

new Horizons

Vol 14 No 4

July/August 2010

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

*In this issue we address the
vexed question:*

Who Is God?

CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by His apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "...Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature - eg our bi-monthly Newsletter OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS magazine, the BIBLE BASICS on-line home study course, and the 32-lesson Study Course. The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - and individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses or from our web site www.cgom.org. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications

New Horizons is published by the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*, an association of independent churches, to make known the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God

It is distributed free on request, being a co-operative voluntary effort financed by the members and friends of the *Churches of God*. We also welcome the financial support of all who benefit from our publications and who wish to labour with us.

If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* please request it from any of the addresses listed

Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
USA
e-mail: information@cgom.org
1-800-611-8080
Editor: James McBride
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

The Churches of God, UK
PO Box 2525
LINCOLN LN5 7PF United Kingdom
Regd Charity No 283358
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
100 Northcote Street
Aberdare NSW 2325 Australia
e-mail: icg.aust@netcentral.com.au

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 476 Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4 Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

or from:

Tulsa, OK 2010

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Does 'monotheism' mean that God is a solitary being?

Arguments about the 'unity' of God rage even after almost two thousand years of theological jousting. For most the controversy closed in the fourth century with the conclusion that God is a 'Trinity' of immortal beings. But there are also dissenting 'unitarians' for whom God can be but a single being.

God is 'one'

There is no doubt that the Scriptures teach the unity of God. It lies at the heart of Jewish belief. Wrote Moses: *'Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah'* (Deuteronomy 6:4). The proclamation by Moses emphasises there can be but one supreme Creator God. And Jesus answered an enquirer: *'The first [commandment] is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one'* (Mark 12:32). There can be only one Jehovah, though the apostle Paul points out that in our world *'we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life'* (I Corinthians 8:5-6).

That is a puzzle: *'...one God, the Father'* and *'...only one Lord, Jesus Christ'*. Does that mean Jesus isn't divine?

Divine Nature

Let's look first at God's nature, His attributes.

Paul tells us that God - the Father - alone has immortality. *'For at just the right time Christ will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honour and power to him forever!'* (I Timothy 6:15-16).

The Father has sovereignty over all His creation - over all political and religious endeavour. He is unapproachable by humans. He has never been seen by any of us nor ever will be seen by the human eye. He created everything. He is *'Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last'*. He is revealed to us by His Name 'Jehovah'. [There are various spellings of this Name.] His supreme authority cannot be questioned.

God Is One

What, then, of Jesus? He appears to have a subordinate role to the Father.

In a couple of texts Jesus uses the title *'the Alpha and the Omega'*, yet this is the title ascribed (Revelation 1:8) to *'the Lord God...the Almighty'*. Yet Jesus tells John: *"Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End"* (Revelation 22:12-13). Clearly, Jesus shares these august titles with the Father.

As the apostle Paul states: *'...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself'* (II Corinthians 5 18-19). God, the self-existing One. was *'in Christ'*. But was that only since his resurrection from the dead? Well, no. The Father was working through Jesus of Nazareth throughout his earthly lifetime to reconcile us to Himself. And before? Paul again, of Jesus:

"Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together" (Colossians 1:15-19).

Paul there says that Jesus was instrumental in creating angels (*'the heavenly realm'*). All creation? That would include all those galaxies observed by the orbiting Hubble telescope - and more. The universe 'works' because of the awesome power He exerted, and exerts. And everything on planet Earth - including Earth. He also oversees all human government.

Clearly, the Bible understanding is that Jesus existed from 'the beginning': *"In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone"* (John 1: 1-4).

So, since Jesus 'was God' - and God alone has immortality - then He, too, was 'self-existing' and shared all the divine qualities and nature.

Human Birth

Jesus, of course, shared our humanity, being born like all of us from a woman. He fought the same battles of human nature but without ever giving in to wrong desires, wrong thoughts: "So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Quite a transformation - from God to man.

He had no ordinary birth. Just as the universe was created from nothing by divine power, by the Spirit of God, Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb by the same Spirit (Matthew 1: 18ff):

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins".

The angel adds: "She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel which means, God is with us". As wrote the apostle John: "The Word became flesh". 'The Word' - the Logos - no philosophical concept but the very means by which the Creator communicates with His creation. Endowed from birth with 'the fullness of God' Jesus developed the divine gifts in the service of humanity.

Jesus says he 'came down from heaven'. He was 'sent by the Father'. He would 'ascend where he was before'. In his prayer just prior to his arrest Jesus said: 'Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began'.

That glory Jesus willingly gave up - for us:

"Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:6-11)

Divine Family

All Christians understand that Jesus is the Son of God. We are 'children of God'. We are 'sons and daughters of the Almighty'. We pray to God as 'Father'. We belong to 'the household of God'. And we are brothers and sisters of Jesus. A family relationship. God, in other words, has a family. That family now consists of Himself and a born Son who is the Fa-

ther's image. Then there are his as yet unborn children - men and women conceived by that same Spirit that begat Jesus. We await our resurrection when our flesh will be destroyed and all that remains will be the image of the Father - our character - mirrored in the holy Spirit in us.

Because of that indwelling Spirit we will be joint heirs with Jesus: "For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory" (Romans 8:16-17). "God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that he should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation. So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. For he said to God, I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people." He also said, "I will put my trust in him," that is, "I and the children God has given me." (Hebrews 2:10-12).

Because of His Spirit in us, Christians have in a sense co-existed with God from eternity past. Should we remain faithful till death we will co-exist with our Father and our 'elder brother' Jesus throughout eternity to come. Jesus, the Word of God, has consciously existed co-eternally with the One who became his - and our - Father. We will all, at our resurrection, be 'one'. One divine everlasting Family. That has been God's intention, His plan, from the beginning.

Since no man has seen the Father at any time we must live with the fact that the 'divine appearances' recorded in the Scriptures were a manifestation of the Word - the one who became Jesus. Listen to Him! **Ω**

Why Does God Kill?

The Bible—Old Testament and New—clearly shows that the Creator has at times chosen to take the lives of those He has created. For many it is a puzzle.

This short article addresses some of the issues, and provides a different analysis. You are invited to request a free copy

The world is full of 'gods'. Which do you worship? And does it matter?

'There are many roads to God' is a common enough idea. It underpins the various attempts not only to bring together all Christian churches - the 'Ecumenical Movement' - but also inter-faith dialogue. At the same time, all the major religions actively promote their vision of 'god'. Islam has *Allah*. Christians have the *Trinity*. Judaism holds to the God of the Torah. The major gods of Hinduism are *Shiva, Rama, Krishna*.

Yet the apostle Paul wrote, "*We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father*" (I Corinthians 8:4-6). Just as today, there were in his time multitudes of 'idols'. Athens, for example, was '*given over to idols*'. Christians, then, are obliged to reject the notion that we can pick and choose the god we worship without consequence: '*There is no other God but one*'. But how can we identify that one God?

Every major religion is a patchwork of often conflicting interpretations of their underlying faith. *Islam* has its factions - often in mortal combat. *Judaism*, too, has its diversity. *Hinduism* is more an individually interpreted philosophy built around a kaleidoscope of festivals, and gods galore. And the variety of *Christian* belief is notorious. Even the apparent unity of the Church of Rome is superficial.

Tangled Web

Even in its early years - in New Testament times - Christianity had become a tangled web of conflicting doctrine. The apostles constantly battled an influx of perverse teachings and self-serving deceptive practice. But their bottom line was that

there was a '*faith once for all delivered to the saints*'. All else was a step further away from 'the truth of the Gospel'. Two thousand years, near enough, of human thought have shunted that original truth into a theological graveyard. The faith once delivered is now widely viewed as heresy!

It is generally believed that the three great 'monotheistic' religions accept the same God. Yet that's not so! *Judaism*, certainly, derives from the Old Testament - as does Christianity. But it has strayed far from the *Torah*, having added doctrines and practices not in the Scriptures. Today's Judaism would not be recognized by a resurrected Moses! Then there's *Islam*. Its theologians claim doctrinal descent from Abraham. In reality it is firmly rooted in an ancient moon cult. Nothing to do with the true God of the Old Testament.

At what point, then, does this 'new Christianity' become a *different religion*?

Undoubtedly, there's room for some diversity of teaching - especially now. Aspects of the Bible's teaching are open to some interpretation. We are twenty centuries removed from its culture, from its language, from its idiom. Yet its foundation teachings are 'plain as a pikestaff'. Insidiously over the centuries theologians have absorbed - and promoted - concepts totally foreign to the Scriptures, and derived from idolatry. These false teachings have all but strangled the pure religion of the Bible. Judge for yourself whether or not the 'new Christianity' has tipped over into a new religion. [You are invited to request the free article *Babylon - Fountain of Error* for a bird's eye view of this idolatry.]

Quotations from the Bible in New Horizons are from translations which clearly express the meaning in modern terms

WHO DO YOU WORSHIP?

Each religion has teachings that distinguish it from another. Perhaps the most obvious is the form of worship. You would not, for example, mistake Islam for Judaism or for the new Christianity. Muslims worship on Friday, Jews on Saturday, Christians on Sunday. And the rites performed on those weekly days of worship are obviously different. Each, too, has its own annual celebrations. Other visible differences - especially among the devout - are their attire or their daily observances. All such practices emphasize that each is a different religion - vigorously defended and often fought over to the death.

But probe further and we find surprising similarities.

More of the Same

Each has its version of 'heaven and hell' - not markedly different from one another. The foundation for these teachings is the age-old - but utterly false - notion that man has an 'immortal soul'. Death is not the end, but the beginning of eternity. For Islamic martyrs this may be in paradise. For new Christians it means heaven - or hell if you fail to measure up to divine standards. Judaism holds the conflicting doctrines of resurrection and the soul's immortality - with the 'disembodied bliss of the soul as the ultimate state to which the righteous will attain'. The Roman church - the largest new Christian denomination - encourages prayer to and for the 'souls of the departed'. After death the faithful are admitted to heaven, perhaps after a suitable purging of venal sin in Purgatory. Few of Protestant persuasion do not believe in 'heaven or hell'. The notion of an immortal soul is virtually universal. It is the original lie, subtly spoken by Satan: "*You will not surely die*" (Genesis 3:4).

Bible Truth

Whatever you may think of the Bi-

ble, even a superficial reading sets the religion of Jesus apart from all other faiths. Remember that according to the Scriptures God does not change in His fundamentals. Consider the following:

- divinely revealed worship pinpoints the *seventh* day of the week - Saturday - as His weekly day of worship. Not Friday, not Sunday. The Sabbath, not Sunday, was observed by the New Testament church
- the Bible gives precise guidance as to when Christians meet for *annual* festivals: Leviticus 23 outlines the seven divinely-inspired annual festivals. There's evidence that these, based as they are on the harvest seasons, were observed from the beginning of human history. There is also clear evidence that they were observed by Jesus, the apostles and by the early church. There is no instruction to observe Easter, Christmas, saints days *etc* - imports from idolatry. Indeed these are treated negatively in the Scriptures
- there is no hint in the Scriptures of the concept of an 'immortal soul' except to brand it as a Satanic deception - a lie. The twisted doctrines of *heaven* and a *fiery hell* derive from this false notion. So, too, prayers to - and for - the dead, the assumption to heaven of Mary the mother of Jesus, the idea of purgatory, all contact with 'the other side' through mediums *etc*
- the notion that everyone who isn't 'born again' will burn for eternity in hell-fire is negated by the sane Biblical teachings
- the Christian Bible finds no room for the perception of God as a 'trinity' - a belief often considered as an identifying sign of a Christian, and one which derives from non-Biblical religions

So - a yawning chasm of differences which place modern Christianity alongside all other non-Biblical faiths. However, there is no doubt that the ethical teachings of the Bible have, through Christian influence, had a civilising effect on nations, on religions and on individuals. 'My Word', says God, 'will not return to me void, but shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it' (Isaiah 55:11). Christian missions have sent the Scriptures winging to nearly every corner of the world.

The Great Deception

But there is also a mountain of similarities which brand the 'new Christianity' as part of Satan's great deception. From the earliest days of Christianity dark forces were at work to distort the true Gospel. The apostle Paul - and others - wrote about it: "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6). But it's not obviously different, he says: "...which is not another" (v.7). Twice he states that whoever preaches any deviation from the message Paul taught was 'accursed' (vv.8, 9). It is perverted (v.7). And to the Corinthians he writes: "If he who comes preaches

another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted - you may well put up with it..." (II Corinthians 11:4). Another Gospel. Another Jesus. Another spirit.

Jesus, according to the apostle John (John 1:9), is 'the true Light that gives light to every man that comes into the world'. These false apostles - preachers - bring a false Gospel. They use 'Christian' terms: Jesus, Spirit, Gospel, repentance, baptism, light. It is, in other words, a subtle deception. Paul again: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

It's only by an open-minded, prayerful and diligent study of the Scriptures that we can determine which God we worship. Accept the teachings of these false apostles and you may share their destiny. **Ω**

Festival Revolution?

For centuries the weekly and annual festivals appointed by the Creator for His people have been observed by a tiny minority of Christians. Indeed many of the latter have been persecuted—even martyred—by the established churches for rejecting the 'holy days' instituted by the established church. It has been almost universal Christian practice to substitute worship days derived from the pagan cultures around them.

It is refreshing to note that many Christians are now turning to the observance of the Bible holy days. One Christian organization now attracts Christians from several denominations to Jerusalem each year to observe the annual *Festival of Tabernacles*. It is an eight-day assembly (held in the autumn) for worship, fellowship and Bible teaching.

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**The story of Jesus begins
December 25, AD1...
Or does it?**

The Western - and increasingly worldwide - belief is that Jesus Christ came into the world December 25. The date is annually celebrated as *Christmas* - a festival no longer confined to the Christian faith. Indeed it is fast becoming a universal celebration. The date is disputed, for many believe the correct time is earlier in the year - around September. [Request the article *The Feast of the Nativity*] The Jesus history, however, has a much longer pedigree prior to his nine months in the womb.

Human Birth

The life of Jesus is well documented, and even the arch-enemies of Christianity recognize him as a real flesh-and-blood person. You need to be pretty dumb not to recognize his birth in first century Palestine among the Jewish people - whatever your opinion of his mission. And that he gave his name to one of the world's major faiths, with over two billion calling themselves 'Christian'. There is more evidence for his existence than there is for Julius Caesar and many other historical figures!

That may not sound surprising - a run-of-the-mill pregnancy that happens multiple millions of times yearly. What happens next makes the difference. Notice this: '... Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been be-

...the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin who had been betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And entering, the angel said to her, Hail, one having received grace! The Lord is with you. You are blessed among women! And seeing this, she was disturbed at his word, and considered what kind of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, Do not fear, Mary, for you have found favor from God. And behold! You will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you will call His name Jesus' (Luke 1:26-31)

trothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 1:18). No sexual relationship was involved, but Jesus was the direct son of the Father acting by His Spirit. Jesus, in other words, had a pedigree stretching back

through eternity. Do we have any evidence for that?

Only a tiny fraction of mankind has ever denied the reality of 'God' - however He may be understood. Only a self-existing eternal Spirit could bring into existence a material creation. The nature of that Being is variously portrayed in the traditions and scriptures of different faiths. The most logical, clearest, understandable account is in the Hebrew Bible - the Old Testament - and expanded in the Christian New Testament. It provides the direct words of the Creator conveyed by mediators.

God Invisible

The Eternal God who stands behind His creation is described in the Christian Scriptures as *Father*. That's how Jesus (the Son of God) describes Him, prays to Him, instructs us to pray to Him, worship Him: '...So, then, you should pray this way: *Our Father who is in Heaven*' (Matthew 6:9). As children of God, 'sons and daughters', it is natural that we, too, so address Him. The perfect Father - that's His unchanging character.

God, however, has never been seen by human eye: '...No man has seen God at any time' writes the apostle John (John 1:18). Not only so, but '... the Father that sent me, he has borne witness of me. You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form' said Jesus' (John 5:37). That leaves us with a conundrum, for Adam and Eve '...heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day' (Genesis

Jesus - a history

3:8). The people of Israel heard the 'voice of God' (Deuteronomy 4:33). Moses desired to see God but was told: '...You can not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live'. (God graciously allowed Moses an obscured glimpse - Exodus 33) Time and again 'God spoke' to nations, prophets, priests and people. What, then, is this 'voice'? Who did they see? Who appeared time and again through the millennia to men and women?

Visible God

At certain times, we're told, God spoke to His prophets - who recorded His message. We don't know how; an inner voice, an audible sound, a sensation? At other times, however, we are told He - under various names - 'appeared'. Notice Moses' encounter with God (Exodus 3). We are told that God (v.4) spoke to him from the burning bush. This (v. 2) was 'the angel [messenger] of the LORD' (Heb JHVH, or Jehovah).

Numerous appearances of 'the LORD' to mankind are recorded in Scripture - to Abraham, to Isaac, to Moses, to all Israel, to Balaam, to Gideon, to Solomon. In New Testament times to Joseph, to Zacharias (father of John the Baptist), to Saul (Paul). Clearly this 'messenger' - JHVH - fully represents the Father, and was totally at one with Him.

To judge by his actions he exercises all the Father's power and authority. He it was who was sent to assess and judge a world that had corrupted itself, and sent an obliterating flood (Genesis 6). He judged the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah - and destroyed them (Genesis 19). It was He who engineered the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It was JHVH who exercised judgment on the House of Israel and the House of Judah. He inspired the prophetic writings - and conveyed through them the promise

unsigned articles are by the Editor

of a Deliverer and Saviour. Said Isaiah:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this' (ch 9:6-7)

'God', then, is presented in Scripture as a unity - a unity of thought, a unity of action, one Spirit. There is the Father - immortal, invisible. Then there is His interface with the physical world, His messenger, His Spokes-person - also named JHVH, also God, the Word ('...and God said'). By JHVH-Elohim the physical creation was created. All God's personal dealing with man was in the name of JHVH-Elohim (Genesis 1-2).

Fulfilment

In the unveiling of the divine plan God was to become one with humanity: '*...the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel'* (Isaiah 7:14). Immanuel - 'God with us'. The

prophet Micah (late 8C.BC, a contemporary of Isaiah) adds: .

'...But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting [from eternity]. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travails has brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God

(Micah 5:2-

The prophesied Ruler - the Anointed, the Messiah - was, says Micah, '*from eternity'*, but was to be born of a woman of Judah. The century prior to the Christian era bubbled with anticipation of the

Shiloh '*The sceptre [rulership] shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come'* (Genesis 49:10). Historically, Judah was the dominant Israelite tribe, and the prophecies indicate Messiah would be born from it. *Shiloh* is variously interpreted but can refer to 'one sent'. It is universally recognized as a reference to Jesus; when he came Judah's rulership waned and, as Jesus predicted, ceased to exist as a nation. The Scriptures repeatedly tell us that Jesus was sent by the Father.

immanence of the long-awaited Messiah. And not only in Judaea - for he was expected widely, and at that time. The prophet Daniel predicted the coming of Messiah; Jesus came precisely on Daniel's timing (Daniel 9:24-27). The Magi from Persia, for example, shared the expectation and searched for '*the King of the Jews'* (Matthew 2:2); it was a term synonymous with '*Messiah'*, and they knew where to look for him.

Moses, too, foretold the coming of a future prophet. The apostle Peter quotes him: '*A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall you hear in all things whatsoever he shall say to you'* (Acts 3:22).

The editor of Deuteronomy - probably Ezra (5th C BC) - tells us: '*And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face'* (ch 34:10). Jewish commentators refer this to Messiah. But no-one in history other than Jesus of Nazareth reflects Moses so precisely. He fulfilled the multitude of predictions concerning Messiah, and is none other than the incarnation of JHVH, the promised seed of the woman who would '*bruise the Serpent's head'* - and ultimately destroy him. Ω

Wisdom For A Dying World

"Owe nothing to any one except mutual love; for he who loves his fellow man has satisfied the demands of Law.

For the precepts, "THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," "THOU SHALT DO NO MURDER," "THOU SHALT NOT STEAL," "THOU SHALT NOT COVET," and all other precepts, are summed up in this one command, "THOU SHALT LOVE THY FELLOW MAN AS MUCH AS THOU LOVEST THYSELF."

Love avoids doing any wrong to one's fellow man, and is therefore complete obedience to Law. Carry out these injunctions because you know the critical period at which we are living, and that it is now high time, to rouse yourselves from sleep; for salvation is now nearer to us than

when we first became believers.

The night is far advanced, and day is about to dawn. We must therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness, and clothe ourselves with the armour of Light.

Living as we do in broad daylight, let us conduct ourselves becomingly, not indulging in revelry and drunkenness, nor in lust and debauchery, nor in quarrelling and jealousy. On the contrary, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for gratifying your earthly cravings" (Romans 13:8-14) Ω

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Course. It's a key to what
is for many a
'Book of Mystery'

The early centuries of the Christian church were riven by fierce dispute regarding the nature of God. Is God a “trinity”?

Our human perception of the nature of God in no way affects the reality. God is what He is no matter what anyone believes! He probably chuckles at the varieties of belief - but undoubtedly gets pretty angry at the violence of the protagonists. Christians through the centuries have literally tortured and killed in support of their particular trinitarian view. And today scorn is heaped on any professing Christian who denies “The Holy Trinity”.

Of course no-one, whatever view he or she holds about God,

has any thought of disrespect for Him. All are trying to express their understanding of the Scripture teaching, and few hold “unorthodox” views from malice. So it is at least uncharitable to self-righteously condemn all who differ from a trinitarian view! This is especially true in face of the large volume of scholarly objections to the orthodox concept.

Objections

The doctrine “bristles with difficulties” writes pro-trinity Louis Berkhof (*Systematic Theology* p.82). He points out the “deficiencies” of early writers on the doctrine - including Tertullian, Origen. It’s not until Augustine (d.430AD) that we have what modern protagonists of the trinity would deem acceptable! Yet controversy continues to this day. It remains “a mystery beyond the comprehension of man” (p.89)!

Divinity Of The Spirit

The existence of “the Holy Spirit” is universally accepted by Christians of every persuasion. What is in dispute is the nature of the Spirit, and the relationship within the Godhead.

Whatever that nature and relationship, the Holy Spirit is divine and

personal. The Spirit is an integral part of the Godhead. It’s our view, however, that the Scriptures are unambiguous that the Spirit does not have any separate “bodily” existence - the commonly-held and misunderstood lay view of the trinitarian doctrine. There’s the Father, there’s Jesus and there’s the Holy Spirit. And somehow the three are one. A mystery!

In essence, the Holy Spirit is God’s “persona” - by which He acts throughout the universe. By analogy, in human terms we talk of a “powerful personality”, by which the

individual exerts influence by his or her very presence. It is the force of the human spirit. God’s Spirit is of course holy, perfect, infinitely powerful and everywhere present. God, through the Spirit, can perform any action - move a mountain, for example, in answer to prayer! - without a “physical presence”. It’s the way Jesus Christ, now located in heaven at God’s right hand, carries out on earth the work He did in His human body. As Paul writes, “The Lord [ie Jesus Christ] is that Spirit” (II Corinthians 3:18).

The terms used in Scripture of the holy Spirit confirm this. They don’t lend themselves to a person but to an influence, a dynamic force: baptized by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, quench the Spirit.

Trinitarian Texts

This “mystery beyond comprehension” isn’t very evident in the text of Scripture. Indeed the only ‘clear’ verses are laughed out of the text by theologians. Take, for example I John 5:7, rarely included except as a foot-note in modern translations. It’s “an insertion” (*Berkeley*). “Added in late MSS of the Vulgate” (*New International*). “Clearly a gloss and

rightly excluded from the RSV even in the margin” (*New Bible Commentary Revised*). “The best authorities do not consider it to be part of the original text” (*SPCK Commentary*). “Not the shadow of a reason for considering them genuine” (Alford: *On the New Testament*). It is “the only passage speaking of tri-unity”, say Protestant scholar Louis Berkhof.

Source

Noted textual scholar F H A Scrivener writes: “We need not hesitate to declare our conviction that the disputed words were not written by St John: that they were originally brought into Latin copies in Africa from the margin, where they had been placed as a pious and orthodox gloss on v.8: that from the Latin they crept into two or three late Greek codices, and thence into the printed Greek text, a place to which they had no rightful claim” (*Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 1883, 3rd ed).

Judgment on this text is summed up by Wm Cunningham: “...most Trinitarians now admit that there is a decided preponderance of critical evidence against the genuineness of I John 5:7” (*Historical Theology* v.2 p.216).

Matthew 28:19

There can be little doubt that this text, too, “*baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” is an early spurious gloss on the original form of words used in baptism - “*in my name*”.

Wrote F C Conybeare: “In the course of my reading I have been able to substantiate these doubts of the authenticity of the text of Matthew 28:19 by adducing patristic evidence against it so weighty that in future the most conservative of divines will shrink from resting on it any dogmatic fabric at all while the most

enlightened will discard it as completely as they have its fellow text of the Three Witnesses [I John 5:7] And "...of any other form of text [Eusebius] had never heard until he had visited Constantinople and attended the Council of Nice" [*Hibbert Journal*, 1902].

The *Acts of the Apostles* gives us a photo-fit of the practices of the primitive Christian community. There we find that baptism was done '...in the name of Jesus'. The use of 'the three-fold name' is now recognized as a late doctrinal expansion. "The facts are, in summary, that Eusebius [church historian of the early 4th century] quotes Matthew 28:19 twenty-one times, either omitting everything between 'nations' and 'teaching', or in the form 'make disciples of all nations in my name', the latter being the more frequent" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*).

The only 'clear Biblical evidence' for a view of God as a 'trinity' collapses under the weight of historical judgment. It arrived very late in Christian theology, and can be traced in the teachings of the inspired apostles only by reading into them concepts that derive from sources other than the Scriptures.

Consequences

While all human views of the Godhead are seen "through a glass, darkly" - and in no way affect what the Godhead is really like - yet acceptance of a non-Biblical view can have serious consequence. The truth frees us. Embracing error in one doctrinal aspect distorts other teaching. How we perceive the nature of God affects our understanding of the Scriptures.

For example, a narrow trinitarian concept of God blinds us to the clear and breathtaking Bible teaching that man can become - through the same indwelling Holy Spirit - a part of the divine Family. If God is a closed "trinity" - a pre-Christian and unbiblical notion - how can mere humans become part of the divine Family, His children? How can we come to be in the *very image* of God? How can God, as Paul wrote, "...become all in all"?

Another adverse consequence of trinitarian belief seems to be the un-Christ-like urge to persecute - historically to the point of death - or ostracize all who reject it! Certainly Christians who reject it - and on

strong Biblical evidence - are often branded a 'cult' and excluded from Christian facilities.

It is remarkable that most protagonists for a trinitarian view of God are in the forefront of a whole package of other unbiblical doctrines. In general they accept the non-Biblical days of worship - Sunday, Christmas, Easter *etc.* They embrace the false notion of an immortal soul, confusing their hearers by teaching that they have an "immortal soul" yet also preaching a bodily resurrection. They frighten by teaching the pagan notion of an eternal ever-burning hellfire for the wicked, and deceive by promising the unbiblical notion of "going to heaven" at death.

By contrast, where a Biblical concept of the Spirit is held, such false teachings are likely to be firmly rejected. And human destiny is recognized as becoming, truly and fully, "*sons and daughters of the Almighty*".

While respecting other "guesses" at the nature of God, we strive to express what we perceive to be the Bible view. Ω

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MiniStudy**Is Jesus God?**

As famously noted by a past US President, clarity often hangs on word meaning: "It depends what the meaning of 'is' is". Perhaps surprisingly it is pertinent to the answer to our title question

- Controversy surrounded the life of Jesus of Nazareth from birth. The circumstances of his birth were mysterious. His early life was unique. Certainly so, too, were the circumstances of his death. And it didn't end there. Even the apparently simple question *Who was he?* follows Jesus to this day.
- The battle-lines are drawn along the lines of *Is he God - or man?* The established church of the fourth century thought they could bury the question - much debated until then - at the Council of Nicea. Overawed by the Emperor Constantine a compromise was decided - Jesus was *both God and man*. However illogical that may seem it is present orthodoxy.
- The history of Jesus pre-dates his conception. Only in recent years has the true story become confused. Theology has long equated Jesus with the LORD of the Old Testament - *Jehovah* (JHVH), the true *Elohim*. He is presented to us as 'The Word': *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'* (John 1:1). That is, Jesus was fully God and perfectly at one with the Father - co-existent with Him
- In the New Testament we also learn that Jesus was the interface with the Father's creation, the intermediary by which the unseen Father created the Universe: *'For by him 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'* (Colossians 1:16-17). As LORD Jesus sustained the Father's creation: *'You even you, are LORD alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and you preserve them all'* (Nehemiah 9:6). To Him the Father has committed all His dealings, at this time, with His creation: *'[the Father] has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man'* (John 5:27)
- The divine purpose of creation is to enable mankind to become part of the Family of God. Before creation (before sin entered) God provided a way to reconcile us to Himself - through His Son (Ephesians 1:4-6). The LORD relinquished His divine status and powers: *'Christ Jesus...Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men'* (Philippians 2:6-8). According to Paul *'...God sent forth his Son, made of a woman'* (Galatians 4:4)
- That woman was Mary . She said *'...from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things'* (Luke 1:48-49). The *'great things'* are recorded by Matthew: *'...Mary had been betrothed to Joseph. Before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit'* (ch 1:18). It was the fulfillment of an ancient divine prophecy: *'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us'* (v.23, Isaiah 7:14)
- Jesus *'... took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it [was necessary for] him to be made like unto his brethren'* (Hebrews 2:17), and he *'...was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin'* (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus, writes Paul, was *'... born of the seed of David according to the flesh'* (Romans 1:3). He was fully human
- But Jesus is also called *'Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us'*. The Spirit of God physically engendered him and, as with all Spirit-begotten children since his resurrection, Jesus was indwelt by the Father - though from his conception (John 14:11, 20). Though he encountered temptation Jesus never once transgressed the divine Law, never - unlike us (Romans 3:23) - fell short of the glory of God. Jesus never sinned and thus - by virtue of his divine origin - he became the perfect atonement for all of mankind (I Peter 2:22, Hebrews 5: 7-10). While on earth Jesus was totally at one with the Father: *'I and my Father are one'* (John 10:30), and *'...I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me'* (John 8:28)
- The evidence for this can be summed up in the words of the apostle Paul: *'...[Jesus] was made 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'* (Romans 1:3-4). The status of Jesus as the Son of God was powerfully and irrefutably demonstrated by his resurrection from the dead - the truth of which was witnessed by many hundreds (I Corinthians 15:5-8)
- At His resurrection Jesus was restored to his divine status, authority and powers: *'God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'* (Philippians 2:9-11) (*Ephesians 1: 17-23, Colossians 1:15*). Now, exalted at the right hand of the Father *'...in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily'* (Colossians 2:9) Ω

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