as his master", i. e. Himself (Lk. 6:40). This was why Paul can speak of "Jesus who is our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1), all we hope to ever become. Later, the Lord spoke of following Him as being like a man ploughing by keeping his eye constantly and unswervingly on an end point- and that point is Him as a person (Lk. 9:61,62). The account of Peter starting to drown exemplifies all this- when he took his gaze off the Lord personally, in order to notice how the wind was so strongly blowing some object [perhaps back on the boat], then his walk to Jesus started to come to an end (Mt. 14:30).

In the parable of the sower, the seed is surely Jesus (Jn. 12:24)- our eternal destiny is decided upon our response to Him and His teaching. We are bidden believe in or into Jesus. Belief involves the heart; it doesn't mean to merely give mental assent to some propositions. **It must in the end involve believing in a person, with all the feelings and emotions this involves**. We are married unto the Lord Jesus, in order that we might bring forth fruit unto God (Rom. 7:4). All spiritual fruit is therefore an offspring, an outcome, of a living, daily relationship with the Lord Jesus. This is how crucial it is to know Him. To believe in Him is described by John as a 'work' that has to be laboured at- with even more effort than that expended by the crowds who walked around the lake to get to Jesus and the free bread He appeared to be offering (Jn. 6:27; 2 Jn. 8). It is this 'labour', this hard mental effort to know Him and believe in Him, which will have a 'full reward' (2 Jn. 8). John here is alluding to the LXX of Ruth 2:12, where a 'full reward' is given to Ruth for working hard all day gleaning in the fields. It may be that this allusion was because "the elect lady" addressed by John was in fact a proselyte widow, like Ruth. But the point is, we have to *labour*, as much as one might work hard walking around a lake or gleaning in the field, in order to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

The blind man asked about Jesus: "Who is he, that I may believe on him?" (Jn. 9:36). True belief depends upon having the true image of Jesus. The goal of conversion to Him is love from a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:22). To know Him properly leads to love within us. 1 Jn. 3:22 brackets together believing in His Name and loving one another. Again and again we say: images and understanding of Jesus matter. As John Newton put it:

To try both your faith and your scheme:
You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of him.

Two of the twentieth century's greatest theologians in the field of Christology [the study of Christ] were Albert Schweitzer and Rudolf Bultmann. At the risk of all too crudely summing up the large corpus of research and writing which they left behind, I'd say that Schweitzer presented Jesus as a man of *action*, calling people to works; whilst Bultmann's writings present Jesus as a man of *words and ideas*, who urged people to *think* differently. Thus the two men held different images of Jesus. Schweitzer's images of Jesus led him to be a medical missionary; Bultmann's led him to write "A New Testament Theology". Our images of the Lord Jesus, our understandings of Him, affect our lives in practice.

Who Then Is Jesus?

All this, then, throws up a question of fundamental importance: Who then is Jesus? What is our image of Him as a person? Do we actually *know* Him as a person? Or is He to us a mere piece of theology, an *idea* in

our brains, a black box that we call 'Jesus' every time we pray. . . and not somebody whom we can say we *know*? This question is crucial, utterly crucial. Perhaps the greatest and easiest mistake in the Christian life is to think of Jesus as a figure in a book, as someone who existed in history, and whose work we recount in terms of academic statements about the atonement. We can be so understandably concerned about finding the true interpretations of the Bible, in a religious world so sadly mistaken in their views, that we can actually forget the essence of what it means to be Christian disciples- to be learners of Him, of this man, this more than man, whom having not seen we love. Yet we can't truly love a person we don't know. It concerns me, it really does worry me, that so many of us seem to lack a sense of knowing the man Jesus as their personal Lord and instructor. One wonders whether our hymns of praise to Jesus are really appreciated by us for what they are and for what they say. Indeed, it's our very presumption of familiarity with Jesus that is so often the basis of our unfamiliarity with Him.

We are no longer under Moses' law; but under " the law of Christ" . I cannot understand this as meaning that the 613 commands of Moses have been replaced by a set of laws given by Jesus. For the antithesis between law and grace to which the New Testament constantly draws our attention would then be meaningless. The law of Christ surely means the law which is Christ; to be and speak and think and do as He would do. This must be our law, a principle far more comprehensive and intrusive into our lives than mere legalism. 'What would Jesus do?' is surely our law. To walk even as He walked (1 Jn. 2:6), to do as He did (Jn. 13:15), love as He loved (Jn. 13:34; 15:12; Eph. 5:2), forgive as He forgave (Col. 3:13), have the mind which was in Him (Phil. 2:5), give our lives for our brethren as He did (1 Jn. 3:16). Gal. 6:2 defines fulfilling the law of Christ as 'bearing one another's burdens'. He bore the burden of our sin on the cross. The essential law of Christ, the law of being like Christ, is to likewise play our part in leading others towards the forgiveness of their sins. This is why preaching to others in whatever form is such a basic and necessary part of our response to His bearing of our sins on the cross. But if 'What would Jesus do?' is the golden rule of the Christian life, this of course assumes that we have a clear understanding of Jesus, and what He would do! To be able to live according to the 'What would Jesus do?' rule, we need to know Him, and know Him in a way which means we have a clear picture of how He would live in our current human situation.

The New Testament speaks in challenging terms of how real is to be our relationship with the Lord Jesus. The Lord's enigmatic words of Jn. 16:16 indicate just *how* close the Comforter was to make Him come to His people once He was in Heaven: "Yet a little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father". I suggest that the "little while" in each clause is one and the same. In "a little while" they would not see Him physically, but exactly because He would be with the Father, He would send the Comforter, and enable His people to 'see' Him in the sense that John usually speaks of in his Gospel. This 'seeing' of Jesus, this perception of Him, is effectively a 'seeing' of the Father. 2 Cor. 3 speaks of our beholding the glory of the Lord Jesus in a mirror; and this process slowly transforms us into that same image of Him which we see. The "glory" of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai in Ex. 34 as the declaration of His character. In this sense, the Lord Jesus could speak of having in His mortal life "that glory which was with [the Father]" when the [Jewish] world came into existence at Sinai (Jn. 17:5 Ethiopic and Western Text). It was that same glory which, like Moses, He reflected to men. But according to 2 Cor. 3:18, the very experience of gazing upon the glory of His character will change us into a reflection of it. There is something transforming about the very personality of Jesus. And perhaps this is why we have such a psychological barrier to thinking about Him deeply. We know that it has the power to transform and intrude into our innermost darkness. I have given reason elsewhere for believing that the Gospel records are in fact transcripts of the Gospel message preached by the four evangelists. The 'Gospel according to Matthew' is therefore the Gospel message which he usually preached. And it's significant that at least three of them start and end where many of us would- starting with the promises to the Jewish fathers, and concluding with an appeal for baptism. Actually John's Gospel does this too, if you decode the language he uses. This is surely the explanation of the Lord's otherwise strange remark that wherever the Gospel is preached, the anointing of His feet by Mary would be part of that message. And this is one of the few incidents that all four Gospel writers each mention. What this shows is that the Gospel message is in its quintessence, the account of the man Christ Jesus- with all that involves. It has truly been commented that " the central message of the gospels is not the teaching of Jesus but Jesus himself" . This is true insofar as Jesus is the word made flesh.

Images of Jesus matter. He will say to many in the last day that He has never known them, for they never knew Him- for all their pure doctrine and good works. Life eternal is about knowing God and Jesus (Jn. 17:3)- and the Greek word here doesn't mean to merely know in an academic sense, but to know intimately and personally. Only if we *really* see / perceive the Son will we be saved; " ye have seen me and yet believe not" the Lord told the Jews, warning them that only those who see the Son *and* believe in Him will have eternal life (Jn. 6:36, 40). If we really know the Son then we will likewise know His love and sacrifice is enough to truly grant us the life eternal. If we truly see the Son and believe in Him, then we will know that we (will have) eternal life- because His grace, His love, His desire to save will be so clearly evident to us through the study and knowledge of His personality. If we know Him, we will be sure of our salvation. Knowing Him, coming to know Him, is this important. We will be humbly confident that in the very, final end- we will be there. There is therefore the factual, doctrinal 'knowledge' or 'seeing' which by grace has been granted us. But beyond that there is the true seeing and believing into the Man Jesus, with the definite Hope which that brings. If we *truly* know Him we will count literally all else as loss (Phil. 3:8).

1 Jn. 3:14 states that "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren". But this is John taking his converts further in appreciating something he had earlier preached to them in his Gospel: "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (Jn. 5:24). To hear the word of Christ and believe the Gospel of God *must* issue, if it is valid and credible, in something practical- loving our brethren. It is only John who records the Lord speaking of "my word" [*logos*]. To hear Christ's word or *logos* is not merely to believe that the Bible was written by Divine inspiration, or to intellectually assent to doctrinal truth; it is to discern *Him*, to know Him as a person in truth [which will involve correct doctrinal perception, of course]. And this simply has to lead to loving the brethren. This is the real result of knowing Christ.
I am convinced from talking to people that for many, their childhood image of Jesus remains intact into adulthood. If you were raised thinking of Him as a pale faced man with a halo round His head, effectively non-human, this tends to continue. Yet because Christianity is based around the man Christ Jesus, this means that ones image of Christian life will reflect their image of Jesus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer truly wrote that "Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship" (1). Albert Schweitzer in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (2) shows how most students of Jesus Christ had simply worked through the New Testament evidence to find support for the picture of Jesus which they already had in their subconscious. And we can do the same, even if we may not consider ourselves scholars. Reading the pages of the New Testament should reveal to us the real Christ who confronts and challenges us, whether or not we are comfortable with what we see and hear from Him there. **Indeed, we could say that we have to rescue Christ from Christianity And actually we have to rescue [if I may use the term in this context] the true understanding of God Himself from religion / theology as a whole.** Bonhoeffer had this in mind when he spoke of "the startling paradox of a non-religious understanding of God" (3). That's a phrase I can go with. That Bonhoeffer came to that conclusion as he awaited his death in a Nazi prison, with all the clarity of thinking which impending death brings with it… is to me significant. To teach and preach that is not to preach atheism, nor even an end to 'theism'. In plainer terms, it means to preach God as He is, without all the trappings of mere religion, even if those trappings have been created by men who believed in God. Images of Jesus matter in the same way as images of God matter. In my few discussions with pure atheists which have got to grips with the real issues, it's become apparent to me that the God they are so passionately tilting against, the God they say they can no way accept as real… is in fact an image of God which they hold in their minds. The true image of God, like the true image of Jesus, encourages faith rather than discourages it.

Any biographer tends to interpret the great person of whom they write through the lens of their own personality; in a way, they create another person who is related to their own image and worldview. Yet if we read the Gospels properly, we are confronted there by the real Christ. We are asked to study His character, indeed to make this the most vital pursuit of our lives. But in seeking to reconstruct His personality, we are to allow Him as He was and as He is to be accepted by us just as He is, and not re-interpreted by us to make Him somehow more convenient or palatable or easier to handle. Of course we need a correct image of Jesus if we are to follow Him. He, Himself, is the way in which we are to walk. When we read of being and acting and thinking "in Christ" , this surely refers to our way of life being based around Him as a person, reflecting His image into our own. The believer works and rejoices "in Christ", speaks and admonishes in Him, shows hospitality in Him, marries in Him, is a slave in Him. . . We can only

do these things in Him if we have an image of who He is. And my concern is that some of us admit to having a very hazy image of Him; or, in fact, hardly having one at all. God forbid that we should have merely accepted certain doctrinal principles and been baptized as mere members of a church. **We must *know Christ***. If there was no meaning in the words used about Jesus in our formative years, our later Christianity can likewise be empty and void. For example, I think I knew Jesus was " born of the virgin Mary" well before I knew what a virgin was. And this empty image of Jesus as a mere 'Heavenly' idea that can't be practically related to can continue all our lives, unless we truly know and meet Him for ourselves. All I can do is to present to you my own understanding of the person of Jesus; and invite you to contribute or at least develop your own.

John writes that he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God will be thus empowered to overcome the world (1 Jn. 5:5). It's unusual for the Lord of glory to be referred to merely as "Jesus" by the apostles. Perhaps what John is saying is that if we perceive how the real, human Jesus, the man from Nazareth, was so much more than that, He was Son of God- we too will find strength from the fact of His humanity to overcome the world. **Thus later John writes that to confess Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh, to acknowledge His true humanity, is related to walking after His commandments (2 Jn. 6,7)**. And this perhaps is why John can say that it is a sin, a "transgression", to abide not in the doctrine of a human Jesus (2 Jn. 9). Why should it be 'sinful' to hold a theological misunderstanding? Surely God cannot hold people morally culpable for genuine misinterpretation? Perhaps the answer lies in looking at it from a different angle. **The purpose of doctrine is to elicit a Godly way of life. To refuse to believe in the real, human Jesus is actually a way of justifying our wrong behaviour, of hiding away from the challenge that *His* humanity is to *us* as His fellow human beings- to transform our personalities after the pattern of His.** To believe the doctrine of a human Jesus who was nonetheless God manifest in human flesh empowers us not to sin; through this real and human Christ we have forgiveness and inspiration in the life that is in Him. This is why doctrine about Him matters- because if believed properly, it empowers a Christ-like life. This perspective helps us likewise understand what is fundamental doctrine, and what isn't. Any idea or theory or interpretation that doesn't have the potential to change our lives in practice just… isn't worth arguing about.

Real prayer and Bible study as God intends- exciting, life-changing prayer and Bible reading- must surely be rooted in a correct image of Jesus Himself. Even as non-trinitarians, we have so often muted the stark challenge of the real, genuinely human Jesus. We have done this by abstracting Jesus into theological terms which obscure the exciting, compelling human being which Jesus was. If we aren't careful, we end up doing in essence what the Catholics and Orthodox churches have done by reducing this awesome Man to a mere stained-glass figure. Caught up as we inevitably are in this world, in careers, child care and worldly worries, we must think afresh through the issues of what allegiance to this Man mean in practice. The substance and structure of our lives, and indeed of the whole world around us, need to be thought through in the light of the unique achievement of the man Jesus. And we must then go on to be for this world what Jesus was for the Israel of His day. So to search for a reconstruction in our own hearts and minds of who Jesus was is a solemn, non- negotiable duty for each true believer. Some degree of recovery of the personality of Jesus of Nazareth is not beyond the reach of any serious believer. And only in this way will we find the power to be renewed in our personal discipleship, and our community to be renewed in its sense of mission in this world. Indeed, our view of God depends totally upon our understanding of Jesus- for He has revealed the invisible God, not only to those who met Him, but to those who read and learn of Him through the inspired records of Him (Jn. 1:18).

Images of Jesus matter because the believer consciously seeks to mould his or her personality into the image of Jesus which they have. Who *He* is and was becomes vital in deciding who *we* become. We are changed into that same image, from glory to glory, by the Lord the Spirit. And psychological analysis of Christians by L. J. Francis and J. Astley has concluded that they "shape a self-concept that corresponds… to some extent and in some sense to his or her image of Jesus" (4). They interviewed 473 secondary school students, 317 older students and 398 adult churchgoers in the UK using the "Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire" and concluded that their data "exhibit significant correlations between the respondents' personality and their images of Jesus".

An Eye For Jesus

The Lord Jesus likens Himself to a candle that has been lit and displayed publicly, giving light to us. He then continues that imagery in some rather difficult words. **He says that in our lives, the eye is "the light of the body"- a good eye lets light and vision in, thus totally and fundamentally affecting how we are inside us, as persons.** But if the eye is faulty, then there is darkness within. But when the eye is good and functioning, the whole person is "full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle gives you light" (Lk. 11:33-36). But earlier, He's defined Himself as the candle which gives light. He seems to be saying that our "eye", our perception of Him, is vital. And this is exactly the context of this passage- He's been lamenting how Israel haven't perceived Him for who He is. If we perceive Him rightly, if our "eye" is good, then our whole body will be filled with the light which comes from Him. But it all depends upon our image / perception of / eye for Jesus. Hence the vital and ultimate importance of understanding and perceiving Him correctly. The subject we're now studying actually couldn't be more important; for the correct perception of Him will fill our whole lives with light, totally affect our internal world-views, granting us an ability to understand and make sense of all around us and within us in the light of the person of Jesus. And if we don't perceive Him aright, our inner lives will be dark and formless, whatever external trappings of culture and knowledge we may have.

And so I have sought to show that images of Jesus matter. We each have a solemn duty to reconstruct our own personal image of the Lord, based on Scripture. On one hand, the details don't matter. If you imagine Him with a long beard, well it doesn't ultimately matter if this wasn't how He was. But we need to have an imagination, an imaging, of how He essentially was in thinking and behaviour in situations so that we can seek to replicate that image. It is clear enough that the four Gospel writers, under inspiration, were each struck by different aspects of this incredible man. Thus Luke pays more attention that the others to the prayers of Jesus; this is what struck him so deeply. John makes little mention of the phrase " Gospel of the Kingdom" - unlike Matthew. And this, perhaps, is how the body of Christ as a whole potentially has the complete vision of Him- for we each see different aspects of Him. Comparing the Gospel records, it is apparent that different people saw different things in Jesus. According to Mark's record, Jesus never openly proclaimed His identity; whereas John shows how in fact Jesus did so very clearly. John proclaims Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, whereas Mark almost implies that His Messiahship was some sort of secret throughout the ministry. And so it will be with us- my perception of Jesus may not quite be yours. Indeed, this is the very unique thing about Jesus- that He is the very personal Lord and representative of each of His followers, uniquely able to relate to them in an intimate way.

Notes

(1) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost Of Discipleship* (London: S. C. M. , 1964 ed.), p. 50.
(2) Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: A. and C. Black, 1910).
(3) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters And Papers From Prison* (London: Macmillan, 1953) p. 124.
(4) L. J. Francis and J. Astley, 'The Quest for the Psychological Jesus: Influences of Personality on Images of Jesus', *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* Vol. 16 No. 3 (1997) p. 248.

2-2 Abba, Father

Jesus as the perfect man was a function both of His Father and mother. And so there was a psychological matrix for Jesus in which He lived and developed. Until relatively recently, there was very limited knowledge of the early stages of human development. Biographies tended to be long at the end, focusing on the achievements of a person, and short at the beginning. But now, biographers and psychologists are realizing that the traumas, triumphs and parental influence of childhood are crucial in a person's later personality and achievements. And so it is surely significant that the Biblical record gives so much attention to the babyhood and childhood of Jesus, telling us virtually nothing about the rest of His life until age 30. Mary's crucial role is thus tacitly recognized. **Jesus was fully human.** Of this there must never be any doubt. As such, He would have passed through all the stages of growth and socialization which we all do. We become what we are emotionally, intellectually, morally, not only by prolonged acts of sheer willfulness, but also simply by living through a sequence of biological, personal and interpersonal developments, beginning in the very first weeks of our lives. For Jesus to have been perfect says a huge amount about His mother. The Lord had an exceptional sense of self-identity, He knew who He was and clearly had a sense of mission from an early age. Because of this, He developed into a person about whom it was difficult to remain neutral; people had decided opinions either for or against Him. This sense of self-identity was surely developed in Him by Mary getting through to Him from a very early age that He was uniquely special, with

a mission of ultimate consequence. Within the matrix of His upbringing, the child Jesus was of course immature and under so many less than perfect influences. The fact He was perfect indicates to me that a strong, independent will must have coursed through Him from the very beginning. It was the will that later matured to be able to say "I am [that I am]", to send away huge crowds by the sheer force of His personality… And yet there is huge emphasis upon the fact that the will of Father and Son differed (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38; Heb. 10:7,9; Rom. 15:3). He had to submit perhaps the strongest of any human wills to that of the Father. And for this, I for one salute Him.

The Lord Jesus was obviously male and not female. I recall the (friendly) argument I had with my wife in the first couple of years of our marriage, about whether men are multi-taskers. I conceded defeat. Men simply aren't multi-taskers. We focus on one thing at a time. This raises for me the question of spiritual mindedness. What is it? I have at times emerged from half an hour's work on, say, trying to fix a broken lock, or coding some HTML on a web page, feeling guilty that in that period, I've not consciously thought about spiritual things. My restless mind thinks of Jesus. As His skilled hands worked on a piece of furniture, or fixing a leaking roof, surely He too suffered from the same inability to have the male mind in two places at once? How, then, was He so one with the Father in daily life and thought? Perhaps as the only man to be fully in the image of God, He had both male and female elements in His psychology, and He had that feminine way of being able to have a mind in two places. But maybe His male example redefined spiritual mindedness, as simply having a deep inner consciousness focused upon the Father.

There must have been certain similarities of personality type between the Lord and His mother. Thus in Lk. 2:33 Mary "marvelled", and the same word is used about Jesus in Mt. 8:10 and Mk. 6:6. The Lord at 12 years old displayed such piercing knowledge and spirituality, but it seems He returned to Nazareth and suppressed the expression of it (Lk. 2:51). This is why the villagers were so amazed when He stood up in the Nazareth synagogue and on the basis of Old Testament exposition, indirectly declared Himself the Messiah. He must have stored up so much knowledge and spirituality within Him, but hid it from the eyes of men. This was quite an achievement- to be perfect, and yet not to be noticed as somehow other-worldly. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. It has been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as "the son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother.

Abba, Father

Whether or not Joseph died or left Mary by the time Jesus hit adolescence, the fact was that Joseph wasn't His real father. He was effectively fatherless in the earthly sense. As such, this would have set Him up in certain psychological matrices which had their effect on His personality. He could speak of His Heavenly Father in the shockingly unprecedented form of 'abba', daddy. He grew so close to His Heavenly Father because of the lack of an earthly one, and the inevitable stresses which there would have been between Him and Joseph. A strong, fatherly-type figure is a recurrent feature of the Lord's parables; clearly He was very focused upon His Heavenly Father. He could say with passionate truth: "No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son" (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22). Yet as a genuine human being, Jesus would have gone through some of the psychoses which any human being does when deprived of the physical presence of his or her true Father. Such an experience produces a major hole in the human psyche; yet if coped with successfully, "the hole in the psyche [of the fatherless child] becomes a window providing insights into the depths of being" (1). This is surely why so many geniuses have been fatherless children. Yet there is a very strong tendency for such children to be fixated on their mothers, and to be generally ill at ease with fathers and father figures.

Yet Jesus was clearly enough at home with His Heavenly Father, and most of His parables feature a strong fatherly figure in them. The tensions evident between Jesus and Mary show clearly enough that He wasn't fixated on her, either. Yet this explains the terrible tension there must have been within the Lord when He considered His mother; there would have been a natural desire to be as fixated upon her as she was upon Him. And yet He overcame this, whilst still loving her, in order to focus upon His Heavenly Father. This explains, to me at least, His unusual addressing of Mary as "woman", and the final tragic scene of separation from her at the cross. Yet it had to be, for the sake of a true relationship with His Father; and, as with all

aspects of the crucifixion sufferings, the essence of it had been going on throughout the Lord's life. Again we bow in admiration before the Lord; that He was no mere victim of background, but that every negative in His life [e. g. not having the physical presence of a father] He turned into a positive in progressing in His unique relationship with His invisible Heavenly Father. There is in Jn. 5:39 what C. H. Dodd has called 'the parable of the apprentice': "**A son…does only what he sees his father doing: what father does, son does;** for a father loves his son and shows him all his trade" (2). Now just imagine what that meant for the Lord Jesus, growing up with Joseph, who appeared to be His father, learning Joseph's trade. Yet He knew that His true Father was God, and He was eagerly learning *His* trade.

Assuming Joseph disappeared from the scene quite early on, Jesus would have had to take financial responsibility for the household, and would have become the emotional and spiritual head of the home. This would have played its part in maturing the Lord. His latent talents would have been brought out, His personal development accelerated. And yet Mary would have likely sought to cope with the loss of her husband by relying increasingly on her capable firstborn, Jesus, and becoming fixated on Him. This is the backdrop for the evident tension between them throughout the ministry, as the Lord struggles to be the person God intends Him to be, and not to be merely caught up in the hand-to-mouth existence as supporter of His mother and younger siblings. It has been observed by counselors that mothers in this situation become very blind to the needs of their sons on whom they have come to rely. Her sensitivity to who Jesus really was would have likely decreased; she would perhaps have seen Him merely as the clever, hard working, amazing solver of all the myriad daily problems the poor young widow faced. And so we too can be worn down by life into making the same mistakes Mary made in our relationship with the Lord. The wonder of who He is must never be lost upon us.

Often when certain needs have to take priority, e. g. the need for a teenager to care for younger siblings and His mother, other needs are subsumed and the personality becomes skewed, the biological imperative pushes one on to physical maturity, yet unfulfilled emotional needs become stuck and remain at that stage of development. These needs keep coming back and are acted out, particularly at times of stress. Yet, there is no sign that our Lord was in any way an emotionally dysfunctional adult. He was the perfect human in every sense. He must have concentrated on His relationship with His Father to an extent that He could develop perfectly to the extent that His human problems didn't skew or damage His personality. And in this He sets us, hour by hour, the supreme pattern.

Finding The Father

Almost all adopted children have a very strong desire to find their real parents if they are still alive, or find those that knew them if they are no longer around. The stories of the 'stolen generation' of Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their parents prove this; their lives were consumed with trying to 'find' their parents in various ways. The Lord would have naturally turned His attention to 'finding' and getting to know His real Father from about the age of 3 or 5, forging a bond which is the biological imperative of all children, at this age. He would have been told by Mary that the true Father was not around, but could be 'found' in the book of His words- the Law and the Prophets. This knowledge would have given Him a strong desire to not only read the scriptures but to understand every single word of them, to mull over them to imagine what His Father was like and so on. He would have read the Torah avidly from beginning to end and back again, knowing they were the words, every single one of them, of His Heavenly Father. Through them and through prayer He got to 'know' and love His Father intimately because He is there in Scripture in all His completeness, nothing is hidden. For the word is God, and God is His word. Hence His 'abba' approach to the Father He came to know. The Lord had more understanding than all his teachers in the temple and synagogues, because he *so* meditated in the Father's word all day (Ps. 119:99). He was the word made flesh; the Father's word was always His mediation.

The spirit that motivated Him was partly His own psychological need, His great desire that grew and grew, to know and love His real Father, His own dad. In this He was helped by the sure knowledge of His mother's love. And by the tradition that all Jewish boys learn to read and write from God's word, we can be sure that from an early age He filled Himself with Scripture. By the time He was 12, His insight into those Scriptures was phenomenal. He was utterly convinced and secure in the knowledge that God in heaven was His real Father and that these very words spoke of Him too. . . He could teach others to pray to the Father who really *is* in Heaven, with a credibility that came from so evidently having come to know for sure that

His Father was truly there. I think this knowledge would have been utterly fantastic to have beheld, and the love between Father and Son. . . simply formidable. There is well attested evidence that there were several in 1st century Palestine who had memorized the entire Old Testament; and there is no doubt in my mind that the Lord had done so too.

Jn. 5:19 gives a window into the Lord's self-perception here. He says that whatever He sees the Father / abba / daddy do, He does "in like manner". It is the language of a young child mimicking their father. And He speaks of Himself as an adult behaving just like this. There was a child-likeness about Him in this sense. And the disciples seem to have noticed this- for no less than four times in Acts (Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30) they **refer to Jesus as the "holy child" of God.** Their image of Jesus had something in it which reflected that child-likeness about Him which still stuck in their memories. And may we too "ceaseless. . . Abba, father, cry". The haunting melody of that hymn well expresses the utter wonder of it all, as we too struggle to find our true Father. **The spirit / attitude of the Son of God should be ours,** in that we like Him cry "Abba, father" (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). **His spirit / attitude to the Father should be ours**; He stressed that His Father is our Father (Jn. 20:17). Jesus acted and 'was' for all the world as if He had had His natural Father with Him from the start of His life. This was how close the Father became to Jesus; the extent to which He successfully 'found' Him; to the point that the 'mere' invisibility of that Father was not a major issue or barrier in their relationship. And so it should be for us, in the life of believing in that which is unseen, and in them who are invisible to us.

Another window into the Lord's self-perception is given in the record of His behaviour in the temple at age 12. Within the psychological matrix in which the young Jesus existed, as well as within the cultural norms of first century Palestine, it was rude for a 12 year old to retort to his mother: "Didn't you know I would be about my father's business?". It appears insolent towards Joseph too. But that statement, in the Lord's case, was not a sin, nor a typically precocious childish comment- although it would've been on the lips of any other 12 year old. Instead it reflects an abnormal degree of detachment from His mother and step-father, and a remarkable statement as to how much He was Himself, how mature and strong was His sense of identity as the uniquely begotten Son of God.

Another part of the psychological matrix would have been that by the time the Lord was 30, the younger siblings would have grown to self-sufficiency; the need for Him to stay in the home as provider was now past. The normal psychological pressure would have been for Him to start His own family and home. Yet instead, He channelled those energies into His true bride, the band of Palestinian peasants who were to slowly and falteringly come to love Him back and bring forth fruit to His glory. Much study has been done of the crisis many males go through around the age of 30, the desire to stop experimenting and settle down, to cease being cared for and instead seeking to build up something permanent, the sense that life is passing by. . . it has all been very well summed up by Daniel Levinson in his study of the "age thirty transition" (3). All this energy was released by the Lord into His three year ministry which changed human destiny, so intense and far reaching and successful was it. "I go to prepare a place for you. . . . " is surely an allusion to the Palestinian tradition that the wife came to live with the new husband after a year and a day, whilst He 'prepared the place' for her. The cross was His purchase of us as His bride. The bridegroom was “taken away” from the wedding guests (Mk. 2:20)- the same word used in the LXX of Is. 53:8 for the ‘taking away’ of the Lord Jesus in His crucifixion death. But the groom is ‘taken away’ from the guests- because he is going off to marry his bride. The cross, in all its tears, blood and pain, was the Lord’s wedding to us.

Fatherless In Galilee

The fact that Jesus was humanly fatherless has been extensively commented upon by Andries van Aarde. He points out that: “Against the background of the marriage arrangements within the patriarchal mind-set of Israelites in the Second Temple period, a fatherless Jesus would have been without social identity. He would have been excluded from being called a child of Abraham, that is, a child of God. Access to the court of the Israelites in the temple, where mediators could facilitate forgiveness for sin, would have been denied to him. He would have been excluded from the privilege of being given a daughter in marriage” (4) . Behold the paradox. Because He was the Son of God, He was written off by Israel as not being a child of God; because He was *the* seed of Abraham, He was rubbished as not being a son of Abraham. We can now understand better how He could attract other social outcasts to Him; we have another window into the fact He never married; we appreciate more deeply the significance of His offering forgiveness and fellowship with God to

those who were outside of the temple system. He could offer a new social identity to people on the basis that He knew what it was like to be without it. All this is confirmed in the Biblical record. This is why the Jews accused the Lord of being both not a "**child of Abraham" and also illegitimate**" (Jn. 8:42), a "**sinner**" (Jn. 9:16). And He was also called a **"Samaritan"** (Jn. 8:48). According to the Mishnah, "… they are the people of uncertain condition, with whom one may not marry: those of uncertain parentage, foundlings and Samaritans" (5). Refusing to declare Joseph as His father meant that the Lord would've been unable to marry, at least not any girl from a religious family.

We can easily overlook the deep and awesome significance of calling our fellow believers "brother" and "sister". As Paul so strongly stresses, the Lord Jesus created a new sense of family, of "social identity". We can easily miss how radical this was in first century Palestine; just as we can miss it in our own context. In the Mediterranean world of the first century, families were supremely important. The head of the family exercised total control. For the Lord to teach that His followers should call no man on earth their father was extreme; and yet He said it and expected it (Mt. 23:9). Likewise His teaching about our having a *Heavenly* Father may appear quite painless to accept; but it was radical, demanding stuff in the first century. The family then was "the centrally located institution maintaining societal existence… it [was] the primary focus of personal loyalty and it [held] supreme sway over individual life" (6). "Our father, *who is in Heaven*" was a prayer hard to pray if one really accepted the full import of the words; every bit as much as it is today. The idea of belonging to another family, of which the invisible Lord Jesus in Heaven was the head, belonging to a new society of world-wide brothers and sisters, where the Lord from Heaven held "supreme sway over individual life", was radical indeed. It took huge commitment and a deep faith in this invisible head of the new family to step out from ones existing family. And the call of Christ is no less radical today. The social circle at uni, the guys at work, our unbelieving family members… now all take a radical second place to our precious family in Christ. And yet we so easily abuse or disregard the importance of our spiritual family; we too easily exclude them, won't meet with them, can't be bothered about them.

Because the Lord was so excluded from society, He would have been so focused upon His Heavenly Father. And that would have been felt and perceived. Reflect how the Centurion muttered: "Truly this was the Son of God". The Lord's creation of a new family was radical then; and it's just as radical today. In passing, the Lord must have been so tempted to say that Joseph was his father. It would've made things *so* much easier for Him. Just as we are tempted to sorely to effectively deny our Heavenly Father, and act like we're just the same as this world. According to the rabbinic writing *Qiddusin* 4:2, a fatherless person must remain silent when asked "Where are you from". And this is exactly what Jesus did when asked this very question in Jn. 19:9. **This refusal to call Joseph His father cost Him His life. He refused to call Himself the son of Joseph.** Indeed, E. P. Sanders makes the point that the fatherlessness of Jesus not only meant that He would not have been counted as a child of God or son of Abraham; because of these exclusions, He would have been put in the category of "a sinner" (7). If Joseph did indeed abandon Mary, she would have been classified as "a whore", and Jesus would have been the "son of adultery", putting Him in the same "sinner category". In this we see a wonderful outworking of how <u>God having a son resulted in that Son being counted as a sinner, even though He was not one</u>. He was treated as "a sinner", and thereby He came to know how we feel, who truly are sinners.

The Struggle With Self-Doubt

The essence of the wilderness temptations appears to me to be connected with a tendency within Jesus towards self-doubt; to question whether He really was God's Son. After all, everyone around Him thought He had a human father. Perhaps Mary's mid-life collapse of faith involved her going quiet over the visit of the Angel and her strange son's Divine begettal. Perhaps it all seemed as a dream to her, especially if Joseph was dead or not on the scene. Jesus was so human that it must have been unreal for Him to imagine that actually, His mother was the only woman to have become pregnant directly from God. And we all have the essence of this temptation; to wonder whether in fact we really are any different from the world around us, whether we have in any meaningful sense been born again, whether God actually sees us as His children; whether we will receive the salvation of God's children and eternal entrance into His family which is ours if we are now His children. To have those struggles isn't sinful; for the Lord endured these temptations without sinning. <u>Here, then, is the evidence that the wilderness temptations hinged around His own questioning of His Divine Sonship</u>:

- The promise to receive 'the Kingdoms of the world and their glory' was framed in the language of Ps. 2:7,8 LXX. Here God proclaims His Son to the world, and invites His Son to 'Ask of me, and I will give to you the nations of the earth for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession". The Greek words used are similar to the words of 'the devil' to Jesus. Clearly the Lord was being tempted not only to misapply Scripture, but also to just check that He really was in fact God's Son.
- "*If* you are the Son of God…" was the repeated temptation the Lord faced. Either, as I believe, the 'devil' refers to the 'enemy' of the Lord's internal temptations; or, if we are to read the temptation records with reference to a literal person, then that person was unsure as to the identity of Jesus. This latter option is another nail in the coffin for the orthodox understanding of 'the devil' as a personal, omnipotent fallen Angel who set out to target Jesus.
- "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (Mt. 4:3) can also be translated: "Give the command to God, so that he will provide bread from these stones" (8). The idea is that if Jesus is God's Son, then, God will do what Jesus asks Him. The temptation to jump off the temple was really the same thing- 'If God's really your father, then surely He'll give you unlimited protection?'.
- The temptation to worship the devil, and *then* to receive all the Kingdoms of the world, was also self-doubt- that as God's Son, the Kingdoms of this world belonged to Him in prospect there and then, and would be later given to Him, according to Psalm 2.
- The Jews expected Messiah to authenticate Himself by creating manna (9). The *Pesiqta Rabbati* 36/126a stated that "When the King Messiah reveals himself to proclaim salvation he will come and stand upon the roof of the temple". The Lord Jesus was a Palestinian Jew, who would've been familiar with these ideas. His temptations therefore involved an element of doubt as to whether He, who had just opened His public ministry, was actually the Messiah after all. He was tempted to 'prove it' in terms which the Jews would've understood, rather than God's terms.
- The temptations involved an element of doing visible miracles in order to prove that He was indeed God's Son. Several times, the Lord stresses that experiencing miracles would not of itself prove to anyone that He is the Son of God. He taught this on the basis of having faced acute temptation in that very area.
These temptations to self-doubt recurred. We read that the devil left Jesus for a while, implying he / it returned to Jesus. If the devil refers to a literal person, then Scripture is silent as to this ever occurring. But once the devil is understood as the personal temptations of Jesus, then all becomes clearer. The essence of what He internally struggled with as He sat in the desert returned to Him. In fact whenever the Lord is described as being 'tempted' later in the Gospel records, it's possible to understand those temptations not merely as 'tests', but as moral temptations which repeated the essence of the wilderness temptations:
- The Greek wording of 'command that these stones be made bread' recurs in Mt. 20:21, where a woman likewise asks Jesus to command, to utter a word of power, that would give her sons the best places in His Kingdom. Likewise in Lk. 9:54, where the Lord is asked to issue a 'command' for fire to come down against the Samaritans. Fire will only come from Heaven in the final judgment (Rev. 20:9). Again, the essence of the temptation was to try to prove that He was Son of God by forcing the Kingdom to come in His lifetime, to avoid the cross. Whereas it was His death and resurrection which actually declared Him to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4)- not simply His miracles. For many men have done miracles, but this didn't prove they were the begotten Son of God. And all this is what He faced in the wilderness.
- Another example of the 'devil' returning is to be found in the way that the Lord Jesus is described as being 'tempted' to provide a 'sign', a miracle to prove He is actually Son of God (Mt. 12:38-40; 16:1-4).
- The temptation to produce a miraculous sign to validate Himself was of course repeated as He hung on the cross (Mk. 15:27-32).
- The temptation of the Lord about the divorce and remarriage question was also a moral issue (Mt. 19:1-9). John the Baptist had lost his head for criticizing Herod's divorce and remarriage; and surely the intention of the question was to lead the Lord into making a statement which Herod would see as critical of his situation. The temptation for the Lord was perhaps to assert Himself as a King in opposition to Herod and thus proclaim His political Kingdom there and then. Likewise the 'temptation' whether to pay tax to Rome or not (Mk. 12:14). Refusing to pay tax to Rome was the classic issue raised by the Jewish revolutionaries- for the tax was seen as funding anti-Jewish and pagan functions and rituals. Again, the essence of the temptation, as in the wilderness, was to proclaim Himself as King of Israel and Son of God there and then, rather than wait for His death and resurrection to be the true declaration of that Sonship (Rom. 1:4).
- Peter tempts the Lord to consider that being Messiah didn't mean that He had to suffer, and that He could

start His Kingdom there and then (Mt. 16:21-23). Perhaps the way the Lord called Peter 'satan' at that point was an intentional reference back to the wilderness struggles with 'satan'.

Notes

(1) Edward Edinger, *Ego And Archetype* (New York: Putnam, 1973) p. 132.
(2) C. H. Dodd, *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: M. U. P. , 1968) pp. 30-40.
(3) Daniel Levinson, *The Seasons Of A Man's Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978).
(4) Andries van Aarde, *Fatherless In Galilee: Jesus as child of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2001) p. 4. According to Talmudic writings like *Yebamot* 78b, Dt. 23:3 was interpretted as meaning that a fatherless man wasn't allowed to enter the temple or marry a true Israelite. The reference to Jesus as "son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3) rather than "son of Joseph" is, apparently, very unusual. It reflects the Lord's lack of social identity in first century Israel; He had no father's house to belong to. In passing, the jibe in Mt. 27:64 "the last deception shall be worse than the first" is likely a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the "first deception".
(5) Quoted in J. A. Montgomery, *The Samaritans: The Earliest Jewish Sect* (New York: KTAV, 1968) p. 181.
(6) Bruce Malina has written extensively about this. See his *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986) and *The New Testament World: Insights From Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1993).
(7) E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Allen Lane, 1993) p. 229.
(8) This translation is justified at length in J. B. Gibson, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Early Christianity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) p. 99.
(9) B. Gerhardsson, *The Testing Of God's Son* (Lund: Gleerup, 1966) p. 44.

2-3 The Self-Proclamation Of Jesus

The real Christ must be the concealed basic pattern behind a person. But one of the problems in seeking to build up an image of the man Jesus is that He Himself didn't proclaim so much about Himself in so many words. He never specifically announces that He is Messiah- that fact is stated by who He was in life. His miracles were a *phanerosis*, a rendering apparent, of His glory (Jn. 2:11). **The glory of God is essentially His character (Ex. 33:18).** The Lord started to reveal this, to let this show, after age 30- beginning, it seems, with His *arche-miracle* of making the wine at Cana (Jn. 2:11 Gk.). But even that was a revealing of His glory to only a few- because even the governor of the feast thought that it was the bridegroom, and not Jesus, who had somehow pulled out new supplies of wine (Jn. 2:10). The guests were drunk (Jn. 2:10- *methuo* = 'to drink to intoxication'). The revealing of His glory, spoken of by John in such startling terms as His archemiracle, was in fact only to the disciples and perhaps a few others who perceived what had happened. This, I submit, is how to understand the Biblical references to the glory which the Lord Jesus had "from the beginning"- i. e. of His life and His ministry, but which was only made apparent later. Certainly until that point at Cana, He somehow restrained that glory within His very ordinariness- to the extent that people were utterly shocked when He stood up in the synagogue and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah. **Most of His messages are hidden in His lifestyle and in the way He treated people**. He left it to those who watched Him to see how the word was being made flesh in Him. In this sense Jesus' words really were eminently deeds. **He was the word made flesh**. When the Jews asked Him "Who art thou?", He replied: "How is it that I even speak to you at all? I have many things to say…When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 8:25,28 RVmg.). Jesus didn't have to speak anything about Himself; He was the word made flesh, His deeds and above all His death would declare who He was. This self-proclamation that didn't require any self-advertisement or even self-explanation was so wonderfully unique to Jesus. However, Peter says that a wife should convert her husband without needing to speak a word- and there we have something of the same idea.

Jesus does not proclaim Himself, and yet He expects us to base our lives in Him. This is yet another paradox. Clearly we are intended to reconstruct Him from our repeated and sensitive readings of the Gospels. We in our day must read the Gospel records, portraying Him as they do from four different angles, and seek to reconstruct Him in our own minds as a person. **His actions spoke loudly** [and in this He is a pattern to us in our witness]. When He stilled the storm, the disciples marvelled: "What manner of man is this?", knowing full well that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the

waves of the sea. And in that context He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely **suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the Yahweh Name,** I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "**son of man**". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much much more than that. But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

The Lord Jesus preached of the Kingdom of God. But "The Kingdom of God" is a title of Jesus in places like Lk. 17:20,21. As the King of the Kingdom, He was the personal embodiment of it. His personality was the proclamation in itself of the reign of God, both as it can be now, and as it will be on earth at His return. There's another example of "the Kingdom of God" being used as a title for Jesus; it's in Jn. 3:2-5. There, Nicodemus says that he perceives that Jesus is "from God" because of His miracles. But the Lord replies that only if a man is born again can he see or perceive the Kingdom of God; and only if he is born again by baptism of water and spirit can he enter into the Kingdom. It's easy to overlook the fact that the context of the Lord's comment was about His being Messiah, and how men could perceive / recognize that. If we read "the Kingdom of God" as a title of Himself, all becomes clear. Through baptism, birth of water and spirit, we enter into Christ. He was then and is now, the very essence of the Kingdom; the ultimate picture of the Kingdom life. There was a perfect congruence between His message about the Kingdom, and His own character. And this is what will give our preaching of that very same Kingdom a like power and convicting appeal to men and women.

2-4 Jesus A Palestinian Jew

The real Christ becomes yet more real – in my experience at least- by reflecting upon what the Gospels record of His *actions*. Only after the invention of the printing press did ordinary people become so maxed out upon written words and analyzing them. The vast majority of the Lord's followers down the centuries were illiterate and as such not able to hyper analyze and connect His words. The Gospels in their unique way present even the imaginable body language of the Lord Jesus- the whole experience of hearing them read lends itself to imagining His *actions*. I'm not saying of course that His words were unimportant, but it seems to me that in order to reconstruct Him as a personality we need to focus upon Him as a real, acting person. And this is how the Gospels invite us to perceive Him. As N. T. Wright has noted in this context, "Actions… speak louder than words. Studying actions… is a far better starting-point for the historian than studying isolated sayings" (1).

And so we come to I guess the crucial question, in our search for a true picture of Jesus. What did people see in Jesus as He walked down the street, as He scratched, sneezed, as perhaps He asked for directions to someone's home. . . ? Surely they saw no halo around His head. The Orthodox and Catholic churches have done huge damage to people in pushing this image of Jesus. People saw in Him a man. So human, that they were surprised when He indirectly declared one day in the synagogue that basically, He was Messiah. We read that Jesus "came into his own country" (Mk. 6:1)- an artless reflection of the way in which He really was so human, having His "own" native area- here on this earth and not in any pre-existent form in Heaven! He had a very common Jewish name. The brothers of Jesus had names which were among the commonest Jewish names at the time- James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3). I know we know this, but just remember how Jesus truly shared our nature. He smelt the smells of the marketplace, as He walked around helping a little child crying because he'd lost his mum. From the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there truly came the words of Almighty God. There, in the very flesh and body tissue of the man Jesus, was God manifested in flesh. And yet that wondrous man, that being, that Son of God who had no human father, readily laughed at the funny side of events, just like anyone else. His hands and arms would have been those of a working man. He is always described as walking everywhere- and it's been calculated that He must have walked 10,000 km. during His ministry. He slept under the Olive trees at the foot of the Mount of

Olives; the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head. So He would often have appeared a bit rough, His feet would have developed large blisters, and His skin would have been sunburnt. Palestine was infested with bandits at the time. It was almost inevitable that the Lord was robbed and threatened at least once. He would have gone through all the gut feelings one does when they are mugged: the initial shock, the obvious question that skates through the mind 'How much harm are they gonna do me. . . ?', the bad taste left in the mouth afterwards, the way one keeps on re-living every moment of what happened. He would have known those feelings.

He was "despised and rejected of men", as Isaiah had foretold so long before. It's perhaps hard to feel from our distance the extent to which Galilee was despised by the Jerusalem Jews. Although Jerusalem to Galilee is only around 100 km. , "only in exceptional circumstances will someone living in Jerusalem have travelled to the distant province of Galilee, as the *Life* of Josephus shows…a journey to Rome would be more likely for a better class Jerusalem dweller than one to provincial Galilee, which was the back of beyond…the people of Judaea despised the uneducated Galileans and were not particularly interested in this remote province"(2). The Jerusalem elite and the majority of Palestinian Jews despised Galileans- "For them 'fool' and 'Galilean' were almost synonyms" (3). We see the typical way in which God loves to work- using Galileans to confound the wisdom of the society in which they lived. It was exactly from *here* that the Son of God came! It was from the parochial, the ordinary, from the nothing special, that God's holy child came forth to change this world. So if you too feel a nobody, a cut below the rest, held back by your background…this is the very wonder of God manifestation. It's through you and me, the kids from the backstreets, the uneducated, the duffers, the dumbers…that God Almighty reveals Himself to this world.

Notes

(1) N. T. Wright, *Jesus And The Victory Of God* (London: S. P. C. K. , 2004) p. 141.
(2) Martin Hengel, *The Geography of Palestine in Acts*, in Richard Bauckham, ed. , *The Book of Acts* Vol. 4 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), p. 33.
(3) L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Galilean Christianity* (Chicago: Allenson, 1956) p. 25.

2-5 Jesus And People

Although He was a leader, swamped by crowds wherever He went, with an entourage of children always behind Him, Jesus had none of the characteristics of the cult leader. Those religious reformer, cult leader types are usually highly strung, compulsive, angry, austere people who make others feel uncomfortable in their presence. Yet the way the Gospels make it clear that He made all types of people and children feel happy in His presence indicates that Jesus just wasn't like this. He wasn't critical of others' weaknesses. And today just as much, Jesus attracts all types of people to Himself, thus forging the unique fellowship which we know so well- from taxi drivers to insurance executives, saints to sinners. The light of who He was revealed the areas of improvement required in others; but it was His very uncriticalness which attracted people. Yet this wasn't because He simply wasn't the critical type. His lambasting of the Scribes and Pharisees shows that clearly enough. What He *was* so passionately against was hypocritical organized religion that abuses and damages people; and a disproportionately large amount of the Gospel records goes into recording His criticisms of this. There were at most 5000 Pharisees in the whole of Israel; and yet the Lord's passionate confrontations with them are so extensively recorded. As far as I can tell, Jesus only spoke of the reality of future condemnation when talking about those who had been insensitive and uncompassionate towards their brethren, protecting their religious structure at the cost of tragic human wastage in the personhood of others.

His otherwise uncritical spirit is shown by His patient bearing with the immaturity of the twelve. Recall when the Lord was walking ahead of them, and they were fiercely debating who should be the greatest. He either sensed what they were talking about, or simply overheard them and didn't let on. He slows down and lets them catch up. And instead of blasting them that "Come on, that's not how you should be talking. . . ", He almost congratulates them on wanting to be greatest by saying that whoever wants to be greatest must be servant of all. So artless, so gentle, so careful not to humiliate them by force or spiritual manipulation. Or think of the rich young man who wanted to follow the Lord. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. There is a glaring contradiction in the way this *young* man says that from his *youth* he has kept them. But he's young. . . Yet Jesus doesn't point out the arrogance and inappropriacy. He encourages the young man

to rise up to the highest level, and loves him for his spiritual ambition. It's an essay in the Lord's masterful way of combining challenge with gracious acceptance- all in the same breath.

His body language would have spoken volumes. Grace as it were poured from His lips, Ps. 45 had foretold. His words were full of grace in a way that was altogether striking. You know how it is when it seems a fly or a bee seems intent on persecuting you. Think of your body language as you brush it away in exasperation. Think of His. . . in the blazing heat of Palestine. Time and again, day after day. I suspect it would have been different. And then think of how the scent of blood would have beckoned all manner of insects and even birds of prey to irritate the Son of God as He hung in His time of dying, unable to brush them away. Thinking of His daily demeanour helps us grasp how the cross was really an extension of His life; it wasn't simply an unusual, out of character pinnacle of uncharacteristic spirituality. And likewise our crises will only be surmounted if we can meet them in the spirit with which we live everyday life.

Jesus was in His life "separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). The Greek word very definitely means 'to actively depart from'- it's used about a partner walking out of a marriage. Yet the Lord is always pictured as mixing with sinners, to the extent that they felt they could come to Him easily, and actually liked to do this. So how was He "separate" from them in the way the Hebrew writer understood? Here again we see one of the profoundest paradoxes in this supremest of personalities. He was with sinners, then and now; His solidarity with us, the roughest and the most obvious and the subtlest of us, is what attracts us to Him. And yet He is somehow totally separate from us; and it is this in itself which brings us to Him.

Jesus truly was all things to all men, as was his matchless disciple Paul; yet He managed to achieve this without being hypocritical, in the sense of being one thing to one person but acting another way to someone else. The fact He wasn't hypocritical and yet was all things to all perhaps reflects the way there were so many sides to His character; or it can simply be that He Himself had such compassion for people that He could somehow genuinely be the person they needed Him to be, without any insincerity about Him. God is perfect within Himself as signified by His name "I am that I am" nothing more nothing less, and Jesus as His Son was likewise complete within Himself. He was complete as a human being. When we look at our Lord there is no false self- a phenomena which dogs all of us in some ways at some times, What we see is what He is, nothing is hidden in the sense that He had no hidden agendas. This was extremely appealing to people.

All this was why He was able to attract all kinds of sinners to Him, when those who are spiritually marginalized tend normally to steer away from those who exude righteousness but no humanity. He was real, He really was who He appeared to be, there was total congruence between His words and actions; and He encouraged others in the same spirit to simply face up to who they were. And He would accept them at that. Yet He was real and human; although there was this congruence between His words and actions, consider how His spirit was “troubled”; “now is my soul troubled” (Jn. 12:27; 13:21). Yet He goes on to use the same word to exhort the disciples hours later: “Let not your heart be troubled” (Jn. 14:1, 27). Was this inconsistency, “Do as I say, not as I do”? Of course not. The strength and power of His exhortation “Let not your heart be troubled” was in the very way that His heart *had been troubled* but He now had composed Himself in calm trust in the Father. And Peter remembered that, as he later in turn exhorted *his* flock to not be troubled nor afraid under persecution (1 Pet. 3:14).

2-6 The Words Of Jesus

From the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there came the words of Almighty God. And yet He spoke them in the accent of a rural Galilean. We know this because Peter was identified as being one of the Lord's close disciples because of His accent (Mt. 26:73; Mk. 14:70). The dialect of Aramaic used in Galilee was a permanent topic of sarcasm in Jerusalem circles. There is a story in the Mishnah (bErubin 53b) which mocks how the Galileans pronounced words which began with a guttural [deep-throat] consonant. It ridicules how a Galilean in Jerusalem tries to buy something in a market but is mocked by the merchant: "You stupid Galilean, do you need something to ride on [*hamair*- a donkey], or something to drink [*hamar*- wine], or something to make a dress with [*'amar*- wool], or something for a sacrifice [*immar*- lamb]". What an essay in God's preference for using the things which man despises- that He should arrange for His Son to speak His words in the most humanly despised dialect of the ecclesia. In this context, it is interesting to note the debate over the original text of Mk. 5:41, where the Lord is recorded as saying the Aramaic words

Talitha kum in the oldest manuscripts, but it seems this has been changed to the more grammatically correct *Talitha kumi* in later codices. *Kum* would apparently have been the slovenly Galilean way of speaking, whereby the masculine form of the imperative is joined to a feminine subject. It could be that the Lord spoke in the Galilean way, technically incorrect grammatically- as a Londoner might say 'We was waiting for a bus' rather than 'we were waiting. . . '; or an Ulsterman 'how are yous all?' rather than using the more correct 'you' for 'you' plural. If this is so, we have another window into the person of Jesus. There was a naturalness about Him, an expression of the ultimate image of God in totally human form, which was so attractive.

Most 1st century religious Jews tried to pray to God in Hebrew rather than Aramaic. Yet even on the cross, Jesus prayed to His Father in Aramaic- *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*; rather than the Hebrew *Eli, Eli lema 'azabtani*. 'Abba' itself, which He so often uses, is an Aramaic rather than Hebrew way of addressing God. From this, I rather imagine the 21st century Jesus saying 'You' rather than 'Thee' in His prayers; and reading from a contemporary Bible translation rather than from the AV. And not using Hebrew words for 'God', either; for Jesus addressed the Father in Aramaic, when He surely could have addressed Him in Hebrew. This was a radical departure from contemporary Jewish practice, where prayers were said three times / day, preferably in Hebrew. But Jesus removed prayer from being mere liturgy into being a part of real, personal life with God. The way Peter prays at 12 noon (Acts 10:9), and how Paul urges us to pray *all the time* (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2) are therefore radical departures from the concept of praying at set times, three times / day. Further evidence that Jesus prayed in Aramaic is found by comparing the two records of the Lord's prayer; Matthew has "forgive us our debts", whilst Luke has "forgive us our sins". The Aramaic word *hobha* means both 'sin' and 'debt'. The conclusion is therefore that Jesus taught the disciples to pray in their native Aramaic dialect rather than in Hebrew or Greek. Further, the Lord's prayer has many links to the *Kaddish*, an ancient Aramaic prayer which included phrases like "Exalted and hallowed be his great name. . . may he let his kingdom rule. . speedily and soon".

There can be no doubt that Jesus spoke the words of God, and therefore His sayings can be interpreted at the deepest possible level; and yet at the same time, <u>they were so easy to understand.</u> The sayings of Jesus have been translated back into Aramaic, the language of His day, by C. F. Burney (1). He was struck by the degree to which they had a rhythmic shape, like many of the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament. Thus a passage like Lk. 7:22 has six two-beat lines followed at the end by a three beat line; the commission to the disciples in Mt. 10:8 rhymes, both in Aramaic and in Greek. The Lord's prayer is expressed in two-beat lines. The crunch point of the Lord's forgiveness parable in Lk. 15:7, that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, uses the device of alliteration, i. e. similarly sounding words. He uses three words which feature the guttural 'h': joy = *hedwa*; one = *hada*; sinner = *hateya*. In passing, I find this kind of thing evidence that we do have in the Gospel records the actual words of Jesus, and not a rough summary of them interpreted by many others, as modern theologians wrongly suppose. Our view of inspiration enables us to return as it were to the actual, living voice of Jesus in confidence. If the record of His words is sure and true, then we can go on to guess in what tone of voice He would have spoken, and seek to define in our own minds ever more features of the Son of Man. This thought alone I find so immensely inspiring- for we hear the real Christ speaking to us down the centuries. The Lord's teaching style thus reflected His recognition that He was speaking to the illiterate, and that many of those who followed Him would need to commit His words to memory; and so He spoke His words in a form which was memorable by them, as well as profitably dissectable by computer-aided intellectuals of the 21st century. In this alone is a marvelous insight into both His genius and also His sensitivity to His audiences, from which we can take a lesson. But on a practical level, it is apparent that He had carefully prepared His sayings in advance, perhaps during His years up to age 30. I don't see His sayings as off the cuff bursts of wisdom, neither words merely flashed into His mouth by the Father. They were God's words, but carefully prepared by Him. He sets a matchless example to any would-be teacher in His church. Jesus spoke to the hearts of the people. He didn't use words like 'sin' very often. He uses *hamartia* ['sin'] in the Synoptics only 8 times, compared to 64 times in Paul's writings. Jesus wasn't talking theology, He didn't speak in abstract terms. Rather did He speak of evil fruit, lost sheep, lost coins, no good sons… because He was framing His message for the illiterate, who thought in images rather than abstractions.

How He prayed is an example of the Lord's words being made flesh in His living. He taught His men to pray "Your will be done"; and in Gethsemane, He prayed those very words Himself, even though praying them meant an acceptance of crucifixion (Mt. 26:52). In that same context, the Lord asks His men to pray

that they enter not into temptation (Lk. 22:46). He was asking them to pray His model prayer just as He was doing. His own example was to be their inspiration. I wonder too, in passing, whether the Lord's request at that time that the cup of suffering pass from Him (Mk. 14:35) was His way of praying not to be led into temptation- for perhaps He momentarily feared that He would finally spiritually stumble under the burden of the cross? This surely is the meaning of the hymn that speaks of living more nearly as we pray. The theme of John's writings is that "the word" which was in the beginning, the word of the Gospel, the word of command which brought forth all creation in the first place, is the same word that has been made flesh in Jesus, and which can likewise work a powerful new creation in the lives of all who allow that word to abide in them. Hence the emphasis of John upon the manner in which the *word* of the Lord Jesus was sufficient to bring about amazing miracles. Even Josephus noted this unique feature of the Lord's ministry: "Everything that he [Jesus] performed through an invisible power he wrought by word and command"(2).

Notes

(1) C. F. Burney, *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 1925).

(2) This is from the Old Russian text of *The Jewish War*; it is missing in many editions. I found the reference in T. F. Glasson, *Moses In The Fourth Gospel* (London: SCM, 1963) p. 32.

2-7 The Poverty Of Jesus

Rich Man In A Poor Man's Shirt

Jesus was poor (1). He was from Nazareth, a village of between 200 to 2,000 people, about 7 km. away from Sepphoris, a city of 40,000. And He would have gone through the process of socialization which anyone does who lives in a village under the shadow of the big town. He is described as a *tekton* or manual worker ("carpenter" in many translations). "A *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who owned a small piece of land. We should not think of a *tekton* as being a step up from a subsistence farmer; rather, a *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land" (2) . The problem was that the Jewish authorities insisted that the tithes were still paid, and these could amount to around 20% of agricultural income. But the Romans added their own heavy taxation system on top of this. Farmers had to pay a 1% land tax, plus a 12% crop tax on produce, as well as various other custom, toll and tribute taxes. For those who wished to be obedient to the Government as well as the Jewish law, there was a total taxation of around 35%. Those who could no longer pay their taxes to Rome lost their land, and a *tekton* was one in this class. It has been noted: "Some peasant who were forced from their lands turned to carpentry as a profession" 3). A case has even been made that the term "Abba" ['daddy'] was specifically "from lower class Palestinian piety" (4). If this is so, then we see yet another window into the poverty of the Lord Jesus, extending even to the kind of language He used to address His Father in prayer. So Jesus was Himself marginalized, the poorest of the poor [perhaps because of paying all the required taxes and not being dishonest], in one of the poorest corners of the Roman empire. The poor needn't think of Jesus as so Heavenly that He doesn't know their crises; the crises that come from not having food or money, the problems of drought, the worry about the weather, the rains not coming, the problem of broken equipment and worn out clothes and shoes, the distress that a little brother is sick, there's medicine in the nearby town, but no money for it. . . He *knows*. He really does. He can and does relate to all this. And it's why He is so especially watchful, according to His own teaching, of how we respond to those in such need. It means a lot to Him; because as a poor man, He must have known what it was to receive charity, to be given a few eggs by a neighbour, some milk from a kind woman down the street. When He taught "Blessed are the poor. . . the hungry", He immediately had a realness and credibility. For all the poor want to be better off. But He was so self-evidently content with who He was. The poor also want a bit more security for the future than just knowing that they have enough food for today. Yet Jesus could teach people to pray only for the food they needed for each day. And they were to forgive their debtors. This was radical stuff for people who lived a generally hand to mouth existence as day labourers and subsistence farmers. Only if Jesus was real and credible would people have flocked to hear Him and taken His teaching seriously. The fact He preached to the poor was a sign that He was indeed Messiah (Lk. 7:22); the context of that passage suggests it was something totally unusual, that a religious leader should bother with the poor. Serious religion was some kind of hobby for those rich enough to be able to spare the time for it. But Jesus turned all this upside down; He, the poor man, preached to the poor, and showed them that God and salvation was truly for them more than anyone else.

That God's Son could be a normal working class person actually says a lot about the humility of God Himself. Jn. 5:17 has been translated: "My Father is a working man to this day, and I am a working man

myself". No less an authority than C. H. Dodd commented: "That the Greek words could bear that meaning is undeniable" (5). I find especially awsome the way Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a lowly gardener- He evidently dressed Himself in the clothes of a working man straight after His resurrection, a far cry from the haloed Christ of high church art. And yet if ever there was the rich man in the poor man's shirt, it was Jesus. The cross is imaged as Jesus the rich man making Himself a pauper for our sakes. He could have asked His Father for anything; He could have had all the Kingdoms of the world and their wealth. Just for the sake of an internal submission within His brain cells to the desire to have it all. That's how close wealth and prosperity was for Jesus. Why, then, did He allow Himself to remain poor, when He must have seen His family so suffering? Surely it was because He wanted to be able to relate not only to the materially poor, but to those who are marginalized and desperate in *any* sense. It's not surprising that Paul comments that the majority of those who respond to the Gospel are poor; and the Lord Himself commented that "to the poor the Gospel is preached". Indeed, it is noticeable that His preaching campaigns in Galilee were focused on dirt poor villages and hamlets that were no more than a huddle of houses; there is no mention of Him tackling the big Galilean cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias which were the more obvious ones to go for strategically. Here was someone the poor can relate to. And the massive explosion of the Truth in our times has very largely been amongst the poor of this world. Not just the economically strapped, but those poor in spirit too. Why? Because the real Jesus is our representative, which means He is someone we can truly relate to. My concern is, though, that although we have so rightly understood Jesus as our representative, we may not feel that identity with Him in practice, because we haven't allowed ourselves [or quite simply, haven't made the effort] to really know and image Him as a person. Our search for Bible truth has perhaps left us Bible-centred, whereas in the business of practical life we are to be Jesus-centred.

The special identity of Jesus with the poor is reflected in His parable of the sheep and goats. We will be judged upon our treatment of “the least” of the Lord’s brethren; yet the description of “the least” brethren exactly match the Lord’s own experience in His death- one who is imprisoned (Mt. 26:50), sick (Mt. 27:26), naked (Mt. 27:35), thirsty (Mt. 26:29; 27:48), friendless like a stranger (Mt. 26:56). In responding to “the least” of the Lord’s brethren, we are responding to His cross. For our brethren, in their poverty, nakedness and imprisonment, are fellowshipping the sufferings of their Lord.

Notes

(1) However the suggestion has been made that because Jesus increased in favour with men, He may have gotten on quite well in His secular life. Paul speaks about how although Jesus was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor [a pauper, Gk.] that we through His poverty might be rich (2 Cor. 8:9). I find those words hard to conclusively interpret. Clearly the reference is to the 'poverty' of the cross, that we might be spiritually rich- for He doesn't enable us to get materially rich through following Him. And yet the context of Paul's words is about the need to give up our material riches for Christ's people, and he cites the example of Jesus to inspire us in this.

(2) Geza Vermes, *Jesus The Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1973). It has also been observed that the choice to reveal the good news of Christ to the shepherds first of all was surprising; for these too were the poorest of the poor, deprived [along with tax collectors] of Jewish rights. They belonged to the "most despised" of all social groups. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem In The Time Of Jesus* (London: S. C. M. , 1969) p. 304; Richard Horsley, *The Liberation Of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives In Social Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) pp. 102-106. Mk. 6:56 speaks of His preaching campaign as focusing on the towns, villages and "country" - in modern terms, the villages, hamlets and isolated rural dwellings. He made the effort to get out to the individuals, the poorest and loneliest of society. Likewise it was the mentally sick who were the main group to 'know him to be the Christ' (Mk. 1:33 RVmg.). And it was a woman, and one with a history of mental illness, who was chosen as the first and leading witness of His resurrection. And women had no legal power as witnesses.

(3) Andries van Aarde, *Fatherless In Galilee* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2001) p. 75.

(4) James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 27. Other New Testament references to our calling God "Abba" are to be understood as our doing so insofar as we possess "the spirit of Christ" and come to the Father in prayer as Jesus once did.

(5) C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C. U. P. , 1960) p. 4.

In Jn. 10:36 there's a brief and rare window into how the Lord perceived His life before age 30. There Jesus says that He was "consecrated" [as a priest or High Priest], and then sent into the world, at age 30. That's how He looked back and understood those 30 years of mundane village life- a process of consecration, of purifying, of preparation. He saw that none of the multitude of daily frustrations was without purpose- it was all part of His preparation. And perhaps we'll look back on these brief years of our humanity in the same way. But the point in our context in these studies is that the Lord's mundane life before 30 was actually an active preparation of Him for service. Like most Jews, He would have prayed the *shema* ("The Lord our God is one") upon rising and going to bed- just as He had a garment like that of the Pharisees, with the traditional tassles hanging from its edge (Mt. 9:20; 23:5). Yet He thought about what He prayed. When asked which was the greatest of the commandments, He replied that it was the fact that God is one. He saw the unity of God as a commandment that elicited action; and He says [note His grammar] that this plus the command to love our neighbour is the [singular] great commandment (Mk. 12:31). And He again combines these two commandments in Lk. 10:27,37, saying that to love God with all our heart is parallel with loving our neighbour and showing mercy to him. He quoted two commandments as one, so deeply had He perceived that we can't claim to love God without loving our brother. How had He worked that out? Perhaps by daily reflecting upon what to many was merely a ritual saying of words. And we too read and have pass our lips, ideas which can work radical transformation in us *if only we will put meaning into the words* and reflect upon them. He speaks of giving His *shalom* [peace] to us, not as the [Jewish] world gives it; each time He called out *shalom* across the street or to the guys at work each morning, He meant it. And He perceived that it would take His death on the cross to really achieve what He was giving to them in His words.

This way He had of finding meaning in everyday experience is reflected in His parables, most of which have an element of unreality in them. By doing this, Jesus was telling stories which had the hearers feeling comfortable, because they were set in such well known homely contexts, but then He shows how in the midst of ordinary life, there is something arrestingly different.

No shepherd really leaves 99 sheep and goes off looking for one	But this is the extent of the searching, saving love of Christ
A mustard seed doesn't really grow into such a huge tree where birds nest. They only grow a metre or so high.	But this is the power of preaching; small beginnings have disproportionate results. A leaflet left on a bus brings a human being to eternal life. . .
No sower really throws out seed literally everywhere.	But this is the enthusiasm we should have to spread the message absolutely everywhere
No employer really pays the guy who worked one hour what he paid the one who worked all day	But works are so totally irrelevant to the pure grace of salvation, the penny given to all.
Nobody with a plank in front of them seeks to reach behind it to take a splinter out of another's eye	But this is how stupid we are in seeking to criticize others.
No smart trader literally sells all he has and buys a pearl, just to sit and look at it in his new poverty. He can't eat it, benefit from it materially. . . just have it.	So possessing relationship with the Father and the hope of salvation is something which gives no material increment; it's the joy of having it which is so wondrous, and leads us to act out of character with human wisdom, as the once wealthy trader did.
It surely wouldn't be that when the King has a marriage supper for his son, nobody wants to come	But this really is how hurtful, rude and inexplicable is humanity's rejection of the Gospel's invitation.

No father waits up all day looking for any sign of his wayward son; no woman goes so crazy and gets so extravagant when she finds a lost dowry coin	But this is the Father's searching love and eager desire for our return; and Heaven's joy at a repentance is way out of proportion with who we are. That an attitude of mind within human brain cells can result in the whole of Heaven electric with joy. . .

All this reflects how although the Lord was supremely 'separate' in the ways that true holiness require, yet He perceived spiritual prompts in the ordinary things of every day life. Recall how the disciples rebuked those who wanted to bring children to Jesus (Lk. 18:17). Yet He saw in them the qualities of those who would be in His Kingdom. Those kids weren't 'spiritual' in themselves. They were just Palestinian kids with well meaning mums. Yet, the Lord explained, that was no reason to disregard them. They should be seen as reminders of spiritual qualities which should be in us all. And this was how He perceived everything in His daily round of life. He raised everything to an altogether higher level. It was, for example, customary for Semitic peoples to greet each other [as it is today] with the words 'shalom!' or 'salaam!' ['peace']. But there was little real meaning in those words. The Lord said that His peace, His 'shalom', He gives to us, not as the [Jewish] world gave it. Likewise He told His disciples to say "Peace be to this house" (Lk. 10:5) when they entered a home. Yet this was the standard greeting. What He surely meant was that they were to say it with meaning.

Jesus focused on the essential whilst still being human enough to be involved in the irrelevancies which cloud the lives of all other men. Just glancing through a few random chapters from the Gospels reveals this tremendous sense of focus which He had, and His refusal to be distracted by self-justification. In all of the following examples I suspect we would have become caught up with justifying ourselves and answering the distractions to the point that our initial aim was paralyzed.

Focus	Distraction	Resumed Focus
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.
He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But. . . " He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the cross (Mk. 8:31-34)

2-9 Jesus The Intellectual

As the Son of God, Jesus was an intellectual without compare. The way He spoke is evidence enough. His stories and images were simple and yet tax the finest intellect to fully interpret. They spoke to all men. His debating skills were extraordinary. In a split second, it seems, He could turn a question back on His interrogators to confound them in the profoundest way. His words often contain allusions to 5 or 6 Old Testament passages in the same sentence, all perfectly and compellingly in context. If He had so allowed His mind to wander down the paths of science, He would have easily grasped the principles of gravity, relativity etc. that took a Newton or an Einstein of later centuries to uncover. And who knows, maybe He did figure all this. Maybe He mused about the surface tension on the water in His cup as He took a break

with the guys at work. This would have resulted in an ineffable loneliness, as He lived and worked amongst the simplest and poorest human beings. There must have been so many things that He troubled over that He could share with nobody. Nobody, apart from His Father in prayer. Here we take a breath in sheer admiration. For He could relate so well to them, He was one of them, yet He was so far above them. We tend to relate well only to those of our own type. Whereas the Lord was truly all things to all men. And this, it seems to me, is the essence of powerful preaching and influencing of others for good, to be able to truly relate to them, as one of them, and yet have earn enough respect from them to be able to lead them to higher levels. Further, if you feel, as we all do to some extent, to be essentially different from those around you, to think in different ways from them to the point you just pine away inside your own personality. . . think of Jesus. He "came down" from Heaven to earth for us- not literally, of course, but in His manifestation of Heavenly things in the terms of flesh.

The remarkable nature of Jesus wasn't, it seems, recognized by those He grew up with. When He began His public ministry by standing up in the synagogue, both the villagers and His own family were scandalized [Gk.] that He was claiming to be anything other than the Jesus-ben-Joseph they had always known. Yet they had all heard the stories about the strange conception of John, the belief he was the Elijah prophet heralding Messiah, who was to have been Jesus, the Angel's visit, etc. They shouldn't have been *too* surprised, surely, if one day He claimed to be Messiah? But their surprise is surely an indication of how totally ordinary and human He appeared. Even His cousin John seems to have not always found it obvious that Jesus was indeed Messiah. He was too human, it seems. Here again we bow in admiration before Him. To be perfect, never committing sin and never omitting an act of righteousness, and yet to be seen as someone totally ordinary. . . here indeed was the word made flesh in exquisite beauty. Whenever we act righteous, or decline to act as the world does, we seem to somehow turn people off. We come over as self-righteous, as getting at them. But not Jesus. His concept of holiness was evidently different from that of those around Him. He didn't show Himself to be so scrupulously obedient to the Law as 'holy' people were at His time. He came over as an ordinary guy. And in all this, He set a compelling example and challenge to those who really got to know Him: You could be an ordinary person appearing as everyone else, but underneath your simple ordinariness, possess extraordinary holiness. The Lord Jesus spoke to the people in earthly parables which they could relate to, rather than expositions of specific OT texts as the Rabbis did- seeing that, it has been estimated, 95% of Palestine was illiterate. Yet those parables were skillfully packed with allusions to OT Scriptures, for those who were on that level. This was surely the Lord's matchlessness- He could relate to all types of people on different levels, all at the same time. He was truly all things to all men.

The Messianic Ps. 40:9 predicted how the Lord would preach or proclaim righteousness; and yet He never allowed Himself to be loudly preached in the streets, and the people He lived with considered Him so ordinary. Yet He proclaimed righteousness; “to the great congregation” (LXX *ekklesia*), to those who perceived Him. Although He was not widely recognized for who He was, He overcame the temptation to hide God’s righteousness in His heart, to conceal God’s truth within Him (Ps. 40:10). He didn’t merely internalize His own spirituality; and, seeing most people didn’t understand who He really was, this must have been such a temptation. Instead, He consciously declared God’s righteousness, against, presumably, His natural inclinations [so Ps. 40:10 implies].

The parables are to me the greatest window onto the Lord's intellectual genius. They meant one thing for those who heard them; and yet even those with no idea of the cultural milieu in which the Lord spoke them can still learn so much from them. The more we struggle to interpret them, the more layers of meaning and Old Testament allusion we perceive; and the more bitingly personally relevant they become to us. The Old Testament scriptures were clearly in the bloodstream of Jesus, allusions to them just flow out in all kinds of ways, at all sorts of levels. He was the word made flesh. I believe the Lord didn't just open His mouth and the stories flowed out, by some Divine impulse. They were clearly rooted in His own life experience amongst the peasants of Galilee; His genius was in the way He so deeply reflected upon mundane life and brought it all to such glorious and vivid spiritual life. I submit that He had spent years developing those stories, and of course the ideas behind them. They are an art form, quite apart from the reflection they give of the Lord's spiritual insights. Paul spoke in theological terms, using conceptual language. But the parables address those same issues, e. g. of grace and forgiveness, in a simple and pictorial form. As the exquisite art form which they are, they reveal to us the huge creative energy and achievement of Jesus. We all have

creative potential; but we are held back from painting that picture, penning that poem, writing that book, finishing that project. . . because of the mundane. The cat's puked on the carpet, the kids are crying, we're worried about cash flow this month because the gutter broke. . . but the Lord Jesus was assailed by all these things, and far more. And yet He didn't allow all this 'humanity' to impede His creativity; He in fact used all those very mundane things as fuel for His thinking, mixing them in with His constant meditations upon the text of God's word to produce the parables. I salute Him and bow before Him for this. What a joy it will be to meet Him, to see / perceive Him as He is. . . and, quite simply, to experience the truth of the fact that 'We shall be like Him'. The emphasis must be on the word "Him"- we shall be like *Him*. David had this spirit, when speaking of his future Messiah: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Ps. 17:15).

2-10 The Naturalness Of Jesus

The naturalness which Jesus had with people reflects His respect for the freedom which God has given His people to chose for themselves. He was Himself supremely free, due to His pure conscience before the Father. He was the red heifer "upon which never came yoke" (Num. 19:2). We were set free from sin and the law by Christ through "freedom" (Gal. 5:1 RV). But we were set free by Him as a person. His freedom, His freedom from sin and the freedom that must have characterized His person, is what liberates us too. And it is the experience of that freedom, the freedom from sin that comes through forgiveness (Jn. 8:32), which can be 'used' to love others (Gal. 5:13). He didn't spell things out to His followers in the detailed way many religious leaders do. And yet it is surely related to a sense one gets from re-reading the Gospels that Jesus was in tune with nature. He so often uses examples and parables grounded in a perceptive reflection upon the natural creation. He spoke of the care freeness of birds and other animals; and yet He had the shadow of the cross hanging over Him. The way He was evidently so relaxed with people is a tremendous testimony to Him, bearing in mind the agony ahead. All this is what makes and made Jesus so compelling. On one hand, an almost impossible standard- to be perfect, as the Father is. And yet on the other, an almost unbelievable acceptance of fallen men and women. He didn't criticize those who came to Him. He Himself was the standard by which their consciences were pricked, and yet not in such a way that they were scared away from Him. This mixture of high standards and yet acceptance of people wherever they were is what we all find so elusive. The fact none of us get it right is what turns so many away from our preaching. How compelling He was is shown by how He polarized people- He sought to provoke a final decision in people for or against Him personally- not a yes or no to a particular dogma, rite or law. His compelling power is associated with the sense of urgency which there was in His teaching. **The Lord repeatedly spoke of His return as being imminent-** and surely His intention was to inspire in us a sense of urgency about His return, a living for His kingdom today rather than delaying till tomorrow.

The Lord was unlike any other Rabbi- He wasn't a verse-by-verse expositor of the Old Testament, neither did He like to argue case law. He told parables to exemplify and clarify His message- not in order to explain an Old Testament verse, as the Rabbis tended to. He drew lessons from nature in a way the Rabbis simply couldn't do. Rabbi Jakob, a first century Rabbi, stated: "He who walks along the road repeating the Law and interrupts his repetition and says: How lovely this tree is! How lovely this field is! To him it will be reckoned as if he had misused his life" (The Mishnah, *Pirqe Abot* 3. 7b). By contrast, the Lord stopped and looked at the flowers of the field and drew His teaching from them. The Rabbinic way was to write and study endless *midrashim* on Bible verses, a kind of verse-by-verse exposition. The Lord's approach was more holistic and natural. The word 'Midrash' comes from 'darash', to search, and perhaps the Lord had this style of 'Bible study' in mind when He said: "Ye search [i. e. midrash] the scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life… [but] ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life" (Jn. 5:39). Neither the Lord nor myself are against careful Bible study. But the Lord was warning against the attitude that eternal life comes from midrashing the Scriptures, writing dry analytical commentary, labouring under the misapprehension that this somehow will give life. Eternal life comes from knowing the life of Jesus, for His nature and quality of life is the life that we will eternally live, by His grace.

Jesus died because He gave out His Spirit, as an act of the will. He gave His life, it was not taken from Him by murder. The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died…the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person

to have ever lived. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

On one hand, the Lord was totally in tune with the thinking of those around Him. Yet on another, He was so out of step with them to an extent that must have led to great temptations of frustration and loneliness. The disciples drove away the children; but Jesus wanted them to come to Him. He spoke of having food to eat which they didn't know, referring to the stimulation of His conversation with the Samaritan woman; and they thought someone had sneaked Him a packed lunch. They thought that Mary had wasted the valuable ointment; whereas He perceived it as a highly appropriate gift of love and understanding. It was as if He spoke a different language, was on a different level, was out of sync with those around Him. And yet on the other hand, it was His very humanity and realness which attracted people to Him. The tension between these two aspects of Jesus provides real insight into His personality and daily mental experience amongst us. And consider the way He was accused of being a glutton and drunkard. He clearly had no problem in making wine at Cana. Would He have shared a mug of wine with the boys when, say, someone had a birthday? And therefore would a 21st century Jesus have shared a beer with His fellow workers? Now in my image of Jesus I'm not sure He would have done. But perhaps in your image of Him, He would have. Apart from the memorial meeting, I don't drink, and haven't done for many years. I know how in many cultures this seems to erect a barrier between me and those I seek to make contact with. But when Jesus made the water into wine, He provided about 180 gallons [400 litres] of it. At a time when surely some were already rather the worse for wear from alcohol- for the master of the feast pointed out that the best wine [i. e. with higher alcohol content!] was brought out only when people couldn't tell the difference, because they had "well drunk" (Jn. 2:10- Gk. *methuo*, 'to drink to intoxication'). I wouldn't have done that. At least, not to that extent- for you can be sure, they drank it all up. But He did, so comfortable was He with His humanity. And this perhaps was what made all kinds of people so comfortable with Him, prostitutes and old grannies, kids and mafia bosses, saints 'n' aints. We seem so often ashamed of being human, indeed, some have taken their understanding of 'sinful human nature' to the extent that it's almost a sin to be alive. **Whatever we say about human nature, we say about our Lord.** Let's remember this. But Jesus was happy with who He was. And He encouraged others to likewise 'be themselves'. He spoke much of not being a *hupokrites*, an actor. Those who follow Him are not to act a part before others, as if all the world's a stage, being what others want in the audience of the world of eyes that surround us, acting as an actor does, merely to please others. He continued the image when He warned of not doing things "tobe seen [Gk. *theathenai*]of men". Don't let them be a mere theatre audience to you- be yourself, living life in the constant presence of God's eyes, not man's. This was a major theme with the Lord. Paul likewise teaches us that every man should "be as he is" (1 Cor. 7:26 RV). Jesus taught His men "first of all", i. e. most importantly, to beware of hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1). This was a cardinal point in Christ's manifesto. We must ask whether it has this place in our discipleship. It can be that the ecclesial audience is a kind of theatre, showing gratitude for the pleasing entertainment of the speakers. Yet the opposite should be true- God is the audience, we are living bared lives before His gaze.

The 'naturalness' of Jesus becomes all the more powerful when we grasp Biblically that Jesus is our representative; exactly because He was really, genuinely human, He is such a natural and powerful imperative to us in our behaviour. Take, for example, His perception of His own baptism. Surely why He went through with it was to show His solidarity with us, who would later be baptized. He lined up along the banks along with big time sinners, nobodies, dear old grannies, weirdos, starry-eyed youngsters, village people stuck in the monotony of a hand-to-mouth existence, all of them standing there probably half-naked. . . and took His turn to be baptized. When asked later to account for His authority, Jesus asked whether His questioners accepted John's baptism as from Heaven or from men (Mk. 11:30). This wasn't merely a diversionary question; it was dead relevant. His authority was [partly] because He had been baptized by John. This was how much John's baptism inspired Him. It meant so much to Him, to have been thus identified with us. And it was that very identification with humanity, as the "son of Man", that gave Him His authority.

It could even be argued from Rom. 8:3 ("in the likeness of sinful flesh") that the Lord Jesus appeared to be a normal sinful human being, although He was not a sinner. This would explain the amazement of the townspeople who knew Him, when He indirectly declared Himself to be Messiah. Grammatically, "it is not

the noun "flesh" but the adjective "sinful" that demands the addition of "likeness"" (1). He appeared as a sinner, without being one. Of course we can conveniently misunderstand this, to justify our involvement with sinful things and appearing just like the surrounding world, in order to convert them. But all the same, it was exactly because the Lord Jesus appeared so normal, so closely part of sinful humanity, that He was and is our Saviour and compelling example.

Child-likeness

There was a child-likeness about the Lord. Not in that He was naieve- He was the least naieve of all men. But rather did He have an innocence about sin, as if He were a sweet child caught up within the web of sinful men around Him. Indeed the point has been made that when Paul spoke of the Lord as being one "who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), he was using the very phrase used in rabbinic and other contemporary writings to describe children, who were too young to 'know sin' (2). This child-likeness was beautifully related to His utter naturalness of which we have earlier spoken.

Notes

(1) F. F. Bruce, *Paul And Jesus* (London: S. P. C. K. , 1977) p. 78. I have elsewhere argued that Rom. 8:3 is alluding specifically to the Lord's death, where He was treated as a sinner, strung up upon a tree like all those cursed by sinful behaviour, although in His case He was innocent.

(2) R. Bultmann, *The Second Letter To The Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) pp. 159,160.

2-11 Perceiving Others' Needs

You will have noticed how often the Gospels record that Jesus "answered and said. . . ". Yet it's often not clear whether anyone had asked a question, or said anything that needed a response (Mt. 11:25; 22:1; Mk. 10:24, 51; 11:14,22,33; 12:35; 13:2; 14:48; Lk. 5:22; 7:40; 8:50; 13:2; 14:3,5; 17:17; 22:51; Jn. 1:50; 5:19; 6:70; 10:32; 12:23,30; 16:31). If you go through this list, you will see how Jesus 'answered' / responded to peoples' unexpressed fears and questions, their unarticulated concerns, criticisms, feelings and agendas. This little phrase reveals how sensitive Jesus was. He saw people's unspoken, unarticulated needs and responded. He didn't wait to be asked. For Jesus, everybody He met was a question, a personal direct challenge, that He responded to. And of course this is how we should seek to be too. He treated each person differently. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that the rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them.

Even though Jesus never sinned, He reveals a remarkable insight into the process of human sin, temptation and subsequent moral need. This was learnt not only from reflection on Old Testament teaching, but surely also by a sensitive seeking to enter into the feelings and processes of the sinner. This is why no sinner, ourselves included, need ever feel that this perfect Man is somehow unable to be touched by the feeling of our infirmities. Consider how He spoke of looking upon a woman to lust after her; and how He used the chilling figure of cutting out the eye or hand that offended (Mt. 5:29)- the very punishments meted out in Palestine at the time for sexual misbehaviour. He had surely observed men with eyes on stalks, looking at women. Although He never sinned, yet He had thought Himself into their likelihood of failure, He knew all about the affairs going on in the village, the gutter talk of the guys at work. . . yet He knew and reflected upon those peoples' moral need, they were questions to Him that demanded answers, rather than a thanking God that He was not like other men were. Reflect on the characters of the Lord's parables. They cover the whole gamut of first century Palestinian life- labourers and elder sons and officials and mums and dads. They were snapshots of typical human behaviour, and as such they are essays in the way Jesus diagnosed the human condition; how much He had reflected upon people and society, and perceived our tragic need as nobody else has.

I once listened to an old Russian telling me how he was a soldier in the 2nd world war. Whilst fighting in the ruins of Germany in 1945, he got to know well a British soldier. He was impressed with the man's morality and kindness. One day, he observed his British friend sitting down on a curb in a burnt out German village. He took a big bar of chocolate out of his pack and started eating it. A young malnourished German boy came up and watched him at close range, mesmerized by the chocolate. The British soldier didn't give him any, and ate it all. Afterwards, my Russian friend explained, he asked him why he hadn't given the boy anything, when he had seen this same man show untold kindness and sensitivity to friend and foe alike for

several weeks past. 'Well, he didn't ask me for any' was the answer, said, apparently, with total and evident honesty. And this is how we can all be, even though we may need to see ourselves from outside ourselves to perceive it. Generous, perhaps, when asked, but not actively imagining nor seeking out the needs of others and responding to them, unless we are confronted with them face to face. This was the warning I took from the old man's story. Not only did Jesus 'answer' to the needs of others, but He Himself was a silent, insistent question that had to be responded to. He came and found the disciples sleeping, and they didn't know what to *answer* Him (Mk. 14:40). His look, the fact that when facing super exhaustion and sleep deprivation He endured in prayer. . . this was something that demanded, and demands, an answer- *even if we can't give it*. He responds / 'answers' to us, and we have to respond / answer to Him. This is how His piercing sensitivity, coupled with the height of His devotion, compels the building of real relationship between ourselves and this invisible Man. Whom having not seen, Peter writes, we love and believe in (1 Pet. 1:8). Peter almost implies that His very invisibility is what makes us love Him, through His revelation to us in Scripture, in the way He seeks us to. We believe in Him because He is presently invisible to us; for faith is belief in what cannot be seen (Heb. 11:1-3).

The Sensitivity Of Jesus

The sensitivity of the Lord is reflected in how He frequently sensed and foresaw human behaviour and objections / response to His teaching and actions. You can read the Gospels and search for examples. Here's a classic one: "But John would have hindered [Jesus]… but Jesus answering said…" (Mt. 3:14 RV). Jesus 'answered' John's objection even before John had properly expressed it. His sensitivity is further revealed in how He comments upon the Jews' question: "Art thou then the Son of God?". He replies: "Ye say it because I am" (Lk. 22:70 RVmg.). The Lord perceived that men ask a question like that because subconsciously, they perceive the truth of the matter, and in their conscience, they already know the answer to their question. Perhaps for this reason He simply ceased answering their questions as the trial went on (Lk. 23:9). He realized that the questions they asked were actually revealing the answers which were already written in their consciences. For a man of this psychological insight to have lived and died amidst and for such a primitive rabble is indeed amazing.

The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented: "Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money. . . garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith. . . when Jesus heard it. . . " (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

The altogether lovely manner of the Lord is shown in how He dealt with immature understanding and ambition amongst others. James and John wanted to sit on either side of the Lord in His Kingdom glory. Instead of telling them to be more humble, the Lord gently went along with them- so far. He said that this great honour would be given to "them for whom it is prepared" (Mk. 10:40). And whom is this? *All* those redeemed in Christ have that place "prepared" (Mt. 25:34). The immediate context speaks of the cross (Mk. 10:33,45), and it is this which prepared the places in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:1,2). Thus the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, and the Kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34). Actually, all those redeemed in Christ will sit down with Him in His very throne- not just on the right and left side of Him (Rev. 3:21). Indeed, the Lord's subsequent parable about the places prepared in the Kingdom, and people being on the right *and left* hand of Him at judgment, with the rejected on the left hand, was perhaps His gentle corrective to James and John. But my point is that He was so gentle about the way He corrected their error. Actually twice before in Mark 10, the Lord had shown this spirit. The arrogant young man told Him that he'd kept all the commandments from his youth [and, get it, he was only a young guy anyway…]. And yet "Jesus beholding him, loved him" (Mk. 10:20). And then moments later in the record, Peter starts on about "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee"- and the Lord so gently doesn't disagree, even though Peter's fishing business and family were still there for him to return to it seems, but promises reward for all who truly do leave all (Mk. 10:28-30). So just three times in one chapter, we see the gentle patience of the Lord with arrogant, small minded people, who thought they understood so much and were so righteous. They were nothing compared to Him. But the way He deals with them is indeed "altogether lovely".

I think the extraordinary sensitivity of the Lord Jesus is reflected in the many examples of Him displaying extraordinary perception and precognition of what had happened or was going to happen. He had felt that Nathanael was sitting under a fig tree before they even met (Jn. 1:48); He knew the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter had been cured (Mk. 7:29); He knew the thoughts of men, etc. Now all this may have been due to the Father directly beaming that knowledge into Him through a Holy Spirit gift of knowledge. Maybe. And this was the explanation I assumed for many years. But I have noticed in myself and others that at times, we too have flashes of inexplicable precognition; we somehow know something's happened. I remember sitting next to a sister, and she suddenly came over looking distressed. She simply said: "John Barker's mother has just died". And so indeed it was. I think we've all had such things happen. And we share the same nature which the Lord had. So my restless mind wonders, and no more than that, whether His extraordinary precognition was not simply a result of a bolt of Holy Spirit knowledge, but rather an outflow of His extraordinary sensitivity to other people and their situations. This Lord is our Lord, the same today as He was back then yesterday. In any case, living as such a sensitive person in such a cruel and insensitive and blunt world would itself have been almost unbearable. And yet He was like that for us, the insensitive, the ignorant, the selfish and the uncaring, in so many moments of our lives.

2-12 Jesus The Radical

There's a radical in each of us, even if the years have mellowed it. The way to express it is surely through radical devotion to the Father's cause. On one hand, Jesus spoke to men as they were able to hear it, not as He was able to expound it. Yet on the other, He gave His radicalism free reign. The Sabbath miracles seem to have purposefully provoked the Jews. When He encouraged His men to rub the corn heads and eat them like peanuts as they walked through a field one Sabbath, He knew full well this was going to provoke confrontation. And he said what was anathema to the Jews: "The Law was made for man and not man for the Law". Where there is human need, the law can bend. This was a startling concept for a Jew. Jesus described the essence of His Kingdom as mustard seed, which was basically a weed. It was like a woman putting leaven [both symbols of impurity] into flour. Surely the Lord was trying to show that His message was not so Heavenly that it was unrelated to earthly life. It was real and relevant to the ordinary dirty business of life. The woman who have everything she had was noted by the Lord as His ideal devotee. He taught that it was preferable to rid oneself of an eye or a limb and to sacrifice sex if that is for us the price of entry into the Kingdom (Mk. 9:45-47). The parable of the man who built bigger barns taught that in some senses we should in His service like there's no tomorrow. He expected His followers to respond immediately, to pay the price today rather than tomorrow, with no delay or procrastination. There is an emphasis in His teaching on immediacy of response, single-mindedness and unrestrained giving. This is radical stuff for 21st century people in the grip of manic materialism.

His simple claim that God can forgive men all sins was radical (Mk. 3:28)- for the Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others… Another example of the Lord's radical collision course with the Rabbis is in His comment that God's care even embraces sparrow (Mt. 10:29). For the Rabbis explicitly forbad prayers that mentioned God's care for birds, because they argued that it was dishonouring to God to associate Him with something so small as a bird (*Berith* 5. 3). And the Lord purposefully stood that idea upon its head.

Judaism focused repentance and forgiveness around the temple; but Jesus offered forgiveness to all and sundry, out there on the street. The realness of His person backed up the truth of His claims to grant forgiveness. And it was a forgiveness they evidently *felt* ; it wasn't mere philosophy. And it was backed up by healing miracles which spoke to the reflective as live parables of the reality of that cleansing and

forgiveness. This is what, put together, made Him so unique and magnetic. This was what gave that radical bite to the teaching of Jesus. Truly, the more real, the more credible. This is what enabled a man who lived such a short life, in such a backwater, never rising to public prominence until age 30, and then only being in the local limelight for three and a half years. . . to influence the lives of millions world-wide over the next 2,000 years, in a way which nobody else has ever done, and to become Lord of the empire which had crucified Him.

Presenting The Radical Jesus

The essential spirit of the great commission was "Go!", following on as it does from the repeated commands to "go" and share the glorious news that Christ had risen. And yet so many congregations of believers seem to stress instead "Come in to us!". And every manner of carrot is dangled before the public to entice them to 'come in' to some church event. But the emphasis was clearly, and should still be, upon 'going' to people. Our turning of 'Go!' into 'Come to us' is all part of a wider picture, whereby the group of hard core, desperate men who first followed Jesus, the whores, the gamblers, the mentally ill, the marginalized women… have all been diluted into a religion of conformists, a spiritual bubble in which we risk nothing, sacrifice nothing, and comfortably continue in the way of our fathers who were also members of the same church as we are.

It's this mindset which is in my view our most serious problem as a community. We need a shake up. Perhaps we need to remember that the teaching of Jesus was actually not directed initially at irreligious people; it was rather to the people of God, to those within the ecclesia. We need to read the Gospels from that viewpoint. They are a radical call to a radical life, a life and way of thinking that's not about sitting around in a church doing humanly sensible things, taking the safe decisions and options, raising our children in a cocoon of safety and 'fun', often to see them walk out into life either indifferent to Jesus, or as merely passive members of a church. It's not about 'a religion that makes sense'. It's not about God always keeping us safe on the roads if we pray regularly and go to meeting on time and read the Bible now and again. It's about a call to do that which is humanly nonsensical, but to give and give up things in faith, to risk, to aim high, to leap in faith. I see this spirit in those newly baptized. But so often I see it quenched by their attendance at church driving them into the status quo, the utter monotony of civilized church life, within a nominally Christian culture. I'm not against churches; to be together in the body of Christ is a vital part of our growth. But it has to be said that all too often, the structure ends up rationalizing apathy, and absolving the newly converted individual from the great weight of personal responsibility which they feel to take Christ to their world. Somehow we have to ensure that we all keep in personal contact with our Lord, with the spirit of the Gospels, that we never lose that sense of personal encounter with Him. For this will ever keep us from worrying too much what others think of us, doing what is smart and acceptable and right in the eyes of men… rather we will think only of what is right in His eyes. We'll get the spirit of David as he danced before the Lord, being himself, with his wife mocking him for what he was looking like in the eyes of men (2 Sam. 6:21,22). The cause of the Kingdom must be forcefully advanced by "violent men" (Mt. 11:12). This was the sort of language the Lord used. He wasn't preaching anything tame, painless membership of a comfortable community.

2-13 Radical Demands Of Jesus

The very high standards which He demanded of His followers would only have had meaning if it was evident that He was Himself a real human who all the same was sinless. This was [and is] why the words of Jesus had a compelling, inspirational power towards obedience; for He Himself lived out <u>those words in human flesh.</u> The Lord of all grace was and is amazingly demanding in some ways. And He has every right to be. Just reflect how in Jn. 3:10, He expected Nicodemus to have figured out the Old books/dhament's teaching about the new birth (presumably from Ps. 51:10; Is. 44:3; Ez. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26; 37:14; 39:29; Ecc. 11:5). And the Lord castigates Nicodemus for not having figured it out. In the first century, family and the family inheritance was everything. The way the Lord asked His followers to reject family and follow Him was far more radical than many of us can ever appreciate. Likewise His command to sell everything and follow Him (Lk. 18:22) implied so much- for the Middle Eastern family estate was the epitomy of all that a person had and stood for. And to be asked to give the proceeds of that inheritance to poor strangers. . . was just too much. It could seem, once one gets to know Middle Eastern values, that to

abandon both family and the village home in favour of Jesus was just impossible- those things were more valuable to a Middle Eastern peasant than life itself. But still He asked- and people responded.

Consider how He spoke of the man with the splinter in His eye trying to cast the beam out of his brother's eye. He prefaces this mini-parable by saying that the blind can't lead the blind. For Him, a man with even slightly impaired vision was effectively blind. In this very context He speaks of the need to be "perfect. . . as his master". Only the perfect, by implication, can criticize their brethren. And the final reason He gives for not attempting to cast out the plank from our brother's eye is that "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit". This is rather hard to understand in the context. But on reflection, it seems that He is teaching that if we are good trees, we will have no corrupt fruit, no splinters in our eye- and because none of us are like this, there is corrupt fruit on each of us, we aren't perfect as our Master, therefore we shouldn't think of trying to cast out the plank from our brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-43). And of course He bids us to be perfect as our Father is. These high standards of demand were mixed with an incredible grace. Only a man who was evidently perfect could speak like this with any realness or credibility. Otherwise His words would just have been seen as the ravings of a weirdo. But there was a realness to His perfection that made and makes His demands so piercingly appropriate to us. The way He handled His perfection is a wonderful insight into His character. He knew that He was without sin; and He knew that the life He lived moment by moment was to be the pattern for all God's people. Yet somehow, He handled this in a manner which was never arrogant, never proud, and never offputting to sinners; but rather, actually inviting to them. He usually speaks of Himself in the third person- e. g. "the son"; but in Jn. 17:3 He refers to Himself in prayer to the Father as "Jesus Christ", as if He was consciously aware of how we would later see Him.

There is something demanding and almost intrusive about the true personality of Jesus. In this sense, the knowledge of Jesus can never really be denied. There is something compelling about Him. Grasping the fact that Jesus was a real, credible human who was somehow so much 'more than man' ought to empower our preaching. For this is just what people are looking for- a Man to idolize, to follow, who is real and credible and won't let us down, not again dashing dreams and expectations as all else does. Young people worldwide [and within our own community and families] hunger for authentic relationships. They despise the superficiality of both irreligious materialism and religious conformity; they sense there is an awesome 'reality' far bigger than the trivialities of bourgeois socializing which surround them, far beyond the utter, trivial boredom of middle class life which most human beings either experience or tacitly aspire to. And the real, human Jesus whom we preach really can be their answer- depending how we put Him over to them. Many of the younger generation are unwilling to accommodate themselves to the status quo, or acclimatize themselves to the prevailing culture. They have a quest for a 'counter-culture', real and credible, every bit as much as Jesus to this day forms a radical counter-culture (1).

And the true Christianity, based on the real Jesus, which we preach- this is surely what at least some of them ought to be satisfied with. They fumble for words in their music and writing to express the reality for which contemporary youth seek. Yet they perceive, in different words and tones, the essence of Jesus' words: 'What does it profit a man that he should gain the whole world and lose his soul?'. It's a bit like the men who worshipped an idol for 'the unknown God'. We have to declare Him to them. Today's youth are looking for the right things (meaning, peace, love, reality etc.) but in the wrong places (drugs, religions etc.); whereas all these things are to be found in the man Jesus. Instead of a counter-culture, they find in most churches mere conformity; whereas the true church / ecclesia should be in radical tension with the culture of the world. But we should be offering them the radical Jesus; not just another mere religion. If ever we are told 'But you're just like all the others. . . '- we ought to be seriously worried. But I'm proud to say that time after time, I am told by those who join us that we are truly different. Not only are young people looking for right things in the wrong places; but they have more interest in moral subjects than they have the capacity for handling moral ideas. It is that capacity, that apparatus, which the true teaching of the Lord Jesus will give them.

The counter-culture of which Jesus is Lord is indeed radical. The Sermon on the Mount, and so much of Jesus' later teaching, **revolves around "us"** [His people] acting one way whilst the world acts in another. We are to love all men, whereas the world loves only its friends; we are to pray meaningfully, whilst the Gentile world merely heap up empty phrases; we are to seek the things of God's Kingdom, whilst the world seeks only for material things. Human values are radically reversed in Christ. The humble are exalted and the proud debased; the first are put last, the servant made the greatest. But Jesus also contrasts His followers

not only with "the Gentiles" but with the contemporary religious people- the 'scribes and Pharisees'. Thus we are to be radically different both from the nominal church, and the secular world in general. Repeatedly Jesus speaks of "they" and "you"; and yet He also spoke of the handful of Palestinian peasants who really grasped His teaching as being the salt of the earth [Israel?] and the light of the [whole Gentile] world. It was their separateness from the world that was to be a part of the world's salvation. So Jesus was certainly not teaching a bunker mentality, an island existence, but rather a reaching out into the world of others for their salvation. The true radicalism is the radicalism of love- love lived out in ordinary life. Whether we strive for absolute truthfulness, what place we seek at a feast, the struggle to grant real and total forgiveness- this is the radicalism of love.

The religion of Jesus was radically different from that of both the ecclesia and the world of His day. For them, prayer was to take place within the synagogue and temple. Yet Jesus prayed in a desert, in a garden, on mountains. . . but He is never recorded as praying in the temple or synagogue. The biography of any other religious Jew of the first century would have included a mention of his prayers in those places. But not with Jesus. His prayer life was radically at variance with that of his contemporaries. Strangely and paradoxically, the generation contemporary with Jesus were one of the most legalistically obedient, Law-honouring generations in Israel's sad history. The Lithuanian Jew Jacob Neusner commented: "It was not a sinning generation, but one deeply faithful to the covenant and the Scripture, perhaps more so than [any other]" (2). Yet this generation that sought more than any other to keep the Law and be serious about their obligations to God were the very ones who murdered His Son. The world of Jesus was in collision with that of the ecclesia and world of His day. **And who is to say that the true spirit of Jesus may not be the same today, in these last days**. The true vision of Jesus calls the true ecclesia to be *the* alternative culture of our age. The dominant values of this world- affluence, achievement, appearance, personal advancement, power, consumption, selfish individualism- are in total collision with anything that is of the real Christ. We are not to separate our lives into two realms, one religious and the other secular. Spiritual life is not something merely private and internal. The real Christ demands of us that we are He as us; that "to live is [to be] Christ" ; that our whole lives in every part of them are based around Him, whatever the cost.

"Let the dead bury their dead"

The Lord's comment: "Let the dead bury their dead" (Mt. 8:22) reveals how He had a way of so radically challenging the positions held by normal people of the world, to a depth quite unheard of- and He did it in so few words. And even more wondrous, the Lord appeared to have come out with this so pithy and semantically dense statement almost 'off the cuff', when presented with a man declining to follow Him immediately because he had to bury his father. So let's see in what ways the Lord's comment was so radical. Respect for parents as expressed in burying them "was at the heart of Jewish piety… under Hasidic-Pharisaic influence the last offices for the dead had gained primacy among all good works… the duty to participate in a funeral procession could even override study of the Torah"(3). And of course the Lord *knew* this, He knew just how fanatic the Jews were getting about burying parents- and it's exactly that issue which He chooses to pick on in His relentless demand for our 'all' in He as us. Quite apart from the particular obsessive situation in first century Israel relating to burying parents, in any case there was a widely held view amongst both Greeks and Jews that burial of a father could only properly be done by the son, and if this wasn't done, then the man was effectively not properly buried, which even Biblically is used as a curse. And 'just' for delaying doing the Lord's service for a day, the Lord demanded all this of a person. He's no less demanding today, even if His radical call is articulated over different issues. It may mean having to remain single when our parents want us to marry an unbeliever; giving up a good job; turning down promotion; relocating somewhere nearer our brethren; driving or sending our kids to a school a long way away for their spiritual sake… these, and far more, unto death and the complete giving up of life, are His demands.

But there are other radical elements in those words of the Lord. Lev. 21:11 forbad the High Priest to be polluted by the corpse of his parents, which would've precluded him from the usual Jewish manner of burying the dead in the first century. By asking His followers to act as if under the same regulation, the Lord was inviting His followers to see themselves, each one, as the High Priest. We may merely raise our eyebrows at this point, as a matter of mere expositional interest. But to those guys back then, this was major and radical, a man would have to sum up every ounce of spiritual ambition in order to rise up to this invitation. And psychologically, we could say that those first century illiterate Jews were subject to a very

powerful systemic spiritual abuse. By this I mean that they were so emotionally hammered into the ground by the oppressive synagogue system that they felt themselves unworthy, no good, not up to much, awful sinners, woefully ignorant of God's law, betrayers of Moses and their nation… and the Lord addresses these people and realistically asks them to feel and act like the High Priest! No wonder people just 'didn't get' His real message, and those who did were so slow to rise up to the heights of its real implications. And we today likewise toil under a more insidious systemic abuse than we likely appreciate, with the same sense of not being ultimately worth much… until the Lord's love and high calling bursts in upon our lives, releasing us from the mire of middle class [or aspired-to middle class] mediocrity into a brave new life. Another example of the challenging way in which the Lord treated His men is to be found in **Jn. 15:16: "I have chosen you and ordained [Gk. *etheka*] you"**. C. K. Barrett shows that *etheka* reflects the Hebrew *samak*, and that the Lord's phrase alludes to the ordination of a disciple as a Rabbi (4). Those guys must've looked at each other in shock. They who were barely literate, and knew how very human they were, whose small minds were creaking under the burden of trying to understand this Man they so loved… were being ordained as Rabbis, by a man who'd just washed their feet, which was what disciples usually did for their Rabbis. But yes, the Lord challenged them and us to have a far higher estimate of His opinion of us…

The Spirit Of The Prophets

And further. 'The prophets' were painted by Judaism rather like the Orthodox church paints 'the saints' today- white faced men of such spirituality that they are to be revered and worshipped as icons, rather than seen as real examples to us today. The Lord by contrast saw them as working models of the sort of spiritual life and walk with God which we too can just as realistically attain to. In Ez. 24:13-24, God forbad Ezekiel to carry out the mourning rituals associated with his wife's funeral. Likewise Jeremiah was forbidden to participate in lamentation for the dead in a house of mourning (Jer. 16:5-7). And again, the man who was bidden "let the dead bury their dead" was being invited to see himself on that level, of an Ezekiel or Jeremiah, being called to this behaviour by a person who could speak directly on God's behalf. And why were those prophets bidden do those things? It was in order to be a witness to Israel, proclaiming judgment to come. And this was exactly the same reason the Lord bid His potential follower to 'let the dead bury the dead'- in order that the man could urgently proclaim the Gospel to Israel. Yet if we press further with the question as to *why* exactly God wanted Jeremiah and Ezekiel to not mourn for the dead, we find ourselves reflecting that actually, quite often God asked His prophets to engage in what some would call anti-social behaviour in order to attract attention to the message they were preaching. Remember that Jeremiah was forbidden to marry [most unusual for a Jew], go to weddings etc. (Jer. 16:1-4,8). For other examples of 'anti-social behaviour' demanded of the prophets [e. g. walking about naked], see Ez. 4:9-15; 12:1-7; Hos. 1:2; Is. 20:1-6. When we meet the enigmatic phrase "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10), I believe it's a pithy summation of what we're saying here. The Angel had made prophecies, and John felt that this was something so wonderful that it separated him from the Angel. But John like us was bearing "the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 1:9). The same essential spirit which was in the prophets is in all those who in *their* spirit or attitude bear the witness of Jesus. Hence the prophesying Angel encourages John not to worship him, but rather to recognize that he is John's "fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book", i. e. all believers (Rev. 22:9). And again, this was radical stuff for the initial audience of the Apocalypse. They were being told that they had the prophets as their brethren, and on account of their spirit / attitude of bearing the testimony of Jesus, the same spirit which was in the prophets was in them. The very act of bearing witness to Jesus in our spirit / disposition is in fact to have the same spirit in us which was in the prophets and was the basis of their prophetic witness. This makes the prophets our "brethren", not distant white faced 'saints'.

Israel was a society bound together by 'norms' of behaviour and taboos regarding cleanliness. Yet prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel had been asked to openly break with the conventions of their environment, in order to draw attention to the message they were preaching- which was that God is likewise outside of the conventions of human environments, and His message is a radical call to quit them and be ourselves, *His* children and not the children of this world. The Lord asked a man on the way to his dad's funeral to "let the dead bury their dead" and instead come with Him and preach the Gospel- and this chimes in seamlessly with the way God treated the prophets and commissioned them for witness to His people. The prophets were perceived as men raised up by God in a crisis situation, to do something special in their generation, to be God's men of the moment which we admire from the safe distance of historical study. And we too can feel the same about them. But the Lord bursts abruptly into this complacency- 'thou art the man!' is very much

the message. Our lives are likewise to be lived [in this sense] in a spirit of all out effort for God's people in urgent crisis. A man in a desperate war situation might dodge out of his dear dad's funeral procession to fight the enemy or save a life that was immediately and urgently threatened. But it would have to be a pretty urgent and immediate crisis, that bore down very personally upon him. 'And this', the Lord is saying, 'is the intensity and pressing urgency of the spiritual battle I've called you to'. I salute the Lord as highly as I can for the totally artless and majestic way in which He packed so much challenge into those few words: "Let the dead bury their dead".

The Urgency Of Our Task

There is to be an urgency about following the Lord, an urgency that can't be put off. This was one of the things which was so unique about the Lord's teaching style. It's been observed: "There is nothing in contemporary Judaism which corresponds to the immediacy with which he [Jesus] teaches"(5). Or as the Gospel records themselves put it: "Never man spake like this man". The total unusualness of His teaching style and content was enough in itself to make soldiers sent to arrest Him simply give up and turn back. If we ask *why* men followed Jesus, it's hard to think they did so because they thought He had promised them a great reward in the future; for He says little of this, and their reaction after the crucifixion indicates that they loved Him not because He had offered them anything that tangible. There was simply a Divine power of personality within Him, and by this I mean more than mere human charisma, and a message which demanded the immediate response of following Him wherever it might lead, even like Abraham not knowing where He was going. As Nebuchadnezzar proudly surveyed his capital city, the Angelic voice suddenly stated: "To thee it is spoken; the Kingdom is departed from thee" (Dan. 4:31). But it was 12 months previously that Daniel had bravely told the King that unless he repented, God's intention was to remove his Kingdom from him. The King had heard the word… and forgotten its' real import. But "to thee [you singular] it *is* spoken". So it can be with us. We may hear and perceive something from the word, but a year later we've forgotten it, and we tend to use the nature of human memory as an excuse not to have to take seriously the simple fact that if we hear something from God's word, we are to do it… and we are forever held accountable if we don't. The passing of time doesn't somehow produce an atonement for us. Therefore, and this point just outlined needs some reflection before we feel it's practical import, it becomes absolutely crucial to respond to God's word *immediately*. Hence there is an urgency to our Bible study- for as we understand, we are to *do*, not to merely jot notes in a margin or imagine we've taken a mental note. We are to *do*, to act, to take concrete action, as a result of what we perceive God asking of us. The immediacy of the baptisms in the first century were symptomatic of how the early church responded with immediacy to the Lord's call; but the immediacy of response to His word continues, of course. For we are to live "in new*ness* of life", ever living out again that same basic response of baptism which we made when we first encountered the Lord's call.

The idea of leaving family and putting them last was uncommon but not unknown within Jewish circles. Again, the Lord was using familiar ideas, but with a radical and thoroughly unique twist to them. The schools of the Rabbis and Pharisees were full of both stories and examples of where men had indeed quit their families and given up their jobs in order to fanatically study the Torah, and had ended up materially and socially advanced(6). It's apparent from the Gospels that the Scribes and Pharisees were socially and economically better off than the mass of the population in Palestine. But the radicalness of the Lord's demand was that He asked people to leave all and 'follow Him'- in order to achieve an actual *loss* of material and social advantage. In all this we see a relentlessness in the Lord's demands of men and women, His dogged insistence as to the unconditional and total nature of following Him. Once we grasp what following Him is all about, it becomes apparent that to tell a man on the way to bury his father 'Let the dead bury their dead' was actually quite in harmony with what the Lord was asking of those who would follow Him. On this occasion, He put it so baldly and bluntly to the man rushing to the funeral that both readers and hearers of those words of Jesus were and are shocked. But if only we grasped the real essence of His teaching, we wouldn't see that demand as in any way unusual or out of character with the general tenor of His message.

Following Him

And there was yet more radical, paradigm breaking demand within the Lord's words: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead". To 'Follow me' and be an itinerant student of the teacher Jesus of Nazareth was not unknown in first century Palestine. But to stop a man on the way to his dad's funeral and insist he had to

join up right *now* and skip the funeral- that was just incredibly demanding. Further, it was always pupils who tried to get into a Rabbi's entourage or school- he didn't just walk up to a normal, non-religious working guy and say 'Hey you… come right now and follow me…'. This is where the attempts to make the Lord Jesus out to have been just another 'holy man' within the first century Jewish prophetic milieu are to me simply pathetic. Here was a man, a more than man, who spake and demanded and convicted and loved and ultimately saved like no other. There is an undeniable connection between the guerrilla groups who fought the Roman occupation and the schools of rabbinic teaching- the fanatic zeal for the Law was what drove the Jews to fight as they did. The idea of 'following after' a man is a Hebrew figure for men following their leader / general into battle. There are many examples: Josh. 3:3; Jud. 3:28; 4:14; 6:34,35; 9:4,49; 1 Sam. 17:13,14; 30:21; 2 Sam. 5:24 etc. In those early days, a general wasn't a smart guy with a degree who directed the battlefield from his laptop; he was the one who went over the top first with his men behind him, knowing full well he was the one whom his enemies would go for above all others. It was his bravery which inspired the followers to go after him, and which, over the battles and wars, solidified their trust in him and willingness to give their lives behind him. And this figure of speech was well understood by the Lord. Around him were false prophets and rabbinic teachers, asking young men to follow them, adopt their interpretations of Torah, study the traditions, and get hyped up enough to take weapons in their hands and go forth to fight the infidel. The Lord was fully aware of this, and He frames His calling of men in the same terms. Indeed, when He speaks of leaving all and following after Him (Lk. 14:33), He surely had in mind the well known story of Mattathias, who began the Maccabean revolt by saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the Law and supports the covenant *follow after me*…and they *left their possessions behind* in the town" (1 Macc. 2:27). And again the Lord seems to have had this in mind when He says that when He comes, His true people are to flee Jerusalem and not worry that their 'stuff is in the house' (Lk. 17:31). For an itinerant teacher like Jesus of Nazareth to offer his ideas and his interpretation of the Old Testament, and then have men following Him, was not out of place in first century Palestine. But the Lord twists the whole figure of 'follow me'. Unlike the other teachers, his teaching didn't lead to taking arms and fighting Rome. His men are to follow Him in wilfully taking up and carrying a cross, imitating His supreme human bravery in both His life and above all in His death, a bravery which He showed in facing sin in the eye and conquering every temptation, whatever the cost, whatever the human implication.

The Violence Within

The real battle was not against Rome, but against sin in all its forms, against human weakness and dysfunction, rooting out cherished habits, secret sins, the innermost fantasies of the heart, and reaching out to the salvation of others and the advancement of the things of God's Kingdom. The ultimate battle we are led to is the battle of truly accepting the cross in our lives, of realizing and living out the truth of the fact that losing now is winning, dying now is living… In the moments, the seconds and even half seconds of temptation, we are to fight and win, to courageously follow that bravest of men, "the captain [another of the many military allusions in the New Testament] of our salvation". As one man sees one hell of a girl sitting lonesome on a low wall, drinking cool beer in the warm summer rain, as he fights with the ideas and associations which that sight triggers… as one woman glances at the display of alcohol in the supermarket, yearning to 'just this once' drown the tension of an unbearable, no-exit life… as another brother begins to slip into a rage of anger and expletives yelled in his mind at the brother who's just demolished his cherished view of prophecy… as a sister sits at her computer keyboard tempted to write words of untruth to trash her rival… in these moments we are in the heat of battle. But it's all a question of perceiving that this is what the war is about, and that every battle is bitterly contested and fought out to the end, with no easy victories. The battle is above all against ourselves, not some brother with suspected wrong teaching or Rome or the Moslems or the JWs round the corner. In this was the essential difference between the Lord's teaching and that of the contemporary Rabbis, who saw the struggle as a literal one by the righteous, those justified by their correct reading of Torah, against an external pagan enemy. There *is* of course a conflict with the world around us, 'satan' refers both to the powers of the world as well as to our own internal temptations, but the conflict is most significantly within our own hearts. It's no good gallantly fighting the evil of the world if we've not started and keenly felt "the violence within" (to borrow a phrase from Paul Tournier). Perhaps this theme is presented to us in the account of Uzziah, who had many "valiant men" in his army, but it was the priests who are in that same context called "valiant men" for daring to stand up to Uzziah's immorality and speak out against it (2 Chron. 26:12,17).

The Call Of God

But this radical call to 'follow me' is thrown out by the Lord in an almost casual way- or so it can seem. The usual way was for a man to observe and reflect upon a rabbi's words and ideas, and then ask to join in his inner circle of followers. But the Lord wasn't like that. He called men, arresting them with His radical call in the very midst of daily life, at the most utterly inconvenient moment, even the most humanly inappropriate moment- such as being on the way to your father's funeral. And again, the Son of God was actually acting as His Father had done. Gideon was called whilst in the middle of threshing wheat in a time of famine (Jud. 6:1), Saul whilst he was out looking for lost cattle (1 Sam. 9:10) and again whilst he was coming home from work one evening (1 Sam. 11:5); David whilst he was looking after the sheep; Samuel whilst he was asleep; Amos whilst he was leading the flocks to water (Am. 7:14); and see too 1 Kings 11:29; 19:16; 2 Kings 9:1-13,18. In other words, the call of God comes to us right in the midst of ordinary, mundane life. Of this there can be no doubt. And the Lord Jesus called men in just the same way. This was what was and is so unusual and startling about the ministry of the Lord. His love sought men out, He didn't wait for them to come to Him [for none of us would ever come without God's gracious initiative]. Of course, it was only those who perceived that He spake on God's behalf who could take His invitation as a real call from God which had to be obeyed.

And again, every Old Testament 'call of God' was for someone to do something dramatic, often in extreme crisis and physical danger, inviting them to rise up to the challenge of the moment. Yet as we have shown, the call of the disciples had the call of the prophets as its prototype. And the Lord Jesus went around Palestine and goes about this world today, calling people with that same call. We are ordinary folk, nothing special women, average fellas… just like those invited in the first century. And yet we are 'called' in the same way as people were called to heroic things in Old Testament times. To encounter Jesus as we have is to be called by God. The struggle and fight and victory and eternal cause and glory to which the Lord Jesus calls us to rise up to… is just as real now as it is ever was, and just as bitingly urgent to respond to. Perceiving it imparts a spirit of heroism to our otherwise formless and unachieving lives. To e. g. , conquer gluttony or repressed anger and bitterness over a lost relationship, to lead a friend to Christ… these are the victories, the real ones, which have eternal consequence and glory.

So to sum up, I don't think that we should skip a relative's funeral in order to 'do' things for the Lord. And I don't think that was the intention of the Lord's words. Rather is He teaching us of the sense of urgency which there must be in our service of Him, our willingness to 'follow' Him whatever it takes, to place no restrictions upon our service to Him and what it may demand of us. We are to see our lives as to be totally dedicated to Him, making use in some way of all the precious seconds granted us, rather than letting them slip away between our fingers. We are to realistically grasp the fact that His mission and ministry is in fact ours. And the total insecurity, exposure to danger, misunderstanding, slander, sudden calls of God to change direction and move way out of our comfort zone etc. are all part of participating in the short term fate and eternal victory of the One whom we follow. His call to each of us to preach Him is radical. He sent out His preachers with *no* money, *no* food etc. He didn't tell them to go out without extra money, extra food nor clothes etc. He told them to take *none* of these things (Lk. 22:35). Why? Surely because He wanted them – and us- to understand that the preacher of Christ is to be *totally* dependent upon His provision for them. It was a high challenge. When the disciples faltered at the Last Supper, the Lord told them that OK, if you have a purse, take it; if you want a sword for protection, then buy one (Lk. 22:35). Surely He was saying, as He is to us today: 'OK, I want you to rise up to the spirit of My 'Let the dead bury their dead' and 'Take no money with you' exhortations. But if you can't, OK, take a lower level, but all the same, go forth and be My witnesses. *Please!*'.

Notes

(1) For more on this see Theodore Roszak, *The Making Of A Counter-Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969) especially p. 233.
(2) Jacob Neusner, *A Life Of Yohanan ben Zakkai* (Leiden: Brill, 1970) p. 11.
(3) Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader And His Followers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981) pp. 8,9.
(4) C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According To St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978).
(5) Gunter Bornkamm, *Jesus Of Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) p. 57.
(6) See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem In The Time Of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), pp. 112, 233.

2-14 The Radical Language Of Jesus

Because of the gracious words and manner of speaking of Jesus, therefore God so highly exalted Him (Ps. 45:2). The Father was *so* impressed with the words of His Son. Lk. 4:22 records how people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke; there was something very unusual in His manner of speaking. Evidently there must have been something totally outstanding about His use of language. **God highly exalted Him because He so loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Ps. 45:7),** and yet also because of His manner of speaking (Ps. 45:2); so this *love* of righteousness and hatred of evil was what made His words so special. The Lord's choice of language was therefore radically different. Indeed, the Father Himself has inspired His word in a way which uses language quite differently to how we do. Thus there are many examples in Scripture of where even basic rules of grammar are broken- an obvious example is the way Leviticus and Numbers begin with "And…", what scholars call a "*waw* conjunctive" that is not ever used to start a sentence let alone a book. The Father's Son likewise used language in His own way. "'Peace' ['shalom'- the usual Semitic greeting] is my farewell to you" (Jn. 14:27) is an example of how He seems to have almost purposefully delighted in using language in a startlingly different way. There are times when the Lord Jesus seems to have almost coined words. The adjective *epiousios* in " our daily bread" is one example; there in the midst of the prayer which the Lord bid His followers constantly use, was a word which was virtually unknown to them (1). Our bread only-for-this-day was the idea. When He addressed God as *abba*, 'dad', the Jews would have been scandalized (2). But this was the experience He had of God as a near at hand, compassionate Father. He purposefully juxtaposed *abba* with the Divine Name which Jews were so paranoid about pronouncing: " Abba, glorify your name" (Jn. 12:28). This was nothing short of scandal to Jewish ears. And we are to pray as the Lord prayed, also using " Abba, father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Seeing it was unheard of at the time for Jews to pray to God using 'Abba', Paul is clearly encouraging us to relate to God and pray to Him as Jesus did (cp. Jn. 20:17). The Lord made a big deal of calling God 'Abba', even forbidding His Jewish followers to use the term about anyone else (Mt. 23:9). The Lord's attitude to prayer was radical in itself. The observant Jew prayed three times / day, the first and last prayers being merely the recital of the *shema*. Yet Jesus spent hours in those morning and evening prayers (Mk. 1:35; 6:46). Perhaps He was motivated in His prayers by the lengthy implications of the fact that Yahweh is indeed one, and this demands so much of us.

He asked us to drink His blood, another idea repellent to Jewry. His healings broke all the purity boundaries of His social world. He touched lepers and hemorrhaging women. He ate with the outcasts and well known sinners. Women followed Him around the country, yet He was unmoved by all the scandal mongering which inevitably must have gone on. He allowed Mary to wash Him with her hair, and to speak with Him in public- even though the hair, legs and voices of women were felt by Judaism to be especially enticing. Jesus refused to share the usual Jewish fears of female sexuality. Believing that sexual desire was evil and uncontrollable, the Jewish world coped with women by secluding them. The Lord, however, accepted women into His company of disciples. He was comfortable with His humanity, He wasn't paranoid about the 'thin end of the wedge'. And moreover, He expected His responsible and comfortable-with-his-humanity attitude to rub off upon the men He'd chosen to be with those women. He valued persons for who they were, and this had radical results in practice. And yet He spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed (Mk. 2:14), is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

Jesus juxtaposed ideas in a radical way. He spoke of drinking His blood; and of a Samaritan who was good, a spiritual hero. It was impossible for Jews to associate the term 'Samaritan' and the concept of being spiritually an example. And so the stark, radical challenge of the Lord's words must be allowed to come down into the 21st century too. Lk. 6:35 has Jesus speaking of "children of the Most High" and yet Mt. 5:45 has "children of your father" . What did Jesus actually say? Perhaps: "Children of *abba*, daddy, the Most High". **He juxtaposed His shocking idea of *abba* with the exalted title "the Most High**". The Most High was in fact as close as *abba*, daddy, father. "Amen" was what you usually said in the first century about the words of someone else. To use it about your own words was, apparently, unthinkable (3). But the

Lord Jesus was so quietly sure of Himself that He could say this of His own words. Without being conceited or proud, the Lord valued His own person to this extent. Truly "Never [did a] man spake like this man".

The Sting In The Tail

The radical nature of the Lord Jesus is reflected in His teaching style. His parables work around what I have elsewhere called "elements of unreality". They involve a clash of the familiar, the comfortable, the normal, with the strange and unreal and radical. The parables are now so well known that their radical nature has been almost buried under the avalanche of familiarity. The parables begin by getting the hearers sympathetic and onboard with the story line- and then, in a flick of the tail, the whole punch line is turned round against their expectations, with radical demands. Take the good Samaritan. The story of a man travelling the Jerusalem-Jericho road alone would've elicited sympathy and identity with the hearers- yes, that road *is* awfully dangerous. And then the priest and Levite pass by and don't help. That was realistic-"priests and levites were known to have quarters in the Jordan valley near Jericho where they retreated from the beehive of activity surrounding the temple" (4). The common people were anticlerical, and yes, they could just imagine the priest and Levite passing by. "Typical!" would've been their comment. They're all set up to expect the Messianic Jewish working class hero to stride in to the rescue. But. . . it's a despised Samaritan who stops and gives saving help. They had expected a Jewish Saviour- and Jesus, the teller of the parable, claimed to be just that. But. . . in the story, He's represented by a Samaritan. Remember that Samaritans and Jews had no dealings, and people were amazed that Jesus would even speak with the Samaritan woman at the well. Even in desperation, a Jew wouldn't have wanted to be helped by a Samaritan. You had to be utterly desperate to accept such help. Moments earlier, the audience had been identifying with the injured Jewish man. But. . . were they really *that* desperate, did they appreciate their desperation to that extent, to keep "in" the story, and accept that that desperate man was really them? They wanted to be able to identify with the hero. But no, they had to first of all identify with the wounded, dying, desperate Jew. And only then were they bidden "Go and do likewise"- 'be like the Samaritan'. The Lord's initial audience would have been left with knitted eyebrows and deep introspection at the end of it. The whole thing was too challenging for many. They quit the parable, quit identifying with the story. . . just as we can when it gets too demanding. It's a tragedy that this amazing story, crafted in such a radically demanding way, has been reduced to merely 'Be a good neighbour to the guy next door, so long as it doesn't demand too much of you'- which is what the story has come to mean for the majority of professed Christians today. That of itself indicates a discomfort with the radical nature of the demands.

It's the same with Nathan's parable to David. It elicited David's sympathy- and then it was turned back on David: "You are the man!". But he didn't quit the parable. He acted on it, as we have to. The parable of the self-righteous older son is just the same. The parable's story line leads us to expect that the wayward son repents and is accepted back by his father. But then right at the end, the whole thing takes a biting twist. We suddenly realize that the prodigal son and the need to forgive your wayward son isn't the point of the story- for that's something which comes naturally to any father and family. The whole point is that the son who played safe, who stayed home and behaved himself. . . *he* is the one who ends up outside of the family's joy because of his self-righteousness. ***He* ends up the villain, the lost son.** Again, there'd have been knotted brows and an exit from identity with the story line. And the way generations of Christians have described the story as "the parable of the lost / prodigal son" shows how they [we] too have so often missed the essentially radical point of the story.

Jesus And The Temple

It was the Lord's radical usage of language which led to the huge, seething anger which He provoked, culminating in the demand for His death. He seems to have purposefully reinterpreted and reapplied symbols and ideas which spoke of Jewish national pride, and applied them to something quite different. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on an ass, not a war horse, and in order to die. . . led to so much anger exactly because He had subverted such a familiar and longed for hope and symbol. We have to remember the huge value of symbols in the first century, living as we do in an age when the written word has become paramount. For the illiterate, symbols and acted parables were of far greater importance than the written word. We may think of 'Jesus' in terms of His teachings recorded at a specific chapter and verse of our Bibles. To the illiterate first century Jew, they thought of Him in terms of what He *did*- His cleansing of the temple, His image of the temple mount being plucked up and cast into the sea. The Lord's teaching about the temple was especially subversive- for the temple played a "decisive role. . . in resistance toward Rome"

(5). It was "the focal point of the hope of national liberation, and hence was regarded as a guarantee of security against the pagans" (6). But what does Jesus teach about the temple? It will be destroyed, His body shall be greater than the temple, it was to be a place of blessing for pagan Gentiles, because of Israel's wickedness the abomination would be set there, every place was hallowed ground, He was the true priest, etc. According to the *Mishnah Berakoth* 9. 5, the faithful were to wash the dust from their feet before entering it- and Jesus washed His disciples feet in likely allusion to this before they say down in a private room and broke bread with Him (Jn. 13:1-20). As the Lithuanian Jewish Rabbi Jacob Neusner commented about Jesus' institution of the 'breaking of bread': "The holy place has shifted, now being formed by the circle made up of the master and his disciples" (7). The Lord Jesus used the term "the blood of the covenant" at the last Supper, with reference to how Zech. 9:9-11 prophesied that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would be because of this "blood of my covenant". Yet the restoration / redemption which the Lord had in mind was not politically from Rome, but from sin and death through His blood. The temple had no great role in the Lord's teaching. By driving out traders from the temple, the Lord was effectively suggesting that the Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21, of how in the restoration there would be no Gentile traders there, was coming true in Him. And the elders of the Jews are thus paralleled by Him with the Gentiles. He speaks of how "this mountain"- and He must've been referring to Zion, the temple mount- was to be plucked up and cast into the sea of Gentiles (Mk. 11:23). And He was alluding to Zech 4:6,7, which spoke of how the mountain of Babylon would be cast into the sea at the restoration- with the 'splash' expressed in the words "Grace, grace". This was to associate the Jewish temple system with Babylon- just as Revelation 17 likewise does. The Lord opened up a new universe of symbols; in an almost kaleidoscopic way, He twisted all the well loved symbols around. And when you mess with symbols, people get angry. Having lived in the Baltic States many years, I observed how inflammatory is the issue of messing with war memorials. Russians and Balts can slag each other off verbally all they wish, and people shrug. But mess with symbols, remove or rededicate a war memorial- and the crowds are on the streets. And this was, partially, what led to the fury with Jesus which led to His lynching. He who proclaimed non-violent revolution, the radical transformation of the inner mind into God's temple, Israel's true Messiah, was seen as the ultimate threat to all that it meant to be Jewish- all because His language and actions subverted the beloved symbols of the social club. When we experience this. . . we are sharing something of His sufferings. Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome (8). And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work (Mk. 2:19). But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

The memories of the Maccabean heroes and their rebellion were strongly in the minds and consciousness of first century Israel. Their exploits were recited yearly at the feast of Hanukkah. Yet the Lord purposefully subverts the history of the Maccabees. Mattathias had taught violent resistance to Gentile occupation in the slogan: "Repay the Gentiles in their own coin" (1 Macc. 2:68 N. E. B.). But the Lord alludes to this, at least to the LXX form of the saying, when He advocated paying the Roman temple tax, giving the coin to them, and not violently resisting. The Hebrew writer likewise alludes to and subverts the defiant language of the Maccabees in repeatedly describing Christ as "priest for ever" (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:3,17,21)- when this was the term applied to Simon Maccabaeus in 1 Macc 14:41. The Lord's Olivet prophecy as recorded by Mark has so many allusions to the Maccabean revolt under Mattathias ("the abomination", flight to the hills, "let the reader understand" and many other phrases are all quotations from 1 Macc. 1-3). But in this context the Lord warns of false Messiahs- as if He considered the Maccabean heroes to be just that. And interestingly it is Mark more than any other Gospel writer who stresses the Messiahship of Jesus throughout the crucifixion record. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews a contradiction in terms. The idea of Jewish revolutionaries marching triumphantly to Jerusalem to liberate it was common in Jewish thought at the time (9)- but Luke emphasizes that Christ's last journey to Jerusalem and triumphant entry to it was in fact in order to die the death of the cross there. The battle had been redefined by the Lord Jesus- not against Rome, but against internal sin and Jewish religious hypocrisy. Victory was by self-crucifixion, not military might. This was

just too much for Jewish nationalism, just as legalists today end up baying for the blood of those who preach grace and not works.

Notes

(1) J. H. Moulton & G. Milligan *The Vocabulary Of The Greek Testament* (London: Hodder, 1949).
(2) Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers Of Jesus* (London: S. C. M. , 1967) pp. 96,97 comments on how he searched through " the prayer literature of ancient Judah. . . [but] in no place in this immense literature is this invocation of God as *abba* to be found. . . *Abba* was an everyday word, a homely family word. No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner" .
(3) J. D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective On Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) p. 75.
(4) Robert Funk, *Honest To Jesus* (Harper San Francisco, 1996) p. 174.
(5) Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness And Politics In The Teaching Of Jesus* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984) p. 174.
(6) N. T. Wright, *Jesus And The Victory Of God* (London: S. P. C. K, 2004) p. 420.
(7) Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1993) p. 69.
(8) N. T. Wright, *The New Testament And The People Of God* (London: S. P. C. K. , 1992) p. 234.
(9) N. T Wright, *ibid* pp. 171-177.

2-15 The Radical Authority Of Jesus

The Lord often began His statements with the word " Amen" - 'truly', 'certainly', 'surely. . . I say unto you. . . '. Yet it was usual to *conclude* a sentence, prayer or statement with that word (1). But the Lord *began* His statements with it. And this feature of His style evidently caught the attention of all the Gospel writers. Mark mentions it 13 times, Matthew 9 times, Luke 3 times and John 25 times. And it should stand out to us, too. Jeremias also mentions that "according to idiomatic Jewish usage the word *amen* is used to affirm, endorse or appropriate the words of another person [whereas] in the words of Jesus it is used to introduce and endorse Jesus' own words. . . to end one's own prayer with *amen* was considered a sign of ignorance". Thus Jesus was introducing a radically new type of speaking. The Lord's extraordinary sense of authority was not laughed off as the ravings of a self-deluded 'holy man'. For the crowds flocked to Him, and even hardened guards sent to arrest Him had to give up on the job for the humanly-flimsy excuse that "never man spake like this man". And it is that very sense of ultimate authority which amazingly comes through to us today, who have never met Him nor heard His words with our own ears. This is the power of the inspired Gospel records, yet it is also testimony to the extraordinary, compelling power of the Personality which is transmitted through them. The Lord's sense of authority helps explain His mysterious logic in Jn. 8:17,18. The Jews accuse Him of bearing witness of Himself, and that therefore His witness is untrue. The Lord replies that under the Law, two witnesses were required in addition to the accused person. And He argues that He is a witness to Himself, and His Father is too: "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me bears witness". But this was exactly their point- He was bearing witness of Himself, and therefore "your witness is not true" (Jn. 8:13 RV). Yet His reply seems to have silenced them. Clearly the authority attached to Him was so great that effectively His bearing witness of Himself *was* adequate witness.

Notes

(1) See the article "Amen" in Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971) pp. 35,36.

2-16 The Radical Acceptance Of Jesus

His demands upon those who would follow Him were radical- to take up a cross and follow Him, to hate father and mother, to sacrifice all worldly ambition for Him. Jesus often spoke of breaking with ones natural family; and His own example showed as ever what He meant. Yet the family was the primary social unit in 1st century Palestine, the basis of identity and security. The man who wanted to first bury his father before following the Lord was rejected by the demanding Jesus- when to properly bury one's dead was among the most sacred obligations of Judaism. His standards were sometimes unbelievably high. Whoever called his brother a fool (Gk. *more*-a moron, but implying a rebel, an apostate- Ps. 78:8; Jer. 5:23 LXX) was liable to eternal condemnation by Him. When struck on the right cheek- which was a Semitic insult to a heretic (1)- they were to not respond and open themselves up for further insult [surely a lesson for those brethren who are falsely accused of wrong beliefs]. And yet the compassion of Jesus shines through both His parables and the records of His words; as does His acceptance of people for who they were. People were relaxed with

Him because they could see He had no hidden agenda. He wasn't going to use them for His own power trip. He kept saying, His concrete Kingdom was yet to come. He wasn't going to heap criticism and guilt upon them. And so people came to Him. Today people are wary of joining a religious group because they feel they cannot be themselves, that they will be forced into positions that do violence to their integrity. But Jesus didn't treat people like this; and that's just why they came to Him. And this surely must be a lesson for us, never to institutionalize the body of Christ so that we turn people away from Him rather than bring them to Him. His sensitivity to people was and is simply stunning. Sensitive people today, living as we do in this hard world, can find life unbearably difficult. Every encounter with others can become excruciating. Yet Jesus, the most sensitive man who ever lived, went through all this. Victoriously. The way He forgave the thief on the cross, who had just "cast the same [abuse] in His teeth"as had the unrepentant thief, is an essay in this. Jesus was sensitive enough to understand the tortured spirit and pain which gave rise to peoples' unkind behaviour. Jesus saw the man's anguish, and had pity rather than anger with Him. And somehow, in perhaps only His body language in response to the abuse from the two thieves, the one thief was motivated to repent and dare to ask for salvation.

Consider how He asks Zacchaeus to eat with Him- a public sign of religious fellowship in first century Palestine. This acceptance of the man for who and where he was, inspired Zacchaeus to then start changing his life in practice- he then offered to give back what he had stolen. When quizzed as to why He ate / fellowshipped with sinners, the Lord replied that He had come to call sinners to repentance (Lk. 5:32). Think through the implications of this. He fellowshipped with those who were so weak within the ecclesia of Israel so as to bring them to repentance; His eating with them was like a doctor making a home visit. The religious attitude of the Pharisees was that one only fellowshipped someone who was repentant; whereas the Lord said that He fellowshipped with people to bring them to repentance. Note how in Lk. 19:1-10, the Lord offered salvation to sinners *before* they had repented. It's the same idea.

Time and again His parables sought to justify His association with outcasts (Lk. 14:15-24; 15:1-32; Mt. 18:23-25; 20:1-15; 21:28-32). When the nobleman came to ask Jesus to cure his son, Jesus agreed; and the man went home. But it was only on the way home that he really believed. He came to faith spontaneously, and not because Jesus insisted on it. Or remember the woman who had had five men in her life, and presumably a number of children to go with each of them. Her face and body would have reflected the story of her life. She was living with someone not her husband. Jesus didn't tell her to break up with the guy. He knew full well that if a woman left her man, she had nowhere to go. Here was a woman who had been 'married' five times. Who would want her? There were children involved. Probably even her family had rejected her. Jesus accepted the real life situation, and human failure to rise up to higher standards. One wonders whether the very lack of specific demand from Jesus maybe motivated her to somehow normalize her life. The gentle way Jesus treated these cases shows not so much approval, but an understanding of the frailty of human nature. And this is what enabled Jesus to be so unwaveringly committed to His own perfect standards, and yet be so natural and at ease with the lowest of the low.

Notes

(1) Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon On The Mount* (London: Athlone Press, 1961) pp. 27,28.

2-17 Jesus: A Man Misunderstood

The Gospel writers three times bring out the point that people perceived that the Lord Jesus didn't "care" for people. The disciples in the boat thought that He didn't care if they perished (Mk. 4:38); Martha thought He didn't care that she was left in an impossible domestic situation, doubtless assuming He was a mere victim of common male insensitivity to women (Lk. 10:40); and twice it is recorded that the people generally had the impression that He cared for nobody (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 12:14). And yet the Lord uses the very same word to speak of the hired shepherd who cares not for the sheep- whereas He as the good shepherd cares for them so much that He dies for them (Jn. 10:13). I find this *so* tragic- that the most caring, self-sacrificial person of all time wasn't perceived as that, wasn't credited for it all. The disciples surely wrote the Gospels with shame over this matter. It points up the loneliness of the Lord's agonizing last hours. And yet it provides comfort for all unappreciated caregivers, as spouses, parents, children, servants of the ecclesia. . . in their suffering they are sharing something of the Lord's agony.

It has been so often pointed out that the crowd who welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem with shouts of "Hosanna!" were the very people who days later were screaming "Crucify him!". It's been suggested that the crowds were comprised of two different groups; those who shouted "Hosanna!" were those who had come up from Galilee, and the Jerusalem crowd shouted "Crucify Him!". But Jn. 12:13 and Jn. 19:14,15 seem to encourage us to make a connection between the two scenes, for "the crowd" *shouts* both times- firstly "Hosanna!", and then "Crucify Him!". Personally I am convinced it was the same basic crowd. They were a classic witness to the fickleness of human loyalty to God's Son. And remember that only a few months after Jerusalem slew Him, the leaders of the Jews feared that "the people" would have stoned them if they acted too roughly with the followers of Jesus (Acts 5:26). Popular opinion had swayed back the other way again. And a while later, it was to sway against the Christians again, when "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). But this leads to questions, questions which aren't answered by a simple acceptance of humanity's fickleness. Why this *anger* with Jesus, a man who truly went about doing good, caring for little children, impressing others with the evident congruity between His words and His person? How could it have happened that the anger of His people was so focused against Him, leading them to prefer a murderer as against a Man who clearly came to give life, and that more abundantly…?

The answer, I suggest, lies in the way that they misunderstood Him. They liked Him; the Jewish authorities despaired even just prior to His death that "the world is gone after him", because so many of the Jews were [apparently] "Believing in him" (Jn. 12:11,19); His popularity seems to have resurged to an all time high on his final visit to Jerusalem. The crowds liked some aspects of the idea of this man Jesus of Nazareth; they are described in John's Gospel as "believing on him", and yet John makes it clear that this was not the real belief which the Lord sought. John makes this point within Jn. 6:14,26: "When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world… Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled". The crowd appeared to respond and perceive the significance of the sign-miracles; but the Lord knew that they had not properly understood. They apparently "believed", but would not confess Him before men (Jn. 12:42)- and such 'confession' is vital for salvation (Rom. 10:9,10 s. w.). For all their liking of Jesus and some of the things that He stood for, they willingly closed their hearts to the radical import of His essential message of self-crucifixion, of a cross before the crown, of a future Kingdom which inverts all human values, where the humble are the greatest, the poor in spirit are the truly rich, the despised are the honoured. . .

They welcomed Him into Jerusalem with the waving of palm fronds. These were a symbol of Jewish nationalism- hence the palm appeared on the coins of the Second Revolt (AD 132-135). Back in 164 BC when Judas Maccabeus rededicated the temple altar, palms were brought to the temple (2 Macc. 10:7); and Simon Maccabeus led the Jews back into Jerusalem with palm fronds in 1 Macc. 13:51. The crowd were therefore welcoming Jesus, expecting Him to announce His Messianic Kingdom there and then. The "Hosanna!" of Jn. 12:13 was used in addressing kings in 2 Sam. 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26. It meant literally "Save *now*!". They wanted a Kingdom there and then. His whole interpretation of the Kingdom, extensively and so patiently delivered for over three years, had simply failed to register with them. It seems that only after the crowd had started doing this, that the Lord sat upon the donkey, to fulfill the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Israel's King would come to them "humble, and riding upon a donkey"- not a warhorse. And, moreover, Zechariah says that He would come commanding peace [and not bloodlust] *to the Gentiles*, with a world-wide dominion from sea to sea, not merely in Palestine. Those who perceived the Lord's allusion to Zechariah 9 would have realized this was what His acted parable was trying to tell them- the Lord Jesus was not out to destroy Rome but to bring peace to them as well as all the Gentile world. A humble, lowly king was a paradox which they could not comprehend. A king, especially the Messanic King of Israel, had to be proud and war-like. The crowd must have been so terribly disappointed. He purposefully abased Himself and sat upon a donkey. This Jesus whom they had liked and loved and hoped in, turned out to totally and fundamentally *not* be the person they thought He was- despite Him so patiently seeking to show them who He really was for so long. He had become an image in their own minds, of their own creation, convenient to their own agendas- and when the truth dawned on them, that He was *not* that person, their anger against Him knew no bounds. The Russian atheist Maxim Gorky commented, in terrible language but with much truth in it, that man has created God in his own image and after his own likeness. And for so many, this is indeed the case. The image of Jesus which the crowds had was only partially based on who He really was. Some things they understood right, but very much they didn't. And they turned away in disgust

and anger when they realized how deeply and basically they had misunderstood Him. They angrily commented: "Who is this son of man?" (Jn. 12:34). In that context, Jesus had not said a word about being "son of man". But they were effectively saying: 'What sort of Messiah / son of man figure is this? We thought you were the son-of-man Messiah, who would deliver us right now. Clearly you're not the type of Messiah / Christ we thought you were'.

All this would explain perfectly why the awful torture and mocking of Jesus in His time of dying was based around His claims to be a King. The crown of thorns, the mock-royal robe, the 'sceptre' put in His hand, then taken away and used to beat Him with, the mocking title over His body "This is the King of the Jews", the anger of the Jewish leaders about this even being written as it was, the jeers of the crowd about this "King"- all this reflects the extent of anger there was with the nature of His 'Kingship'. All the parables and teaching about the true nature of His Kingship / Kingdom had been totally ignored. The Lord had told them plainly enough. But it hadn't penetrated at all… The Lord was not only misunderstood by the crowds, but His very being amongst men had provoked in them a crisis of conscience; and their response was to repress that conscience. As many others have done and do to this day, they had shifted their discontent onto an innocent victim, artificially creating a culprit and stirring up hatred against him. Their angry turning against Him was therefore a direct outcome of the way He had touched their consciences.
Such tragic misunderstanding of persons occurs all the time, to varying intensities. One frequently finds married couples with such anger against each other that it seems hard for an outsider to appreciate how two such nice people could be so angry with each other. The source of that anger is often traceable to a misunderstanding of each other during courtship. Each party built up an idealized or simply incorrect image of the other; and once they really got to know the other, in the humdrum of daily life, there was a great release of anger- that the spouse was not the person the other partner had imaged. The goodness of who they really goes unperceived and is readily discounted- simply because they don't live up to the mistaken image which the spouse had of them in other areas.

I knew a fine brother, well known for his preaching and Biblical expositions in a conservative circle of ecclesias in the 1950s and 1960s. He was by anyone's standards a conservative, a hard liner, ever eager to point out how all other Christians would be damned and we alone 'had the truth'. He preached a very graphic Gospel of a future Kingdom, where the Lord would return and gleefully crush all opposition and other dissenting churches under His feet. Much applauded at the time, his articles in conservative magazines remain to this day, gathering dust on shelves. Then, the brother changed. He started explaining that such an attitude had been wrong. He emphasized the spiritual graces of the Kingdom, exploring more fully the present aspect of the Lord's Kingship and Lordship over us, teaching tolerance for those who are misbelievers, and a loving, corrective rather than judgmental attitude towards "those who oppose themselves". And the anger of the community became focused upon him. Slandered, hated and humiliated, he was effectively crucified by his brethren. And we have all probably seen something similar go on in our own lives, when someone has a false perception of us and then finds we stand for different things than they thought we did. So often, there is an expression of anger. And it is this kind of anger which has been so destructive, and responsible for so much of the shameful division in the true church. This anger is, it seems to me, largely related to fear- fear that our understanding was a misperception, fear that we were actually wrong, that our judgments were incorrect, fear that who our brethren really are, and who the Lord Jesus really is, might reveal us in a poorer light. And it is this fear which paralyzes all meaningful growth in understanding and relationships, be it of our Lord or of our brethren, family or friends.

Paul Tournier comments with true insight upon these phenomena: "…the preacher who thunders loudly from the pulpit in order to drown out his own haunting doubts…the confusion of minds is such that many men, in order to reassure themselves, cling with cramped fanaticism to some curious doctrine. In order to still the voice of their inner illness they cast themselves into that sectarian intolerance which involves opposing parties in strife and controversy…when a man is not sure of himself, he pretends to be the man who is unshakably convinced…the more living faith grows weaker in the church, the more the church takes refuge in formalism and intolerance". This was why Joseph's brothers turned against him, prefiguring the Jewish destruction of Jesus; it's why to this day, the Jews so strongly reject Jesus. It's why apparently devout Christians are capable of the most awful vendettas and campaigns against those who tweak their guilty consciences. To quote Tournier again: "Moral malaise and unconscious guilt feelings…release vicious reactions of perversity and that particular form of refined and insatiable compulsion which we call hate.

None are so likely to become violent polemicists and to exhibit a violence, tenacity and formidable dynamism, accompanied by denigration, accusation and calumny, as those who have something on their conscience" (1). Thus the strong of this world are in fact the weak; and thus the Biblical paradox that the weak are the strong and vice versa has a definitely true psychological basis.

But returning to the misunderstood Jesus, welcomed by the crowds with palm fronds in hope of an immediate Messianic Kingdom. Surely John intends us to think back to that when we read in Rev. 7:9 that the Lord will be welcomed by another large crowd, from every nation, carrying palm fronds and calling out praise to Him for dying on the cross and redeeming them. Here are those who truly understand Him. The Lord had in mind this contrast between the crowd and those who would truly understand Him when He said that "Now is the son of man glorified" in the things of the cross (Jn. 12:23) in contrast to the crowds who were shouting "Glory in the highest!" at the prospect of Him there and then inaugurating the Messianic Kingdom (Lk. 19:38). The true glory to God was to be through the lonely rejection of the cross. He who quietly honours / glorifies the Father (Jn. 5:23; 8:49) in the life of self-crucifixion will be honoured / glorified by the Father quietly in this life, and openly in the age to come (Jn. 12:26); such is the mutuality between a man and his God. And the Lord had earlier taught the crowds to focus more on the gift of Him as a person and His sacrifice, than on the literal achievement of the Kingdom there and then. The Jews understood the coming of manna to be a sign that the Messianic Kingdom had come. Their writings are full of this idea:

- "You shall not find manna in this age, but you shall find it in the age that is coming" (Midrash Mekilta on Ex. 16:25)
- "As the first redeemer caused manna to descend…so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend" (Midrash Rabbah on Ecc. 1:9)
- "[The manna] has been prepared for…the age to come" (Midrash Tanhuma, *Beshallah* 21:66).

Yet the Lord told them in Jn. 6 that the true manna was His flesh, which He was to give for the life of the world. Some have supposed from Josh. 5:10-12 cp. Ex. 16:35 that the manna fell for the first time on the eve of the Passover, thus adding even more poignancy to the Lord's equation of the manna with His death. Yet all this painstaking attempt to re-focus the crowds on the spiritual rather than the literal, salvation through His death rather than an immediate benefit for them, patient eating / sharing in His sufferings rather than eternity here and now…all this went so tragically unheeded. And it does to this day. If you feel misunderstood, and a victim of others' anger because of it, realize that you are directly fellowshipping the sufferings of your Lord. You can enter somewhat into the ultimate tragedy, of the misunderstood love of God as it was poured out in the Lord Jesus to an uncomprehending and misunderstanding world. Don't minimize what you're going through. You really are suffering with Him. And just as surely as you went into the water at baptism and came up out of it, so you will share in His resurrection life, both now and eternally. But further. The danger is that we can be like the Jewish crowds, apparently "believing in him", when all we are believing in ever more strongly is a mixture of our own perception of Jesus, mixed with some aspects of His true personality which appeal to us. He faces us, with His whole person and history. We are to believe in the *real* Christ, the *whole* person of Jesus, with *all* His radical and shocking demands upon us. May it never be true of us that we angrily complain in the last day, as did the Jews, "What sort of Christ is this? You weren't who *we* thought you were…Now we see, you are a hard man…". We are not to define Him according to who we think He should be; we are to read and meditate upon the Gospel records and allow ourselves to be confronted with the pure totality of who He essentially is, was and shall ever be. And to respond and believe in what we 'see' in Him.

Notes

(1) Paul Tournier, *The Whole Person In A Broken World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1964 ed.), pp. 34,73.

2-18 The Real Cross: Today Is Friday

The idea that the Lord Jesus ended the Law of Moses on the cross needs some reflection. That statement only pushes the question back one stage further- how exactly did He 'end' the Law there? How did a man dying on a cross actually end the Law? The Lord Jesus, supremely in His death, was "the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4). But the Greek *telos* ["end"] is elsewhere translated "the goal" (1 Tim. 1:5 NIV). The

character and person of the Lord Jesus at the end was the goal of the Mosaic law; those 613 commandments, if perfectly obeyed, were intended to give rise to a personality like that of the Lord Jesus. When He reached the climax of His personal development and spirituality, in the moment of His death, the Law was "fulfilled". He taught that He "came" in order to die; and yet He also "came" in order to "fulfil" the Law (Mt. 5:17).

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em. . . Ain't I seen 'em? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today" . And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening (1). Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life.

The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i. e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person . In essence, He was. **All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God.** And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith. It is in our reflections upon the cross that we see revealed the real nature and quality of our relationship with the Lord Jesus. When we survey the wondrous cross… there ought to be that sense of wonder, of love for Him, of conviction of our personal sins, and also conviction of the reality of His forgiveness. As we survey that wondrous cross, all commentary is bathos. It's like trying to describe the Ninth Symphony in words. It is so much easier, so less challenging, to respond to the cross by seeking to describe it in the words of atonement theory. All the ink pointlessly spilt in this area is indicative of this; there seems an obsession with 'the doctrine of the atonement'. But the essential response to the cross is not any commentary in words; for as I've said, grasping it for what it is convicts us that all commentary is bathos. Not words, not theories of explanation, but feelings, belief deep in the heart, challenge to our habits and traits of character, real, actual, concrete and practical change, a transformation that is empowered by the Man hanging there.

Notes

(1) "Today is Friday" in *The Short Stories Of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Scribner's, 1954), p. 357.

2-19 The Same Yesterday And Today

The relevance of all this is that Jesus Christ is the same today as He was yesterday. The Jesus of history is the Christ of faith. The *same* Jesus who went into Heaven will *so* come again *in like manner* (Acts 1:11). The record three times says the same thing. The "like manner" in which the Lord will return doesn't necessarily refer to the way He gradually ascended up in to the sky, in full view of the gazing disciples. He was to return in the "like manner" to what they had seen. Yet neither those disciples nor the majority of the Lord's people will literally see Him descending through the clouds at His return- for they will be dead. But we will 'see' Him at His return "in like manner" as He was when on earth. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Jesus who loved little children and wept over Jerusalem's self-righteous

religious leaders, so desirous of their salvation, is the One who today mediates our prayers and tomorrow will confront us at judgment day. Perhaps the Lord called the disciples His "brethren" straight after His resurrection in order to emphasize that He, the resurrected Man and Son of God, was eager to renew His relationships with those He had known in the flesh. It's as if He didn't want them to think that somehow, everything had changed. Indeed, He stresses to them that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God (Jn. 20:18). He appears to be alluding here to Ruth 1:16 LXX. Here, Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God". This allusion would therefore be saying: 'OK I am of a different people to you now, but that doesn't essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God'.
And there's another rather nice indicator of the Lord's conscious effort to show His 'humanity' even after His resurrection. It's in the way the risen Lord calls out to the disciples at the lake, calling them "lads" (Jn. 21:5). The Greek *paidion* is the plural familiar form of the noun *pais*, 'boy'. Raymond Brown comments that the term "has a colloquial touch…[as] we might say 'My boys' or 'lads' if calling to a knot of strangers of a lower social class" (1). Why use this colloquial term straight after His resurrection, something akin to 'Hey guys!', when this was not His usual way of addressing them? Surely it was to underline to them that things hadn't changed in one sense, even if they had in others; He was still the same Jesus. The Lord was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke the bread. How He broke a loaf of bread open with His hands *after* His resurrection reflected the same basic style and mannerism which He had employed *before* His death. Not only the body language but the Lord's choice of words and expressions was similar both before and after His passion. He uses the question "Whom are you looking for?" at the beginning of His ministry (Jn. 1:38), just before His death (Jn. 18:4) and also after His resurrection (Jn. 20:15). And the words of the risen Lord as recorded in Revelation are shot through with allusion to the words He used in His mortal life, as also recorded by John.

Significantly, both Luke and John conclude their Gospels with the risen Lord walking along with the disciples, and them 'following' Him (Jn. 21:20)- just as they had done during His ministry. His invitation to 'Follow me' (Jn. 21:19,22) is the very language He had used whilst He was still mortal (Jn. 1:37,43; 10:27; 12:26; Mk. 1:18; 2:14). The point being, that although He was now different, in another sense, He still related to them as He did when He was mortal, walking the lanes and streets of 1st century Palestine. Elsewhere we have pointed out that the fishing incident of Jn. 21 is purposefully framed as a repetition of that recorded in Lk. 5- again, to show the continuity between the Jesus of yesterday and the Jesus of today. It's as if in no way does He wish us to feel that His Divine Nature and glorified, exalted position somehow separates us from Him. When the Lord awoke, He would have immediately been aware of the carefully wrapped grave clothes and the anointing oil. He would have then realized the care shown to Him by His sisters. Some of the very first thoughts of the risen Lord were of His brethren. There was no gap between His mortal awareness of His brethren, and His feelings for them after resurrection.

Even in His mortal life, the Lord was eager to as it were close the gap between Himself and His followers, so that they didn't feel He was an unattainable, distant icon to admire, but rather a true friend, leader, King and example to realistically follow. Thus when He cursed the fig tree, having prayed about it and firmly believing that what He had asked would surely come about, Peter marvelled: "Master, behold, the fig tree you cursed is withered!". The Lord replies by urging Peter to "Have faith in God. For truly I tell you, *whosoever* (and this is the stress, surely) shall say unto this mountain (far bigger than a fig tree) , Be removed be cast into the sea (a far greater miracle than withering a fig tree overnight), and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he says will come to pass (referring to how the words of Jesus to the fig tree were effectively His prayer to God about it); he shall *whatever* he says. Therefore I say unto *you*, Whatever *you* desire (just as I desired the withering of the fig tree), when *you* pray, believe that you receive them, and *you* shall have them (just as I did regarding the fig tree)" (Mk. 11:21-24). Peter's amazement at the power of the Lord's prayers was therefore turned back on him- '*You too* can do what I just did, and actually greater things are possible for you than what I just did'. That was the message here- and He repeated it in the upper room, in encouraging them that "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do" (Jn. 14:12). Even when making the profoundest claims to be God's Son, sent from God and destined to ascend to Heaven, the Lord in the same context emphasizes His humanity- e. g. in Jn. 8:26, having spoken of His origins, Father, and destiny, He stresses that *He* has much He'd like to say and judge of His generation, but He could only share

what His Father had taught Him to speak. This was a very pointed presentation of His humanity, and He made it lest His hearers think that He was altogether other-worldly.

The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. “They see the Kingdom of God come” (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by “They see the Son of man coming” (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the ‘coming’ of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal ‘coming’ of the Lord Jesus (e. g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i. e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory. It just isn't true that He came as a meek, gentle person, but will roar back as an angry lion. At His second coming, He will reveal "the wrath of the lamb". Can you imagine an angry lamb? Yes, lambs can get angry. But it's a lamb-like anger. He came as the lamb for sinners slain, and yet He will still essentially be a lamb at His return. The Jesus who loved little children, sensitive to others weaknesses, desperate for their salvation, is the same one who will return to judge us. Even after His resurrection, in His present immortal nature, He thoughtfully cooked breakfast on the beach for His men (Jn. 21;9,12). And this is the Lord who will return to judge us. After His resurrection He was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke bread. The way He handled the loaf, His mannerisms, His way of speaking and choice of language, were evidently the same after His resurrection as before (Lk. 24:30,31). <u>The Lord is the same today as yesterday</u>.

Our tendency to value, indeed to worship, human works leads to great frustration with ourselves. Only by realizing the extent of grace can we become free from this. So many struggle with accepting unfulfilment-coping with loss, with the fact we didn’t make as good a job of something as we wanted, be it raising our kids or the website we work on or the book we write or the room we decorated… And as death approaches, this sense becomes stronger and more urgent. Young people tend to think that it’s only a matter of time before they sort it out and achieve. But that time never comes. It’s only by surrendering to grace, abandoning the trust in and glorying in our own works, that we can come to accept the uncompleted and unfulfilled in our lives, and to smile at those things and know that of course, I can never ‘do’ or achieve enough.
Realizing that we are in the grace of God, justified by Him through our being in Christ, leads us to a far greater and happier acceptance of ourselves as persons. So many people are unhappy with themselves. It’s why we look in mirrors in a certain way when nobody else is watching; why we’re so concerned to see how we turned out in a photograph. Increasingly, this graceless world can’t accept itself. People aren’t happy or acceptant of their age [they want to look and be younger or older], their body, their family situation, even their gender and their own basic personality. I found that when I truly accepted my salvation by grace, when the wonder of who I am in God’s sight, as a man in Christ, really dawned on me… I became far happier with myself, far more acceptant. Now of course in another sense, we are called to radical transformation, to change, to rise above the narrow limits of our own backgrounds. This is indeed the call of Christ. But I refer to our acceptance of who we are, and the situations we are in, as basic human beings.

Jesus is right now "quick to discern the thoughts and intents of [our hearts]" in mediating for us (Heb. 4:12 RV). But this is how He was in His mortal life here- for then He was "of quick understanding" too (Is. 11:3). He would have had a way of seeing through to the essence of a person or situation with awesome speed- and this must have made human life very irritating for Him at times. But who He was then is who He is now. It's the same Jesus who intercedes for us in sensitivity and compassion. Note carefully the tense used in Heb. 4:15: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities". It doesn't say 'which could not have been touched. . . ', but rather "which cannot [present tense] be touched". It's as if He is *now* touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Which opens a fascinating window into what having God's nature is all about. When we by grace come to share it, it's not just that we will dimly remember what it was like to be human. We will somehow still be able to be touched by those feelings, in sympathy with those who still have that nature during the Millennial reign. The only other time the Spirit uses the Greek word translated "touched with the feeling. . . " is in Heb. 10:34, where we read of how the Hebrew Christians "had compassion of me", the writer of the letter. The link, within the same letter, is

surely to reflect how they had been so compelled by their Lord's fellow feelings toward them, His fellow feeling for them right now, that they in turn came to feel like this for their suffering brother. A related word is found in 1 Pet. 3:8: "Having *compassion one of another*, love as brethren". The wonder of the fact that Jesus feels for us, that He can enter into our feelings, should result in our seeing to get inside the feelings of others, empathizing with them, feeling for them and with them.

It's this feature of the Lord Jesus which enables Him to be such a matchless mediator. Stephen saw Him *standing* at the right hand of the throne in Heaven, when usually, Hebrews stresses, He *sits*. The Lord was and is so passionately, compassionately, caught up in the needs of His brethren that this is how He mediates for us. And it's the same Jesus, who walked round Galilee with a heart of compassion for kids, for the mentally sick, for oppressed and abused women. . . even for the hard hearted Pharisees whom He would fain have gathered under His loving wings, such was His desire for others' salvation. One of the great themes of Matthew's gospel is that various men and women 'came to Jesus' at different times and in a variety of situations. The Lord uses the same term to describe how at the last day, people will once again 'come unto' Him (Mt. 25:20-24). The same Jesus whom they 'came before' in His ministry is the one to whom they and we shall again come at the last day- to receive a like gracious acceptance. He will judge and reason the same way He did during His mortality. Likewise we know what kind of judge Christ is, and so the meeting of Him in final judgment need not be for us something so terribly unknown and uncertain. We know that He is the judge who 'justifies' sinners- the Greek word means not so much 'making righteous', but 'acquiting, declaring righteous' in a legal sense. It's unthinkable that a human judge treats the guilty as if they are righteous and innocent, just because they are "in" Christ. It's also unheard of that a judge also is the counsel for the defence! But this is the kind of judge we have, day by day- to those who believe. Will He be so different in the last day?

"The Kingdom of God" was a title used of Jesus. He 'was' the Kingdom because He lived the Kingdom life. Who He would be, was who He was in His life. At the prospect of being made "full of joy" at the resurrection, "therefore did my heart rejoice" (Acts 2:26,28). His joy during His mortal life was related to the joy He now experiences in His immortal life. And this is just one of the many continuities between the moral and the immortal Jesus. Pause for a moment to reflect that the Lord's resurrection is a pattern for our own. This is the whole meaning of baptism. "God has both raised the Lord and will raise us up through his power" (1 Cor. 6:13,14). Yet there were evident continuities between the Jesus who lived mortal life, and the Jesus who rose again. His mannerisms, body language, turns of phrase, were so human- even after His resurrection. **And so who we are now, as persons, is who we will eternally be.** Because of the resurrection, our personalities in the sum of all their relationships and nuances, *have an eternal future*. But from whence do we acquire those nuances, body languages, etc? They arise partly from our parents, from our inter-relations with others etc; we are the sum of our relationships. And this is in fact a tremendous encouragement to us in our efforts for others; for the result of our parenting, our patient effort and grace towards others, will have an eternal effect upon others. Who we help them become is, in part, who they will eternally be. Job reflected that if a tree is cut down, it sprouts (Heb. *yaliph*) again as the same tree; and he believed that after his death he would likewise sprout again (*yaliph*) at the resurrection (Job 14:7-9,14,15). There will be a continuity between who we were in mortal life, and who we will eternally be- just as there is between the pruned tree and the new tree which grows again out of its stump. At His return, Christ will "fashion anew the body of our humiliation" (Phil. 3:21 RV)- implying a reworking of the same basic material both before and after the 'refashioning' process. All our obedience and response to God's word in this life is likened to building a foundation which will endure beyond the storm, representative as that is of judgment day at Christ's return (Lk. 6:48). **There is therefore a link between who we are now and who we will eternally be; we are building now the foundation for our eternity.**

If who we are now is who we will eternally be, in essence. . . then some of life's most crucial questions are begged of us. If we don't know what to do with ourselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon, if we go back to work on retirement sheerly for something to do, if our hours are spent on endless soap operas and crossword puzzles. . . is that what we wish to spend *eternity* doing? I don't say that some element of relaxation is somehow disallowed for the believer; but if who we are now is who we will eternally be. . . is our yearning for some future existence motivated by a desire to love and serve God and His Son, or is it simply the normal response to the fear of death which each of us has? It was exactly because of who the Lord Jesus was in His mortal life that it was just, rightful, purposeful. . . that He should be raised from the dead and live

eternally. **By reason of our being in Him and living life for and through and in Him** (and for no other reason), there becomes a point and purpose in our resurrection to eternal existence likewise.

The Lord had such a wide experience of human life and suffering so that not one of us could ever complain that He does not know in essence what we are going through. This is my simple answer to the question of why, exactly why, did Jesus have to suffer so much and in the ways that He did. Take one example of how His earthly experiences were the basis of how He later administered "grace to help in time of need" for a believer. The Lord's one time close friend Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn. 18:5. **Paul says that none of the brethren 'stood with' him when he was on trial, but "the Lord [Jesus] stood with me" (2 Tim. 4:16,17).** It seems to me that the Lord knew exactly what it felt like to be left alone by your brethren, as happened to Him in Gethsemane and at His trials; and so at Paul's trial He could 'stand with' him, based on His earthly experience of being left to stand alone. In our lives likewise, the Lord acts to help us based on His earthly experiences; He knows how we feel, because He in essence went through it all. John maybe has the image of Judas and Peter standing with the Lord's enemies in mind when he writes that the redeemed shall stand with Jesus on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1), facing the hostile world.

Who the Lord Jesus was is who He will be in the future; in the same way as who *we* are now, is who we will eternally be. For our spirit, our essential personality, will be *saved* in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5). "Flesh and blood" will not inherit the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50); and yet the risen, glorified Lord Jesus was "flesh and bones" (Lk. 24:39). We will be who we essentially are today, but with Spirit instead of blood energizing us. It's a challenging thought, as we consider the state of our "spirit", the essential 'me' which will be preserved, having been stored in Heaven in the Father's memory until the day when it is united with the new body which we will be given at resurrection. For in all things the Lord is our pattern; and we will in that day be given a body like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:21)- which is still describable as "flesh and bones" in appearance (Lk. 24:39). Note that whilst flesh and *blood* cannot inherit the Kingdom, the risen, immortal Lord Jesus described Himself as flesh and *bones* (Lk. 24:39). In fact, we find that "flesh and bones" are often paralleled (Gen. 2:23; Job 10:11; 33:21; Ps. 38:3; Prov. 14:30), and simply mean 'the person', or as the Lord put it on that occasion, "I myself". We ourselves will be in the Kingdom, with similar personalities we have now [that's a very challenging thought of itself]. "Flesh" doesn't necessarily have to refer, in every instance, to something condemned. Who we are now is who we will essentially be in the eternity of God's Kingdom. Let's not allow any idea that somehow our flesh / basic being is so awful that actually, the essential "I myself" will be dissolved beneath the wrath of God at the judgment. The Lord is "the saviour of the body" and will also save our "spirit" at the last day; so that we, albeit with spirit rather than blood energizing us, will live eternally. Understanding things this way enables us to perceive more forcefully the eternal importance of who we develop into as persons, right now. The Buddhist belief that we will ultimately not exist, that such 'Nirvana' is the most wonderful thing to hope for, appears at first hearing a strange 'hope' to be shared by millions of followers. But actually, it's the same essential psychology as that behind the idea that 'I' will not exist in the Kingdom of God, I will be given a new body, person and character. It's actually saying the same- I won't exist. And it's rooted in a terribly low self-image, a dis-ease with ourselves, a lack of acceptance of ourselves as the persons whom God made us and develops us into. Whilst of course our natures will be changed, so that we can be immortal, it is *we* who will be saved; our body will be resurrected, made new, and our spirit "saved" in that day, reunited with our renewed and immortal bodies. We have eternal life in the sense that who we are now, in spiritual terms, is who we will eternally be. Our spirit, the essential us, is in this sense immortal; it's remembered with the Lord. In this sense, not even death itself, nor time itself, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). Just as we still love someone after they have died, remembering as they do who they were and still are to us, so it is with the love of God for the essential us. Hence 1 Pet. 3:4 speaks of how a "gentle and calm disposition" or spirit is in fact "imperishable" (NAB)- because that spirit of character will be eternally remembered. This is why personality and character, rather than physical works, are of such ultimate and paramount importance. How we speak now is in a way, how we will eternally speak- I think that's the idea of Prov. 12:19: "The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment". Our "way" of life and being is how we will eternally be- and for me that solves the enigma of Prov. 12:28: "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death". In Jeremiah 18, God likens Himself to a potter working with us the clay. We can resist how He wants us to be, and He can make us into something else. . . we are soft clay until the 'firing'; and the day of firing is surely the day of judgment. The

implication is that in this life we are soft clay; but the day of judgment will set us hard as the persons we have become, or have been made into, in this life.

The continuity between the mortal, human Jesus and the exalted Lord of all which He became on His ascension is brought out quite artlessly in Heb. 4:14: "Our great high priest, who has passed through the heavens". The picture is of "this same Jesus", the man on earth, passing through all heavens to 'arrive' at the throne of God Himself to mediate for us there. His ascension to Heaven was viewed physically like this by the disciples, and is expressed here in that kind of language of physical ascent, to bring home to us the continuity between the man Jesus on earth, and the exalted Lord now in Heaven itself. The same Jesus who once experienced temptation can thereby strengthen us in our temptations. We need to realize that nobody can be tempted by that which holds no appeal; the Lord Jesus must have seen and reflected upon sin as a possible course of action, even though He never took it. And for the same reason, several New Testament passages (e. g. 1 Tim. 2:5) call the exalted Lord Jesus a "man"- even now. Let's not see these passages merely as theological problems for trinitarians. The wonder of it all is that Jesus after His glorification is still in some sense human. He as "the pioneer of our faith" shows us the path to glory, a glory that doesn't involve us becoming somehow superhuman and unreal. Charles Hodge marvelled: "The supreme ruler of the universe is a perfect man"(2). Charles Wesley caught some of this in his hymn:
Of our flesh and of our bones,
Jesus is our brother now.

The Glory Of The Lord
The continuity of personality between the human Jesus and the now-exalted Jesus is brought out by meditation upon His "glory". The glory of God refers to His essential personality and characteristics. When He 'glorifies Himself', He articulates that personality- e. g. in the condemnation of the wicked or the salvation of His people. Thus God was " glorified" in the judgment of the disobedient (Ez. 28:22; 39:13), just as much as He is " glorified" in the salvation of His obedient people. God glorified Himself in redeeming Israel, both in saving them out of Babylon, and ultimately in the future. Thus He was glorified in His servant Israel (Is. 44:23; 49:3). There are therefore both times and issues over which the Father is glorified. He was above all glorified in the resurrection of His Son. Each of these 'glorifications' meant that the essential Name / personality of the Father was being manifested and justified. The glory of the Lord Jesus was that of the Father. He was glorified in various ways and at different times within His ministry (e. g. Jn. 11:4); but He was also glorified in His resurrection and exaltation (Jn. 7:39). As the Lord approached the cross, He asked that the Father's Name be glorified. The response from Heaven was that God had already glorified it in Christ, and would do so again (Jn. 12:28). At the last Supper, the Lord could say: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (Jn. 13:31). And yet various Scriptures teach that the Son of man was to be glorified in His death, in His resurrection (Acts 3:13), at His ascension, in His priestly mediation for us now (Heb. 5:5), in the praise His body on earth would give Him, in their every victory over sin, in every convert made (Acts 13:48; 2 Thess. 3:1), in every answered prayer (Jn. 14:13), and especially at His return (2 Thess. 1:10). . . So the glorification of the Lord Jesus wasn't solely associated with His resurrection, and therefore it wasn't solely associated with His nature being changed or His receiving a new body. In each of these events, and at each of these times, the Name / glory / personality of the Father is being manifested, justified and articulated.

The Lord Jesus had that "glory" in what John calls "the beginning", and he says that he and the other disciples witnessed that glory (Jn. 1:14). "The beginning" in John's Gospel often has reference to the beginning of the Lord's ministry. There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of God's glory as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His "own self", His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). **It is *God's* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).** Jesus is the brightness of God's

glory, because He is the express image of God's personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God's glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the "Father of glory", the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father's glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him".

What all this exposition means in practice is this. **There is only "one glory" of God**. That glory refers to the essential "self", the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been "glorified", and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons (note that- *to be persons*!) who reflect and 'are' that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror. The outline of God's glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. The essence of who we are now in our spiritual man, how we reflect it, in our own unique way, is how we shall always be.
And so the Man who walked dusty Galilee streets is the very same one, in essence, whom we will meet in judgment day. The ultimate question for each of us, is whether we will be accepted by Him. In the Gospels, we see the Son of man, Son of God, so acceptant of others, so patient with their weaknesses, passionately dying for our salvation. Will He turn as it were another face on us at the day of judgment, showing Himself suddenly and unpredictably to be someone else? Like people we know, who suddenly surprised us one day by showing a completely different aspect to their character? I believe He won't. Because integrity and consistency of character, sharing His Father's characteristic of not changing, is what He is essentially about. He won't show another face then, that we've not seen now. The same basic Jesus, who so wished and wishes to eternally save us, will be the One whom we meet in the final day.

If we truly love the Lord, we will fantasize about our moment of meeting with Him. I suspect that His very appearance of ordinariness and evident human aspect will impress me in that first moment of meeting. Perhaps it will be that He appears to me in the midst of everyday life, when I'm desperately consumed with doing something, and interrupts me. And He'll seem like an ordinary local person, speaking with the same accent, wearing normal clothes, just as He did after His resurrection. And then He'll say with a very slight, cultured kind of smile: "Duncan, I'm Jesus…". Who knows how it will be. But if you love Him, you'll fantasize of that moment, as you love His appearing.

Notes
(1) Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According To John* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), Vol. 2 p. 1070.
(2) Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946 ed.) Vol. 2 p. 637.

2-20 The 21st Century Jesus

It was so hard for the Jewish mind to conceive that a man walking down a dusty Galilee street was the awesome God of Sinai manifested in flesh. And it's hard for us too. This is why the whole struggle over the trinity has come about; people just can't find the faith to believe that a real man could have been the just as real perfect Son of God. It's our same struggle when we come to consider the cross; that a body hanging there, covered with blood, spittle, dirt and flies, an image as palatable as a hunk of meat hanging in a butcher's shop. . . was and is the salvation of the world, the real and ultimate way of escape for us from the guilt of our iniquity. **The life the Lord Jesus lived was 'the sort of life that was in the Father's presence'** (1 Jn. 1:2 Gk.). The sort of life God Almighty lives, the feelings and thoughts He has, were the life and feelings and thoughts and words and deeds of the man Jesus. This has to be reflected upon deeply before we grasp the huge import which this has. That a Man who walked home each day along the same dusty streets of Nazareth was in fact living the sort of life that was and is the life of God in Heaven.

And so we must try to image Him as He might be today. If He lived in your town, how would He be? 'Jesus' was a fairly common name in first century Palestine. So the Anglo-Saxon 21st century Jesus would be

called Steve, or a Russian one Vladimir, or a Hispanic one Jose. He'd be a manual worker, maybe a mechanic at a gas station, living in some dumb village. Talking with a rural accent, but with gently piercing eyes set in a smiley, bearded face. Anyone who worked with Him was struck by His intelligence and sensitivity, yet nobody in the workplace felt threatened by Him in any way. Remember how the Lord grew in favour with men; He was popular, and yet nobody guessed that He was the perfect, sinless Son of God. There were no girlie posters in the mechanic's workshop. Not because Jesus had asked for the guys to take them down. But they just sensed His feelings, and somehow felt His eyes looking right through them (consider how often the Gospels mention how Jesus turned and looked at people). So they'd taken them down. He rode to work on a bike [or did He drive to work in a beat up Honda Civic?]. Sometimes His bike got a puncture and He had to push it home in the rain. He did the shopping for His mum, a reclusive figure with an unclear past, and balanced the bags on His handlebars. Once they fell off and the eggs broke. . . but His body language exuded a patience and almost enjoyment of being human as He cleared it all up. This essential joy within Him is perhaps reflected in the 30 or so passages which record the Lord's use of humour in His teaching(1) . He sometimes forgot the number of his mobile; once He sat on it and broke a key. When some guy stopped and asked Him for a light, He'd grin and say He didn't smoke; but then He got into carrying a lighter just in case He was asked. And forgetful old Joe used to say He just loved asking Jesus for a light because you just got into such a nice chat with Him. He wore faded Levi's jeans, which He passed down to His kid brothers. Whenever they lost something (like the house keys) and got frustrated, He'd help them look for it until it was found. He helped them with their homework- them kids considered Him a real brainbox. Sometimes He'd hang out with them, He'd be goalie up at the recreation ground while a bunch of village kids played soccer, 4 against 4, with goalposts made up of piles of jackets. Even though He was busy, so busy. . . and part of His mind was in Heavenly places, on spiritual things. But that never, ever, not once, I am convinced. . . showed.

Notes

(1) See Elton Trueblood, *The Humor Of Christ* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

2-21 The Importance Of The Humanity Of Christ

The extent of Christ's humanity is brought out by the RV translation of 1 Tim. 2:5. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus". Paul is writing this *after* the Lord's ascension and glorification. A mediator might be thought of as being somehow separate from both parties; but our mediator is actually "himself man", so on our side, as it were. Having received Divine nature doesn't take anything away from the Lord's appreciation of our humanity, to the extent that Paul here [for all the other exalted terms he uses elsewhere about Jesus] can call Him even now "himself man". The Lord Jesus inaugurated the "new and living way" for us *dia* , on account of, "his flesh" (Heb. 10:20). It was exactly because of "the flesh" of the Lord's humanity that He opened up a new way of life for us. Because He was so credibly and genuinely human, and yet perfect, the way of His life becomes compellingly the way we are to take. Once we grasp this, we can better understand the anathema which John calls down upon those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" (2 Jn. 7-9). The Lord's relationship with His cousin John provides an exquisite insight into both His humanity and His humility. The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected (Mk. 6:14). Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins?

Fear of Death

And exactly because of that, He had a quite genuine "fear of death" (Heb. 5:8). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession. . . and it was just the same with the Lord Jesus. Note that when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity. Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when *we* in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"-

for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death.
The Lord's fear of death was, it seems to me, to a far greater extent than what even we experience- doubtless because He knew all that was tied up with *His* death and how much depended upon it. He spoke of how "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Lk. 12:50). There was something in His body language during His last journey to Jerusalem which was nothing short of terrifying to the disciples: "They were amazed; and as they followed Him, they were afraid" (Mk. 10:32-34). All this came to a climax in His extreme sweating in Gethsemane as the great horror of darkness began to actually descend on Him (Mk. 14:33-42). Contrast this with the calmness of suicide bombers or other religiously persuaded zealots going to their death. The Lord- *our* Lord- was too sensitive to humanity, to *us*, to His *own* humanity, to His own sense of the possibility of failure which His humility pressed ever upon Him. . . than to be like that. Contrast all this with the words of Ignatius at the start of the 2nd century A. D. : "Our God, Jesus the Christ, was carried in Mary's womb" (*Ephesians* 18. 2). How could *God* get inside the womb of an ordinary woman? If the very founders of popular Christianity, the 'church fathers', could be so totally astray. . . surely we have to get back to the Bible for ourselves and give no weight at all to the accepted wisdom of 'orthodox / mainstream Christianity' as a religion.

The Real Jesus
We non-trinitarians understand, quite correctly, that Jesus saved the world on account of being human- for all His Lordship and spiritual unity with the Father. If He had been of any other nature, salvation would not have been possible through Him. He in all ways is our pattern. It is our humanity that enables us to go into this world with a credible, convincing and saving message. We have to be enough of a man himself in order to save a man. We are not asking our hearers to be super-human. **The way senior churchmen seem to lack a genuine, complete humanity has led so many to conclude that because they cannot rise up to such apparently austere and white-faced levels, therefore Christianity for them is not an authentically human possibility.** Our message is tied to *us* as human people, just as the message of Jesus *was* Him, the real, human Jesus. **The word was made flesh in Him as it must be in us**. This is why nowhere in the Gospels is Jesus described with a long list of virtues- His actions and relations to others are what are presented, and it is from them that we ourselves feel and perceive His righteousness. The teachings of Marxism, e. g. , can be separated from Marx as a man. You can accept Marxism without ever having read a biography of Karl Marx. But real Christianity is tied in to the person of the real Christ. The biographies of Jesus which open the New Testament are in essence a précis of the Gospel of Jesus. His life was and is His message. We are to follow *Him*. This is His repeated teaching. A Marxist follows the ideas of Marx, not merely his personality. But a Christian follows Christ as a person, not just His abstract ideas.

If the message of Jesus is defined by us merely as ideas and principles, then we will inevitably find that ideas and principles lack the turbulence of real life- they are abstract. The principles of Bible Truth will be found to be colourless and remote from reality- unless they are tied in to the real, concrete person of Jesus. God forbid that our faith has given us just a bunch of ideas. The principles of the Truth, every doctrine of the Truth, is lived out in Jesus- and it is this fact, this image of Him, which appeals to us as live, passionate, flesh and blood beings. A person cannot be reduced to a formula. It is a living figure and not just dry theories that actually *draws* people, and in that sense is "attractive". The person of Jesus, as the person of each of us in Him, makes the ideas, the doctrines, the principles, real and visible; He "embodies" them. It is only a concrete, real person who can be felt to call and appeal to people. What I am saying is that if we present the principles of the Truth as they are in Jesus, then this will be far more powerful in its appeal than simply presenting dry theories. " The truth as it is in Jesus" is a Biblical phrase- surely saying that the doctrines of the one Faith are lived out in this Man. Because of this, the person hearing the Gospel will feel summoned, appealed to, called, by a *person*- the risen Jesus. And then later on in the life of the convert, it will become apparent to him or her that this same Jesus, by reason of His very person, makes demands, challenges, invitations to them, to yet greater commitment. And only a real, living person can be *encouraging* in life. Principles as mere abstractions cannot encourage much of themselves.

Jesus is our representative- a distinctive Bible doctrine. We are counted as being in Him. This means that His life is counted as being our life- and only because He was human and we now are human can this

become true. The wonder of this is that so many people have acquired a new personal quality through their association with the risen Jesus- for all their human failures, humiliations, setbacks. No longer is it so important for them to ask 'Who am I? What have I achieved in this dumb life?'. Rather it is all important that we are in fact in Christ, and sharing in *His* life and being. Life has become so achievement and efficiency orientated that many of us feel failures. Only by achievement, it seems, can we justify ourselves in society. We have become caught up in a machine of life that robs us of our humanity. Our initiative, spontaneity, autonomy, our essential freedom- is lost. Yet if we are in Christ, secure in Him, part of His supreme personality, then our lives are totally different. **We are no longer ashamed of our humanity. We are affirmed for who we are by God Himself, justified by Him- for we are in Christ. This is the real meaning, the wonderful implication, of being truly 'brethren-in-Christ'.**

By losing our life, we gain it. But the life we gain is the life of Jesus. And therefore life has meaning and purpose, not only in successes but also in failures. Our lives then make sense; for we have and live the *true* life, even if we are destroyed by opponents and deserted by friends; if we supported the wrong side and came to grief; if our achievements slacken and are overtaken by others; if we are no use any more to anyone. The bankrupt businessman, the utterly lonely divorcee, the overthrown and forgotten politician, the unemployed middle aged man, the aged prostitute or criminal dying in prison. . . all these, even though their persons and lives are no longer recognized by this world, are all the same joyfully, gleefully, recognized by Him with whom there is no respect of persons; for they are in His beloved Son.

Genuine Humanity

I remember the cold, Russian winter's day when it finally burst upon me that the Lord Jesus really was human. Because He was genuinely human, so genuinely so, I suddenly started thinking of all sorts of things which must have been true about Him, which I'd never dared think before. And in this, I believe I went up a level in knowing Him. He was the genuine product of the pregnancy process. He had all the pre-history of Mary in his genes. He had a genetic structure. He had a unique fingerprint, just as I have. He must have been either left-hand or right-handed (or ambidextrous!). Belonged to a particular blood group. Fitted into one psychological type more than another. He forgot things at times, didn't understand absolutely everything (e. g. the date of His return, or the mystery of spiritual growth, Mk. 4:27), made a mistake when working as a carpenter, cut His finger. But He was never frustrated with Himself; He was happy being human, comfortable with His humanity.

And as I walked through that long Moscow subway from Rizhskaya Metro to Rizhsky Vokzal, the thoughts were coming thick and fast. Why did He look on the ground when the woman [presumably naked] caught in the act of adultery was brought before Him? Was it not perhaps from sheer embarrassment and male awkwardness? Did He… ever know sexual arousal? Why not ask these questions? If He was truly human, sexuality is at the core of personhood. He would have known sexuality, responding to stimuli in a natural heterosexual manner, "yet without sin". He was not a cardboard Christ, a sexless Jesus. He shared the same unconscious drives and libido which we do, with a temper, anxiety and 'anxious fear of death' (Heb. 5:7) as strong as ours. He was a real man, not free from the inner conflict, effort, temptation and doubt which are part of our human condition. No way can I subscribe to a Trinitarian position that "there was [not] even an infinitely small element of struggle involved" when the Lord faced temptation (1). He was tempted just as we are- and temptation surely involves feeling the pull of evil, and having part of you that feels it to be more attractive than the good. The record of Jn. 8:8 seems to imply that it was the way Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust which convicted the accusers of the adulteress in their consciences. As He kept on writing, they one by one walked away. It's been speculated that He was writing their deeds or names there, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy of how the names of the wicked would be written in the dust. But I'm not so sure they'd have just let Him do that with no further recorded comment. My suggestion is that He stooped down and looked at the ground out of simple male embarrassment, but His 'writing' in the dust was simply Him doodling. If this is so, then there would have been an artless mix of His Divinity, His utter personal moral perfection, and His utter humanity. Embarrassed in front of a naked woman, crouching down on His haunches, doodling in the dust. . . that, it seems to me, would've been the ultimate conviction of sin for those who watched. It would've been surpassingly beautiful and yet so challenging at the same time. And it is that same mixture of utter humanity and profound, Divine perfection within the person of Jesus which, it seems to me, is what convicts us of sin and leads us devotedly to Him. Maybe I'm wrong in my imagination and

reconstruction of this incident- but if we love the Lord, surely we'll be ever seeking to reconstruct and imagine how He would or might have been.

The fullness of the Lord's humanity is of course supremely shown in His death and His quite natural fear of that death. Perhaps on no other point do human beings show they are humans than when it comes to their reaction to and reflection upon their own death. I would go further and suggested that the thought of suicide even entered the Lord's mind. It's hard to understand His thought about throwing Himself off the top of the temple in any other way. His almost throw away comment that "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Mt. 26:38- *heos thanatou*) is actually a quotation from the suicidal thoughts of Jonah (Jonah 4:9) and those of the Psalmist in Ps. 42:5,6. Now of course the Lord overcame those thoughts- but their very existence is a window into the depth and reality of His humanity. I suspect I can see through that huge gap between writer and reader, to sense your discomfort and alarm, even anger, that I should talk about the Lord Jesus in such human terms. I can imagine the splutter and misunderstanding which will greet these suggestions. I am not seeking to diminish in any way from the Lord's greatness. I'm seeking to bring out His greatness; that there, in this genuinely human person, there was God manifest in flesh. The revulsion of some at what I'm saying is to me just another articulation of our basic dis-ease when faced with the fact the Lord Jesus really was our representative. I believe that in all of us, there's a desire to set some sort of break between our own humanity, and that of Jesus. But if He wasn't really like us, then I see the whole 'Christ-thing' as having little cash value in our world that seeks so desperately for authenticity and human salvation. The human, Son of God Jesus whom we preach is actually very attractive to people. There's something very compelling about a perfect hero, who nevertheless has a weak human side. You can see this expressed in novels and fine art very often. Some examples would be novels like D. H. Lawrence, *The Man Who Died*; *Miss Lonelyhearts* (Nathanel West); Faulkner's *A Fable*. Nikolay Gorodetsky wrote a book entitled *The Humiliated Christ In Modern Russian Thought* where he brings this out well (2). **If He were really like us, then this demands an awful lot of us. It rids us of so many excuses for our unspirituality.** And this, I'm bold enough to say, is likely the psychological reason for the growth of the Jesus=God ideology, and the 'trinity' concept. The idea of a personally pre-existent Jesus likewise arose out of the same psychological bind. The Jews wanted a Messiah whose origins they wouldn't know (Jn. 7:27), some inaccessible heavenly figure, of which their writings frequently speak- and when faced with the very human Jesus, whose mother and brothers they knew, they couldn't cope with it. I suggest those Jews had the same basic mindset as those who believe in a personal pre-existence of the Lord. **The trinity and pre-existence doctrines place a respectable gap between us and the Son of God.** As John Knox concluded: "We can have the humanity [of Jesus] without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both" (3). His person and example aren't so much of an imperative to us, because He was God and not man. But if this perfect man was indeed one of us, a man amongst men, with our very same flesh, blood, sperm and plasm… we start to feel uncomfortable. It's perhaps why so many of us find prolonged contemplation of His crucifixion- where He was at His most naked and most human- something we find distinctly uncomfortable, and impossible to deeply sustain for long. But only if we properly have in balance the awesome reality of Christ's humanity, can we understand how one man's death 2,000 years ago can radically alter our lives today. We make excuses for ourselves: our parents were imperfect, society around us is so sinful. But the Lord Jesus was perfect- and dear Mary did her best, but all the same failed to give Him a perfect upbringing; she wasn't a perfect mother; and He didn't live in a perfect environment. And yet, He was perfect. And bids us quit our excuses and follow Him. According to the Talmud, Mary was a hairdresser [*Shabbath* 104b], whose husband left her with the children because he thought she'd had an affair with a Roman soldier. True or not, she was all the same an ordinary woman, living a poor life in a tough time in a backward land. And the holy, harmless, undefiled Son of God and Son of Man… was, let's say, the son of a divorcee hairdresser from a dirt poor, peripheral village, got a job working construction when He was still a teenager. There's a wonder in all this. And an endless challenge. For none of us can now blame our lack of spiritual endeavour upon a tough background, family dysfunction, hard times, bad environment. We can rise above it, because in Him we are a new creation, the old has passed away, and in Him, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Precisely because He blazed the trail, blazed it out of all the limitations which normal human life appears to impress upon us, undeflected and undefeated by whatever distractions both His and our humanity placed in His path. And He's given us the power to follow Him.

He wasn't a God who came down to us and became human; rather is He the ordinary, very human guy who rose up to become the Man with the face of God, ascended the huge distance to Heaven, and received the very nature of God. It's actually the very opposite to what human theology has supposed, fearful as they were of what the pattern of this Man meant for them. The pre-existent view of Jesus makes Him some kind of Divine comet which came to earth, very briefly, and then sped off again, to return at the second coming. Instead we see a man from amongst men, arising to Divine status, and opening a way for us His brethren to share His victory; and coming back to establish His eternal Kingdom with us on this earth, His earth, where He came from and had His human roots. Take a passage must beloved of Trinitarians, Phil. 2. We read that Jesus was found (*heuretheis*) in fashion (*schemati*) as a man, and He humiliated Himself (*tapeinoseos*), and thereby was exalted. But in the next chapter, Paul speaks of *himself* in that very language. He speaks of how he, too, would be "found" (*heuretho*) con-formed to the example of Jesus in His death, and would have his body of humiliation (*tapeinoseos*) changed into one like that of Jesus, "the body of his glory". We aren't asked to follow the pattern or *schema* of a supposed incarnation of a God as man. We're asked to follow in the path of the Lord Jesus, the Son of man, in His path to glory. Repeatedly, we are promised that *His* glory is what we will ultimately share, at the end of our path of humiliation and sharing in His cross (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; Jn. 17:22,24). The more we think about it, the idea of Jesus as a Divine comet sent to earth chimes in with some of the most popular movies. Think of *Superman* and *Star Trek*- the hero descends to earth in order to save us. Or take the "Lone Ranger" type Westerns, set in some wicked, sinful, hopeless town in the [mythical] American West. . . and in rides the outsider, the heroic cowboy, and redeems the situation. The huge success of these kinds of story lines suggests that we like to think we are powerless to change, that our situation is hopeless and beyond human salvation. . . an outsider is needed to save us, as we look on as spectators, feeling mere pawns in a cosmic drama. And this may explain the attraction of trinitarianism and a Divine comet-like Christ who hit earth for 33 years. It breeds painless spectator religion. . . go to church, hear the Preacher, watch the show, come home and spend another rainy Sunday afternoon wondering quite what to do with your life. Yet the idea of a *human* Saviour, one of us rising up above our own humanity to save us. . . this demands so much more of us, for it implies that we're not mere spectators at the show, but rather can really get involved ourselves. In *The Real Devil* I often found myself making similar points in relation to the misunderstanding of Satan as a superhuman being involved in a cosmic battle with God, which we watch from afar here on earth. . . . whereas the Biblical 'satan' refers to the 'adversary' of our own natures, internal codes and dysfunctions, which we ourselves must struggle to master, following the example of the Lord Jesus. His victories become ours; until His very death becomes our personal pattern too.

The relationship of the Lord Jesus with His Father was evidently intended by Him to be a very real, achievable pattern for all those in Him. He wasn't an aberration, an uncopyable, inimitable freak. John's Gospel brings this out very clearly. The Father knows the Son, the Son knows the Father, the Son knows men, men know the Son, and so men know both the Father and Son (Jn. 10:14,15; 14:7,8). **The Son is in the Father as the Father is in the Son; men are in the Son and the Son is in men; and so men are in the Father and Son** (Jn. 14:10,11; 17:21,23,26). As the Son did the Father's works and was thereby "one" with Him, so it is for the believers who do the Father's works (Jn. 10:30,37,38; 14:8-15). Whilst there obviously was a unique bonding between Father and Son on account of the virgin birth, the Lord Jesus certainly chooses to speak as if His Spirit enables the relationship between Him and His Father to be reproduced in our experience.

The Challenge Of Christ's Humanity

The undoubted need for doctrinal truth about the nature of Jesus can so easily lead us to overlooking the need for obedience to His most practical teaching. As Adolf Harnack put it: "True faith in Jesus is not a matter of credal orthodoxy but of doing as he did (4). In this sense we need "to rescue Jesus from Christianity (5). We need to reconstruct in our own minds the person of Jesus and practical teaching of Jesus which so perfectly reflected His own life, free from the theology and creeds which have so often surrounded Him. As a result of this, our preaching of Christ so often ends up stressing those elements which the unbeliever or misbeliever finds most difficult to accept, rather than focusing on the Lord's humanity and His practical teachings, which they are more likely to accept because as humans they have a natural affinity with them. The Lord Jesus was not merely human, as a theologically correct statement. He passionately entered into human life to its' fullest extent. Thus B. B. Warfield comments: "[Jesus] knew not mere joy

but exultation, not mere passing pity but the deepest movements of compassion and love, not mere surface distress but an exceeding sorrow even unto death" (6).

There is an incredible challenge in the fact that the Lord Jesus had human nature and yet never sinned. He rose above sin in all its forms, and yet was absolutely human. It seems to me that many Christians feel that their calling is to rise above both sin, and also their own human nature. And this results in their belief that spirituality is in fact a denial of their humanity. In extreme forms, we have the white faced nun who has been led to believe that being spiritual equals being white faced, passionless, and somehow superhuman. In a more common expression of the same problem, there are many elders who believe it to be fatal to show any emotional conviction about anything, no chinks in their armour, no admission of their own human limitations or understanding. For this reason I see a similarity between the 'lives of the saints' as recorded in Catholic and Orthodox writings (replete with white faces and large holy eyes, hands ever folded in prayer, never making a slip)- and the glossy biographies of Evangelical leaders which jump out at you from the shelves of Protestant bookstores. They too, apparently, never set a foot wrong, but progressed from unlikely glory to unlikely glory. All this arises from an over-emphasis upon the Divine rather than the human side of the Lord Jesus. The character of the Lord Jesus shows us what it's like to be both human and sinless. It has been truly commented that "if we believe in the fact of his humanity, we must affirm our own". And the same author perceptively points out that "Just as we have sought a mythical model of Jesus Christ whose humanity is a sham, so we have sought a mythical model of the Christian life" (7). Because we seek to rise above being human, we are aiming for something that doesn't exist. The Lord Jesus wasn't and isn't 'superhuman'; He was and is the image of God stamped upon humanity, and in this sense the New Testament still calls Him a "man" even now. We need not take false guilt about being human. We should be happy with who we are, made in the image of God. Yes we are human, with all that this involves, negatively and positively. I interpret the image of the baby Jesus maybe rather differently from how the Christmas cards do. For a baby and young child to survive, there is an element of desperate selfishness from the first struggling breath. The Lord would've been no different, and obviously shared this basic instinct to preserve self, right up to His death on the cross. And yet somehow He would've stood apart from other people, even as a young person, as He never allowed what Richard Dawkins has termed "the selfish gene" to predominate in Him (8). It was *this* difference in Jesus, throughout His life, which was and is so crucial. For it is exactly *this* aspect of Him which is our moment-by-moment challenge, inspiration and saving comfort.

The Preference Of Jesus To Be Seen As Human

When the Lord spoke of how "the son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20), He was apparently alluding to a common proverb about how humanity generally ["son of man" as generalized humanity] is homeless in the cosmos (9). In this case, we see how the Lord took every opportunity to attest to the fact that what was true of humanity in general was true of Him. Perhaps this explains His fondness for describing Himself as "son of man", a term which can mean both humanity in general, and also specifically the Messiah predicted in Daniel. He understood Himself as rightful judge of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk. 2:10). If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism" (10)**, then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.** It's perhaps noteworthy that in the wilderness temptation, Jesus was tempted "If you are the Son of *God*. . . " (Mt. 4:3), and He replies by quoting Dt. 8:3 "*man* shall not live by bread alone"- and the Jonathan Targum has *bar nasha* [son of man] here for "man". If we are correct in understanding those wilderness temptations as the Lord's internal struggles, we see Him tempted to wrongly focus upon His being Son of *God*, forgetting His humanity; and we see Him overcoming this temptation, preferring instead to perceive Himself as Son of *man*. Twice in Mark, Jesus is addressed as "Messiah" but He replies by calling Himself "the Son of man" (Mk. 8:29-31; 14:61,62). If this was His preferred self-perception, should it not be how we perceive Him?

In this context, note how the Lord Jesus is "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45). Even in His resurrected, immortalized glory He is still as it were an "Adam", the Son of Man. As such He shows us to what humanity can attain; His path to that glory is to be ours. For that "last Adam became a life-giving spirit", in

the sense that the spirit or mind of Christ really can be ours. This possibility 'works' and hinges around the fact that He was human, one of us. This is 'humanism' as it should be; these possibilities opened up to us by the personal path of Jesus personally. Psalm 8 comments in profound poetry upon this 'rise' of the "son of man", both the Lord Jesus personally and every man in Him. The Psalm outlines how we progress, from being in one sense a tiny being on earth, so small that human life is at first blush reduced to practical insignificance by the immensity of the stage we stand upon, to being "crowned with glory and honour", made greater than the Angels who created the earth (Ps. 8:5). The smallness of man is emphasized in Ps. 8:4- two Hebrew words are used, *enosh* (related to a word meaning 'weak'), and *adam*, 'soil'. Yet *enosh* and *adam* are to be crowned, perhaps respectively, with "glory and honour". Yet this "son of man" of Psalm 8, terms which are understood by David there as applying to all men, with 'Adam' as everyman, are specifically applied to the Lord Jesus who although human rose up to become Lord of all creation (Heb. 2:6-9; 1 Cor. 15:27,28; Eph. 1:22). We poor weak ones really can realistically follow His path to glory. The end point of our spiritual development is to become like the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16). The usage of Psalm 8 eloquently presents Jesus as human, a "son of man" as much as any of us are; indeed, it has been commented that Christ's preference for this title would have been seen as striking: "It is an extremely odd expression in Greek. . . in itself a commonplace idiom, like the modern English 'guy', it is as odd in the gospels as if some famous teacher or guru of today constantly referred to himself as 'the Guy'" (11). And yet for those who become "in Him", identifying with Him in baptism and a life lived in Him, encouraged in this by His very humanity- His path to glory, from so low to so high, becomes ours. A study of the Lord Jesus Christ therefore reveals the possibilities of being human. But we would rather insert a gap between Him and us, calling Him 'God', or weaving intricate theories of how *our* nature precludes us from being like Him, implying *His* nature was different; or focusing our thinking and theology on Him as *Saviour* to the exclusion of seeing Him as our real example who beckons us forward through every temptation and every choice of commitment to God which we daily face. This, without doubt, is how the Lord Jesus is presented to us in passages like Heb. 2:14-18 and 4;15,16. Our sinfulness, our humanity and mortality, no longer is to be seen as locking us down within the limits of our ordinary experience. He has shown us, if we perceive Him for who He really was and is, that we as humans have a potential far beyond what we may think. In this very context of describing Christ's exaltation from so low to so high, we are bidden have the same mind which was in Christ (Phil. 2:3-5).

Him and Us

Heb. 2:6-9 is an example of the inspired writer using expected reader response and expectations in order to make a point. Having spoken of how the world to come will be given to redeemed human beings and not to Angels, the writer goes on to quote from the Psalms to prove that point: "Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet. " Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death". We begin reading the quotation assuming it's talking about humanity generally; but as it goes on, we realize it's talking about the pre-eminent Son of Man, i. e. the Lord Jesus. Notice how He is called "Jesus", with no 'Lord' or 'Christ' added on. The point of it all is to make us perceive how totally identified is Jesus with humanity as a whole; a passage which speaks in its context of humanity generally is allowed to quite naturally flow on in meaning to apply to the Lord Jesus personally. It's a majestic, powerful way of making the point- that the Lord Jesus was truly one of us.

Throughout the Gospels, it's apparent that both explicitly and implicitly, the Lord was almost desperate to persuade His followers to see Him as their brother, one to whom they could realistically aspire- and not a superhuman icon to be trusted in to get them out of temporal problems. We've noted His preference for the title 'Son of man' rather than any more direct reference to His Divine Sonship- although this term is also associated Him with the glorious Son of man of Daniel's visions. The Lord's struggle was prefigured in the way Joseph-Jesus had to urge his brothers "Come near to me, I pray you", and begged them to believe in His grace and acceptance of them (Gen. 45:4; 50:18-21). This is in essence the plea of Jesus to Trinitarians today. Take the incident of the withered fig tree in Mark 11:20-24 as an example of what I mean. The disciples were amazed at the faith of Jesus in God's power. He had commanded the fig tree to be withered-

but this had required Him to pray to God to make this happen. As the disciples looked at the withered fig tree and then at Him, wide eyed with amazement at His faith, the Lord immediately urged *them* to "have faith in God. . . *whosoever* [and this was surely His emphasis] shall [ask a mountain to move in faith, it will happen]. . . therefore I say unto *you*, Whatsoever things *you* desire [just as Jesus had desired the withering of the fig tree], when *you* pray [as Jesus had done about the fig tree], believe that *you* receive them, and *you* shall have them". I suggest His emphasis was upon the word *you*. He so desired them to see His pattern of faith in prayer as a realistic image for them to copy. How sad He must be at the way He has been turned into an other-worldly figure, some wonderful, kindly God who saves us from the weakness and lack of faith which we are so full of. Yes, He *is* our Saviour, and our hearts surely have a burning and undying sense of gratitude to Him. But He isn't *only* that; He is an inspiration. It is in this sense that the spirit of Christ can and does so radically transform human life in practice. Of course, we have sinned, and we continue to do so. For whatever reason, we are not Jesus. But our painful awareness of this [and it ought to be painful, not merely a theoretical acceptance that we are sinners]. . . shouldn't lead us to think that His example isn't a realistic pattern for us. It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for other cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate for themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding, the Lord asked the disciples where "*we*" could get food from to feed them (Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise.

Repeatedly, the Lord Jesus carefully worded His teaching in order to use the same words about Himself as about His disciples. He was the lamb of God; and He sent them forth as lambs amongst wolves; He was "the light of the world", and He stated that they too must be likewise. As He was the source of living water to us, so we are to be to others (Jn. 4:10,14). I have tabulated many examples of this kind of thing in *A World Waiting To Be Won* chapter 3. John grasped this, by using even some of the language of the virgin birth about the birth of all God's children. It's as if even the Lord's Divine begettal shouldn't be seen as too huge a barrier between us and Himself. Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32). This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus will yet be exalted at His return.

I suppose most challenging of all is the Lord's invitation to us to take up our cross and follow after Him, in His 'last walk' to the place of crucifixion. This image would've been chilling to those who first heard it, who were familiar with a criminal's walk to his death. Quite rightly, we associate the cross of Jesus with our salvation. But it is also a demand to us to be like Him, not only in showing the courtesy, politeness, thoughtfulness etc. which is part of a truly Christ-like / Christian culture, but in the utterly radical call to self-sacrifice unto death. It is in this matter of bearing the cross after Him that we would so dearly wish for the crucified Christ to be just an item in history, an act which saved us which is now over, an icon we hang around our neck or mount prominently on our study wall- and no more. But He, His cross, His 'last walk', His request that we pick up a cross and walk behind Him, the eerie continuous tenses used in New Testament references to the crucifixion- is so much more than that. If He washed our feet, we *must* wash each others' (Jn. 13:14). Everything He did, all He showed Himself to be in character, disposition and attitude, becomes an imperative for us to do and be likewise. And it is on this basis that He can so positively represent us to the Father: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:16).

Notes

(1) F. D. E. Schliermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T& T Clark, 1928) p. 414. Clement of Alexandria, one of the so-called "fathers" of the Christian church, "Argued that Jesus, being divine, did not need to eat or drink, but merely did so to keep up appearances" (as quoted in N. T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?*

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) p. 69). It's hard to square this with the Lord's cry from the cross: "I thirst!" and other Gospel references to His need to eat and drink. The founding fathers of 'Christianity' as a religion, it seems to me, utterly missed the point of the real Christ. Thomas Hart, *To Know And Follow Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984) p. 44 adds more nonsensical verbiage: "He has a human nature but is not a human person. The person in Him is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus does not have a personal human centre". Any Biblical reflection upon the sensitivity, the love, the death, the kindness of the Lord Jesus. . . reveals He had the most wonderful "personal human centre". And that is obscured by this hopeless mess of words from Trinitarian apologists. The idea of having "two natures" seems to me quite UN Biblical and would imply a lack of integrity to every word and action of Jesus. It would be like a man saying "I've got no money in my pocket" and showing an empty pocket- when he has 1000 Euros or $ in a money belt, and a fist full of well charged debit cards.
(2) Nikolay Gorodetsky, *The Humiliated Christ In Modern Russian Thought* (London: SPCK, 1938).
(3) John Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ* (Cambridge: CUP, 1968) p. 106.
(4) A. Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (5th ed. , London: Benn, 1958), x.
(5) R. W. Funk, *Honest To Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996) p. 300.
(6) B. B. Warfield, 'The Emotional Life Of Our Lord' in *The Person And Work Of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1950) p. 142.
(7) Nigel Cameron, *Complete In Christ* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1997). He perceptively sees a link between the false notion of an 'immortal soul', and a wrong view of the nature of man and of Jesus: "There is the idea, as unbiblical as it is common, of the 'soul'- understood as an animating spirit which inhabits the body but in fact itself constitutes the human person, the essential self. Then there is the related idea of the life to come as an 'after-life' in which the soul survives while the body departs. These are notions which derive from ancient Greece and have become parasitic on Christian thinking. They foster a lasting suspicion of man as a corporeal being, and undermine our confidence in the Christian life as a human life" (p. 110). I find these sentences very incisive and true in their analysis.
(8) Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 1993).
(9) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1971) p. 154.
(10) Cullmann, *op cit* p. 161.
(11) Edmund Hill, *Being Human* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984) p. 223. "Son of man" is a Hebrew phrase used often to describe people in their smallness and modesty compared to great men; it is rendered "men of low estate" in Job 25:6; Ps. 49:2; 62:9. Yet Dan. 7:13,27 and Mk. 14:62 purposefully juxtapose the images of the humble "son of man" with Messiah Himself coming in clouds of glory.

2-22 The Divine Side Of Jesus

In many discussions with Trinitarians, I came to observe how very often, a verse I would quote supporting the humanity of Jesus would be found very near passages which speak of His Divine side. For example, most 'proof texts' for both the 'Jesus=God' position and the 'Jesus was human' position- are all from the same Gospel of John. Instead of just trading proof texts, e. g. 'I and my father are one' verses 'the Father is greater than I', we need to understand them as speaking of one and the same Jesus. So many 'debates' about the nature of Jesus miss this point; the sheer wonder of this man, this more than man, was that He was so genuinely human, and yet perfectly manifested God. This was and is the compelling wonder of this Man. These two aspects of the Lord, the exaltation and the humanity, are spoken of together in the Old Testament too. A classic example would be Ps. 45:6,7: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever [this is quoted in the New Testament about Jesus]…God, thy God, hath anointed thee [made you Christ]". It was exactly because of and through His humanity that His glory, His 'Divine side', was and is manifested. **His glory was 'achieved', if you like, not because He had it by nature in Heaven before His birth; but exactly because He as a human of our nature reflected the righteousness of God to perfection in human flesh.** Thus "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He"(Jn. 8:28)- the 'I am' aspect of Jesus was manifested at the point of His maximum humanity. Thus He was 'made sin for us' so that we might have the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; 8:9). It was only because the Word was made *flesh* that the glory of God was revealed (Jn. 1:14).

The juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His exaltation is what is so unique about Him. And it's what is so hard for people to accept, because it demands so much faith in a man, that He could be really so God-like. The juxtaposition of ideas is seen in Hebrews so powerfully. Here alone in the New Testament is His

simple, human name "Jesus" used so baldly- not 'Jesus Christ', 'the Lord Jesus', just plain 'Jesus' (Heb. 2:9; 3:1; 4:14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2,24; 13:12). And yet it's Hebrews that emphasizes how He can be called 'God', and is the full and express image of God Himself. **I observe that in each of the ten places where Hebrews uses the name 'Jesus', it is as it were used as a climax of adoration and respect**. For example: "… whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" (Heb. 6:20). "But you are come unto… unto… to… to… to… to… and to Jesus the mediator" (Heb. 12:22-24). The bald title 'Jesus', one of the most common male names in first century Palestine, as common as Dave or Steve or John in the UK today, speaking as it did of the Lord's utter humanity, is therefore used as a climax of honour for Him. **The honour due to Him is exactly due to the fact of His humanity**. John's Gospel uses exalted language to describe the person of Jesus- but actually, if one looks out for it, John uses the very same terms about all of humanity. Here are some examples:

About Jesus	About humanity generally or other human beings
Came into the world (9:39; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37)	1:9 [of "every man"]; 6:14. 'Came into the world' means 'to be born' in 16:21; 18:37
Sent from God (1:6; 3:28)	3:2,28; 8:29; 15:10
A man of God (9:16,33)	9:17,31
'What I saw in my Father's presence' (8:38)	The work of '*a man* who told you the truth as I heard it from God' (8:40)
God was His Father	8:41
He who has come from God (8:42)	8:47
The Father was in Him, and He was in the Father (10:37)	15:5-10; 17:21-23,26
Son of God (1:13)	All believers are 'the offspring of God Himself' (1:13; 1 Jn. 2:29-3:2,9; 4:7; 5:1-3,8)
Consecrated and sent into the world (17:17-19)	20:21
Jesus had to listen to the Father and be taught by Him (7:16; 8:26,28,40; 12:49; 14:10; 15:15; 17:8)	All God's children are the same (6:45)
Saw the Father (6:46)	The Jews should have been able to do this (5:37)
Not born of the flesh or will of a man, but the offspring of God Himself	True of all believers (1:13)

Juxtaposition

Hebrews 1 can be a passage which appears to provide perhaps the strongest support for both the 'Jesus is God' and 'Jesus is not God' schools. Meditating upon this one morning, I suddenly grasped what was going on. The writer is in fact purposefully juxtaposing the language of Christ's humanity and subjection to the Father, with statements and quotations which apply the language of God to Jesus. But the emphasis is so repeatedly upon the fact that God did this to Jesus. God gave Jesus all this glory. Consider the evidence: It is God who begat Jesus (Heb. 1:5), God who told the Angels to worship Jesus (Heb. 1:6), it was "God, even your God" who anointed Jesus, i. e. made Him Christ, the anointed one (Heb. 1:9); it was God who made Jesus sit at His right hand, and makes the enemies of His Son come into subjection (Heb. 1:13); it was God who made / created Jesus, God who crowned Jesus, God who set Jesus over creation (Heb. 2:7), God who put all in subjection under Jesus (Heb. 2:8). And yet interspersed between all this emphasis- for that's what it is- upon the superiority of the Father over the Son… we find Jesus addressed as "God" (Heb. 1:8), and having Old Testament passages about God applied to Him (Heb. 1:5,6). The juxtaposition is purposeful. It is to bring out how the highly exalted position of Jesus was in fact granted to Him by 'his God', the Father,

who remains the single source and giver of all exaltation, and who, to use the Lord's very own words, "is greater than [Christ]" (Jn. 14:28).

This juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His exaltation is found all through Bible teaching about His death. It's been observed that the 'I am' sayings of Jesus, with their obvious allusion to the Divine Name, are in fact all found in contexts which speak of the subordination of Jesus to God (1). He was 'lifted up' in crucifixion and shame; and yet 'lifted up' in 'glory' in God's eyes through that act. We read in Is. 52:14 that His face was more marred, more brutally transmogrified, than that of any man. **And yet reflecting upon 2 Cor. 4:4,6, we find that His face was the face of God; His glory was and is the Father's glory:** "The glory of Christ, who is the image of God… the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". Who is the one who redeems His people? Isaiah calls him "the arm of the Lord": "to whom has *the arm of the Lord* been revealed?" (53:1; compare 52:10). **Then he continues: "*He* grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground" (v. 2). So, the *arm of the Lord* is a person- a divine person! He is God's "right arm," His "right-hand Man"! He is also human:** He grows up out of the earth like a root out of dry ground. The same sort of juxtaposition is to be found in the way the Lord healed the widow's son. He touched the coffin- so that the crowd would have gasped at how unclean Jesus was, and how He had identified Himself with the unclean to the point of Himself appearing unclean. It was surely shock that made the pallbearers stop in their tracks. But then the Lord raised the dead man- and the people perceived His greatness, convinced that in the person of Jesus "God hath visited His people" (Lk. 7:14-16). His humanity and yet His greatness, His Divinity if you like, were artlessly juxtaposed together. Hence prophetic visions of the exalted Jesus in Daniel call Him "the Son of man".

The mixture of the Divine and human in the Lord Jesus is what makes Him so compelling and motivational. He was like us in that He had our nature and temptations; and yet despite that, He was different from us in that He didn't sin. Phil. 2 explains how on the cross, the Lord Jesus was so supremely "in the likeness of men"; and yet the same 'suffering servant' prophecy which Phil. 2 alludes to also makes the point that on the cross, "his appearance was so unlike the sons of Adam" (Is. 52:14). There was something both human and non-human in His manifestation of the Father upon the cross. Never before nor since has such supreme God-likeness, 'Divinity' , if you like, been displayed in such an extremely human form- a naked, weak, mortal man in His final death throes.

Even after His resurrection, in His moment of glory and triumph, the Lord appeared in very ordinary working clothes, so that He appeared as a gardener. The disciples who met Him on the Emmaus road asked whether He 'lived alone' and therefore was ignorant of the news of the city about the death of Jesus (Lk. 24:18 RV). The only people who lived alone, outside of the extended family, were drop outs or weirdos. It was almost a rude thing for them to ask a stranger. The fact was, the Lord appeared so very ordinary, even like a lower class social outcast type. And this was the exalted Son of God. We gasp at His humility, but also at His earnest passion to remind His followers of their common bond with Him, even in His exaltation. The Lord Jesus often stressed that He was the only way to the Father; that only through knowing and seeing / perceiving Him can men come to know God. And yet in Jn. 6:45 He puts it the other way around: "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me". And He says that only the Father can bring men to the Son (Jn. 6:44). Yet it is equally true that only the Son of God can lead men to God the Father. In this we see something exquisitely beautiful about these two persons, if I may use that word about the Father and Son. The more we know the Son, the more we come to know the Father; and the more we know the Father, the more we know the Son. This is how close they are to each other. And yet they are quite evidently distinctly different persons. But like any father and son, getting to know one leads us to know more of the other, which in turn reveals yet more to us about the other, which leads to more insight again into the other… and so the wondrous spiral of knowing the Father and Son continues. If Father and Son were one and the same person, the surpassing beauty of this is lost and spoilt and becomes impossible. The experience of any true Christian, one who has come to 'see' and know the Father and Son, will bear out this truth. Which is why correct understanding about their nature and relationship is vital to knowing them. The wonder of it all is that the Son didn't automatically reflect the Father to us, as if He were just a piece of theological machinery; He made a supreme effort to do so, culminating in the cross. He explains that He didn't do *His* will, but that of the Father; He didn't do the works *He* wanted to do, but those which the Father wanted. He had many things to say and judge of the Jewish world, He could have given them 'a piece of His mind', but instead He commented: "*But*... I sp**eak to the world those things which I**

have heard of [the Father]" (Jn. 8:26). I submit that this sort of language is impossible to adequately understand within the trinitarian paradigm. Yet the wonder of it all goes yet further. The Father is spoken of as 'getting to know' [note aorist tense] the Son, as the Son gets to know the Father; and the same verb form is used about the Good Shepherd 'getting to know' us His sheep. This wonderful, dynamic family relationship is what "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit", true walking and living with the Father and Son, is all about. It is into this family and wonderful nexus of relationships that trinitarians apparently choose not to enter.

The Path To Glory

The Lord's path to glory culminated in the Father 'making known unto Him the ways of life' (Acts 2:28). That statement, incidentally, is a major nail in the coffin of trinitarianism. But more significantly for us personally, in this the Lord was our pattern, as we likewise walk in the way to life (Mt. 7:14), seeking to 'know' the life eternal (Jn. 17:3). In being our realistic role model in this, we can comment with John: "The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that *we* may know… the eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:20).

Notes

(1) P. B. Harner, *The 'I Am' Of The Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) pp. 39,51.

The Father And Son

The Wrath Of God

I want to look at the relationship between the Father and Son by considering some of the Father's characteristics, and how His articulation of them has been affected by His experience of His Son.

God can be provoked to anger (Dt. 9:7; Ezra 5:12), His wrath 'arises' because of sinful behaviour (2 Chron. 36:16). He drove Israel into captivity in anger and fury (Jer. 32:37). The wrath of God 'waxes hot' against sinful men, and Moses begged God to 'turn' from that wrath (Ex. 32:11,12). The whole intercession of Moses with God gives the impression of God changing His mind because of the intercession of a mere man. Admittedly the idea of anger flaring up in God's face and then Him 'turning' from that wrath is some sort of anthropomorphism. The very same words are used about Esau's wrath 'turning away', i. e. being pacified, as are used about the pacification of God's wrath (Gen. 27:45). But all the same, this language must be telling us something. The wrath of God did come upon Israel in the wilderness (Ps. 78:31; Ez. 22:31), but Moses 'turned' God from executing it as He planned (Ps. 106:23). Many times He turned away from the full extent of His wrath (Ps. 78:38). It is by righteous behaviour and repentance that the wrath of God turns away (Dt. 13:17; 2 Chron. 12:12; 29:10; 30:8). Ezra 10:14 speaks of God's wrath turning away because those who had married Gentile women divorced them. God's wrath is also turned away by the death of the sinner- the heads of the sinners in Num. 25:4 were to be 'hung up' before the Lord so that His wrath would turn away. A similar example is to be found in Josh. 7:26. Jeremiah often comments that God's wrath is turned away by the execution of judgment upon the sinner (e. g. Jer. 30:24). In this sense His anger and wrath are poured out or 'accomplished', i. e. they are no more because they have been poured out (Lam. 4:11).

Turning Away Wrath

The fact that men such as Moses and Jeremiah (Jer. 18:20) turned away God's wrath without these things happening , or simply by prayer (Dan. 9:16) therefore means that God accepted the intercession of those men and counted their righteousness to those from whom His wrath turned away. We shouldn't assume that these righteous men merely waved away God's wrath. That wrath was real, and required immense pleading and personal dedication on their behalf. Thus we read in 2 Kings 23:26 that despite Josiah's righteousness, the wrath of God against Manasseh was still not turned away. Truly „wise men turn away wrath" (Prov. 29:8). And they evidently pointed forward to the work of the Lord Jesus- perhaps, like the sacrifices, those men only achieved what they did on account of the way they pointed forward to the Lord Jesus. He delivered us from God's coming wrath (1 Thess. 1:10)- the wrath of God is frequently spoken of in the New Testament as being poured out with devastating physical effects in the last days. All those not reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). The very existence of the law of God creates His wrath, because we break that law (Rom. 4:15). Romans has much to say about the wrath of God; and the letter begins with the reminder that we are all sinners, and the wrath of God will be revealed against all forms of sin (Rom. 1:18). It is only through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus that we are saved from this wrath and 'reconciled' to God (Rom. 5:8-10). The wrath of God abides on all who don't

accept Christ (Jn. 3:36)- confirming the truth of Paul's statements that all of us before our conversion were „by nature the children of wrath". God isn't unrighteous because He will take vengeance- this is how He will judge the world in the last day (Rom. 3:5).

The Other Side Of God

But. . . and it's a big but. There's another side to this apparently angry God. He is a God of untold love, who is almost unbelievably slow to His anger. The whole Old Testament exemplifies this in His dealings with Israel. This is the God who presents Himself to us as appointing our sympathetic Lord Jesus as both our judge and our advocate. The God who will almost compromise, apparently, His own statements in order to save us, whose grace in Christ finds a way around the law that sin leads to death, freeing us from that principle (Rom. 8:2), the God who revealed Himself through the senseless love of Hosea for the worthless Gomer. The harder side of God is there, undoubtedly. But it is there in order to give depth and meaning to His amazing grace and desire to save us. Without the reality of God as a God of wrath and judgment of sin, His grace in saving us would be far cheaper to our eyes, and far harder to deeply appreciate.

Beyond Mechanics

So the question arises, how could the death of the Lord Jesus as a perfect man turn away God's wrath from us, just because we place ourselves 'in' Him? It is far too primitive to suggest that the sight of the red blood of Jesus somehow appeased an angry God. For starters, God isn't an angry God. He is a God of love who delights to show mercy and grace. But on the other hand, as Old Testament men turned away the wrath of God, so the Lord Jesus turned away that wrath from us; He saved us from it. That is the Biblical position. But how and why was this possible? What was so special about Jesus? The standard answer would be along the lines that the Lord Jesus shared our nature, was our representative, and yet was perfect, dying for us to show how we deserve death, but rising again because it wasn't possible that a perfect man could remain dead, **and if we are 'in Him' then we are counted as being 'Him'**, and thereby our sins are overlooked and we will share the resurrection and eternal life now enjoyed by Him personally. And I stand by all that. But it only throws the essential question a stage further back. Why and how is this so? Why would God operate like that, given the part of His character that exacts judgment for sin, and experiences the emotion of wrath against sinners? Why go through that process of atonement that required the death of His Son to achieve it- when He could have achieved our salvation in any way He liked? Maybe I have too restless a mind. But a valid explanation of what happened doesn't explain to me ultimately why it had to be the way it was; and what was it about the death of Jesus that so uniquely moved the Father for all time to forgive us our sins and save us.

Perhaps our problem is that we are inclined to see the tragedy in Eden as a 'problem' for God, which He had to devise a very clever means of getting around, whilst leaving His essential principles uncompromised. The fact that the Lord Jesus in a sense was slain from the foundation of the world, the 'word' / logos of Jesus was in the very beginning with God (in His mind/plan), surely indicates that God didn't in any sense think up some plan to save us when faced by Adam's sin. To me, we're coming at this the wrong way around, assuming that God had a problem which He needed to solve. Not at all. God's basic principles don't change, but He also reveals Himself as a loving Father who has all the emotions of a human father- again, the manifestation of God in Hosea exemplifies all this, with God presented as having the feelings of the wounded lover, the anger mixed with senseless love and acceptance of the betrayed husband, the God who makes statements in His fury and then by His grace and love doesn't carry them out (1). It is this passionate and emotional side of the Father which is our salvation. But back to our question. In what sense did the life and death of His Son somehow turn God's wrath away from us, and why did it all work out the way that it did? For me, dry atonement theory doesn't provide any ultimate explanation. It describes a mechanism. But the questions of why and how remain- for me at least. My explanation of what happened due to the life and death of God's Son is best initially illustrated by a human explanation.

Father And Son

My father is in his 70s as I write this. Recently we had literally the conversation of a lifetime, one of those en passant chats which turns into a profound interchange. He explained to me how I had influenced him. How his basic life and faith principles had never changed, but what he had seen of himself in me, in failure and success, had led him to act and feel very differently towards others; and thus he had changed from being a legalistic defender of the faith to being a far more gracious individual. Not so much because of any grace

or otherwise I showed; but because he saw himself played out through me, through my failures and successes, triumphs and failures. He shared with me how well he knew my mother; but it was only by seeing her in me, again, in both triumph and failure, in good and bad, that he came to more deeply understand and appreciate her. That conversation remains an abiding memory. And I am thankful to God that we both lived long enough in this lonely world to be able to have it.

My point of course from all this is that God's having a son influenced Him. God isn't static. I'm pinned down under the tyranny of words here, but something like 'growth', 'deeper experience' (or whatever word we find appropriate) surely is a facet of His nature, as it is of us who are made in His image. And there's no doubt that God can be influenced to change His mind. Both Moses and Jonah demonstrated that clearly. God's experience in Christ led Him to a deeper insight into the nature of His creation, just as my very existence gave my father greater understanding of my mother. I'm not saying that God somehow changed between the Old Testament and the New Testament. But the life and death of His Son, the way His Son gave His life for us His brethren, influenced God. It saved us from His wrath- not in that the sight of the red blood appeased an angry God, but in that He perceived again ever more forcibly how in His own personality, grace outweighs judgment, and thus He became committed to hearing our desperate pleas for that grace. The wrath of God simply couldn't be against those who chose to be in this wonderful Son of His, who voluntarily identified themselves with Him, who believed in and were baptized into that death and seek to share in it by their own feeble lives of self-crucifixion. Such behaviour from God isn't unexpected- because in Old Testament times He had been 'turned from' His wrath by men far beneath the status of the Lord Jesus. It was their lives and their prayerful intercession which affected Him. But it's been pointed out that their 'intercession' was a mediating of God's principles and blessings to men, rather than 'mediation' in the sense of settling a quarrel between two parties (2). How, then, did their manifestation of God to men so influence God Himself? Surely because as He saw e. g. Moses telling Israel of Him, pleading with them to repent, He saw Himself in Moses. And Moses was also Israel's representative. And so He was moved to turn from His wrath. When it came to the 'intercession' of His own Son, the effect was even the more powerful. Not just Israel but any from all nations would be saved; and the Son of God ever lives to make this kind of intercession both for and to us. Moses died, but the Lord Jesus lives for evermore in God's presence, the example of His life, the nature of His very being, having 'persuaded' the Father to turn away from His wrath, to not stir up all His anger [to use an Old Testament figure], and exercise to the full extent the wonderfully gracious aspect of His character towards us. God is presented to us in the Old Testament as a person, and a person with a struggle within them. He speaks in Hosea of how His heart is kindled in 'repentings', in changes of mind, over whether to reject or redeem His wayward people; how His very soul is grieved to decide. It seems to me that the Father's experience of His Son leads Him to resolve this struggle, to come down on the side of goodness / grace rather than severity, with those of us who are idenitified with His Son.

Admittedly we have trodden upon ground which Scripture doesn't explicitly open up to us. But there is some Biblical indication of the nature of the Son's influence upon the Father, and His relationship with Him. Remember that whilst Father and Son were one in purpose, the will of the Father wasn't always that of the Son. The agony in Gethsemane was proof enough of that. In the parable of Lk. 13:7,8, the servant [=Jesus] is commanded by his master [= God] to cut down the fig tree. Not only does the servant take a lot of initiative in saying that no, he will dig around it and try desperately to get it to give fruit; but, he says, if even that fails, then you, the Master, will have to cut it down… when he, the servant, had been ordered to do it by his master! This servant [the Lord Jesus] obviously has a most unusual relationship with the Master. He suggests things on his own initiative, and even passes the job of cutting off Israel back to God, as if He would rather not do it. In the parable of Lk. 14:22, the servant [= Jesus] reports to the master [= God] that the invited guests wouldn't come to the supper [cp. God's Kingdom]. The master tells the slave to go out into the streets and invite the poor. And then we're hit with an incredible unreality, especially to 1st century ears: "The servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room". No slave would take it upon himself to draw up the invitation list, or take the initiative to invite poor beggars into his master's supper. But this servant did! He not only had the unusual relationship with his master that allowed this huge exercise of his own initiative- but he somehow knew his master so well that he guessed in advance what the master would say, and he went and did it without being asked. In all this we have a wonderful insight into the relationship between the Father and Son, especially in the area of inviting people to His supper [cp. salvation]. The point of all this is to demonstrate how the Lord Jesus has His influence upon the

Father, and can at times change His stated purpose [e. g. with regard to the rejection of Israel- just as Moses did]. And this is the same Father and Son with whom we have to do, and whose matchless relationship is the basis and reason of our salvation.

Real Relationship

The parable of the fig tree appears to show the Lord Jesus as more gracious and patient than His Father- the owner of the vineyard (God) tells the dresser (Jesus) to cut it down, but the dresser asks for another year's grace to be shown to the miserable fig tree, and then, he says, the owner [God] Himself would have to cut it down (Lk. 13:7-9). **But in Jn. 6:37-39 we seem to have the Lord's recognition that the Father was more gracious to some than He would naturally be; for He says that He Himself will not cast any out, exactly because it was the Father's will that He should lose nothing but achieve a resurrection to life eternal for all given to Him.** And the Lord observed, both here and elsewhere, that He was not going to do His own will, but rather the will of the Father. Now this is exactly the sort of thing we would expect in a truly dynamic relationship- on some points the Father is more generous than the Son, and in other cases- vice versa. And yet Father and Son were, are and will be joined together in the same judgment and will, despite Father and Son having differing wills from one viewpoint. But this is the result of process, of differing perspectives coming together, of a mutuality we can scarcely enter into comprehending, of some sort of learning together, of a Son struggling to do the will of a superior Father rather than His own will, of conclusions jointly reached through experience, time and process- rather than an automatic, robot-like imposition of the Father's will and judgment upon the Son. And the awesome thing is, that the Lord invites us to know the Father, in the same way as He knows the Father. His relationship with the Father is a pattern for ours too.

Notes

(1) See http://www. aletheiacollege. net/ww/4-5-1extent_of_grace. htm

(2) John Launchbury, 'The Present Work Of Christ' , *Tidings* Vol. 69 No. 1, Jan. 2006 pp. 8-18.

2-23 Christ-centredness

The Gospel of the Lord Jesus isn't a collection of ideas and theologies bound together in a statement of faith. It is, rather, a proclamation of facts (and the Greek words used about the preaching of the Gospel support that view of it) concerning a flesh and blood historical person, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. The focus is all upon a concrete and actual person. Paul in Gal. 2:20 doesn't say: 'I live by faith in the idea that the Son of God loved me'. Rather: "I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me" (RV). Faith is centred in a person- hence the utterly central importance of our correctly understanding the Lord Jesus. We are clearly bidden see the man Jesus as the focus of everything. Think about how Mark speaks of Jesus " sitting in the sea" teaching the people on the shore (Mk. 4:1). All else was irrelevant- even the boat He was in. The focus is so zoomed in on the person of Jesus. And Paul in his more 'academic' approach sees Jesus as the very core of the whole cosmos, the reason for everything in the whole of existence. God's whole purpose, according to Paul, is that we should become like His Son-and to this end all things are directed in God's plan for us (Rom. 8:28,29). To achieve the " measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" is the 'perfection' or maturity towards which God works in our lives. As we read of Him day by day, slowly His words and ways will become ours. The men who lived with Jesus in the flesh are our pattern in this; for the wonder of the inspired record means that His realness comes through to us too. Time and again, their spoken and written words are reflective of His words, both consciously and unconsciously. Note how John repeats his Lord's use of the term "little children"; and how He appropriates the Lord's phrase "that your joy may be complete" (Jn. 16:24; 17:13) to the way *he* spoke (1 Jn. 1:4). These are just a tiny fraction of the examples possible. We are to speak, think and feel as He did; to *be* as He was and is; to be brethren in Him.

The extent to which we are intended to be Christ-centred is reflected in how John speaks of Him as "the truth". Indeed, He appears to refer to the Name of Jesus with the same sensitivity with which a Jew would refer to the Name of God. John seems to use *aletheia*, 'the truth', as a kind of periphrasis for "Jesus"; *en aletheia*, in the truth, appears to match Paul's *en kyrio* ['in the Lord'] or *en christo* ['in Christ']. John refers to missionaries being sent out "for the sake of the name", when the other records say that they were sent out

in the name of Jesus. The exalted Name of Jesus was therefore, to John, 'the truth'; the person of Jesus, which the Name encapsulates, is to be the deciding, central truth in the life of the believer. Note too how John speaks of Jesus as "that one" in the Greek text of 1 Jn. 2:6; 3:5,7,16; 4:17. I. H. Marshall comments: "Christians were so used to talking about Jesus that 'that One' was a self-evident term" (1). Too often I hear fellow believers talking about their faith in terms of "I believe that… I do not believe that…". Maybe I'm being hypercritical, but surely it ought to be a case of believing *in* the things of the personal Jesus, rather than 'believing *that*…'. For example. I believe *in* Jesus returning to the earth, rather than 'I believe that Jesus will return'. It's so absolutely vital to see and believe in the Lord Jesus as a person, rather than merely a set of doctrine / teaching *about* Him.

In the first century, you usually began a letter with a preface, saying who you were and to whom you were writing. The letter to the Hebrews has a preface which speaks simply of the greatness of Christ (Heb. 1:1-3). The higher critics speak of how the preface has been lost or got detached. But no, the form of Heb. 1:1-3 is indeed that of a preface. The point is that the greatness of Christ, of which the letter speaks, is so great as to push both the author and audience into irrelevancy and obscurity. It's significant that the New Testament writers speak so frequently of Jesus as simply "the Lord". Apparently, this would've been strange to first century ears. Kings and pagan gods always had their personal name added to the title 'the Lord'- e. g. 'the Lord Sarapis'. To just speak of "the Lord" was unheard of. The way the New Testament speaks like this indicates the utter primacy of the Lord Jesus in the minds of believers, and the familiarity they had with speaking about Him in such exalted terms.

Reading Luke and Acts through together, it becomes apparent that the author [Luke] saw the acts of the apostles as a continuation of those of the Lord Jesus. This is why he begins Acts by talking about his " former treatise" of all that Jesus had *begun* to do, implying that He had continued His doings through the doings of the apostles (cp. Heb. 2:3, Jesus " began" to speak the Gospel and we continue His work). Note too how Mark's Gospel likewise focuses on the beginnings of things (Mk. 1:1,45; 4:1; 5:17,20; 6:2,7,34,55; 8:11). It is for us to finish them. The Acts record repeatedly describes the converts as " the multitude of the disciples" (2:6; 4:32; 5:14,16; 6:2,5; 12:1,4; 15:12,30; 17:4; 19:9; 21:22), using the same word to describe the " multitude of the disciples" who followed the Lord during His ministry (Lk. 5:6; 19:37). There is no doubt that Luke intends us to see all converts as essentially continuing the witness of those men who walked around Palestine with the Lord between AD30 and AD33, stumbling and struggling through all their misunderstandings and pettiness, the ease with which they were distracted from the essential…to be workers together with Him. Luke describes the Lord and His followers as 'passing through' and teaching as He went (Lk. 2:15; 4:30; 5:15; 8:22; 9:6; 11:24; 17:11; 19:1,4); and employs the same word to describe the preaching of the apostles in Acts (8:4,40; 9:32,38; 10:38; 11:19,22; 12:10; 13:6,14; 14:24; 15:3,41; 16:6; 17:23; 18:23,27; 19:1,21; 20:2,25). He uses the same word translated 'preach' in both Luke and the Acts [although the other Gospels use it only once]. In Luke we find the word in 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18,43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1; and in Acts, in 5:42; 8:4,12,25,35,40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7,15,21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18. Luke clearly saw the early ecclesia as preaching the same message as Jesus and the apostles; they continued what was essentially a shared witness. This means that we too are to see in the Lord and the 12 as they walked around Galilee the basis for our witness; we are continuing their work, with just the same message and range of responses to it. Lk. 24:47 concludes the Gospel with the command to go and preach remission of sins, continuing the work of the Lord Himself, who began His ministry with the proclamation of remission (Lk. 4:18 cp. 1:77). Acts stresses that the believers did just this; they preached remission of sins [s. w.] in Jesus' Name, whose representatives they were: Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18. There is no doubt that we are called to witness (Acts 1:8,22; 22:15). But a witness, legally, isn't allowed to repeat what they have been told; rather must they testify firsthand to what they themselves have seen or experienced. Quite simply, we cannot witness for a Lord of whom we have only heard from others; we can only bear true witness of a Jesus whom we personally know. There is a crucial difference between knowing about a person, and knowing a person. And it is this difference, it seems to me, that we need to seriously reflect upon.

Luke describes the " amazement" at the preaching and person of Jesus (Lk. 2:47,48; 4:36; 5:26; 8:56; 24:22), and then uses the same word to describe the " amazement" at the apostles (Acts 2:7,12; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16). This is why the early brethren appropriated prophecies of Jesus personally to themselves as they witnessed to Him (Acts 4:24-30; 13:5,40). The same Greek words are also used in Luke and Acts about

the work of Jesus and those of the apostles later; and also, the same original words are used concerning the deeds of the apostles in the ministry of Jesus, and their deeds in Acts. Thus an impression is given that the ecclesia's witness after the resurrection was and is a continuation of the witness of the 12 men who walked around Galilee with Jesus. He didn't come to start a formalized religion; as groups of believers grew, the Holy Spirit guided them to have systems of leadership and organization, but the essence is that we too are personally following the Lamb of God as He walked around Galilee, hearing His words, seeing His ways, and following afar off to Golgotha carrying His cross. Luke concludes by recording how the Lord reminded His men that they were " witnesses" (23:48); but throughout Acts, they repeatedly describe themselves as witnesses to Him (Acts 1:8,22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39,41; 13:31; 22:15,20; 26:16). This is quite some emphasis. This too should fill our self-perception; that we are witnesses to the Lord out of our own personal experience of Him. **They were witnesses that Christ *is* on God's right hand, that He really *is* a Saviour and source of forgiveness (5:32)**; because they were self-evidently results of that forgiveness and that salvation. They couldn't be 'witnesses' to those things in any legal, concrete way; for apart from them and their very beings, there was no literal evidence. They hadn't been to Heaven and seen Him; they had no document that said they were forgiven. They were the witnesses in themselves. This even went to the extent of the Acts record saying that converts were both added to the ecclesia, and also added to Christ. He *was* His ecclesia; they were, and we are, His body in this world.

Knowing the Lord Jesus as a person will excite real passion and feeling in response. Our reactions to the tragedy of the way He was rejected, and is rejected and mocked to this day, will be like those of the woman who was a sinner whom Luke records in Lk. 7. The Lord was invited to the home of a Pharisee, who clearly had only invited Him to insult and mock Him. For the Pharisee hadn't kissed Him, nor arranged for His feet to be washed- things which simply *have* to be done to an invited guest. And so that woman becomes passionate. She feels anger and hurt for the insult and rejection made against Jesus. She does what Simon the Pharisee didn't do- kissing Him, washing His feet. Having no towel to dry His feet, she let down her hair to use as a towel- and a woman could be divorced for letting down her hair in front of men (2). She touches the Lord's body- something deeply despised, for the Greek and Hebrew idea of 'touching' has sexual overtones (Gen. 20:6; Prov. 6:29; 1 Cor. 7:1), the Greek word 'to touch' also meaning 'to light a fire'. The ointment she carried between her breasts denoted her as a prostitute (3)- but she breaks it open and pours it on the Lord in repentance. Her attitude was surely: 'Yeah I'm a whore, you all know that. And yes, you're all gonna misunderstand me and think I am just madly coming on at this Jesus. OK, misunderstand me as you will, I don't care, I truly love Him as my Saviour, and there, I'm pouring out my ointment, I'm through with this broadway life, I'm repenting, in the abandon of freedom from sin I now feel, I'm giving myself wholly to Him and His cause, mock me, be shocked and disgusted in your middle class way all you like, but this is for real'. And this, it seems to me, is the response of everyone who truly comes to the Lord Jesus as a person, and feels for Him as a real person whom we have met in a real, valid encounter. The Lord responded to that woman by doing something which may not seem a big deal to us, but which was radical in 1st century culture. He criticized strongly the hospitality of His host. This just wasn't done, and still isn't. He was angry- because despite the woman's sincerity, they still labelled her as a 'sinner' (Lk. 7:39). He rebuked Simon through the parable of the two debtors, who owed 500 pence and 50 pence. As that woman went away "in peace", with her Lord passionately behind her and on her side, defending her to the world, **so we too walk away from our encounters with Him.**

Notes

(1) I. H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) p. 128.

(2) Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables Of Jesus* (London: S. C. M. , 1963) p. 126.

(3) Kenneth Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) p. 11.

2-24 The Spirit Of Jesus

I observe in many Christian converts something which was also in me for far too long: a perception of the Lord Jesus as somehow passive, sitting dutifully at the Father's right hand until the day on the calendar comes when He will return to take us unto Himself. This really couldn't be further from the truth. The Spirit of Jesus is *so* active. *All* power has been given to Him; He it is who opens the seals so that world history can progress (Rev. 6). The essence of our belief, our being 'in the Truth', being Christians, Bible students (however you want to term it)- is a personal relationship with the Father and Son. It really isn't enough to see the Lord Jesus as a theological concept called 'Christ', a black box in our brain marked 'Jesus', who of necessity had our nature, who overcame it as our representative, and therefore opened up the way of salvation for those who identify themselves with Him. This is all vitally true; but just as cold theology, it won't save anyone. It must be so deeply believed, that the saving power of the Lord's character and the great salvation He is achieving is known *now* in our humbled souls, and reflected in our thinking and being. The idea of a *relationship* with Him, of Him actually *doing* things for us now, seems to be something we shy away from. The recognition that we do not now possess the miraculous Spirit gifts has perhaps made us go too far the other way: to a position where the Lord Jesus is only a passive onlooker in our struggles, and the Spirit of Jesus and God is effectively dead. Of course, we must ever remember that the Lord will not make us do something which is quite against our will: otherwise we would be but spiritual robots. And we must be aware of the 'cheap grace' in this area peddled by the 'evangelical' movement and their happy-clappy songs. On the other hand, if our spirituality and final redemption is left down to our unaided freewill, we won't get very far. The self-analysis of any honest Christian will soon make that apparent. We simply don't rise up to the call of true spirituality as we ought to. In our own strength, we will take the wrong turning, make the carnal choice, five times out of ten. There must be the Lord's hand and strength in our struggles for spiritual mastery. Otherwise our salvation, if ever we could achieve it, would be by human works rather than God's work and grace.

The Work Of The Spirit Of Jesus

The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'spirit' don't *only* mean 'power'. They frequently refer to the mind / heart. We read of God giving men a new heart, a new spirit; of Him working on men's hearts to make them do His will. He gives them a new spirit. This doesn't mean that they of their own volition have the *power* of the Holy Spirit gifts, as, e. g. , some in the early church did. God will strengthen the heart / spirit of those who try to be strong (Ps. 27:14; 31:24). He can even, somehow, withhold men from sinning (Gen. 20:6), and keep us from falling (Jude 24). We should therefore have no essential objection to the idea of the Lord granting us His Spirit, in the sense of His thinking, His heart / mind. The word of God is the essential medium through which the Spirit now moves; but whether this is the *only* method, and *how* God's word is used by the Father and Son to effect their purposes: of these things we cannot speak. The NT emphasizes, time and again, that after baptism, the Spirit operates upon us in this sense. *How* it operates is another question. The full force of this emphasis is only apparent when it is catalogued. Notice that none of these passages can be read with reference to miraculous possession of Spirit gifts; rather do they refer to the work of God on men's hearts. We perhaps tend to assume that "the Holy Spirit" refers to miraculous gifts far more often than it does. The Corinthians possessed the gifts, but were in a more fundamental sense Spirit-less (1 Cor. 3:1). “John did no miracle”, but was filled with the Spirit from his birth. Even the Comforter, which does refer to the miraculous gifts in its primary context, was, in perhaps another sense, to be unseen by the world, and to be *within* the believers (Jn. 14:17). It could well be that the Lord’s discourse with Nicodemus concerning the need to be born both of water and Spirit must be read in the context of John’s baptism; his was a birth of water, but Christian baptism is being described with an almost technical term: birth of the Spirit, in that baptism into the Spirit of Jesus brings the believer into the realm of the operation of God’s Spirit. Consider the following selection of passages:

"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5)
"The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in these things (i. e. *now*, in this life) serves Christ is acceptable" (Rom. 14:17)
"The God of patience and consolation *grant you* to be likeminded one toward another" (Rom. 15:5)
"Now the God of hope *fill you* with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13)
"Eye (the natural eye) has not seen, nor (the natural) ear heard, neither have entered into the (unregenerate) heart of (the natural) man, the things which God has prepared. . . but God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit. . . for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the

things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. For we have received. . . the spirit which is of God: that we might freely know the things that are freely given to us (of the Spirit) of God. Which things also we speak. . . in the words. . . which the Holy Spirit teaches" (1 Cor. 2:9-13)
"Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have (been given) of God" (1 Cor. 6:19)
"He which establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God; who has also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:21,22)
"He that has wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 5:5)
"Thanks be to God, which *put the same earnest care into the heart* of Titus" (2 Cor. 8:16)
"The communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14)
"That we might receive the promise of the Spirit (a reference to the Comforter?) through faith. . . that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ (what Jesus Christ promised: the Comforter?) might be given to them that believe" (Gal. 3:14,22)
"After that you believed, you were sealed with that (i. e. the specific, promised) holy Spirit of promise (the Comforter? when else was the Spirit promised?), which is the earnest of our inheritance (which we possess) until the redemption of the purchased possession. . . the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph. 1:13,14,19)
"**For through him we both have access by one Spirit [of Jesus] unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18)**
"I bow my knees. . . that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; *that* Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith: that you, being rooted and grounded (by Him) in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth (human, unaided) knowledge, that you *might be filled* with the fullness (the characteristics, Ex. 34:5,6 RV) of God. . . him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:16-21).
"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30)
"Be (let yourselves be) filled with the Spirit [of Jesus]" (Eph. 5:18)
"This shall turn to my salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19)
"(I) do not cease to pray for you, that you may be filled (by him) with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding: that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. . . strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience" (Col. 1:9-11)
"You became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6)
". . . God, who has also given us his holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 4:8)
"God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the Truth. . . now our Lord Jesus Christ himself. . . comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work" (2 Thess. 2:13,17)
"God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7)
"That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us" (2 Tim. 1:14)
"God perhaps will *give them* repentance. . . God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. . . renew them unto repentance" (2 Tim. 2:25; Acts 11:18; Heb. 6:6- note that God gave repentance, not just forgiveness)
"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ. . . that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Tit. 3:5-7)
"I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb. 8:10; this is a condition of the new covenant which we are now in)
"The God of peace. . . make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:20,21)
"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally. . . and it shall be given him" (James 1:5)
"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience. . . who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Pet. 1:2,5).

This catena of passages could be easily extended. There can be no doubt that the operation of God's Spirit in men is a major N. T. theme. *How* exactly it is achieved is beyond my present comment- save to say, that without a true love of and response to God's word, we are frustrating the evident enthusiasm and will of the Father and Son for our redemption.

"The Lord the Spirit"

The Lord Jesus is "the Lord the spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV); and "the Spirit" is one of Jesus' titles in Revelation, so closely is He identified with the work of the Spirit. The Lord calls men and women to Him, having first prepared their way to Him, guiding the preachers of His word. He brings people to baptism, enters into a husband-wife relationship with them (Eph. 5:24), has children by them (i. e. spirituality develops in our characters, Rom. 7:4), strengthens them afterwards, keeps them in Him, "in everything. . . co-operates for good with those that love God" (Rom. 8:28 NEB), saves them in an ongoing sense, develops them spiritually, and then finally presents them perfect at His return. He is actively subduing "all things", even in the natural creation, unto Himself (1 Cor. 15:27,28 Gk.). However, the NT focuses on His work amongst us, the ecclesia. Where two or three are gathered, He manifests Himself in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20). He is like a priest constantly on duty, bringing His people to the Father (Mt. 26:29 cp. Lev. 11:9). The lampstand is a symbol of the ecclesia; the lamps are us. The oil is the spirit of Jesus. Aaron was as Jesus. He daily 'orders' us, enabling us to shine (Lev. 24:4). Jesus understood this to be so in saying that He came to fan mens' lamps into brighter light, to mend smoking flax, not give up on it. And He is actively about this work on a daily basis as were the priests.

The Lord The Preacher

The Lord Jesus has compassion upon those who are ignorant of His Gospel, just as He does upon those who fall out of the way to life (Heb. 5:2, alluding to Christ as the good Samaritan who comes to stricken men). It is He who brings men to faith in God (1 Pet. 1:21; 3:18), revealing the Father to men (Lk. 10:22; Jn. 14:21), calling and inviting them to the Kingdom (1 Pet. 5:10; Rev. 22:17), going out into the market place and calling labourers (Mt. 20:3-7), almost *compelling* men to come in to the ecclesia (Mt. 22:8-10), receiving them when they are baptized (Rom. 15:7). He is the sower who sows the word in men's hearts, working night and day in the tending of the seed after it has take root (Mk. 4:27); the one who lights the candle in men's spirituality so that it might give light to others (Mk. 4:21). He permits and sometimes blocks preaching (1 Cor. 16:7,4,19; 2 Cor. 2:12; Phil. 2:24; 1 Thess. 3:11). When a preaching effort yields a much lower or higher response than anticipated: this is nothing else but the Lord Jesus working with us. He desires to manifest His meekness and gentleness through those who preach Him (2 Cor. 10:1). This very fact that He is working *through* His preachers ought to instil a far greater attention as to what manner of persons we are, as we reflect Him to this world. The Lord Jesus works through men like us (Heb. 13:21), He comes and preaches to men through those who preach Him (Eph. 2:17; 4:21). He works in the lives of His people so that they witness about Him to others (Col. 1:29), strengthening those who preach Him (2 Tim. 4:17 and often in the Acts record), with them in their witness to the end of the world, figuratively and geographically (Mt. 28:20), working with the preachers (Mk. 16:20), and by their preaching, He reveals Himself to men (Eph. 1:7-9), taking hold of them by the Gospel (Phil. 3:12). He is like the boy who brings the ship's line to shore (AV "forerunner" , Heb. 6:20), and then guides the ship to dock; or, to use a different figure, the author (beginner) and developer of our faith (Heb. 12:3).

The Lord Who Blesses

Baptism is to be associated with the ancient rite of circumcision. The Lord Jesus Himself as it were circumcises men at their baptism, cutting off the flesh of their past lives, and thereby inviting them to live in a manner appropriate to what He has done for them (Col. 2:11-13). He wishes us to be like Him, to have *His* Spirit. In this sense, through having the spirit of Jesus, He comes and lives in the hearts of those who accept Him (Rom. 8:1-26; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20). There is a resultant joy in the heart of the convert after baptism, as a result of the Lord's work (1 Thess. 1:6). To this end, He blesses us with all the varied blessings of His Spirit (Eph. 1:3 Gk.). Not only does He expect us to develop His Spirit within us, but in response to this, He sheds His Spirit upon us at baptism (Tit. 3:5,6). This statement is not to be taken as many an evangelical would read it. The Lord Jesus sheds His Spirit in the sense of an outpouring of His work and involvement in the lives of the man who has accepted the Lord as his saviour in baptism. After that act of commitment to Him, He builds us up (Col. 2:6,7; 2 Thess. 3:3-5), using other brethren to do so

(1 Thess. 3:2). Every visit, every letter, the Lord graciously uses. He does, of course, work Himself on the mind of men, but never totally separate from the word of the Spirit, and never forcing a man against his own will. The Lord Jesus writes on men's hearts (2 Cor. 3:3), He personally gives grace and peace (Eph. 2:7; 2 Thess. 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:2 etc. - a major theme in Paul's salutations), and thereby changes men from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18)- all done by the Spirit of Jesus. As brethren and sisters strive to fellowship His sufferings in their self-control and self-sacrifice, so He bestows His gracious power and comfort, as part of the relationship He has with us (2 Cor. 1:5; 12:9). By doing this, He brings glory to God (the manifestation of God's characteristics) in the ecclesia (Eph. 3:21). He strengthens brethren to have spiritual attitudes, for example, to be able to accept situations (Phil. 4:11-13); He succours us in temptation (Heb. 2:18; 2 Pet. 2:9), and guides our experiences so that we grow in true love for each other (1 Thess. 3:12). He comforts our hearts and establishes our words and works (2 Thess. 2:16,17). He directs the development of our thinking towards an appreciation of the Father's matchless love (2 Thess. 3:5). In all this, He establishes the minds of believers as they should be (1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:16,17; 3:3), He is in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22; Philemon 25), and preserves us in Him (Jude 1,24). In all these things, the Lord is stronger than man and human flesh. Ultimately, at the end of the days of every man and woman who has remained in Him, He will have achieved His ends. The Lord Jesus is *with us* in the sense that the spirit of Jesus is in and with us. He wishes to live ou lifes as we are. He has come to us, through the preaching of the Gospel. The parables which suggest that He is now absent are mainly in the context of describing His return and judgment. The actual material reality of being with Him will be of such an exalted nature that *relatively speaking*, it is as if He were absent- but in essence, He is in us. He tries to make the whole ecclesia, His body, cohere and grow together (Mt. 16:18; Col. 2:19 cp. Eph. 4:15,16)- although how often do we thwart His work.

He walks among the ecclesias He is building up (Rev. 2:1), opening up the hearts of individual members for examination (Heb. 4:13), searching our motives (2 Cor. 8:21; 10:18) by the spirit of Jesus, noting the good and bad points (Rev. 2:3,4), measuring their growth (Rev. 2:5,19), washing and pruning the vine so that it gives more fruit (Jn. 15), chastening so that the fruit of spirituality improves (Rev. 3:19), giving space to repent (Rev. 2:21) and punishing the apostate (Rev. 2:5). He even works with parents, nurturing and admonishing their children in spiritual growth (Eph. 6:4). Pause to reflect- that this is what He is doing with you, and the brethren with whom you meet and mix regularly. I would go so far as to suggest that as the Lord hung on the cross, He was motivated by the thought of all this future work which His sacrifice would enable Him to do. "He gave himself for us, *that* (so that) he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14). So, let's do the works- for the Lord imagined us, in our paltry zeal, responding to His cross. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, *that* he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). That last clause covers *all* His work- the calling and guiding of men to baptism, the blessing of them and intercession for them. . . And He died as He did in order to be able to accomplish all this work for us. The final outbreathing of the spirit of Jesus was made toward that small body of representatives of His faithful people gathered around the cross.

The Saviour Lord

The Lord Jesus both was *and is* the saviour of the body (Eph. 5:23,26,27); He nourishes and cherishes us through our response to His word, as a faithful husband (Eph. 5:27). The salvation He achieves for us is being worked out in an ongoing sense. Atonement and justification are expressed to us in courtroom language, but this must not take away from the passion and ongoing nature of the salvation which has and is being achieved for us by our active Lord. We receive abundance of grace and righteousness in an ongoing sense (Rom. 5:17). He saved us in His perfect life and death; but through the spirit of Jesus He is our Saviour now, day by day, we are saved because of what He does for us now that He is alive again (Rom. 5:5,10): and finally He will save us into His Kingdom when He returns. To that end, He keeps hearts and minds in peace (Phil. 4:7), and supplies our spiritual needs (Phil. 4:19). He cleanses and justifies us in an ongoing sense (Gal. 2:17; 1 Jn. 1:7), He is our Heavenly advocate for our every sin (1 Jn. 2:1), constantly praying for us, perhaps even after our death (Heb. 7:24-27 may imply); it is almost as if He lives through His sacrifice again, as He cleanses our consciences of sin (Heb. 9:14). We go forth to Him day by day, without the camp, bearing our stake- as if the cross is still there. On the cross, the Lord Jesus resigned His riches, that we through His poverty might be rich (2 Cor. 8:8). And yet Rom. 10:12; Col. 1:27; 2:2 and Eph. 3:8 tell us that the Lord's riches are *now* bestowed upon us, the riches of the spirit of Jesus, in our experience of His grace and salvation. The point is, the essence of the Lord's love on the cross, that devotion

and victory which He rose to and obtained, is all still poured out upon us now. The cross is still there. If we reject Him, we crucify Him afresh, making Him actively re-live the shame of the cross (Heb. 6:6). He intercedes for us now as He did on the cross (Rom. 8:26 cp. Heb. 5:7-9), not only in support of our prayers, but also praying for us on His own agenda (as He did for Lazarus to be raised). The Lord praying in the mountain whilst the disciples, in their unspirituality, struggled on the lake. . . this is a cameo of the Lord's present work for us.

The Lord Jesus is truly alive and active amongst us and within us. Paul saw the Lord Jesus always before his face in ecclesial life. He recognized that we can sin against Him (1 Cor. 8:12), tempt Him (1 Cor. 10:9), provoke Him to jealousy (1 Cor. 10:22). In his final writings, Paul charges his brethren before the Lord Jesus (e. g. 1 Tim. 5:21; 6:13; 2 Tim. 2:14; 4:1). This may suggest that at the end of his life, Paul felt ever more strongly the real presence of the Lord. It is one thing to believe that Jesus of Nazareth rose again and was exalted; it is quite another to know Him as an ever-present, ever-working reality in our lives; the man, the more-than-man, whom we should see as our Lord and Master, our Captain, the One who leads by example hour by hour, the One who died for us and rose again: the One whom we are dedicated to serving (2 Cor. 8:5; Eph. 6:6). The language of serving, ministering to, attending upon the Lord Jesus *simply fills the New Testament*. He is a real, living Master and Lord, and according to our realization of this, our grasping of the spirit of Jesus, so will our service be.

Footnote: The Lord Jesus In Acts

The Gospel records, Luke tells us, were a record of all the Lord Jesus *began* to do; the implication is that Acts is a continued account of the Lord's work (Acts 1:1). Acts is, therefore, an account of the sort of work which we have detailed above. The risen Lord lead thousands in Israel to repentance (5:31), and did the same among the Gentiles (cp. 14:27), opening hearts to His Gospel (16:14), controlling the areas preached in (16:6,10; 22:21), adding to His church (2:47), almost giving faith to men (3:16), turning them from their sins (3:26), pricking their consciences (9:5), converting them (11:20,21), revealing Himself to them (9:16), His Angel arranging conversions (8:26; 12:11,23). The Lord's preachers are described as "preaching through Jesus"; their words were on His behalf (4:2). "Through this man is preached unto you. . . ", Paul emphasized (13:38). Even a Messianic prophecy about Christ as light of the world is applied to His preachers (13:47). Yet He had to strengthen, deliver and encourage His weak preachers, than He might work through them the more (13:52; 18:9; 23:11; 26:17). The healings done by the apostles were effectively done by Him working through them (4:10; 9:34; 13:11). He justifies them throughout their lives (13:39 Gk.), caring for those He has converted all their days (14:23), and at the end of their lives, receives the spirit of His followers (7:56,59). Given this intense activity of the Lord Jesus, it's not surprising to find examples of believers praying to Him as well as to the Father. And this should be part of our experience of Him too- after all, do we expect to meet a much loved Lord and Saviour at judgment day with whom we've never spoken before? Speaking of "the Son of God", John comments that "if we ask anything according to his will he hears us" (1 Jn. 5:14). That alone is proof enough that prayer to Jesus, including requests to Him, was the norm in the first century church.

Another related theme of Acts is that the work of the Father and Son are paralleled (e. g. 16:31 cp. 34; 15:12; 26:17 cp. 22). They are working *together* to achieve our final redemption. The concept is wondrous.

3 Why The Trinity Was Accepted

In my opinion, the Biblical evidence against the trinity is compelling. And yet the majority of professing Christians are trinitarian; and moreover, they stigmatize non-trinitarians as non-Christian, many claiming that non-trinitarians are automatically a 'sect'. Clearly enough, neither the word 'trinity' nor the wording of the trinitarian formula were known to New Testament Christianity. In a sense, Jesus 'became' God to many Christians all because a group of bishops decided it was so. But *why* did this happen? And why was there so much angst to label those who didn't accept the trinity as heretics? Having read around the history of the early centuries of Christianity, the following are some suggested reasons.

3-1 Accommodation To Paganism

From earliest times, paganism featured many gods often subsumed beneath or within one apparently greater god. Each tribe or territory had their own god, but as they were subsumed within other tribes by conquest or some other form of domination, their god became subsumed beneath the god of the dominant tribe or nation. Thus there developed pantheons of gods, and yet within the pantheons there was often a hierarchy, and a desire to insist on one hand that the god of the subdued people still existed, and yet on the other hand, an insistence that the god of the dominant group was supreme. It was generally accepted that there was a "communion of blood and soil" between a nation and their god, in that their god was connected to the land or territory upon which that god's people lived (1). Hence Naaman wanted to take some soil from Israel back to Syria to symbolize how the God of Israel was his God (2 Kings 5:17). When tribes were taken into captivity, or conquerors came and lived in their land, the gods had to somehow be accomodated within a religious system. **And so began the idea of 'godheads'.** The mysterious, ill defined relationships between the members of the supposed 'Trinity' are very similar to those assumed within the godheads of paganism. Apologists for the Trinity are all divided about the nature of the relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit; this is a weak point in the whole idea. And the very same difficulty is encountered by any who would wish to explain or defend the gods within the pagan godheads. Further, it becomes apparent from the literature and sculptured art of early paganism that gods, animals and humans all tend to get mixed up; half-human and half-god. Again, we can see how this came to be reflected in Trinitarian views of Jesus.

It was a mixture of paganism and Christianity which made the changeover from paganism to nominal Christianity less controversial and more painless. I've given some specific examples of this in a European context below. Many scholars have pointed out that the idea of a Divine figure coming to earth to redeem the faithful was a very common pagan myth in the Middle East of the first century (2). It's easy to see how early Christians would've been tempted to claim that Christ was some form of pre-existent God in order to make their beliefs accommodate the surrounding paganism- and it's understandable that some would've been eager to misinterpret Bible passages to this end.

The idea of a 'trinity' of gods was widespread in paganism. The Egyptians had three main gods, Osiris, Isis and Horus. Horus was in turn divided into 3 parts or persons:

Horus - the King
Horus - Ra
Horus - the Scarabaeus.

Likewise the Hindu Vedas of around 1000 BC claimed that one God existed in three forms:

Agni - Fire, presiding over the earth
Indra - the Firmament, presiding over the mid-air
Surya - The Sun. presiding over the Heavens.

In later Hinduism, the 'trimurti' or trinity of gods became:

Brahma - the creative power
Vishnu - the preserving power
Siva - the transforming power.

So when Theophilus, bishop of Antioch introdcued the word 'trias' to Christian literature for the first time in AD170, and the word '**trinitas**' was first used by Tertullian in AD200, they were importing pagan concepts which were familiar and had been for millenia.

Barry Cunliffe (3) notes "the prevalence of tripilism in Celtic religion… The 'power of three' was frequently expressed in iconography, as, for example, in the three-faced stone head from Corleck, Cavan, in Ireland or the tricephalic deity depicted on the pot from Bavay in northern France, but it is also found as a recurring motif- the triskele- in Celtic art. The concept is made even more specific in the Romano-British and Gallo-Roman religion in the form of the *Deae Matres* or the *Matronae*- the three mother goddesses- who together form a unity representing strength, power and fertility. Another but less widespread female trinity are the *Saluviae*, who preside over springs… inscriptions to the *Lugoves* in Switzerland and Spain may well refer to a triple form of Lugh. In the Insular literature of Ireland, tripilism is a recurring theme. The great goddess, the Morrigan in her plural form, the Morrigna, resolves into three: Morrigan, Badb, and Nemain. Brigit and Macha also occur as triads. It is tempting to wonder if the threefold division proposed by Lucan, of Esus, Teutates, and Taranis, is a further expression of Celtic tripilism".

So it's not surprising that the idea of God as a trinity was easily accepted in Europe- the one true God had been adapted to the pagan background culture, rather than Bible truth being allowed to define our beliefs. The more one searches, the more one finds evidence of what Cunliffe calls "tripilisms", **pagan godheads that occurred in three forms or persons.** Examples include: the "three legs of Mann" on the Isle of Mann, which symbol is also found on coins found in Italy and Asia Minor from before the time of Christ; the triple knot inscriptions [called the Triquetra] and the "Triskel" symbol, again a reference to some primitive form of 'trinity', found in inscriptions and art forms throughout Brittany, Ireland and Western Britain. There's a small plaque of schist from Bath, England with three female figures representing the 'three mothers', a triad of deities. These triads of mother goddesses were common in the West of Britain in the early Roman period, probably reflecting an earlier Iron Age tradition. The original is in the Roman Baths Museum in Bath UK.

Greek Influence

Greek mythology was well known, and formed the background for the early Christian converts. It was full of legends relating how young men sacrificed themselves in the prime of life, winning victories against superhuman odds, and then resurrected, ascended to 'heaven' and turned into gods who were to be worshipped on earth. Heracles is the classic example, but Martin Hengel lists many others (4). It's easy to see how people who had heard something of the Christian Gospel, but were not aware or didn't pay attention to the content of the word itself, came to confuse the story of Jesus with these kinds of myths and legends. And so they ended up seeing Jesus as a God, one of many. . . and the fatal step towards Trinitarian doctrine was thus natural and easy for them. Again, if they had paid attention to the actual words of the Christian message, they'd have seen the crucial difference between those myths, and the startling reality of the real Christ. But because they paid insufficient attention to God's word in the Gospel, they ended up understanding the Christian story in terms of the surrounding mythology, rather than giving God's word its' full weight and seeing Christ freestanding, as the unique *Son* of God whom He was.

Roman Influence

Around AD8, Ovid published his collection of poems called *Metamorphoses*. They are full of tales of how gods descended to earth, incarnated as men, and then went back to Heaven. Jupiter and Mercury were supposed to have come to earth, unrecognized as men, and were supposedly entertained by Baucis and Philemon. **These ideas were common in the first century- hence when Paul and Barnabas did miracles (Acts 14:11), the people assumed they were Hermes and Zeus (the Greek equivalent of Mercury and Jupiter).** Note, of course, how fervently Paul denied this! Cicero wrote to the governor of Asia and encouraged him to act as if he were one of the Divine men who supposedly came to earth from Heaven (*Ad*

Quintem Fratrem I. i. 7). Horace in B. C. 30 addressed Caesar Augustus as Mercury incarnate, and wrote that the son of Mercury was to come down from Heaven and 'expiate human guilt' (*Odes* I. 2). Vergil in 40 B. C. made a similar prophecy that "was later interpreted as a Messianic prophecy by Christians" (5). I find all this highly significant. The ideas of a pre-existent God coming to earth as man, as a saviour, expiating human guilt etc. , were all pagan ideas. And it is these very ideas which were seized upon by Christians and later made respectable [in orthodox Christian terms] as the doctrine of the trinity. **A hard question to trinitarians would be: 'How do you explain the huge similarities between your beliefs and those of pagan Greece and Rome at the time of Jesus?**'. This question hits the harder when the admission is finally forced that the New Testament itself is silent about the trinity, incarnation, God becoming man, personal pre-existence of Jesus etc. And the question acquires fatal force when it is demonstrated that the few New Testament passages used to shore up trinitarianism are in fact examples of the apostles quoting or alluding to the pagan myths *in order to debunk them*. I have exemplified that point frequently in these studies- see, e. g. , my comments on Philippians 2.

The Roman policy was not to deride the gods of the peoples they conquered but rather to introduce them into their religious systems. "Local gods would be merged into the Roman pantheon- a provincial god of thunder could simply be seen as Zeus or Jupiter in a different guise- with the result that a complex of interlocking rituals and scared sites could sustain local cultures without undermining Roman supremacy" (6). When Rome adopted Christianity, this mindset continued- hence the willingness to import 'tripilisms' of local pagan cultures into Constantine's version of Christianity. In order to enforce unity of belief in the Roman empire, there began a program of church building after the time of Constantine. "In this way a pagan custom, the worship of gods through impressive buildings, was transferred successfully into Christianity. Such display was completely alien to the Christian tradition. . . " (7). Theodosius followed Constantine in trying to ensure that Trinitarian Christianity was the one and only state religion. This meant campaigns against paganism as well as Trinitarian Christians. But these campaigns inevitably met resistance; and the Roman empire sought compromise to their advantage wherever possible. Thus a law was passed forbidding the lighting of lamps in front of pagan sacred places; but instead it was permitted to light lamps in front of Christian altars and tombs. Jerome justified this by teaching that pagan practices were acceptable when done in a Christian context.

Remember that the trinity was adopted at the Council of Nicea in AD325. This Council was called by Constantine after he decided he wished to turn the official religion of the Roman empire from paganism to Christianity. Not long before that Council, Christians had been cruelly persecuted. Some of the delegates at that Council even bore on their faces and in their bodies the marks of that persecution. The pagans had [falsely] accused the Christians of making Jesus into a God whom they worshipped. Pliny had reported how they "chant antiphonally a hymn to Christ as to a god" (8). In the pagan Roman world, only the Jews refused to worship other gods on the basis that there was only one true God. The fact the Christians did the same led to the perception that they too thought that there was only one God, just that they called Him 'Christ'. The Jews likewise wrongly assumed that anyone claiming to be the Son of God was claiming to be God (Jn. 10:33-36; 19:7)- even though Jesus specifically corrected them over this! As often happens, the perceptions of a group by their enemies often come to define how the group perceive themselves. Constantine was a politician and a warrior. He wasn't a Bible student, nor a theologian, in fact he wasn't even a very serious Christian (9). Although he accepted Christianity, he said he didn't want to be baptized because he wanted to continue in sin. He seems to have figured that Christianity was the right thing for the empire. So, Christianity, here we come. Constantine, and many others who jumped on the 'Christian' bandwagon, shared the perception of Christ which had existed in the pagan world which they had grown up in. And the pagan perception, as Pliny and many others make clear, was that Jesus was a kind of God. And so when Constantine presided over the dispute amongst the bishops at Nicea about who Jesus was, he naturally assumed that the 'Jesus is God Himself' party were in fact traditional Christians.

Notes

(1) H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 69. Chapter 6 of Renckens' book exemplifies in more detail this development of 'godheads' within paganism.

(2) Barry Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* (London: Penguin, 1999) p. 17
(3) Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology Of The New Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1965) Vol. 1 p. 166; F. B. Craddock, *The Pre-Existence Of Christ In The New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968); M. Wiles, *The Remaking Of Christian Doctrine* (London: S. C. M. , 1974) Chapter 3.

(4) Martin Hengel, *The Cross Of The Son Of God* (London: S. C. M. , 1986) pp. 192-194.

(5) Frances Young, in John Hick, ed. , *The Myth Of God Incarnate* (London: S. C. M. , 1977) p. 97.

(6) Charles Freeman, *AD381: Heretics, Pagans And The Christian State* (London: Pimlico, 2008) p. 18.

(7) Freeman, *ibid* p. 48.

(8) Pliny (the Younger), *Epistles* 10. 96. English translation in *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative Of The History of The Church To AD 337*, ed. J. Stevenson (London: S. P. C. K. , 1974) pp. 13-15.

(9) There's strong historical evidence that Constantine was scarcely a Christian himself by the time of the Council of Nicea. The idea is commonly held that he saw a vision of Christ at the battle of Milvan Bridge in AD312 and then converted to Christianity in gratitude, especially as Christ supposedly told him to lead his soldiers with the sign of the cross. However, there is serious evidence against this. After the battle, he claimed that "The supreme deity" had helped him, and he placed "the heavenly sign of God" on his soldier's shields. But historical sources dating from soon after the battle state that this sign was not the cross, but the chi-ro sign, or labarum- **the emblem of the sun god**. It was only many years later that Eusebius wrote a biography of Constantine, in which he claimed that this had actually been the sign of the cross. After the battle in AD312, Constantine erected a triumphal arch opposite the Colosseum in Rome to celebrate the victory- and covered it with reliefs of Mars, Jupiter, Hercules [the gods of war], and ascribed victory to the power of the Sun god. Depictions of the battle show no soldier with any cross on his shield! As late as AD320, Constantine's coins represented him with the crown of the 'Sol Invictus', the Sun god cult. And was it co-incidence that he declared December 25th, the main festival of the 'Sol Invictus', as the birthday of Jesus? Further, his new capital, Constantinople, was committed to the care of the local protecting deities, Rhea and Tyche- Constantine built temples for them all over his new capital. (see video)

3-2 Genuine Intellectual Failure?

There was an element of genuine misinterpretation. For the Middle Eastern people of the first century, any supernatural being could be spoken of as a 'god'. When Paul preached the resurrected Jesus in Acts 17:18, the people assumed he was telling them about a strange 'god'. There was no precise definition of 'god' but it is clear that it was open to leading towards the 'Jesus = God' error. As you read through the New Testament chronologically, it becomes apparent that the Lord Jesus is spoken of in ever more exalted language. For example, the term “son of man” is a favourite of the Gospel writers to describe the Lord Jesus. But it occurs only once in the later New Testament. **Mark, the first Gospel, never calls Jesus “Lord”**- but “Lord” is Paul’s most common title of Jesus some years later. John’s Gospel, clearly written after the other three, uses much more exalted language about the Lord Jesus than the earlier Gospels. The growth in perception of the greatness of Jesus is also perhaps reflected in the way that Revelation, the last inspired book of the New Testament, employs the most exalted language about Jesus. Both Paul and Peter show a progressive fondness in their choice of words for terms which exalt Jesus higher and higher. And presumably this trend continued after their death, as believers realized more and more that the carpenter from Nazareth had in fact been God’s Son, and is now the exalted King of Heaven and earth. The penny dropped that in fact “we can never exalt Christ too highly”, as Robert Roberts put it in the 19th century. But… and it’s a big but. The language of exaltation can reach a point where Jesus is no longer Jesus, but somehow God Himself. Further,

it's my observation that intellectual failure very often has an underlying psychological basis. To make Jesus God was one thing, but to accept the doctrine of three Gods in one, the trinity, was another. And I submit that this intellectual failure was rooted, even unconsciously, in a desire for an easier ride. It is after all extremely demanding to accept that a man, born into all our dysfunction, could be perfect; that from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there could come forth the words of God Almighty. It's a challenge, because we too are human; and if this was how far one of us could rise, above all the things that hold us down, that retard our growth towards the image of God Himself… then He is setting us an example so challenging that it reaches into the very core of our being, uncomfortably, inconveniently and even worryingly. To have a Jesus who was in fact not truly human, but just acting out, a Jesus who was really God and not man… this removes so much of the challenge of the real, human Christ.

- It has to be admitted that any attempt to use human language in order to somehow express the greatness of what the Lord Jesus has achieved, who He was and who He is, is somehow doomed to failure. I may break the rules of grammatical convention in my writings by writing the personal pronouns related to Jesus with a capital 'H' ("He. . . His. . . Him"), but this of course quite fails to express in language and under "the tyranny of words" all that I think of Him. I like to imagine that all genuine believers know something of my dilemma. As Robert Roberts said so well, "We cannot lift Christ too high". Perhaps it was in this spirit that men began to speak of Jesus as "God"- the problem is that by ending up with the "Jesus=God" equation, we are doing violence to God's word and also actually minimizing the colossal, unspeakable achievement of the human Jesus. The New Testament is full of very high adoration for the Lord Jesus. Since those words and phrases were chosen under the inspiration of God, His Father, we would be better advised to stick with them rather than try to invent our own terms and analogies in order to express His greatness. The structure of the original text of the prologue to John's Gospel regarding the word, and also Phil. 2:9-11 regarding the exaltation of Jesus, are arranged in such a way that they appear to be hymns which were sung by the believers. Pliny the Younger (*Epistle* 10. 96. 7) writes of the Christians "singing hymns to Christ as to a god"; surely he had in mind these passages. It can often be that we adopt the very position falsely ascribed to us by our critics; and perhaps that's what happened here. The critics of early Christianity wrongly claimed that the Christians thought of Jesus as God; and this eventually became their position for the most part, *although it was not originally.*

- It could be that some read [or heard of] the Biblical descriptions of Christ in glory *now* and assumed that this is how He must have been whilst on earth- and thus artists depict Jesus praying in Gethsemane which the kind of halo of glory around His head which we might assume He *now* has. That, however, is a really quite inexcusable misuse of the Bible text, taking a few verses and images from one part of it with no respect at all for the others. I'm being generous by categorizing this kind of thing under 'intellectual failure'. For the Bible is God's word to us, carefully and amazingly preserved by Him. . . and to treat it like this is rather like my hearing your earnest and passionate explanation of something to me, but my only bothering to *listen* to a couple of phrases, and then using these to totally misrepresent to others your whole message to me.

- Suetonius records that there were frequent "disturbances caused by Chrestus among the Jews of Rome" (*Claudius* 25. 4). 'Chrestus' meant 'slave'- this was how Jesus was known, as the slave who was King. But those ideas didn't fit together well in the Mediterranean world, where the image of a humble King was somehow a contradiction in terms. For me, the significance of Suetonius' record is that the Lord Jesus was initially popularly known as *Chrestus*, the glorified slave, rather than *Christos*, the Christ. Of course it's quite Biblical and correct to call Jesus "the Christ"; but in early Christianity He was glorified for His humility, as a slave of all who was thereby exalted. The trinity seems to have partly arisen from a forgetting of this factor in His exaltation, and focusing instead solely on the titles of His glorification until the primitive and incorrect equation "Jesus=God" was reached.

- Christianity was and is radically counter-cultural. The very terms used by the Roman empire regarding its Kingdom and Caesars are all applied to the Kingdom of God and to His Son. I have exemplified this at length elsewhere (1). Thus 'Caesar is Lord' became 'Jesus is Lord' in early Christianity (2). I suggest that there may have been an element of genuine intellectual failure amongst some illiterate early Christians, who noticed this feature of Christianity, and wrongly inferred from it that therefore all that is true or claimed to be true of Caesar must therefore be true of Jesus- when the fact they shared the same verbal titles doesn't imply that at all. Thus when it was claimed that Caesar was a pre-existent God who on death returned to

Heaven, those illiterate [and other] folks may have been tempted to assume that this was therefore also true of Jesus. But maybe I'm being too generous here. The early Christians virulently rejected the Emperor-cult; but as Christianity came to merge with the Roman world, it became modelled on the Emperor-cult in a way which the earliest Christians would've fiercely rejected. By the Middle Ages, icons were depicting Christ appearing like the Emperor, and God rendered as the Pope- Van Eyck and Botticelli presented God the Father as wearing the same triple crown which the Pope wore (3). In this we see the full mixture of apostate church and worldly state, and the Trinity was just a convenient means to that end.

- Initially, as we see from e. g. John's Gospel, the core issue in Christianity revolved around simply believing in Jesus. But soon, as we see from John's letters, it became important to counter wrong beliefs *about* Jesus. As controversy over interpretation developed, it was almost inevitable that the arguments led to exaggerations on both sides. We see it happen in political arguments today- the supporters of candidate X respond to criticisms of him by painting him as more exalted, wonderful and even Divine than he really ever could be. And as they do so, the critics become even more virulently against them. This is the nature of controversy. And as the Jews began expelling Christians from their synagogues (Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) and inventing many slanderous stories about Jesus, it was inevitable that those without a solid Biblical grounding in their faith would *react* rather than *Biblically respond* to this- by making Jesus out to be far more 'Divine' than He was.

The Hebraic Mindset

So many have pointed out that our difficulties in understanding the Bible often arise from reading Hebrew literature with a Greek, Western mindset. The Eastern, Semitic thinker will say things like "Israel killed 1000 Palestinians today!" when 10 were killed; "It's 1000 degrees today!" when it's only 40. The literalistic Western mind would see these statements as 'untrue', 'exaggerations' and lacking integrity. But they are perfectly valid forms of expression within Semitic mindsets. Many interpretations of the Lord's parables have come to grief because of the desire by Western readers to interpret each feature in a logical [to them] manner. 'Greek', **Western thinking seeks to isolate and interpret each detail in a literal manner, rather than perceiving that Hebrew thinking uses exaggerations, paradoxes and elements of unreality in order to make a point.** "There is much in most of the parables of Jesus which to the literal or logical mind is at best fanciful, at worst nonsensical. But the literal or logical mind is not the only kind of mind. . . the Hebrew religion ought to be taken by is, and was taken by its own prophets, Jesus among them, in a poetic sense, not in a prosaic or literal one. When theology fails to understand the Hebrew scriptures in this way, it becomes an immense misunderstanding of the Bible" (4). It's no wonder that there are such serious misunderstandings when we come to the language used about the relationship between the Father and His Son.

In Hebrew thought, it was quite common to speak of God as having an intention which was then fulfilled. Indeed, this kind of thing is found in the literature and epics of other Semitic languages. Thus the Exodus record records God's commands regarding the tabernacle, and then Moses' fulfillment of them. **The prologue to John speaks of God's *logos*, His word or intention, coming to "flesh" in the Lord Jesus. This is classic Hebrew thinking, albeit written in Greek.** We will demonstrate below that in Hebrew thought, a representative can be spoken of as being the person who sent them, or whom they represent. Thus the Hebrew way of reading John 1:1-14 would never come anywhere near interpreting it as meaning that 'Jesus is God'. This is a result of not reading the passage against its Hebrew background.

I pointed out in Section 2-22 that frequently in the New Testament we meet a juxtapositioning of language emphasizing Christ's humanity alongside terms which emphasize His Divine side. This is typical Hebraic logic, whereby blocks of material are placed next to each other, in order to create a dialectic between them which leads to the intended conclusion. Back in Exodus, we find Pharaoh's heart hardened by God, and yet him hardening his own heart. Greek thinking panics here- for it works by step logic, logically reasoning from one statement to another. There appears to our European minds to be a crisis of contradiction, which many find worrying. But the Hebrew mind is far less phased. Rather the two seeming contradictions are weighed up and the conclusion reached- e. g. that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but God confirmed him in this. The language used about the Lord Jesus in the New Testament is similar. John Knox got somewhere close to understanding this when he wrote that "we do not experience the humanity and divinity of Christ in

ways as separate as this language suggests; we are aware of them together" (5). John's Gospel is maybe the most evident example. In the context of all the high, lofty language relating the Lord Jesus to the *logos*, that was God from the beginning, we read of Him coming "to his own", *eis ta idia*, his own heritage of people and place; and being rejected by "his own people", *hoi idioi*, the Jews of his time and setting (Jn. 1:10-12). It is the "son of *man"* who is spoken of as having descended from Heaven (Jn. 3:13; 6:62). Truly "the Christ of John is actually more human than in almost any of the other New Testament writings" (6). So often does **John's Gospel baldly speak of the Lord Jesus as "the man**": Jn. 4:29; 5:12; 8:40; 9:11, 24; 10:33; 11:47, 50; 18:14, 17, 29; 19:5.

The Greek thinking minds who read the New Testament were sadly divorced from the Hebrew background which is the backdrop for God's revelation in the Bible. In the lead up to the AD381 Decree of Constantinople, which declared Trinitarianism as the only acceptable form of Christian faith, Gregory of Nazianzus preached a series of sermons in defence of the Trinity. He dealt with the two blocks of Biblical evidence as saying that e. g. in John 11:34, Jesus resurrected Lazarus by His Divine nature, and then wept in His human nature (7). Gregory utterly failed to appreciate Hebrew thought; he ended up splitting up the Lord Jesus effectively into two persons, rather than seeking to harmonize the two strands which there were within the one person of Jesus.

And so some seized upon the 'Divine' language about Jesus and concluded He must have been God; and then struggled to explain away all the 'humanity' language with complex philosophical theories about merely *appearing* human, the gods entering human bodies etc. Those who profess to believe in a 'Binity' have perhaps most clearly failed to grasp the idea of dialectic- they treat the two 'blocks' of reasoning as totally separate. It has to be said of course that some non-trinitarians have done the same the other way- grabbing hold of the 'humanity' passages and trying to explain away the 'Divine' ones by recourse to doubtful re-translations of the original and trying to reduce the full and obvious import of the Divine language being used.

It seems to me that there has been a chronic and even wilful failure to realize that Divine language can be applied to a person without making them God Himself in person. There are ample Biblical examples of this. It is in keeping with the Eastern way of seeing a person and their representative as very closely linked, to the point of functional identity. The great Rabbi Hillel was fond of taking language about God and applying it to himself- but this doesn't mean that he claimed to be, nor was, God Himself in person (8). This blurred identity between the sender and the representative is hard for the Western mind to understand. It's a line of thought that needs careful reflection upon. In Hebrew thought, it was common to call a substitute by the name of the thing whose place it takes- with no comment to this effect. Thus the tent Moses set up in which to meet God is called "the tent of meeting" (Ex. 33:7)- which is what the tabernacle was called. But that tent wasn't the tabernacle.

In a brilliant Biblical study of the cherubim, the Jewish scholar Umberto Cassuto noted that sometimes the cherubim upon which God's throne is are at times *equated with* the throne; and "in the end the chariot is identified with the throne, and even the wings of the cherubim are regarded as identical with the throne". But what is significant in our context is Cassuto's explanation of why this confusion occurs: "In the thought processes of the ancient East the boundary between the symbol and the thing symbolized, and likewise between the distinctions between the different parts of the symbol, were liable to be easily blurred" (9). This blurring of semantic boundaries is, in my opinion, why the Bible writers can speak of God and His Son in such similar language, whilst also teaching a very clear separation of them. It was Greek and European influenced thinkers, with their need for step-logic and sharply defined boundaries, who ran into problems when they encountered the Hebrew way of thinking found in the Bible. And so they came up with the Trinity as a messy and ultimately failed attempt to cope with this problem of blurred boundaries.

The language of Jesus as the image of God, bearing His exact likeness so that whoever perceives the Son perceives the Father, has likewise been misunderstood by those who don't read the Bible within the context of the language use in which it was written. The Belgian theologian Henricus Renckens puts it like this: "For the Oriental, the image and its original are very much more closely bound up together than they are for us; there are many texts in the Bible which go to show that the image of a god was habitually more or less

identified with the god himself" (10). But the image of the god, or even of the one true God, was and not and is not the god or Yahweh Himself.

All this intellectual failure, at both extremes, can be avoided by trying to read the Scriptures against their Hebraic background. We have elsewhere noted how the New Testament uses various terms current at the time but then redefines and reuses them with relation to the Lord Jesus. Appreciating the background is vital to correct understanding. Indeed, it has been observed that many of the uninspired 'Gospels' that began to circulate in the 2nd century (e. g. Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of the Hebrews, of the Ebionites, of the Nazoraeans, of Peter, Protoevangelium of James) are all characterized by a distinct lack of attention to the Hebrew background of the Gospel. They "do not characteristically present Jesus with reference to the Old Testament and the narrative world of Israel. . . Jesus is not, for example, usually presented [by these 'gospels'] as fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, or of typological events or characters of the Old Testament. In some cases [they] specifically deny any relevance or validity to the Scriptures of Israel for understanding Jesus (e. g. *Gospel of Thomas* 52)" (11). Indeed the 'Epistle of Barnabas', dating from the early second century, virulently denounced the Jews.

The Greek / European mindset loves to define and pin down. But when we come to the Hebraic language of the God who is so far above and beyond us, we're set on a disaster course if we will not jettison that mindset. The Hebraic mode of language use "does not so much analyze, reduce, and narrow down toward definition as it uses metaphor to expand and open out meaning" (12). The Trinity is in my opinion yet another such Western / Greek attempt to reduce and narrow God down, rather than letting the real Christ, as His Son, reveal Him.

Conclusions

On balance, whilst I accept that the trinity may have arisen from an element of genuine intellectual failure, being honestly mistaken in Bible study, it seems to me that this doesn't really excuse the huge and basic ignorance of God's word as the source of truth about Himself and His Son. It seems that the early church 'fathers' began desperately grabbing any Bible verse which would justify their position, as we have commented so many times. Thus commenting on the Hebrew and Septuagint of Mic. 5:2, James Dunn concludes: "In neither instance does the Hebrew suggest the idea of pre-existence. . . it was not until Justin took it up in the middle of the second century AD that it began to be used as a prophecy of Christ's pre-existence" (13). In this observation, which Dunn documents at length, we see how once the ideas of Christ being God and pre-existing were accepted and assumed, the church 'fathers' started casting around for Biblical evidence to support those positions. This, sadly, is typical of the inductive reasoning that has plagued Christian thinking. An idea is seized upon, often because it is acceptable to the surrounding world, and then Bible verses are appended to it, regardless of their context.

Notes

(1) See 'The Objections To Christianity' in my *Bible Lives* section 16-4.

(2) Adolf Deissmann gives very many examples of how the titles of Caesar used in the Imperial Cult were applied to Jesus- see his *Light From The Ancient East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927) pp. 342 ff.

(3) See F. E. Hulme, *Symbolism In Christian Art* (Blandford: Blandford Press, 1976) pp. 43 ff.

(4) R. H. Ward, *The Prodigal Son* (London: Gollancz, 1968) pp. 9,10. The same point is exemplified throughout J. Danielou, *Gospel Message And Hellenistic Culture: A History Of Early Christian Doctrine Before The Council Of Nicaea* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973).

(5) John Knox, *The Humanity And Divinity Of Christ* (Cambridge: C. U. P. , 1967) p. 113.

(6) J. E. Davey, *The Jesus Of St. John* (London: Lutterworth, 1958) p. 89.

(7) Quoted in John McGuckin, *Saint Gregory Of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001) p. 350.

(8) David Flusser, 'Hillel's Self-Awareness And Jesus', in *Judaism And The Origins Of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988) pp. 509-514.

(9) Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997) p. 333.

(10) H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 119.

(11) Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003) p. 484.

(12) J. B. Russell, *A History Of Heaven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) p. 7.

(13) James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) p. 71. A similar conclusion concerning Mic. 5:2 is to be found in J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea In Israel* (New York: Macmillan, 1956) p. 77.

3-3 The Psychological Attraction Of A Non-Human Jesus

I would suggest that every false understanding of the Bible, every wrong doctrine, has some sort of psychological basis to it; and that often, this involves an excuse for flunking the challenge to *believe* God's word. To believe that Jesus of Nazareth was human, never sinned, died, and then rose again. . . demands a lot of faith. I recall discussing the nature of the Lord Jesus for many hours, late into the night in an apartment in South London. By about 2 a. m. , we seem to have got to the crux of the issues. My friend said something to the effect, with a genuine sense of wonder, 'If you're asking me to believe that a man could live and never sin, die and then resurrect. . . I can't believe that of a man. I just. . . don't have the faith. I have to believe He was God to have done all that'. I left soon afterwards, and drove across the silent, sleeping suburbs of my hometown feeling that at last I had understood *why* there is so much belief in the Trinity, 'Jesus = God' idea. Quite simply, it demands much less *faith*. And to believe the simple Biblical account does actually require more faith than might at first appear. To believe that 2000 years ago, on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, on a hill outside Jerusalem, a perfect man died. . . and after three days, the grave clothes stirred, a young man walked out into the early morning mist, with the lights of Jerusalem shimmering in the distance. . . that 40 days later He ascended up vertically into the sky and somehow got taken to Heaven, the very centre of the cosmos. . . yes, it demands faith to grasp the personal, actual, concrete, historical reality of it all. It's so much easier to shrug it all off, to walk away from the challenge of faith, by saying that yeah, actually, He was God. First century Israel stumbled at the humanity of Jesus. "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James? And they were offended at him" (Mk. 6:3). In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being. . . was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person. The early Christians must likewise have struggled with the questions- how could a *man* have done all this? How could this be true of a *man*? Could one of *us* really have pulled *this* off? And so they took the easy way out, flunked the issue, by deciding that Jesus must've been God. Likewise there is the challenge of the fact that Jesus is explained in Scripture as our *representative*; but that requires a lot of faith from us, and so Christianity generally has ditched that demand and replaced it with a pagan notion of substitution. Yet the Lord Jesus set us a pattern- humiliation and suffering, followed by glorification. Yet the common conception of Jesus gets this all the wrong way around- pre-existent glory in Heaven followed by humiliation, then a return to glory. But the Bible clearly teaches that the glory of the Lord Jesus was earned, it was His reward, and we with all our hearts say "Worthy is the lamb that was slain!" to receive that glory- knowing that we too have embarked upon a similar path to glory, with every experience of humiliation in this life understood in that context.

Despite the fact that Jesus evidently preferred to speak of Himself as **"son of man"**, the disciples are never recorded as referring to Him in this way. This psychological discomfort with the human Jesus is reflected by the way in which the 2nd century Christian [heretic] Valentinus started teaching that Jesus ate and drunk "in a special manner, so that no excretal waste was produced" (1). Yet the Biblical emphasis is upon His eating and drinking as being a sign that He really was human, like us! This same strange discomfort with a real Christ continues to this day- there's always vociferous reaction against any Bible translation which has Jesus speaking in ordinary human language (e. g. that of Andy Gauss, *The Unvarnished New Testament*), and against any movie or piece of writing which shows the Lord Jesus experiencing the kinds of human feelings and passions which we do. The human desire to believe in a god rather than a man is demonstrated in Israel's attitude to Moses. They complained about "this Moses, the *man* that brought us up out of the land of Egypt"; and therefore made the golden calf, proclaiming: **"These be thy *gods*, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:1,4).** Note in passing how they created *one* calf, but worshipped it as *gods* plural. They committed the trinity fallacy of many centuries later. They couldn't handle a saviour who was human, like them, and so they decided that a god had been their saviour, who existed as a plurality, gods, within a unity, i. e. the golden calf. The essence of Christianity is to be as it were in a personality cult behind the person of the Lord Jesus. It's all about reflecting daily upon Him, asking "What would Jesus do?" as we face the myriad decisions which make up daily life. Yet this is hard to do; we find it almost impossible to maintain daily focus upon the Jesus who is revealed in the Gospels. The tendency always is to let our mind stray onto more abstract and less personally demanding things; and it has been observed that as the Church as a whole moved away from focus upon the real, human Jesus of the Gospels, so they became increasingly absorbed in speculation about His supposed previous life in Heaven. We can see this discomfort with the literal and the real by the way in which Christians began to allegorize everything. To believe in the real Jesus, in the miracles of God in human lives over history, was too great a challenge to faith- and so everything was made comfortably abstract. The New Testament writers present things like the crossing of the Red Sea and the events in the wilderness as real historical events which were types of the work of Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-4; Hebrews 3 etc.). But by the second century, there was a shift away from reading these events as types, but rather they were seen as allegories- no longer were the events so importantly *real*, rather the characters and events were seen as allegorical (2). It was against this background of ever increasing abstraction that Christians likewise started to move away from the real Christ. Origen in the third century argued strongly that the historical sections of the Bible were to be taken as allegory and not as literally accurate history. He spoke of there being in the Bible "spiritual truth in historical falsehood", and went on to use this as an excuse to explain why the Lord Jesus is presented as human rather than Divine in the Gospels (3). And so, as so often, an incorrect base attitude to God's word led to seriously misunderstanding it.

Notes

(1) As quoted in Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003) p. 528.

(2) This shift in exegetical style is documented at length in Martin Mulder & Harry Sysling, eds. , *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading And Interpretation Of The Hebrew Bible In Ancient Judaism And Early Christianity* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988) pp. 727-787.

(3) As quoted in Henry Chadwick, *The Church In Ancient Society* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 2001) p. 135.

3-4 Jewish Influence On The Trinity

The true Christian believer has ever been under pressure from the world. Paul wrote words of eternal relevance when he asked that we not allow the world to press us into its mould, but rather allow Christ to transform us. The acceptance of the trinity was a result of the world pressurizing the church. The Roman and Jewish worlds which surrounded the Christians had a way of divinizing human figures. If you concluded a man had been a hero, then you applied Divine language to him- a form of what the Greeks had called apotheosis. This is why some of the Rabbinic commentary on men like Moses and Elijah use God-like language about them, although clearly the intention was not to make them equal to the one and only God of Israel whom they believed in. Yet the Greek and Western world have unfortnately read the Hebraic Biblical documents through their own worldviews, and have missed the fact that Hebrew terms and approaches are quite different to their own.

There's no lack of evidence that Christians did this with regard to the language used about Jesus, indeed there are examples of it in the New Testament. And it has also been observed that some of the exalted Jewish language used about Moses- e. g. "the one for and on account of whom the world was created"- was purposefully appropriated by Paul and applied to Jesus (1). Such glorified figures were also spoken of with the language of pre-existence, as if they had existed from the beginning of creation, even though that wasn't literally the case. They were "ascribed a prior, heavenly status or existence, however that was understood" (2). But as Christianity generally turned against the Jews, as Jewish Christians were thrown out of the church or returned to the synagogues, the actual human roots of Jesus were overlooked. The Jewish background to the language of exaltation used about Him was no longer appreciated. Instead, Christ remained in the minds of many Christians with just the Divine titles attached to Him; and so they ended up concluding that He was God Himself. They preferred to stick with forms of wording which were comfortable and familiar to them, rather than searching out the meaning behind those words. And today, nothing much has changed. Christians still remain almost wilfully ignorant of the basic principle of 'God manifestation' which is found throughout Scripture, whereby Divine language can be used of a person without making them God Himself.

Vincent Taylor analyzes Paul's hymn of praise to the Lord Jesus in Phil. 2:6-11 and concludes that it is an adaptation of a Jewish hymn which spoke of "the appearance of the Heavenly Man on earth" (3). Paul was writing under inspiration, but it seems he purposefully adapted a Jewish hymn and applied it to Jesus- to indicate the status which should truly be ascribed to the Lord Jesus. Col. 1:15-20, another poetic fragment which is likewise misunderstood by those seeking to justify the false idea of a personal pre-existence of the Lord, has also been identified as a Jewish hymn which Paul modified (4). We must remember that Paul was inspired by God to answer the claims of false teachers; and he was doing so by using and re-interpreting the terms which they used. Nearly all the titles of Christ used in the letter to the Hebrews are taken from Philo or the Jewish book of Wisdom (5). The writer to the Hebrews is seeking to apply them in their correct and true sense to the Lord Jesus. This explains why some titles are used which can easily be misunderstood by those not appreciating this background. For example, Philo speaks of "the impress of God's seal", and Hebrews applies this to the Lord Jesus. The phrase has been misinterpreted by trinitarians as meaning that Jesus is therefore God; but this wasn't at all the idea behind the title in Philo's writings, and neither was it when the letter to the Hebrews took up the phrase and applied it to Jesus. This sort of thing goes on far more often than we might think in the Bible- existing theological ideas are re-cast and re-presented in their correct light, especially with reference to the Lord Jesus. Arthur Gibson notes that "there is an important second level within religious language: it is a reflection upon, a criticism of, a correction of, or a more general formulation of, expressions which previously occur" (6). He even shows that the very Names 'Yahweh' and 'El' were an allusion to earlier contemporary gods of a similar name and meaning- but the only true God, Yahweh, the El of Israel, alludes to these false notions and presents them as applying solely to Himself.

Jewish Myths Deconstructed

In my study of the historical development of the common Christian understanding of Satan, I found that Jewish myths played a particularly strong role in influencing the early Christian positions- once Christianity started to depart from a purely Biblical approach (7). The same appears true for some elements of the false doctrines which led to the development of the Trinity. **The apocryphal Jewish *Book of Enoch* held that the "Son of man" figure personally pre-existed (1 Enoch 48:2-6; 62:6,7). The idea of personal pre-existence was held by the Samaritans, who believed that Moses personally pre-existed (8).** Indeed the idea of a pre-existent man, called by German theologians the *urmensch* , was likely picked up by the Jews from the Persians during the captivity. Christians who believed that Jesus was the prophet greater than Moses, that He was the "Son of man", yet who were influenced by Jewish thinking, would therefore come to assume that Jesus also personally pre-existed. And yet they drew that conclusion in defiance of basic Biblical teaching to the opposite. Paul often appears to allude to these Jewish ideas, which he would've been familiar with, in order to refute and correct them. Thus when he compares Jesus and Adam by saying: "The first man is of the earth, the second man is from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:45-47), he is alluding to the idea of Philo that there was an earthly and heavenly man; and one of the Nag Hammadi documents *On The Origin Of The World* claims that "the first Adam of the light is spiritual. . . the second Adam is soul-endowed" (9). Paul's point is that the "second Adam" is the now-exalted Lord Jesus in Heaven, and not some pre-existent being. Adam was "a type of him who was to come" (Rom. 5:14); the one who brought sin, whereas Christ brought salvation. Paul was alluding to and correcting the false ideas- hence he at times appears to use

language which hints of pre-existence. But reading his writings in context shows that he held no such idea, and was certainly not advocating the truth of those myths and documents he alluded to.

The natural human desire to downplay our own sin, and that of our race, led Judaism to misinterpret the fall of Adam. They ended up calling Adam "the Heavenly man" and believing that he was somehow alive and would be re-incarnated in the Messiah. Philo, the great Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, popularized this view. In *The Real Devil* I comment how this kind of corrupt Judaism was partly responsible for Christianity's adoption of pagan notions of the Devil. But the same observation holds true in seeking to explain how early Christianity also became corrupted in its understanding of Messiah-Jesus. Philo argued that there were two "Adams" referred to in Genesis (based on his failure to reconcile Gen. 1:27 with Gen. 2:2). Paul was fully aware of these false ideas, and specifically alludes to them when explaining how "the first Adam" was the historical Adam we meet in Genesis; and the "second Adam" is a term only applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection. Martin Hengel suggests that Christians attempted to answer the Jewish ideas of pre-existent Torah, Wisdom and *Logos* by developing the idea that Jesus pre-existed, as a kind of answer to their claims (10). This would indicate that the Christians simply sought to make their Jesus attractive to the surrounding world, paying more attention to justifying their beliefs and silencing other alternatives than to simply proclaiming the Biblical Christ. And so many have repeated that error over history. Origen's reply to Celsus, a critic of Christianity, reveals how a wrong understanding of Jesus developed in response to the criticisms received by Christianity. Celsus claimed that the Christians were making Jesus out to be a God by worshipping Him (as quoted by Origen in *Contra Celsum* 8. 12). The response should've been that worship of Jesus doesn't require Him to be one and the same person as God- for the same Greek words used in the New Testament about 'worship' of Jesus are used about worship of *men*. But instead, Origen took the path of justifying the idea that Jesus *is* God.

C. H. Dodd throughout chapter 3 of his classic *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* gives ample reason to believe his thesis that John's Gospel was written [partly] in order to deconstruct the popular teachings of Philo in the first century- and there are therefore many allusions to his writings. Thus John records how in vain the Jews searched the Scriptures, because in them they thought they had eternal life (Jn. 5:39)- when this is the very thing that Philo claimed to do. This approach helps us understand why, for example, the prologue to John is written in the way it is, full of allusion to Jewish ideas about the *logos*. How John writes is only confusing to us because we're not reading his inspired words against the immediate background in which they were written- which included the very popular false teachings of Philo about the *logos*. Thus Philo claimed that God had two sons, sent the younger into the world, and the elder, the *logos*, remained "by Him"- whereas John's prologue shows that the *logos* was an abstract idea, which *was* sent into the world in the form of God's one and only Son, the Lord Jesus. Dodd shows how constantly John is referring to Philo- e. g. Philo denied any possibility of spiritual rebirth, whereas John (Jn. 3:3-5) stresses how needful and possible it is in Christ. The very abstract views of Philo are challenged when John comments that the *logos* has become flesh- real and actual, handled and seen, in the person of the Lord Jesus. Philo claimed that the *logos* was an Angel- whereas John effectively denies this by saying that the *logos* became a real and actual human being. Those Christians who claim Jesus was an Angel- and they range from Jehovah's Witnesses to those who claim Jesus appeared as an Old Testament Angel- should all stand corrected by John's argument against Philo. In chapter 11 of his book, Dodd makes the observation that there was a tension between Jewish monotheism, and the many gods of Greek mythology. He shows how these ideas were reconciled by bringing the gods into some kind of family relationship with each- thus Hermes and Apollo became sons of Zeus, and all were seen as emanations of the one God. This is highly significant for any study of how the Trinity came into existence- the stage was set for the idea of a small family of gods to develop, all supposedly emanations of one God.

The Samaritans

I wish to share a theory which to me is significant in explaining the way that Jewish conceptions came to influence Christian misunderstanding of Jesus. My suggestion is that the Samaritan Christians came to import into their theology a view of Jesus which was based upon the mixture of Jewish-pagan ideas which they had held before their conversion to Christianity. The letter to the Hebrews is clearly intended as a rebuttal of wrong understandings of the Lord Jesus, and as noted above, the language used about Jesus in Heb. 1 clearly alludes to incipient Gnostic ideas of a pre-existent redeemer who was in some ways 'God'- and the writer is clearly debunking those ideas. I write more about this in *The Divine Side Of Jesus*. My

suggestion is that Hebrews was written specifically to Samaritan Christians. For starters, it was Samaritans who called themselves *Hebraioi*; the Jews tended not to use that term (11). And the reasoning of Hebrews is all drawn from the *tabernacle* rather than the Jerusalem temple, which the Samaritans didn't accept. The list of the faithful in Heb. 11 is drawn only from the Pentateuch and Joshua, which were the only Old Testament books accepted by the Samaritans. Justin (*First Apology* 26) and Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* i. 23. 1-4) both claimed that it was the Samaritans who were the first Gnostics. John Macdonald in his extensive work *The Theology Of The Samaritans* demonstrates that the Samaritans actually believed in a binity, two Gods, called "The true one", and "The Glory" (12). They reasoned that the two accounts of creation in Genesis were the work of these two beings, and that Moses in Ex. 34 met two beings each called "Yahweh". And yet the Samaritans were monotheists. They justified their belief in only one God much as trinitarians do today- they argued that the one God was incarnated in the other one, so that there was one God in a kind of binity (13). And so in my opinion this group of Hebrew Christians were likely to revert to their original beliefs, and make Jesus out to be an incarnated God. And it is to them that the letter to the Hebrews is written. It's significant that John's Gospel pays attention to the theme of the Samaritans, and John 1 is full of allusions to Genesis 1 and Exodus 34- the two passages which, as shown above, the Samaritans used as the basis for their belief in a binity of Gods. It's perhaps noteworthy that Paul mentions false apostles in Corinth claiming to be 'Hebrews' rather than *Ioudaioi*, Jews (2 Cor. 11:22). Significantly, a "Synagogue of the Hebrews", i. e. Samaritans, has been uncovered at Corinth (14). Harry Whittaker and I have offered independent studies showing the existence of a 'Jewish plot' against Paul's work throughout the first century; perhaps that thesis needs to be honed a little and applied specifically to this group of Samaritan Christians (15).

The significance of all this in our present context is that Paul and the apostolic writers of the New Testament were already up against the idea that Jesus = God. Michael Goulder sums it up: "There is evidence that these 'Hebrew' missionaries introduced new doctrines to the . . . churches in. . . the teaching that Jesus was God become man [and] a glorifying and dehumanizing of his earthly life" (16). The apostles dealt with these ideas by alluding to and deconstructing the Gnostic and Samaritan ideas which were at the root of them- and that, in my view, is the basis of many of the passages which are seized upon by trinitarians in support of their idea, whilst of course ignoring the mass of Bible teaching to the contrary. As I have shown elsewhere, passages such as John 1 and Hebrews 1 are in fact full of emphasis upon the fact that Jesus is *not* God Himself; but their allusion to the prevailing views and literature leads to their use of phrases from that literature which are seized upon by careless Bible readers as evidence for their preconceived idea of a trinity.

The Jewish View Of Angels

The Jewish obsession with Angels influenced the early Christians in the area of Christology [i. e. theories about Christ], just as it did on the topic of the Devil. Chapters like Hebrews 1 and Colossians 2 deal with this in detail, stressing that Jesus was *not* an Angel [something which the Watchtower movement of today needs to consider more fully]. The Jewish *Testament Of Daniel* 6. 1 exhorts Israel to "draw near unto God and unto the angel that intercedeth for you, for he is a mediator between God and man". This is alluded to by Paul in 1 Tim. 2:5, when he underlines that *to us* there is "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus". Clearly Paul is alluding to the apostate Jewish angelology and correcting it- as in Hebrews 2, the point is laboured that Jesus was a *man* and not an Angel, and He is the *only* mediator. 3 Enoch [also known as *The Hebrew Book Of Enoch*] spoke much of an Angel called Metatron, "the prince of the presence", "the lesser Yahweh", who appeared as Yahweh to Moses in Ex. 23:21, sat on "the throne of glory" etc (3 Enoch 10-14). Early Jewish Christianity appears to have mistakenly reapplied these ideas to Jesus, resulting in the idea the first of all Jesus was an Angel, and then coming to full term in the doctrine of the Trinity. J. Danielou devotes the whole fourth chapter of his survey of the development of Christian doctrine to the study of how Jewish views of Angels actually led on to the Trinity (17). Paul's style was not to baldly state that everything believed in by the Jews was wrong; he recognized that the very nature of apostasy is in the mixing of the true and the false. He speaks of how Jesus truly has been exalted and sits at God's right hand (Rom. 8:34) and has been given God's Name, as the Angel was in Exodus (Phil. 2:9-11); but his whole point is that whilst that may indeed be common ground with the Jewish ideas, the truth is that Jesus is *not* an Angel. He came into physical existence through Mary ("made / born of a woman", Gal. 4:4), and as the begotten Son of God has been exalted above than any Angel. The language of Heb. 1:3-6 clearly alludes to the Metatron myth and deconstructs it in very clear terms. For Jesus is described as "being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image / pattern of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

having become by so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee? and again, I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a Son? And when he again bringeth in the firstborn into the world he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him".

James Dunn quotes Tertullian, Justin, Epiphanius and Clement as all believing that the Lord Jesus was an Angel: "so too Jewish Christians of the second and third centuries specifically affirmed that Christ was an angel or archangel. . . Justin's identification of the angel of Yahweh with the [supposedly] pre-existent Christ" (18). It was this Jewish obsession with Angels, and the desire to make Jesus understandable as an Angel, which led to the idea that He personally pre-existed and was not quite human. And hence the specific and repeated emphasis of the New Testament that the Lord was *not* an Angel but *because* He was a man and *not* an Angel He has been exalted far *above* Angels (Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:16; 2:8-10; Heb. 1; 1 Pet. 1:12; 3:22; Rev. 5:11-14). It's the same with the idea of Melchizedek, whom the Qumran community and writings understood as an Archangel. The commentary upon Melchizedek in Hebrews stresses that he was a *man* ("consider how great this *man* was. . . ", Heb. 7:4)- therefore *not* an Angel. He was a *foreshadowing* of Christ, and not Christ Himself. It would appear that the commentary upon Melchizedek in Hebrews is actually full of indirect references to the Qumran claims about Melchizedek being an Angel and somehow being the Messiah. **Sadly, too many trinitarians today have made the same mistake as the Jews- arguing that Melchizedek was somehow Jesus personally**. We examine that view in yet more detail in section 1-13. The Jews of Qumran were quite obsessed with Angels- they also suggested that Gabriel was somehow the pre-existent Messiah. Bearing that in mind, it would appear that the descriptions of the Angel Gabriel announcing the conception and birth of Jesus are almost purposefully designed to show that Gabriel and Jesus are *not* the same but are two quite different persons (Mt. 1:20,24; 2:13,19; Lk. 1:11,19,26-38; 2:9).

The Jews believed that the *shekinah*, the physical light of glory associated with the tabernacle, was somehow a personal being associated with a Messiah figure. Paul deconstructs this idea in 2 Cor. 3:17,18, where he says that the *shekinah* seen on the face of Moses was a *fading* glory of the Old Covenant, having been made insignificant by the glory of Christ. Thus Paul is attacking the common Jewish idea by saying that the Lord Jesus was *not* the *shekinah* but is *superior* to it. Indeed, he so often makes the same point by stressing that the glorification of the Lord Jesus was at His resurrection and ascension. He *became* "the Lord of glory" by what He suffered, and received this glorification at the resurrection and ascension. **If the Lord's glory was somehow pre-existent before that, the wonder and personal significance of the resurrection for Jesus is somehow lost sight of; the idea of suffering and *then* being glorified, as a pattern for us, is quite lost sight of.** And yet this was the repeated theme of Paul's inspired writings. Note in passing how when describing the *shekinah* cloud in which the Angel dwelt, Paul comments that the cloud was mere water, for at the Red Sea it played a part in symbolizing Israel's baptism "into Moses in the cloud [water above them] and in the sea [water on both sides of them]" (1 Cor. 10:2). Moses and not the *shekinah* cloud was the type of Christ. Yet Justin Martyr and many other careless Bible readers, coming to Scripture in order to seek justification for their preconceived trinitarian ideas, have interpreted the cloud as being the Angel which was supposedly Jesus. Hebrews 1 clarifies that God spoke in Old Testament times through Angels and prophets- but *not* through His Son. **This He began to do in the ministry of the human Jesus**. That path of thought alone should remove all possibility that any Old Testament Angel was in fact the Lord Jesus.

We may wonder why John is at such pains to point out that Christ "came in the flesh", and why he pronounced anathema upon those who denied that (2 Jn. 7-9). It seems to me that his converts had come up against Jewish attempts to re-interpret Jesus in terms of apostate Jewish thinking about Angels and the whole nature of existence, the kind of heresy battled against in Hebrews and Colossians. Take Jewish views of the Angels who appeared to Abraham. Josephus says they "gave him to believe that they did eat" (*Antiquities* 1. 197); Philo claimed that "though they neither ate nor drank, they gave the appearance of both eating and drinking" (*Abraham* 118). The Bible states simply that they ate. And that Jesus likewise ate after His resurrection. John emphasizes that the Lord Jesus had been fully tangible, the disciples touched and felt Him (1 Jn. 1:1-4); and that His death was equally real (1 Jn. 1:7; 2:2; 4:10; 5:6-9). And he presses the point that this is what had been believed "from the beginning", indicating that already new ideas were coming into the Christian communities about the nature of Jesus. This of itself shows that the whole issue of who Jesus is *does* matter; that the Christ was and is the *real* Christ was for John crucially important, as it is for me.

Hence this book. The inspired apostle didn't simply shrug off these new ideas as well meaning misunderstandings. He speaks against them in the toughest possible terms.

The Jewish Background To *The Logos*

Much has been made of the similarities between Jn. 1:1-3 and the 'Wisdom' literature of the Jews. Judaism believed in a number of intermediaries who interceded between God and Israel- Wisdom, the Shekinah [glory], the Logos / word. The Torah [law] had become so elevated and personified that it was spoken of almost as a separate 'God' (19). John and Paul are picking up these terms and explaining their true meaning- Jesus is the glory [*shekinah*] of God, *He* alone is the one and only true mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). By stressing that the mediator was "the man Christ Jesus", Paul is also taking a swipe at the Greek idea of a superhuman mediator between the world and the world's creator, sometimes called a "second God". And when it comes to the Logos, John is explaining in his prologue that the theme of all God's word in the Old Testament was ultimately about Jesus, and that 'word' became flesh in a person, i. e. Jesus, in His life and death. **Understanding this background helps us understand why John appears to use very 'Divine' language about the *logos*.** He's doing so because he's alluding to the mistaken beliefs of Judaism and showing where the truth really lies in Jesus.

Jewish Influence On The 'Pre-existence' Idea

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account in Mt. 16:14-18. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be (20). So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

Peter's rejection of these ideas and declaration instead that Jesus is the Son of God gave the Lord Jesus great joy; and so too will our faith in Him as the actual Son of God, not a pre-existent being somehow incarnated inside Mary. The Jesus who to this day remembers early childhood with Mary knows full well that He didn't pre-exist before that. We too, you and I, know how frustrating it is to have our origins and essential being misunderstood, and to hear others insisting that their false images of us are in fact true. It may not mean that we break all relationship with them just because of this- but it is surely so that our correct understanding of the nature and essence of Jesus rejoices His heart and draws us closer in our relationship. This is my perspective on the issue of "So how important is it to reject the idea of a pre-existent Jesus?". I cannot speak for His ultimate judgment of men and women, although I do know that many will call Him "Lord, Lord" at the last day and realize they never knew Him and He never knew them (Mt. 7:22,23). All I can say is that correct understanding of our Lord's nature will deeply enrich our relationship with Him- and this is what the daily essence of following Him is all about.

We know from Acts 8 that people from Samaria formed a significant part of the earliest Christian community. Yet all converts are prone to return to their former beliefs in some ways at some times. The Samaritan view of Messiah was likewise that he would be the re-incarnation of a prophet, specifically Moses (Jn. 4:19,25). It therefore seems likely that the idea of a pre-existent Christ / Messiah developed as a result of the early Jewish and Samaritan converts returning to their previous conceptions of Messiah. For these were less taxing to their faith than the radical idea that an illiterate Jewish teenager called Marryam in some dumb Galileean village actually conceived a baby direct from God Almighty. Uninspired documents such as the *Preaching Of Pete*r and the *Gospel Of The Hebrews* also make the false connection between Jesus and a re-incarnated Moses, Elijah etc. **Clearly enough, the idea of a pre-existent, incarnated Jesus had its**

roots in paganism and apostate Judaism. The descriptions of Jesus as a "man", a human being, have little meaning if in fact He pre-existed as God for millions of years before. **The descriptions of Him as "begotten" (passive of *gennan* in Mt. 1:16,20) make no suggestion of pre-existence at all.** And the words of the Lord Jesus and His general behaviour would have to be read as all being purposefully deceptive, if in fact He was really a pre-existent god. There is no hint of any belief in a pre-existent Jesus until the writings of Justin Martyr in the second century- and he only develops the idea in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew. The Biblical accounts of the Lord's conception and birth just flatly contradict the idea of pre-existence. This contradiction leads trinitarians into the most impossible statements. Take Kenneth Wuest, leading Evangelical and trinitarian: "Jesus proceeded by eternal generation as the Son of God from the Father in a birth that never took place because it always was" (21). This is meaningless verbiage- all necessitated by a desire to accept the Trinity tradition above God's word. And Wuest makes that incredible statement in a book entitled "Great truths to live by". Nobody can live a victorious spiritual life on the basis of such 'truths'.

Time and again we have to remind ourselves that in reading the Bible, we are reading literature which was relevant to the time in which it was written, and which is inevitably going to freely use the current terminology without as it were giving footnoted explanations for 21st century readers. The whole language of pre-existence in Heaven must be understood against the Jewish background in which it was first used in the Biblical writings. **"When the Jew wished to designate something as predestined, he spoke of it as already 'existing' in heaven"** (22). Moses (especially in *The Testament Of Moses* 1:13,14), the Torah etc. are all spoken of in this sense in Jewish writings of the time. "Attribution of preexistence indicates religious importance of the highest order. Rabbinic theology speaks of the Law, of God's throne of glory, of Israel. . . as things which were already present with [God] before the creation of the world. The same is also true of the Messiah. . . in *Pesikta Rabbati* 152b **it is said that "from the beginning of the creation of the world the King Messiah was born, for he came up in the thought of God before the world was created"**. This means that from all eternity it was the will of God that the Messiah should come into existence, and should do his work in the world to fulfill God's eternal saving purpose" (23). We must not read the New Testament through Greek / Western eyes, but rather try to understand it against its original Jewish / Hebrew background of thought. It's a failure to do this which has given rise to trinitarianism and its associated misconceptions. Thus when we read of Jesus being "with" God, the Greek / Western mind can assume this means sitting literally together with Him. But time and again in the Hebrew Bible, the idea of being "with" someone means [according to the Brown, Driver and Briggs *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 768] to "be in one's consciousness, whether of knowledge, memory or purpose". Thus Job speaks of how what God plans to do to him is "with God", i. e. in His purpose (Job 23:14); David is spoken of as having the idea about building a temple "with" him (1 Kings 8:17; 2 Chron. 6:7)- and there are multiple other examples (Num. 14:24; 1 Kings 11:11; 1 Chron. 28:12; Job 10:13; 15:9; 23:10; 27:11; Ps. 50:11; 73:23). It is this refusal to read the Bible within its own Hebraic context which has led to so much misunderstanding, and adopting of doctrines and positions which simply don't stand up to closer Biblical scrutiny.

The whole idea of a human *being* God Himself, or of personal pre-existence, are both Greek / Hellenistic concepts, and not Hebrew ones. "When the Jew said something was "predestined", he thought of it as already "existing" in a higher sphere of life. . . this typically Jewish conception of predestination may be distinguished from the Greek idea of preexistence by the predominance of the thought of "preexistence" in the Divine purpose" (24). The language of Jn. 1:1-3 is all about this- the *logos* preexisting in God's purpose. Significantly, the idea of 'apocalypse' alludes to this Jewish idea of predestined things 'existing' in Heaven with God; for 'apocalypse' means literally an unveiling, a revealing of what is [in Heaven]. In this sense the believer at the resurrection will receive what was already laid up in store for him or her in Heaven (2 Cor. 5:1; Col. 1:5; Mt. 25:34). Because of this, Hebrew can use past tenses to speak of that which is future (e. g. Is. 5:13; 9:2,6,12; 10:28; 28:16; 34:2; Gen. 15:18 cp. Acts 7:5). Things can thus "be" before they are created: "They were and were created" (Rev. 4:11). And thus when the Lord Jesus speaks of the glory which He had with God from the beginning (Jn. 17:5), **there is no suggestion there that He therefore existed in glory from the beginning.** He didn't ask for that glory to be restored to Him, as trinitarianism demands; instead He asked that the glory which He already had in the Divine purpose, be given to Him. **Significantly, there is a Greek word which specifically refers to personal, literal pre-existence: *pro-uparchon*- and it's never used about the Lord Jesus.**

The Jewish View Of Adam

There was a first century Jewish speculation that Adam would be re-incarnated as Messiah. Paul's references to Adam and Christ in Rom. 5:12-21 and 1 Cor. 15:45-47 are very careful to debunk that idea. Paul emphasized that no, Adam and Jesus are different, Jesus is superior to Adam, achieved what Adam didn't, whilst all the same being "son of man". And this emphasis was effectively a denial by Paul that Jesus pre-existed as Adam, or as anyone. For Paul counters these Jewish speculations by underlining that the Lord Jesus was *human*. The hymn o**f Phil. 2:6-11 is really a setting out of the similarities and differences between Adam and Jesus- and unlike Adam, Jesus did not even consider equality with God as something to be grasped for (Gen. 3:5). The record of the wilderness temptations also appears designed to highlight the similarities and differences between Adam and Jesus- both were tempted, Adam eats, Jesus refuses to eat; both are surrounded by the animals and Angels (Mk. 1:13).**

A false understanding of the nature of the Lord Jesus is related to a wrong understanding of sin and the whole nature and need for atonement. There was a first century Jewish speculation that Adam would be re-incarnated as Messiah, and this was connected with the idea that Adam was somehow sinless. The *Book of Enoch* blames the fall of man on the sin of the [supposed] Angels in Genesis 6, rather than Adam's sin in Eden; and some early Jewish Christians likewise denied the fall of Adam, blaming humanity's problems rather on the supposed visit of Angels to the earth [according to their misinterpretation of Genesis 6] (25). In all this we see a refusal to face sin for what it is, and to dilute human responsibility for sin, blaming it rather on supposedly fallen Angels. It is this, on a psychological level at least, which appears to be the root cause for the misinterpretation on the Genesis 6 passage. I've written more about this in chapter 5 of *The Real Devil*. This failure to perceive the importance and nature of sin led to wrong thinking as to how salvation could be achieved. According to the Gnostics, mankind was to be saved simply by the act of "the Heavenly man" descending to earth and ascending back to Heaven (see the Naasene Hymn and Hippolytus in *Refutations* 5. 6-11). The Biblical picture is very different. The Lord Jesus was born of an ordinary woman, human, with all our temptations (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15,16), and only through His struggle against sin, unto death, can we be saved. This is a far different picture from that of popular Christianity, whereby [just as in the Gnostic theory], some non-human redeemer saved us merely by making a trip down to earth and back to Heaven again. Such a theory also says something about the nature of God- would He really forgive us all the hurt we cause Him, just because someone took a trip from Heaven to earth and back again? Is the God of the Bible really so tokenistic and so easily satisfied by ritual for the sake of it? The huge place accorded to the death and resurrection of Jesus by the New Testament writers is clearly enough a denial of the Gnostic idea of the Heavenly redeemer coming down to earth and ascending again for our redemption. And yet this mistaken idea is clearly behind the theology of mainstream Christianity- even though it utterly devalues the cross and resurrection. John's idea is that the Lord Jesus was 'lifted up' on the cross, and yet 'lifted up' is the term used for exaltation to and by God (Jn. 3:14 etc. all play on this idea). The Lord's ascension to Heaven wasn't therefore a 'going home', as required by the Gnostic pre-existence theory; it was a wonderful exaltation of "the man Christ Jesus" from earth to Heaven, in recognition of His supreme achievment. Truly has it been commented: "**The dogma of Christ's deity turned Jesus into a Hellenistic redeemer-god, and thus was a myth propagated behind which the historical Jesus completely disappeared"** (26).

Further, the Lord Jesus is set up in so many ways as the example for us to follow- in a way that some cosmic being descending from outer space never could have been. In the same way as Jesus was the image of the invisible God in His character (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4), so we are bidden put on the image of God (Col. 3:10), being transformed into His image progressively over time (2 Cor. 3:18), through "the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2), being conformed to the image of Jesus our Saviour (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49). Thus the *process* of our redemption, through the perfect character of Jesus, becomes in turn a *personal pattern* for each of us who have been saved by that process. And it was only through the successful completion of that work of redemption that Jesus was "made" Lord of all (Rom. 1:4; Acts 2:36). This is a different picture to the Gnostic-Trinitarian idea of a pre-existent Lord of all descending to earth. Further, their theory gets somewhat confused when they claim that the Angelic appearances on earth in Old Testament times [e. g. the Angel with Israel in the wilderness] were actually appearances of Jesus on earth. If this is so, then *when* did Jesus come to earth to save men? Did He make several visits. . . ? Why couldn't each of these visits have been enough for human salvation? The idea that the Lord Jesus was an Old Testament Angel is simply unsustainable in Scripture and needs to be rejected, along with all Gnostic-

influenced views of Him. We know from Acts 14:11 that there was a strong tendency in the first century to believe that the gods could come to earth in the likeness of men; and trinitarianism simply reflects the fact that weak Christians in the early centuries sought to accomodate Christianity to their existing beliefs.

The Language Of Exaltation

As scholarship uncovers and analyzes more and more Jewish literature contemporary with and predating the New Testament, it becomes apparent that many of the terms of devotion used about Jesus are in fact borrowed from Judaism. This we would expect, seeing that the New Testament writers and the early Christians were largely Jewish. Judaism gave Divine titles to Messiah, speaking of Him in Divine terms (27)- and yet clearly enough, this didn't mean that the Jews understood Messiah as equal to God, for they were the world's fiercest monotheists. **If the Jews of the first century were being asked to quit monotheism and accept trinitarianism, why is there no New Testament hint of the struggle this would have resulted in?** Why doesn't Paul speak of how he struggled with it? For even today, Trinitarian preachers find their view of the Trinity to be the greatest stumblingblock for their Jewish audiences. Larry Hurtado sums it up like this: "Virtually all the Christological rhetoric of early Christians was appropriated from their environment" (28). We of course do the same- we describe a promising young footballer as "the next [Beckham]", or whoever is the football star of the moment. Likewise the word "awesome" came into strong vogue in the late 1990s as a superlative. We use the terms of exaltation which are current at our time. Thus reading the New Testament against its context, the highly exalted language used about the Lord Jesus was not in fact making any claim at all that 'Jesus = God' in a trinitarian sense. It was only because Judaism and Christianity parted company with each other that later generations of Gentile Christians came to forget the immediate Jewish context against which those terms were initially used- and conveniently mixed them with their own pagan ideas about gods coming to earth etc.

The Extent Of Jewish Influence

It may be wondered whether I'm not over emphasizing the influence of apostate Jewish thinking upon apostate Christian thinking in the first century. However there's ample evidence that such influence occured in other doctrinal and behavioural areas even amongst the early Gentile churches. *The Songs Of The Sabbath Sacrifice* was a document used in the Qumran community, claiming that the Angelic choirs of praise to God were reflected in the praises of the Qumran community. They saw themselves as praising God with the "tongues of Angels". A similar idea can be found in the *Testament Of Job*, which also uses the term "tongues of Angels" to describe how the praises of Job's daughters matched those of the Angels in Heaven. These two apocryphal writings include many phrases which are used by Paul in his argument against how the Corinthians were abusing the idea of 'speaking in tongues': "understand all mysteries (1 Cor. 13:2). . . in a spirit speaks mysteries (1 Cor. 14:2). . . speaking unto God (1 Cor. 14:2). . . sing with the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:15). . . bless with the spirit (1 Cor. 14:16). . . hath a psalm (1 Cor. 14:26)" (29). It would seem therefore that the Gentile Corinthians were influenced by apostate Jewish false teachers, who were encouraging them to use ecstatic utterance with the claim that they were speaking with "tongues of Angels". And Paul's response is to guide them back to the purpose of the gift of tongues- which was to preach in foreign languages. My point in this context is that even in the Gentile church at Corinth, there was **significant influence from Jewish false teachers.** So it's no surprise to find that in the area of the nature and person of the Lord Jesus, which was the crucial issue in the new religion of Christianity, there would also be such influence by Jewish thinking.

The Kabbalah

This set of mystical commentaries upon the writings of Moses is centered around a book called The Zohar, which was supposedly produced by Shimon bar Yochai, a rabbi of the second century. This book gives an insight, therefore, into Jewish thinking at that time. The Zohar often speaks of God as being "interconnected" within Himself, and often speaks of this interconnection in terms of tripilisms, i. e. three aspects inteconnected. Michael Lodahl comments: "The Zohar, near its beginning, describes the sefirotic interconnectedness in this way: "Three issue from one and one is established on three; one enters between two, two give suck to one, and one feeds many sides, and so all are one (1:32b). "And so all are one": the rich, multivalent consciousness of God. . . " (30). This language is remarkably similar to that used in the Trinitarian creeds, and it's hard to imagine that Trinitarianism didn't partly originate from an apostate Judaism.

Notes

(1) See Larry Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion And Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003) pp. 71-92.

(2) N. A. Dahl, "Christ, Creation And The Church" in *The Background Of The New Testament* , ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: C. U. P. , 1964) pp. 422-443.

(3) Vincent Taylor, *The Person Of Christ In New Testament Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1959) p. 62.

(4) Evidence provided in Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology Of The New Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1965) Vol. 1 pp. 132, 176, 178.

(5) See J. Moffatt, *The Epistle To The Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924) pp. 11,38; C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1989 ed.) pp. 174-184.

(6) Arthur Gibson, *Biblical Semantic Logic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981) p. 26. The same point is often exemplified in Jmaes Barr, *The Semantics Of Biblical Language* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 1961).

(7) See my *The Real Devil* Chapter 1.

(8) John Macdonald, *The Theology Of The Samaritans* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964) p. 162.

(9) References in James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) p. 100.

(10) Martin Hengel, *Acts And The History Of Earliest Christianity* (London: S. C. M. , 1979) p. 106.

(11) See John Hick, ed. , *The Myth Of God Incarnate* (London: S. C. M. , 1977) p. 67.

(12) John Macdonald, *op cit*. , pp. 135, 221, 306.

(13) W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy And Heresy In Earliest Christianity* (London: S. C. M. , 1972) pp. 44-60; H. G. Kippenburg, *Gerazim And Synagogue* (Berlin & New York: Gruyter, 1971) pp. 205, 316, 367.

(14) Mentioned in Bauer, *op cit*. , p. 44.

(15) Harry Whittaker, 'The Jewish Plot', in *Studies In The Acts Of The Apostles* (Wigan: Biblia, 1991); and my 'The Jewish Satan' in *The Real Devil* (Sydney: Aletheia, 2007).

(16) Michael Goulder, in John Hick, ed. , *The Myth Of God Incarnate* (London: S. C. M. , 1977) p. 84.

(17) J. Danielou, *The Theology Of Jewish Christianity: A History Of Early Christian Doctrine* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) chapter 4, 'The Trinity and Angelology'.

(18) James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) pp. 132, 150.

(19) H. Ringgren, *Word And Wisdom* (Lund: Ohlsson, 1947) pp. 165-171. See too his *The Faith Of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963).

(20) See documentation in Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: S. C. M. , 1971) pp. 15,16.

(21) Kenneth Wuest, *Great Truths To Live By* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) p. 30.

(22) E. G. Selwyn, *First Epistle Of St. Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) p. 124. Likewise Emil Schurer: "In Jewish thinking, everything truly valuable preexisted in heaven", *The History of The Jewish People In The Age Of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979) Vol. 2 p. 522.

(23) H. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954) p. 334.

(24) E. C. Dewick, *Primitive Christian Eschatology* (Cambridge: C. U. P. , 1912) pp. 253,254.

(25) For documentation, see Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: S. C. M. , 1971) p. 170.

(26) Martin Werner, *The Formation Of Christian Doctrine: An Historical Study Of Its Problems* (London: A. & C. Black, 1957) p. 298.

(27) See William Horbury, *Jewish Messianism And The Cult Of Christ* (London: S. C. M. , 1998); Nils Dahl, "Sources of Christological language" in his *Jesus The Christ: The Historical Origins Of Christological Doctrine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) pp. 113-136.

(28) Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion To Jesus In Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) p. 75.

(29) References for all this can be found in Andrew Perry,'The Songs Of The Sabbath Sacrifice And Tongues', *Christadelphian Journal Of Biblical Interpretation*, Vol. 2 No. 2 April 2008 p. 13.

(30) Michael Lodahl, *Shekhinah / Spirit: Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992) p. 86. See too S. M. Bernard Lee, "An 'Other' Trinity," manuscript form of a paper presented at the Conference on Jewish Theology and Process Thought at Hebrew Union College, New York (April 13, 1986), p. 4. There are several references to the connections between the Zorah and the formulation of Trinitarian doctrine in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981). Moltmann sought to justify the Trinity as a reflection of "the three modes of human freedom" which the Kabbalah speak of.

3-5 Dirty Politics And The Doctrine Of The Trinity

A review of the "Letters concerning the Decrees of the Council of Nicaea", published in English translation in the *Collection Of Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers*, reveals that Athanasius kept insisting that the church had the right to definitively interpret Scripture, and it was their authority to interpret it as they wished, and therefore no great weight should be placed on the fact that at times their conclusions and dogmas weren't supported by the Bible text. Letter 5. 20,21 reads: "The bishops. . . were compelled to collect the sense of the Scriptures. . . the expressions [of the proposed doctrine of the Trinity] are not in so many words in the Scriptures". It was not a question of those men being 'compelled' at all- they ought to have been faithful to the Biblical text, rather than demanding that others accept their "sense" on pain of being called non-Christian and cast out of the church. It is this attitude to the Bible itself which ultimately determines whether we accept or reject the Trinity.

The argument between Arius (non-trinitarian) and Athanasius (trinitarian) was more political than it was theological or Biblical. There was a power struggle between the two men. Once Christianity became the state religion of the Roman empire, power within the church became political power. These two Christian leaders both had significant followings; and they both wanted power. The followers of the two groups fought pitched battles with each other in the urban centres of the empire. There are numerous accounts of Athanasius' followers beating and murdering non-trinitarian Christians in the lead-up to the Council of Nicea, torturing their victims and parading their dead bodies around (1). The trinitarian Athanasius was by far the more brutal. "Bishop Athanasius, a future saint… had his opponents excommunicated and anathematized, beaten and intimidated, kidnapped, imprisoned, and exiled to distant provinces" (2). As in any power struggle, the opponents of both sides became vilified and demonized; the issue of how to formulate a creed about the nature of Jesus became a matter of polemics and politics, with the non-trinitarians being described in the most vitriolic of language. Non-trinitarians were accused of "rending the robe of Christ", crucifying Him afresh, and far worse. Sadly this spirit of vilification of those who hold another view has continued to this day, with many trinitarians refusing to accept any non-trinitarian as a Christian. Arius complained in a letter that "We are persecuted because we say that the Son had a beginning, but that God was without beginning" (3). At the Council of Nicea, Bishop Nicholas- who later became the legendary saint of Christmas in much of Europe- slapped Arius around the face (4). It would be wrong to think of the dispute as a matter of learned men of God disagreeing with each other over a matter of Biblical interpretation. Athanasius, who had the ear of Constantine more than Arius, was out for victory. He therefore emotionalized the issue and used every manner of politics and destruction of his opponents in order to get Constantine to come down on his side, exile Arius for heresy, and therefore leave him as the senior churchman of the Roman empire- which meant major political power, in an empire which had newly adopted Christianity and sought to enforce it as the empire's religion. It's highly significant that the draft 'creed' relating to the Godhead was initially acceptable to Arius; but because Alexander and his side simply wanted Arius 'out', they made the language more extreme; so that reconciliation wouldn't be achieved. And so they added the clause that Jesus was *homoousios*, of the same substance, with the Father- knowing Arius would have to reject this (5). Again, this was no outcome of sober, sincere Bible study. It was pure politics. Often I hear the comment 'Well this matter was all looked into long ago, and wise Christians weighed it up and came to a prayerful conclusion, which tradition Christians rightly follow and uphold'. The history of the matter is quite different, and those who make such statements are sadly ignorant. Athanasius compounded his physical attacks on Arius' supporters, his burning of their churches etc, with a series of personal slanders against the leading non-trinitarians, calling them seducers, rapists, frequenters of prostitutes, etc (6). If the argument was really just about the interpretation of Scripture, there needn't have been all this personal attacking and politicking and rioting. Clearly, the issue of accepting the trinity was all about power politics. In any case, we simply cannot allow our personal faith and understanding of God and His Son to be dictated and defined by a church council of many centuries ago. Reviewing the history of the Christian church hardly gives much reason to trust its "councils" to come up with Godly, Biblical decisions. Just think back through the burning of heretics and suspected witches, torture to the death of non-trinitarians such as Michael Servetus by Luther, anti-semitism, the crusades, the Inquisition, church support for Fascism, for war and violence, for making black people stay out of white churches in the USA and South Africa. . . high level "Christian" decision making has a pathetic record. We really have no reason at all to allow "church councils" to define our view of the Lord, Saviour and Master with whom we are to have an intensely personal relationship mediated by His word. I cannot rest my faith on the shoulders of men; true faith

cannot be a secondhand faith. It must trace its origins directly back to the Lord Jesus and His word, rather than back to some cranky guys playing church politics in the fourth century.

Constantine was a politician, not a Bible student. "Constantine's goal was to create a neutral public space in which Christians and pagans could both function. . . creating a stable coalition of both Christians and non-Christians" in the Roman empire (7). He also realized that Christianity itself had to be united if it were to be the state religion, and so he wanted there to be only one view on this contentious issue of who Jesus was. It was intolerable for him that Christians were rioting against each other over it. The matter had to be resolved. One side had to be chosen as right, and the other side must be silenced. He came down on the side of Athanasius for political reasons- adopted the trinitarian creed for the church, and exiled Arius. And so, Jesus 'became' God because of that. In the same spirit of wanting a united church at all costs, Constantine agreed at Nicea to a whole range of other measures which were likewise not Biblical- e. g. that anyone excommunicated by a Bishop in one province could never be accepted in another province, and the appointment of "superbishops" in Alexandria, Rome and Antioch who would decide all contentious issues in future. Personal conscience and understanding didn't matter; all Constantine wanted was a united church, as he believed it would result in a united empire. One empire, one religion- and therefore, that religion had to be united, and dissent had to quashed. Someone had to be made out as totally right, and someone as totally wrong. Sadly one sees today the very same mentality in so many churches and local congregations. It's all about power. The mess made in early Christianity remains our sober warning in these last days.

Constantine's Legacy

Constantine's integrity is for me self-questioned by his claim to be "the thirteenth apostle". Such a person can hardly be taken as a founding father of the true church. And add to this his murder of his rivals, boiling his wife to death in her bath and murdering one of his sons. Paul Johnson documents all this, and in the context of the trinity [and other] political agreements, comments: "His abilities had always lain in management. . . he was a master of the smoothly-worded compromise" (8). Indeed, Constantine wrote to both Arius and Alexander that he considered the theological issues themselves to be of no importance: "Having inquired carefully into the origin and foundation of these differences, I find their cause to be of a truly insignificant nature, quite unworthy of such bitter contention" (9). It really was all just dirty politics- for soon after writing this, non-trinitarians were cast out of the church as infidels and heretics, over an issue which Constantine considered "insignificant". It wasn't many centuries later that the Crusaders raped and pillaged both Moslem and Jewish cities, in the name of the Trinity and justified by the idea that those who didn't accept it, and were monotheists, should be put to the sword. **John Calvin, in this spirit, ordered the destruction of Michael Servetus, because he too came to deny the Trinity. For this, he "deserved to have his bowels ripped out and to be torn in pieces" (10). So much for Calvin as a father of the so-called reformation.** Nothing very fundamental was reformed. And Michael Servetus was taken to his execution in a dung cart, and burned alive with his anti-trinitarian writings, and the flames were fed with every known copy of his book *Christianismi Restutio*- a book which called for the restoration of Christianity to its non-trinitarian original form. The downright nastiness of many Trinitarians to non-Trinitarians today, branding them as cults etc. , is a continuation of this spirit.

Theodosius And AD381

The Nicaea decree of AD325 was set even further in stone by the decree of Constantinople, issued by the emperor Theodosius in AD381. This edict condemned all other Christian beliefs as heresy, punishable by both the Roman state and also, so he claimed, by God's condemnation. The historian Charles Freeman argues at length that this edict brought about what he calls "the closing of the western mind" (11). All Bible study, theology etc. was now done within the tramlines of the Trinitarian dogma; fear of being accused heretical permeated Christianity. The state controlled the church, and thus the Roman empire became as much a 'one church' state as it did a one party state. Secular law upheld church law. Loyalty to the empire thus became the same thing as loyalty to the church. Once the empire pronounced God as being a Trinity- anything else was seen as subversive and dangerous. And so "'Having faith' could be defined as the virtue of believing what the church believed, and 'the sin of pride' as thinking for oneself" (12). The 'orthodox', Trinitarian bishops were empowered to confiscate the churches and property of heretics, and punish and slay them as required. The libraries and writings of 'heretics' were destroyed. The tradition of intellectual free thought and debate that Rome had inherited from Greece dried up; even Christian art became influenced and limited by the Trinity, triple tiaras started appearing everywhere. . . and the slide into the dark ages was

perhaps hastened by this clampdown on Christian thought. The divisive and condemnatory language used by Theodosius and his supporters in condemnation of non-Trinitarian Christians bears quoting at length: "We shall believe in. . . the Holy Trinity. We command that persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom we judge demented and insane, shall carry the infamy of heretical dogmas. Their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by Divine vengeance, and secondly by the retribution of hostility which we shall assume in accordance with the Divine judgment. . . [Arians] are wolves harrying the flocks, daring to hold rival assemblies, stirring sedition among the people and shrinking from nothing which can do damage to the churches" (13). This kind of vitriolic recalls the way the Trinitarian Athanasius spoke of non-Trinitarian Christians like Arius: **"In every respect his heart is depraved and irreligious.** . . utterly bereft of understanding, heretics show no shame. . . they are hostile and hateful to God" (14). And so the art of heresy hunting by Christians against other Christians began in earnest. There was no category in Roman law to condemn wrong belief; there were only articles against sorcery. Understanding the Lord Jesus in a non-Trinitarian way was therefore elevated to a seriously criminal offence. Burning alive was the traditional Roman punishment for counterfeiting coins- and this was applied to those who 'counterfeited Christ' by rejecting the Trinity. There arose, therefore, a fear of asking too many questions- as the Bishop of Melitene observed: "We uphold the Nicene creed but avoid difficult questions. . . Clever theologians soon become heretics" (15). Yet asking questions is a basic tool in the search for Truth, for God, in exploring His word for ourselves. Yet to simply *be*, in all spiritual, Bible-believing honesty, a non-Trinitarian was painted as an awful sin. . . and in some quarters, **Trinitarian Christianity has the same aggressive, intolerant spirit to this day, associated with a total close down of thought and intellectual integrity when it comes to the issue of the Trinity.**

Why did Theodosius act like this? Why did he begin this process of persecuting anyone who didn't accept the Trinity? It wasn't the outcome of Biblical study, but rather political fears and ambitions. The Roman empire was breaking up, and he urgently wanted to unite the empire through enforcing unity of belief. Further, it had been pointed out that the Gospels present Jesus as a rebel against the Roman empire, a man who claimed to be King in contradistinction to Caesar. The response of Theodosius was therefore to insist that Jesus was God, and His human side was to be downplayed. One recalls the way that the Nazis, in a desperate attempt to get the German church onside with them, likewise ordered the Divine side of Jesus to be emphasized and His humanity as a Jew to be diminished. For one could hardly expect a Christian church to support the extermination of Jewry if the Christ of Christianity were to be title-roled as a Jew. Further, the empire of Theodosius was under attack from the Goths, who had been converted to an earlier, non-Trinitarian form of Christianity. Rather than justify a war of Christians against fellow Christians, it was expedient for Theodosius to slate the Goths as apostate Christians, deserving of Rome's brutality to suppress them.

Notes

(1) See Richard Hanson, *The Search For The Christian Doctrine Of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) p. 386.
(2) Richard Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God* (London: Harcourt, 2000) p. 6.
(3) Quoted in Rubenstein, *ibid* p. 58.
(4) Mentioned in Rubenstein, *ibid* p. 77.
(5) As documented in Charles Freeman, *AD381: Heretics, Pagans And The Christian State* (London: Pimlico, 2008) p. 54.
(6) These things are chronicled extensively in T. D. Barnes, *Constantine And Eusebius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) pp. 18-27 and throughout T. D. Barnes, *Athanasius And Constantius: Theology And Politics In The Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
(7) H. A. Drake, *Constantine And Consensus* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 1995). The same author concludes that Constantine realized that Christianity was unstoppable, and therefore it was better to merge with it than seek to destroy it. See his *Constantine And The Bishops: The Politics Of Intolerance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2000).
(8) Paul Johnson, *A History Of Christianity* (New York: Atheneum, 1976) pp. 67,68.
(9) Quoted in Ian Wilson, *Jesus: The Evidence* (London: Harper & Row, 1984) p. 165.
(10) As quoted in A. Buzzard and C. Hunting, *The Doctrine Of The Trinity* (Oxford: International Scholars Press, 1998) p. 155. For more on Calvin's persecution of Servetus, see Marian Hillar, *The Case of Michael Servetus* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).

(11) Charles Freeman, *The Closing Of The Western Mind* (London: Heinemann, 2002) and also *AD381: Heretics, Pagans And The Christian State* (London: Pimlico, 2008).
(12) Charles Freeman, *The Closing Of The Western Mind* (London: Heinemann, 2002) p. 341.
(13) As quoted in Charles Freeman, *AD381: Heretics, Pagans And The Christian State* (London: Pimlico, 2008) pp. 25,101. There are many similar quotations on record- see Richard Hanson, *The Search For The Christian Doctrine Of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) p. 828.
(14) Quoted in Freeman, *op cit.* p. 70.
(15) As quoted in Henry Chadwick, *The Church In Ancient Society* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 2001) p. 591.

3-6 The Trinity: A Desire For Acceptance

Thomas Gaston and others have pointed out that despite the initial working-class beginnings of first century Biblical Christianity, by the second century there was a determined effort by the Christian community to attract higher class followers. The majority of the non-canonical Acts, epistles and Gospels reflect something of this. There was a desire to present the Christian message in terms which the educated and upper classes could understand and accept. The attacks of Celsus and others on Christianity in the 2nd century indicate a concern on their part that the edcuated classes were being attracted to it and even accepting it. Kyrtatos observes: "Christianity is presented in the New Testament in a form that was unacceptable. . . to people of education. . . one of the dearest concerns of the second century [Christian] apologists. . . [was] the translation of Christianity into a language that could be understood and accepted by the upper classes" (1). This would explain why the Christian apologists began to present Biblical Christianity in Platonic terms, just as Philo the Jew presented Jewish history in such terms- and it was but a short step to accepting and incorporating the Platonic ideas of the immortal soul, a personally pre-existent "Logos" figure etc. And this is what happened. The desire to win educated converts led to the early church writers of the second century adopting Platonic terminology with which to describe the Lord Jesus, and it stuck. Some second century Christian leaders even wrote to the Roman Emperor, addressing him as the "chief philosopher", begging him not to persecute Christians because Christianity and Greek philosophy were essentially the same thing. Justin's *First Apology* is a classic example (2). The apocryphal *Preaching Of Peter* 2 claims that "we [Christians] and the good Greeks worship the same God" (3). The deconstruction of Greek philosophy which we meet throughout the New Testament was sadly ignored in the desperate desire to be acceptable within society. As Gaston comments: "It is not coincidence that the Middle Platonists also believed in the 'three-ness' of God" (4). Thus it was through the conscious desire to present Christianity in Platonic terms that the concept of the trinity entered Christian thought. But there can be no doubt that this was not a reflection of the Biblical texts themselves.

Notes
(1) D. J. Kyrtatos, *The Social Structure Of The Early Christian Communities* (London: Virgo, 1987) p. 99. See too Thomas Gaston, *Proto-Trinity: The Development Of The Doctrine Of The Trinity In The First And Second Centuries* (MPhil. thesis, University of Birmingham UK, 2007, published by Lulu Press, 2007) p. 28.
(2) See F. Young in M. Edwards *et al*, eds. , *Apologetics In The Roman Empire* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 1999) pp. 83,84, 94.
(3) As cited in Gaston *op cit.* p. 35.
(4) Gaston *op cit.* p. 56.

3-7 How The Real Christ Was Lost

I feel I am obligated to make the point that the real, genuinely human Son of God whom we have reconstructed from the pages of Scripture is at variance with the Trinitarian perspective. The Trinity grew out of Gnosticism, which taught that life comes by leaving the world and the flesh. But John's Gospel especially emphasizes how the true life was and is revealed through the very flesh, the very worldly and human life, of the Lord Jesus. True Christianity has correctly rejected the trinity and defined a Biblically correct view of the atonement. But we need to make something of this in practice; we must use it as a basis upon which to meet the real, personal Christ. In the 2nd century, the urgent, compelling, radical, repentance-

demanding Jesus was replaced by mere theology, by abstracting Him into effectively nothing, burying the real Jesus beneath theology and fiercely debated human definitions. And we can in essence make the same mistake. And I might add, it was this turning of Jesus into a mystical theological 'God' which made Him so unacceptable to the Jews. The preaching of the real, human Jesus to them ought to be more widely attempted by our churches. It must be realized that the growing pressure to make Jesus 'God' was matched by a growing anti-Judaism in the church. Some of the major proponents of the Trinitarian idea were raving anti-Judaists such as Chrysostom, Jerome and Luther. And in more recent times, Gerhard Kittel, editor of the trinity-pushing *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* was also a regular contributor to the official Nazi publication on the Jewish 'problem'. It was Hitler who pushed the idea that Jesus was not really a Jew, suggesting that the humanity of Jesus should be de-emphasized and the divinity stressed, so that the guilt of the Jews appeared the greater (1). The point is, we have been greatly blessed with being able to return to the original, Biblical understanding of Jesus, which worldly theology and politics has clouded over for so many millions. But we must use this to build a Christ-centred life.

The Trinity is theology. One reason that the Trinity dogma arose was exactly because of the development of theology as a discipline, more precisely, systematic theology. This tends to deal with religious ideas on a large conceptual scale, and it soon fell adrift from a study of the actual text of the Bible. A Roman Catholic theologian laments that "There has been a continuous tendency. . . to divide what is called dogmatic or systematic theology from what is called biblical exegesis, and to put them into separate and practically water-tight compartments. . . biblical scholars have often had reason to complain that too many dogmatic theologians [i. e. those in the business of constructing dogma- D. H.] appear to be biblically illiterate" (2). The Trinity would be a parade example of this; 'dogma' became established and then dogmatized about as a result of philosophical speculation about God and Jesus, rather than being the result of careful, deductive Biblical study.

The humanity of Jesus was more radical for the early Christians than we perhaps realize. Against the first century background it must be remembered that it was felt impossible for God or His representative to be frightened, shocked, naked, degraded. And yet the Lord Jesus was all this, and is portrayed in the Gospels in this way. **To believe that this Man was Son of God, and to be worshipped as God, was really hard for the first century mind; just as hard as it is for us today.** It's not surprising that desperate theories arose to 'get around' the problem of the Lord's humanity.

We need to keep earnestly asking ourselves: 'Do I know Jesus Christ?'. The answers that come back to us within our minds may have orthodoxy ['I know He wasn't God, He had human nature…. ']. But do they have integrity, and the gripping practical significance which they should have for us? Too much emphasis, in my view, has been placed upon this word 'nature'. We're interested in knowing the essence of Jesus as a person, who He was in the very core of His manhood and personality. Not in theological debate about semantics. Athanasius, father of the Athanasian Creed that declared the 'trinity', claimed that "Christ. . . did not weigh two choices, preferring the one and rejecting another". This is in total contrast to the real Christ whom we meet in the pages of the New Testament- assailed by temptation, sweating large concentrated blobs of moisture in that struggle, and coming through triumphant.

Separating Jesus From His Nature

Trinitarians have ended up making ridiculous statements because they've separated the 'nature' of Jesus from the person of Jesus. "He permitted his own flesh to weep, although it was in its nature tearless and incapable of grief" (*Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary in John,* 7). "He felt pain for us, but not with our senses; he was found in fashion as a man, with a body which could feel pain, but his nature could not feel pain" (Hilary). "In the complete and perfect nature of very man, very God was born" (Leo, *Tome* 5)(3). This is all ridiculous- because these theologians are talking about a nature as if it's somehow separate from Jesus as a person. And we non-trinitarians need to be careful we don't make the same mistake. Forget the theological terms, the talk about 'wearing a nature'; but focus upon the person of Jesus. The terms end up distracting people from focus upon Him as a person; and it's that focus which is the essence of true , Jesus-centred spirituality. The meaning and victory of the Lord Jesus depend upon far more than simply 'nature'. So much of the 'trinity' debate has totally missed this point. **It was His personality, *Him*, not the words we use to define 'nature', that is so powerful.**

Mere Appearance?

Further, the so-called 'fathers' ended up suggesting that the Lord Jesus effectively deceived people into thinking He was human when He wasn't. Clement claimed: "He ate, not because of bodily needs… He was… untroubled by passions; no movement of the passions, either pleasure or pain, found its way unto him" (4). Hilary of Poitiers (315-367) likewise: "He bore the form of a servant, but he was free from the … weaknesses of a human body" (5). This surely undoes the whole wonderful achievement of the cross, turning the sufferings of Jesus into some act and even deception. Jesus was who He was; indeed it was the congruity between who He claimed to be – i. e. God's Son- and who He was in practice which was so attractive to people. Cosmic deception on this massive scale would hardly be an inspiration to us here on earth to follow Jesus, to make who He was on earth the practical model for our daily lives. It was His through-and-through humanity which makes Him such a challenge, inspiration and Saviour to us. Some have argued that the miracles of Jesus were His Divine side, and His need, e. g. to eat, were His human side. But the Lord promised His followers that they would be empowered to do even greater miracles than what He had done, because of the victory He was to achieve on the cross (Jn. 14:12). He was as He was, I am that I am, and His victory and exaltation became a personal pattern for all those who would afterwards believe in Him. The theory of Him only 'acting out' reaches its nadir when we come- as each Christian must- to personally contemplate the meaning of the dead body of Jesus. That lifeless corpse, in contrast with the immortal God who cannot die, was surely the ultimate testament to Christ's total humanity. God did not die for three days. The Lord Jesus did. His subsequent resurrection doesn't in any way detract from the fact that He was really dead for three days. Indeed, His resurrection would also have been a cheap sham if He had actually not been really dead, with all that death means. We too, in our natural fear of death (cp. Heb. 2:15), come to that dead body and wish to identify ourselves with it, so that we might share in His resurrection. Baptism is a baptism into His death (Rom. 6:3-5). It's more than some act of vague identification with the dead and resurrected Jesus. We are "buried with him", literally 'co-buried' (Gk. *syn-thaptein*) with Him, inserted into His death, sharing the same grave. **If His death was not really death, then baptism loses its meaning, and we are left still searching for another Saviour with whom we can identify in order to rise out of the grave.** Jesus Himself was baptized in order to emphasize our identity with Him: "Now when *all* the people were baptized, and Jesus *also* had been baptized…" (Lk. 3:21).

In this context we should consider Rom. 8:3, which is often used to support the idea that the Lord Jesus merely appeared human. Rom. 8:3 speaks of the Lord Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" in order to achieve our redemption. The Greek word translated "likeness" elsewhere is used to express identity and correspondence- not mere external 'appearance' (consider its usage in Rom. 1:23; 5:14; 6:5; Phil. 2:7). Scholars, even Trinitarian ones, are generally in agreement on this point. Two examples, both from Trinitarian writers commenting upon this word in Rom. 8:3: "Paul consistently used "likeness" to denote appropriate correspondence or congruity. Thus Paul affirmed Jesus' radical conformity to and solidarity with our sinful flesh (*sarx*)" (6). "The sense of the word (likeness) in Rom. 8:3 by no means marks a distinction or a difference between Christ and sinful flesh. If Christ comes *en homoiomati* of sinful flesh, he comes as the full expression of that sinful flesh. He manifests it for what it is" (7).

The Real Christ

I am no stranger to theological debate about the nature of the Lord Jesus. I've engaged in it so much that inevitably I have considered the question, "Why bother?". Even if the non-Trinitarian position which I present 'wins on points', the question must still be faced: "And? And so what?". I have therefore sought in these pages to also bring out the devotional implications of following the human Christ. Our tendency is to enquire into the nature of the Lord Jesus rather than asking 'What does Jesus do and mean for me?'. For this starts to get uncomfortably personal and demanding. The meaning of Christ for me today is a question which some of the greatest theologians likewise have eventually come around to in their maturity; Barth, Bonhoeffer and C. H. Dodd come to mind, having all written books about this very question in the later part of their lives. Whenever commenting upon His own identity, the Lord always went on to say what this meant in practice; He never simply says "I am the Son of Man" and leaves it at that. Because He is "Son of Man" He had to suffer (Mk. 8:31), because of it He has authority to forgive sins and reposition the Law of Moses (Mk. 2:10,28), because of it He is our mediator and encourager in prayer (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15,16),

and exactly because of it He will return in glory to save His true people (Mk. 14:61). The emphasis is continually upon *His activity and our response* on account of His nature, His person, His being. And we in our days must let this power break through into our likewise very human lives.

Wading through all the empty, passionless theology about Jesus, it becomes apparent that the first error was to draw a distinction between the historical Jesus, i. e. the actual person who walked around Galilee, and what was known as "the post-Easter Jesus", "the Jesus of faith", the "kerygmatic ['proclaimed'] Christ", i. e. the image of Jesus which was proclaimed by the church, and in which one was supposed to place their faith. Here we must give full weight to the Biblical statement that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Who He was then is essentially who He is now, and who He ever will be. This approach cuts right through all the waffle about the trinity, the countless councils of churches and churchmen. Who Jesus was then, in the essence of His teaching and personality, is who He is now. We place our faith in the same basic person as did the brave men and women who first followed Him around the paths over the Galilean hills and the uneven streets of Jerusalem, Capernaum and Bethany. Yes, His nature has now been changed; He is immortal. But the same basic person. The image we have of Him is that faithfully portrayed by the first apostles; and not that created by centuries and layers of later theological reflection. We place our faith in the Man who really was and is, not in a Jesus created by men who exists nowhere but in their own minds and theologies. This, perhaps above all, is the reason why I am not a Trinitarian; and why I think it's so important not to be. There is simply no legitimate way that we can read the words of Jesus of Nazareth as proclaiming Himself part of a 'Trinity'. As one of the world's leading Protestants is driven to admit at the conclusion of a 700 page theological study of the Lord Jesus: "Forget the pseudo-orthodox attempts to make Jesus of Nazareth conscious of being the second person of the Trinity; forget the arid reductionism that is the mirror-image of that unthinking would-be orthodoxy" (8). I love the way Tom Wright there describes the Trinity as a pseudo-orthodoxy. In layman's terms: Too many Christians think they're being 'orthodox', faithfully towing the party line, by claiming to believe in the Trinity. If they return to Scripture, to the New Testament Jesus, to Christ rather than 'Christianity' in its popular guises. . . they will find the true orthodoxy, the true original picture which is to be held on to. **And the Jesus we meet there is simply not God Himself, let alone a "second person" of some theological 'trinity'.** To repeat an oft-stated observation, often made in an over-simplistic way but that is all the same in-your-face true: The word 'Trinity' simply isn't in the Bible.

Leo Tolstoy powerfully came to Christ, but he later quit the established church over (amongst others issues) the Trinity; for he didn't see it taught in the Bible. Probably with allusion to this, there's a section in his *Anna Karenina* where Anna surveys a painting of the Lord Jesus with Pilate. She loves the way that it portrays His humanity, and comments in wonder: "You can see he's sorry for Pilate". Golenishchev then complains that the painting shows Jesus as human rather than God. The artist, Mikhailov, responds: "I couldn't paint a Christ I didn't have in my own soul. . . this is the greatest theme art can be confronted by". Golenishchev retorts: "There is one question that emerges, for the believer and for the unbeliever- is this a God or not a God?". " "But why? It seems to me that for educated people", said Mikhailov, "there really can't be any debate"" (9). And so it seems to me too.

But not to me alone. Both in academic research and amongst lay Christians in many denominations, there has been a growing dissatisfaction with Trinitarianism. This picked up speed in the latter half of the twentieth century and continues until now (10). This book is only part of a far wider movement back to the Biblical Jesus. The needs of modern society form a Christ-shaped hole within us, which only the genuinely human yet sinless Jesus can fill. Our hunger and thirst, our hardships, suffering of persecution and injustice, alienation and rejection by friends, family and society, our fate to die, in some senses, as outcasts and lonely men and women… makes us cry out for someone stronger than us who also hungered and suffered likewise, who can suffer with us, who can die with us; and who can save us from and out of it all. And quite simply, Jesus [the real Jesus] is the answer. As we cough and hack our way through this world, He is truly our inspiration- as we daily reflect upon His fortitude in suffering, His determination in the face of indescribable injustice; His abiding, persistent, continual kindness and gentleness in the midst of frustration and humanly hopeless situations [His care for others whilst hanging there crucified was the summation of a whole life lived doing just that]. But even more importantly, significantly, relevantly, powerfully… and here our choice of words has run out… because of His humanity underpinning and empowering His final sacrifice, He is and shall for ever be, our eternal Saviour; saving us from the times and moments and sad fact that our

hard hearts still fail to accept His inspiration. And we receive the salvation that is in Him both now and always in humbled gratitude.

Notes

(1) *Hitler's Table-Talk: Hitler's Conversations Recorded by Martin Bormann* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 1988) pp. 76, 721.

(2) Edmund Hill, *Being Human* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984) pp. 4,5.

(3) All quoted from T. H. Bindley, *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith* (London: Methuen, 1950).

(4) *Stromateis* 6. 9 (71), as found in Henry Bettenson, translator, *The Early Christian Fathers* (Oxford: O. U. P. , 1956).
(5) *De Trinitate* 10. 24,25, as found in Bettenson, *op cit*.
(6) Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1993) p. 79.
(7) Vincent Branick, "The Sinful Flesh of the Son of God", *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 47 (1985) p. 250.

(8) N. T. Wright, *Jesus And The Victory Of God* (London: S. P. C. K, 2004) p. 653.

(9) The whole section is a masterpiece. Outside of straight Biblical argument, the case against the Trinity couldn't have been more powerfully put. Anna's wonder at the humanity of the Lord Jesus, her admiration of His pity for Pilate, her million warm feelings as she thinks about Christ as a human person, the weakness of Golenishchev's insistence that Jesus is God, and the artist's explanation that he had to express in any painting of Jesus His humanity, seeing that he as the artist was likewise human. . . is all really a powerful piece of writing. In English translation, this section is in Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* translated by Joel Carmichael (London: Bantam Books, 1981 ed.) pp. 503-508.

(10) This is evident from any summary account of the history of Christology in this period- see, e. g. , Elizabeth Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) pp. 19-65; William M. Thompson, *The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) pp. 14-78.

Appendix: Some Wrested Scriptures
Introduction

I cannot help but comment upon the intellectual desperation of Trinitarianism. The so called 'early church fathers' fumble all over the place to explain basic Bible passages which contradicted their complex philosophy. Consider how they faced with the Lord's statement that He did not know the day nor hour of His return, although the Father did (Mk. 13:32). Basil claims that actually, Jesus *did* know the day and hour, but He meant that as a man He didn't. Didymus claimed that He "put on a deliberate poe of ignorance" (1). But the real Christ, the one who manifested God, who was one with the Father, who hungred and thirsted, bled and died for us- is all one and the same Jesus. Time and again when I ask for evidence that "Jesus is God", I'm told things like "Well, in the Bible He's called 'the Son of God', 'the Lord', the 'Son of man'- so, of course He's God! The Bible says so!". My dear mother used to call me obtuse, and maybe it's just so, that I really am. But I'm afraid I can't see why ever those titles of Jesus can make Him "God". There's no lack of thorough academic study of all those titles. The evidence is conclusive that they were used *before* the time of the New Testament and applied to *men* (2). Indeed the adjective *theios* meant little more than 'inspired' in the first century. And further, all these terms were used at the time of Jesus by the Jews- who were fierce monotheists, unwilling to countenance the idea of there being any other being apart from Yahweh who could be 'God' in the trinitarian sense. And so it would seem that in the minds of many

Christians, the Trinity is an *assumption* rather than a reasoned understanding and belief. The presence of unexamined assumptions in our lives and hearts, as well as in societies, ought to be a red flag. Why, in this age of apparently fearless examination, eager toppling of paradigms, deconstruction of just about everything, rigorous research, trashing of tradition, brutal testing of assumptions. . . does the Trinity idea remain an unexamined assumption? Perhaps it's because it demands so much to believe in the Biblical account of a truly human Jesus. Admittedly there *is* a difficulty for any Bible reader in integrating the Bible passages which speak of the 'God' side of God's Son, His Divine titles etc. , and those passages which speak of His humanity. The discussion of misunderstood Bible verses which now follows is an attempt to achieve just that integration, a key which as it were turns every lock presented to us by the references. But the effort required in interpretation is, it seems to me, designed by God, whose word it is which we are discussing. The intention is to make us think about Jesus, struggle with the issue of His identity and nature, in order that we should understand Him better, and thereby love and serve Him the more intently. Perhaps that is why so little is recorded of Jesus- all the speeches and actions of Jesus found in the Gospels would've occupied only three weeks or so of real time. The rest of His life, words and actions we are left to imagine, given what we do know of Him. He wants us to reflect, as He did the disciples, "Whom do *you* think I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Perhaps that is why at least in Mark's Gospel there is the theme of Jesus not wanting men to be told in point blank terms that He was Messiah. There are very few direct statements about Himself- e. g. He never actually says He had a virgin birth, nor does He explain that He was born in Bethlehem as required by Micah 5:2. He left people assuming He was born in Nazareth (Jn. 7:42). In fact it could be that without this struggle for understanding going on within the heart of each of us, there is no other way for us to come to real relationship with Jesus. Without that effort to understand we'd be left with a fictional Jesus, a 'Jesus' we inherited from men, from churches, from theologians, from our own unexamined assumptions. . . and not the real Christ.

Retranslation and twisting of the actual Biblical text is always a tell-tale sign that an author is desperate to prove his or her point, rather than being led to truth by God's word. Augustine (*Homilies On John* 105. 17) mistranslates Jn. 17:3 like this: "This is eternal life, that they may know Thee and Jesus Christ, whom Tho has sent, as the only true God". The Greek text, in any reading, simply doesn't bear that translation. That's Augustine's interpretation, and yet he purposefully makes out that his *interpretation* is in fact what the original text actually says. Other church fathers such as Ambrose followed him in this (3). This incident alone indicates the lack of integrity required to force the doctrine of the Trinity into the Bible. It's simply not there, and if it were there, this kind of utter desperation wouldn't have to be resorted to. And we see the same in some Bible translations of the present day, where trinitarian interpretation is dressed up as the actual text of Scripture. I note that in recent times, more and more theologians and leading Christians are admitting to doubt about the Trinity. And if one looks for it, we find scepticism about it in many writings of leading Christian thinkers and writers throughout history. Further, I note that trinitarians are increasingly recognizing that their standard arguments are weak. There was a time when Gen. 1:26 would be often quoted to support the Tinity. But it's now widely recognized that there are several Hebrew words which have plural endings, and yet refer to a singular entity- e. g. *panim* means "face". Nearly always, *elohim* is referred to in the singular by the grammar surrounding it. Thus "Christians have traditionally seen this verse as [proving] the Trinity. It is now universally admitted that this was not what the plural means to the original author" (4). **The note in the NIV Study Bible likewise takes the approach that this passage refers to Angels: "God speaks as the Creator-King, announcing his crowning work to the members of his heavenly court".**

Deconstruction

Many of the 'difficult passages' in the New Testament are only difficult because they are alluding to, and even quoting phrases from, popular contemporary ideas and writings and seeking to deconstruct them. This technique is found throughout the Bible, especially with respect to false yet popular ideas about evil. To take an example: Valentinus taught in the second century that there was a *pleroma*, a "fullness of the Godhead", comprised of 30 aeons of time (5). Like most thinkers, he was drawing on ideas that had circulated a century before him, and so it's reasonable to think that the philosophical idea of a "fullness of the Godhead" was around in the first century. And Paul uses just this phrase when explaining how the entire fullness of the Godhead was to be found in the person of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9). No need for philosophy and wild guesses at the structure of God. **The fullness of the Godhead was and is in the personality of Jesus.** However, this isn't Paul's only allusion to this idea. The lowest of the 30 aeons, Sophia, "yielded to

an ungovernable desire to apprehend [God's] nature" (6). And Paul alludes to this in Phil. 2:6,7, saying that Jesus by contrast didn't even consider apprehending God's nature, but instead made Himself a servant of all. As more and more is known of the literature and ideas which were extant in the first century, it becomes the more evident that Paul's writings are full of allusions to it- allusions which seek to deconstruct these ideas, replacing them with the true; and by doing so, presenting the Truth of the Gospel in the terms and language of the day, just as we seek to.

Notes

(1) Quotations in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968) pp. 300,301.
(2) See W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: S. C. M. , 1971); H. Todt, *The Son Of Man* (London: S. C. M. , 1965) and many others.
(3) See H. A. W. Meyer, *Commentary On John* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884 p. 462.
(4) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1997) p. 27.
(5) J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968) p. 23.
(6) Kelly, *ibid*

2 "In the beginning was the word"

Every Bible student will inevitably be involved at some time in seeking to explain the opening verses of John's Gospel. And all who have done so will probably have felt a slight dis-ease at beginning the discussion by saying that "the word" in Greek is *logos*...because it is always far better to make a point from the Bible text that one has in front of them, rather than claiming to know Greek. Remember that the majority of us don't even know the Greek alphabet, so arguments based on Greek ought best to be avoided where possible. In recent times I have slightly changed my approach to explaining this passage and I submit it for your reflection. The key is to get our contact to let us systematically explain the phrases one by one. Of course you can't make *all* of the following points to a person in a conversation, but it's as well to have the background clear in one's own mind.

2-1 "In the beginning was the word"

"The word"

Just look at the many times this phrase occurs in the Gospel records. It doesn't mean 'the whole Bible'. It means clearly enough and without any dispute 'the Gospel message' (e. g. Mk. 2:2; 4:33; 16:20; Lk. 3:2; Jn. 12:48; 14:24; Acts 4:4; 11:19). The Gospel was preached to Abraham in that it comprises the promises to Him and their fulfilment in Jesus (Gal. 3:8). That word of promise was "made flesh" in Jesus; "the word of the oath" of the new covenant, of the promises made to Abraham, "maketh the son" (Heb. 7:28). This is just another way of saying that the word– of the promises, of the Gospel- was made flesh in Jesus. Note how in Rom. 9:6,9 "the word" is called "the word of promise"- those made to Abraham. The same Greek words translated 'Word' and 'made' occur together in 1 Cor. 15:54- where we read of the word [AV " saying"] of the Old Testament prophets being 'made' true by being fulfilled [AV " be brought to pass"]. **The word of the promises was made flesh, it was fulfilled, in Jesus.** The 'word was made flesh', in one sense, in that the Lord Jesus was " *made*. . . of the seed of David according to the *flesh*" (Rom. 1:3)- i. e. God's word of promise to David was fulfilled in the fleshly person of Jesus. The Greek words for " made" and " flesh" only occur together in these two places- as if Rom. 1:3 is interpreting Jn. 1:14 for us. But note the admission of a leading theologian: "**Neither the fourth Gospel nor Hebrews ever speaks of the eternal Word…in terms which compel us to regard it as a person**" (1).

"In the beginning was the word"

John's Gospel tends to repeat the ideas of the other gospel records but in more spiritual terms. Matthew and Luke begin their accounts of the message by giving the genealogies of Jesus, explaining that His birth was the fulfilment, the 'making flesh', of the promises to Abraham and David. And Mark begins by defining his

"beginning of the gospel" as the fact that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophets. John is really doing the same, in essence. But he is using more spiritual language. In the beginning was the word- the word of promise, the word of prophecy, all through the Old Testament. And that word was "made flesh" in Jesus, and on account of that word, all things in the new creation had and would come into being. Whilst John is written in Greek, clearly enough Hebrew thought is behind the words. "The Hebrew term *debarim* [words] can also mean 'history'" (2). The whole salvation history of God, from the promise in Eden onwards, was about the Lord Jesus and was made flesh in His life and death.

Luke's prologue states that he was an "*eyewitness* and minister of *the word*…from *the beginning*"; he refers to the word of the Gospel that later became flesh in Jesus. John's prologue is so similar: "That which was from *the beginning*, that which we have heard, which we have *seen with our eyes*, that which we *beheld*…*the word* of life" (1 Jn. 1:1 RV). Jn. 1:14 matched this with: "*The word* was made flesh, and *we beheld* his glory". **John 6 shows how John seeks to present Jesus Himself as the words which give eternal life if eaten** / digested (Jn. 6:63). And some commented: "This is a hard saying, who can hear him?" (Jn. 6:60 RVmg.), as if to present Jesus the person as the embodiment of His sayings / words. **Jesus was the word of God shown in a real, live person. All the principles which Old Testament history had taught, the symbology of the law, the outworking of the types of history, all this was now living and speaking in a person.** Luke's Gospel makes the same point as John's but in a different way. Over 90% of Luke's Greek is taken from the Septuagint. All the time he is consciously and unconsciously alluding to the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the things of Jesus. As an example of unconscious allusion, consider Lk. 1:27: "A virgin betrothed to a man". This is right out of Dt. 22:23 LXX "If there be a virgin betrothed to a man…". The context is quite different, but the wording is the same. And in many other cases, Luke picks up phraseology from the LXX apparently without attention to the context. He saw the whole of the OT as having its fulfilment in the story of Jesus. He introduces his Gospel record as an account "of those matters which have been fulfilled" (Lk. 1:1 RV). And "those matters" he defines in Lk. 1:2 as the things of "the word". The RV especially shows his stress on the theme of fulfilment (Lk. 1:20, 23, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 70). In essence he is introducing his Gospel just as John does.

In passing, it is interesting to reflect upon the Lord's comment that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, He is in their midst. For this evidently alludes to a Rabbinic saying preserved in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 3. 2) that "If two sit together and study Torah [the first five books of Moses], the divine presence rests between them". The Lord was likening Himself (His 'Name') to the Torah, the Old Testament word of God; and His presence would be felt if that Law was studied as it ought to be. In confirmation of all this, it has been observed that " The numerical use of *logos* in the Johannine writings overwhelmingly favours "message" (some 25 times), not a personified word; and elsewhere in the NT the use of "word" with genitival complement also support the message motif: "word of God" . . . "word of the Kingdom" . . . "word of the cross" " (3). So our equation of "the word" with the essence of the Gospel message rather than Jesus personally is in harmony with other occurrences of *logos*. That said, there evidently is a personification of sorts going on. Personifications of the word of God weren't uncommon in the literature of the time. Thus Wisdom of Solomon 18:15 speaks of how "Thine all powerful word leaped from heaven down from the royal throne". Because "for the Hebrew the word once spoken has a kind of substantive existence of its own" (4) , e. g. a blessing or curse had a kind of life of their own, it's not surprising that *logos* is personified. One way of understanding the prologue in Jn. 1 is to consider how it is interpreted in the prologue we find in John's first epistle. It appears that John's Gospel was the standard text for a group of converts that grew up around him; John then wrote his epistles in order to correct wrong interpretations of his Gospel record that were being introduced by itinerant false teachers into the house churches which he had founded. For example, " God so loved the world. . . " (Jn. 3:16) seems to have been misunderstood by the false prophets against whom John was contending, to mean that a believer can be of the world. Hence 1 Jn. 2:16 warns the brethren that they cannot 'love the world' in the sense of having worldly behaviour and desires. On the other hand, John saw the faithful churches to whom he was writing as those who had been faithful to the Gospel he had preached to them, as outlined in the Gospel of John. He had recorded there the promise that "You will know the truth" (Jn. 8:32), and he writes in his letters to a community " who have come to know the truth" (2 Jn. 1), i. e. who had fulfilled and obeyed the Gospel of Jesus which he had preached to them initially. This thesis is explained at length in Raymond Brown (5).

With this in mind, it appears that the prologue of 1 Jn. is a conscious allusion to and clarification of that of Jn. 1. Consider the following links:

In the beginning was the word	**What was from the beginning**
The word was with God	The eternal life which was with [Gk. in the presence of] God
In [the word] was life	The word of life
The life was the light of men	God is light
The light shines in darkness	In Him there is no darkness at all
The word became flesh	This life was revealed
And dwelt amongst us	
and was manifested to us	
We beheld his glory	What we looked at
Of his fullness we have all received	The fellowship which we have is with
Through Jesus Christ	the Father and with his son
The only Son of God	Jesus Christ

You will note that the parallel for "the word" of Jn. 1 is 'the life' in 1 Jn. 1, the life which Jesus lived, the type of life which is lived by the Father in Heaven. That word was made flesh (Jn. 1:14) in the sense that this life was revealed to us in the life and death of Jesus. **So the word becoming flesh has nothing to do with a pre-existent Jesus physically coming down from Heaven and being born of Mary.** It could well be that the evident links between the prologue to John's Gospel and the prologue to his epistle are because he is correcting a misunderstanding that had arisen about the prologue to his Gospel. 1 Jn. 1:2 spells it out clearly- it was the impersonal "eternal life" which was "with the Father", and it was this which "became flesh" in a form that had been personally touched and handled by John in the personal body of the Lord Jesus. And perhaps it is in the context of incipient trinitarianism that John warns that those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" are actually antiChrist.

Notes

(1) G. B. Caird, *Christ For Us Today* (London: SCM, 1968) p. 79.
(2) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1971) p. 261.
(3) Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982) p. 164.
(4) C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C. U. P. , 1960) p. 264.
(5) *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979) and in his *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982). These are lengthy and at times difficult reads, and I can't agree with all the conclusions, yet I'd heartily recommend them to serious Bible students. One pleasing feature of his writings is his frequent admission that trinitarian theology is an *interpretation* of what the NT writers, especially John, actually wrote- and they themselves didn't have the trinity in mind when they wrote as they did. He comments on the hymn of Phil. 2 about Christ taking the "form of God": "Many scholars today doubt that "being in the form of God" and "accepting the form of a servant" refers to incarnation" [*The Community Of The Beloved Disciple* p. 46].

2-2 "The word was with God"

The Hebrew idea of being "with" someone can carry the idea of being 'in their presence'. 2 Kings 5:1,2 speak of how Naaman was "with" his master, and the RVmg. gives "before" or 'in the presence of' as a translation of this idiom. He is paralleled in the record with the maid who was "before" (RVmg.) her mistress, Naaman's wife. When we read that the word was "with" God, the idea is that the word was always before God, in His presence, in His perspective. Applied to an abstract idea like the *logos*, surely the idea is that God always had this plan for a Son before Him, in His presence / perspective.

Wisdom In Proverbs

The basic idea in John 1 is repeated in Proverbs 8. In the beginning, there was a *logos* / word / intention with the Father. His 'idea' of having a Son was not thought up at the last minute, as some sort of expediency

in order to cope with the unexpected problem of human sin, as some of the critics and false teachers of the first century taught. In fact, it wouldn't be going too far to say that John actually has Proverbs 8 in mind when speaking about the *logos* being in the beginning with the Father. Prov. 8:22-31 (ASV) reads: "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, Before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, Before the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, When there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills was I brought forth; While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, Nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there: When he set a circle upon the face of the deep, When he made firm the skies above, When the fountains of the deep became strong, When he gave to the sea its bound, That the waters should not transgress his commandment, When he marked out the foundations of the earth; Then I was by him, as a master workman; And I was daily his delight, Rejoicing always before him, Rejoicing in his habitable earth; And my delight was with the sons of men".

The key issue is whether "wisdom" in Proverbs is in fact the Lord Jesus personally. A brief glance at Proverbs surely indicates that wisdom is being personified as a woman. Wisdom in Proverbs stands at the gates and invites men to come listen to her. She dwells with prudence (Prov. 8:12), and in Solomon's time cried out to men as they entered the city (Prov. 8:1-3). None of these things are intended to be taken literally. "Wisdom" is wisdom- albeit personified. Wisdom was "possessed" by God- and yet the Hebrew word translated "possessed" is defined by Strong as meaning 'to create'. When God started His "way" or path with men, He had principles and purpose. He didn't make up His principles as He went along. And this was what was being said by John's first century critics. Therefore John alluded to Proverbs 8 in explaining that the essential purpose of the Father was all summarized and epitomized in the person of His Son; and that *logos* was created / conceived by the Father from the very beginning. Note that Prov. 8:24,25 describes wisdom as being "brought forth" by the Father from the beginning. Again, God as it were hatched a plan. Even if we were to equate wisdom with Jesus personally, He was still created / **brought forth from the Father**. Somewhat different to the false Trinitarian notion of an 'uncreate' Jesus who 'eternally existed'. Wisdom was the "master workman" (Prov. 8:30), or 'the one trusted / believed in' (Heb.)- in the sense that all of God's natural creation was made according to and reflective of the principles of "wisdom". John's allusion to Prov. 8 shows that this "wisdom" was above all to be embodied and epitomized in God's Son. **From this it follows that the whole of the natural creation was designed with the Lord Jesus in mind.** Somehow it speaks of Him; will be used by Him; and will in some sense be liberated and redeemed by Him from "the bondage of corruption" to share the glorious liberty of us God's children (Rom. 8:21-24). And perhaps this is why we sense that the Son of God was strangely at peace with the natural creation around Him, and could so effortlessly extract deep spiritual lessons from the birds, flowers and clouds around Him. "Then I was by [Heb. toward] him" (Prov. 8:30) is the idea behind the Greek text of Jn. 1:1: "The word was [toward] God". **It wasn't Jesus personally who was with God or God-ward; it was the word / wisdom / *logos* which was, and this was then "made flesh" in the person of the Lord Jesus. And this *logos* was the "wisdom" in Proverbs.**

We've demonstrated that John's Gospel begins with the idea that the "word" of God in the Old Testament was made flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus. But John actually continues that theme throughout his Gospel. He continually refers to things which the Jews saw symbols of the Torah- and applies them to Jesus. Examples include the bread / manna and water, and also light. The Assumption of Moses speaks of the Torah as "the light that enlightens every man who comes into the world"- and this is exactly the language of Jn. 1:9 about Christ. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to discover that nearly all the phrases used in the prologue to John's Gospel are alluding to what Jewish writers had said about the "Wisdom of God", especially in Proverbs and the apocryphal writings known as the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus (1). And they understood "Wisdom" to primarily refer to the Torah. For example, Jn. 1:14 RVmg. states that the Lord Jesus as the word made flesh "tabernacled amongst us". Yet Ecclus. 24:8 speaks of Wisdom 'tabernacling' amongst Israel. *Skenoo*, the verb 'to tabernacle', is of course related to the noun *skene*, the tabernacle. As Israel lived in tents in the wilderness, God too came and lived with them in a tent- called the tabernacle, the tent where God could be met. The idea was that God wasn't so far from them, He chose to come and be like them- they lived in tents, so He too lived in a tent. He didn't build a huge house or palace to live in- because that's not how His people lived. He 'tented' in a tent like them. This pointed forward to the genuine humanity of the Lord Jesus; for the human condition is likened to a tent in 2 Cor. 5:1. So rather than proving that 'Jesus was God', this whole prologue to John's Gospel actually proves otherwise.

The language of pre-existence was applied by the Jews to the Torah and Wisdom, and so when John demonstrates that the ultimate Wisdom / Torah / *logos* / word which was from the beginning has now been fulfilled in and effectively replaced by Jesus**, he's going to reference that same 'pre-existence' language to make his point.** As an example, the Mishnah stated (*Aboth Nathan*) that "Before the world was made the Torah was written and lay in the bosom of God"(2). **John's desire is that his fellow Jews quit these fanciful ideas and realize that right now, in Heaven, the Son of God is in the bosom of the Father (Jn. 1:18). He right now is the word-made-flesh.** The uninspired Jewish writings spoke of the descent and re-ascent of Wisdom (1 Enoch 42; 4 Ezra 5:9; 2 Bar. 48:36; 3 Enoch 5:12; 6:3), and Philo especially connects Wisdom and the Logos. It seems that these wrong Jewish ideas found their ways into Christianity, and were taken over and wrongly applied to Jesus. Indeed I would go so far as to argue that John's 'Logos' passage in Jn. 1:1-14 is in fact a deconstruction of those wrong ideas; he alludes to them and corrects them, just as Moses alluded to incorrect pagan myths of creation and shows a confused Israel in the wilderness what the true story actually was.

Notes

(1) This is shown at great length throughout Rendel Harris, *The Origin of The Prologue To St. John's Gospel* (Cambridge: C. U. P. , 1917).

(2) Cited in C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C. U. P. , 1953) p. 86.

2-3 " The word was made flesh"

"Was with God"

The idea of a "word" being "with" God or even another person has an Old Testament background. Job comments: **"Yet these things you have concealed in your heart, I know that this is *with you*"** (10:13; NIV "in your mind"). Similarly Job 23:13, 14: **"What his soul desires, that he does, for he performs what is appointed for me, and many such *decrees* are *with him*". God's essential plans are therefore 'with Him', in this figure of speech.** When those plans are revealed in words, i. e. they are openly verbalized, it would be true to say: **"I will instruct you in the power of God; what is *with* the Almighty I will not conceal" (Job 27:11)**. Wisdom, personified as a woman, was "with God" before creation- it was not 'with' the sea, but it was 'with' God (Job 28:14; 8:22,30). To hold a plan in one's own mind is to have it 'with' them. The Hebrew text of Gen. 40:14 bears this out, when Joseph is begged: "Remember me with yourself". So for the essential purpose of God in His Son to be 'with' Him does not in any sense imply that a person was literally 'with' God in Heaven. Note the parallel between the word of God and the work of God in Ps. 106:13: "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel". Whatever God says / plans comes to concrete fulfillment; and the idea of a Son was always in His mind. That word became flesh, became real and actual, in the person of Jesus.

"The word was made flesh"

So there shouldn't be any problem with accepting that an abstract thing like the *logos*, the word, could become a person. For wisdom is personified in the Old Testament (e. g. Proverbs 7). And it is spoken of in James 3:17 as being easy to intreat, merciful, not hypocritical- all attributes of a person. "**The word" is often put for 'the preaching of the word'** (Acts 6:2,4,7; Tit. 2:5; Rev. 1:9; 6:9; 20:4). The man Christ Jesus was the word of the Gospel made flesh. He was and is the epitome of what He and others preached. This is why another title for Jesus was "the Kingdom"- He thus described Himself when He said that He, the Kingdom, was amongst them in first century Israel (Lk. 17:21). "The word of the Kingdom" is paralleled with "the word" (Mt. 13:19 cp. 20-23). The things of the Kingdom and the things of Jesus are inextricably linked. Likewise John calls Jesus "the eternal life" (1 Jn. 1:2). The life that He lived was the quality of life which we will eternally live in the Kingdom. The personality of Jesus was the living quintessence of all that He preached- as it should be with the living witness which our lives make. To preach "Christ" was and is therefore to preach "the things concerning the Kingdom of God", because that Kingdom will be all about the manifestation of the man Christ Jesus (Acts 8:5 cp. 12). So, Jesus was "the word" in the sense that He epitomised the Gospel. **This is why James 1:18 says that we are born again by the word of the Gospel, and 1 Pet. 1:23 says that the word who begets is the Lord Jesus.** And it is why Lk. 8:1 describes the Lord as both preaching and "proclaiming" the Gospel of the Kingdom. Who He was and who He is [and ever shall be] is the shewing forth of the Gospel. We likewise must not only preach the doctrine of the Kingdom but proclaim it in our lives. For this is the essential witness to the good news of the Kingdom. Indeed, in all the teaching of the Lord, He was Himself the great exemplar of it. The Sermon on the Mount was the Lord unpacking His compelling vision for human life as He believed God intended, and as He

Himself exemplified it. It was almost a self-explanation rather than a set of demands upon us. Yet the very fact that it was an explanation of Himself somehow makes it all the more compelling.

The word being made flesh was an act of the will on the Lord's part. "The word was made flesh" isn't just a piece of theological description of something that was effortlessly achieved. The principles of "the word", the radical implications of the word of the Gospel spoken throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, had to be "made flesh" in the Lord, culminating in the crucifixion. There He was "The word was made flesh". This was and is the ultimate outworking of the implications of the Gospel taught in Eden, promised to Abraham, developed throughout the prophets. And it didn't happen automatically. T**hat word was in the beginning with God, but not all 'words' / intentions that He 'has' become flesh, i.** e. concrete reality here on earth. God has had various intentions which He 'thought' to do, but because of human weakness they don't actually become reality. He told Israel about His plan / intention / *logos* of driving out the Canaanites: "If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land… I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them" (Num. 33:55,56). He 'thought' to do things to them through the agency of His people; but those 'thoughts' never became flesh.
The extent to which Jesus made the word flesh needs some reflection. When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. **But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them**. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation. John's Gospel especially seems to speak of the "words" and "works" of the Lord Jesus almost interchangeably (Jn. 14:10-14); in illustration of the way in which the word of Jesus, which was the word of God, was constantly and consistently made flesh in Him, issuing in the works / actions of this man who was "the word made flesh". Consider how in Jn. 8:28; 12:49,50 He says that He *says* only what the Father taught Him to say; whereas in Jn. 8:28 He says He *does* nothing of Himself but only what the Father taught Him. His words and His doings are thereby paralleled. The parallel between the Lord's words and works is again brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*…He said…let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected "to tell no man what was done" (Lk. 8:56), even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

"The word was made flesh" in daily reality for Jesus. The extraordinary connection between the man Jesus and the word of God which He preached and spoke is perhaps reflected in Lk. 4:20: "He closed the book [of the words of God], and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him". Here we have as it were an exquisite close up of Jesus, His very body movements, His handling of the scroll, and the movement of the congregation's eyes. Notice that at this stage He had only read from the scroll, and not yet begun His exposition of what He had read. The impression I take from this is that there was an uncanny connection between Him and the word of His Father. The Son reading His Father's word, with a personality totally in conformity to it, must have been quite something to behold. He was the word of God made flesh in a person, in a way no other person had or could ever be. Thus He was indeed "The word was made flesh". The idea of words becoming flesh is a reflection of the Hebrew idea that a person's words become their actions. Thus we read of Solomon's "acts" or, RVmg. , "sayings" (2 Chron. 9:5). **There is no requirement for a person to exist in one form and then turn into another form**. There was perfect congruence between the personality of Jesus, and the words of God which He preached. Thus the people marvelled at Him, commenting "What is this word?" (Lk. 4:36 RV). God's word was made flesh, was made personal, in Him. In this sense there was almost no need for Jesus to say specific words about Himself- His character and personality showed forth that word, that *logos*, that essential message. The Jews pressured Him: "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly". But He could respond: "I told you, and you believe not: the works that I do. . . these bear witness of me" (Jn. 10:24,25). Of course, they'd have complained that He had *not* told them in so many words. His comment was that His "works", His life, His being, showed plainly who He was, His personality was "the [plain] word" which they were demanding. He was the word made flesh in totality and to perfection.

It bears repeating that "the word was made flesh" in Jesus in the sense that there was absolute congruence between His teaching and His actions. Thus He not only *taught* that distinctions between clean and unclean were ended; He actually went and ate / fellowshipped with sinners and touched lepers. The Old Testament prophets so absorbed the word of God that their emotions were His; they mourned and grew angry in the same way as He did. Their words were therefore both theirs and His at the same time; that's why it's hard at times in the prophets to decide whether we are reading the feelings / thoughts of the prophet, or of God. In the symbolic acts of the prophets (e. g. Isaiah 20, Jeremiah 19, Ezekiel 4 and 5) we see their actual lives and deeds being in a sense the Word of God embodied in them. Von Rad suggests that "the entry of the word into a prophet's bodily life. . . approximates to what the writer of the fourth Gospel says about the word becoming flesh" (1). The Lord Jesus was the greatest of the prophets and the ultimate example of God's word becoming identified with and in the very core personality of a human being. However, as a concept, the word could become flesh in men who were not the begotten Son of God- e. g. the prophets- and it's possible that Jewish minds in the first century would have actually understood John's language of "the word made flesh" in this kind of prophetic context.

As the resurrected Lord stood before the disciples, he says: "These are my words which I spake unto you" (Lk. 24:44 RV), and goes on to say that His resurrection had been predicted throughout the Old Testament words of God. He had made both His words and the words of God into flesh as He stood there. He didn't say 'Look everyone, I've risen!'. He just stood there, reminded them of the words of the prophets, and His own words, and said "These are my words". He was so powerfully and completely the word made flesh. John opens his first letter by speaking about "the word" as if he refers to something neuter and abstract- and yet he speaks of how he personally touched and handled it. The grammar of 1 Jn. 1:1-3 refers to an abstract idea, the *logos*- but the reference is evidently to the real historical person of Jesus. It seems to me that this was John's inspired way of getting over the awesome extent to which "the word became flesh", all the ideas inherent in God and in His word were expressed seamlessly in Jesus; there was such perfect congruence between the word Jesus spoke and the person He was. No longer should these passages be seen as merely the battleground for the arian-athanasian, unitarian-trinitarian argument. The wonder of what is being actually said by John needs to be taken on board by us, and risen up to; for the word is to become flesh in us as it was in our Lord.

The Name / Word Becoming Flesh

There's a Hebrew grammatical feature known as the intensive plural, whereby one great, important, significant thing is spoken of in the plural. The AV margin in Is. 53:9 speaks of the *deaths* [plural] of Messiah- i. e. the one great significant death of Messiah. So with *elohim*. It can effectively mean the ONE great mighty one. The common Old Testament Name of God, Yahweh Elohim, then becomes - Yahweh will be through the one great ONE- i. e. , a prophecy of the Lord Jesus who would manifest Him supremely. Bearing this in mind, we come to John's statement that the Word was with God, was God, and became flesh in the Lord Jesus, and we behold the glory of that. John's Gospel is evidently full of allusions to Jewish terminology and ideas. He also alludes to many surrounding pagan ideas, recasting them with reference to the Lord Jesus, demonstrating thereby their error. Philo's influence was significant in the first century. He had developed the idea that "the logos" was what he called the "archangel of many names," and the "name of God". The Logos is also designated by him as the "high priest". John's writings, and Hebrews, are at pains to show where these ideas were wrong, and in what sense they could have some truth in relation to the Lord Jesus. *He*, and not Philo's abstract 'logos', is the one ultimate high priest; He is greater than Angels; and He is the one who ultimately came in the Father's Name and revealed it to us (Jn. 5:43 etc.). The Son has now been given the Name of the Father (Phil. 2:6-11; Is. 9:6; Rev. 3:12); but the Son's Name is now "the logos of God" (Rev. 19:13). The logos that became flesh thus refers to the Name of the Father, Yahweh, which became the One special one in the person of Christ.

The ideas of the Name, the word and the glory of God are heavily interconnected. I've explored this at length at http://www. carelinks. net/books/dh/james/james_d05. html . Jn. 1:14 says that when the word of God was made flesh in the Son of God, we saw the glory of God. If "The word" which was made flesh is in fact a reference to the Name of God, then this becomes understandable. And so the logos of God, the Name of God, being with Him in the beginning and being Him in a sense, was revealed fully in the human person ("flesh") of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said this in so many words: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me" (Jn. 17:6). John surely has this in mind when he comments that the word / Name

became flesh, and we saw that glory, but others in "the world" didn't perceive it (Jn. 1:14). John parallels the word becoming flesh, with the Son declaring the Father who cannot be seen (Jn. 1:18). This is in fact a reference to the declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses, at which time Moses was reminded that God cannot be physically seen. Thus the declaration of the Yahweh Name to Moses is paralleled with the word / Name being made flesh. The Father glorified His Name in the Son (Jn. 12:28), who was the word of God. Remember the links between the Name, the glory and the word of God. Summing up, the reference to the logos / word becoming flesh in the Lord Jesus therefore speaks of the fulfillment of God's Name in Christ, just as any father's name is in a sense fulfilled in his son. And countless times in the Old Testament, this had been foretold- Yahweh would be elohim, one great one- the Lord Jesus, His Son.

"Dwelt among us"

"Dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14) can too easily be misread as meaning that the Word was once in Heaven but came to earth to live amongst us humans. But this (yet again) is to miss the Old Testament background. Time and again, the LXX uses the Greek word *kenosa* ("dwelt") to refer to how God dwelt in the sanctuary. The "us" amongst whom God now dwells through His *logos* is not humanity generally, the inhabitants of planet earth, but specifically we who believe and form His sanctuary / dwelling place amidst the unbelieving world. Perhaps this is John's equivalent to Matthew's reference to how where two or three are gathered together in His Name, there the Lord will dwell in their midst (Mt. 18:20).

Notes

(1) Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) Vol. 2 p. 274.

2-4 "The word was God"

Not believing in God and not believing in His word of the Gospel are paralleled in 1 Jn. 5:10. **God is His word**. The word "is" God in that God is so identified with His word. David parallels trusting in God and trusting in His word (Ps. 56:3,4). He learnt this, perhaps, through the experience of his sin with Bathsheba. For in that matter, David "despised the commandment (word) of the Lord. . . you despised me" (2 Sam. 12:9,10). **David learnt that his attitude to God's word was his attitude to God- for the word of God, in that sense, was and is God.** By *our* words we personally will be condemned or justified- because we too 'are' our words. When Samuel told Eli of the prophetic vision which he had received, Eli commented: "It is the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:18). He meant 'It is the word of the Lord'; but he saw God as effectively His word. "The word", the "word of the Kingdom", "the Gospel", "the word of God" are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. The records of the parable of the sower speak of both "the word of God" (Lk. 8:11-15) and "the word of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:19). The word / Gospel of God refers to the message which is *about* God, just as the "word of the Kingdom" means the word which *is about* the Kingdom, rather than suggesting that the word is one and the same as the Kingdom. "**The gospel of God" means the Gospel which is *about* God, not the Gospel which *is* God Himself in person (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2,8,9; 1 Pet. 4:17)**. So, the word of God, the word which *was* God,the Gospel of God, was made flesh in Jesus. "**The word of Jesus" and "the word of God" are interchangeable (Acts 19:10 cp. 20; 1 Thess. 1:8 cp. 2:13); as is "the word of the Gospel" and "the word of Jesus" (Acts 15:7 cp. 35). The word wasn't directly equivalent to Jesus; He manifested the word, He showed us by His life and words and personality what the Kingdom was like, what God is like; for the word which He "became" was about God, and about the Kingdom. He was the entire Gospel, of God and of His Kingdom, made flesh**. He could speak of His words abiding in us (Jn. 15:7), and yet make this parallel to He personally abiding in us (Jn. 15:4,5; 14:20). "The word was God" can't mean that the word is identical with God- for the word "was with God", or "was in God's presence". The NEB therefore renders: "What God was, the Word was". G. B. Caird suggests the translation: "In the begnning was a purpose, a purpose in the mind of God, a purpose which was God's own being" (1).

In the person of Jesus, there was an uncanny and never before, never again experienced congruence between a human being and his words. And our witness should be modelled on His pattern- we should be the living embodiment of the doctrines we preach. The message or word of Jesus was far more than the words that He spoke from His lips. In one sense, **He revealed to the disciples everything that He had heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15); and yet in another, more literal sense,** He lamented that there was much more He could tell them in words, but they weren't able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). His person and character, which they

would spend the rest of their lives reflecting upon, was the 'word' of God in flesh to its supremacy; but this doesn't necessarily mean that they heard all the literal words of God drop from the lips of Jesus. I have shown elsewhere that both the Father and Son use language, or words, very differently to how we normally do. The manifestation of God in Christ was not only a matter of the Christ speaking the right words about God. For as He said, His men couldn't have handled that in its entirety. The fullness of manifestation of the word was in His life, His character, and above all in His death, which Jn. 1:14 may be specifically referring to in speaking of how John himself beheld the glory of the word being made flesh. It seems to me that many of us need to learn these things in our hearts; for our preaching has so often been a matter of literal words, Bible lectures, seminars, flaunting our correct exposition of Bible passages and themes. When the essential witness must be of a life lived, a making flesh of the word which is God. To ignore this will lead us into literalistic definitions of literal words, arguments about statements of faith, endless additions of words and clauses to clarify other words. . . whereas " the word" which the Lord Jesus manifested was not merely human words. There was far more to it than that. It was and is and must ever be a word made flesh. This is why nothing can replace personal witness and personal, one on one teaching as the way that conversions are really made. And yet increasingly we tend to try to use *media* to preach- TV, CDs, internet, video, tapes etc. There is nothing personally 'live' in all this; there can be no communication of truths through their incarnation in our own personalities. And yet this was how God communicated with us in His Son; and how we too reveal His word in flesh to others.

"**The word was God**". The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature than mere lexical items strung together. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh in person. And this, of course, was why the unbelieving Jews just didn't understand the literal words which He spoke. They asked Him to speak plainly to them (Jn. 10:24); and the Lord's response was that their underlying problem was not with His language, but with the simple fact that they did not believe that He, the carpenter from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Is it going too far to suggest that all intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a simple lack of faith and perception of Him as a person?

As the word of God, the message of God in flesh, Jesus was God's agent, and as such could be counted *as* God, although He was not God Himself in person. P. Borgen brings this out in an article 'God's Agent In The Fourth Gospel' (2). He quotes the halakic or legal principle of the rabbis, that **"An agent is the like the one who sent him**", and quotes the Babylonian Talmud *Qiddushin* 43a: "He ranks as his master's own person". This, therefore, was how those in the 1st century who understood Jesus to be God's agent would have understood Him. John Robinson, one time Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, observed that popular Christianity "says simply that Jesus was God, in such a way that the terms 'Christ' and 'God' are interchangeable. But nowhere in Biblical usage is this so. The New Testament says that Jesus was the Word of God, it says that God was in Christ, it says that Jesus is the Son of God; **but it does not say that Jesus was God, simply like that"**(3). And he goes on to apply this good sense to an analysis of the phrase "the word was God" in John 1. He argues that this translation is untenable because: "In Greek this [translation "the word was God"] would most naturally be represented by 'God' with the article, not *theos* but *ho theos*. Equally, St. John is not saying that Jesus is a 'divine' man… that would be *theios*. The NEB, I believe, gets the sense pretty exactly with its rendering, 'And what God was, the Word was'. In other words, if one looked at Jesus, one saw God"- in the sense that His perfect character reflected that of the Father (4). The lack of article ["the] before "God" is significant. "In omitting the article before *theos*, the author intends to say that the Logos is not actually God but only. . . a divine emanation" (5).

"He came unto his own"

The context here speaks of both the word which was "in the beginning", and of Jesus personally, whom John had witnessed to. Acts 10:36-38 RV puts this in simpler terms: "He sent the word unto the children of Israel, preaching the gospel of peace by [in] Jesus Christ…that word, I say, ye know, which was published

throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; even Jesus of Nazareth". The sequence and similarity of thought between this and John 1:1-8 is so great that one can only assume that John is deliberately alluding to Luke's record in Acts, and stating the same truths in spiritual terms: 'In the beginning was the word of the Gospel which was with God. And then John came witnessing to Jesus, and then the word as it was in Jesus came to the Jews…'. Paul pleaded with his fellow Jews: "Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham…to us is the word of this salvation sent forth" (Acts 13:26 RV). Yet he also wrote that in the fullness of time, God "sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). **The Son of God was "the word of this salvation" / Jesus. "The word was God".**

Notes

(1) G. B. Caird, *The Language And Imagery Of The Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1988) p. 102.
(2) In *Religions In Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) pp. 137-148.
(3) John Robinson, *Honest To God* (London: S. C. M. , 1963) p. 70.
(4) *Ibid* p. 71.
(5) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: S. C. M. , 1971) p. 266.

2-5 "All things were made by him"

Speaking of the *logos* as a person was quite common amongst the Jews- and they in no way understood that God could have any other god in existence or equal with Him. One of the most thorough surveys of the *logos* theme concludes: **"It is an error to see in such personifications an approach to personalisation.** Nowhere either in the Bible or in the extra-canonical literaure of the Jews is the word of God a personal agent" (1). It was the apostate Jew Philo who began to speak of the *logos* as "the second God, who is his *logos*. . . God's firstborn, the *logos*" (2). And it was this interpretation which obviously came to influence Christians desperate for justification of their idea of a Divine Jesus; but such justification is simply not to be found in God's word. <u>All talk of a "second God" is utterly unBiblical.</u>

However, whilst in a sense the *logos* was God's word, plan and intent personified, it became actual flesh / concrete reality in the person of Jesus. That God created and accomplished the physical creation by His word was an obvious Old Testament doctrine (Is. 55:11). By the time John was writing his Gospel [somewhat later than the others], the idea of believers being a new creation in Christ would have been developed in the early ecclesia (2 Cor. 5:17 etc.). The Greek translated "made by…" occurs often in John's Gospel. It clearly describes how the Gospel of the Lord Jesus 'made' new men and women; lives were transformed into something new. The phrase is used in the immediate context of John 1: "to become ['be made'] the sons of God" (1:12), in that grace and truth *came* ['were made'] by Jesus (1:17). "All things" therefore refers to the "all things" of the new creation. Note how Jesus came unto "his own things" (1:11 N. I. V.), i. e. to the Jewish *people*. **"All *things*" which were made by him therefore comfortably refers to the "all things" of the new creation- which is just how Paul uses the phrase (Eph. 1:10,22; 4:10; Col. 1:16-20).** Quite simply all of us, in "all things" of our spiritual experience, owe them *all* to God's word of promise and it's fulfilment in Christ. This is how totally central are the promises to Abraham! "All things were made by him"!

Consider other occurrences of "made by" in John's Gospel:
4:14 The water of the life of Jesus *shall be* ['made'] in the believer "a well of water springing up into everlasting life"
5:9,14 the lame man "was made" whole
10:16 the believers *shall be made* (RV 'shall become') one flock
12:36 *may be* ['made'], RV 'become', "the children of light"
15:8 So *shall ye be* ['made'] my disciples
16:20 Your sorrow shall *be turned* ['made'] into joy.

"*Apart from him* not a thing came to be" (Jn. 1:3) is a phrase repeated by the Lord Jesus in Jn. 15:5, where He says that "*apart from me*" we can bring forth no spiritual fruit. The things that came into being in Jn. 1:3 would therefore appear to be the things of the new life enabled and empowered in Christ. In this sense Jesus can be described as the creator of a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). But in practice, it is the word of the Gospel, the *message* of Jesus, which brings this about in the lives of those who hear and respond to it. **We are born again by the *word*, the "seed" of the living God (1 Pet. 1:23 RV mg.**). In this arresting, shocking analogy, the "word" of the Gospel, the word which was made flesh in the person of Jesus, is

likened to the seed or sperm of God. We were begotten again by "the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creations" (James 1:18). In God's word, in all that is revealed in it of the person of our Lord Jesus, we come face to face with the imperative which there is in what we know of Him to be like Him. In this feature of God's word, as it is in the Bible record and therefore and thereby as it is in and of His Son, we have the ultimate creative power, the dynamism so desperately needed by humanity, to transform our otherwise shapeless and formless lives. And in a multitude of lives, "All things were made by him". As the Lord Jesus was sent into this world, so are we. We evidently didn't personally 'pre-exist'; and so we cannot reason that He did because He was sent by the Father. 'Sending' in Scripture can refer to being commissioned to speak forth God's word (Is. 48:16; Jer. 7:25; Ez. 3:4,5; Zech. 2:8-11). Thus God is often described as sending forth His prophets. We too must allow ourselves to be sent forth as our Lord was, making the word of the Gospel flesh in us as it was in Him. For like Him, we personally are the message which we preach. **The word of God / the Gospel is as seed (1 Pet. 1:23);** and yet we believers end our probations as seed falling into the ground, which then rises again in resurrection to be given a body and to eternally grow into the unique type of person which we are now developing (1 Cor. 15:38). The good seed which is sown is interpreted by the Lord both as the word of God (Lk. 8:11), and as "the children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:38). This means that the word of the Gospel becomes flesh in us as it did in our Lord. The word of the Gospel is not, therefore, merely dry theoretical propositions; it elicits a life and a person. We will be changed; not just physically, but we will each be given our own, unique 'body', as Paul puts it. There will be eternal continuity between who we now become, and who we grow into throughout eternity. This is the amazing power of the word of the Gospel; for this is the seed, which transforms the essential you and me into a seed which will rise up to great things in God's future Kingdom. In all this, the Lord was and is our pattern. "All things were made by him".

Notes

(1) G. F. Moore, *Judaism In The First Centuries Of The Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) Vol. 1 p. 415.

(2) References in James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) p. 221.

2-6 How Was The Logos / Word Made Flesh?

How exactly was the word made flesh in the person of Jesus? It was not simply a question of the nature of His birth. 'The word' was a title given to the Lord in recognition of His achievement in being and becoming the 'word made flesh'. It wasn't something which automatically happened to the Lord, as an irresistible process in which He played no part. **The Lord's Old Testament allusions, His familiarity with and use of His Father's words doubtless had a lot to do with His becoming 'the word made flesh'.** If Paul alluded to the words of the Lord Jesus once every four verses on average, it is to be expected that the Son of God quoted and alluded to His Father's word even moreso. And this is what we find, when we search the Lord's words for their allusions to the Old Testament. An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in His exasperated comment: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" (Mt. 17:17). Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation…?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this.

The level, depth and multiplicity of Old Testament allusions becomes the more amazing when we accept that these were spoken words, some of them clearly spoken unprepared and off-the-cuff. Literature can be crafted to pack multiple allusions. But when a speaker produces such a depth of allusion, one can only marvel at his intellectual depth. But with the Lord, it reflects His utter familiarity with the Father's word, grasping the real spirit of it all. He breathed it, thought it, spoke it, lived it. And in all He said, this was reflected. He truly was "the word made flesh". The following are just a few examples from the first words of Jesus; but the list can be continued. The simple fact is that on average, the Lord is alluding to the Old Testament at least 3 times in every verse! This means that every phrase of every sentence He is recorded as

speaking- is alluding to His Father's word. It would've been like an orphaned son 'finding' his late father's words. He would read the words with such delight, and somehow eagerly pick up their sense in the way nobody else could.

The Words Of Jesus	Old Testament Allusions
Mt. 3:15 Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.	Ez. 18:19,21 fulfill righteousness
Mt. 4:4 It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God	Dt. 8:3 direct quote
Mt. 4:7 It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.	Dt. 6:16 direct quote
Mt. 4:10 Get thee hence, Satan: forit is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God,and him only shalt thou serve.	Dt. 6:13 direct quote
Mt. 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	Ps. 40:17; Is. 41:17; 61:1
Mt. 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn:	Is. 61:1-3; 66:2
for they shall be comforted.	Is. 40:1
Mt. 5:5 Blessed are the meek:	Ps. 37:11,20; Is. 60:21; Prov. 22:24,25; 25:8,15
for they shall inherit the earth.	Gen. 15:7,8; Ex. 32:13
Mt. 5:6 Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.	Gen. 49:18; Ps. 17:15; 119:20; Jer. 23:6; Is. 45:24; 51:1; 55:1; 65:13
Mt. 5:7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.	2 Sam. 22:26,27; Ps. 18:25,26
Mat 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.	Ex. 33:20; Job 19:25-27; Ps. 17:15; Is. 6:5; 38:3,11

If you follow through some of those allusions- and there are surely many more that I've not picked up- it becomes apparent that the Lord had a mind capable of operating on several different levels of allusion at once. So it was not simply that He was hyper-familiar with His Father's word. He had the intellectual ability, with all the intelligence of God's very own Son, to think and speak on several levels at once. Hence **His words were absolutely *full* of God's thoughts and words.** He was so fully and deeply "the word made flesh". And in analyzing *from where* in the Old Testament the Lord quoted, we find that He had His favourite places- just as we'd expect from a genuine man. He appears to have been especially fond of the references to the "Servant" in the latter half of Isaiah; and also of the Psalms. He quotes from them both literally and freely, with all the confidence and appropriacy of a person who is thoroughly familiar with the text. But the way and extent to which He applied it all to Himself makes Him in very reality "the word made flesh".

It wasn't only in words but in actions too that the Lord was the word made flesh. The Lord Jesus lived life; He didn't just let events happen to Him. Much as I respected Harry Whittaker both as an individual and an expositor, I can never understand why throughout his monumental *Studies In The Gospels*, he repeatedly makes the point that the Lord Jesus didn't go around consciously trying to fulfil Bible prophecy. My reading of the Gospels tells me that the Lord did do exactly this. The writers stress that He did action X or spoke word Y in order to fulfil Bible prophecy A and B. He consciously made the word flesh in Himself. A case can be made that He carefully planned out His ministry; He didn't just let events happen to Him. I don't find it hard to believe that He consciously engineered the timing of His own death to be at Passover time, after a three and a half year public ministry. He purposefully seems to have pressed all the buttons in Jewish

expectations to lead them to revolt against the dashed expectations they had of Him. His actions in the temple could be read as almost asking to be killed. He knew what makes people tick and act to an an extent we can't begin to understand. He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem to die there (Lk. 9:60). He laid down His life- it wasn't taken from Him.

3. Jesus' Raising Up Of Himself (Jn. 2:19-21)

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body" (Jn. 2:19-21).

I think the answer lies in Jn. 5:19-21: "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he show him, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom he will. For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father". **This makes it clear that all power and possibilities that Jesus had, were in fact given to Him by God.** In fact, whatever God is spoken of as doing, it would be appropriate to speak of the Son doing it. This was and is the nature of their relationship. The one thing that it would seem God did for Jesus, in a way that Jesus could not do for Himself, was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God. It is emphasized so many times that God raised Jesus from the dead. And yet it's as if Jesus almost enjoys making the point that even in that, so connected is He with the Father, that in a sense, He raised Himself up- because whatever, literally whatever, God does, in a sense Jesus therefore does it too. This is why Jesus could say about His life in Jn. 10:18: "I have power [authority] to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father". He was given this authority by the Father (1). But even in the very thing where it seems God would be separate from His Son- i. e. in resurrecting the Son- Jesus wanted to emphasize that in a sense, He was still united with the Father. Because the Father so loved the Son, that whatever the Father did, He wished His Son to somehow be associated with. And so Jesus can speak of how in that sense, He [Jesus] was involved in His own resurrection- even though the repeated and obvious Biblical emphasis is upon the Father resurrecting His Son back to life. We see this theme touched on again in Jn. 10:18, where the Lord teaches that He has received a commandment to lay down His life and take it again, and yet He says that He has been given the authority / empowerment to do this, and therefore He will not die merely because of being unable to avoid the machinations of His murderers. So we could conclude that He obeyed a command to die and rise again- but was empowered by God to do this.

Another consideration in Jn. 2:19-21 is that Jesus speaks specifically about the 'raising up' of His body as a tabernacle. The 'body' of Christ frequently refers not so much to His literal body as to His spiritual body, i. e. the body of believers. In a sense, it is Jesus who has raised them up.

Notes

(1) It has been suggested to me by Chris Clementson that the Greek word *exousia* translated "power" or "authority" in Jn. 10:18 can mean 'privilege'- and this is a possible meaning given for the word by James Strong in his concordance. Other N. T. usage of the word definitely suggests 'power' or 'authority', but this idea of 'privilege' is worth bearing in mind.

4 “God is a Spirit” (Jn. 4:24)

God’s spirit is His power or breath by which His essential self, His being and character, is revealed to man through the actions which that spirit achieves. Thus “God is spirit”, as Jn. 4:24 should be properly translated (see R. S. V. , N. I. V.), **because His spirit reflects His personality**.

God is described as being many things, e. g.

- “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29)
- “God is light” (1 Jn. 1:5)

- “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8)
- “The word (Greek *logos* - plan, purpose, idea) was God” (Jn. 1:1).

Thus “God is” His characteristics. It is clearly wrong to argue that the abstract quality of love is ‘God’, just because we read that “God is love”. We may call someone ‘kindness itself’, but this does not mean that they are without physical existence - it is their manner of literal existence which reveals kindness to us.

The spirit being God’s power, we frequently read of God sending or directing His spirit to achieve things in harmony with His will and character. Examples of this are numerous, showing the distinction between God and His spirit.

- “He (God) that put His Holy Spirit within him” (Is. 63:11)
- “I (God) will put My spirit upon him (Jesus)” (Mt. 12:18)
- “The Father give(s) the Holy Spirit” (Lk. 11:13)
- “The Spirit descending from heaven” (Jn. 1:32)
- “I (God) will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17).

Indeed, the frequent references to “the spirit of God” should be proof enough that the spirit is not God personally. These differences between God and His spirit are another difficulty for those who believe that God is a ‘trinity’ in which God the Father is equated with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Very importantly, a non-personal God makes a nonsense of prayer - to the point where prayer is a dialogue between our consciousness and a concept of God which just exists in our own mind. We are continually reminded that we pray to God who is in heaven (Ecc. 5:2; Mt. 6:9; 5:16; 1 Kings 8:30), and that Jesus is now at God’s right hand there, to offer up our prayers (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 9:24). If God is not personal, such passages are made meaningless. But once God is understood as a real, loving Father, prayer to Him becomes a very real, tangible thing - actually talking to another being who we believe is very willing and able to respond.

“Grieve not the Holy Spirit” (Eph. 4:30)

I have shown elsewhere that the 'Spirit' refers to the mind, the heart, the power which actualizes what the mind thinks. Both God and human beings in this sense have a 'spirit', and God's spirit is naturally holy, for He is holy. A man's "spirit" can be stirred up (Acts 17:16), made troubled (Gen. 41:8) or happy (Luke 10:21)- just as God's spirit, or 'Holy Spirit', can be. A person's spirit is described as being "grieved" in Is. 54:6 and Dan. 7:15. It would be unreasonable to suggest that these passages imply that one person is in fact two persons- that the references to their spirit being grieved or troubled mean that their spirit is in fact a separate person. **But Trinitarians seem so desperate for evidence that the Holy Spirit is a person that they make this exact mistake when we read about the Holy Spirit being grieved. It is God's "spirit", i. e. His very essence, His mind and purpose, which gives rise to His actions, just as the human spirit does to our actions. It isn't surprising, therefore, that the Holy Spirit is at times personnified.**

Looking at Eph. 4:30 in more detail, we find that it is a quotation from Is. 63:10- a lament about how Israel in the wilderness "vexed His holy spirit" with their continued provocations. Ps. 78:40 says the same: "How often did they provoke Him in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert!". Putting these verses together, we see that to provoke God, to grieve Him, is the same as vexing or grieving His spirit. Paul's point was that the Ephesian believers had likewise been redeemed from 'Egypt' and had been sealed by God "with that holy spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). I understand this to mean that God's spirit works upon and merges with the human spirit in the heart and life of the baptized believer in Christ. But by turning away from that leading, we are vexing or grieving God through frustrating the way of His spirit which He has put within us. Clearly it was *God* whom Israel grieved in the wilderness, and it is *God* whom we grieve by provoking and frustrating His spirit in us.

5 “I came down from Heaven” (Jn. 6:33,38) / "No man has ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven" (Jn. 3:13)

“The bread of God is he which comes down from heaven, and gives life unto the world. . . I came down from heaven” (Jn. 6:33,38).
These words, and others like them, are misused to support the wrong idea that Jesus existed in Heaven before his birth. The following points, however, must be noted:

1. Trinitarians take these words as literal in order to prove their point. However, if we are to take them literally, then this means that somehow Jesus literally came down as a person. Not only is the Bible totally silent about this, but the language of Jesus being conceived as a baby in Mary’s womb is made meaningless. Jn. 6:60 describes the teaching about the manna as a saying “hard to take in” (Moffat’s Translation); i. e. we need to understand that it is figurative language being used.
2. In Jn. 6, Jesus is explaining how the manna was a type of himself. The manna was sent from God in the sense that it was God who was responsible for creating it on the earth; it did not physically float down from the throne of God in Heaven. Thus Christ’s coming from Heaven is to be understood likewise; he was created on earth, by the Holy Spirit acting upon the womb of Mary (Lk. 1:35).
3. **Jesus says that “the bread that I will give is my flesh**” (Jn. 6:51). Trinitarians claim that it was the ‘God’ part of Jesus which came down from Heaven. But Jesus says that it was his “flesh” which was the bread which came down from Heaven. Likewise Jesus associates the bread from Heaven with himself as the “Son of man” (Jn. 6:62), not ‘God the Son’.
4. In this same passage in Jn. 6 there is abundant evidence that Jesus was not equal to God. “The living Father has sent me” (Jn. 6:57) shows that Jesus and God do not share co-equality; and the fact that “I live by the Father” (Jn. 6:57) is hardly the ‘co-eternity’ of which Trinitarians speak.
5. It must be asked, When and how did Jesus ‘come down’ from Heaven? Trinitarians use these verses in Jn. 6 to ‘prove’ that Jesus came down from Heaven at his birth. But Jesus speaks of himself as “he which cometh down from heaven” (v. 33,50), as if it is an ongoing process. Speaking of God’s gift of Jesus, Christ said “My Father is giving you the bread” from Heaven (v. 32 Weymouth). At the time Jesus was speaking these words, he had already ‘come down’ in a certain sense, in that he had been sent by God. Because of this, he could also speak in the past tense: **“I am the living bread which came down from Heaven”** (v. 51). But he also speaks about ‘coming down’ as the bread from Heaven in the form of his death on the cross: “The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (v. 51). So we have Jesus speaking here of having already come down from Heaven, being in the process of ‘coming down’, and still having to ‘come down’ in his death on the cross. This fact alone should prove that ‘coming down’ refers to God manifesting Himself, rather than only referring to Christ’s birth. This is conclusively proved by all the Old Testament references to God ‘coming down’ having just this same meaning. Thus God saw the affliction of His people in Egypt, and ‘came down’ to save them through Moses. He has seen our bondage to sin, and has ‘come down’ or manifested Himself, by sending Jesus as the equivalent to Moses to lead us out of bondage. The Lord Jesus was "the beginning of God's creation" (Rev. 3:15)- **He was a created being and as such in whatever form He 'came down from Heaven', He was still not God Himself.** Hugh Schonfield comments: "Clearly John himself believed that the heavenly Christ was a created being, as did the early Christians" (1).

A Devotional Appeal
The Lord's language of coming down from Heaven can be understood from a very powerful devotional aspect. He reasons that because He had *come* down from Heaven, therefore, whoever *comes* to Him, He would never reject (Jn. 6:37,38). The connection is in the word "come". We 'come' to Jesus not by physically travelling towards Him, but in our mental attitudes. He likewise 'comes' to us, not by moving trillions of kilometres from Heaven to earth, but in His 'coming' down into our lives and experiences. If He has come so very far to meet us, and we come to Him. . . then surely we will meet and He will not turn away from us, exactly because He has 'come' so far to meet us. This theme continues throughout John's Gospel. "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62) is therefore not a reference to Him physically travelling off anywhere- He is saying that if people would not 'come' to Him in meeting, then He would withdraw the opportunity from them. He wouldn't stand waiting for them

indefinitely. This explains the urgency behind His appeals to 'come' to Him. He had 'come down', and was waiting for people to 'come' to Him. He's come a huge distance, from the heavenly heights of His own spirituality, to meet with whores and gamblers, hobby level religionists, self-absorbed little people. . . and if we truly come to Him, if we want to meet with Him, then of course He will never turn us away. For it was to meet with us that He 'came down'. This approach shows the fallacy of interpreting His 'coming down' to us and our 'coming' to Him in a literal sense.

And yet this Lord of all grace also sought to confirm men and women in the path they chose. He admitted that His comment about Himself being the manna which descended from Heaven was a "hard saying". And yet He goes straight on to say [perhaps with a slight smile playing at the corner of His lips] something even more enigmatic: "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62). Surely He is here choosing to give them yet another, even harder "saying"; and goes on to stress that His sayings, His words, are the way to life eternal (Jn. 6:63). For those who didn't want His words, He was confirming them in their darkness. And He did this by the mechanism of using an evidently "hard saying". Therefore to simplistically interpret the saying as meaning that the Lord had literally descended from Heaven through the sky just as literally as He would ascend there through the clouds. . . is in fact to quite miss the point- that this is a "hard saying". It's not intended to have a simplistic, literalistic interpretation.

Notes
(1) Hugh Schonfield, *The Original New Testament: Revelation* (London: Firethorn Press, 1985) footnote on Rev. 3:15.

"No man has ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven" (Jn. 3:13)

The context of John 3 is the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. This passages highlights the difference between flesh and spirit, human understanding and spiritual perception, literal birth and the birth "from above" (Jn. 3:3,5). All this suggests that we are to understand 'Heaven' and (by implication) 'earth' in a figurative manner. The Lord Jesus speaks as if He has already ascended into Heaven- yet He spoke these words during His ministry. In any case, He speaks of how "the Son of man" will do these things, and not 'God the Son', as would be required by Trinitarian theology. To suggest that Jesus as Son of Man literally ascended to Heaven and descended to earth during His ministry is surely literalism's last gasp. There are many allusions to Moses throughout John's record, as if both the Lord Jesus and John were seeking to impress upon the audience that the Lord Jesus was indeed the Messianic "prophet like unto" Moses predicted in Dt. 18:15,18. Jewish writings of the time [e. g. *Wisdom of Solomon]* spoke of Moses' ascent of Sinai as an ascension into Heaven, descending to Israel with the Law (1). This language is being picked up and applied to the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus has just spoken of how believers in Him are to be "born from above" and "born of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:3,5). However, the same Greek words for "born" and "Spirit" are found in Mt. 1:20 and Lk. 1:35- in description of the virgin birth of Jesus. He was the ultimate example of one "born of the Spirit". And yet John's Gospel applies the language of the virgin birth to believers. We have another example in Jn. 1:13- the believers "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"- i. e. , they were born "of the Spirit". My suggestion is that the Lord Jesus is saying in Jn. 3:13 that of course, He is the only one fully born of the Spirit, the only one in Heavenly places; but the preceding context makes clear that He is willing to count believers in Him as fully sharing His status. Further, we need no longer complain that His virgin birth makes Him have some unfair advantages in the battle against sin which we don't have. The spiritual rebirth experienced by all those truly born again by God's word, His "seed" (1 Pet. 1:23), is such that we in some way are given all the inclinations towards righteousness which the Lord Jesus had by virtue of His birth.

Notes
(1) More references to this effect in Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) p. 100.

6 “Before Abraham was, I am”(Jn. 8:58)

These words are often misapplied to teach that Jesus existed before Abraham did. However, closer investigation reveals the opposite to be true:
1. Jesus does not say 'Before Abraham was, I was". **He was the promised descendant of Abraham;** we make a nonsense of God's promises to Abraham if we say that Jesus physically existed before the time of Abraham.
2. The context of Jn. 8:58 is Christ's discourse with the Jews concerning Abraham. As far as they were concerned, Abraham was the greatest man who would ever live. Jesus is saying "I am now, as I stand here, more important than Abraham". As they stood there, Jesus was the one to be honoured rather than Abraham. He is saying 'I am now, more important than Abraham ever was'. It is possible to understand "before" in Jn. 8:58 with some reference to time, in the sense that before Abraham existed, **Christ had been in God's plan right from the beginning of the world.** It was because Jesus was "before" Abraham in this sense that he was "before" him in terms of importance. But the more comfortable reading is to understand "before"as referring to importance rather than time. In 2 Sam. 6:21 there's a good example of "before" meaning 'before' in importance rather than time. David tells his wife: "The Lord chose me *before* your father [Saul]". Actually, in terms of *time*, God chose Saul well before He chose David. But God chose David *above* Saul in terms of importance and honour.
3. Proof of this is found in Jn. 8:56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad". The only time Abraham is recorded to have laughed and been glad was when he was given the promise that he would have a seed; he understood that ultimately that promise had reference to Jesus (Gen. 17:17). Abraham "saw" ahead to Christ through the promises made to him concerning Jesus. He cryptically commented about the future sacrifice of Jesus: "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Gen. 22:14). It was in this sense that Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen him. It is in this context of speaking about the promises that Jesus could say "Before Abraham was, I am". He appreciated that God's promises to Abraham were revealing the plan about Jesus which God had known from the beginning of the world. That purpose, which had been "before Abraham was", had been revealed to Abraham in the promises to him, and was now being fulfilled in the eyes of the Jews of the first century, as they stood in a ring around Jesus, "the word (of promise) made flesh".
4. "I am" may indeed be a reference to the Divine Name which Jesus, as the Father's Son, carried (Jn. 5:43). But "I am" is also used by the healed blind man in Jn. 9:9 with no apparent reference to the Name. The same Greek words are also used by Asahel in the LXX of 2 Sam. 2:20. Jesus and the Father were "one" and so for Jesus to bear the Father's Name is no reason to think that 'Jesus = God". Note however that the unity between Father and Son spoken of e. g. in Jn. 10:30 is the same kind of unity possible between the Father and all His children (Jn. 17). The use of the neuter form for "one" (*hen esmen*) in Jn. 10:30 shows that the Father and Son aren't interchangeable- they are at one with each other, not one and the same. And sharing such unity it is quite appropriate for them to share the same Name.
A related misunderstanding is often applied to the comment of John the Baptist about Jesus- that "He was before me" (Jn. 1:30). John the Baptist was actually older than the Lord Jesus; he therefore meant that Jesus was "before" him in the sense of being more important than him. C. H. Dodd interprets this passage as meaning: "There is a man in my following who has taken precedence over me, because he is… essentially my superior"(1).

Notes
(1) C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition In The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 274.

7 "The glory I had with you before the world was" (Jn. 17:5)

What does the Bible mean when it speaks about "glory"? The glory of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai- and what he heard was the declaration of God's Name or character, that Yahweh is a God full of grace, mercy, truth, justice, judgment etc. (Ex. 33:19; 34:6,7). Jesus alludes to what happened at Sinai by saying that He has "glorified you… manifested your name" (Jn. 17:4,6). Whenever those characteristics of God are recognized, manifested or openly shown, God is glorified. In this sense, God is the "God of glory" (Ps. 29:3 etc.). He is totally associated with His Name and characteristics- it's not that He just shows those particular attributes to men, but He Himself personally is someone quite different. He *is* His glory. And this is why Jn. 17:5 parallels His glory with God's very own "self".

That glory of God was of course always with God, right at the beginning of the world. He hasn't changed His essential characteristics over time. The God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New Testament. As John begins his Gospel by saying, the essential "Word", *logos* of God, His essential plans, intentions, personality, was in the beginning with Him. It was "made flesh" in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14), in that the Lord Jesus in His life and especially in His death on the cross revealed all those attributes and plans of God in a concrete, visible form- to perfection. The request of Jesus to be glorified is therefore asking for the Name / attributes / characteristics / glory / word of God to be openly revealed in Him. Surely He had in mind His resurrection, and the glorifying of God which would take place as a result of this being preached and believed in world-wide. But in what sense was this the glory which Jesus had with God before the world was? As we have said, the "glory" of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai in Ex. 34 as the declaration of His character. **In this sense, the Lord Jesus could speak of having in His mortal life "that glory which was with [the Father]**" when the [Jewish] world came into existence at Sinai (Jn. 17:5 Ethiopic and Western Text). It was that same glory which, like Moses, He reflected to men. But according to 2 Cor. 3:18, the very experience of gazing upon the glory of His character will change us into a reflection of it. There is something transforming about the very personality of Jesus. And perhaps this is why we have such a psychological barrier to thinking about Him deeply. We know that it has the power to transform and intrude into our innermost darkness.

There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of God's glory as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His "own self", His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). **It is *God's* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).** Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, because He is the express image of God's personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God's glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the "Father of glory", the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father's glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him".

What all this exposition means in practice is this. **There is only "one glory" of God.** That glory refers to the essential "self", the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been "glorified", and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons who reflect and 'are' that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror (2 Cor. 3:18). The outline of God's glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. **That glory was with God from the beginning. Jesus was in the mind and plan of God from the beginning.** It was God's original plan to resurrect and glorify and justify His Son. And in Jn. 17:5, Jesus is asking that this will happen. The glory which Jesus had "before the world was" is connected with the way that He was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20), the way God promised us eternal life (through His Son) before the world was (Tit. 1:2). 2 Tim. 1:9 speaks of us as being called to salvation in Christ "before the world began", He "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). In the same way as we didn't personally exist before the world began, neither did Christ. Indeed 1 Cor. 2:7 speaks of *us* having some form of glory with God "before the world began". It's the idea of this "one glory" again- God's glory existed, and it was His plan to share it with His Son and with us; and He speaks of those

things which are not as though they are, so certain are they of fulfilment (Rom. 4:17). In Jn. 17:5, the Lord Jesus is 'pleading the promise' of these things.

Jewish Perspective

We need to remember that the Lord was speaking, and John was writing, against a Jewish background. The language of 'pre-existence' was common in Jewish thinking and writing. To be 'with God' didn't mean, in Jewish terms, to be up there in heaven with God literally. Mary had favour *para* God (Lk. 1:30) in the same way as Jesus had glory *para* God, but this doesn't mean she pre-existed or was in Heaven with God with her "favour". The Torah supposedly pre-existed, everything on earth was a pattern of the pre-existing ideas of those things which were held in the plan and mind of God in Heaven. John 17:5 has reference to these things: "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed". The Talmud and Genesis Rabbah speak of the "Throne of Glory" pre-existing before the world existed. And the Lord Jesus seems to be alluding to that. The Jewish mind wouldn't have understood the Lord Jesus to be making any claim here to have bodily, physically existed before birth. Peter reflected Jewish thinking when he wrote (albeit under inspiration) that Jesus was "foreknown" before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20 ESV). Think through the implications of being "foreknown"- the Greek word used is the root of the English word 'prognosis'. If God 'foreknew' His Son, the Son was not literally existent next to Him at the time of being 'foreknown'. Otherwise the language of 'foreknowing' becomes meaningless.

8 The Rock That Followed Them (1 Cor. 10)

It should be evident enough that the rock which Moses smote in the desert was simply a rock; it wasn't Christ personally. The Jewish book of Wisdom claimed that "the rock was Wisdom" (Wisdom 11). Paul is picking up this phrase and saying that more essentially, the rock represented Jesus personally, and not 'Wisdom' in the Jewish misunderstanding of this figure. It "was" Him in the sense that it represented Him. Likewise He said about the communion wine: "This is my blood". It wasn't literally His blood; it was and is His blood only in that it represents His blood. Paul is describing the experience of Israel in the wilderness because he saw in it some similarities with the walk of the Corinthian believers towards God's kingdom. The whole of 1 Cor. 10 is full of such reference. And this is why he should speak about the rock which Moses smote as a symbol of Christ. The Israelites had been baptized into Moses, just as Corinth had been baptized into Christ; and both Israel and Corinth ate "the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink". "Spiritual food. . . spiritual drink"shows that Paul saw the manna they ate and the water they drank as spiritually symbolic- just as He saw the rock as symbolic. Paul goes on in 1 Cor. 10:16,17 to write of how Corinth also ate and drank of Christ in the breaking of bread, and in chapter 11 he brings home the point: like Israel, we can eat and drink those symbols, "the same spiritual meat. . . the same spiritual drink", having been baptized into Christ as they were into Moses, and think that thereby we are justified to do as we like in our private lives. This is the point and power of all this allusion. The picture of their carcasses rotting in the wilderness is exhortation enough. Baptism and observing the 'breaking of bread' weren't enough to save Israel.

Jesus Himself had explained in John 6 how the manna represented His words and His sacrifice. He spoke of how out of Him would come "living water", not still well water, but bubbling water fresh from a fountain (Jn. 4:11; 7:38). And He invites His people to drink of it. It was this kind of water that bubbled out of the smitten rock. Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21 describe it with a variety of words: gushing, bursting, water running down like a high mountain stream, "flowed abundantly". . . . . as if the fountains of deep hidden water had burst to the surface ("as out of the great depths", Ps. 78:15). So the Lord was saying that He was the rock, and we like Israel drinking of what came out of Him. The Law of Moses included several rituals which depended upon what is called "the running water"(Lev. 14:5,6,50-52; 15:18; Num. 19:17). "Running"translates a Hebrew word normally translated "living". This living water was what came out of the smitten rock. The Lord taught that the water that would come out of Him would only come after His glorification (Jn. 7:38)- an idea He seems to link with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19; Heb. 2:9). When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. The rock was "smitten", and the water then came out. The Hebrew word used here is usually translated to slay, slaughter, murder. It occurs in two clearly Messianic passages: ". . . they talk to the hurt of him [Christ] whom thou hast smitten"(Ps. 69:26); "we esteemed him [as He hung on the

cross] smitten of God"(Is. 53:4). It was in a sense God who "clave the rock"so that the waters gushed out (Ps. 78:15; Is. 48:21). "Clave"implies that the rock was literally broken open; and in this we see a dim foreshadowing of the gaping hole in the Lord's side after the spear thrust, as well as a more figurative image of how His life and mind were broken apart in His final sacrifice. Yahweh, presumably represented by an Angel, stood upon [or 'above'] the rock when Moses, on Yahweh's behalf, struck the rock. Here we see a glimpse into the nature of the Father's relationship with the Son on the cross. He was both with the Son, identified with Him just as the Angel stood on the rock or hovered above it as Moses struck it. . . and yet He also was the one who clave that rock, which was Christ. As Abraham with Isaac was a symbol of both the Father and also the slayer, so in our far smaller experience, the Father gives us the trials which He stands squarely with us through. And within the wonder of His self-revelation, Yahweh repeatedly reveals Himself as "the rock"- especially in Deuteronomy. And yet that smitten rock "was [a symbol of] Christ". On the cross, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". There He was the most intensely manifested in His beloved Son. There God was spat upon, His love rejected. There we see the utter humility and self-abnegation of the Father. And we His children must follow the same path, for the salvation of others.
The rock "followed [better, 'accompanied'] them"(1). We must understand this as a metonymy, whereby "the rock"is put for what came out of it, i. e. the fountain of living water. It seems that this stream went with them on their journey. The statement that "they drank"of the rock is in the imperfect tense, denoting continuous action- they *kept on* drinking of that water, it wasn't a one time event, it continued throughout the wilderness journey.

A careful reading of Ex. 17:5,6 reveals that at Rephidim, Moses was told to "Go on before the people", to Horeb. There he struck the rock, and yet the people drank the water in Rephidim. The water flowed a long way that day, and there is no reason to think that it didn't flow with them all the time. The records make it clear enough that the miraculous provision of water was in the same context as God's constant provision of food and protection to the people (Dt. 8:15,16). The rock gave water throughout the wilderness journey (Is. 48:21). This would surely necessitate that the giving of water at Horeb was not a one-off solution to a crisis. There is a word play in the Hebrew text of Is. 48:21: "He led them through the Horebs [AV 'desert places']" by making water flow from the rock. The Horeb experience was repeated for 40 years; as if the rock went on being smitten. Somehow the water from that smitten rock went with them, fresh and bubbling as it was the first moment the rock was smitten, right through the wilderness (2). It was living, spring water- not lying around in puddles. The water that came from that one rock tasted as if God had opened up fresh springs and torrents in the desert (Ps. 74:15 NAS). It always tasted as if it was just gushing out of the spring; and this wonder is commented upon by both David and Isaiah (Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21). It was as if the rock had just been struck, and the water was flowing out fresh for the first time. In this miracle, God clave the rock and there came out rivers (Hab. 3:9; Ps. 78:16,20; Is. 43:20). Each part of Israel's encampment had the water as it were brought to their door. And so it is in our experience of Christ, and the blessing enabled by His sacrifice. The blessings that come to us are deeply personal, and directed to us individually. He died once, long ago, and yet the effect of His sacrifice is ever new. In our experience, it's as if He has died and risen for us every time we obtain forgiveness, or any other grace to help in our times of need. We live in newness of life. The cross is in that sense ongoing; He dies and lives again for every one who comes to Him. And yet at the end of their wilderness journey, Moses reflected that Israel had forgotten the rock that had given them birth. The water had become such a regular feature of their lives that they forgot the rock in Horeb that it flowed from. They forgot that 'Horeb' means 'a desolate place', and yet they had thankfully drunk of the water the first time in Rephidim, 'the place of comfort'. We too have done the same, but the length of time we have done so can lead us to forget the smitten rock, back there in the loneliness and desolation of Calvary. Not only did his disciples forsake him and his mother finally go away home, but He even felt that the Father had forsaken Him. As Abraham left alone in the Messianic "horror of great darkness", as Isaac alone with only his Father, leaving the other men behind. . . so the Lord on the cross was as a single green root grown up out of a parched desert. Let us never forget that 'Horeb'; and let's not let the abundant new life and blessing which there is in Christ become something ordinary. God forbid that we like Corinth, like Israel, should drink of that sparkling water each week in our 'place of comfort' and go forth to do just as we please.

Notes
(1) Marvin Vincent [*Vincent's Word Studies*] comments: "Paul appears to recall a rabbinic tradition that there was a well formed out of the spring in Horeb, which gathered itself up into a rock like a swarm of bees, and

followed the people for forty years; sometimes rolling itself, sometimes carried by Miriam, and always addressed by the elders, when they encamped, with the words, "Spring up, O well!" (Num. 21:17)". Whether this is true or not, Paul is alluding to this idea- hence the rather awkward idiom to non-Jewish readers.
(2) There is repeated emphasis in the records that the water came from the [singular] rock. However Ps. 78:16 speaks of God cleaving the rocks. I suggest this is an intensive plural- the sense is 'the one great rock'. The next verses (17,20) go on to speak of how the water came from a singular rock.

9 "Being in the Form of God" (Phil. 2)

"Jesus. . . being in the form of God, thought it not a thing to be grasped at, to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:5-11).

These verses are taken to mean that Jesus was God, but at his birth he became a man. It is significant that this is almost the only passage which can be brought forward to explain away the **'missing link**' in trinitarian reasoning - how Jesus transferred himself from being God in Heaven to being a baby in Mary's womb. The following analysis seeks to demonstrate what this passage really means.

1. There are a number of almost incidental phrases within this passage which flatly contradict the trinitarian idea.
a) "God also has highly exalted" Jesus "and given him a name" (:9) shows that Jesus did not exalt himself - God did it. It follows that he was not in a state of being exalted before God did this to him, at his resurrection.
b) The whole process of Christ's humbling of himself and subsequent exaltation by God was to be "to the glory of God the Father" (:11). God the Father is not, therefore, co-equal with the Son.

2. The context of this passage must be carefully considered. Paul does not just start talking about Jesus 'out of the blue'. He refers to the mind of Jesus in Phil. 2:5. Back in Phil. 1:27 Paul starts to speak of the importance of our state of mind. This is developed in the early verses of chapter 2: "Being of one accord, of one mind. . . in lowliness of mind. . . look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. . . " (Phil. 2:2-5). Paul is therefore speaking of the importance of having a mind like that of Jesus, which is devoted to the humble service of others. The verses which follow are therefore commenting upon the humility of mind which Jesus demonstrated, rather than speaking of any change of nature. Just as Jesus was a servant, so earlier Paul had introduced himself with the same word (Phil. 1:1 cp. 2:7). The attitude of Jesus is set up as our example, and we are urged to join Paul in sharing it. We're not asked to change natures; we're asked to have the mind of Jesus- so that we may know the "fellowship of sharing in his [Christ's] sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10,11).

3. Jesus was "in the form of God". We have shown in an earlier study that Jesus was of human nature, and therefore this cannot refer to Christ having a Divine nature. The N. I. V. translation of this passage goes seriously wrong here. In passing, it has to be noted that some modern translations designed for 'easy reading', tend to gloss over the precise meaning of the Greek text, and tend to give a paraphrase rather than a translation in certain passages. Phil. 2:5-8 is a classic example of this. However, this is not to decry their use in other ways. That "form" (Greek 'morphe') cannot refer to essential nature is proved by Phil. 2:7 speaking of Christ taking on "the form of a servant". **He had the form of God, but he took on the form of a servant.** The essential nature of a servant is no different to that of any other man. In harmony with the context, we can safely interpret this as meaning that although Jesus was perfect, he had a totally God-like mind, yet he was willing to take on the demeanour of a servant. Some verses later Paul encourages us to become "conformable unto (Christ's) death" (Phil. 3:10). We are to share the 'morphe', the form of Christ which he showed in his death. This cannot mean that we are to share the nature which he had then, because we have human nature already. We do not have to change ourselves to have human nature, but we need to change our way of thinking, so that we can have the 'morphe' or mental image which Christ had in his death.
The Greek word 'morphe' means an image, impress or resemblance. Human beings can have a 'morphe'.

Gal. 4:19 speaks of "Christ (being) formed in" believers. Because he had a perfect character, a perfectly God-like way of thinking, Jesus was "in the form of God". Because of this, Jesus did not consider equality with God "something to be grasped at". This totally disproves the theory that Jesus was God. Even according to the N. I. V. translation, Jesus did not for a moment entertain the idea of being equal with God; he knew that he was subject to God, and not co-equal with Him. There are many examples in the Greek Old Testament of the Greek word *morphe* being used to mean 'outward form' rather than 'essential nature'- e. g. Jud. 8:18 [men had the *morphe* , the outward appearance, of a king's sons]; Job 4:16 ; Is. 44:13 [a carpenter makes an idol in the *morphe* or outward appearance of a human being- but not in the very nature of a human being!]; Dan 3:19 [the king's *morphe* or appearance changed because he got angry; his essential nature remained the same]. And likewise in the Apocrypha: Tobit 1:13; Wis. 18:1; 4 Macc. 15:4. If Paul meant nature or essence he would have used the word *ousia* or *physis*- as he does in Gal. 2:16 where he speaks of "We who are Jews by nature [*physis*]. . . ".

4. Christ "made himself of no reputation", or "emptied himself" (R. V.), alluding to the prophecy of his crucifixion in Is. 53:12: "He poured out his soul unto death". He "took upon himself the form (demeanour) of a servant" by his servant-like attitude to his followers (Jn. 13:14), demonstrated supremely by his death on the cross (Mt. 20:28). Is. 52:14 prophesied concerning Christ's sufferings that on the cross "his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men". This progressive humbling of himself "unto death, even the death of the cross" was something which occurred during his life and death, not at his birth. We have shown the context of this passage to relate to the mind of Jesus, the humility of which is being held up to us as an example to copy. **These verses must therefore speak of Jesus' life on earth, in our human nature, and how he humbled himself, despite having a mind totally in tune with God, to consider our needs.**

5. If Christ was God in nature and then left that behind and took human nature, as trinitarians attempt to interpret this passage, then Jesus was not "very God" while on earth; yet trinitarians believe that he was. This all demonstrates the contradictions which are created by subscribing to a man-made definition such as the trinity.

6. A point concerning the phrase "being in the form of God". The Greek word translated "being" does not mean 'being originally, from eternity'. Acts 7:55 speaks of Stephen "being full of the Holy Spirit". He was full of the Holy Spirit then and had been for some time before; but he had not always been full of it. Other examples will be found in Lk. 16:23; Acts 2:30; Gal. 2:14. Christ "being in the form of God" therefore just means that he was in God's form (mentally); it does not imply that he was in that form from the beginning of time.

7. "In the likeness of man. . . in human form" (Phil. 2:7) doesn't mean that the Lord Jesus only appeared as a man, when He was in fact something else. **Rather the emphasis is upon the fact that He truly was like us.** Going deeper, F. F. Bruce has suggested that these terms "represent alternative Greek renderings of the Aramaic phrase *kebar-'enash* ("like a son of man") in Daniel 7:13" (1).

8. Paul's writings are shot through with allusions back to the Gospels and to incidents in the life of the historical Jesus. In addition to the crucifixion, Paul seems to also have in mind the way that Jesus as Lord and Master of the disciples "laid aside" his clothing and humbled Himself to wash their feet. His comment that they were to follow His example and "*become* as. . . he that does serve" (Lk. 22:26 RV) lays the basis for the implication in Phil. 2:7 that Jesus *became* as a servant. No change of nature is therefore in view here; the 'becoming as' refers rather to the decided mental attitude of chosing to serve others. Paul is beckoning his readership to likewise have the mind of Christ and 'become as' He was then. And Paul surely has the same ideas in mind when he says that he himself "have *made myself* servant unto all" (1 Cor. 9:19). As Christ on the cross and in the upper room was "servant of all", so Paul*made* himself a similar servant. Philippians 2 is surely Paul asking his entire readership to follow his own example, motivated and inspired as it was by his response to the way the Lord Jesus had*made Himself* a servant.

Philippians 2 In First Century Context

It has been shown that the hymn of Phil. 2:6-11 is alluding to various Gnostic myths about a redeemer, the son and image of the "highest God", who comes down to earth, hides himself as a man so as not to be

recognized by demons, shares human sufferings, and then disappears to Heaven having redeemed them (2). I suggest that these allusions are in order to deconstruct those myths. Paul's point is that the redemption of humanity was achieved by the human Jesus, through His death on the cross, and not through some nebulous mythical figure supposedly taking a trip to earth for a few years. The hymn also alludes to the many wrong ideas floating around Judaism at the time concerning Adam. Messiah was *not* Adam; Adam is compared and contrasted with Jesus in Phil. 2:6-11- he like Jesus was made in the image of God, yet he grasped at equality with God ("you will be like God", Gen. 3:5), which Jesus didn't do. **The description of Jesus "being in the form of God" was therefore to highlight the similarities between Him and Adam, who was also made in the form of God.** The choice Jesus faced was to die on the cross or not, and it is this choice which Phil. 2:6-11 glorifies. The context of Phil. 2 shows that it was in this that He was and is our abiding example in the daily choices we face. If His choice was merely to come to earth or stay in Heaven, then there is nothing much to praise Him for and He is not our example in this at all.

We can understand 2 Cor. 8:9 in this same context- the choice of Jesus to 'become poor' for our sakes is held up as an example to the Corinthians, to inspire their financial giving. The choice is whether or not to live out the cross in our lives- rather than deciding whether or not to come down from Heaven to earth. Jesus gave up the 'riches' of His relationship with God, calling Him "abba", to the 'poverty' of the cross, in saying "My God, Why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46). Poverty was associated with crucifixion, rather than with a God coming from Heaven to earth: "Riches buy off judgment, and the poor are condemned to the cross" (3). **It is Christ's cross and resurrection, and not this supposed 'incarnation', which is repeatedly emphasized as being the source of our salvation** (Rom. 5:15,21; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; Eph. 1:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18). This is a far cry from the teaching of Irenaeus, one of the so-called 'church fathers', that Christ "attached man to God by his own incarnation" (*Against Heresies* 5. 1. 1). The New Testament emphasis is that we were reconciled to God by the *death* of His Son. The whole of Phil. 2 is about the Lord's attitude in His *death* and not at His *birth*. It was *after* His birth but *before* His death that the Lord could talk of his freedom of decision as to whether or not to lay down His life (Jn. 10:18)- and it is this decision which Phil. 2:9-11 is glorifying.
<u>One of the dangers of the Trinity is that it de-emphasizes the colossal human achievement of Jesus as a man.</u> It also makes God Himself somewhat of an irrelevancy, if Jesus is our Saviour God. And thus it's been observed that the history of Christian art shows icons etc. progressively giving prominence to Jesus, with God Himself portrayed increasingly as an old man with a white beard, somewhere in the background. Yet Jesus came to bring us to God, living out a breathtaking partnership of God and man which remains our constant pattern.

Trinitarian theology sees God's salvation of humanity as being on account of His supposed 'incarnation' in Christ, and His sending of the [supposedly] pre-existent Christ into the world. But the New Testament emphasis is upon the *death* of Christ, His victory within Himself and subsequent resurrection, as the crucial means by which our redemption was enabled. And further, how He saved us through the cross and through His own self-debasement is held up **as our very real example** in passages like Phil. 2 and 2 Cor. 8:8-10. <u>We are not pre-existent gods in Heaven awaiting an incarnation on earth. We are very real, human guys and gals.</u> His pattern can mean nothing for us if it was all about saving others through submitting to some kind of 'incarnation'. But the Biblical emphasis makes His sufferings, death and victory in resurrection our very real pattern, so real that we are to be baptized into it (Rom. 6:3-5) and live according to this as a pattern for human life every moment.

We should remember that Philippi was in Macedonia, it was named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. Alexander was some sort of hero there. He was held to be successful in his exploits because after conquering a people, he did not have a policy of ruling by suppression but instead made all attempts to befriend them by making himself a servant to the people. Alexander was perceived to have an *hypostasis* (the substantial quality) of both master and servant. It seems that Paul may be making a conscious connection between the Lord Jesus, and Alexander the Great. But the Lord Jesus went so much further. He emptied Himself of all pride and became a servant to all. In our context, the point I take from this is that Alexander didn't change natures when he, the master, became a servant to his people; and the same is true of the Lord Jesus. His humiliation and self-deprecation was specifically upon the cross; and as such He is our example. We too are to have His spirit. We are unable to change natures; the challenge rather is to change our minds. Peter says the same, perhaps alluding to Paul's words here: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under

God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time". It seems that the language of this section in Phil. 2 is full of allusion to the 'divine hero' conception which had been applied to Alexander the Great. There are clear similarities between Paul's account of Christ's humiliation and exaltation and the language used by Plutarch about Alexander's humiliation and exaltation. My point is that that language was talking about Alexander's humiliation and exaltation *during his life*. No change of nature was in view. And Paul is making the same point about the Lord Jesus, thereby urging the Philippians to look to Jesus rather than Alexander as their inspiration and model.

The Acme Of Humility

Trinitarian theology uses Phil. 2 to justify their 'V-pattern' view of Christ- that He was high in glory in Heaven, then descended briefly to earth, and then returned to high glory in Heaven. All such talk of a V-pattern, albeit on the lips of eloquent churchmen and theologians (4), is frankly a serious missing of the point. Phil. 2- and the whole teaching of Jesus- is that the true greatness is in humility, the servant of all becomes Lord of all. The pinnacle, the zenith, the acme- was in the humility of the cross. The New Testament presents the death of Christ as His final victory, the springboard to a J-curve growth, involving even literal ascent into Heaven. What seemed to be defeat turned out to be the ultimate victory.

Notes

(1) F. F. Bruce, *Paul And Jesus* (London: S. P. C. K. , 1977) p. 77.
(2) Documented in Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology Of The New Testament* (London: S. C. M. , 1955) p. 166. Bultmann showed that many of the 'difficult passages' in John have similar connections (*ibid* p. 175). I would argue that John likewise was alluding to these Gnostic [and other] redeemer myths in order to deconstruct them.
(3) Quoted in Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion In The Ancient World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) p. 60 note 15.
(4) The V-pattern analogy is to be found, e. g. , in C. F. D. Moule, *Forgiveness And Reconciliation* (London: S. P. C. K. , 1998) p. 36; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary On The Second Epistle To The Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1973) p. 336.

10 Colossians 1:15-18: By Jesus Were All Things Created

"The firstborn of every creature: for by (Jesus) were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be **thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers;** all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: <u>who is the beginning</u>, the firstborn from the dead. . . " (Col. 1:15-18). This is typical of those passages which can give the impression that Jesus actually created the earth.

1. If this were true, then so many other passages are contradicted which teach that Jesus did not exist before his birth. The record in Genesis clearly teaches that God was the creator. Either Jesus or God were the creator; if we say that Jesus was the creator while Genesis says that God was, we are saying that Jesus was directly equal to God. In this case it is impossible to explain the many verses which show the differences between God and Jesus (see *Bible Basics* Study 8. 2 for examples of these).
2. **Jesus was the "firstborn", which implies a beginning**. There is no proof that Jesus was God's "firstborn" before the creation of the literal earth. Passages like 2 Sam. 7:14 and Ps. 89:27 predicted that a literal descendant of David would become God's firstborn. He was clearly not in existence at the time those passages were written, and therefore not at the time of the Genesis creation either. Jesus became "the Son of God with power" by his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). **God "has raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, You are My Son, this day have I begotten you"** (Acts 13:32,33). Thus Jesus became God's firstborn by his resurrection. <u>Note too that a son standing at his father's right hand is associated with being the firstborn</u> (Gen. 48:13-16), and Christ was exalted to God's right hand after his resurrection (Acts 2:32 R. V. mg. ; Heb. 1:3).
3. It is in this sense that Jesus is described as the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), a phrase which is parallel to "the firstborn of every creature" or creation (Col. 1:15 R. V.). **He therefore speaks of himself as "the first begotten of the dead. . . the beginning of the creation of God**" (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). Jesus was the first of a new creation of immortal men and women, whose resurrection and full birth as the immortal sons of God has been made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus (Eph. 2:10; 4:23,24; 2 Cor.

5:17). "In Christ shall all (true believers) be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:22,23). This is just the same idea as in Col. 1. **Jesus was the first person to rise from the dead and be given immortality,** he was the first of the new creation, and the true believers will follow his pattern at his return.

4. The creation spoken about in Col. 1 therefore refers to the new creation, rather than that of Genesis. Through the work of Jesus "were all things created. . . thrones. . . dominions" etc. Paul does not say that Jesus created all things and then give examples of rivers, mountains, birds etc. The elements of this new creation refer to those rewards which we will have in God's Kingdom. "Thrones. . . dominions" etc. refer to how the raised believers will be "kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). These things were made possible by the work of Jesus. "In him were all things created in the heavens" (Col. 1:16 R. V.). In Eph. 2:6 we read of the believers who are in Christ as sitting in "heavenly places". If any man is in Christ by baptism, he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). By being in Christ we are saved by His death (Col. 1:22). The literal planet could not be created by being in Christ. Thus these verses are teaching that the exalted spiritual position which we can now have, as well as that which we will experience in the future, has all been made possible by Christ. The "heavens and earth" contain "all things that needed reconciliation by the blood of (Christ's) cross" (Col. 1:16,20), showing that the "all things. . . in heaven" refer to the believers who now sit in "heavenly places. . . in Christ Jesus", rather than to all physical things around us.

5. If Jesus were the creator, it is strange how He should say: "…from the beginning of the creation God made them…" (Mk. 10:6). This surely sounds as if He understood God to be the creator, not He Himself. And if He literally created everything in Heaven, this would include God.

6. That "by him" is a poor translation is readily testified by reliable scholars. Take J. H. Moulton: "for *because of him* [Jesus]. . . " (1); or the *Expositor's Greek Commentary*: "*en auto*: This does not mean "by Him"" (2).

7. Many of Paul's more difficult passages are understandable once it is appreciated that he is alluding to existing Jewish and Gentile literature which was familiar to his readers. He does this in order to deconstruct it and give the Lord Jesus His rightful place of exaltation. There are a number of connections between Col. 1:15-20 and Jewish Wisdom theology concerning Adam and the mystical "heavenly man". The terms "image of God" and "firstborn" refer to Adam; it's as if Paul is showing that Jesus should be afforded the place of all exaltation, and not the mystical "Adam" or "Heavenly Adam" which Judaism then believed in (3). Another possibility, not necessarily mutually exclusive, is that Paul is alluding to and even quoting a "pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer hymn" (4)- and seeking to demonstrate that Jesus is the true redeemer. We may apply the words of a well known song or character to someone we know, in order to show the similarities and bring out the contrasts; but the correspondence isn't 100%. And so with the manner in which Paul quotes Gentile or Jewish literature and terminology about Jesus- not every word must be literalistically pressed into relevance to Him. It's like the idea of types- Joseph was a type of Christ, but not *everything* about Joseph was true of Christ. We need to be aware that Paul didn't sit down to right theology sitting in an ivory tower university, or because he just felt like delving into these matters for the pure intellectual buzz of it. His letters are all missionary documents, born out of real life situations in his work of preaching and then pastorally caring for his immature converts. He was dealing with attacks upon his tender babes in Christ by Jewish and Gentile false teachers; there was no written New Testament, and the Christian message was in competition with the 'scriptures' of the surrounding religions. So it's hardly surprising that Paul so often alludes to their terminology and literature in order to deconstruct it.

8. It should be noted, as a general point, that God the Father *alone, exclusively,* is described as the creator in many passages (e. g. Is. 44:24; Is. 45:12; Is. 48:13; Is. 66:2). These passages simply leave no room for the Son to have also created the literal planet.

9. It could also be argued that the hymn to Jesus here in Colossians 1 is speaking of how God views Jesus. **"He is "firstborn of all creation"- not in time, but in the Father's mind"** (5). To God, Jesus was the beginning, in everything He was *en pasin autos proteuon*- in all things He held first place (Col. 1:18). But where and how? In the Father's mind. It was God who created the world. But for God, in the context of creation, Jesus His Son was pre-eminent.

James Dunn comments on Col. 1:20: "Christ is being identified here not with a pre-existent being but with the creative power and action of God…There is no indication that Jesus thought or spoke of himself as having pre-existed with God prior to his birth" (6).

Notes

(1) J. H. Moulton, *Grammar Of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) Vol. 3 p. 253.
(2) W. R. Nicoll, ed. , *Expositor's Greek Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) p. 504.
(3) This case is made at length in H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) pp. 78-86.
(4) See E. Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy" in *Essays On New Testament Themes* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1964) pp. 149-168.
(5)Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1993) p. 138.
(6) James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 254.

10-1 Colossians 2:9: "Christ. . . In whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"

Colossians 2:9 "Christ. . . In whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily".
The Lord Jesus has now been exalted to Heaven, and shares God's nature. This verse refers to how Jesus is now, after His resurrection, and not how He was during His mortal life on earth.

Reading the rest of Colossians chapter 2, we see that Paul is writing to counter various heresies that were being introduced to the ecclesia in Colosse- especially those which required a return to the Law of Moses. Yet Paul reasons that now God supremely "dwells" or 'tents' in Jesus- not in the Jewish tabernacle or temple (Jn. 1:14; 2:19). He emphasizes the supremacy of Jesus; His greatness. Because the Jewish false teachers were trying to persuade the Christian converts to join Judaism and devalue Jesus. Paul isn't saying that Jesus is God Himself. **Rather is he saying that the fullness of God's personality and glory is manifested in the person of Jesus.**

"All the fullness"
The Greek word for "fullness" is *pleroma* - the same word is also found in Col. 1:19, regarding how all God's "fullness" dwelt in Jesus. Although the Lord Jesus had human nature, He never sinned; and thus was full of the God's personality and character. To know Jesus was to know God- for He was and is God's Son, and indeed the perfect replica of Him in human form.

The fullness which is Christ's- and His "fullness" is God's fullness- is shared with us: "Of His fullness have all we received" (Jn. 1:16). In this sense the church, as the body of Christ, is "the fullness of Him that fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23; 4:13). Through knowing Christ, the believers are therefore "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). So the fact that Jesus had "all the fullness of God" doesn't make Him "God" Himself in person; because we will not become God Himself in person because we are filled with God's fullness; any more than a son *is* his father. In the same way as Christ's body after His resurrection was filled with the Spirit and nature of God- so will ours be (1 Cor. 15:49; Phil. 3:20,21).

The Colossian Heresy
It's clear that Paul was writing his letter to the Colossians in order to combat some specific heresies which were developing there. We can try to reason back from what Paul wrote, to get some idea of the false teachings that were being circulated. The words "fullness" and "bodily" are terms which were common amongst the Gnostics. The Gnostic heresy was developing at the time Paul wrote to the Colossians. The Gnostics spoke about how they had a "fullness of knowledge" which Christians only had part of. The 2010 Wikipedia article about Gnosticism defined it as: "Gnostic systems are typically marked out by. . . The notion of a remote, supreme source - this figure is known under a variety of names, including '*pleroma*' (fullness, totality). . . The heavenly *pleroma* is [understood as] the centre of divine life, a region of light "above" our world. . . Jesus is interpreted as an intermediary aeon who was sent from the *pleroma*. . . The term is thus a central element of Gnostic cosmology".

Paul was deconstructing and correcting these ideas. **The fullness of God Himself was manifested in one specific person- the risen Lord Jesus. This "fullness" wasn't some "region of light"- it was an actual person, i. e. the Lord Jesus.** It's been shown that Colosse was a centre of Gnosticism, and that many Jews living there had mixed their ideas with it (1). William Barclay makes the point that "There was not

infrequently a strange alliance between Gnosticism and Judaism; and it is just such an alliance that we find in Colosse, where. . . there were many Jews" (2).
The Gnostics believed that all matter was hopelessly evil, including the human body. Paul is arguing against this by pointing out that the Lord Jesus even now has a body, which is full of God's fullness in a bodily way. William Barclay explains further: "If matter was altogether evil and if Jesus was the Son of God, then Jesus could not have had a flesh and blood body so the Gnostic argued. He must have been a kind of spiritual phantom. So the Gnostic romances say that when Jesus walked, he left no footprints on the ground. This, of course, completely removed Jesus from humanity and made it impossible for him to be the Saviour of men. It was to meet this Gnostic doctrine that Paul insisted on the flesh and blood body of Jesus and insisted that Jesus saved men in the body of his flesh" (3).

Notes
(1) Edwin Yamauchi, "Sectarian Parallels: Qumran and Colosse," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:482 (April 1964): 141-152, online at http://www. biblicalstudies. org. uk/pdf/bsac/gnosis_yamauchi. pdf
(2) William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series: Colossians* (Westminster John Knox Press: 1976).
(3) Barclay, *op cit.*

11 Hebrews 1:2:
"The Son. . . by whom [God] made the worlds"

Heb. 1:2 is another passage misunderstood to believe that Jesus created the earth. It could be argued that the prologue to Hebrews is based upon the prologue to John's Gospel. The same ideas recur- the Word of God from the beginning come to expression in Christ, "all things", glory, etc. Note the similarity between "apart from him not one thing came into being" (Jn. 1:3) and Heb. 2:8, "not one thing is not left put under him". Jn. 1:3 stated that "all things" were created by the Word, i. e. the logos / intention which God had of the Messiah. Heb. 1:2 clarifies this (because of misunderstandings in the early church?) to define the "all things" as all the ages of human history. These were framed by God with Christ in mind. Later in Hebrews we meet the same idea- Heb. 11:3 speaks of how the ages were framed and then goes on to give examples of Old Testament characters who displayed their faith and understanding of the future Messiah.

It should be noted that the 'ages' which Christ was to be involved in creating refer to "the world to come"- for Heb. 2:5 says that this passage is speaking about "the world to come". Heb. 9:26 adds indirect support by commenting that Christ died at the end of "the (singular) age"; the ages to come are the eternity of God's Kingdom which is made possible through His work. Thus the idea is not that He created the world, but rather that through His work, the ages /to come/ were made possible through Him. And therefore those ages before Him find their meaning in the context of He who was to come and open the way to eternal ages.
We read of "the Son… by whom [Gk. *dia*] He [God] also made the worlds [Gk. *aion*]". A quick look at Strong's concordance or an online Bible seems to me conclusive. '*Dia*' can mean'for whom / for the sake of / on account of'. It doesn't *always* mean that, as it's a word of wide usage- but it very often does mean 'on account of' and actually frequently it *cannot* mean 'by'. There are stacks of examples:

- In a creation context, we read that all things were created *dia*, for the sake of, God's pleasure (Rev. 4:11). Significantly, when 2 Pet. 3:5 speaks of how the world was created "*by*" the word of God, the word *dia* isn't used- instead *hoti*, signifying 'causation through'. This isn't the word used in Heb. 1:2 about the creation of the *aion* on account of, *dia*, the Son. Eve was created *dia* Adam- she wasn't created *by* Adam, but *for the sake of* Adam (1 Cor. 11:9). 1 Cor. 8:6 draws a helpful distinction between *ek* [out of whom] and *dia*- all things are *ek* God, but *dia*, on account of, Christ (1 Cor. 8:6).
- The context of Heb. 1:2 features many examples of where *dia* clearly means 'for the sake of' rather than 'by'. Just a little later we read in Heb. 1:14 of how the Angels are "ministering spirits" who minister *dia*, for the sake of, the believers.
- Because of [*dia*] Christ's righteousness, God exalted Him (Heb. 1:9).
- The Mosaic law was "disannulled" *dia* "the weakness and unprofitableness thereof" (Heb. 7:18). The weakness of the law didn't disannul the law; the law was disannulled by God *for the sake of* the fact it was so weak.

- Levi paid tithes *dia* Abraham (Heb. 7:9), not *by* Abraham, but *for the sake of* the fact he was a descendant of Abraham.
- Jesus was not an Angel *dia* the suffering of death (Heb. 2:9). Clearly here the word means 'for the sake of' rather than 'by'. Jesus was born a man *for the reason that* He could die. He was not an Angel who was then made 'not an Angel' *by* the fact of death. That makes no sense.
- Scripture was written *dia* us- not *by* us, but 'for our sakes' (1 Cor. 9:10)
- The martyrs were executed *dia*, for the sake of, their witness to Jesus (Rev. 20:4)
- Israel today are loved by God *dia* the Jewish fathers (Rom. 11:28)- clearly the word here means 'for the sake of' and not 'by'.
- Cold and wet people made a fire *dia*, for the sake of, because of, the rain and cold (Acts 28:2). They didn't make a fire 'by' the rain and cold.
- Timothy was circumcised *dia*, for the sake of, the critically minded Jews (Acts 16:3). He was not circumcised *by* them.
- When the voice came from Heaven, Jesus commented that the voice came not *dia* me, but *dia* the disciples (Jn. 12:30). Clearly *dia* here means 'for the sake of' and not 'by'.
- "*Dia* the people that stand by I said it" (Jn. 11:42)- Jesus said 'it' for the sake of the bystanders; He didn't speak 'by' them.
- The authorities couldn't punish the apostles *dia* the people's support for them- clearly *dia* here means 'for the sake of' and not 'by'.
- Paul wrote *dia* many tears (2 Cor. 2:4). He didn't write literally *by* or *with* those tears, but for the sake of his tears and grief for Corinth, he wrote to them.
- "By reason of" (Gk. *dia*) false teachers, the truth is badly spoken of (2 Pet. 2:2)
-We labour *dia*, for the sake of, the Lord's name (Rev. 2:3). We believe *dia* Christ- not that He creates faith in us in an arbitrary way or forces us to believe; we believe *for the sake of* what we have seen and known in Christ (1 Pet. 1:21). Likewise we experience the birth of faith within us "*dia* the resurrection of Jesus" (1 Pet. 1:3). This doesn't mean that when Christ rose, He created us as believers without any choice on our part. Rather, *for the sake of* [*dia*] Christ's resurrection, generations of believers have come to faith and hope whenever they have encountered and believed in the fact of His resurrection. . Thus Jesus was raised *dia* our justification (Rom. 4:25). He was not raised *by* our justification, but *for the sake of* it.
- Christ was manifested "for [*dia*] you" (1 Pet. 1:20)- He was not manifested *by* us in a causative sense, but was manifested for our sakes.
- "Wherefore"- *dia*, for the sake of, Diotrephes' behaviour, John would discipline him (3 Jn. 10). To read *dia* as 'by' here makes no sense.
- "For the truth's sake"- *dia aletheia* (2 Jn. 2); "for righteousness sake", *dia dikaiosune* (1 Pet. 3:14)
- Those who are "of the world" *dia*, "therefore", for this reason, speak in a worldly way (1 Jn. 4:5). Because we are "not of the world", *dia*, "therefore", the world doesn't accept us (1 Jn. 3:1). Persecution arises *dia* the word of God- for the sake of the word (Mt. 13:21). It's not persecution of us *by* the word of God. Likewise men will hate us, not *by* Christ, but *for the sake of* (*dia*) Christ (Mk. 13:13).
- There was a division "because of" (*dia*) Jesus (Jn. 7:43).
- "They could not… bring him in because of (*dia*) the multitude" (Lk. 5:19). They didn't aim on bringing the man in *by* the multitude.
- 'For the sake [*dia*] of the elect', and not *by* the elect, the days will be shortened (Mk. 13:20).
- Herod bound John *dia* Herodias- clearly, 'for the sake of' rather than 'by'. It was not Herodias who did the binding. It was Herod.
- A ship waited on Jesus *dia* the crowd pushing on Him (Mk. 3:9)- clearly 'because of' and not 'by'.
- "The Sabbath was made *dia* [for] man" (Mk. 2:24). It wasn't man who made the Sabbath; it was made for the sake of man.

Then, *aion*, [AV "worlds"] is a plural- if this verse means 'Jesus created the earth', then, did He create multiple, plural 'earths'? That the word means 'the ages' or 'an age' is again clear from seeing how else *'aion*' is used. In almost every case where the word *aion* occurs in the New Testament, it doesn't mean 'the physical planet earth', but rather an age or situation on the earth, rather than the physical planet. In Eph. 2:7 we read of "the ages to come"- and it is the word *aion* again. The church will glorify Jesus "throughout all generations", and this is paralleled with the phrase 'the *aion* of the *aions*' [Eph. 3:21- AV "world without end"; the same parallel occurs in Col. 1:26, "hid from *aions* and from generations"]. Clearly *aion* refers to periods of time rather than a physical planet. Just a few verses after Heb. 1:2, we read that the son will

reign 'for the *aions* and the *aions*', or in English "for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8). Surely the combined message is that the previous ages / *aions* existed only for the sake of Christ, and He will rule over all future *aions*. There is the *aion* to come [AV "the world to come", Heb. 6:5], and Christ will be a priest "for ever" [Gk. 'for the *aion*', Heb. 5:6]. The *aion* to come is the eternity of God's Kingdom. It will be, in somewhat hyperbolic language, an eternity of eternities. Later in Hebrews we read that Jesus made His sacrifice for sin "in the end of the world / *aion*" (Heb. 9:26). If an *aion* ended at the death of Jesus, then clearly the word doesn't refer to the physical planet- but rather to the age which then ended. The Hebrew writer clinches this view of *aion* in Heb. 11:3, where he prefaces his outline of Bible history from Abel to the restoration from Babylon by saying that the ages / *aion* are framed by the word of God. Response by faith to God's word, seeing the invisible with the eye of faith, occurred amongst the faithful in every *aion*. The *aion* [AV "worlds"] were framed by the word of God.

Consider other uses of the word *aion* where clearly it refers to the ages and not to a literal planet:
- "The cares of this world" (Mk. 4:19)
- The prophets which have been "since the world began" (Lk. 1:70). There were no prophets standing there at creation. The context clearly refers to the prophets of the Old Testament Scriptures.
- "The children of this world" (Lk. 16:8)
- "Be not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2)
- "The wisdom of this world" (1 Cor. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:18), "the princes of this world" (1 Cor. 2:8)
- "This present evil world" (Gal. 1:4)- there's nothing evil about the physical planet, the reference is clearly to the world-system.
- "The darkness of this world" (Eph. 6:12)
- Loving "this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10) is wrong, Paul says. Surely he wasn't referring to the literal planet.

The whole of history, with all its ages, and all that is to come, exists solely for the sake of Christ. He is the One who gives meaning to history. Further, if this verse means 'Jesus created the earth', then OK, question: Genesis and many other passages say *God* created. If this says Jesus was the actual creator, then is Jesus directly equal to God? Also, if Heb 1:2 is saying that *Jesus* is the creator of earth, the One through whom God did the job, then, *why* do we have to wait until Hebrews to know that? There's no indication in Genesis or even in the whole Old Testament nor in the teaching of Jesus that Jesus was the creator of earth on God's behalf. That's my problem with the pre-existence idea- it's nowhere in the Old Testament. So would believers have been held in ignorance of this fact for 4000 years? If so, then, is it so important to covenant relationship with God? I am sure David, Abraham etc. believed that *God* and *not* Messiah created the earth. If they'd have been asked: 'Did *Messiah* create the earth, or God? Does Messiah now exist?', they'd have answered 'No' both times. Surely?

It is often commented that a few verses later, Heb. 1:10 appears to quote words about God (from Ps. 102:25) and apply them to Jesus. To take a Psalm or Bible passage and apply it to someone on earth, even a normal human, was quite common in first century literature (1). It's rather like we may quote a well known phrase from Shakespeare or a currently popular movie, and apply it to someone. It doesn't mean that that person is to be equated with Romeo, Juliet, Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth etc. By quoting the words about them, we're saying there are similarities between the two people or situations; we're not claiming they're identical. And seeing that the Son of God was functioning for His Father, it's not surprising that words about God will be quoted about the Lord Jesus.

Footnote: *Dia* + Genitive
It is argued by trinitarians that *dia* + the genitive, as we have in Heb. 1:2, means that the ages were made by the instrumentality of Christ. But *dia* + genitive doesn't only mean 'by whose instrumentality'. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* , p. 90 explains the uses of *dia* with genitive:
"1. With a genitive, through
a. Used of place or medium through
b. Used of time, during in the course of; through
c. Used of immediate agency, causation, instrumentality, by means of,
by; of means or manner, through, by, with
d. Used of state or condition, in a state of".

Meaning (b) appears relevant to Heb. 1:2 because it is *dia* Christ that the aions (a time reference) were created. This would require us to read in an ellipsis: "Through the (period of the ministry of) the Son, God framed the ages". Or, "Through(out) the Son, God framed the ages", i. e. all God's purpose throughout the ages was framed with Christ in mind. Acts 3:18 uses *dia* + genitive to explain how God had spoken of Christ "by" or throughout the period of all His "holy prophets".

Notes
(1) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1971) p. 234.

12 Who Was Melchizedek?

In the commentary on Melchizedek in Hebrews; the writer admitted he was going deep, speaking of things which could only be grasped by very mature believers (Heb. 5:10,11,14). It is therefore not wise to base fundamental doctrine on the teaching of such verses; nor should the Melchizedek passages loom large in the minds of those who are still coming to learn the basic doctrines of Scripture. "This Melchizedek, King of Salem (Jerusalem), priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him" is spoken of as being "without father, without mother, without descent (genealogy), having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:1,3). From this it is argued by some that Jesus literally existed before his birth, and therefore had no human parents. Jesus has a Father (God) and a mother (Mary) and a genealogy (see Mt. 1, Lk. 3 and cp. Jn. 7:27). 'Melchizedek' therefore cannot refer to him personally. Besides, Melchizedek was "made *like* unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3); **he was not Jesus himself, but had certain similarities with him which are being used by the writer for teaching purposes. "After the similitude of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest", Jesus** (Heb. 7:15), who was ordained a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:5,6).

The language of Hebrews about Melchizedek just cannot be taken literally. If Melchizedek literally had no father or mother, then the only person he could have been was God Himself; He is the only person with no beginning (1 Tim. 6:16; Ps. 90:2). But this is vetoed by Heb. 7:4: "Consider how great this man was", and also by the fact that he was seen by men (which God cannot be) and offered sacrifices to God. If he is called a man, then he must have had literal parents. His being "without father, without mother, without descent" must therefore refer to the fact that his pedigree and parents are not recorded. Queen Esther's parents are not recorded, and so her background is described in a similar way. Mordecai "brought up. . . Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother. . . whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter" (Esther 2:7). **The author of Hebrews was clearly writing as a Jew to Jews, and as such he uses the Rabbinic way of reasoning and writing at times.** There was a Rabbinic principle that "what is not in the text, is not" (1)- and it seems that this is the principle of exposition being used to arrive at the statement that Melchizedek was "without father". Seeing no father is mentioned in the Genesis text, therefore he was "without father"- but this doesn't mean he actually didn't have a father. It's not recorded, and therefore, according to that Rabbinic principle, he effectively didn't have one. The book of Genesis usually goes to great lengths to introduce the family backgrounds of all the characters which it presents to us. But Melchizedek appears on the scene unannounced, with no record of his parents, and vanishes from the account with equal abruptness. Yet there can be no doubt that he was worthy of very great respect; even great Abraham paid tithes to him, and was blessed by him, clearly showing Melchizedek's superiority over Abraham (Heb. 7:2,7).

The writer is not just doing mental gymnastics with Scripture. There was a very real problem in the first century which the Melchizedek argument could solve. The Jews were reasoning:
'You Christians tell us that this Jesus can now be our high priest, offering our prayers and works to God. But a priest has to have a known genealogy, proving he is from the tribe of Levi. And anyway, you yourselves admit Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). Sorry, to us Abraham is our supreme leader and example (Jn. 8:33,39), and we won't respect this Jesus'.
To which the reply is:
'But remember Melchizedek. The Genesis record is framed to show that such a great priest did not have any genealogy; and Messiah is to be both a king and a priest, whose priesthood is after the pattern of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6 cp. Ps. 110:4). Abraham was inferior to Melchizedek, so you should switch your

emphasis from Abraham to Jesus, and stop trying to make the question of genealogies so important (see 1 Tim. 1:4). If you meditate on how much Melchizedek is a type of Jesus (i. e. the details of his life pointed forward to him), then you would have a greater understanding of the work of Christ'.
And we can take that lesson to ourselves.

Notes
(1) See James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 276 note 59.

13 God and Saviour (Titus 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1,11; also Eph. 5:5; 2 Thess. 1:12; 1 Tim. 5:21; 2 Tim. 4:1; Jude 4)

The references to "the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" and "God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" are assumed to teach that Jesus is God. Trinitarians quote the supposed **Granville Sharp rule in support of this;** they explain this as meaning that "*when you have two nouns, which are not proper names (such as Cephas, or Paul, or Timothy), which are describing a person, and the two nouns are connected by the word "and," and the first noun has the article ("the") while the second does not, both nouns are referring to the same person".*

1. This reasoning proves too much; if those verses are to be interpreted as claimed, then Jesus and God are directly equal; the great God was our Saviour, was Jesus in person. Yet clearly Jesus was the Saviour whom God the Father sent; "*The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world*" (1 Jn. 4:14; Jn. 15:21; 16:5); and he who is sent is inferior to the one who sent him: "He that is sent is not greater than He that sent him" (Jn. 13:16). To argue that God the Father is one and the same person as God the Son is [to use Trinitarian jargon] to 'confuse the persons' of the Trinity.
2. **'Jesus', in Hebrew 'Yehoshua', means 'The salvation of Yah'.** He is the means of God's salvation. It's no surprise, therefore, to read of "God" and Jesus, His Son, our Saviour, in close proximity. **We could even say that God was our Saviour- through Christ.** But this doesn't make God equal to Jesus or Jesus one and the same person as God. The close connection between Father and Son can be explained in far better ways than to suppose that they are one and the same being.
3. Granville Sharp's rule has been criticized even by Trinitarians as being an over-zealous attempt to prove the Trinity, and some Trinitarians have warned that it shouldn't be used to attack the Unitarian position because it simply isn't true (1). Examples have been given from other classical Greek writings of where this 'rule' simply doesn't hold up. Middleton draws attention to Herodotus' *Histories* 4. 71: "the cup-bearer and cook and groom and servant and messenger" (toVn oijnocovon kaiV mavgeiron kaiV iJppokovmon kaiV dihvkonon kaiV ajggelihfovron) (2). The Greek translation of the Old Testament [the Septuagint] clearly doesn't follow this rule. Prov. 24:21 LXX: "Fear God, O son, and the king" (fobou' toVn qeovn, uiJev, kaiV basileva). Granville Sharp was far better known as a political activist and campaigner against slavery than for his abilities in Greek grammar.
4. Even if the supposed "rule" is valid, we are left with Jesus being called 'God', *theos*. I have shown elsewhere in these studies that this word was commonly used in the first century as a term of exaltation and didn't necessarily mean that the person addressed as 'God' was in fact understood as God Almighty; hence Jewish writings could refer to Moses as 'God' whilst very clearly advocating a Unitarian view of God Himself. **The identity of God's Son is surely to be determined by our interpretation of Scripture**, rather than according to our acceptance or otherwise of a fine point of Ancient Greek grammar- a language which is no longer spoken and therefore the actual validity of rules of this nature is impossible to verify.
5. It is misleading to speak of Granville Sharp's "rule". It's an observation, a hypothesis, and it is not to be found in any grammar of Ancient Greek written before his time. The fact there are exceptions to it surely demonstrates it isn't a "rule" at all. My personal submission is that in his zeal to 'prove the Trinity', he confused idiom with the concept of grammatical rules. What he observes in his supposed "rule" is indeed often although not always the case; but this is a function of idiom rather than grammatical construction.

Notes
(1) See amongst others: Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) p. 273, note 50; Calvin Winstanley, *A Vindication of*

Certain Passages in the Common English Version of the New Testament: Addressed to Granville Sharp, Esq. (London: Longman, 1819 ed.) pp. 39–40- available on Google Books.
(2) T. F. Middleton, *The Doctrine of the Greek Article* (London: Cadell & Davies, 1808), available on Google books.

May, 1648

[2 May, 1648.]

An Enumeration of several errors. ;The maintaining and publishing of these with obstinacy shall be felony.

For the preventing of the growth and spreading of Heresie and Blasphemy, Be it Ordained by the Lords and Commons in this present Parliament Assembled, That all such persons as shall from and after the date of this present Ordinance, willingly by Preaching, Teaching, Printing, or Writing, Maintain and publish that there is no God, or that God is not present in all places, doth not know and foreknow all things, or that he is not Almighty, that he is not perfectly Holy, or that he is not Eternal, or that the Father is not God, the Son is not God, or that the Holy Ghost is not God, or that they Three are not one Eternal God: Or that shall in like manner maintain and publish, that Christ is not God equal with the Father, or, shall deny the Manhood of Christ, or that the Godhead and Manhood of Christ are several Natures, or that the Humanity of Christ is pure and unspotted of all sin; or that shall maintain and publish, as aforesaid, That Christ did not die, nor rise from the Dead, nor is ascended into Heaven bodily, or that shall deny his death is meritorious in the behalf of Believers; or that shall maintain and publish as aforesaid, That Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, or that the Holy Scripture (viz.) of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ester, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zecharia, Malachi: Of the New Testament, The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, The Acts of the Apostles, Pauls Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians the first, Corinthians the second, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians the first, Thessalonians the second, to Timothy the first, to Timothy the second, to Titus, to Philemon, the Epistles to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, the first and second Epistles of Peter, the first, second, and third Epistles of John, the Epistle of Jude, the Revelation of John, is not the Word of God, or that the Bodies of men shall not rise again after they are dead, or that there is no day of Judgment after death; all such maintaining and publishing of such Error or Errors with obstinacy therein, shall by vertue hereof be adjudged Felony, and all such persons upon complaint and proof made of the same in any of the cases aforesaid, before any two of the next Justices of the Peace for that place or County, by the Oaths of two Witnesses (which said Justices of Peace in such cases shall hereby have power to administer) or confession of the party, the said party so accused shall be by the said Justices of the Peace committed to prison without Bail or Mainprise, until the next Goal delivery to be holden for that place or County, and the Witnesses likewise shall be bound over by the said Justices unto the said Goal delivery to give in their evidence; And at the said Goal delivery the party shall be indicted for Felonious Publishing and maintaining such Errour, and in case the Indictment be found, and the Party upon his Trial shall not abjure his said Errour and defence and maintenance of the same, **he shall suffer the pains of death, as in case of Felony without benefit of Clergy.**

In case of Recantation how such shall be dealt with.

But in case he shall recant or renounce and abjure his said errour or errours, and the maintenance and publishing of the same, he shall nevertheless remain in prison untill he shall finde two sureties, being Subsidy men, that shall be bound with him before two or more Justices of the Peace or Goal delivery, that he shall not thenceforth publish or maintain as aforesaid the said errour or errours any more: And the said Justices shall have power hereby to take Bayl in such cases.

Second offence after renouncing.

And be it further Ordained, That in case any person formerly indicted for publishing and maintaining of such erroneous Opinion or Opinions, as aforesaid, and renouncing and abjuring the same, shall nevertheless again publish and maintain his said former errour or errours, as aforesaid, and the same proved as aforesaid, the said party so offending shall be committed to Prison as formerly, and at the next Goal Delivery shall be

indicted as aforesaid. And in case the Indictment be then found upon the Trial, and it shall appear that formerly the party was convicted of the same errour, and publishing and maintaining thereof, and renounced and abjured the same, the Offendor shall suffer death as in case of Felony, without benefit of Clergy.

Other Errors; How such shall be dealt with.

Be it further Ordained by the Authority aforesaid, That all and every person or persons that shall publish or maintain as aforesaid any of the several errours hereafter ensuing, viz. That all men shall be saved, or that man by Nature hath free will to turn to God, or that God may be worshipped in or by Pictures or Images, or that the soul of any man after death goeth neither to Heaven or Hell, but to Purgatory, or that the soul of man dieth or sleepeth when the body is dead, or that Revelations or the workings of the Spirit are a rule of Faith or Christian life, though diverse from or contrary to the written Word of God: or that man is bound to believe no more than by his reason he can comprehend; or that the Moral Law of God contained in the ten Commandments is no rule of Christian life; or that a believer need not repent or pray for pardon of sins; or that the two Sacraments of Baptism and the Lords Supper are not Ordinances commanded by the Word of God, or that the baptizing of Infants is unlawfull, or such Baptism is void, and that such persons ought to be baptized again, and in pursuance thereof shall baptize any person formerly baptized; or that the observation of the Lords day as it is enjoyned by the Ordinances and Laws of this Realm, is not according, or is contrary to the word of God, or that it is not lawfull to joyn in publique prayer or family prayer, or to teach children to pray, or that the Churches of England are no true Churches, nor their Ministers and Ordinances true Ministers and Ordinances, or that the Church Government by Presbytery is Antichristian or unlawfull, or that Magistracy or the power of the Civil Magistrate by Law established in England is unlawfull, or that all use of Arms though for the publique defence (and be the cause never so just) is unlawfull, and in case the Party accused of such publishing and maintaining of any of the said errours shall be thereof convicted to have published and maintained the same as aforesaid, by the Testimony of two or more witnesses upon Oath or confession of the said party before two of the next Justices of the Peace for the said place or County, whereof one to be of the Quorum (who are hereby required and Authorized to send for Witnesses and examine upon Oath in such cases in the presence of the party) The party so convicted shall be ordered by the said Justices to renounce his said Errors in the publique Congregation of the same Parish from whence the complaint doth come, or where the offence was committed, and in case he refuseth or neglecteth to perform the same, at or upon the day, time, and place appointed by the said Justices then he shall be committed to prison by the said Justices until he shall finde two sufficient Sureties before two Justices of Peace for the said place or County (whereof one shall be of the Quorum) that he shall not publish or maintain the said errour or errours any more.

Attainders by force hereof shall not forfeit the estate or corrupt the bloud.

Provided always, and be it Ordained by the Authority aforesaid, that no attainder by virtue hereof shall extend, either to the forfeiture of the estate real or personal of such person attainted, or Corruption of such persons blood.

'May 1648: An Ordinance for the punishing of Blasphemies and Heresies, with the several penalties therein expressed. ', in C. H. Firth, R. S. Rait (eds), *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660* (History of Parliament Trust, 1911), pp. 1133-1136. URL: http://www. british-history. ac. uk/report. aspx? compid=56264 Date accessed: 07 June 2013

Duncan Heaster is open to receive your comments and questions, either c/o the publishers or info@carelinks. net .

Peter Notes
We will have the same body as Christ at resurrection

It was the Lord's will to bruise Him" (Is. 53:10)
although he "cried unto God: he heard my voice. . . and my cry came before him, even into his ears" (Ps. 18:6)

He swears that there will be no God formed after Him

David in Ps. 110:1 calls this future Messiah adoni, Lord, rather than adonai, the Lord God. If David understood Messiah to be God, then why this choice of word? And if David didn't think Jesus was God- why should we?

Paul speak of "the man Christ Jesus" even *after* the ascension of Jesus to Heaven (1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 5:15)

Why do the accounts of the birth of Jesus emphasize the humanity of Mary, speak of the Lord's conception in quite simple terms, and give no hint whatsoever that a pre-existent being was entering a woman, who was to be the mother of God?

Moses has set the people up to expect him to deliver them a long list of detailed commands; …. . . . . but the most important law was. . . . God is one

Angels as well as Jesus can carry God's name

In the New Testament the Greek word latreuo which specifically refers to the worship of God- and this is always [21 times] applied to God and not Jesus. The worship of Jesus that is recorded is always to God's glory, and is recorded with the same words

Everlasting father

If we cannot draw logical conclusions from the Scriptures, then all Bible study is vain

Paul's letters contain opening salutations which refer to God and Jesus, but not to the Holy Spirit

The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, Unto your descendant [singular- i. e. one special descendant]

I am the. . . offspring of David", Jesus said (Rev. 22:16).

Your descendant. . . which shall proceed out of your body. . . I will be his father, and he shall be my son.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1)

The false doctrine of the physical 'pre-existence' of Christ before birth makes a nonsense

That Jesus was 'conceived' in Mary's womb (Lk. 1:31) is also proof that he could not have physically existed before this time.

History of Christ

There is strictly no Hebrew word for 'promise

To claim Jesus was " God" is to depersonalize Him

As there is only *one* God, it is impossible that Jesus could be God

God cannot be sinless God Himself; it had to be a sinless man, of human nature

Christ's possibility of sinning: "*If* he commit iniquity, I will chasten him

Christ having "flesh" nature means that in no way did he have God's nature during his mortal life

After Christ's resurrection, death had "*no more* dominion over him

Jesus himself recognised all this when he asked *God* to glorify him

My God

The word *became* flesh (Jn. 1:14), rather than the word entering into a fleshly form

Christianity for them is not an authentically human possibility

The trinity and pre-existence doctrines place a respectable gap between us and the Son of God

Constantine was scarcely a Christian himself

If the Lord's glory was somehow pre-existent.....

I ask for evidence that "Jesus is God"

The word of Jesus" and "the word of God"

God the Father *alone, exclusively,* is described as the creator