

The Unity Series

One Lord

Aiden, Chris, and Phoebe:

May the little fire of your oil lamp shine in the darkness.

Don't be discouraged by those who call Jesus "Lord, Lord" but do not love his sheep. He said that things would come to this. Your job is simply to feed the flock, follow his footsteps, and proclaim his message— together.

Mom & Dad
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One Lord

I. Above the controversy

The Lordship Controversy¹ of the late 1980s and early 90s was a pointed battle of words in the Church. It was epitomized in books written by professors from the Dallas Theological Seminary on one side, and John MacArthur of *Grace to You*² on the other. The issue at stake was whether people can be saved by simply accepting Jesus as Savior, or whether they also need to accept Jesus as Lord. The Dallas position was that we only need to receive Jesus as Savior, while MacArthur argued that people must accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The controversy coincided with the Church Growth movement. Thousands of Evangelical congregations, most notably in South Korea, Latin America, and Western and Southern Africa, following so-called “innovative” methods for outreach, were exploding with numerical growth. Lots of contemporary music ministries were born and evangelism became a priority³ for thousands of congregations around the world. Their commitment was to follow the example of mega-churches like the *Misión Carismática* in Colombia.⁴

•...whether people can be saved by simply accepting Jesus as Savior, or whether they also need to accept Jesus as Lord.

¹ You can find a fair reflection on what these discussions were about at <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Articles/2263>. To understand what was at stake, another helpful website is http://davcarson.home.mindspring.com/Intertestamental/Lordship.htm#_edn15. You will also find more at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lordship_salvation_controversy.

² *Grace to You* is the name of MacArthur's radio and Internet teaching ministry. Since 1969 and as of November 2014, he has been the Senior Pastor at Grace Community Church (Sun Valley, California). He is also president of The Master's College (Newhall) and The Master's Seminary (Sun Valley).

³ Even worship became highly evangelistic. Christian musicians began to write songs which made the Gospel more palatable for what Christians called “seekers.” Rock, rap, and even metal came to churches so that anybody could enjoy music that was familiar to them. The old hymns all but disappeared while the Church became as “seeker-friendly” as possible, attracting people through entertainment.

⁴ Two well-known U.S. mega-churches of those times were Willow Creek in Chicago and Saddleback Church in Saddleback Valley, California. The biggest Church in the world was located in South Korea, pastored by Paul Youngi Cho. The book that most accurately defines the mega-Church philosophy is *The Pur-*

While most Church leaders were desperately searching for ways to present the Gospel in the easiest way possible, John MacArthur wrote a book called *The Gospel According to Jesus*,⁵ a comprehensive argument for an evangelism that demands more than a simple prayer of faith. In it, MacArthur proved through the Bible that a person is not really converted until they are firmly committed to obeying Jesus as Lord.

To his credit, MacArthur confronted head-on the cheap evangelistic techniques of the time. God used him to cause many of us to reflect more deeply on what it takes to truly be saved. The following excerpt from one of his articles⁶ will give you a feel for Pastor MacArthur's style:

•...a person is not really converted until they are firmly committed to obeying Jesus as Lord.

• *Jesus is Lord* is the distinguishing article of Christianity.

• Saving faith and Christian discipleship have been reduced to the cliché 'a personal relationship with Jesus.'

Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3) is the distinguishing article of Christianity and marks the essential confession of faith (Romans 10:9). Jesus proclaimed it to his disciples, his enemies, and his casual inquirers alike—and he refused to tone down its implications.

The expression 'Lord' (*kurios*) speaks of ownership, while 'Master/Lord' (*despotes*) denotes an unquestionable right to command (John 13:13; Jude 4). Both words describe a master with absolute dominion over someone else...

... Saving faith and Christian discipleship have been reduced to the cliché 'a personal relationship with Jesus.' It's hard to imagine a more disastrous twisting of what it means to be a Christian. Many people (including Judas and Satan) had some kind of 'personal relationship' with Jesus during his earthly ministry without submitting to him as Lord...

Slavery to Christ is not a minor or secondary feature of true discipleship. It is exactly how Jesus himself defined the 'personal relationship' he must have with every true follower (John 12:26; 15:20).

pose Driven Church, by Rick Warren.

⁵ Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988, 1994.

⁶ This is from an article MacArthur wrote called *The Distinguishing Mark of Christianity* retrieved on May 17, 2014 from <http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/grace-to-you/read/articles/distinguishing-mark-of-christianity-10316.html>.

A. One verse says it all

What can we say about the Lordship Controversy except that it never deserved to be a controversy at all! Why was it ever debated in God's Church? If it passed you by, you didn't miss a thing. The entire argument should have been brought to a screeching halt with Colossians 2:6, a passage which proves that the only way to receive Jesus is receiving him as Lord. There is no other way.

... just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him (Colossians 2:6).

So according to this passage, if you think that you have received Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord, you are deceived. You haven't ever really had him as your Savior at all. You have never been saved from your sins. Poor soul—you haven't even started the Christian life!

Reflect upon Colossians 2:6, please. Not only does it say that receiving Jesus as Lord is the only manner we can receive Christ, it also says that it is just as necessary to persevere with Jesus as our Lord. That is to say, we have to continue on in the same submission to Jesus we start with.

With regard to whether Jesus has to be our Lord or not, the next question we need to answer is "When exactly do we start the Christian life?" There is much disagreement about this in the Church, but the Bible is straightforward enough: You begin your Christian life at baptism. Since you enter into the New Covenant through baptism, that's when you become a Christian.

Now—follow the logic here—because you commit yourself to live in obedience to Jesus in baptism, your baptism is the moment Jesus becomes your Lord. That's the start of the Christian life. That's your initiation into salvation. Count on it—Jesus will test that baptismal commitment. First of all, he requires you to recertify it in the Lord's Supper.

Yes, Jesus tests our faithfulness to the New Covenant every time we eat and drink the Lord's Supper. Every time you participate in the Lord's Supper, you need to present a clear conscience to God. If you take the Lord's Supper while you are sinning, you are breaking the covenant. You have failed Jesus' litmus test—and that's serious. The price is high for covenant breakers: sickness or death!

•...the only way to receive Jesus is receiving him as Lord.

•...we have to continue on in the same submission to Jesus we start with.

•...your baptism is the moment Jesus becomes your Lord.

B. Children of God

So does God really expect us to maintain a lifestyle of obedience to Jesus? Yes he does. But God does not force us into obedience. Rather, he elicits our obedience the way a father firmly but lovingly elicits obedience from his children: Through the hope of rewards and the fear of punishments.

The father metaphor brings us to another issue, and it's this: Before anybody presumes that God is their Father, they have to know whether or not they have received Jesus as Lord yet. The sad reality is that most people today who call themselves Christians are not really children of God yet. Remember, there are millions of church goers who entered church communities either through reciting a prayer of faith or by answering an altar call at an evangelistic meeting.

This next passage teaches a truth that many so-called "Christians" never got when they first "got saved": To become a child of God, you first have to receive Jesus as Lord.

• To become a child of God, you first have to receive Jesus as Lord.

... to all who did receive him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:11-13).

Read the passage slowly and you'll see that Jesus gives us the right to become children of God in a very clearly-defined chronological order. It is our right to be children of God only after we receive Jesus as Lord.⁷ That is, you can't be a child of God until your receive Jesus as your Lord.

C. In covenant

You must receive Jesus as Lord to enter into the New Covenant—but the covenant is an issue that most of today's pastors overlook completely. In fact, one major thing that both John MacArthur and the Dallas Seminary men ignored in their debate is that your entry into the New Covenant is not by means of a prayer at all,⁸ but through baptism in Jesus' name.

•...your entry into the New Covenant is not by means of a prayer at all, but through baptism.

⁷ This is precisely the reason why we must be baptized in Jesus' name for God to grant us a new birth in the Spirit. Water baptism must come before the baptism of the Spirit. That's God's order, not our suggestion. First you have to get cleansed from your sin, then the power of holiness (the Holy Spirit) will come upon you.

⁸ Both camps, the lordship proponents and those who stood against lordship as a requirement for salvation were basically arguing about how to lead people in the

If they had understood that in the first place, there would have been no Lordship Controversy at all. Anyone who knows what the New Covenant is about won't have any doubts as to whether they must be submissive to Christ or not. There's nothing to debate. Covenants are lifelong commitments, and baptism is a commitment to submit to Jesus for the rest of our lives. Case closed.

God offers us no other way of salvation—the only way is through a covenant with him. Does that sound new to you? It shouldn't. That's the way God has *always* worked. Just

•...baptism is a commitment to submit to Jesus for the rest of our lives.

so-called "sinner's prayer" (an evangelistic prayer popularized by Billy Graham) which goes something like this (we got it from the web-page of The Billy Graham Institute):

Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. Please forgive me for my sins. I believe that you died and rose from the dead for me. Right now I receive you as my personal Savior.

So the two groups were basically debating about whether the prayer should finish with "I receive you as my personal Lord and Savior" or just "I receive you as my personal Savior."

We would argue that a prayer falls way short of what God requires for salvation anyways. It's not a matter of whether people say a prayer or not. Each repentant sinner must enter into the New Covenant through baptism, crying out for God to give them a good conscience. God won't respond to a person's faith unless that person believes with all their heart.

... they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?' Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may' (Acts 8:36-37).

... baptism [is]... the pledge of a clear conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21).

If someone insists that they need to say a prayer, and the Holy Spirit is leading you to help them, then have them repeat one when they are standing in the waters of baptism (and not a moment beforehand). You can direct it to Father God with words similar to these:

Dear God, I need you to cleanse me from my sins. Let them be nailed to the Cross as I am baptized now. I renounce my sins, dying to my old self so that I can live a new life for you. I want to be buried with Jesus right here and now. I haven't understood right from wrong, but now I want a good conscience. Please baptize me in the Holy Spirit so that I might be able to follow Jesus for the rest of my life. In his name I pray. Amen.

God knows the sincerity of every heart, and "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). If you are truly repentant of your sins, believe that your prayer won't fail. If it's based on faith in his Word, Jesus won't disappoint you.

•...God offers us no other way of salvation—the only way is through a covenant with him.

read the stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon—one thing that stands out about their relationships with God is that their relationships were always based upon a covenant with him.

Every person seeking eternal life, every “seeker,” should be informed from the start that Jesus insists on a covenant which consists of water, blood, and Spirit. He won’t settle for less.

• Jesus insists on a covenant which consists of water, blood, and Spirit.

... he [Jesus] took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the New Covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you’ (Luke 22:20).

Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom⁹ of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit’ (John 3:5).

For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement (1 John 5:7-8).

The only way to be saved is to make a solemn pledge to God that you will keep a clear conscience for the rest of your life. Only Jesus can help you to be holy—nobody else. That’s why the only way we’ll keep a clear conscience is committing ourselves to Jesus as Lord. We make that commitment through baptism.

•...the only way we’ll keep a clear conscience is committing ourselves to Jesus as Lord.

Baptism is how you ask God for a good conscience. It washes you from your old sins and shows God that you fully believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

... baptism ... now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21).¹⁰

We will look further into the New Covenant in the books *One Body* and *One Baptism*. For now, it’s enough for you to know that Jesus demands water baptism for salvation. The fact that he demanded it proves that he insists on being our Lord. If

•...Jesus demands water baptism for salvation.

⁹ Since the Kingdom of God is a place and the rules of English grammar are to capitalize a place that has a name, we capitalize this word in our book. We do the same for Hell, Heaven, Paradise, and Hades. Most of the time we also capitalize the word *Earth*. It is, after all, a place and *Earth* is its proper name.

¹⁰ The LEB translation says

... baptism now saves you, not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience.

you want forgiveness, Jesus demands that you surrender your life in complete submission to him.

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved... (Mark 16:16)

D. A fallen house

Quite frankly, it's inconceivable for us that someone who calls himself a Christian would take the time to argue against submitting to Christ's lordship—but that's exactly what the Dallas doctrine¹¹ inspires Christians to do. It should be embarrassing for us that the issue was ever even debated—but you don't see many Christians embarrassed by it at all.

That raises another issue: The fact that a debate about whether Jesus is Lord or not even exists proves how absolutely apostate Christianity has become. Put differently, if a large portion of the Church argues *against* the lordship of Jesus, the Church has already fallen into apostasy!

If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand (Mark 3:25).

How can the Church stand if it resists its own Lord? Even today, decades after the Lordship Controversy, the Church continues to be a house divided. But it's not only divided—it has split over one of the seven basic truths of Christianity—the truth of the Church's One Lord! If we're not sure whether Jesus has to be Lord of all Christians, or if he's Lord of just some of them, then we have no real spiritual unity. Without One Lord to bring Christians together, there simply is no unity in the spirit. Any unity we have is just superficial—consisting of the tag *Christians* and the songs we sing.

The Church today is like a ship that has been assembled with glue. It has a nice appearance, but it won't weather a storm. And a storm is most certainly on the horizon for us. When the storm starts, the modern Church will sink. The time of Tribulation follows the current Apostasy. But we do not need to fear. Know Jesus as Lord, and he will make you stand.

... it is time for judgment to begin with God's household (1 Peter 4:7).

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¹¹ This expression was coined by the late Dr. James M. Boice of 10th Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.

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• ... if a large portion of the Church argues *against* the lordship of Jesus, the Church has already fallen into apostasy!

• ... the Church... has split over one of the seven basic truths of Christianity...

II. Salvation through obedience

Try to find one historical record of a Christian denomination which has taught that Jesus does not have to be obeyed. If there ever was such a group, it has not gone down in history books as being Christian. Salvation through obedience to Christ, what Paul called “the obedience that comes from faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26) or being “obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7) has been the standard doctrine of the Church throughout its history—until now.

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Charles Swindoll, an American preacher who has been popular from the 80s up to the time of the writing of this book, is a proponent of today’s watered-down Gospel. He argues against what he calls “human performance” in salvation. By that, he means to tell us that actions do not affect your salvation, not even actions you perform in obedience to the Lord Jesus! Pastor Swindoll said this:

A theology that rests its salvation on one ounce of human performance is not good news, it is bad information. It is heresy. It is antithetical to the true message that lit the spark to the Reformation: *Sola fide*—faith alone.¹²

A. Did he say *heresy*?

Is it indeed heresy to include human performance in our salvation? Pastor Swindoll¹³ teaches that man does absolutely nothing (he said not “one ounce” which is 0%) and God does 100% of what pertains to our salvation—but is he right? If salvation is salvation from sin (and the Bible says

¹² Swindoll, Charles R., *The Grace Awakening*, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990, p. 86.

¹³ To prove how grave the situation is in the Evangelical Church, we should quote John MacArthur here as well. Regrettably, he has the same views as Charles Swindoll on the issue of works. He said:

Any religion on the planet that doesn’t believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is a religion of works. It’s a religion where you make a contribution to your salvation (Retrieved on May 31, 2014 from <http://www.christianpost.com/news/john-macarthur-on-the-jesus-you-can-t-ignore-40230/>).

that that's exactly what salvation is), then Pastor Swindoll's concept of salvation is that God defeats sin in our life and we don't need to exercise even the slightest bit of human effort to maintain that victory. We don't have to struggle to overcome sin's power because God did it all. Could salvation be that easy? Could his popular teaching be true? It wasn't Paul's approach:

Do you not know that those who run in the stadium all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes exercises self-control in all things. Thus those do so in order that they may receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Therefore I run in this way, not as running aimlessly; I box in this way, not as beating the air. But I discipline my body and subjugate it, lest somehow after preaching to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; LEB).

Dr. Swindoll's fundamental error is the same as the one you'll find in around 90% of Protestant and Evangelical preachers nowadays: He denies the role of works in salvation.¹⁴ He dutifully quotes Martin Luther's pet doctrine of

¹⁴ The error goes like this: Like the Calvinists and the Muslims, the "free grace" Evangelical Christian teachers want to appear to be the people who most glorify God. It's an ego trip. The Calvinists think that they are the only ones who really believe that God is sovereign (they insist that there is no human will involved in salvation). Calvinists actually have the same sin as the Muslims—believe it or not! Muslims have convinced themselves that they are the only monotheists on the planet, so they're on an ego trip too. They think that they're the only ones who believe that God is sovereign, just like the Calvinists.

As we said, the free grace Evangelical Christians are constantly fighting a battle of words, insisting that only God saves. They consider themselves to be the defenders of this holy doctrine, defending it from "heretics" like us, who teach otherwise. We're not the only "heretics" though. If anybody who speaks with free grace Evangelical teachers involves any bit of human effort to the equation of salvation, he is deemed a heretic.

But here's our question for them: Isn't our salvation all about us working with the strength that God gives? What of Philippians 2:12-13? Can they explain it for us? It says:

... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act.

As followers of a man who came in the flesh but who walked in the Spirit, we proclaim our doctrine with the utmost confidence: We need to work to be saved. Jesus has already set the standard. That standard is acting by faith in God. We

• Could salvation be that easy?

• Isn't our salvation all about us working with the strength that God gives?

• The Bible says the opposite of Martin Luther!

sola fide (faith alone) which will get him an easy amen from anyone who's not Catholic, but how can he deny this fact: The Bible says the opposite of Martin Luther! The Bible says in black and white that salvation is not by faith alone:

... a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24).

What will people who enjoy quoting Luther do with James 2:24? They can ignore it. They can twist it and bend it. They can try to convince us that the Greek says something else—we've heard them preach that way. Yet another fact remains even after they've mistreated the verse all they want: There is nothing in the Bible that says anything different from that verse. The Bible never says that salvation is by faith alone.

• The Bible never says that salvation is by faith alone.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was working together with his works, and by the works the faith was perfected... You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

• Jesus exemplifies the balance between human effort and dependence on God.

just preach Jesus and his example says it all. Jesus exemplifies the balance between human effort and dependence on God. He loved God with all his strength. Paul discovered the work-faith balance of Christ's example, and made it his own lifestyle, saying:

I labor, striving according to his [Jesus'] power, which mightily works within me (Colossians 1:29; NASB).

James demonstrated that he followed the same approach to life when he said:

... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:17).

The whole free grace Evangelical debate is just a giant ego trip. Don't fall into their ego-trip trap. The free grace Evangelicals are trying to show themselves theologically superior to others, especially the Roman Catholics who insist that works are part of salvation. If the free grace preachers open their eyes, they'll see that they're not only contending with Catholics, they're contending with the Bible.

We can avoid their trap by not debating with them at all. But if you must debate with them, try using the "wise guy" answer of James. James had to deal with the free grace people of his time, and he did so by giving them a challenge:

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds (James 2:18).

Put differently: "Talk as much as you like—it is impossible to show someone your faith without deeds. Actions speak for themselves—and what my actions speak of is faith!"

And likewise was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by a different route? (James 2:21-22, 24-25; NASB).

B. What kind of works?

As we said, Pastor Swindoll's error is a very common one among Christians. The error lies in their interpretation of the NT term *works*. They take it to mean human performance, but it does not always mean that. In fact, the NT *works* passages they utilize (to say that we don't need to do anything to be saved) are not about human performance at all. The passages which contrast faith and works have a theme: The difference between the OT and NT covenants. The context is covenants, not actions. When those passages speak of works, they mean the works of the Law. In those passages, *works* is not about doing good deeds, but about the rituals the Old Covenant demanded. Here's one example:

... no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the Law (Romans 3:20).

Now, what has happened ever since the Protestant and Evangelical Church has so vehemently denied the role of works in salvation? Countless numbers of Christians have become lazy. They see no purpose for doing good works because they think that faith will be enough to get by—and *faith* for them means *mental assent*. Faith is something that happens unseen. It happens in their minds and hearts, not in their hands and feet.

The Evangelicals will point to Jesus and say "He has done it all," convinced that they are glorifying him, but with those same words they deny him. How so? They deny his authority over them! They reason in their minds: "If Jesus has done it all, I don't need to do anything. I don't even need to obey him," so they end up actually denying that Jesus is Lord in the very same breath they point to the Cross. How is that a denial of Jesus as Lord? The very reason why Jesus handed himself over to be crucified was to give us an example of using our bodies to glorify God. He did it to motivate us to be *fervent* for good deeds! The power of our actions is in following Jesus' example.

•...the NT *works* passages they utilize (to say that we don't need to do anything to be saved) are not about human performance at all.

•...they think that faith will be enough to get by—and faith for them means mental assent.

•"If Jesus has done it all, I don't need to do anything. I don't even need to obey him."

... [Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14; NASB).

What is missing from the Church these days? A sense of covenant. The great majority of church-goers have no clue as to what our commitment even is under the New Covenant. Do they dare to take the bread and the cup in their hands without understanding what commitment that entails? Unfortunately, many of them do. They think that Christ will coexist with sin, but Jesus will not live in someone who is practicing sin. He will not give his Spirit to someone who is living in sin.

Jesus is faithful to Christians, but how is he faithful? Not by being our “fire insurance.” His role is not to make sure that we don’t go to Hell, no. Do you think that saving us from Hell is Jesus’ commitment to Christians? It is not. Rather, Jesus is faithful to us in that he fulfills his part of the covenant. And what is Jesus’ part in the New Covenant? He intercedes for us before the Father. He makes sure that our sins are covered with his blood—but only the ones we confess! Your commitment to Christ is confession: that means keeping a clear conscience. You confess your sins to him daily. Jesus’ commitment to you is to get God’s forgiveness for the sins you confess.

Furthermore, under the New Covenant, Jesus is to be obeyed just as the Jews were to obey Moses under the Old Covenant. Jesus is the Lord of the New Covenant. Are you in it? Are you doing your part? If you do not obey Jesus, then you should not take the Lord’s Supper. But if you don’t take the Lord’s Supper, then have no life. You are dead. You are not a Christian.

C. Willful disobedience

If Christians willfully disobey Christ, then they have broken their covenant with God—which is obviously a very serious matter. Heavy punishments are likely around the corner. They don’t need to despair though. There is still hope for them if they repent. And they must repent because they are at great risk of slipping away. They must act quickly.

• Your
commitment
to Christ
is con-
fession...
Jesus’
commitment
to you is to
get God’s
forgiveness
for the sins
you con-
fess.

•...under the
New Cove-
nant, Jesus
is to be
obeyed...

If we deny him [Jesus], he also will deny us; If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:12-13; NASB).

If we confess our sins, he [God the Father] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Look at what happens to Christians who take the sign of the covenant into their hands and consume it *without* a clear conscience. In the case of the Corinthian church, the brothers who did not have a clear conscience were the rich members of the church. What was their sin? They were not being charitable to the poor brothers and sisters. Paul chastised the rich Corinthians with these words:

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord [Jesus], we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world (1 Corinthians 11:28-32).

The ones in Corinth were the lucky ones. Their covenant with God was not nullified, Jesus only punished them with illness and death. Sound horrible? That's light compared to eternal condemnation. And yes, Christians who go back to practicing sin get eternal condemnation. Any Christian whom God corrects, but who willfully continues to sin, violates the terms of the New Covenant. The only thing awaiting that stubborn brother is a fiery judgment.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

•...what happens to Christians who take the sign of the covenant into their hands and consume it without a clear conscience...

•...Christians who go back to practicing sin get eternal condemnation.

Anyone who rejected the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29).

You may ask: “Are there any Biblical examples of people who got close to eternal life, but who turned back to sin?” The answer is yes, Judas and Esau. Jesus chose Judas to be his apostle and to reign with him. Judas would have been a prince in the Kingdom of God. Esau was the heir of the blessings of his father Isaac, including the promise of the inheritance. He was going to inherit the Promised Land—the land that God promised to his grandfather Abraham.

But here’s their sin: Both Judas and Esau considered the promises of God to be less important than what the world offered them. Judas selected silver over salvation, and Esau loved lentils more than land, the promised land his father and grandfather sought so diligently.

• Judas selected silver over salvation, and Esau loved lentils more than land.

... woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him [Judas] if he had not been born (Mark 14:21).

See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done (Hebrews 12:16-17).

The preachers who say that sin is not so bad give people the idea that God allows it. Because those pastors do not demand holiness from God’s people, they deny Christ. They deny him by denying his example. It’s as if our Lord Jesus lived in holiness for nothing.

These men are also denying Jesus’ role as Lord. How so? Because they don’t fight sin in the Church. By not fighting sin in the Church, they place little value on Jesus’ com-

mandments. Ignoring his commands is equivalent to denying that Jesus is Lord. It's like saying that he doesn't have to be obeyed. It's like saying that he has no authority.

Worse off, because these pastors at one point knew the Lord Jesus Christ, were redeemed by him, and were set free from sin, their turning back to sin makes their lost condition all the more grave. Their final condition becomes worse than the previous one. Why? Because they get a lot more hard-hearted, having been so close to the truth, but then having so stubbornly opposed it.

... there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them...

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them (2 Peter 2:1, 20-21).

There's still one more passage that talks of these same folks and their miserable condition, and we want to share it with you. Notice what it says below: It says that they have gone beyond repentance. They have passed the point of no return. Because they have turned away from so much, it is impossible to bring them back!

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance (Hebrews 6:4-6).

• Ignoring his commands is equivalent to denying that Jesus is Lord.

• Their final condition becomes worse than the previous one.

• ...they have gone beyond repentance.

D. Apostasy

1. Good for nothing
2. Common sense
3. Stumbling blocks
4. The starting point

The only way to make heads or tails of the Lordship Controversy is to recognize that modern-day Christianity is apostate—it has deviated very far from the original apostolic faith. If it were just sickly, there would be a cure. Nevertheless, it is beyond sickly. The Church has a terminal illness—a highly-invasive cancer. How apostate is it? The Church has drifted so far from the teachings of the apostles that it has denied its One Lord!

• The Church has drifted so far from the teachings of the apostles that it has denied its One Lord!

1. Good for nothing

We do not lay all of the responsibility for the Apostasy on the false teachers—demons are responsible too. Demons are the ones who inspire the deviant doctrines we hear in churches today. These lying spirits promote false doctrine because they know that false teachings will have the most destructive effect on Christians. They are spreading their ideas even more forcefully in these later times.

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons (1 Timothy 4:1).

These shrewd demons attempt to mislead God's people—and they do it most effectively by contradicting the Christian faith. In other words, they steer believers away from the truth by undermining fundamental doctrines. As they destroy the foundations of Christian doctrine (and they're doing a fine job of it currently) the Church loses its holiness and power. It stops being what God designed it to be: the foundation of truth.

•...they steer believers away from the truth by undermining fundamental doctrines.

... the Church of the living God [is] the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

The aim of demons is to deactivate the power of the Church. They want us to become useless. It's a serious matter for the Church to be as weak as it is now, because the people of the world have no hope of salvation if there is nobody to preach

truth to them. Jesus warned us that if we lose our effectiveness in preaching the Gospel, we will be good for nothing. Then what will happen? He will cast us out.

You are the salt of the Earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot (Matthew 5:13).

2. Common sense

If a Bible verse won't convince us, common sense should be enough to get us to understand that obeying Christ is what makes a person a Christian. Think about it on a purely commonsensical level: How could anyone be called by a name to which they owe no obedience? Should someone who ignores the principles of Marx be called a *Marxist* or should someone who doesn't read Calvin be called a *Calvinist*? If a Buddhist is called so because he follows the teachings of Buddha, why would someone be called a *Christian* if he is not even a follower of Christ?

Christian is not even supposed to be a name we call ourselves anyways. It should be a name others call us. It should be a name we earn. The idea is to live such holy and Christ-like lives that people call us Christians. They will only do that if they observe that our lives closely resemble the life of Jesus. *Christian* originally meant "a follower of Christ."

... for an entire year they [Barnabas and Paul] met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

Would Jesus accept my claim to be a Christian if I am not willing to submit to him? Will it help me to get any extra acceptance from him in judgment? We'll let Jesus speak for himself on the matter:

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:37-38).

•...if we lose our effectiveness in preaching the Gospel, we will be good for nothing.

•...obeying Christ is what makes a person a Christian.

•How could anyone be called by a name to which they owe no obedience?

• Why would the Church ever even imply that obedience to Jesus is not necessary?

The whole Lordship Controversy is a shameful blight on Christian history: Why would the Church ever even imply that obedience to Jesus is not necessary? It's so hard to get believers to obey in the first place—why would a teacher in the Church ever give repentant seekers the slightest reason to question any of Jesus' commands? That would be self-defeating. It wouldn't be... well, natural.

... anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven,¹⁵ but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:19-20).

Today's pastors are often afraid to challenge people to holiness the way Jesus challenged people. Worse off, most of these pastors don't accept Jesus' challenge for themselves. Don't they want to be great in the Kingdom? If they want to be great, Jesus has defined the way to be great: They'll have to practice his commands and teach those commands to others accordingly.

3. Stumbling blocks

Why would we ever weaken a person's commitment to Christ knowing that that kind of commitment requires such an intense internal struggle? To weaken a person's conscience is to fly in the face of Christian love! It's what the apostles called placing a *stumbling block* before someone. In the case of a weaker brother, two entire chapters of the Bible have been written to warn us against putting stumbling blocks in someone's way.

•...how wrong it is to encourage a believer to act against their conscience...

If you do not understand how wrong it is to encourage a believer to act against their conscience, you would do well to read Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 14. They're too long

¹⁵ Since *Heaven* is a place and the rules of English grammar are to capitalize a place that has a name, we capitalize this word in our book. We do the same for the Kingdom, Hell, Paradise, and Hades.

to include in our book, so some excerpts from those two chapters are included here:

... make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister... if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died... Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.

All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall (Romans 14:13-15, 20-21).

... if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall (1 Corinthians 8:10-13).

4. The starting point

So respecting your brother's conscience is essential for Christian love—you probably already knew that. But did you know that the conscience is really important for another reason? We are supposed to evangelize non-Christians through their consciences.

The *conscience* is the starting point from which we begin to reach unbelievers. God confronts their sinful behavior by pricking their conscience. Then and only then does he bring them to repentance. On the day of Pentecost, the people who heard Peter's message were "pierced to the heart"

• The *conscience* is the starting point from which we begin to reach unbelievers.

when they heard that God had made Jesus Lord. Just like they did, someone whose conscience is pricked today will ask you: “What do I have to do to be saved?”

[Peter preached at Pentecost] ‘God has made him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.’ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ (Acts 2:36-37; NASB).

‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household’ (Acts 16:30-31).

Do you have a ready answer for the seeker who asks you how they can be saved? The apostate church would say: ‘Do nothing, just believe in Jesus.’ And that’s precisely why churches are filled with people who have done nothing, do nothing, and will continue to do nothing. We say (to people who have heard the Gospel) the same thing that Peter said: “Repent and be baptized.” We tell them:

•...churches
are filled
with people
who have done
nothing, do
nothing, and
will continue
to do nothing....

Turn from your **sins**. You know what they are. Be **cleansed** from them. Enter into a **covenant** with God through baptism. Make Jesus the **Lord** of your life by **obeying** him.

Biblical evangelism starts with the conscience and concludes with baptism. It’s all about speaking the truth in love. If people have a sensitive conscience, they might open their hearts.

... we do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 4:2).

III. Lord since when?

The Bible says that God made Jesus Lord. Have you ever asked yourself when precisely that happened? When did God make Jesus Lord?

God... made this Jesus... Lord (Acts 2:36).

In order to really comprehend what it means for Jesus to be the Lord, we have to investigate how he got such an honor—or should we, like the great majority of so-called Christians, just suppose that Jesus has always been the Lord? No, we shouldn't take the blind approach. If we are honest with ourselves, we won't.

Instead of blindly believing that Jesus has always been Lord, accept this challenge: Try to pinpoint the precise moment in history when Jesus became Lord. In this section of the book, we'll look back as far as we need to discover when Jesus became Lord. Our confidence is in God and in his Word, the Holy Scriptures. We are confident that if we can get a handle on who Jesus was in the past, we will come to understand why he is the Lord he is today.

• Try to pinpoint the precise moment in history when Jesus became Lord.

A. A shallow Church

Now, be aware that the topics covered in this section are not covered in any books you'll get from a Christian book catalogue. You won't find them featured on any church websites. You won't see any videos about them on YouTube. To see how these topics are debated, you'll have to go all the way back to 325 AD, to the Council of Nicaea. You won't find them discussed anywhere in today's shallow Church.

The issue churches debate today which comes closest to the One Lord doctrine is the Lordship Controversy we already studied. However, the main concern of those who are involved in the Lordship Controversy debates is how a person can be saved. We won't focus on that issue here. We're going to focus on something much more important than your salvation: We're going to focus on fundamental doctrine. Get it straight, and you will be saved!

Do you know the One Lord or not? To really know Jesus, you don't study whether he needs to be Lord or not. That's

• Knowing how Jesus became Lord

the Lordship Controversy focus: whether I need Jesus to be the Lord of my life or not to be saved. That's not a way you're going to get to know Jesus. If you want to get to know him, you study how Jesus became Lord. Knowing how Jesus became Lord is the knowledge that will save our souls.

•...today's Church...is so worried about evangelism that it has almost completely neglected sound doctrine.

Let's worry about saving our own souls before we invest so much energy in saving others. One of the great faults of today's Church is that it is so worried about evangelism that it has almost completely neglected sound doctrine.

•...they take it for granted that Jesus has always been Lord.

Another great error in Christian churches today is that they take it for granted that Jesus has always been Lord. Christians dare not investigate further than what they are taught: That Jesus is the "second person" of the Holy Trinity. For Christians in this day and age, that vaguely means that Jesus is the same as the Father. Those who have studied some theology might go on to say that Jesus is *co-equal* and *co-eternal* with the Father (two terms that Trinitarian teachers throw around), but these Christians would be hard-pressed to actually explain to somebody what those words mean.

•...Christians today are clueless on the issue of how Jesus became Lord.

Mentally stripped of any ability to discern the difference between Jesus and the One God, Christians today are clueless on the issue of how Jesus became Lord. In fact, it is a non-issue for them because Trinitarianism cancels it out. Trinitarianism nullifies the issue of how Jesus became Lord because for a Trinitarian, Jesus is completely united with the Father. For them, Jesus is part of their version of the One God, which is what they call *the Godhead*; meaning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

•...God intended for the example of how Jesus became Lord to be the very inspiration of our lives.

Trinitarians could care less about researching how Jesus became Lord—but we can't be like them. We have to care about this issue. How Jesus became Lord must be a supremely important issue for us. Why? Because God intended for the example of *how* Jesus became Lord to be the very inspiration of our lives. We will have no reason be good and, by doing so, to strive for our own glory if Jesus didn't strive for his glory. His struggle is meant to inspire us to obtain the same great prize. Jesus' victory over sin, the world, and the Devil is God's light to guide us through temptations.

... one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me Heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).

B. God made Jesus Lord

1. A fundamental doctrine
2. Exalted for a reason
3. God's fullness
4. Lord plus
5. Back in time

The general consensus among Trinitarians is that Jesus' position as Lord is a given. He has always been God so he always has been Lord, they reason. What they say would be true if Jesus was the One God, but he's not. We can't say with the Trinitarians: "Jesus is God so that *automatically* makes him Lord." We can't take it for granted that Jesus has always had complete authority, power, and a divine nature. To see why we can't take it for granted, consider these questions:

- With regard to "always having authority," what **authority** did Jesus have when Joseph and Mary brought him home as an adolescent and he "went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them" (Luke 2:51)?
- With regard to "always having power," what **power** did Jesus have when he was a fetus in Mary's womb?
- With regard to a divine nature, what **nature** did Jesus have when he was dead for three days? Didn't he have a **mortal** human nature?

We already saw one passage of Scripture which unequivocally teaches that the One God made Jesus Lord. That means that Jesus is not Lord as some say "because he is God." Rather, the One God made Jesus Lord. If he made him Lord, then God did it at a specific moment in time. What was that time? What was that key moment in history?

• Jesus is not Lord as some say "because he is God."

1. A fundamental doctrine

Although we have yet to meet a pastor who preaches it today, “God made Jesus Lord” was a fundamental doctrine of the Early Church. It was boldly proclaimed by Peter as the finale of his Pentecost sermon. His concluding words worked like a stab right into the heart of his audience:

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this:
God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36).

No less than 3000 people were convicted of their sins and brought to repentance when they heard those words! They were then baptized on the spot. So “God has made Jesus Lord” was a very powerful truth when the apostles preached. Does it feel powerful to you today? It should—but it probably doesn’t. That’s because you and I are part of a generation which has been blinded. We don’t see the importance of God having made Jesus Lord.

2. Exalted for a reason

“God made Jesus Lord” is stated again in another very important passage which we would like you to read very carefully below. Notice that it says that God exalted Jesus with the objective that everyone would recognize that Jesus is Lord. When did that exaltation take place exactly? Right after Jesus was resurrected.

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name that¹⁶ at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

3. God’s fullness

Now, here’s another challenging passage: It says that God felt great satisfaction placing his nature, authority, and glory (i.e., all God’s fullness) in Jesus. Now, if that “fullness” first belonged to God, at what point in time did God share it with Jesus?

¹⁶ This word “that” is a very important word in the passage. It means “so that.” It works in the sentence as a conjunction between two clauses, leading us to the reason why God exalted Jesus. And what was that reason? That everybody should recognize that Jesus is Lord.

...that “fullness” first belonged to God.

... [Jesus] is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus]... (Colossians 1:18-19)

Does the passage tell us why God actually had all of his fullness dwell in Jesus? Yes, it does. Notice the words “Jesus is... the firstborn from among the dead, so that...” The “so that” means that Jesus was resurrected for a reason. The resurrection happened so that Jesus would have supremacy.

•...Jesus was resurrected for a reason.

4. Lord plus

We have successfully identified the time when Jesus was made Lord then. God exalted Jesus when he raised Jesus from the dead. That is to say, Jesus became Lord at his resurrection.

•...Jesus became Lord at his resurrection.

But that’s not all that happened to Jesus when he was resurrected. A lot more happened:

- He was appointed to be **Judge** of the living and the dead.
- He was seated at **God’s right hand**.
- God placed **everything** under Jesus’ feet.

We glean this information from the two passages below:

He [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42).

... [God] seated him [Jesus] at his right hand in the Heavenly Realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the Church (Ephesians 1:20-22).

As if that wasn’t enough, God also appointed Jesus to be “head over everything.” Sounds pretty important, doesn’t it? It is. It’s very impressive—but there’s more. God also set Jesus above all angels, prophets, and apostles. God calls them Jesus’ *companions*.

You [Jesus] have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions (Hebrews 1:9).

Then God made Jesus our High Priest.

... no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was. In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’ (Hebrews 5:4-5).

In case you haven’t yet realized how great Jesus’ role of High Priest is, consider this: There has never been a heavenly High Priest until Jesus ascended to God’s Throne. That means that there has never been anyone in Heaven to help us with God until now. No one has ever been given the honor of interceding for us before God until now! No one was there to facilitate the forgiveness of our sins—until Jesus went to Heaven. Now there is someone there for us!

So, there’s a lot to chew on if you’re going to really assimilate the things God did in Jesus at the resurrection. It’s almost too much, isn’t it? To meditate completely on the verses we have shared with you here, you would need a few days, so let’s sum things up. In brief, what exactly happened when God resurrected Jesus? In the simplest terms: God made Jesus Lord. If that doesn’t sound like much, it’s because you’ve got to understand how much *Lord* means!

5. Back in time

You have just seen undeniable Biblical proof that God established Jesus as Lord. The scriptural evidence proves that Jesus was established as Lord at his resurrection—fine, but there are more questions to be answered:

- Wasn’t Jesus Lord **before** the resurrection?
- If he was made Lord at the resurrection, does that mean that he was **not** Lord before the resurrection?

•...there has never been anyone in Heaven to help us with God until now.

•...let’s sum things up... In the simplest terms: God made Jesus Lord.

If we want to know Jesus Christ well, we'll have to dig deep and explore these questions. Our method in this section of the book will be to go back in time, starting from eternity past, and to ask ourselves systematically:

- Was Jesus Lord **before** Creation?
- Was Jesus Lord **at** Creation?
- Was Jesus Lord in the **Old Testament**?
- Was Jesus Lord when he was a **baby**?
- Was Jesus Lord when he was a **boy**?
- Was Jesus Lord when he was a **full-grown man**?

Answering these questions will get us to the root of an issue that most people never even consider: the source of Jesus' authority. Congratulations to you if you have accepted the challenge to study it—but don't get discouraged along the way. Lots of so-called "Christians" oppose this kind of study. If you are able to discover where Jesus' authority came from, you will understand why he is Lord. You will be able to answer the great question "Why is Jesus Lord?" You will know Jesus in a way you never thought you could before. Do you want to?

I want to know Christ—yes... (Philippians 3:10).

... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

C. Before the Beginning

1. Another world
2. What Jesus made
 - a. Which heaven is which?
 - b. Demons in the heavens
 - c. All things reconciled
 - d. A public spectacle
 - e. A strategy for the Church
 - f. Things never made
3. What Jesus didn't make
 - a. If it wasn't Jesus...
 - b. Where Jesus works
 - c. Jesus the Maker
 - d. God the Source

•...go back in time, starting from eternity past.

• If you are able to discover where Jesus' authority came from, you will understand why he is Lord.

4. The little we know
 - a. Not the One God
 - b. God loved Jesus
 - c. Jesus made the angels
 - i. Created before Creation
 - ii. Imagine there's a Heaven
5. Status unknown
 - a. How low can you go?
 - b. What you're going to find
 - c. Alpha and Omega
 - d. When Jesus was established
 - e. Worthy of our trust
 - f. More than he was before

Genesis 1 is the logical starting point for researching Jesus' role as Lord—but it's actually not the best place to begin. Although Genesis 1 describes the time called *the Beginning*, there was a time that existed before the Beginning. Yes, the Bible reveals what was going on even before the Creation.

•...the Bible reveals what was going on even before the Creation.

The Beginning (described in Genesis 1) is the Beginning of this World, but there was another world before it. If you read closely, you'll realize that the Scriptures drop us some big hints about a time and place that existed before Creation. Here's one passage that gives us one of those hints:

... when Christ came as High Priest... he went through the greater and more perfect Tabernacle that is... not a part of this Creation (Hebrews 9:11).

1. Another world

The Greater Tabernacle is “not a part of this Creation”? If it's not, then what is it a part of? Here we have a Bible verse of immense importance. Why? Well, it proves that a place exists outside of the world we live in! A place exists beyond what astronomers or astrophysicists refer to as *the cosmos*. That is to say, we live in the Universe, a place the Bible calls “this Creation,” but there is another place beyond it. Wow.

•...a place exists outside of the world we live in!

Now, we don't really need a revelation from the Bible to confirm this truth. Anybody should be able to make the

deduction that a place exists outside the Universe. It only takes common sense to make that deduction. Isn't it pretty logical that God wouldn't have lived alone in some dark void before the World was made?¹⁷ Sure it's logical. But still, to have a Bible passage actually refer to that place—a place that predates the Universe—confirms common sense.

What's more, with the passage at hand, we can affirm with confidence that what some Bible teachers¹⁸ suggest was emptiness, was actually a time and place. It had to have been a time and place if it contained a building—the “greater and more perfect Tabernacle”—wouldn't it?

In other words, before this World was created, the Heavenly Tabernacle was already standing. Now, we'll have you know that the Heavenly Tabernacle is no trivial place: We're talking about the very abode of God—the place where God Himself dwells.¹⁹

And don't disregard this fact: that the Tabernacle not only existed before the world was created, it still exists today! In fact, Jesus is working there now! It's his place of employment. Jesus works there on our behalf, interceding for us as our High Priest—so we're talking about a really important place.

But we're drifting off the subject when we talk about what

¹⁷ To think so is to have a low view of God. It restricts him to our concept of time. It smacks of human pride, making “poor God” sound lonely without us, as if he needed us to keep him company. The truth is that God wants us to be with him, but he would be fine without us. Weren't there millions of angels with him before the Creation? Wasn't he together with the One he loved? If you don't already know who we're speaking about, we are referring to the One who prayed to God saying “You loved me before the foundation of the World” (John 17:24), Jesus.

¹⁸ For example, Tyndale publishers printed *The Action Bible* (a picture Bible for children; Cook, 2010) which starts with these words: “In the beginning there was nothing, just God,” and the illustration they give is darkness surrounding a bright light—the light representing God. So they're telling children that God dwelt in the midst of nothing? Hebrews 9:11 proves that this lamentably common Christian conception is false.

¹⁹ Do you want to catch a glimpse of what God's abode is like? It's much more wonderful than you could ever imagine. If you haven't done so yet, prayerfully read about it in Ezekiel 1:4-28; Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, and Revelation 4:2-11. If you want to see a video that depicts Ezekiel 1 Biblically, watch <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vq3uOwUxqKs&feature=related>, which was still available when I last checked on February 28, 2014.

•...God wouldn't have lived alone in some dark void before the World was made.

•...before this World was created, the Heavenly Tabernacle was already standing.

• We're talking about the very abode of God—the place where God Himself dwells.

•...the Tabernacle not only existed before the world was created, it still exists today!

•...there
was another
world before
Creation.

Jesus is doing there. The main idea is this: Supported by Hebrews 9:11, we can state with confidence that there was another world before Creation. There had to be another world because a building existed. The building had to be located in a place and time—and it definitely wasn't the place or time that we experience here and now (because the place and time we experience now hadn't been created yet).

2. What Jesus made

• Jesus
made ev-
erything in
this Uni-
verse—ev-
erything!

So we sustain that Jesus made everything in this Universe—everything! That is to say, it was Jesus who created all the things that Genesis 1 says were made:

- the heavens²⁰ and the Earth (v.1)
- the light (v.3)
- the sky²¹ (v.8)
- the land and the sea (v.10)
- vegetation (v.11)
- two great lights (the sun and the moon)
- and the stars (which would include the other planets; v.16)
- every creature of the sea
- and every winged bird (v.16)
- the livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, horses, etc.)
- the creatures that move along the ground (reptiles/snakes, amphibians, crabs, insects, etc.)
- and the wild animals (lions, monkeys, elephants, etc.; v.24)
- as well as **mankind** which was male and female (v.27).

²⁰ This includes “the heavens” up to where the stars are located, but does not include the place where God abides, the Third Heaven. Read on in the main text to see what we mean: The expression “the heavens” only includes the atmosphere and space.

²¹ The NASB translates this as *firmament*, a more classic English term than *atmosphere*.

It was Jesus [although he was called *the Word*, he was the same person he is now] who made all of that! It would be nice to pause a little and to reflect on the greatness of what Jesus has done, wouldn't it? [*Try that here if you wish.]

Our Lord Jesus was there in the Beginning with God, working as God's General Contractor. Moreover, the Bible says that Jesus is the Creator of things visible and invisible. That is, there are things man has never seen (like Hades and certain thrones) and Jesus made them too, just like he made the visible things.

God the Father gets the credit for Creation most of the time in the Bible—Jesus did the actual handiwork, but since it was God's idea to make the World and God equipped Jesus with the power to create, God deserves the primary credit. At any rate, Jesus was following orders when he made everything. Jesus was like a Contractor, as we already said. If you think that it's unfair to give God the primary credit for Creation, consider how even in architecture, due recognition is always given to the architect, head engineer, and designer—and God is all that in the case of the Universe—over the contractor.

- God equipped Jesus with the power to create.

a. Which heaven is which?

Now, there is a point to clarify about the *heavens* that Genesis 1:1 says Jesus created. When we speak of the *heavens*, that includes the highest heavens in the Universe—up to the furthest star—but it does not include the place where God lives.

- When we speak of the *heavens*... it does not include the place where God lives.

You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the Earth and all that is on it, the seas, and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of Heaven worship you (Nehemiah 9:6).

You can see from this passage that “the highest heavens” contain stars. You can also see that the term *Heaven* is used in the singular at the end of the verse. The *Heaven* at the end of the verse is a place where great numbers of angels are worshipping God. It is the *Third Heaven*.

Now, understand that the term *the heavens* in Genesis 1 means the same thing it does in Nehemiah 9 (given here),

• the atmosphere and space *heavens*

just as it does in many other passages. It means the atmosphere and space *heavens*. It does not mean the Heaven where God abides. If the term *heavens* did include the place where God abides, then Genesis 1 would be saying that Jesus is the maker of the Kingdom of Heaven. That couldn't be true—at least not for God's Throne and Tabernacle which are there. Don't forget: They are things which are not a part of this Creation.

But when Christ came as High Priest... he went through the greater and more perfect Tabernacle that is... not a part of this Creation (Hebrews 9:11).

At this point you may feel a little confused, so let's take it slowly: There are three Heavens. Genesis 1 only describes the first two heavens:

- The First Heaven is the atmosphere. Some Bibles call it the **firmament**.
- The Second Heaven is **space**. That's where the sun, moon, and stars are located.

You probably have never thought of this before, but the *Third* Heaven is not described in Genesis 1. Try to get this point (it's a little difficult): The *highest heavens* do not include the Third Heaven. The highest heavens are the highest places in space, like the furthest star or the most distant galaxy. However, the Third Heaven is beyond those stars and galaxies. It is beyond the highest heavens. If have been able to follow our logic so far, please read on:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the Third Heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows (2 Corinthians 12:2).

• The highest heavens do not include the Third Heaven.

•...the Third Heaven is where a Paradise is located...

Paul goes on to say that the Third Heaven is where a Paradise²² is located (2 Corinthians 12:4), and—more importantly—it's where you find God himself. Whoa, yeah. God

²² We say *a* Paradise and not just *Paradise* because there are at least three paradises described for us in the NT. This Paradise we're mentioning here is different from the "the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7) which is in the New Jerusalem and another Paradise which is located on the cool side of Hades (Luke 23:43).

dwells there.²³ We know that God is in Heaven because Jesus taught us to pray to “Our Father who is in Heaven” (Matthew 6:9; NASB), right? Furthermore, when Solomon prayed to God, he spoke about “... Heaven, your dwelling place” (1 Kings 8:30)—although you probably don’t need Bible verses to confirm the fact that God is in Heaven, do you?

Moving on, you find in Colossians 1:15 the proof that although Genesis 1:1 says that Jesus made *the heavens*, those heavens do not include the Third Heaven. Colossians 1:15 tells us that Jesus made all things “in the heavens and on Earth” (NASB). Now, the idea behind *heavens* in Colossians 1 is the same as it is in Genesis 1—the atmosphere and space. Again, these two places together are called *the heavens* (plural) for a very simple reason: because there are two of them (the Second and Third Heavens). We have yet to find a verse in the Bible where the term *heavens* includes the Third Heaven. The Third Heaven, therefore, is not the atmosphere or space.

To better understand the *heavens* (the ones mentioned in Colossians 1:15), notice what you’ll find there. The Bible says that you will find

... thrones... powers... rulers... [and] authorities (Colossians 1:16).

Isn’t that interesting? To assist your understanding, we want to give an overview of the spiritual hierarchy you can find in the heavens (the atmosphere and space). According to what it says in Colossians 1, this hierarchy should be understood in the light of the following facts:

²³ We believe this, but we also affirm that God cannot be contained by any heaven. For example, not even the most distant place in the Universe, the most distant star (billions and billions of miles away) could impose a limitation on the greatness of God. And if the Second Heaven (space) isn’t big enough for your imagination, try this: God will not be contained even by the Highest Heaven (i.e., the Nehemiah 9:6 heaven we discussed on p. 31). As Solomon asked:

... will God really dwell on Earth? The heavens, even the Highest [that means’ the limits of space] Heaven cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built (1 Kings 8:27)!

Do we share Solomon’s concept of God? Let’s remember that although he dwells in a place called the *Third Heaven*, he’s not going to distance himself from us. On the contrary, his plan it is to come to Earth so that he can dwell with us! Wow.

•...although Genesis 1:1 says that Jesus made *the heavens*, those heavens do not include the Third Heaven.

•...God cannot be contained by any heaven.

- **Jesus** established the spiritual hierarchy.
- He did this at some point slightly **before** the Creation of man.
- Jesus intended for the hierarchy to **benefit** man.
- **Good angels** had the thrones, powers, rules, and authorities.
- Their job was to **administer** God's Creation properly.

b. Demons in the heavens

So there you have a detailed description of what Jesus put in the heavens as he created the Universe. Then something tragic happened: When God kicked the rebellious angels out of the Third Heaven, they descended to the Second Heaven (space), the First Heaven (the atmosphere), and planet Earth itself. Since then, those evil spirits have taken control of the thrones, powers, rules, and authorities. That's a historical event all people should be aware of, isn't it?

What do demons do with these positions of authority today? They control people through religions, idolatries, philosophies, magic, and socio-political ideologies. They have effectively taken control of the World. Their leader is the Devil himself. Now you know why Satan has been given the title *the Prince of this World* (John 14:30).

It sounds kind of chaotic, doesn't it? That's what it has become, but don't forget that these thrones, powers, rules, and authorities were originally created by and for Jesus (Colossians 1:16). Just because demons have won battles and have taken the thrones, powers, rules, and authorities doesn't mean that they will keep them. In fact, they won't! The authority inherent in the positions demons have today is from God. God is permitting the current situation for a reason: to test our faith.

Eventually Jesus will take the thrones, powers, rules, and authorities back. Eventually the authority inherent in these positions will be distributed among those who have followed Christ. It is then that prophecies will be fulfilled and we will "judge angels" (1 Corinthians 6:3). It is then that we will "judge the world" (v. 2). Our position in the Universe will finally be what God intended it to be: We will have a higher place than the angels.

•When God kicked the rebellious angels out of the Third Heaven, they descended to... space...the atmosphere, and planet Earth...

•...these thrones, powers, rules, and authorities were originally created by and for Jesus...

If you have difficulty waiting for that time, take courage in the fact that Jesus has already won a key battle—and we’re not talking about Calvary. Jesus shook things up in the heavens quite a bit after his resurrection. The thrones, powers, rulers, and authorities haven’t been the same since. We’ll look at that shortly. Hold on, please.

c. All things reconciled

First you should understand something a little more basic. Understand that the things which God will reconcile to Himself through the blood of Jesus by “making peace” with them include these thrones, powers, rules, and authorities. That is, God is going to make peace with the First and Second Heavens. He is going to establish peace in the atmosphere and in space. There is not peace there now. The Bible promise is that “all things, whether things on Earth or things in the heavens” (Colossians 1:20; NASB) which have not yet been reconciled to God, will be reconciled to God through Jesus—you can count on it!

... it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him [Jesus], I say, whether things on Earth or things in the heavens²⁴ (Colossians 1:19-20; NASB).

Now, to really understand the passage at hand, you have to understand that God doesn’t need to make peace with anybody or anything in the Third Heaven—do you agree? Everything and everybody there (i.e., Jesus, the good angels, the Tabernacle, the Throne, the Paradise of God) is already pure. These are already holy and at peace with God. That means that the thrones, powers, rules, and authorities mentioned in Colossians 1:20 which do need to be reconciled to God, and which are spoken of as being in “the heavens,” could not possibly be located in the Third Heaven. We know where they are located—in the atmosphere and in space. They are part of this fallen World. Being part of this World, they have been tainted by sin, and that’s why they need to be reconciled to God.

•God doesn't need to make peace with anybody or anything in the Third Heaven.

²⁴ The literal translation is “the heavens,” which, as we have already seen, means the atmosphere and space. Be careful with dynamic translations such as the NIV which use the singular “in Heaven” here. They are not accurate.

Paul defines these same *all things* of Colossians 1:20 for us even more plainly in Colossians 2. They include “every power and authority” of which Jesus is head (v. 10). Knowing that reminds us that Jesus both created and obtained authority (from God) over this hierarchy at the time of the Creation. They are subject to him. His authority over them is also made apparent by the location of those spiritual forces: They are found far below God’s Throne!

•...the location of those spiritual forces: They are found far below God’s Throne!

... [God] seated him [Jesus] at his right hand in the Heavenly Realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion... (Ephesians 1:20-21).

We know that Jesus is just to the right of God’s Throne. We know that Jesus is in the Third Heaven—what is called in Ephesians 1 *the Heavenly Realms*. Jesus is seated on the same Throne with God up there, and they are *far above* the hierarchy Jesus established over this world. Got it? That confirms that the thrones which currently belong to demons are found in the atmosphere and in space. Put differently, the Third Heaven is far above the Second and the First Heavens.

d. A public spectacle

Now here’s the exiting news: Satan’s evil forces experienced a great defeat. We mentioned earlier that we were going to describe a key battle which Jesus won—well, here it comes. The Scriptures say that Jesus took away the weapons of Satan’s hierarchy of evil. He obviously didn’t do it on the day he was crucified because he was dead, but the day that Jesus subjected these forces to public humiliation came a little bit later. That victory was based on his triumph on Calvary—it happened not *at* but *by* the Cross.

•...Jesus took away the weapons of Satan’s hierarchy of evil.

... [Jesus] disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross (Colossians 2:15).²⁵

²⁵ Here are some questions and answers for those who want to dig deeper:

• **What were these Satanic authorities’ weapons in the first place?**

Sickness, disease, blindness, paralysis, deafness, muteness, lies, and especially death.

• **How did Jesus disarm them?**

By dying for us on the Cross. Now we don’t have to pay the penalty we de-

Jesus' victory over the Devil's leading forces was impressive. But Colossians 2 doesn't tell the whole story. Jesus didn't want to just humiliate Satan's leading officers publicly, Jesus wanted to take many of them as prisoners. Look at what Jesus did to the demonic rulers during his ascension:

When he [Jesus] ascended on High²⁶ [that means by the time he had already passed through the atmosphere and outer space], he led captive a host of captives (Ephesians 4:8; NASB).

Do you get it? On the very day that Jesus ascended to the Third Heaven, on his way up, he passed through the First and Second Heavens. Now, what exactly did Jesus do on his way up? Our Lord captured a *host* (i.e., an army) of high-ranking demons. Jesus passed right through the dominion from which those wicked angels ruled over the World—passing through the atmosphere and space. He triumphantly went straight through their territory, the King-

• Our Lord captured a *host* (i.e., an army) of high-ranking demons.

serve for our sin, death. Even if the Devil kills our body, we are still victorious because the penalty of death has been removed from our lives—we will still live in our spirits. Furthermore, now that the gift of healing has been given to the Church, we can be healed of any physical sicknesses. “He himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases” says Isaiah 53:4—repeated in Matthew 8:17.

• **When did Jesus make a public spectacle of them?**

First of all, it was only fair that Jesus should make a public spectacle of the demons since they made a spectacle of him on the Cross. The Pharisees and others mocked Jesus as he was hanging there, but Jesus got the last laugh. He took the demonic forces of Satan prisoners and paraded them before the millions upon millions of angels “on High” when Jesus arrived there. [In case you didn't know that it's possible for a demon to even enter the Third Heaven, both Job 2:1 and 2 Chronicles 18:20-21 prove that they are allowed there].

• **How was the Cross a triumph for Jesus against high-ranking demonic forces?**

It was a triumph because his love triumphed over hate, his forgiveness over condemnation, his faith over sin, and his mercy over judgment. It was a triumph because Jesus was tempted in every way, even by the very greatest and wisest of the demonic forces, the Devil—but our Lord did not sin. It was at that moment that Jesus “became to us wisdom from God” (1 Corinthians 1:30), proving that the religious systems, socio-political ideologies, and philosophies of this world are a bluff (they are inspired by demons). None of them can respond to man's deepest need, which is salvation from sin. Look at the Cross and there you will see the One who can satisfy our deepest needs.

²⁶ *On High* is a synonym for the Third Heaven.

dom of Satan, *the Kingdom of the Air* (Ephesians 2:2), and by means of his victory at the Cross, had the power to take these powerful demons as his prisoners. Wow. Make a movie of that!

Jesus did something really great when he passed through the Kingdom of the Air, and his victory is meant to encourage us. We need Jesus' encouragement because although we know that Christ will win in the end, there are still some battles ahead we're going to lose:

- Against the **Apostasy** (i.e., the dry tree)

[Jesus speaking of the ruthlessness of the religious leaders in crucifying him] ... if they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry (Luke 23:31; NASB)?

[the day of the Lord]... will not come unless the Apostasy comes first (2 Thessalonians 2:2-3; NASB).

... the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... (2 Timothy 4:3; NASB)

- Against the **Antichrist**

It was given to him [the Beast from the Sea—the Antichrist] to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him (Revelation 13:7; NASB).

In spite of the setbacks and temporary defeats that lie ahead, we can always take courage in Jesus' victory against Satan's hierarchy—not only because he showed them who is Boss, but also because of the fact that he actually got to his destination: the Third Heaven. Jesus was able to pass through their dominion victoriously, without any opposition. Now he is our High Priest in Heaven.

• Jesus was able to pass through their dominion victoriously.

Since we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession (Hebrews 4:14; NASB).

e. A strategy for the Church

As we said earlier, Jesus really shook things up in the heavens. Can you imagine how nervous the demons who are there today must feel knowing that Jesus already took their predecessors as prisoners? Yikes. Furthermore, Jesus has already, through his promises, actually given us the rule of the World, including authority in those very heavenly places where they are currently ruling.

[God] ...raised us up with him [Jesus], and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus in order that he [God] might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6-7; NASB).

• Jesus has already, through his promises, actually given us the rule of the World.

The fact that the Scriptures promise it makes it as if we are already seated there with Jesus.²⁷ The demons who are currently seated in the heavenly places know who is destined to rule—not them, but us with Christ—and they know that their days are numbered.

[God] ...has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3; NASB).

But the war continues. The Devil keeps fighting. Continuing in his sinister opposition to Jesus, Satan has replaced his former high-ranking officers with other shrewd demons. What do we do in the meantime? Well, we have to continue our Lord's battle—but our victory over them is based on Jesus' victory, which derives its power from the Cross. We are to fight with the weapons Jesus has armed us with: faith, love, patience, and hope. We still have a struggle...

²⁷ Each time in these verses, when it is mentioned that we are seated in the heavenly places, it qualifies that truth by saying "in Christ." Since the marriage between Jesus and the Church is the overriding theme of Ephesians, *in Christ* means that wherever the Groom is, his bride is also (the groom and the bride are one body).

So because Jesus is already seated on God's Throne, far above the other thrones in the atmosphere and space, and we are in a covenant relationship with Jesus, made one body through the Spirit within us—it's as if we were on the Throne with him. All that Jesus has is ours. So those thrones in the *heavenly places* belong to us just as much as they do to Jesus too. As his bride, they are legally ours. They already belong to Jesus, so they already belong to us too. We can lay a legitimate claim to them.

... against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).

•...we should organize ourselves according to Jesus' design for the Church.

But what is the strategy? We are not to curse these evil authorities. We are not to malign them. Instead, we should organize ourselves according to Jesus' design for the Church. We are to be the effective and orderly army God has called us to be.

Christ himself gave [to the Church] the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11).

Jesus has organized his Church in such a way that the four levels of Diabolic authority are dealt with effectively through four corresponding levels of Church authority: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers.²⁸ Look at how the darkness and the light are lined-up against each other:

Satan's Hierarchy	God's Church
rulers	apostles
authorities	prophets
powers	evangelists
spiritual forces	pastor-teachers

f. Things never made

• We're talking about everything that has been made.

So, Jesus made everything—amen, but be careful here: When we use the term *everything* we're not talking about absolutely everything. We're not talking about everything that exists, no. We're talking about everything *that has been made*. That is a really important distinction, so important that the apostle John puts special importance on it in the very first verses of his gospel. Notice what John does there: He qualifies the *all things* Jesus made as those things *that have been made*.

Through him [Jesus] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:2-3).

²⁸ We'll look into this further in the book *One Body*, God willing.

If you read this passage in a reflective way, you have to accept the fact that there are things that exist, but which were never made. Certainly this is a challenging thought for you, but to make it easier, consider things like the Throne of God and the Heavenly Tabernacle. Did you know that they were never actually made? They were not made by Jesus—but that’s not what we’re driving at—they were not made by God either! They simply were not made at all.

So how did they come into being, then? The Scriptures say that the Throne and the Heavenly Tabernacle were *established* by God. We could use a synonym for *established*, since we find one in Hebrews 8:2, where it says that the Tabernacle was *set up* by God. We will look more into how God²⁹ *set up* the Throne and the Tabernacle a little later.

The important thing to understand at this point is that there are things which were never made. To study that matter a little more, let’s go back to Colossians 1, a key Bible passage for understanding Jesus’ role in Creation. We’ve already looked at it briefly, but now we ask you to pay special attention to the words *all things*. They are mentioned no less than seven times in the following excerpt:

The Son is... the firstborn over all Creation. For in him all things were created: things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together... he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him

²⁹ As you visualize God doing all this, please remember that he lives in another place outside of this Creation. That place is called the *Third Heaven*. It is a place we as humans have difficulty comprehending because time is measured differently there.

You’ll recall that “with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8). Reflect on that. It doesn’t mean that there is no time in the Kingdom of Heaven. It just means that time is not measured the way we measure it. Put differently, your wristwatch won’t be of much use there and neither will your pocket calendar.

•...there are things that exist, but which were never made.

•...the Throne and the Heavenly Tabernacle were established by God.

to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on Earth or things in Heaven... (Colossians 1:15-20)

We can deduce from the context that the *all things* in the passage are not all things anywhere, but the things which are part of *all Creation*. Do you see that that's how the idea of *all things* is introduced in the passage—as the things that are part of *all Creation*? If you can, then you have the key to the passage in your hands. Very few Christians have this key in their hands, but it opens our understanding to the reality that there is something extremely vast beyond this Universe we live in. Do you know what it is? It's the Kingdom of Heaven!

• the Kingdom of Heaven

So as we study who Jesus was before the Creation of the world, it's essential for us to understand that the *all things*

- over which he is the Firstborn
- which he will inherit
- which he created
- before which he was
- which he holds together
- and which he reconciled to God

only include things which are part of the Universe. They were created in the Beginning. They do not include the things which existed before the Creation! Those *all things* are not the things that you'll find in the Kingdom of Heaven.

At this point, we highly recommend that you do a straight-forward reading of Colossians 1. If you do, we trust that God will reveal to you that Genesis 1 (i.e., the story of all that was created in the Beginning of this Universe) is the context. Now, if you do read Colossians 1, there are four points directly related to verses 15-20 which you should keep in mind. Here they are:

- The fact that Jesus is the **Firstborn** means that Jesus will inherit Creation. That is to say, all of Creation will belong to Jesus someday. **Firstborn** in the Bible means the one who will inherit that which belongs to his father. Since Jesus wouldn't

ever take God's Throne,³⁰ we shouldn't imagine that the Throne is part of Creation.

- The 'all things' Jesus created to which Colossians 1:15–20 refers seven times all needed to be reconciled to God. That's why it says in v. 20 that God **reconciled** all things to himself through Jesus. It's obvious that the Throne of God and his Tabernacle have never needed to be reconciled to God; so it's wrong to think that they are among the 'all things' of the passage. Once again, we prove that they were not created by Jesus.
- God gave Jesus the privilege of creating things for a reason: **so that** Jesus would have the supremacy in all things. Put differently, being a Creator was an **honor** given to Jesus by God. You'll see what we mean if you pay close attention to how the words "so that" are used in the passage:

... he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus] (Colossians 1:18-19).

•...the Throne of God and his Tabernacle have never needed to be reconciled to God.

•...being a Creator was an honor given to Jesus by God.

³⁰Jesus does not ever inherit nor take for his possession (that's what *inheriting* means) God's throne. Instead, God has given Jesus a *special right*—the right to sit on it with him. They will rule together, sitting together on one double-seat Throne in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:3).

If that sounds unbelievable to you—you had better get used to the idea or else how will you ever be able to believe in Jesus' promise to us? He said that he would do the same thing for us which God did for him. In Revelation 3:21, Jesus says:

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his Throne.

This generous sharing is a trait of God, but don't take his generosity to mean that God is some fool who renounces his own authority. His sharing with Jesus doesn't mean that somehow God stops being greater than Jesus. The principle articulated by Pharaoh in Genesis 41:40 is God's principle too: "Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you." That's what Pharaoh said to Joseph, and God says the same thing to Jesus. God maintains his authority over Jesus because the Throne will always belong to God.

- Finally, the **thrones** spoken of in Colossians 1:16 where it says ‘in him [Jesus] all things were created: ... whether thrones or powers’ could not include God’s Throne because that would mean that Jesus created God’s Throne, but he couldn’t have. We’ve already seen that God’s Throne was never created. Rather, like the Heavenly Temple where it is found, it was ‘set up’ by God (Hebrews 8:2).

•...the Throne doesn’t establish God’s authority [it’s vice versa—God establishes the greatness of the Throne].

Now, although the Throne doesn’t establish God’s authority [it’s vice versa—God establishes the greatness of the Throne]³¹, it does **represent** his authority. Because of that, it wouldn’t be anything that God would have Jesus create. Jesus established the thrones of those who are **under** his authority, but since God is not under Jesus’ authority, why would Jesus have made God’s Throne? Jesus is under God’s authority—and Jesus never would have had anything to do with establishing God on the Throne. Look at how Jesus spoke of his Father:

... the Father is greater than I... the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing... I live because of the Father (John 14:28; 5:19; 6:27).

•...God sanctifies his own Throne.

³¹ Jesus taught on the issue of who or what makes things holy. He laid out a clear line of logic on this matter, teaching that God sanctifies his own Throne. Jesus applied this same line of logic all the way to the *gold* used in the Temple: 1. God sanctifies the Jerusalem Temple, 2. the altar sanctifies the gift upon it, and 3. the Temple sanctifies the gold that is used in it.

You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

•...anyone whoswears by Heavenswears by God’s Throne .

Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And anyone who swears by the Temple swears by it and by the One who dwells in it. And anyone who swears by Heaven swears by God’s Throne and by the One who sits on it (Matthew 23:17-22).

3. What Jesus didn't make

We have seen that there are two things in existence Jesus did not make: The Heavenly Temple and the Throne of God. But that doesn't mean that those are the only two things he didn't make. The Bible gives us a solid revelation (in Hebrews 9:11-12) that the Tabernacle was not made by Jesus—nor was the Holy Place within it.

Now, from these concrete revelations, could we affirm that Jesus didn't create the Kingdom of Heaven? What do you think? We really don't know. Maybe Jesus made some things but not everything there. Maybe God just *established* everything and nothing there is actually *made*.

•...could we affirm that Jesus didn't create the Kingdom of Heaven?

a. If it wasn't Jesus...

Jesus has been chosen by God to serve in the True Tabernacle, the one in Heaven where God abides. We have already said that the Tabernacle originated with God, but we haven't yet pointed you to a passage that definitively teaches that. Well, here it is. The apostle who wrote Hebrews teaches us that the True Tabernacle was *set up* by God.

•...the Tabernacle originated with God.

We do have such a High Priest [Jesus], who sat down at the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty [meaning God] in Heaven, and who [the High Priest Jesus] serves in the Sanctuary, the True Tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being (Hebrews 8:1-2).

Interestingly, the word *created* is not used here to describe what existed before Creation—and why not? Is it because what existed before the Creation was *never* created? We suspect that that is exactly the reason! What we do know is that the Lord God (and indeed *Lord* here refers to the One God and Father)³² *set up* (NIV) or *pitched* (NASB) the

•...what existed before the Creation was never created...

³² If perhaps you think that the term *Lord* is referring to Jesus here, know that only 4 of the 15 uses of *Lord* in the Book of Hebrews refer to Jesus, and when they refer to Jesus, they say so very very clearly. None of the 4 passages in Hebrews that use *Lord* for Jesus are difficult to interpret. The other 9 uses, including 5 in Hebrews 8 alone (the chapter from which this verse is taken), all refer to God the Father.

If that's not convincing enough, even the context of Hebrews 8:1-2 demonstrates that the author is talking about Jesus as High Priest and he is using the title the *Lord* for God. A casual reading demonstrates that there are two different persons

true Tabernacle—the Heavenly one. That *Sanctuary*, as it is called in Hebrews 8, is not a part of Creation. The Bible never speaks of a time when it was created, but it does tell us that God set it up. That, of course, means that Jesus did not.

b. Where Jesus works

God never assigned Jesus the task of being an earthly priest. Jesus didn't work in the Temple in Jerusalem because God did not ever make Jesus a Levite. This was no mistake on God's part. On the contrary, it was all part of God's plan: Instead of giving Jesus a role as a Levitical priest, God intended for Jesus to serve before him in Heaven, and to serve before him as the greatest of all High Priests!

If he [Jesus] were on Earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the Law (Hebrews 8:4).

God wanted Jesus to be a priest, but he would only allow Jesus to serve as our Priest after Jesus had given his life on the Cross. Only after Jesus had laid the foundation of the New Covenant by shedding his blood, would God allow him to serve as High Priest in Heaven. Now, for the past 2000 years, the only Tabernacle³³ where effective intercession is made is the one in Heaven. That's the one in which Jesus currently ministers on our behalf.

• Only after Jesus had laid the foundation of the New Covenant by shedding his blood, would God allow him to serve as High Priest in Heaven.

How important is that place? God alluded to the Heavenly Temple more than 3500 years ago when he commanded Moses to build a Temple on Earth. God commanded Moses to make the earthly one “according to the pattern.” What was the *pattern* about, we ask? Was it from the original Temple in Heaven? Yes, it was “a copy and shadow of what is in Heaven” (Hebrews 8:5)!

being referred to here, because the author uses two different titles for two different people. Furthermore, there is *interaction* between the High Priest and the Lord, so they can't be the same person.

³³ The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and rendered useless in AD 70 when the Roman General Titus laid Jerusalem in ruins. The Temple hasn't been used for worship or intercession since then. If Titus' destruction weren't enough, at the moment Jesus died on the Cross, the veil of the Temple was rendered in two. Shall we take that as another sign from God to the OT priests? Of course we should. What did the sign mean? That their priestly ministry had come to an end.

See that you make them [the lampstand and all the accessories of the Temple] according to the pattern shown you on the mountain (Exodus 25:40).

... the Tabernacle of the covenant law... had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen (Acts 7:44).

They [the Jewish Levitical priests] serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in Heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the Tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain' (Hebrews 8:5).

There's nothing like that place. It is sanctified by the One who dwells there. It is special because it is God's abode. If Jesus said that all of Heaven is sanctified by the One who dwells there, how much more sanctified is the Holy of Holies?

... anyone who swears by Heaven swears by God's Throne and by the One who sits on it (Matthew 23:22).

c. Jesus the Maker

Let's be exact when we talk about Jesus' role in Creation: He was with God for those six days of Creation, fully involved in the making of the Universe. God spoke his Word and Jesus made God's Word reality. Jesus worked hard creating everything that God decreed: light, waters above, waters below, land, plants, animals, Adam and Eve.

•Godspoke his word and Jesus madeGod's wordreality.

The key for understanding Jesus' role in Creation is found in the word *through*. It was through Jesus that all things were made. The key word for understanding God's role in Creation is *from*. All things come from God. To see what we're talking about, start by noticing how carefully the different authors of the Bible (there are three of them represented in the following verses: John, Paul, and Apollos)³⁴ used the word *through*:

• All things come from God.

He [Jesus] was with God in the beginning. Through him [Jesus] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did

³⁴ We believe that Apollos is the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. If that's not true, the nearest possibility would be that Barnabas wrote it.

not recognize him (John 1:2-3, 10).

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him [Jesus] all things were created: things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him (Colossians 1:15-17).

... in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the Universe (Hebrews 1:2).

What do we learn from these verses? Well, first that we should never hesitate to give Jesus the recognition that he deserves as a Creator. If God recognizes Jesus as Creator of the Universe, so should we. God even goes so far in honoring Christ so as to address him as *Lord* [as an *honorary title*—one of *many* names which the God and Father has bestowed upon our dear Jesus]. God put special emphasis on the fact that Jesus is *Lord* particularly to point out that Jesus “laid the foundations of the Earth.”

In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the Earth, and the Heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain;³⁵ they will all wear out like

³⁵ This phrase “You will remain the same,” which is spoken twice in the introduction of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is echoed for a third time in the conclusion! You might remember that it is found in a very well-known verse:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever
(Hebrews 13:8).

Why is it so important to notice the different places in the Book of Hebrews where this phrase is used? So that we can successfully interpret the meaning of Hebrews 13:8. If we understand what the author of the phrase *the same* meant when he wrote it in Hebrews 1, it’s bound to mean the same thing in Hebrews 13, right?

When God uses the expression with Jesus in Hebrews 1, the meaning is along these lines: “Although this world passes away, you [Jesus] will not.” What it means is that God praises Jesus for being more dependable than the world itself! And the world is pretty dependable with its warm sun, lunar phases, four seasons, towering mountains, flowing rivers, dense forests, dry desserts, swelling oceans, consistent crops, and life-giving trees—isn’t it? Sure, but Jesus is more dependable.

Why do we bring up this point? Many have falsely interpreted Hebrews 13:8 to

• God
praises
Jesus for
being more
dependable
than the
world itself!

a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end (Hebrews 1:10-12).

The fundamental difference between Jesus and God in Creation is that God was the Source of all things, while Jesus was the Maker. Every passage quoted above reinforces the same idea: that God made the world through Jesus. The key word to describe Jesus' role in Creation is unmistakably the word *through*. What does *through* mean exactly? In brief, instrumentality. That means that Jesus was instrumental in Creation—not the source of creative power. The Bible's use of *through* as it defines Jesus' role in Creation means that the power Jesus used to make everything was not from himself—it originated in God.³⁶ That power passed through Jesus, it worked through Jesus, but it came from God.

d. God the Source³⁷

Did you know that the Scriptures never say that created things have come *from* Jesus? The Scriptures only use the preposition *from* to describe the things which were created when the person acting (the subject) is God.

... from him [God] and through him and for him are all things (Romans 11:36).

mean that Jesus has never changed his nature. For them to say such a thing is equivalent to denying the incarnation—a heresy. When Jesus came to us as a baby boy in Mary's womb, Jesus took the human nature upon himself, having abandoned the divine nature. If someone denies the incarnation by using the *the same* of Hebrews 13, it is because they have taken the text way out of its context. What is the context of Hebrews 13 then but the entire Book of Hebrews? And what does the entire Book of Hebrews teach? Along with 1 John, it expresses more clearly than any other book of the Bible, the doctrine of Christ; that is, that Jesus came in the flesh. Its theme is the incarnation. Two crystal-clear examples of how this essential doctrine is expressed in Hebrews follow here:

Since the children [of God, us] have flesh and blood, he too [Jesus] shared in their humanity (2:14).

... he [Jesus] had to be made like them [us], fully human in every way (2:17).

³⁶ And the power Jesus wielded during his earthly ministry was also from God. We hope that you know that.

³⁷ If it sounds familiar to you, it's because this section also appears in the book *One God* (pp. 183-184).

•...God was the Source of all things, while Jesus was the Maker.

•...Jesus was instrumental in Creation.

•...the power Jesus used to make everything was not from himself—it originated in God.

About Jesus, the Bible says something subtly but nonetheless dramatically different from what it says about God. Remember: All things—and that means in the Third Heaven, in “the (First and Second) heavens,” and on Earth—are *from* God; but the Scriptures use different prepositions for Jesus—not *from*. The Scriptures tell us:

For in him [Jesus] all things were created...
all things have been created through him
and for him (Colossians 1:16).

Try to appreciate with us the subtle but significant difference in the words chosen by the apostle Paul here. He is saying that all things were made *in*, *through*, and *for* Jesus—but that’s not the same thing Paul says about God. All things are *from* God, as you’ll recall.

• All things
are from
God...

So the Bible authors were careful not to say the same thing about Jesus than they said about God—are you as careful as they were? We must be careful about how we talk about Creation because God *alone* is the original source of all things. *From* is the preposition which indicates source. So when we use it, we are saying that God is the original source, the *first cause* of all things. We believe that God is the Father from which all things derive their life.

• God alone
is the orig-
inal source
of all things.

• God is...
the first
cause of all
things.

And here’s another passage that proves the exact same point. Notice how skillfully Paul describes the creative work of the Father and Jesus in the same breath, carefully differentiating between each one’s role in Creation:

There is no God but one... for us there is but
One God, the Father, from whom all things
came and for whom we live; and there is
but One Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom
all things came and through whom we live
(1 Corinthians 8:4,6).

So it’s an unmistakable teaching of the Bible that all things and beings have their origins in the One God—only in him, and in no other. Jesus is not the origin of things, but they did all come through him—and that’s no small matter. To be God’s instrument in Creation was no minor job. Be bold enough to say all of that, please.

•...all things
and beings
have their
origins in
the One
God—only
in him, and
in no other.

4. The little we know

Before the point the Bible calls *the Beginning*, we have practically no information about Jesus, but there is some: One weighty OT prophecy describes Jesus as One whose *goings forth* are from *the days of eternity*. Consider it, please:

From you [Bethlehem] one will go forth for me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity³⁸ (Micah 5:2; NASB).

Micah's prophecy shows us that Jesus was very active back long ago. We get the *very active* part from the words *goings forth*. To say that Jesus had some *goings forth* means that Jesus was plenty busy. There were lots of things going on before Creation. Now that's very helpful for us to know because we tend to imagine that the time period we call *eternity past* was a little bit dreary. It was not! There was a lot to do, and Jesus was busy doing it. That's great information, but to understand Jesus better, we need to know more. We especially need to know whether Jesus was Lord back in those times.

• There was a lot to do, and Jesus was busy doing it.

a. Not the One God

Let's start with what we know: Jesus was not the One God before Creation. In fact, Jesus never has been nor ever will be the One God. From that fundamental truth, we can get an idea about his relationship with God in those *times of eternity*. What was the basis of that relationship? Subordination. Jesus was subordinate to God.

• Jesus never has been nor ever will be the One God.

Jesus' subordination to God is a basic Christian truth which, unfortunately, most Christian teachers vehemently oppose. Trinitarian theologians call it *subordinationism* and have deemed it a heresy—while the heresy is just the opposite!

• Jesus was subordinate to God.

³⁸ The NIV translates "days of eternity" as "ancient times" and the NASB offers the alternative translation "days of old." These may not jive with your concept of eternity, and we hope that you'll be willing to seek for a sharper notion of what eternity past was. The Biblical idea is along the lines of "the times before Creation." More research on the Hebrew words might shed more light on the issue, but probably not. It seems to be beyond our ability to research.

Nonetheless, our favorite parallel Bible passage is Job 36:26 where Elihu says about God:

... the number of his years is unsearchable (NASB).

The heresy is to deny that Jesus is subordinate to God. Jesus has been, is, and always will be subordinate to God.

b. God loved Jesus

Secondly, we know that God loved Jesus. Sound quaint? It's not. It's actually a powerful truth—the truth which offers us the most precise concept of what was going on before the Beginning.

Since so little is known about the activities of God and Jesus at that time, let our basic concept of it at least be this: Everything Jesus did won him God's approval. That is to say, God saw in Jesus someone who was worthy of all his trust. Jesus proved himself worthy of God's love by serving God faithfully. Because of that, God lavished his grace on Jesus. God loved Jesus by granting him divine glory!

Father, I want those you have given me to... see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the Creation of the World (John 17:24).

c. Jesus made the angels

Angels are created beings, just like you and me. For you to be a created being means that there was one point in time when Jesus made you—and that you didn't exist before that time. Everybody is either a creature or a Creator. Angels are creatures.

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts... Let them praise the name of the LORD, for at his command they were created... (Psalm 148:2, 5)

[Speaking of Lucifer, a fallen angel, God says]: 'You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created...' (Ezekiel 28:15)

The first passage of the two listed here says that Yahweh gave a command to make the angels. It says: "at his command they were created." Does that mean that it was God who made them? No, it doesn't. It means that God gave the command, not that he made them.

Follow this reasoning carefully: Just as God was the Creator of the light, land, stars, sea, plants, and animals through

•...the truth which offers us the most precise concept of what was going on before the Beginning.

• Everything Jesus did won him God's approval.

Jesus, so was he the Creator of the angels through Jesus. Put differently, God gave the command, and Jesus did the work. We know that not just because we suppose that they did the same thing with the angels they did in Creation, but because the Bible says so. It tells us that Jesus created all things that have been created. He is Creator of all creatures.

Through him [Jesus] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:3).

... by him [the Son] all things were created; both in the heavens and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities; all things have been created by [through] him and for him (Colossians 1:16; NASB).³⁹

i. Created before Creation

Now that we have established that Jesus created the angels, our study gets spiced up a little more because the angels were already created by the time the World was made. Here's the passage that proves it:

[God asks Job] Where were you when I laid the Earth's foundation?... who laid

³⁹ It's really important to get a literal translation in this verse because if you don't, you'll get stuck with something like the NIV translation which says that "... in him [the Son] all things were created: things *in Heaven* and on Earth..." They decided to translate a plural term *the heavens* [which Biblically means the atmosphere and space] as a singular term *Heaven*, which means something completely different from *the heavens*. *Heaven* means the abode of God. So the NIV translators make the Bible say that Jesus made the dwelling place of God—but we have already seen that that would be impossible.

They have made a grave error by turning a plural noun into a singular noun. They have confused many people, not having taken Jesus' warning seriously:

... truly I say to you, until heaven and Earth pass away, no the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:18; NASB).

The Greek word ouranós [*heaven* (singular)] refers to *the heavens* (atmosphere and space) if it is used in combination with Earth like in the example we quote above (Matthew 5:18) where it says *heaven and Earth*. Of the problems we encounter in translation, Gleason Archer commented

The singular and plural have distinct overtones and therefore should be distinguished in translation (though unfortunately they rarely are). (Retrieved on December 3, 2014 from <http://biblehub.com/greek/3772.htm>).

• God gave the command, and Jesus did the work.

•...the angels were already created by the time the World was made.

its cornerstone⁴⁰—while the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God [the angels] shouted for joy (Job 38:4, 6-7)?

• Jesus was in the business of creating angels before the Universe was made!

• ...the angels were made by Jesus sometime before the events of Genesis 1.

We already know that the Universe was made by Jesus, and we also know that Jesus made the angels. Fine. If the angels were witnesses of the Creation, then they must have already been created. That leads us to deduce that Jesus was in the business of creating angels before the Universe was made! Isn't that cool? We have just discovered one of Jesus' activities in the *time of eternity!* His *goings forth* included going forth to create angels (which I'm sure was no menial task).

ii. Imagine there's a Heaven⁴¹

Now that we know that the angels were made by Jesus sometime before the events of Genesis 1, we have divine permission to imagine further what things were like before Creation. Even though the Bible doesn't describe it, whatever else was in that previous world must have been glorious. There is little doubt that there were all different kinds of angels (like cherubim, seraphim, and archangels) flying and scuttling around, serving God and doing his will. But those angels also served Jesus because, as we have just seen, he is their Creator!

Whatever things were like, they must have been mind-bogglingly beautiful. They must have been supernaturally stupendous. But the essential truth that we need to be conscious of when we think of the Kingdom of God before the

⁴⁰ Job didn't know what we know now: Jesus was the one who laid the cornerstone of the Earth. Notice the dynamic of this passage—it's awesome! God was attempting to press Job into reflecting about the role of someone else, other than himself, in Creation. If the answer to God's question were a simple: "You laid the foundation, oh God," then Job would have had it too easy—but the context makes it clear that God was not asking Job an easy question! God was asking Job a very hard question. But it's not a hard question for us to whom the Son of God has been revealed.

Check it out: God was trying to help Job to see how little Job knew. The answer to God's question had not yet been revealed at the time of Job, which is what made it such a hard question. And why had the answer not yet been revealed? Because the Messiah had not yet been born.

⁴¹ It seems like everybody thinks that John Lennon and the Beatles were wonderful musicians, but one of Lennon's most famous songs was *Imagine* in which he encourages everyone to "Imagine there's no Heaven." He says, "It's easy if you try." We would encourage you to do the contrary.

world was made is that God loved Jesus by giving him glory. If you know that much about what was going on before Creation, you know enough!

•God loved Jesus by giving him glory.

4. Status unknown

Since the Word of God is so silent on the matter, we are not able to say much about Jesus' nature before he got equality with God.⁴² Did he have an angelic nature before he got his divine nature? Did he always have a divine nature? We don't know the answers to those questions now.

•...Jesus' nature before he got equality with God.

We simply can't pinpoint any beginning to Jesus' existence—if there is one. But how could we? We can't even pinpoint the time when God gave Jesus equality with him, can we? What we do know is that there was a time when God did that. It happened some time before the Creation of the Universe—and that's information enough.

•We simply can't pinpoint any beginning to Jesus' existence.

You may wonder why we are so interested in defining Jesus' history—well, it's because we want to know *who* Jesus is. It's not because we want to brag about having a revelation others don't have—far be it from us—the only thing we should boast about is in the Cross of Christ our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14). And that brings up a very important point—the Cross is the defining moment in the history of Jesus Christ. It is what helps us to understand him best.

•...it's because we want to know who Jesus is.

•...the Cross is the defining moment in the history of Jesus Christ.

a. How low can you go?

For example, take note of how the Cross informs us about Jesus' pre-Creation past. It tells us that Jesus went to the lowest possible level, right? Well, if we believe that Jesus already went to the lowest level while he was among human beings, why would it be blasphemous for us to believe that, at some time before Creation, Jesus did not have his current glory?⁴³

•...Jesus did not have his current glory.

⁴² Think about it: He had to have gotten equality with God at some point in time. If Jesus surrendered his equality with God for the 33+ years he was with us in the flesh (as it says in Philippians 2:6), it's because the divine nature was not a permanent facet of Jesus' being. Amen? The incarnation proves that his divine nature was temporary. Of course we believe that he'll have it forever; but we also believe that Jesus didn't have it for +33 years. He gave up his equality with God for that time. If you don't believe that, then you don't believe in the incarnation, and you have no Savior.

⁴³ We are not saying what Arius said, "There was a time when he [Jesus] was

• humility
before glory

Doesn't the Cross teach us that Jesus obtained the highest honor by humbling himself to the lowest degree? It does. And isn't humility before glory a law established by God for all who serve him—humans, angels, and Jesus too? Or is Jesus not among those who serve God? Of course he is—in fact, he's supposed to be the example for all the rest of us! God calls Jesus “my Servant” (Isaiah 42:1).

We are seeking to know exactly who Jesus is. To discover the truth about Jesus, we cannot be afraid to ask challenging questions. We should never fear what the Bible will reveal to us about Jesus, and we must not feel afraid of Christian churches either. Many of them don't like our research. For many Christians, asking about Jesus' nature is blasphemous—but that's because they have many false presumptions, like their presumption that the One God is a Trinity.

They only follow the teachings of men. For them, the Bible is not a book to dig into. They don't know what a meaningful time in reflection is even about. They are afraid they might have to adapt their man-made theologies to the truth. They are scared of what they might find and they are self-confident—they think that they know enough already. Yet they don't even have the most basic foundations.

Another impediment to the study of Jesus before the Creation is that our flesh resists a true understanding of Jesus. Did you now that? Of course it does. It resists all that is spiritual and a knowledge of Jesus Christ comes by means of a very spiritual study. Our human nature doesn't want to have to accept the fact that we have to humble ourselves the way Jesus did. Jesus was never afraid to go low but we are. We're particularly afraid to have to go as low as our Lord Jesus did.

not.” Arius taught that Jesus was created at some point and that he did not exist before then. We do not follow Arius' teachings, but we do say something close to what he said: “There was a time when Jesus did not have his glory.” We say it based on these words of Christ spoken in prayer to God:

... my glory, the glory you [the One God] have given me
because you loved me before the Creation of the World
(John 17:24; NASB).

If God gave Jesus glory, the verb gave (it's in the past tense) plainly indicates that God did something at one point in time. God gave Jesus glory because he loved Jesus, and he did it at some point in time. It actually happened in time. This is not our idea, it's all according to Jesus' own words.

b. What you're going to find

What you will find as you look deeper and deeper into the history of Jesus is something marvelous: Jesus is worthy of our trust. If he was worthy of God's trust even before the Creation of the World, why shouldn't you trust Jesus today? Any Bible study you do will always prove one thing, that Jesus has never failed God. You already knew that he didn't fail God at Calvary, but you probably didn't know that he never failed God before that either. That fact is supposed to be really comforting for us!

... I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day (2 Timothy 1:12; NASB).

Do you know the One in whom you have believed? Have you gotten to know Jesus well? Since our salvation is in his hands, we can feel at ease because he has proven himself again and again—not only at Calvary, but from before the Creation of the World!

c. Alpha and Omega

If you try to pinpoint a beginning for Jesus, you'll soon find out that none is defined in God's Word. Rather, Jesus *is* the Beginning. Try asking yourself "What was the Beginning's beginning?" It sounds like a hard question, yes—but that's the point. The question gives us a sense of the difficulties anybody will face as they investigate Jesus' beginning.

If Jesus is called the *Alpha and the Omega* (i.e., the Beginning and the End), then we can't identify a beginning for him! Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet. It means *beginning*. So Jesus' very identity is *the Beginning*. How can we identify the beginning of someone whose identity is the Beginning? Well, we'll try...

d. When Jesus was established

Both the Heavenly Temple and the Throne are carefully described in terms of their relationship to the Almighty God. They have no autonomy from God, but are bound to him. They are practically one with God. Furthermore, the Temple and the Throne are never said in the Bible to have been created, but *established*. We have already looked at that.

• Jesus is worthy of our trust.

• Jesus... has never failed God.

• Jesus *is* the Beginning.

• How can we identify the beginning of someone whose identity is the Beginning?

What we haven't yet considered is how Jesus is also carefully described in terms of his relationship to God. We haven't yet seen how the term *established* is used for Jesus just like it is used to describe the Temple and the Throne. Let's do that now, beginning with Proverbs 8.

The LORD possessed⁴⁴ me at the beginning of his way, before his works of old. From everlasting I was established, from the age⁴⁵ I was anointed, from the first, from former states of the Earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; while he had not yet made the Earth and the fields, nor the first dust of the World (vv. 22-26; NASB).

• Proverbs 8:22-31 is divided into two parts.

Now, if you're going to read it well, you'll have to understand that Proverbs 8:22-31 is divided into two parts: The first, which we have just read, describes what happened before Creation. The second part you will see below. It describes the events that took place at Creation.

The first part uses the expressions "I was established" and "I was brought forth," because that is what happened to Jesus⁴⁶ before the Creation. Describing that epoch of history

⁴⁴ The NIV translates this phrase as "brought me forth."

⁴⁵ Since *the beginning* is a really poor choice for the translation here because it gives us the idea that Solomon is talking about *The Beginning* which was Creation, we have chosen to replace the NIV translation of "from the beginning, from the earliest times of the Earth" with Young's Literal Translation of verse 23 which says "From the age I was anointed, from the first, from former states of the Earth."

⁴⁶ So, what happened to Jesus was that he was *brought forth* by God and *established* by God—amen? You may agree, but can you say what these words mean exactly? If we compare them to Daniel 7, it shines some light on the matter. Daniel wrote of

... One like a son of man, coming with the clouds of Heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power... (vv. 13-14)

We have discovered that the idea of Proverbs 8 and Daniel 7 are the same: Jesus was *brought forth*. In Daniel 7, that bringing forth took place when Jesus was *led into* God's presence. Then God gave Jesus authority, which means that God *established* Jesus as king and ruler. The idea behind *bringing forth* and

very specifically, the passage says “he [God] had not yet made the Earth... nor the first dust of the World.” What does that description tell us? That that epoch of history was pre-Creation.

Now it’s time to consider the second part. It follows immediately after what we have just read. The previous passage ended in verse 26 and this one begins in verse 27.

When he [God] established the heavens, I was there, when he inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when the springs of the deep became fixed, when he set for the sea its boundary so that the water would not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the Earth; then I was beside him, as a Master Workman;⁴⁷

and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in the World, his Earth, and having my delight in the sons of men (NASB, vv. 27-31).

So this second part of Proverbs 8 records Jesus saying “I was there... beside him [God].” And the actual time of this “being beside God” is given to us in the passage—can you see how it is given? The first word of this section is *when*, meaning that the passage is referring to a specific time in history—that specific time is

establishing do not have anything to do with creating, right? Because of that, we know that nothing here indicates that God created Jesus or that “there was a time when he was not” (the infamous words of Arius).

The magnificent event we see in Daniel 7 matches what Paul described about a time when God gave Jesus equality with him. Paul says that Jesus “existed in the form of God” before the incarnation, but that Jesus “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Philippians 2:6). Remember that? Paul was saying that the *form of God* that Jesus had (that *equality* with God) was something that Jesus actually gave up!

Now think about it: If that equality with God was something Jesus could leave aside, it was not an essential part of his being. It was a grace from God, it was the glory that God gave him. So God gave Jesus divine glory. Do you believe that? If you don’t yet, consider another passage, the one where Jesus spoke to God about the glory Jesus had before his incarnation. What glory did Jesus say he had? He called it “my glory, the glory you have given me” (John 17:24). So don’t doubt that Jesus’ pre-incarnation glory was given to him by God.

⁴⁷ Here’s the proof that God is the Architect and Head Engineer, while Jesus is the Master Workman (Proverbs 8:30) of the Universe.

• as a Master Workman

•...the passage is referring to a specific time in history.

•...it was not an essential part of his being... God gave Jesus divine glory.

When he [God] established the heavens...
[and] when he marked out the foundations
of the Earth.

So Proverbs 8 teaches that Jesus was with God (together in a relationship) *when* God was establishing the Heavens and the Earth. Strikingly, that's the very 6-day span of history that John 1:1-2 describes in his famous introduction to his Gospel, and John gives that part of history the exact same emphasis that Solomon gives it: the relationship between God and Jesus!

In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the [One] God, and the Word was God. He was with the [One] God in the Beginning.⁴⁸

If John twice repeats that Jesus was “with the One God” in the Beginning,” then he’s trying to emphasize something: Jesus’ relationship to God. Right? If that is the emphasis of John 1, then we have found the perfect parallel to Proverbs 8! Remember how in Proverbs it says “I was there” and “I was beside him [God].” Well, that sounds a whole lot like John 1 which says “the Word was with the One God,” doesn’t it? It sounds a whole lot like “He was with the One God.”

So both John 1 and Proverbs 8 teach us that Jesus was with God—but what does being *with* God mean? Let’s be absolutely clear here: It means that Jesus’ glory depends on his relationship to God! That’s a truth you can see all over the Bible. If you don’t understand it, you don’t understand Jesus. And it’s a truth that you can apply to your own life experiences too: What makes you great is how much you are *with* God too.

• Jesus’
glory depends on
his relationship to
God!
• What
makes you
great is how
much you
are with
God too.

e. Worthy of our trust

If we can grasp these aspects (we’ve just seen) of the history of Jesus, we will feel immense consolation because he is in charge of our salvation. How Jesus has behaved in the past (as the Word) serves to prove that he is worthy of our deepest confidence now. In fact, Jesus is so trustworthy that *Faithful and True* is his name.

⁴⁸ This is the most literal translation of the passage. In the original Greek text, the article *the* is only found in front of God’s (not the Word’s) *God*—giving it meaning *the One God*.

I saw Heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True... He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God (Revelation 19:11, 13).

Jesus' faithfulness to God in the past assures us that he will continue to fulfill God's will in the future, right? Can you trust him to do all that he has promised? Yes. Are you in a covenant with him? If you are, his promises are firm. If you're not, we recommend that you repent and get baptized to start.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John testify to Jesus' faithfulness to God while he was in the flesh, don't they? Look at how he lived his life. He did everything for God. And currently how much *more* faithful will Jesus be now that he has a spiritual body? He can't even be tempted now—while even when he was in the flesh, he didn't crack under temptation!

Studying the Bible informs us that when Jesus came to us in the human nature, he was no novice. He was no newcomer. He wasn't green. On the contrary, Jesus was already God's most highly-trusted Servant. He had a lot of solid experience under his belt. Did you know that about him? Maybe not. And did you know that when God chose Jesus to be our Savior, God was choosing the One he could trust more than any other? Saving the World was no menial task, so God entrusted it to the best person he had—the Word.

Since Jesus has proven so thoroughly that he is worthy of God's trust, do we have any reason not to trust in Jesus? Surely we will trust in him more today if we understand what Jesus gave up in order to save us: He gave up his King-like divine nature. Jesus was "in very nature God," but then he took on the servant-nature of man.

... being in very nature God, [Jesus] did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing⁴⁹ by taking the very nature of a servant... (Philippians 2:6-7)

⁴⁹ In the NASB, this phrase is accurately translated "he emptied himself." Hebrews 2:17 says the same thing, emphasizing Jesus' complete nature:

... he [Jesus] had to be made like them [human beings], fully human in every way.

- Jesus was already God's most highly-trusted Servant.

- God was choosing the One he could trust more than any other.

- ...understand what Jesus gave up in order to save us.

•...if you can comprehend how much Jesus sacrificed to become human, you'll appreciate his sacrifice at Calvary...

Truly, if you can comprehend how much Jesus sacrificed to become human, you'll appreciate his sacrifice at Calvary the way you should appreciate it. If his death were just a simple shot in the head, it wouldn't have been so difficult for him to face; but Jesus died the most disgraceful and painful death the Romans could give. He died by crucifixion. Jesus was pegged a blasphemer. Jesus sacrificed his reputation, his dignity, his friends, his comforts, and the very blood that ran through his veins. He didn't just die. Jesus gave his life.

... he [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-7)!

Jesus went to that extreme to obey God. He went to that extreme to save us! He has proven his love to God and to us with a faithfulness and love that has no equal in the history of the World. Will you trust Jesus with your future? Can you?

f. More than he was before

Get this truth: The humbling process Jesus persevered in was not altruism.⁵⁰ Jesus humbled himself for his own reason—he was seeking the glory that God gives. Jesus knew very well the kind of god God is. Just like anyone who lives by faith, Jesus was motivated by God's rewards-system. Jesus was well aware that God would reward him handsomely for any and all obedience.

... anyone who comes to him [God] must believe that... he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus knew that he would get all that he sacrificed back again—and more.⁵¹ But what more could someone get back who already had equality with God? That's a great question. See if you can find the answer by studying the following passage from Isaiah:

⁵⁰ *Altruism* is defined by Google as "The belief in or practice of disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others."

⁵¹ The *more* Jesus got at the resurrection could not possibly have been greater divine glory, for he already had equality with God. What greater glory exists than equality with God? The greater glory Jesus has now (greater than what he had before the incarnation) is a Kingdom of trained (Hebrews 5:14) servants who will rule with him. Who are those servants? That's a great question. Examine yourself with it.

•...what more could someone get back who already had equality with God?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ...they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment...

I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you... Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it (Psalm 22:1, 16-18, 22, 30-31)!

So what did Jesus get out of the Cross that makes his status now greater than before? Can you see it from the psalm? It talks about:

- my people
- the assembly
- posterity
- future generations
- a people yet unborn

The answer is that God has given Jesus a people, a nation of faithful followers which includes you and me! Jesus has become a leader of men—Jesus has become the Lord of a Kingdom filled with human subjects!

If through repentance and baptism we die with Christ, then the Cross counts as the payment for our sins. At baptism, we not only can say that we are children of God (by virtue of being born of his Spirit), but can also (for the first time) say with all legitimacy “Jesus is my Lord.” Entering into the New Covenant, you become part of the people of Jesus.

Don’t forget Jesus’ perspective in all this. Most of the time we only think of the Cross in terms of what it means to us, but what does it mean to Jesus? Through it, he got an extremely valuable reward: human resources. Gold is one thing, but people are quite another. Even the King of Sodom knew that. Listen to the words he spoke to Abraham:

Give the people [literally *soul*] to me and take the goods for yourself (Genesis 14:21; NASB).

• God has given Jesus a people, a nation of faithful followers.

• Jesus has become the Lord of a Kingdom filled with human subjects!

Your soul becomes God's gift to Jesus when you die with Jesus in baptism! Psalm 22 isn't the only passage that mentions this topic of God giving human resources to Jesus as a prize. Consider how Jesus calls us "the children the LORD God has given me" in Isaiah. Jesus also calls us his "brothers and sisters" there. We become part of God's family through Christ. He is the Firstborn Son of God, and we are his little brothers and sisters. We follow him.

[Jesus says]: Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion (Isaiah 8:18).

Both the one who makes people holy [Jesus] and those who are made holy [us] are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says, 'I will declare your [God's] name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.'

And again, 'I [Jesus] will put my trust in him [God].' And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me.' Since the children have flesh and blood, he too [Jesus] shared in their humanity (Hebrews 2:11-14).

In conclusion, because of his relationship with God (he is the one who was *with* the One God in the Beginning), Jesus deserves our devotion. That relationship consisted primarily of Jesus receiving glory from God. The fact that God gave Jesus glory makes Jesus worthy of our devotion, but know this: Jesus went *beyond* getting glory from God.

• Jesus didn't cherish his glory more than he cherished the One who gave him glory!

Jesus didn't cherish his glory more than he cherished the One who gave him glory! He didn't cling more tightly to his exaltation than to the One who exalted him. Jesus followed God's will to the manger in Bethlehem—which was a huge step down—but then he followed God's will even further down, all the way to lonely Calvary. And because Jesus sacrificed all he had for God, loving him with all of his heart, God rewarded Jesus. What did God give him? Nothing less than a Kingdom—one that will be filled with servants loyal to Jesus forever.

So Jesus was smart when he went to the Cross. He knew what it would mean for him: the redemption of a people—his own people—eager to serve. He gave his life for a reason:

... to purify for himself a people that are his very own (Titus 2:14).

•...Jesus was smart when he went to the Cross.

D. Jesus before his incarnation

1. Even God called him Lord
 - a. Jesus teaches Psalm 110
2. God's name is in him
3. More OT questions
 - a. The Man
 - b. The Lord who invokes the Lord
4. No one has ever seen God

So we have just learned that before his incarnation, by virtue of his being in very nature God, and being Creator of the Universe—Jesus was already Lord. Since the Father had given Jesus all authority, how could anyone deny that Jesus was Lord? If Jesus had “equality with God” (Philippians 2:6), then what angel, person, or other creature would have denied him due recognition as Lord?

•...before his incarnation...Jesus was already Lord.

1. Even God called him Lord

In fact, even God has used the title *Lord* for Jesus. One thousand years before Jesus' birth, David wrote of another Lord besides Yahweh God. Look the amazing words of God as recorded by David:

The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet' (Psalm 110:1).

With just this one revelation, the Jews should have been able to discern that there was a Lord other than God. It should have sufficed—but God gave them more anyways. We are going to study in this section how the prophets again and again invited Jews (and all the God-fearing Gentiles who studied God's Word with them) to reflect upon the mystery⁵²

•...the Jews should have been able to discern that there was a Lord other than God.

⁵² By *mystery* we don't mean something that cannot be understood. That's the way Catholics use the word, like when they talk about the mystery of the Trinity or the Seven Sorrowful Mysteries. Rather, we are using it in the way it is used in the Bible, to mean “a truth yet to be revealed.”

•themystery of the Christ

of the Christ. For example, Psalm 110 was intended to inspire the Jews to ask:

Who might this person **be** who God invited to sit at his right hand?

a. Jesus teaches Psalm 110

Jesus himself pushed the Jews to ask that same question. He challenged them to think about Psalm 110 and to come up with a suitable interpretation. Read carefully about his confrontation with the Pharisees and you'll see that Jesus made a great effort to show them that the *Lord* who God invited to sit at his right hand was actually the Messiah!

•...the *Lord* who God invited to sit at his right hand was actually the Messiah!

Jesus asked them [the Pharisees], 'What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?' 'The son of David,' they replied.

He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him Lord? For he says, "'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'"

If then David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" (Matthew 22:41-45).

This is a pointed teaching from Jesus, but you'll notice that he didn't stop at teaching the Pharisees that the Messiah was the *Lord* God spoke to in the Psalm. That was not all Jesus wanted to show them. He wanted them to see that the Messiah was much more than what they were expecting. The Messiah was the Son of God, which is much more than a son of David! Did you get the point of Jesus' questions? Read them slowly and you'll see what he was driving at. Undoubtedly he was asking them:

•...the Messiah was much more than what they were expecting.

- **Whose** son is the Messiah? (Answer: The Son of God)
- Can the Messiah be **simply** a son of David? (**Answer:** He cannot be just a son of David. He must be greater than David because he is David's Lord. Because of that, the Messiah must also be the Son of God).

2. God's name is in him

The Scriptures have long pointed out that someone is highly honored by God—and honored to such a degree that God

has actually put his own name in that person! In the OT, that person was often referred to as *the Angel of the LORD*. In the passage below, observe that God said “my name is in him.”

•...God has actually put his own name in that person!

I am sending an Angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my name is in him.

If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. My Angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land... (Exodus 23:20-23)

So what exactly does it mean for God’s name to be in someone? It means at least three things:

- First of all, it means that **all that God represents is invested in that person**. Put differently, that person is God’s ambassador. He represents God to us.
- It also means that **God’s fame is bound to that person’s actions**. That is, if that person does something good, it glorifies God. If he does something bad, it makes others think badly of God. God’s reputation sinks or floats according to what that person does.
- Finally, for God to have his name in someone means that **God shares his name with that person**. God has many names, but his personal name is Yahweh. Just like how a father’s last name becomes the last name of his son, God’s name was given to the Angel [Messenger] of Yahweh. That explains why sometimes people just called the Angel of Yahweh, **Yahweh**. He had the name of God in him.

3. More OT questions

We gather from the “my name is in him” (Exodus 23:21) passage that this *Angel* (as he is called) had “equality with God” (Philippians 2:6). Why else would God speak of the Angel in such terms, even stating “listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say” (Exodus 23:23)? It’s as if the

• Who else do we know in history who God has made his equal?

words of the Angel were the very words of God. So who was that Angel? Who else do we know in history who God has made his equal? There's only one person.

God was leading people to ask really thought-provoking questions, wasn't he? And there are many other passages of Scripture that provoke similar questions. We'll present two of them below. The first one speaks of a *Man* who is simultaneously called *the LORD*. Again, who could it be?

a. The Man

Then the Man brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one facing east, and it was shut. The LORD said to me, "This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered through it..."

Then the Man brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the Temple. I looked and saw the glory of the LORD filling the Temple of the LORD, and I fell facedown. The LORD said to me, "Son of man, look carefully, listen closely, and give attention to everything I tell you..." (Ezekiel 44:1-5)

b. The Lord who invokes the Lord

The second one speaks of a person called *the LORD* who invokes (another) LORD to rebuke the Devil. So, what we have here is a LORD seeking the help of someone else with the same name: the LORD.

The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you!" (Zechariah 3:2).

It was no mistake for two different LORDS to be mentioned in these passages. The Holy Spirit who inspired these verses was trying to do something very specific: spark the curiosity of Bible readers. Even today the Spirit of God presses all of us who study the Scriptures to ask ourselves hard questions like these:

- Who was the LORD, also called "a man," who gave the blueprints for the Millennial Temple to the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 44:1-5?

•...a LORD seeking the help of someone else with the same name: the LORD.

- Who was the LORD who rebuked Satan in the name of the LORD in Zechariah 3:2?

If 2800 years ago Bible readers among the Jews had asked themselves these questions, they would have been forced to conclude that there was another Lord—one who was God’s very own spokesperson. If the Pharisees had asked themselves these questions, they would have been prepared to receive Jesus as Lord.

God has never kept it a secret that he has established another Lord. It’s an ancient revelation. The difference now is that we know exactly who that person is! We know him by name: Jesus.

4. No one has ever seen God

There are many more OT passages about human encounters with a person called *Yahweh* or *the LORD*. This Lord met face-to-face with people, but he couldn’t possibly have been the One God for the simple reason that no man has ever seen God’s face.⁵³

It is a fundamental Bible truth that God has never been seen with the eyes of man. Are nine NT passages⁵⁴ enough to prove it to you? Here they are:

... pray to your Father, who is unseen...
(Matthew 6:6)

No one has ever seen God... (John 1:18)

... You have never heard his [the Father’s] voice nor seen his form (John 5:37).

The Son is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever... who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see (1 Timothy 1:17;6:16).

•...there was another Lord—one who was God’s very own spokesperson.

•...no man has ever seen God’s face.

⁵³ You may ask about Daniel, Ezekiel, and John the apostle. Well, they saw God in visions, but not with their eyes.

⁵⁴ There are OT passages that prove it as well, such as “No one may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20).

[God is called] ... him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27).

No one has ever seen God (1 John 4:12).

... whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen (1 John 4:20).

And remember: Only Jesus has ever seen God's face:

No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father (John 6:46).

E. Jesus in the OT

1. In Eden
2. Cain and the Lord
3. A visit with Abraham
 - a. Hospitality to strangers
 - b. Who is who?
 - c. Judge of all the Earth
 - d. The Lords act together
4. Jacob meets the Lord
5. Meetings with Moses
 - a. Moses saw him and lived
 - b. God moves around
6. Joshua's Lord
7. Gideon: Double-checking the Lord
 - a. Getting an answer
 - b. Panic and peace
8. Samson's parents
 - a. A sacrifice pleasing to God
 - b. The right logic
9. So many names

In this section we're going to look at even more OT passages about what Jesus was like before he came in the flesh. In them he is often called *Yahweh*.⁵⁵ Now, you may not have

⁵⁵ In most English Bibles *Yahweh* is translated *the LORD* in accordance with the ancient Jewish tradition (which Jesus himself followed, making it a legitimate tradition) of never pronouncing the personal name of God. The Jews took the commandment not to take God's name in vain very seriously—although it's clear that they took it too seriously because if Moses wrote *Yahweh* in the Bible, and

known this, but that' the same as being called *the Lord*.

The title *the Lord* is often used synonymously with *Yahweh* in the Bible. Jesus himself confirmed that through a custom he had. Following the tradition of the Jews of his day, Jesus did not use the name *Yahweh* when quoting passages of Scripture that originally had the name *Yahweh*⁵⁶ in them. In order not to offend the Jews,⁵⁷ Jesus replaced the name of God (*Yahweh*) with *the Lord*.

• The title *the Lord* is often used synonymously with *Yahweh* in the Bible.

Study these three examples:

- First we have Matthew 4:10 as quoted from the original text in Deuteronomy 6:13. In the original it says **Yahweh your God** [not **the Lord your God**]:

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

- Secondly we have Matthew 21:42 as quoted from the original text in Psalm 118:22-23. In the original it says **Yahweh** [not **the Lord**]:

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this..."

- Thirdly, here is Luke 4:12 as quoted from the original passage in Deuteronomy 6:16. In the original it says **Yahweh your God** [not **the Lord your God**]:

Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

many of the other prophets did the same, so why would it be wrong to simply pronounce the name? If the prophets pronounced it, why would it be a sin for us to do so?

⁵⁶ The true original was actually just four letters: the tetragrammaton YHWH. The Jews were so reverent with the name that they didn't even record the vowel symbols to indicate the pronunciation. That's the reason nobody is sure of the original pronunciation. Some Bible translation teams translate it as *Yahweh* while others have translated it as *Jehovah*.

⁵⁷ If he had indeed pronounced the name *Yahweh*, surely it wouldn't have been in vain. We trust that those who have the Spirit of Christ and the name of God on their lips don't pronounce it in vain either. Jesus was following the Christian principle of "not offending the weaker brother" and "not putting a stumbling block in someone's way." He was acting in love.

• the oldest experience of human history

1. In Eden

That another Lord, not the One God and Father, should visit man is not a novel idea at all. In fact, it's the oldest experience of human history. For example, someone called *the LORD* introduced Eve to Adam in the Garden of Eden. Could that have been the One God?

Whoever he was, that same LORD performed surgery by taking out Adam's rib. Then he closed up the opening on Adam's body. That means that he touched Adam, right? The LORD was physically present with Adam. From Adam's rib, the LORD then *made* a woman and "brought her to the man." Doesn't that mean that the LORD was visible to them? Of course it does.

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man (Genesis 2:21-22).

Who could the LORD God⁵⁸ have been in that passage? Was it Jesus or Father God? Well, it had to have been the same person who took strolls in the Garden of Eden, speaking intimately with Adam and Eve because the Scriptures call him *the LORD* there also—and it's not characteristic of God's Word to be ambiguous. That would be using one name for two people in a confusing way. The Bible doesn't do that.

• The one called *the LORD God* was physically there!

Whoever he was, as he moved around in the garden, they could hear his sound. The one called *the LORD God* was physically there!

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid them-

⁵⁸ Since the Genesis 2 passage doesn't specifically say that Adam saw *Yahweh God*, you might be tempted to think that it could have been the Father. However, the fact that the Lord was walking there, and the fact that Adam hid from him (hid from his sight), and the fact that the Lord clothed them, mean that this Lord was physically present. It means that Adam and Eve could see him. Because they could see him—and knowing that "no man has seen God"—the LORD of Genesis 2 had to have been the Lord Jesus!

selves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the Garden.

Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the Garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself’ (Genesis 3:8-10).

The passage makes it evident that the LORD who confronted Adam and Eve in their sin was the same one who commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He’s also the same one who clothed the couple with animal skins—keeping in mind that the fact that he put clothes on them means that he actually touched them physically. Could that have been the One God?

Even more revealing is the fact that the LORD spoke to another⁵⁹ who was *like* him. The other one to whom he spoke also had a conscience—a knowledge of good and evil. So there was at least one other being who was similar to the LORD God of Genesis 3. The other one could hear the words of the LORD God of the passage without actually being there—interesting?

•...the LORD spoke to another who was *like* him..

... The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.⁶⁰ Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil...’ (Genesis 3:21-22a)

We believe that the LORD who was in the Garden of Eden was Jesus. He consulted with the Father, who heard him from Heaven. Take some time and analyze the passage on your own. You’ll never look at it the same way again after you’ve been able to see Jesus there.

2. Cain and the Lord

Not only Adam and Eve, but their oldest son Cain also spoke directly with one called *the LORD*, actually standing in the LORD’S presence. The LORD exhorted Cain to repent

⁵⁹ Or more than another, we could say *others* here. The Holy Spirit is like God and he’s like Jesus too, having a divine nature. That means that Jesus could have been speaking about the Holy Spirit in this passage.

⁶⁰ It’s difficult to imagine that Adam and Eve did not actually see *the LORD God* with their eyes because the Scriptures indicate that this LORD was the one who dressed them.

and to change his attitudes. He encouraged Cain to do good, being so intimately involved with Cain's life that he actually put a mark—what seems to have been a tattoo—on Cain.

•...the LORD loved Cain.

And the LORD loved Cain. How do we know that? Because he gave the mark to Cain with the express purpose of protecting Cain from harm. The Bible says that the LORD gave the mark *so that* no one would kill Cain, right? Right.

Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden (Genesis 4:15-16).

Do you know who this "LORD" was who loved Cain to the end? Was the LORD who spoke to Cain *God Himself*? It couldn't have been because Cain (a sinner) was in this LORD'S very presence. No man, not even the most holy, can stand in the presence of the Almighty God. Remember:

... [God] lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see (1 Timothy 6:16).

• the LORD who was with Cain was Jesus.

A man could, however, stand in the presence of someone who was God's messenger. What we're getting at is that the LORD who was with Cain was Jesus.

3. A visit with Abraham

The patriarch Abraham also met with Jesus. In fact, Abraham met with Jesus when Jesus revealed himself as the *I am*.⁶¹ Now, what makes us so confident that it was Jesus who addressed Abraham? Because Jesus told us after the fact. Jesus is so willing for this to be public knowledge that he even told his enemies that it was he who was with Abraham. It's not a secret he kept from anybody—and he wouldn't want us to keep it a secret from you right now, would he?

• It's not a secret...

'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.' So the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am' (John 8:56-58).

⁶¹ In Hebrew, "I am" sounds very similar to *Yahweh*, God's personal name. *Yahweh* is from the Hebrew verb "to be."

a. Hospitality to strangers⁶²

Let's look at how the Jesus-Abraham encounter took place. Jesus, under the name of *the LORD*, and appearing as a man, visited Abraham along with two companions, two angels in disguise. Abraham didn't just offer these men hospitality and a great meal, he had a lengthy face-to-face dialogue with Jesus, bartering to save Sodom.

•...a lengthy face-to-face dialogue with Jesus.

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby... Then one of them [it was Jesus] said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.'

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him... So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord [Abraham] is old, will I now have this pleasure?'

Then the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Will I really have a child, now that I am old?" Is anything too hard for the LORD [God]? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.' But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh' (Genesis 18:1-2, 10, 12-15).

Jesus can get pretty serious with people when he wants to, especially when they doubt what the LORD God can do. Jesus is quick to affirm that nothing is too hard for God. In this passage we have the LORD speaking about the LORD, that is, Jesus speaking about God.

⁶² In reference to this passage, Hebrews 13:2 says "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this, some have entertained angels without knowing it" (NASB). We could take it one step further and say: "Some have entertained Jesus without knowing it," which is what Abraham most certainly did. In Matthew 25:35 Jesus says "I was a stranger and you invited me in..."

• "Some have entertained Jesus without knowing it,"

b. Who is who?

Our Lord Jesus walked along the way to Sodom. On his way, he consulted with the two angels about whether he should reveal to Abraham what he was about to do to Sodom.

When the men [Jesus and the two angels] got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

Then the LORD [Jesus] said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on Earth will be blessed through him.

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD [God] by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD [God] will bring about for Abraham what he [God] has promised him [Abraham]” (Genesis 18:16-19).

Again, observe how the LORD [Jesus] speaks about the LORD [God]. This is really a challenging passage, and a revealing passage. In it, Jesus said that he had chosen Abraham to direct his household to keep the way of the LORD [God]. Did you know that Jesus chose Abraham?

•...you will be challenged to see who is who.

Any way you look at this passage you will be challenged to see who is who. The inevitable question is “What LORD is speaking about what other LORD?” That question is based on the undeniable truth that there are two Lords!

•...the undeniable truth that there are two Lords!

The LORD Jesus also says in the passage that he wants the LORD [God] to bring things about for Abraham. What things? The things that he [the LORD God] had promised Abraham. There are two LORDS in the passage: One was in Heaven, and the other who had come down from Heaven.

• One was in Heaven, and the other who had come down from Heaven.

Jesus, the LORD who was speaking, had arrived from Heaven itself. Please notice in the next part that the cries against Sodom had already reached the LORD Jesus’ hearing in Heaven. He calls those prayers “the outcry that has reached *me*.” That means that Jesus listened to prayers during the

times of the OT—it's not just a ministry he has now. Furthermore, Jesus carried out full-fledged investigations to verify the information he got through prayers. In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jesus had come down to see whether what he heard was true.

Then the LORD said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know' (Genesis 18:20-21).

• Jesus listened to prayers during the times of the OT—it's not just a ministry he has now.

c. Judge of all the Earth

And what about this: The LORD of the passage is the *Judge of all the Earth*. How shall we interpret that? What does it mean for Jesus to be the Judge of all the Earth? Isn't the One God the Judge of all?

... Abraham remained standing before the LORD. Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ... Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the Earth do right?'

The LORD said, 'If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake' (Genesis 18:23, 25-26).

Is Jesus indeed the Judge of all the Earth? If he isn't, then he certainly would have straight up denied Abraham the liberty of using that title for him. Jesus surely would have told Abraham not to be mistaken about his identity—but Abraham was right! The title fits Jesus perfectly well and it even corresponds with what we learn in the NT. Jesus told us that God authorized him to judge.

... he [God] has given him [Jesus] authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (John 5:27).

d. The Lords act together

You probably already are persuaded, but in case you are not yet fully persuaded that the LORD of the Sodom and Gomorrah story was Jesus, then this last passage should convince

•...there
were two
LORDS
acting
together.
to destroy
Sodom and
Gomorrah.

you otherwise. It plainly demonstrates that there were two LORDS acting together to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah: one on Earth and one from Heaven.

Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens (Genesis 19:24).

The LORD who sent burning sulfur from the heavens was God. He was in Heaven. Who could the LORD on Earth have been? It wasn't God. The LORD who rained down the burning sulfur by invoking the LORD in Heaven must have been Jesus.

Are you convinced yet? Jesus spoke of the destruction of Sodom in Luke 10. Did you know that he was a first-hand witness? Did you know that he speaking from experience? What we just studied in Genesis 19 proves that he was! Jesus was actually responsible for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

... whatever city you enter and they do not receive you... I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city... the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from Heaven and destroyed them all (Luke 10:10, 12; 17:28-29).

4. Jacob meets the Lord

Remember the story of how *a man* wrestled with Jacob the night before Jacob met up with his brother Esau? In the story, the mystery man, realizing that Jacob wasn't going to let him go until he got what he wanted, finally blessed Jacob. That man's blessing also involved changing Jacob's name to Israel, a name which means "he struggles with God." So, the mysterious man, by christening Jacob with a new name, was revealing the mystery of who he was—he was God!

Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his

hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.'

But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'

The man asked him, 'What is your name?'

'Jacob,' he answered.

Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome' (Genesis 32:24-28).

Jacob understood the meaning of his new name: It meant that he had wrestled with God! He wondered whether this person with whom he had wrestled really was God, so Jacob spoke with him a little more. He wanted to push the conversation a little further to discover the exact identity of this nameless man. Jacob asked him his name, but got no answer. Jacob then concluded that he had indeed wrestled with God.

Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.'

But he replied, 'Why do you ask my name?' Then he [the Angel] blessed him [Jacob] there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared' (Genesis 32:29-30).

Jacob's reaction to the situation was fear—the good kind of fear—the fear of God. He couldn't understand why he hadn't died during this night of struggle, knowing that the man he had wrestled with was God (Jacob knew that no man is allowed to see God). Jacob was left perplexed, and that was a step in the right direction. He was beginning to wrestle on another level, the spiritual level. Jacob was left wrestling with the mystery of the Christ. That mystery was finally solved when Jesus came. It has been revealed to us. Now we can look back at the passage and know that Jacob was getting to know Jesus.

• 'What is your name?'
'Jacob,' he answered.

• Ja-
cob said,
'Please tell
me your
name.'
But he re-
plied, 'Why
do you ask
my name?'

5. Meetings with Moses

•...hespoke
to the LORD
face-to-
face.

When Moses entered the Tabernacle to pray, the Bible tells us that he spoke to the LORD *face-to-face*. What do we make of that? How can anyone see God face-to-face? As if that isn't strange enough, the Scriptures also say that Moses beheld "the form of the LORD" (Numbers 12:7-8). Shall we throw out the doctrine that no man can see God? Is this the one exception to the rule?

... my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face-to-face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD (Numbers 12:7-8).

Now, what is this all about? Could it be that Moses spoke with the Father there in the Tabernacle? No, that's simply not possible. Nobody ever has seen the One God face-to-face. Since the LORD who met personally with Moses couldn't possibly have been the One God, but Moses was certainly with someone bearing the name the LORD, Moses' meetings must have been with our Lord Jesus. Moses saw Jesus' pre-incarnate form and face—wow!

• Moses'
meetings
must have
been with
our Lord
Jesus.

a. Moses saw him and lived

So far so good. But what shall we do with the passage which tells us that Moses "saw him who is invisible"?

[Moses]... saw him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27).

This is not easy to interpret, but let's try. First of all, we have to determine who the one "who is invisible" is. Well, it can't possibly be our Lord Jesus. Jesus was and is visible. The one "who is invisible" is the One God and Father. Only he is referred to in the Scriptures as "the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Does that mean that Moses saw God then?

We're not done interpreting the passage yet. We still have to determine which OT passage Hebrews 11 is referring to. Perhaps it is referring to:

- the burning bush
- the Tabernacle encounters
- Moses' 80 days on top of Mount Sinai

But we don't think that it's referring to any of those passages. We believe that Hebrews 11 refers to the passage in which God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock—yes, the passage where Moses saw God's backside. You'll recall that God passed by as Moses stood in the cleft of the rock. God let Moses see his back, but not his face or anything else. God only let Moses look after God had already passed by the place where Moses was standing.

Then Moses said, 'Now show me your glory.' And the LORD said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you... But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.'

Then the LORD said, 'There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen' (Exodus 33:18-23).⁶³

God clarifies in the Exodus passage what it means to *see him*—it means specifically to see *his face*. To see God's back doesn't count as seeing him (at least not according to God's way of thinking). Anyways, when the Father's *goodness* passed in front of Moses, God covered Moses with his hand. Moses waited in the cleft of the rock and looked only after God's hand was taken away. It was in that instant that Hebrews 11:27 was fulfilled: Moses "saw him who is invisible." No other man (except of course, Jesus) has ever had an experience like it.

Remember: God insisted that Moses should not see him, but he let Moses see his back. Is that a contradiction? No, the key is that God said that Moses couldn't see his *face*. The view of God that is not allowed is seeing God's face.⁶⁴

⁶³ Reading this passage literally (and there is no reason *not* to) allows us further insight into what God is like: the Father has *very big hands!* Even though we are made in his likeness and image, he must be quite bigger than us since, according to this passage he can cover a fully-grown man with one hand!

⁶⁴ By the way, Jesus never put that stipulation on anybody who had an encounter with him—he never said "You cannot see my face." That's another reason why we know that the LORD of the passage was the One God, not Jesus. And, interestingly enough, the three men whose visions of God are recorded in the Scrip-

• the passage where Moses saw God's backside

• To see God's back doesn't count as seeing him.

• God insisted that Moses should not see him, but he let Moses see his back.

• The view of God that is not allowed is seeing his face.

b. God moves around

•...the Living God is not sedentary.

Please note that another truth we glean from this passage is that the Living God is not sedentary. He doesn't just sit around. This truth is supported by Daniel 7 which describes God arriving at his Throne: It says that:

... the Ancient of Days took his seat (v. 9).

What does "took his seat" tell us but that God had been standing up before that? That is to say, nobody can take a seat unless they have first been standing. In the case of this passage, God arrived at his Throne and then sat down.

God is not like the static idols of the pagans which have feet but cannot walk. We are made in his likeness and we have feet, right? Do we have more than God? Shouldn't we suppose that the One who created us in his image had feet and legs before we did? Excuse the primary-school logic but God has feet and we have them too. How much more capable of walking around is God than we are?

•...God has feet and we have them too.

And mark this: God can go wherever he pleases—he can come to Earth, he can descend to Hades,⁶⁵ he can even enter your heart. He has no limitations. He may choose to have Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and angels do his work for him, but that doesn't mean that he can't do those things himself. It just doesn't make sense for him to do some things, that's all.

• God can go wherever he pleases.

6. Joshua's Lord

And what of the Commander of Yahweh's armies who appeared to Joshua? He couldn't have been God, because he referred to himself as "Commander of the army of Yahweh" and not the "Commander of *my* army," which is what he would have said if he were God. That Commander spoke of God as another person.

Okay, but if this Commander wasn't God, then why did Joshua refer to him as *my Lord*?⁶⁶ The answer is this: It must have been another Lord distinct from the One God.

tures (Daniel, Ezekiel, and John the apostle) offer us no description of God's face. The closest they get is that Daniel tells us that God's hair is "like pure wool" (Daniel 7:9).

⁶⁵ Psalm 139:8 says "... if I make my bed in Sheol, look! There you are" (LEB).

⁶⁶ In this case, the tetragrammaton LORD (Yahweh) was not used. Joshua used the title *Lord*.

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, ‘Are you for us or for our enemies?’

‘Neither,’ he replied, ‘but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.’ Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, ‘What message does my Lord have for his servant?’

The Commander of the LORD’s army replied, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did so (Joshua 5:13-15).

This Lord had to have been Jesus because nobody else in the Bible is reverently called *Lord* but God or Jesus. This is further proof that Jesus was Lord long before his resurrection from the dead.

Note that Joshua felt so humbled before Commander Jesus that he bowed prostrate before him. Additionally, Joshua took off his sandals in the Commander’s presence—a sign of reverence and worship. Even though he did it because Jesus commanded him to, the custom of taking off sandals was a tradition Joshua learned from Moses. We know that because Moses took off his sandals at the burning bush. Joshua shadowed Moses and certainly learned his behavior. And when Joshua found himself in the presence of the same person Moses met at the burning bush, his reaction was to do homage, just as Moses did. We know what Joshua thought because we know what Joshua said. He called this person *my Lord*. Joshua’s Lord was Jesus.

7. Gideon: Double-checking the Lord⁶⁷

In still another OT story, someone called *the LORD* spoke directly to a man named Gideon. Since the Scriptures report that this LORD *appeared to Gideon*, it couldn’t have been the One God—again, no one has ever seen the One God face-to-face but Jesus Christ.

•Jesus was Lord long before his resurrection from the dead.

•Joshua found himself in the presence of the same person Moses met at the burning bush, his reaction was to do homage, just as Moses did.

⁶⁷ There’s a big difference between second guessing and *double checking*. Gideon did the latter, not the former. He was willing to believe, he just had to be sure that the one in whom he was believing was true.

Since the LORD of the passage is also called *the Angel of the LORD*, immediately we know that he is not the One God. Rather, it's someone who is

... the radiance of his [God's] glory and the exact representation of his nature (Hebrews 1:3; NASB).

That Messenger of the LORD had come to challenge Gideon to take up arms against the Midianites:

The Angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the Angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

"Pardon me, my Lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" (Judges 6:11-14)

a. Getting an answer

• It was important for Gideon to get an answer to the question of whether the LORD was God or not.

• ...you and I should try to verify whether Jesus is God or not.

Check this out: It was important for Gideon to get an answer to the question of whether the LORD was God or not—and it should be equally as important for us today. That is, just like Gideon did, you and I should try to verify whether Jesus is God or not. Does that sound wrong? It's not wrong, it's good. This passage proves that Jesus grants us the liberty (if we want to have a solid faith) to test him. Precisely, the reason for Gideon's offering was to test whether it was really the LORD with whom he was speaking! Was it? Yes—it was. It was the LORD. It was the Lord Jesus.

That Messenger was the One upon whom God had put his name, the One with whom God was pleased to share his glory! It was the One Lord, Jesus Christ. It was the one of whom the Scriptures speak calling him "the image of God"

(2 Corinthians 4:4). Jesus is the One in whom “all of the fullness” of God dwelt in bodily form (Colossians 1:19). That is why he was called the LORD. That’s why we call him Lord today!

• Jesus is the One in whom “all of the fullness” of God dwelt in bodily form.

Don’t look down on Gideon for wanting to know whether it was really Yahweh who was speaking to him or not. Gideon knew that imposters existed. He knew that he had to be careful with appearances. “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14), so Gideon asked the Lord a very frank question: “Give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.”

Gideon replied, ‘If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.’

And the LORD said, ‘I will wait until you return.’

Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak (Judges 6:17-19).

Gideon proceeded to prepare an offering for this LORD. Now, the worship of angels is strictly prohibited in God’s Word, so God would only approve of the offering if the LORD to whom it was offered was, in fact, divine.

• God would only approve of the offering if the LORD to whom it was offered was, in fact, divine.

Read the rest of the story to see how things unfolded:

The Angel of God said to him, ‘Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.’ And Gideon did so. Then the Angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the Angel of the LORD disappeared.

When Gideon realized that it was the Angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, ‘Alas, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face!’

But the LORD said to him, ‘Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.’

So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it ‘The LORD is Peace’ (Judges 6:20-24).

God gave a special sign to Gideon. The Angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of his staff, then fire flared from the rock upon which the sacrifice was laid. The flaring of the fire was a miracle from God. When the fire consumed the sacrifice, it proved that God had accepted the sacrifice. So what did the miracle mean? It meant that God’s approval⁶⁸ was upon this mysterious LORD—it meant that he was *really* the Lord. Remember what Gideon’s request was:

• God’s approval was upon this mysterious LORD.

Give me a sign that it is really you talking to me (Judges 6:17).

b. Panic and peace

After Gideon realized that it was the Angel of the LORD he had been speaking to, he panicked. Does that reaction sound familiar? It should. It was just what Jacob did after his wrestling match with the Angel of the LORD was over.

Gideon didn’t know how his life could have been spared—having spoken the Angel of the LORD face-to-face. He didn’t think that such a thing was possible. Gideon knew that a man should die if he saw God face-to-face, so the Angel of the LORD was divine for Gideon. This is an important fact: Gideon’s reaction to the Angel of the LORD demonstrated that Gideon understood that the Angel of the LORD had equality with God! Do you understand that?

• Gideon understood that the Angel of the LORD had equality with God!

Because of Gideon’s reverent fear, God the Father spoke a word of peace to him, promising him that he would not die. Gideon believed God, and named the place appropriately “God is Peace.” That means that the last LORD with which

⁶⁸ We have further evidence that the LORD of the passage was Jesus. That evidence is his staff—it represents the Cross. The sacrifice represents anything we offer to God in Jesus’ name. The fire from the rock was the same miracle of life from death. It could only have come from God. The fact that Jesus ascended in the flame of that sacrifice demonstrated that any sacrifice we make by faith in Jesus is pleasing to God. It also looked a whole lot like the resurrection and ascension, didn’t it?

Gideon spoke could not have been the Angel of the LORD [Jesus]. Jesus had already disappeared. It was the One God who spoke audibly to Gideon. His voice came from Heaven.

8. Samson's parents

The Angel of the LORD would appear again—the next time he would reveal himself to a humble and childless Jewish couple. He was sent to them to prophesy the birth of the child who would be born to them and who they were to raise: the famous Samson.

a. A sacrifice pleasing to God

Now even though the Angel of the LORD refused to reveal his name to Samson's parents, they eventually drew the conclusion that he was the Angel of the LORD. But how were they able to come to that conclusion if he hid his identity from them? Read the story that follows and see if you can find out why:

A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. The Angel of the LORD appeared to her...

Manoah asked him, 'When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule that governs the boy's life and work?' The Angel of the LORD answered, 'Your wife must do all that I have told her.'

... Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, 'We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you.' The Angel of the LORD replied, 'Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food.'⁶⁹ But if

⁶⁹ He didn't stay because he was on a mission to bring a message (not because he wasn't capable of eating or because he wasn't hungry). Jesus, just like other messengers and prophets of God, was diligent to accomplish his mission and to return to God. Perhaps God had another assignment for him. Remember the story of the prophet who was killed by a lion?

As he went on his way, a lion met him on the road and killed him (1 Kings 13:24).

Do you remember how that story began? At first, the prophet followed the command of God by resolutely refusing to stay and eat with the king he had both rebuked and healed. Then he was deceived by a fellow prophet (to see the end of the story, please read verses 11-30 in your own Bible). He stayed behind and

•...they eventually drew the conclusion that he was the Angel of the LORD.

you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.' (Manoah did not realize that it was the Angel of the LORD.)

Then Manoah inquired of the Angel of the LORD, 'What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?' He replied, 'Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.'

Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: As the flame blazed up from the altar toward Heaven, the Angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground.

When the Angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the Angel of the LORD (Judges 13:2-3, 12-13, 15-21).

So the question is "How were Samson's parents able to come to the conclusion that they were dealing with the Angel of the LORD?" Answer: His ascension to God in the sacrifice was the palpable sign. It meant that the Angel of the LORD was not from Earth. They realized that this mystery man did not appear again because he belonged with God in Heaven. It's the Angel of the LORD who belongs with God in Heaven.

Even more important, the manner in which the Angel of the LORD ascended (in the miraculous flame that consumed the goat-grain offering) indicated that the Angel's life was a sacrifice pleasing to God. The Angel himself did not perform the miracle because it says that "the LORD did... [that]

God punished him for not following his commands completely. But here's how it all started:

The king said to the man of God, "Come home with me for a meal, and I will give you a gift." But the man of God answered the king, "Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: 'You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came'" (1 Kings 13:7-9).

• 'Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.'

• ...the Angel's life was a sacrifice pleasing to God.

amazing thing.” God did the miracle to show us three things:

- there is an acceptable sacrifice for sins
- he has power to bring the dead to life
- he can bring Jesus to himself

The whole scene looks a lot like what the apostles witnessed when they saw the ascension of Jesus, doesn't it?

... he [Jesus] was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received him out of their sight (Acts 1:9; NASB).

The fact that Manoah and his wife saw the Lord ascend in the fire of a sacrifice they had offered to God was a revelation of Jesus as the Christ! God performed the miracle to demonstrate to Samson's parents and to all of us who read their story what he would do later for our salvation. Didn't Jesus ascend to God as the sacrifice for our sins?

[Jesus] entered the Holy Place once for all... through his own blood... through the eternal spirit [Jesus] offered himself without blemish to God (Hebrews 9:11, 12, 14; NASB).

Christ... [entered] Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us... [and Jesus] has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:24, 26; NASB).

... we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ... (Hebrews 10:10; NASB).

• Didn't Jesus ascend to God as the sacrifice for our sins?

b. The right logic

If the story stopped there, it would be enough. No doubt you would be satisfied with its powerful lessons. Nevertheless, there are two more verses which we haven't looked at yet and those two verses deserve what's left of our attention. They show Samson's father's reaction to the ascension of the Angel of the Lord.

'We are doomed to die!' he said to his wife. 'We have seen God!' But his wife answered, 'If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this' (22-23).

•...God wouldn't have accepted an offering if things weren't okay.

The interesting thing about this passage is that Manoah's wife had the exact same logic as Gideon—the right logic. She reasoned that God wouldn't have accepted an offering if things weren't okay. But since God accepted the offering, things must have been okay. Now, Manoah was right in thinking that he had seen God, but he was wrong thinking that it was the One God. No man can see the One God and live. He should have understood that they had seen God's special Messenger: the Angel of the LORD.

Manoah's wife understood the main idea: that the LORD God accepted their offering, which meant that he had no intentions to kill them. He would have done so if that's what he wanted. The fact that they were alive and kicking was the evidence God gave them that the sacrifice was pleasing to God. Likewise, the fact that we're still alive today is evidence that Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary was pleasing to God!

9. So many names

• Jesus was revealed to humanity long before he was incarnate.

All of the above examples prove that Jesus was revealed to humanity long before he was incarnate. Although he was not yet known by the name *Jesus*, we have seen that Jesus was known by many other names:

- the LORD / Yahweh
- the LORD God
- the Angel of the LORD
- God
- the man
- Commander of the army of the LORD
- I am
- the Lord

• Jesus was more than Lord!.

• Jesus was so magnificent that he was beyond names..

The OT passages we have studied reveal that Jesus was Lord all throughout the OT—don't they? In fact, they demonstrate that Jesus was more than Lord! Check out all the titles he had! But it's not even just the titles that prove it. Consider this: Jesus was so magnificent that he was beyond names.

Remember what he said to Manoah:

Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding (Judges 13:18).

That is, our Lord was (and he still is) beyond human understanding—Jesus' glory is so great that no one name could

ever sum up what he is. That's why he also challenged Jacob with the same question he gave to Manoah:

Why do you ask my name? (Genesis 32:29)

Do you get the point? Jesus could easily say the same thing to us today: "Do you really think that you can fathom my identity?"

Ask yourself: Do you know how great the name of Jesus is? We're dealing with the name that is the only name given unto men by which we can be saved. Reading this book is just the beginning. The information we give you here is a drop in the bucket. Jesus' name will be greater still. His name is great, but it will be greater than it is now. During the Millennial Kingdom, Jesus will have even more names:

... he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end... The zeal of the LORD Almighty [that's the One God] will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Who can understand someone as great as Jesus? God. Yes, only the God who made Jesus so great comprehends Jesus' greatness! It is God who will accomplish great things in Jesus, and because of that—only God really knows Jesus.

... no one knows the Son except the Father (Matthew 11:27).

F. Baby and Lord

1. Become as little children
 - a. Special protection
2. How the days of Jesus' flesh started
 - a. No confusion
 - b. Straightforward questions
 - c. What *Jesus* means
 - d. A miracle with a message
 - e. Why born of the Spirit?
 - f. The miracle that he was made flesh
 - i. A huge microscopic miracle
 - ii. The greatest humility
 - iii. A human Savior
 - iv. The Holy Spirit in Jesus
 - 1) From before the womb

• Jesus' glory is so great that no one name could ever sum up what he is.

• Jesus' name will be greater still..

•...only the God who made Jesus so great comprehends Jesus' greatness!

- 2) Baby John had more
- 3) What Jesus gives
 - a) Why Jesus is great
 - b) How Jesus gives power
- 4) Anointing for Jesus
 - a) Wisdom and knowledge
 - b) The baptism of the Spirit
- v. Everybody's got a spirit
 - 1) Jesus has his own spirit
 - 2) Spirit versus form
 - 3) How a baby can be Lord
 - 4) God helps through discipline
 - 5) Negative reactions
 - 6) The origin of Jesus' spirit
 - 7) Two exceptions to Jesus' pattern
 - 8) Have faith in Jesus
 - 9) God's breath of life
 - 10) Just like us
- g. Immanuel
 - i. How God was with us
 - ii. Authority for man
 - iii. What's in a name?
 - 1) A good name
 - 2) Get the meaning
- h. Mary, a human mother
 - i. Shock treatment
 - ii. A bad rap
- i. Jesus the Son of God
 - i. Spiritual status
 - 1) Where are you?
 - 2) The way things look
 - 3) Demons with authority
 - 4) The ups and downs of Jesus
 - ii. How Jesus became the Son of God
 - iii. The firstborn Son of God
 - iv. The only begotten Son of God
- j. A blessed boyhood
 - i. Favor with God and man
 - ii. Childhood development
 - ii. Jesus learned to obey
 - iv. Up and coming

We have examined how Jesus was Lord as far back as we can imagine—even from long before the Beginning. We have now completed a study of how he was Lord throughout the entire OT. When believers had encounters with him they treated him as Lord. They even treated him as God! Indeed, his equality with God is what made him Lord. But what happened when he gave up that equality with God? Did he remain Lord? That's the question we pose in this section.

•...what happened when he gave up that equality with God?

To start our research, let's consider Jesus' conception—a very delicate moment in Jesus' personal history. In order to be conceived of a woman, the Word renounced his equality with God, turned microscopically small, and became defenseless. In Mary's womb, Jesus became one of us. He literally stepped into humanity by assuming the human nature. The Word became flesh. Did that make him less than he was before? Yes and no.

•...Jesus became one of us.

1. Become as little children

When Jesus taught a group of adults that they had to “change and... become like little children” (Matthew 18:3) he was speaking from experience: He himself was mature before he became a little child. Just think about the moment he left his glory in Heaven and in its place, made a woman's womb as his new home. Jesus ceased to be with God, and decided to be with us.

•He himself was mature before he became a little child.

It's an amazing thing that happened: A prince became a pauper. The class system around the world is based on the principle that people with power will cling to their power, isn't it? Observe the firm class system—it's established in every country in the world. But Jesus smashed that system by willingly choosing a lowly life. He became a child, a poor child. He demonstrated immense meekness, and if you want to enter into the Kingdom someday, you will have to take a low position too. There is no other way.

• A prince became a pauper.

... the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:1-4).

•...if we don't make that change towards humility, we will never enter the Kingdom.

Did you get that? Jesus insists that we all humble ourselves. In fact, if we don't make that change towards humility, we will never enter the Kingdom. *Never* is a strong word. By employing it, Jesus meant to communicate to us that without a change of attitude, it will be impossible for us to enter into eternal glory. So what is the attitude we need to have? Repentance. We need to admit that we know nothing and that God knows best. We need to have utter dependence on God.

a. Special protection

•...Jesus promised special protection for all who follow his example of meekness.

Jesus knows how dangerous it can be to become defenseless. Imagine how unwise it would be for a country to disband its military forces. They would be exposing themselves to enemy attack. Knowing that weakness requires protection, Jesus promised special protection for all who follow his example of meekness. He calls them his *little ones*.

An army has been assigned to us by God himself—and they constantly report to him in person. That army is strong. It's an army of guardian angels. Read the following passages which assure all of Jesus' *little ones* that we are in good hands.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in Heaven always see the face of my Father in Heaven (Matthew 18:1-6, 10).

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)

•...it's in people's best interest to treat Christians well.

On the flip side, the Matthew 18 passage also shows that it's in people's best interest to treat Christians well. Jesus says that they shouldn't look down on us. Woe to those who lead Christians to sin. Woe to those who hurt us. Jesus will condemn those who destroy us with a devastating punishment. But if someone welcomes us, they welcome Jesus himself—and that's quite a prize.

... whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of

Heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea (Matthew 18:4-6).

The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:40).

2. How the days of Jesus' flesh started

Before our Lord was ever called *Jesus* his name was *the Word*. The Scriptures tell us that the Word was with the One God and that, when he was with God, the Word had the very same nature as God—a *divine* nature. Put differently, Jesus was God along with the One God.

In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with [the One] God, and the Word was God. This one was with [the One] God in the Beginning (John 1:1-2; YLT).⁷⁰

•...Jesus was God along with the One God.

⁷⁰ Take this wisdom for what it's worth: The way to teach John 1:1-3 is not to say "When John says that 'the Word was god' there is no direct article (*the*) there, so Jesus was 'a' god—with a lower-case 'g'." That's how the Jehovah's Witnesses explain the passage, and you do well to avoid their method.

The right method is not to highlight the *lack* of the direct article when Jesus is described, but to highlight the *presence* of the direct article when it's used for God. What that article does is it makes it clear that John is talking about the One God. In fact, the article (*the*) is used twice in the passage to refer to the One God. Put differently, in the original Greek, the text refers to God as the God the two times it mentions him.

Let's just allow the passage speak for itself: It says that Jesus was God (and we should certainly use a capital *G* when we write *God* for Jesus). Cherish the truth that Jesus was God because the fact that Jesus was God proves how great God's love for Jesus was [the past tense verb *was* is the one that's used in the passage, and that's significant—we can't afford to overlook it]. How does Jesus' deity prove that God had a great love for Jesus? Because God let Jesus be with him and that letting Jesus be with him is what opened the way for God to share his nature with Jesus. That's the meaning of the passage: Being with God is what makes someone like the Word divine.

The point a fair Bible teacher should clarify is that the two times that the Father is mentioned in the passage, the direct article (*the*) appears before his name.

a. No confusion

Does that sound confusing? It's not supposed to (the Scriptures were never written to confuse people); but if it does, ask yourself this question: "What was the essential difference between God and Jesus in the Beginning?" What does the passage reveal to us about that?

• "What was the essential difference between God and Jesus in the Beginning?"

How shall we translate the original Greek words "the God" then? That's an important question. Another good question is: Why do we have to translate the word "the" anyways? Why are there no Bible translations available to help us to see the "the"? Is there some sort of a conspiracy among Bible translators which is plotting to hide God's truth from us? Is there a plot among the Bible publishing houses? No, the English Bible translations don't give us the wording "the God" because it's simply not smooth English to say "The Word was with the God."

Fine, but since the God is the way John 1:1-3 was written in the original Greek, we're obligated to find a way to get the meaning of *the God* across in English, aren't we? Yes, that's right, and the best way to do that is to explain that the passage means "the [One] God" when it speaks of *the God*. Put differently, it is affirming the doctrine of monotheism. The apostles believed that the Father is *the One God* (something which shouldn't be difficult for Christians to believe, but Trinitarianism has muddled things up so much that people can't understand fundamental doctrine anymore).

Since Bible translation teams are not going to change their versions of the Bible anytime soon, it's your job (as a teacher of God's Word) to explain to others the meaning of the article *the* before *God* as it is used in the Bible. If you do that, the true message of John 1:1-3 becomes evident: It's not that there were two people called *God* who were mysteriously one person (that's the Trinitarian cop out). Rather, there were two and one was affected by the other: the Word, being *with* the One God, was given the glory of God!

•...there were two and one was affected by the other.

With is the word that should get the most weight in a solid Christian teaching of John 1:1-3. The idea behind the *with* is that because Jesus had the privilege of being *with* the One God, God gave him all the privileges he could afford, including a divine nature. You have to make other people understand what an impressive thing was for Jesus to be *with* the One God. It means life! As Jesus said in John 6:57, "I live *because* of the Father." But more than life, it means glory!

If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me (John 8:54; NASB).

Jesus is never called *the God* in the Bible (not here or anywhere). He is called *God*—yes, and that fact is supposed to be a strong statement about the glory he got from the One God. To understand that glory, consider how Jesus prayed in the Upper Room. When he prayed to God [notice here how he uses the word *with!*], he prayed that God would give back...

... the glory I had with you before the world began (John 17:5).

So we have proven that Jesus "was God" (John 1:1) for a reason: It was because God gave him that honor. That glory that Jesus shared with the One God was given to him from God. It wasn't something Jesus had automatically and it definitely was not glory that Jesus gave to himself. He got that divine glory, equality with God, for a singular reason: because God invited Jesus to be *with* him.

- The answer is not: One was **God** and the other was **not God**.
- The answer is not: One had a **divine nature** and the other **didn't**.
- The answer is: One had a **permanent** divine nature (God), the other had a **temporary** divine nature (the Word, Jesus).
 - Put differently: Jesus' divine nature was a condition. It was **not permanent**.

• Jesus' divine nature was a condition. It was not permanent.

You have to believe that Jesus' divine nature was temporary if you're going to really know him. It will challenge you, but you have to deal with the whole Bible⁷¹ head on. If you don't, you'll be confused by the many false teachings you'll hear.

b. Straightforward questions

Unfortunately, most Christians won't be easily persuaded by our interpretation of John 1, so to get them to reflect at least a little on it, we might ask them three very direct questions:

- Is the passage speaking about the past, the present, or the future?
 - Answer: By saying "the Word **was** God" the passage is patently speaking of **the past**.
- What point in the past is does the passage refer to? Is the passage speaking about what the Word was **before** the Beginning, **at** the Beginning, or **at conception**?
 - Answer: The passage is a clear parallel to Genesis 1. It starts with the same words "in the Beginning," and verse 3 goes on to describe how the Word created all things, so it is speaking of a specific point in time: **the Creation of the World**.
- Is the context of John 1 about how the Word **kept** his divine nature (how he con-

•...the passage is patently speaking of the past.

•...it is speaking of a specific point in time: the Creation of the World.

⁷¹ You especially have to deal with John 1:1-4 and Philippians 2:6-11. Read them over and over again if you have to until you have mastered them.

tinued to be “God with the One God”), or is it about how he **gave up the divine nature** (how he stopped being “God with the One God”)?

• The context is all about how the Word gave up his divine nature...

- Answer: The context is all about how the Word gave up his divine nature because it says in verse 14 “and the Word became flesh.”

Flesh means the corrupt human nature—which is the **exact opposite of the divine nature**.

- It’s logical that nobody can have these two natures at the same time, so the passage was written to show the difference between what Jesus was at Creation and what he became at the incarnation.

• ...the difference between what Jesus was at Creation and what he became at the incarnation.

Our salvation depends upon this message: Jesus had a divine nature with the One God at Creation. He gave up that divine nature, assumed the weak human nature, and instead of being with God, Jesus came and dwelt with us. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

• ...instead of being with God, Jesus came and dwelt with us.

c. What *Jesus* means

You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus (Luke 1:31).

• Jesus... means *Yahweh saves*..

God gave the baby the name *Jesus*, which means *Yahweh saves*. Do you know what God was trying to say by giving Jesus that name? He was making Jesus’ mission plain to all: Jesus would be the Savior. Jesus would be God’s instrument of salvation for all mankind, proving that *Yahweh saves* sinners.

• Jesus would be God’s instrument of salvation... proving that *Yahweh saves* sinners.

[An angel said to Joseph, Mary’s fiancé] ‘... you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins’ (Matthew 1:21).

[An angel said:] ‘Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord’ (Luke 2:11).

d. A miracle with a message

Jesus was conceived miraculously. To be conceived in the womb of a virgin was far from natural—it was supernatural and super-special! In fact, the virgin birth is so special that there is no evidence in all of human history of anyone else being born of a virgin.⁷² By doing the miracle, God wasn't only showing us how powerful he is, he was fulfilling his own promise given 800 years earlier through the prophet Isaiah:

... the LORD Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

The prophet spoke of *a sign*—meaning “a miracle with a message”—but what did the virgin-birth sign mean? It was designed to show us who exactly the Son of God was. That is to say, by means of the miracle, everybody should have been able to tell that Jesus was the Son of God.

God expected people to use this logic:

Who else could ever be **begotten** of God, but the very **Son** of God? The one who is **fathered** by God must be the **Son** of God.

e. Why born of the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit performed a great miracle in Mary. The

⁷² The Greek myths about gods like Zeus procreating with women were common enough, but there were actual sexual relations involved in those soap-opera-style myths. Mary had no physical contact with God. She was a virgin even after she became pregnant. The women in the myths were not. The myths were lies anyways, and they are only worth of mentioning because the Greek myths reflect some faint knowledge of a true event: the attempt of many perverse demons to corrupt human women as related to us in Genesis 6.

In the real history we read of in Genesis 6, demons took human form and seduced young women. They did that in order to procreate a super-strong race. The Bible calls that race the *Nephilim*. The children born of these women seduced by demons grew up and were known as “the mighty men who were of old, men of renown” (Genesis 6:2, 4). But again, sexual relations were involved in those stories. Because of that, those women were not virgins. The sign of the Messiah was that he would be born of a virgin—a woman whose purity was not compromised by any physical contact with any man or spirit-being. Mary's pregnancy was no myth and her virginity was no bluff. Prophecy was fulfilled in her.

•...there is no evidence in all of human history of anyone else being born of a virgin.

• who exactly the Son of God was

NIV says that the Spirit *overshadowed* her, but why? Why exactly did the Spirit do things that way? Well, he did it primarily because God gave him an order to do it. The Holy Spirit is obedient to God and is always willing to do what God wants.

Fine, that's acceptable. But digging deeper, let's ask why God ever sent the Holy Spirit to do such a unique thing—why? The reason is explained to us in the following passage:

'You will conceive and give birth to a son...'

'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.⁷³ So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:31, 34-35).

If you focus on the way *so* is used in the passage, you'll soon understand that God had a reason for sending the Holy Spirit to do such a fantastic miracle. The reason was to make Jesus worthy of being called *the Son of God*. Put differently, the beauty of the Holy Spirit's *overshadowing* Mary was that it proved that God fathered Jesus. Even today the Holy Spirit's miracle is the most solid evidence we have that God is Jesus' Father.

⁷³ If scientists are able to use artificial insemination to produce offsprings in livestock, and can even use it in women, how much more capable is *God* to get a woman pregnant without involving sexual contact? Is it too hard for us to imagine? It shouldn't be. Even science helps us to imagine how possible it was. For those who think that the whole scenario sounds impossible, they can let their imagination stretch a little by contemplating modern science.

But if people demand an overly descriptive explanation and ask you for the precise details of what happened inside her body so that Mary would become pregnant, it's best to simply quote the Bible:

The power of the Most High God overshadowed her (Luke 1:34).

It's not worth it to get tied up in discussions of what happened physiologically. Those discussions tend to become impure because they revolve around what happens *inside* a woman's reproductive organ. If the Scriptures focus on what happened *outside* of Mary, we are wise to have the same focus: "The Holy Spirit came on her" and "the power of the Most High overshadowed her." That's all the Bible tells us, and that's enough. The rest was simply miraculous.

• 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God'

• ...to make Jesus worthy of being called the Son of God.

• ...it proved that God fathered Jesus.

f. The miracle was that he was made flesh

Most Christians wrongly suppose that the Holy Spirit got Mary pregnant in order to infuse a divine nature into Jesus. They couldn't be more mistaken—the Spirit was doing the exact opposite.

Why would the Spirit infuse a divine nature into a baby if before the baby was conceived, he already had a divine nature? That would be completely illogical and even counter-productive. If the Scriptures emphasize that the miracle was that the Word was made flesh; consequently, the miracle was that the Word stopped being divine. Put differently: The Word left the divine nature behind him when he took on the human nature.

We repeat: The reason behind the conception miracle could not possibly have been to give the baby Jesus a divine nature. Why not? Because God was proving something through the miracle—he doesn't do miracles in vain. What God was proving was that Jesus had an authentic human nature. The miracle of Christmas is that Jesus gave up the divine nature and became like us, human. More exactly, in the words of Paul, Jesus had *the very nature* of God, but then he took on *the very nature* of a human.

... Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness... (Philippians 2:5-7).

i. A huge microscopic miracle

What happened when the Holy Spirit performed this tremendous miracle? He didn't make a child God, he made God a child! No Red Sea was parted, no sun stood still over Gibeon. Instead, something microscopic happened: the phenomenon of conception. But even though what happened was physically small, it was a huge miracle. Truly, the best things come in small packages.

Something normal happened; something that almost every woman experiences—pregnancy. Pregnancy is an everyday natural event, but in the case of Jesus, because no human father was responsible, pregnancy became a magnificent

• Why would the Spirit infuse a divine nature into a baby if before the baby was conceived, he already had a divine nature?

• ...Jesus gave up the divine nature.

• ...the Holy Spirit... didn't make a child God, he made God a child!

• ...even though what happened was physically small, it was a huge miracle.

•...as a sign it said something. It said: God has a Son!

miracle. This virgin conception of a child was a sign—remember? And as a sign it said something. It said: God has a Son! The world had never known that message before. Those who had some notion of the prophecies were curious, but just as ignorant as everybody else as to the mystery of who that Son would be.

ii. The greatest humility⁷⁴

• Jesus, who was God, "made himself nothing"

This miracle (which had no precedent and which has never been duplicated) was great because Jesus, who was God, "made himself nothing" (Philippians 2:7). Let's not measure the greatness of the miracle by the shock-value it has, but by the humility of the One who subjected himself to it. Remember: The One who had the glory of God exchanged it for the shame of sin. It's not that he sinned, no—rather, Jesus bore sin's shame. He bore that shame in Mary's womb—and it was a powerful foreshadowing of what Jesus would do later when he bore it again on the Cross.

• It's not that he sinned, no—rather, Jesus bore sin's shame.

The famous Christmas carol Hark the Herald Angels Sing⁷⁵ puts it nicely in the third stanza:

Mild he **lays his glory by**, born that man
no more should die.

Jesus laid his glory aside and took our burden of sin on himself—all to obey God. And God had him do it because of his immense love for us. His love for us is so great that he was willing to sacrifice the person he most loved to justify us and sanctify us.

iii. A human Savior

So the reason for the virgin conception of Jesus was just the opposite of what many people think: The conception established Jesus' human nature. It did not make it impossible. It made it undeniable. The conception did not establish Jesus' sinlessness; on the contrary, it exposed Jesus to temptation!

• The conception did not establish Jesus' sinlessness... it exposed Jesus to temptation!

⁷⁴ The only greater act of humility ever performed was Jesus surrendering himself to the Cross; but the difference is that Jesus' bearing of the Cross was not a miracle. It was the most powerful act of the human will in all history, yes. It involved immense sacrifice and faith, yes—but it was no miracle. The Cross was death, and death is natural. Natural occurrences don't count as miracles. But conception in the womb of a virgin is super-natural. The virgin birth was a miracle par-excellence!

⁷⁵ The hymn was written by Charles Wesley in the 18th century.

It made the Word human! And indeed, the Savior of mankind had to be 100% human in order to fulfill his job:

- How else could we be **led to holiness** if not through a human example?
 - Could we follow the example of **an angel?** No. We don't have an angelic nature so we can't be expected do what they do. And it wouldn't have been fair of God to give us an angel as a savior.
 - Could we have imitated **God Himself?** No. We don't have a divine nature, so it wouldn't be fair for God to expect us to simply follow his example.⁷⁶
- How else can a human being be **redeemed** (bought back) if not by the life of another human being?
 - What value can we place on a human life, but **another** human life? There is no other fair ransom.
- We need someone to intercede for us before God. Who else could **sympathize** well enough with our human weaknesses to be our intercessor but another human being?
 - Jesus, being human, has already been through what we're going through. He is able to be our High Priest in Heaven.

The Savior had to be a *Son of Eve*. Don't forget that God promised as far back as the Garden of Eden that Eve's offspring would ultimately destroy the Devil.

[God said] I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman [Eve], and between your offspring and hers; he [the offspring

⁷⁶ However, we can in fact "be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). We do that by loving the way God loves: blessing our enemies. Nobody can do it until Jesus helps them by empowering them with the Holy Spirit, but when we have the Holy Spirit, we can. We can love like God loves because Jesus has taught us. So when we read that God says "be holy for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:15) we should say *amen* and accept the challenge. He's calling us to the holiness you attain through *love*.

of Eve, the Son of Man] will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Genesis 3:15).

• Jesus loved to call himself the Son of Man precisely because it meant that he was the *Son of Eve*.

Jesus loved to call himself the Son of Man precisely because it meant that he was the *Son of Eve*. He was totally aware of the fact that he was destined to fulfill the God's curse on the Devil. Which curse are we referring to? The one that all Creation longed to see fulfilled. The one about how Eve's offspring would crush the head of the Serpent!

iv. The Holy Spirit in Jesus

Jesus is one of many people who have gotten the Holy Spirit early in life. Maybe you also got the Spirit early in life. It's a bit rare, but there's a special grace you see in certain children, maybe one out of every seven, which gives them a special glow. The Bible mentions that Moses was a *beautiful child* and we know that Daniel, Esther, and Mary were very spiritual youngsters too. Jesus was another one of those very spiritual children.

1) From before the womb

The earliest someone can get the grace of this beautiful anointing is quite early—from before they are born. That is, God foreknows some people before they are born. He has a special plan for those *chosen ones* before they are ever conceived. The prophet Jeremiah was one of God's chosen ones. God knew Jeremiah before Jeremiah was born, and he told him so.

[God says to Jeremiah] 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart' (Jeremiah 1:5).

•...it's an understatement to say that Jesus was foreknown before he was conceived.

•... Jesus is great because of his relationship to God.

Jesus was also *known* by God before he was formed in the womb. We already studied that when we read the OT passages about Jesus as the Word. If you reflect on them a little, it won't take long for you to realize that it's an understatement to say that Jesus was foreknown before he was conceived. Consider this: God knew Jeremiah before Jeremiah was in his mother's womb, but God knew Jesus before the foundation of the world!⁷⁷

⁷⁷ If that doesn't sound special to you, it's because you haven't yet understood that Jesus is great because of his relationship to God. You probably have some

Jesus prayed to the Father: ‘you loved me before the foundation of the world’ (John 17:24; NASB).

He [Jesus] was foreknown before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; NASB).

2) Baby John had more

So is the point that Jesus was far greater than any other human being at birth? Did he have more than anybody else ever did? You’ll be surprised to know that the answer to that question is *no*—Jesus did not have more than any other person at birth. So who had more? John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while inside his mother’s womb.⁷⁸

... he [John the Baptist] will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born (Luke 2:15).

God worked in John’s life as early as possible. That’s great. But why doesn’t the Bible say the same thing about Jesus? Why doesn’t the Bible say that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born? It doesn’t, so should we take the silence of the Bible to mean that John had more grace at an early stage than Jesus? Or should we just suppose that the baby Jesus was filled with the Spirit from the womb? Just *supposing* doesn’t sound like a good way to find the truth of God, does it?

Granted that Simon and Ana saw Jesus in the Temple when he was just 8 days old, praising God for him—but that just means that God gave them a revelation that Jesus was the Messiah, not that the baby had a special appearance. If the baby Jesus had a special appearance (like a halo on his head), a lot more people than Simon and Ana would have been making a fuss over him. The fact is that there was nothing particularly special about baby Jesus when he was 8 days old. The Bible makes no mention of the Jesus’ Holy Spirit filling until Jesus is a full-grown man.

So we can’t say that Jesus had it and we can’t say that he didn’t. But even if Jesus wasn’t filled with the Spirit as a

Trinitarian residue you haven’t filtered out of your mind yet. You need more time with the doctrine of the apostles. Remember: The fact that “the Word was *with* God” is what makes the Word great!

⁷⁸ Don’t forget that the *filling* of the Holy Spirit is a big deal; it’s not just an anointing, it’s a complete empowerment.

•Greatness is to be measured at the end of a man's life, not at the beginning.

baby, that wouldn't make John better than Jesus. Greatness is to be measured at the end of a man's life, not at the beginning.⁷⁹ Jesus' final accomplishments far surpassed those of John the Baptist:

- Jesus ended his life **trusting** in God. John ended his life doubting.
- Jesus already got a **resurrection**. John will get his later.
- Jesus will **reign** in the Kingdom. John is less than the least in the Kingdom.

3) What Jesus gives makes him great

Jesus' greatness was no secret to John, he preached it. John himself gave public recognition that the baptism Jesus would give was much greater than the baptism he was giving.

... this was his [John's] message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit' (Mark 1:7-8).

So by the time John was a man, he was preaching that Jesus was *more powerful* than he was. Was John just being modest? No—he was speaking the plain truth. John knew it, and Jesus knew it too. Jesus knew that he was greater than any man before him, and he wasn't shy about it. Jesus didn't feel like he had to keep it a secret:

... [Jesus said speaking of himself] now something greater than Jonah is here... and now something greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:41, 42).

1. Why Jesus is great

In what way is Jesus great then? Well, let's go back to why John said Jesus was great. Do you remember his words? John said of Jesus:

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8).

⁷⁹ Consider Paul who God chose to serve him even as early as when Paul was in his mother's womb. Although he drifted away from God for decades as a Pharisee, Paul could still confidently say:

God...had set me apart even from my mother's womb (Galatians 1:15; NASB).

Do you remember what Jesus told his disciples to do before he ascended to Heaven? He told them to wait for the Holy Spirit to come to them.

[Jesus said] I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from On High (Luke 24:49).

So Jesus is remarkable because of the baptism he gives, the baptism in the Spirit. That is, Jesus is great because he can give us the Holy Spirit.⁸⁰ As our High Priest, Jesus can ask God to give us the Spirit and he will be heard.⁸¹ God always responds to Jesus' prayers.

• Jesus is great because he can give us the Holy Spirit.

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of Truth... you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you (John 14:16-17).

2. How Jesus gives power

The verses we just shared with you about Jesus sending the Spirit are very important because they will aide you in understanding how Jesus gave power to his apostles. He gave them authority to cast out demons and to heal the sick by God's power—notice that he said that the power they would get was *from On High* (from God in Heaven), and the Spirit would only come because Jesus *asked the Father*. The bottom line is that God gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples because Jesus prayed to God for that to happen.

• how Jesus gave power to his apostles

As usual, Jesus' power was from God. It gets to us through Jesus. This is the same protocol God and Jesus had during the Creation: God's power works through Jesus.

... having summoned his twelve disciples, he [Jesus] gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness (Matthew 10:1; NASB).

⁸⁰ There are no limitations on how much of the Spirit we can get because the Bible tells us that

God gives the Spirit without limit (John 3:34).

⁸¹ That's why when we lay our hands on people for them to receive the Holy Spirit, we do it in Jesus' name.

And he [Jesus] called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases (Luke 9:1; NASB).

4) Anointing for Jesus

Although he didn't get the Holy Spirit baptism until he was about 30, there were definite signs that Jesus had anointings of the Holy Spirit from the time he was a little boy. The gospels tell us that he was filled with wisdom and that he was remarkably keen.

1. Wisdom and knowledge

In the passage below, Luke summarizes what Jesus was like from infancy to 12 years of age by saying that he grew and *became strong*. That's the physical part, but spiritually, along with the grace of God, Jesus was *filled with wisdom*. Since no one else inspires wisdom but the Holy Spirit, the boy Jesus must have had an anointing of wisdom.

• an
anointing of
wisdom

... the child [Jesus] grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him (Luke 2:40).

It was important for God to have an intelligent Son. We learn from the next passage that, as an adolescent, Jesus' understanding was so powerful that the teachers in the Temple were *amazed* at his questions and answers. That's another indication that Jesus had an anointing of knowledge as early as age 12.

• an
anointing of
knowledge

Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers (Luke 2:47).

For those who take these passages to mean that we should push our kids harder in school and make sure that they get straight A's, think again. Jesus' understanding was of the Bible, not of math, science, or languages. Helping your kids to be surrounded by a culture that puts value on the Scriptures will get them a lot further than an expensive private school—it's a much better investment in their future.

• Helping
your kids to
be surrounded
by a culture
that puts
value on the
Scriptures

And remember: The fact that the boy Jesus had wisdom does not mean that he had a lot of information. He knew nothing of computers, minimal arithmetic, and little physics, but Jesus handled himself wisely. He knew when to speak

and when to keep silent. Wisdom is the knowledge of how to live right. Help your kids to get that. It will serve them much more than a tablet, a high GPA, or a college degree—really.

2. The baptism in the Spirit

This is just an aside, but if we mention Jesus' baptism in the Spirit here, it will help us to put Jesus' childhood anointings in perspective. Those anointings were nothing compared to the anointing he got when he was a man.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment Heaven was opened, and he [John the Baptist] saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him [Jesus] (Matthew 3:16).

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, Heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove... Now Jesus himself was about 30 years old when he began his ministry... Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Luke 3:21-23; 4:1).

Okay, so Jesus was baptized in the Spirit at around age 30—you already knew that. But do you know that you and I can get the same baptism today? It's for all of us. Jesus was the first one to get it, not the last. If you have repented, believed, and have been baptized in water, you are in the New Covenant so the next thing is for you to get the baptism in the Spirit. Jesus got it praying to God in the waters of baptism. Have you tried that yet?

Maybe you don't understand what a wonderful privilege this is. Nobody in the OT was able to get the baptism of the Holy Spirit—not Adam, not Abel, not Enoch, not Noah, not Abraham, not Moses, or David, or Elijah, or any of the prophets or great kings of the OT. Not even John the Baptist—who Jesus called “more than a prophet”—was able to get the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and John really wanted it! But it wasn't time. Now it is. You can get the baptism of the Holy Spirit today. Do you want it? Jesus wants it for you.

• Jesus was the first one to get it, not the last.

v. Everybody's got a spirit

We have just seen how the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus at different times in Jesus' life, starting from when he was a child. The meaning of the word *anoint* is "to pour oil over." Oil is a symbol for the Holy Spirit because he smooths things out. He takes the dryness out of our lives. But here's an important question: What part of you does the Holy Spirit anoint exactly—your body? To a degree your body can be anointed, but only because it is the vessel that holds your spirit. It's really your spirit that God wants to pour his Spirit over.

•...the Spirit of God anointed Jesus' spirit.

That means that the Spirit of God anointed Jesus' spirit. And he did, just as the Spirit has anointed other people's spirits all throughout human history. Now, on rare occasions the Spirit has anointed animals (like Balaam's donkey) and even material objects (like Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons in Acts 19:11-12)—those are facts nobody can deny—but the *filling* of the Holy Spirit is not for donkeys or handkerchiefs. God's Spirit only fills the spirits of those who have been made in God's image. The reason why we are digging into this topic is because we need to understand Jesus' spirit.⁸²

•...God's Spirit only fills the spirits of those who have been made in God's image.

1) Jesus has his own spirit

Some Christians will be new to the teaching that Jesus has his own spirit. That's understandable because pastors rarely, if ever teach it. Maybe a question you might have today is: "What exactly *is* a spirit?" That's a good question. Here are some answers:

• understand Jesus' spirit
• What exactly is a spirit?

- Your spirit is the **essence** of what you are.
- Your **personality** is anchored in your spirit.
- Your **life-power** flows from your spirit.⁸³

⁸² Yes, absolutely, Jesus had his own spirit, as indicated at the moment he died and said:

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46).

Jesus also suggested that he had his own soul when he said

My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (Matthew 26:38).

⁸³ Notice how Luke 6:19 tells us that "power was coming from him [Jesus]." Not only that, but Jesus could actually feel that same power as it surged out from

- If you **die**, only your body dies. Your spirit lives on.
- The human spirit is **eternal**.

Those are pleasant facts, but here's something really exciting about your spirit: It can change for good or for bad. Consider how Lucifer, a spirit-being, an archangel, changed from good to bad and became the notorious Devil he is today. Or consider how Matthew, a tax-collector, a traitor to the Jewish nation, eventually became one of the most highly-honored apostles. What happened to Matthew? His spirit changed from bad to good.

•...your spirit...can change for good or for bad.

Now what shall we say about Jesus' spirit? Make no mistake about it: In spite of the powerful temptations and difficulties he faced, and a spirit which is just as subject to change as any other, Jesus' spirit always remained the same. The Devil pulled and tugged at it, but Jesus' spirit never took a turn for the worse.

•...Jesus' spirit always remained the same.

The spirit of the Word was holy, good, and righteous before he was incarnate; it stayed that way while he was in the flesh; and it will remain that way forever.

The Scriptures testify to this wonderful truth saying:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

within him. When the woman with the 10-year hemorrhage touched the corner of his tunic, Jesus said:

Who is the one who touched me?... Someone did touch me, for I was aware that power had gone out of me (Luke 8:45-46).

If power came from within him, it had to have emanated from his spirit. What other source of power is found within a man but his spirit? His soul?

It's true that people who followed Jesus just touched "the fringe of his cloak, and as many as touched it were cured" (Matthew 14:36; NASB), but the power surged from within him, not from Jesus' clothes. The power of God, through his Holy Spirit, is within believers for us to do miracles just like it was present in Jesus to do miracles.

... the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick (Luke 5:17).

If people understood that, they wouldn't dedicate any time to seeking shrouds, relics, the "Holy Grail," or the bones of dead "saints." They would seek power from God in a spiritual way, imploring God to anoint their own spirit. They would seek the baptism of the Spirit—and they would find it!

2) Spirit versus form

• Jesus' spirit has remained the same—it's his form that has changed.

Again, Jesus' spirit has remained the same—it's his form that has changed. But that's not to say that a person's form doesn't matter. When Jesus had the form of God he had great advantages. He didn't get tired, he never felt hungry, thirsty, or weak. He couldn't be tempted either. When he had the form (body and nature) of man, he did get tired, felt hungry, thirsty, and weak—and most importantly, that form made him susceptible to powerful temptations!

Both your spirit and your form (human body) are important. It's God's will for us to take care of our bodies—and frankly, that shouldn't be hard for any one of us. Paul says:

... no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body (Ephesians 5:29).

However, Jesus' message to humanity was not “care for your body.” Jesus' message to humanity is “save your spirit.” He showed us the great value he places on our spirit when he got the baptism of the Holy Spirit for himself. If he needed it, how much more do we need the Spirit? Get it at all costs.

3) How a baby can be Lord

•...the changes of form he underwent never altered his spirit.

To ascertain the difference between spirit and form, we do well to study the life of Jesus. Examine how the changes of form he underwent never altered his spirit. When he took the form of a man, his spirit resisted the temptations his flesh was susceptible to. The external change of taking on a human body did not overwhelm his essence—a pure spirit.⁸⁴ And after his resurrection, taking the form of God didn't make him arrogant or proud. He has it even today, but Jesus is still very willing to serve us!

⁸⁴ The fact that all babies come to us as *pure spirits* is very pleasant to consider, but it's not just for our enjoyment—it's a challenge God has given to all adults! Will you work to help conserve the purity of children? Look at a newborn baby. No sin is there, the baby is perfectly innocent. It is holy. Can we keep our children that way? As parents, we absolutely can and we must. But we'll only be capable of doing it if we learn from the example of how God disciplined Jesus. If we refuse to give our children discipline, we are denying them God's love. If we do not use the rod, their pure spirit will become contaminated by sin, love will not flourish within them, and their holiness will be lost. Getting it back is nearly impossible.

The child conceived in Mary's womb was the same person as the One who was with God in the Beginning—but he was only the same in his spirit. That's why even as a baby, Jesus was still Lord. That baby was still the Word in essence. His spirit was shrouded in an underdeveloped body and infantile soul, but it was there. He didn't have any understanding. He had no ability to speak, so he could not exercise any authority. The Word subjected himself to the normal developmental processes all humans go through, but he was essentially the same person.

• The child conceived in Mary's womb was the same person as the One who was with God in the Beginning.

4) God helps through discipline

Understanding that the spirit of the Word was within the baby Jesus shouldn't be too hard for most of us to believe. What is hard is understanding how Jesus was able to resist his flesh's natural attraction to sin. Well, it helped that the foolish behavior of a child does not count as sin. It also helped in that error is not sin.

Sin is the transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4; GNB).⁸⁵

Since babies don't yet understand God's Law, they cannot be held responsible for their misbehavior. God does not count it as sin.

Jesus' secret to victory over temptation was God's discipline. God was constantly giving Jesus firm lessons in life, teaching him right from wrong so that Jesus would develop a good conscience. Does that sound like Jesus got some sort of special treatment? He didn't. God does the same thing for all of us. That's why the Scriptures admonish us:

'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.'

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children (Hebrews 12:5-7).

By the time Jesus became an adolescent [which is when sin counts as sin because by about 12 years old, children under-

⁸⁵ The 1599 Geneva Bible is the translation which gets the idea across most clearly here. "Sin is lawlessness" is another very good translation from the original Greek (*kai he hamartia estin he anomia*).

- Jesus had some sort of unfair advantage over the rest of us?

stand God's Law], God was there to protect Jesus from the temptations that were too strong for him. Does that sound like Jesus had some sort of unfair advantage over the rest of us? Not at all. God does the exact same thing for us:

... God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

5) Negative reactions

Jesus was Lord when he walked among us, but because he was in the flesh, his Creation did not often give him the honor he so deserved. Without the divine nature, people and even plants would refuse to serve him. If Jesus had come in his divine nature, they would have honored him in a snap, but since he was in *the form of man*, they did not.

For example, when the fig tree refused to provide fruit for Jesus in his hunger—there are no questions about it, the plant was being rebellious. Jesus cursed the plant, taking advantage of the situation to teach his disciples a lesson: All creatures should bear fruit for their Lord Jesus.

- All creatures should bear fruit for their Lord Jesus.

... when they had left Bethany, he became hungry. Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if perhaps he would find anything on it; and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again!'

... As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. Being reminded, Peter said to him, 'Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered' (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21).

We should learn from the fig-tree story that all who refuse to serve their Lord Jesus will be cursed. Jesus will not accept any excuses. Nobody should ever say: "It's not the time for me to bear fruit for Jesus." None of us should think "But how can we bear fruit with so much Apostasy around us?" It's always the right time to serve the Lord Jesus. We have to "be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2).

Just because his form was not divine, many people refused to give Jesus the honor he deserved. They were unable to discern the spirit that was within him—the spirit of the Word. They only saw his human form. They didn't realize that the spirit of the man they were dealing with was same spirit who was with God in the Beginning, and indeed who was God. They were dealing with their very Creator, but (in ignorance) they treated him with contempt.

6) The origin of Jesus' spirit

A question which is very appropriate and necessary at this point in our study is: "When did Jesus' spirit come into being?" Was it at conception? Was it before conception? Did the spirit of Jesus come into being before the Creation?

The answer is that Jesus' spirit was the very same spirit known as the Word—and the spirit of the Word existed before Creation, before the Beginning. God deposited that same spirit, the spirit of the Word, into the human soul of the tiny zygote⁸⁶ which was Jesus at conception.

To really grasp the meaning of what happened in the incarnation, you've got to understand this: Jesus' spirit became greatly limited by his new human soul. At conception, being molecular in size, Jesus could not reason, feel, or make any decisions. Intellect, emotion, and will are all functions

• Jesus' spirit was the very same spirit known as the Word

• Jesus' spirit became greatly limited by his new human soul.

⁸⁶ Scientifically, before an embryo is formed, the union of a male sperm and a female egg constitutes a *zygote*. The zygote stage is the stage before a baby becomes an embryo. The definition of this smallest human form is: "... the nuclei of a sperm and an egg." It is created when the sperm and the egg "fuse to form a diploid cell, known as zygote..." (retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_fertilization on December 30, 2013).

God knows all about this, of course (he designed it), and you might be surprised to know that his Word actually speaks of embryos. David sang about procreation as part of God's creative wonders in Psalm 139, drawing a poetic comparison between his mother's womb and "the depths of the Earth." David describes the process as a secret creation. He says that he was "intricately woven"—words which bring to mind the way the tissue of the human body becomes more and more complex as an embryo matures into a fetus within its mother's womb.

Indeed you created my inward parts; you wove me in my mother's womb. I praise you, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, and my soul knows it well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was created secretly, and intricately woven in the depths of the Earth. Your eyes saw my embryo... (vv. 13-16).

of the soul, and the soul of Jesus (while he was still just a zygote) had just begun to develop. It was within Mary's womb that the baby Jesus began little-by-little to have feelings. Scientists have proven that that an embryo can feel the emotion of fear by the time it is just 6-weeks old.⁸⁷ Surely it can feel love at around the same time!

•whathappened

So let's be concise about what happened:

- **The Word** committed his spirit into the hands of God.
- The Spirit **overshadowed** a virgin named Mary.
- God did a miracle through **the Holy Spirit**.
- God **produced a zygote** within Mary.
- This happened **without** any sexual contact at all.
- God placed **the spirit of the Word** in the zygote.
- The zygote became **alive**.
- Mary became **pregnant**.

It's important to assert that the instant the zygote was created was the same instant that the spirit of the Word began to inhabit it. That was the moment that the earliest phase of the development of the body of Jesus began—a body that would eventually become the sacrifice for the sins of the World. The prophecy was fulfilled that says:

... a body you have prepared for me (Hebrews 10:5 as quoted from Psalm 40:6).

Now, that same *spirit of the Word*, Jesus' spirit, would become endued with more and more of the power of the Holy Spirit as Jesus grew up. By the time he was a mature man, at age 30, Jesus' spirit was *filled* with the Holy Spirit. A particularly important moment in Jesus' life was the when he was baptized at the Jordan River. It was during that ex-

⁸⁷ "At about six weeks prenatally, scientists have observed a ridge that forms the basis of the amygdala, the structure in the human brain that produces emotions such as fear (Joseph, 2000). It is not certain exactly when babies may start to experience fear, but it appears that a fetus has the basic equipment to experience emotions from an early stage in development" (Retrieved on August 18, 2014 from <http://www.thechildcenteredparent.com/?p=141>).

perience that God gave him his great gift: the baptism of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁸

7) Two exceptions to Jesus' pattern

One of our dear readers might now ask: Why is all this important for me? Is it relevant? The answer is: Yes, it is. Jesus' example establishes the basic pattern all humans should follow. Even his pre-natal example is completely relevant. Consider the order of human life:

- All human life **begins** when God breathes into flesh.
- All humans are just **zygotes** the moment we are conceived.
- God makes each of us a living being when **he gives us our spirit.**⁸⁹
- A person's spirit can be **filled with the Holy Spirit.**
- God puts **no limitations** on the Spirit's filling.
- You can be **filled** with the Spirit even while you're still in the womb.
- Any person who repents and is baptized in Jesus' name can receive **the baptism of the Holy Spirit,** and the accompanying **spiritual gifts.**

⁸⁸ Isaac was a "son born by the power of the Spirit" (Galatians 4:29) and his spirituality was evident at a young age—Didn't he let his father lay him on an altar to be sacrificed? What faith! Isaac offered no resistance. What hope. Yet with all of the grace he had, still Isaac's conception in Sarah's womb is not nearly as wonderful as the new birth available to you and me through baptism.

Consequently, there is no need for us to try to be like Isaac, Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist, or even Jesus with regard to their physical births—because through the baptism of the Holy Spirit we can experience a greater miracle than the miracles surrounding their physical births. We can be born again *in the spirit!* The births of Isaac, Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist, and Jesus were physical miracles, but someone who is born again experiences a miracle in their spirit.

⁸⁹ That spirit is not a reincarnated spirit from some other person who died. Although I haven't ever read in the Bible that God *makes* it, he *gives* the spirit to a human. Perhaps he gives it from himself. Perhaps it's his own life—a life from God which is even distinct from his Holy Spirit—that God invests in each of us when he creates us. This topic deserves more research.

One difference between Jesus and us is that we need to repent from our sins, but he had no sins to repent of. Still, he got baptized anyways.

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4).

If baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, why did Jesus get baptized? Just to show us what needs to be done to get the baptism of the Holy Spirit! Follow his example if you want the Holy Spirit.

•...our spirit was created the moment we were conceived.

Another difference between Jesus and us is that our spirit was created the moment we were conceived—Jesus’ spirit already existed. But pay attention here: That doesn’t mean that Jesus had any advantages over any other human being. Having a pre-existent spirit didn’t change Jesus’ development in any way—his soul (emotions, intellect, and will) still had to develop from scratch. For example, he didn’t have any memory of who he was before—no *déjà vu* flashbacks to remind him of what he did as the Word. Rather, he studied the Scriptures. By doing so, God revealed to Jesus who he was, what he had already done as the Word, and what he was called to do. Jesus read about himself in the Bible.

•...the flesh, exerts great limitations on every person’s spirit.

When the Word was made flesh, the same limitations were placed on Jesus’ spirit that you have on your spirit when you are a baby—he knew nothing, he couldn’t speak, he couldn’t take care of himself, he was helpless, and weak. The *form of man*, the flesh, exerts great limitations on every person’s spirit. That’s why we have to be patient with children, the elderly, and all people—especially those who are mentally impaired.

8) Have faith in Jesus

Are you still not 100% convinced that our experience is like Jesus’? Our spirits at conception are just as pure as Jesus’ spirit—are they not? Are they guilty of sin? Are they contaminated? Do they bear Adam’s guilt? No, no, no.⁹⁰ Our spirits are clean slates at conception. Indeed, they are limit-

⁹⁰ Be careful of the dangerous doctrine of “original sin.” It teaches that humans are born sinners because we are (supposedly) guilty of the sin that Adam committed. Catholics, Reformed Protestants, and many Evangelicals teach it.

ed by our human souls and limited by our human bodies—but so was Jesus’ spirit.

Jesus overcame the flesh and so can we! If Jesus overcame by faith in God’s Word, we must overcome the same way. And what does God’s Word tell us to do in order to overcome? What can we do to act the way God wants us to act? Believe in his Son.

... they asked him [Jesus], ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent’ (John 6:28-29).

In fact, it’s only by faith in this Jesus (the one God’s Word tells us about) that we can be saved from sin. There’s no other way. Religion and its traditions may look appealing, but they are not wisdom from God.

... that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:2b-3).

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:8).

... 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 (Colossians 2:16-17).

Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.

Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed

worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence (Colossians 2:20-23).

It's only by believing in the Jesus of the Bible that a person can really be free from sin. Knowing Jesus is eternal life. Believe in him and experience salvation!

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12).

... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:36).

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world (John 9:5).

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die (John 11:25-26).

9) God's breath of life

Conception is a miraculous thing not only because our children (who we love very much) begin their lives at that point, but because they become living beings.⁹¹ How does God make us living beings? By breathing life into us, but

...they be-
come living
beings.

⁹¹ We know this because that's when God made Jesus a human too—at conception. If John the Baptist leapt in his mother's womb when the embryo Jesus was near, it's because that embryo was really the Word there in Mary's womb. The spirit of the Word was in the embryo-child Jesus. God didn't put the spirit in Jesus at his birth. Clearly the Magi were worshipping someone they recognized as Lord (the Word) when they bowed before the infant Jesus. However, they could have worshipped Jesus while he was still in Mary's belly just as well. How so? Wasn't the spirit of the Word there in Jesus from the moment he was conceived? Yes, it was.

This truth has big implications for the issue of abortion. Pro-choice proponents argue that a baby's life begins at birth. Some say that it begins in the second or third trimester. They are all wrong. We understand from the Scriptures that a baby is alive at conception. How do we know that it is alive? If the baby's spirit is there, and the spirit of a person is that person's source of life, then the baby is alive.

Furthermore, when Jesus said "The spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing" (John 6:63); doesn't that mean that there can be no life where there is no spirit? A zygote counts for nothing. It's just flesh. If a baby is alive, it's because a spirit is inside it.

differently than the way he breathed into Adam.⁹² What is God's *breath of life* but the Holy Spirit? God gives⁹³ his life

• What is God's *breath of life* but the Holy Spirit?

⁹² Granted that a zygote doesn't breathe, but it is certainly alive. We do not believe that it's simple oxygen that makes an unborn baby alive. Rather, it's the spirit (given by God) that makes a baby alive. We get the spirit when we are in our mother's womb.

God's *breath* entered through Adam's nostrils and "man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). After that first breath, God issues each human being their personal spirit through the miracle of conception. How do we know that? Well, if God didn't breathe into Cain, Abel, or anybody who originated from Adam [including you and me]—how else could we be made alive? We are alive, aren't we? Yes, but we didn't get that life the same way Adam did.

Now, even Eve originated from Adam according to these verses:

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man... as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman (1 Corinthians 11:8,12).

If those verses aren't enough to prove to you that Eve originated from Adam, perhaps you can trust instead in Adam's declaration:

Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' because she was taken out of man (Genesis 2:23; NASB).

So Eve came from Adam—and there was no conception involved. From Eve on down, we have all proceeded from Adam. Obviously, God issued a different spirit to Eve than he did to Adam. It's also obvious that God issued a spirit to her in a different way than he issued one to Adam. He did, and God has given a unique spirit to every human being who has ever been conceived. He did it in a different manner than he did when he breathed Adam's spirit into Adam.

Since each individual spirit after Adam didn't come directly from God's breath—God must have used a different means. What means did God use? *Blood*. God gave Eve and everyone after her their spirit through blood. The human spirit originates in human blood. This is made clear by the Bible principle "the blood is the life" (Leviticus 17:11,14; Deuteronomy 12:23) as well as the immense importance God puts on blood throughout the Scriptures.

... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life (John 6:53-54).

... we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood (Acts 15:20).

... the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22).

⁹³ Ecclesiastes 12:7 (NASB) says that "the spirit will return to God who gave it,"

force, his Spirit to every human being at conception. In other words, God does the same thing with each one of us that he did with Adam! The only difference is that God's *breath* does not enter through our nostrils now. It enters through our blood.⁹⁴

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).

10) Just like us

• Jesus was totally human.

•...neither physically nor spiritually did Jesus have any advantages over any one of us.

It all boils down to this: Jesus was totally human. He was just like us. Fortunately, God gave him good parents and a religion that guided him towards the truth [that's a grace that relatively few people get in life today], but outside of that, neither physically nor spiritually did Jesus have any advantages over any one of us.

If we can't see this truth, then we might not believe in Jesus—we will think that he came with some unfair advantage over temptation. We will think that he came with a divine nature and we'll say (in our hearts) "That's why he was so holy!" (What a lie). We'll excuse ourselves for our sin because we'll reason in our hearts "Jesus loved, did miracles, and overcame sin because he had a different nature than ours."

But Jesus did not have a divine nature—he had the same one as us, a human one. It is impossible to be saved if you don't believe that Jesus came in the flesh. In fact, you haven't even begun the Christian life if you don't believe it. It's the most basic doctrine our Gospel teaches!

• It is impossible to be saved if you don't believe that Jesus came in the flesh.

meaning that God *gives* life. If he gives life, he must give humans our spirit because our spirit is the source of our life. Furthermore, this verse proves that when we die our spirit returns to God. This truth agrees with Jesus' words on the Cross, "... into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). So Jesus' returned his spirit to the God who *gave* it—and God gave it at the incarnation (we already studied that).

The Ecclesiastes verse deserves our diligent study. If you pay attention to its use of the verb *give*, you'll see that when someone is conceived, God gives them a spirit. That's why we have tried to use the word *give* instead of *create* in the sections of the book that deal with what God does with our spirit at conception.

⁹⁴ Why is this so important? If we understand when a new human life begins, then we can understand exactly when Jesus' incarnation occurred. At the moment that Jesus' zygote (small embryo) began to have its own blood circulating in it—that was the instant when the incarnation took place! Jesus' human life officially started at that instant. His was a physical life that began supernaturally, but which would be subject to the laws of nature from then on—even to the law of death!

g. Immanuel

Immanuel, one of many names we use for Jesus, means *God with us*. Why is Jesus known by this name? Does it mean that Jesus is the One God? Jesus never would have let anyone give him the title of One God, nor would he ever let anyone call him by that title. Because he is *God with us* does not mean that Jesus is the One God, not at all.

i. How God was with us

Does Immanuel rather mean that God was with us through Jesus? Yes. that is the soundest way to interpret the name. Consider the following passages:

Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know (Acts 2:23).

In the passage above we see that God did miracles, wonders, and signs among the people. It was God who did them, although they were performed through Jesus. In the end, the glory and the credit for what Jesus did will go to God. This verse reflects the same teaching we see in Matthew 9:8 below. As you read the verse, ask yourself who the people glorified when Jesus healed the paralytic:

When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man (Matthew 9:8).

The answer to the question is: The crowd praised God.

ii. Authority from God

In Matthew 9:8, the *man* to whom God gave such authority was not just Jesus, it was all of us—*man* meant *mankind*. God had given “such authority to mankind” is the idea. What the people saw in Jesus was a human being who was used mightily by God—and they were right! They saw that God was with humans. He was, after all, with the man Jesus.

The people were watching the One whose name is Immanuel, “God with us.” How exciting it was for them to see that through Jesus, God had visited the people. Those who be-

• God was with us through Jesus.

•...the glory and the credit for what Jesus did will go to God.

• Jesus was a prophet.

lieved glorified God for this *great prophet*. And Jesus was a prophet—more than a prophet, but a prophet nonetheless.

[Crowds saw Jesus resurrect a man and] ... they began glorifying God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us!’ and, ‘God has visited his people!’ (Luke 7:16; NASB).

Jesus made the same point with his disciples in the Upper Room. He told them that he wasn’t speaking by his own authority, but by God’s. He wasn’t acting on his own authority either. It was God who was “doing his work” through Jesus.

The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work (John 14:9-10).

iii. What’s in a name?

You won’t understand what *Immanuel* means until you understand how the Jews handled names and how they named their children. The Jews had the custom of giving their children names with the Hebrew word for *God* as a prefix or a suffix of the name. Some well-known examples include:

- Isra-**el** (he who contends with God)
- Dani-**el** (God is my judge)

Did you notice how these two names have *el* in them? The letters *el* mean *God* in Hebrew just like they do in Arabic.⁹⁵ Hebrew and Arabic are from the same language family (they are both Semitic).

Other names that don’t have *el* but *yah* are also using God’s name because *Yah* is God’s personal name *Yahweh* in its abbreviated form. In other words, *Yahweh* becomes *Yah* just like Jonathan becomes *John* or Franklin becomes *Frank*). Some examples of *Yah* used in Jewish names include:

- Isai-**ah** (Salvation of God)
- Gedali-**ah** (Yahweh has become great)
- Matt-**hew** (God is gracious)
- **Joh**-n (gift of God)
- **Yeh**-shuah (Yahweh saves)

⁹⁵ This is where the Arabs get the name “Allah” from: It’s the article *al*/(the) + *el ah* (God). Put *al* together with *el ah* and you get *Allah* (literally meaning: “the God” or, more precisely, “the One God”).

Did you notice that final name? Maybe you didn't know to whom it belongs. It belongs to Jesus. Yes, that's how Jesus is pronounced in Hebrew.

Notice how in this next name, the name of a well-known prophet, we have both *El* and *Yah* combined:

- **Eli**-jah (my God is Yahweh)

Some other Jewish names have even stronger meanings than the ones we just looked at. Read the following list and consider the impact these names must have had on those who received them:

- **El**-ihu (My God is he)
- Micha-**el** (like God)
- Samu-**el** (name of God)⁹⁶
- **Jeh**-u (He is God)

Now, you have to understand that these names were never intended to glorify human beings, but to glorify God. For example, no Jewish parents ever wanted to say that a boy named Elihu *was God*. God never intended to say that Michael the archangel was actually *like God*. The meaning of the name Michael was more along the lines of:

This angel will challenge everybody to ask
the question: 'Who is like God?'

It was no human error that Michael got his name, by the way. He was created by Jesus, so it was either God or Jesus who gave him the name Michael!

None of the Jews actually imagined that, upon meeting a child named *Samuel*, they should think "He is God's name." That doesn't even make sense. Rather, a Jew who met Samuel was supposed to feel challenged to see how the name of God would be exalted in Samuel's life. Are you getting the picture? Likewise, no Jew upon hearing the name *Jehu* (He is God) would interpret the name to mean "that man Jehu is God." Instead, they would interpret the name along these lines:

•...was supposed to feel challenged to see how the name of God would be exalted.

⁹⁶ The name Samuel also means "God has heard," which is the meaning Ana most likely intended when she christened her prophet-son by that name. She gave her son that name because she never wanted to forget the situation she had passed through. Remember what happened: She begged God for a son in her sterility, and was finally heard by God.

This is a man whose is destined to demonstrate **who God is**. His life should direct us to God like a finger pointing upwards. His life directs our thoughts upward and says to us “He is God.”

• Jesus was destined to demonstrate to all those who hear him that Yahweh saves!

In the same way, with the name (Jesus) that God chose for him, Jesus was destined to demonstrate to all those who hear him that Yahweh saves!

1) A good name

A good name defines a person’s calling in life. Jews were particularly careful to select names in a way that gave value and esteem to a child’s life. They knew that a name was part of someone’s reputation (the one they would earn during their life) and not just a tag given at birth.

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold (Proverbs 22:1).

What really mattered for the Jews was not giving their children a cute baby name, but providing them with a vision, a direction. Jewish parents longed for their children to live a life that fulfilled the meaning of their name.

A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

2) Get the meaning

Consider this: The very passage that establishes the name *Immanuel* for Jesus says that the child was a *sign*. Put differently, the child Jesus’ birth meant something. What did the birth of the baby Jesus mean? The meaning of his birth is revealed in the name Immanuel: The child would show others that God was with them.

• The child would show others that God was with them.

The LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

Now why do we treat this subject so thoroughly? It’s because so many people abuse the idea of calling Jesus *Immanuel*. Taking advantage of the great confusion about who the One God is, Trinitarian teachers use the *Immanuel* name

for Jesus to blur the distinction between Jesus and God. They like to do it particularly at Christmastime, when everybody is very emotional about the holidays, and analyze God's Word less than ever. When Christians hear *Immanuel*, many of them immediately interpret the name to mean that Jesus is the One God. But the problem—as we already said—is that it is heresy to believe that.

We have to be careful not to fall into heresy. On the contrary, we need to guide Christians towards the truth by examining Bible passages in context (which is what we're trying to do here with Immanuel).

We also have to start with the fundamentals. You can't lead people to right belief unless you lay a foundation of sound doctrine first. One of the fundamentals of the Christian faith is One God. Another is One Lord. If anyone changes a fundamental teaching of Christianity, they teach heresy. To avoid heresy, teach the cultural context. That is, answer the question of what the Jewish traditions involved with naming a son were. A Bible teacher once said: "Establish the context and the passage will preach itself."⁹⁷

h. Mary, a human mother

Here's a familiar story:

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary (Luke 1:26-27).

We've heard it a million times, but do we understand this story as well as we think we do? Let's see:

First of all, according to the betrothal customs of her day, Mary would have been as young as twelve⁹⁸ and as old as

⁹⁷ That's what John MacArthur. I can't remember the date but the name of the cassette was "Expository Preaching." It was one of 10 points he was giving to a group of seminary students on how to preach well.

⁹⁸ "In the first century betrothal could take place starting at the age of twelve," retrieved from Bible Gateway at <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Luke/Announcement-Birth-Jesus-Mary> on March 22, 2014. It is unlikely that her father betrothed Mary to Joseph at age 15, which would have been rather late for the times. Being a good-hearted girl, she was quite a catch.

•Trinitarian teachers use the *Immanuel* name for Jesus to blur the distinction between Jesus and God.

fifteen when the angel Gabriel visited her. She was probably 13. Did you know that she was so young?

Gabriel brought Mary surprising news: God had chosen her to bear the Christ-child! At the time, Mary was engaged to be married—but how could she allow herself to get pregnant before consummating her marriage? That would be a disgrace. Joseph would surely renounce her, she thought.

But then again, there was a prophecy to be fulfilled. Being a pious girl, Mary may have been familiar with the virgin-birth prophecy spoken through Isaiah:

...the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son (7:14).

But we're not sure if she knew or remembered the prophecy. It certainly would have been a comfort to her and it would have helped her to make sense of what God was asking her to do. Either way, it was enough for Mary to hear the message straight from an archangel's mouth. She accepted the words of the angel and made herself willing to do God's will. She believed that she would become pregnant, at great risk to her future. Mary bravely took on the high calling of mothering the Messiah.

• Mary bravely took on the high calling of mothering the Messiah.

i. Shock treatment

Imagine what it was like for a village girl to hear the message the angel brought:

You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and... he will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High... and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:31-33; NASB).

Mary very well knew that it was a disgrace for a young lady to be found pregnant before consummating her marriage. Under those disgraceful circumstances, God brought our Lord Jesus into the world. That's really amazing because Jesus shared more than our nature—he shared our shame. He didn't just bear our shame the day he was crucified, he bore it right from the start.

• Jesus shared more than our nature—he shared our shame.

It's likely that Joseph made the engagement as early as possible, let's say when Mary was 12 or 13, seizing the opportunity to get the best young bride he could.

How do we know that Mary was shocked by the message Gabriel brought to her? The Bible says that she was *greatly troubled*. Furthermore, Gabriel himself noted that she was afraid. He had to console her and tell her not to be afraid:

The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God’ (Luke 1:28-30).

ii. A bad rap

Like many children nowadays, Jesus was born with a bad reputation. Everyone in the neighborhood considered him to be a son of sin, not the Son of God. He lived in a small town where everybody knew everybody else’s business.⁹⁹ Imagine how the neighbors gossiped about Mary’s pregnancy! Imagine the way they looked at the newborn Jesus—like a bastard, an illegitimate son, a “child of sin.”

But that child, shamefully conceived (in their eyes), was actually the Creator of the World. He was the very One who created the Sun, Moon, stars, Earth, and everything in it. He was no sinner at all, but one who, having enjoyed equality with God, was willing to exchange his divine glory for humble village life in rural Galilee.

Since the children [we who are children of God] have flesh and blood, he too [Jesus] shared in their humanity (Hebrews 2:14).

The point is this: God chose Mary because of her human nature, not in spite of it. We’re not saying that God chose a woman of bad repute (like a prostitute), but he didn’t choose someone free from sin either. So God did not chose Mary because she had no sin. He chose her because she had sin. The Savior had to be born with the human nature. To get a human nature, you must be born of a woman. Mary was that woman.

•...a son of sin, not the Son of God.

• God chose Mary because of her human nature, not in spite of it.

• God did not chose Mary because she had no sin. He chose her because she had sin.

⁹⁹ There’s a saying in Spanish *pueblo pequeño, infierno grande*, meaning: “A little village [because of gossip] is a big inferno.”

i. Jesus the Son of God

i. Spiritual status

There are divine beings, angelic beings, human beings, and animals. All beings have a different status. Father God has established four levels of spiritual status, the highest is the Divine level. In love, he has welcomed Jesus, the Holy Spirit, you, and me on the Divine level (let's call it Level #1) with him.

Even the most insignificant sparrow¹⁰⁰ has a status. Everything with a spirit in it is somewhere in the hierarchy. Some have a higher status and some have a lower status. If this sounds strange to you, remember how Jesus compared us to birds. When he did that, he spoke about a hierarchy. Very explicitly Jesus said that human beings are much more valuable than birds. In another passage he taught that humans are more valuable than sheep?

Look at the birds of the air... are you not

¹⁰⁰ We're not including plants here because plants are never said in the Bible to have spirits. Our chart is about levels of spiritual status. It's about spiritual beings. Arguably, plants have a soul as we can see by the feelings the Bible attributes to them in the passage below; however, they do not have a spirit.

... the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Romans 8:19-22).

Plants desire to be freed from the curse God put on the ground, and this desire proves that they possess souls. Gardeners who speak to their plants will be encouraged by this truth. You're not wasting your time and you're not crazy if you talk to them. The poor green fellows need your consolation—they're under a curse.

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food... (Genesis 3:17-19)

worth much more than they? (Matthew 6:26).

Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep (Matthew 12:12; NASB)!

1) Where are you?

Everybody's place in the hierarchy depends on what their nature is. Human beings do not have an animal nature; birds and sheep do. We have the human nature. On what level of the hierarchy does the human nature put us? It puts us on the level #3. So if the Divine level is #1, and we are #3, then what is level #2? Angels. We are lower than angels in glory, wisdom, and power.

Psalm 8:4-8 lays the hierarchy out for us quite beautifully. In it, David asks God:

What is man that you take thought of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than God, and you crown him with glory and majesty!

You make him to rule over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the Heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas (NASB).

2) The way things look

Now that you are comfortable with the idea, be careful not to get too comfortable. God will shift things around in the hierarchy when the Kingdom comes. At that time, we will rule over the angels. In other words, we're going to move to level #2 and the angels will get bumped to level #3.

This is nothing new. God has shifted people from one level to another in the past too. Remember that it was God's idea to put Jesus (who was on level #1, the Divine level, during Creation) on level #3 at the incarnation. Then God decided to lift Jesus up to level #1 again. When did that happen? It happened the day God resurrected Jesus.

Here's a chart that shows what the hierarchy looks like:

Level	Who is there	Qualities
#1. Divine	God the Father Jesus (now) the Holy Spirit Christians (after the resurrection)	power authority glory grace love all good qualities
#2. Angelic	angels like the cherubim, seraphim, and arch-angels demons like Satan, rulers, principalities, and the unclean spirits	strength wisdom beauty intelligence
#3. Human	Jesus (before his resurrection) believers (now) non-believers	have image of God strength wisdom beauty intelligence
#4. Animal	mammals fish amphibians reptiles birds insects	recognize God's authority long for the Kingdom instinctual behavior various degrees of intelligence ¹

¹According to the Bible, one animal without wisdom is the ostrich because it forgets its young (Job 39:17). On the other side of the coin, there are many other animals who demonstrate the ability to reason, such as: donkeys, snakes, ants, crows (they fed Elijah meat and bread when he was hiding from Jezebel), and foxes (Jesus said that the shrewd King Herod was a fox).

Just through casual observation, we know that there are other animals who are smart. Some of those include horses, camels, elephants, bears, lions, tigers, dog (with their intelligence varying from breed to breed), cats, monkeys, gorillas, killer whales, and dolphins. It's interesting to note that sheep are not praised in the Bible for being intelligence, which means that God is not flattering us when he compares us to sheep. They are obedient when their shepherd treats them with affection.

3) Demons with authority

We need to understand that certain demons, the ones who hold positions as “rulers... authorities... [and] powers of this dark world” (Ephesians 6:12) have greater authority than humans do. You sometimes hear Christians maligning these spirits and insulting them in prayer time. Some even dare to act like they are trampling the Devil under their feet. Those brothers and sisters are making a big mistake.

The Scriptures teach that only *ungodly people* would every challenge the authority of these demons. Not even God’s archangels slander authoritative demons:

...ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority, and heap abuse on celestial beings.¹⁰¹ But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the Devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct—as irrational animals do—will destroy them (Jude 8-10).

4) The ups and downs of Jesus

Now, to understand him well, we have to realize that Jesus dropped two ranges of spiritual status¹⁰²

• Jesus dropped two ranges of spiritual status.

¹⁰¹ The term *celestial beings* is designed to teach us that these demons are located in the heavens. The popular concept that demons live in Hell is not true. Only the ones who have already been condemned by God are there. Satan is one who has not been condemned yet. He is not in Hell, right? He’s prowling around like a roaring lion, is he not? And he even visits the Third Heaven. Just read Job 1 and you’ll realize that he frequents it.

¹⁰² Our chart shows the *spirit-beings*. What do we mean by that? We mean beings that have a spirit within them. You may be surprised to see a level for the animals, but the Bible does in fact speak of the spirit within animals:

Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the Earth? (Ecclesiastes 3:21).

If that last passage doesn’t convince you, then consider God’s question to the prophet Jonah:

And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot

tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?” (Jonah 4:11).

Why would God care so much for the animals of Nineveh unless they had some degree of spiritual value? God doesn't put any value on material things—it will all be burned up.

... the present heavens and Earth are reserved for fire... the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the Earth and everything done in it will be laid bare... the elements will melt in the heat (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12).

That's why Jesus said “The flesh profits nothing” (John 6:63; NASB). But spiritual beings are important to God. That means that if animals are important to God, it's because they have a spirit.

One animal, Balaam's donkey, was even given the grace to express itself with words! What the donkey said proved that it had coherent, God-fearing, sensitive thoughts.

... the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, “What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?”

Balaam answered the donkey, “You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.”

The donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?”

“No,” he said.

Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn (Numbers 22:28-31).

Note that the donkey had more “fear of the LORD” than the prophet. Could anyone argue that it did not have a spirit? It was more spiritually sensitive than the prophet, wasn't it?

Another famous animal, the serpent of Genesis 3, also had the ability to speak:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say... ?” (Genesis 3:1)

We know that the Devil was speaking through the serpent, but the Devil is a spirit-being and he could only possess the spirit of the serpent if he was going to make it talk the way it did. [His possession of the serpent does not make snakes evil, by the way. Snakes will eventually become the friends of mankind and will be pets for our children by the time the Kingdom is established on the Earth:

The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest (Isaiah 11:8)].

Please observe that demons have to be included under the angelic category for a good reason: They are nothing more than fallen angels. And keep in mind that the Bible makes no reference to extraterrestrials (aliens). The ones that people claim to have seen are either delusions, lies, or tricks played by demons who have found a

(from the divine level #1 to the human #3). He allowed God to give him a place below the level of angels, being *made lower than the angels*—even though he created them. What humility!

We do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death (Hebrews 2:9).

The “days of his flesh” (Hebrews 2:5; LEB) were the approximately 33 years, the years of his human nature, when Jesus surrendered his divine nature, one that gave him automatic power, authority, and understanding. Those years were the period of time when Jesus was subjected to weakness, and it all began when he *emptied himself*. That emptying was the point in which our Lord Jesus put aside *the form of God*, letting go of the *equality with God* he so much enjoyed, in order to assume the *likeness of men*.

... although he [Jesus] existed in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6-7, NASB).

And if you think that ceasing to have equality with God was a tough step to take, reflect upon the decision Jesus took to become “obedient to the point of death” (Philippians 2:8, NASB)! By directing his life towards the Cross, Jesus went so far as to even become *accursed* (Galatians 3:13)!

So Jesus took upon himself flesh, death, and even a curse because he believed that God could get him out of it all. Jesus humbled himself so that we could be exalted. Jesus loved us—he loved us to free us, so that we might love God.

ii. How Jesus became the Son of God

At the same time that he assumed a fallen human nature, something new happened to Jesus: For the first time ever,¹⁰³

very effective way to deceive people.

¹⁰³ Nowhere is Jesus called God’s *Son* in the OT. There are a few passages that preachers might use to teach otherwise, so we are going to examine them here to free you from any doubts:

1. Proverbs 30:3-5

•...Jesus took upon himself flesh, death, and even a curse because he believed that God could get him out of it all.

• Nowhere is Jesus called God’s *Son* in the OT.

he became the Son of God! To really grasp the weight of this

A superficial reading might cause someone to interpret Proverbs 30 to say that there was a Son of God who was known at the time Proverbs was written, but it doesn't. Rather, the passage *invites people to study the mystery* of who that Son of God might be. The Proverbs 30 actually presumes that nobody knows, and this is precisely why it sarcastically challenges the reader: "Surely you know!"

I have not learned wisdom, nor have I attained to the knowledge of the Holy One

[Put differently, the author admits that he doesn't really understand God yet]. Who has gone up to Heaven and come down? [Nobody had done that as of yet—it was only fulfilled the day Jesus was resurrected.]

Whose hands have gathered up the wind? Who has wrapped up the waters in a cloak? Who has established all the ends of the Earth? What is his name, and what is the name of his Son? Surely you know!

Although the answer to the "Who has done up to Heaven and come down?" question would eventually be answered in the person of Christ, an answer was not in sight when Proverbs 30 was written. Jesus eventually explained the "Who has done up to Heaven" part to Nathaniel in John 1:51, revealing what was meant by the mystery of the stairway to Heaven (Genesis 28:12). And what was that mystery? The stairway Jacob saw was Jesus. You can get the same revelation Jesus gave Nathaniel if you study Ephesians 4:8-10. In the Ephesians passage, Paul explains both Jesus' ascension to Heaven and his descent to Hades.

There is not the slightest hint in Proverbs 30 that there an answer existed for the great question: What is the name of God's Son? The question is posed rhetorically (as if there were no answer available yet). However, after the resurrection, this and many other burning questions would all be answered in one name: Jesus.

2. Psalm 2:7-8, 11-12

Now, moving on to another passage that might be interpreted as revealing the Son of God in the OT, Psalm 2; God reminds us of the fact that he would have a Son. It says:

You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance..."

[while it warns the rulers of the Earth] Serve the LORD with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his Son, or he will be angry...

But did Psalm 2 indicate that God already had a Son? Not if the "today" Psalm 2 refers to is a day which had not yet taken place. Precisely, we have already studied the day the Psalm refers to—do you recall? We explained that it was the special day the Son of God was begotten—the day Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb. That means that Psalm 2 is a "telescopic" (future-fulfillment) prophecy. It focused on the day in which the Holy Spirit would overshadow Mary. Put differently, the today of Psalm 2 hadn't yet occurred when Psalm 2 was penned. Its *today* occurred some 1000 years later. This same interpretation is found in Hebrews 1:4-6 and 5:4-6, which give undeniable proof that Psalm 2 was fulfilled in the conception.

3. Luke 20:35

event, you need to understand that nobody can become a son of God unless he has first been begotten of God. This is one reason why Jesus was never called the *Son of God* until he had been begotten of God. Few people ever bother to reflect upon this fact, but Jesus was not the Son of God until his incarnation.¹⁰⁴

•...nobody can become a son of God unless he has first been begotten of God.

Let's study the last example of a passage which some confused teachers misconstrue to mean that a Son of God already existed in the OT. Since angels were called sons of God in Genesis 6:2, some might take that to mean that a son of God does not need to be begotten of God. However, if we consider Luke 20, we can discern the problem with their interpretation:

•...Jesus was not the Son of God until his incarnation.

... those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead... can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection (Luke 20:35).

The angels are *sons of God* in a different sense than Jesus is. They were never actually born of God, but they are still called *sons of God*. The angels are called *sons of God* because they will live forever—and Jesus taught on this matter: He said that those who live forever are sons of God. You will see that if you notice how Jesus uses the word since in the passage at hand. The conclusion of the matter is that Genesis 6:2 is not speaking of anyone who had been begotten of God.

¹⁰⁴ A very important question to ask ourselves is: "What does 'Jesus was *eternally begotten* of the Father' [an expression found in the Nicene Creed] mean?" What does *eternally begotten* mean? It's not a common expression by any means, not even among theologians, and it's certainly not anywhere spelled out for us in the Bible. We have to presume that the authors of the Nicene Creed got it from the Bible—but where?

We know that Jesus was begotten, but why *eternally*? If we didn't think that the Nicene Creed was such a great document, we wouldn't waste our time with this issue, but we do believe that it's a solid document, reflecting the best teaching of the apostolic fathers, and that it is worthy of being understood. So let's try to explain *eternally begotten*.

To start, the expression *eternally begotten* was added to the 381 AD Nicene Creed by an unknown source. That was 56 years after the Creed was penned by the original authors (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Creed, Retrieved on March 22, 2014). The addition was inserted, apparently, as a sincere (albeit feeble) attempt to deal with Proverbs 8:22-26. Since it is so difficult to define the historical epoch Proverbs 8:22-26 describes, the person who added *eternally begotten* to the Nicene Creed was a little careless, albeit fearless, with his addition. What do we mean by "careless"? Well, calling the time (when Jesus was with God before Creation) *eternity* is simply too vague. We have already studied this portion of Scriptures and said in footnote #39 that a good name for the historical epoch might be "the times before Creation." So the Nicene fathers' idea might have been "Jesus was begotten from *the times before* Creation." Bible translations give us other options to describe the epoch, calling it:

I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to me, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’ (Psalm 2:7; NASB).

So also Christ did not glorify himself... but he who said to him, ‘You are my son. Today I have begotten you’ (Hebrews 5:5; NASB).

•...are we sure that Jesus was not called the Son of God in the OT?

But are we sure that Jesus was not called the Son of God in the OT? Yes. Instead, in the OT, God always spoke of his Father-Son relationship with Jesus as something that would be fulfilled in the future. It hadn’t materialized yet. Look at the verb tense in the following passage:

I will be his Father, and he will be my Son
(God speaking of Jesus in Hebrews 1:5 as quoted from 2 Samuel 7:14).

iii. The firstborn Son of God

But beyond being begotten of God, Jesus was also God’s firstborn Son—and that was very important—probably more important than you think it is.

... when God brings his Firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship

-
- the days of eternity,
 - ancient times
 - days of old

(Any of those would be more specific than just *eternity*, don’t you think?)

Anyway, Proverbs 8:22-26 does not speak of Jesus being *begotten* anyways. It speaks of Jesus being “brought forth” (NIV, NASB, KJV, LEB, RSV, ESB). That sounds a little like being begotten, but again, the terms the author of the Nicene Creed addition uses don’t do justice to the Bible, which says:

The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be. When there were no watery depths, I was given birth... (Proverbs 8:22-24; NIV)

Instead of the more common translation “I was given birth,” the NLT reads “I was born.” Our humble conclusion is that no other passage in the Bible could have been behind the Nicene Creed “eternally begotten” addition but this one. If it is the one they had in mind in 381 AD, their effort was commendable, but anybody’s Biblical interpretation of the Nicene addition will still require quite a bit of research, like what we did here.

The important thing is for you not to be confused by the Nicene Creed. If you understand the Creed to mean “Jesus was brought forth from the times before Creation,” you do well. Why do you do well? Simply because you are understanding our Lord Jesus Biblically. Just remember this: The Scriptures are inerrant, the Nicene Creed is not.

• Jesus, as God’s Firstborn is an heir—the heir of God.

• Jesus eventually gets what the Devil offered him (the Earth and its riches), but legitimately!

him' (Hebrews 1:6).

If being the firstborn son has great significance in most families, how much more so in the family of God? The firstborn in a traditional family is the heir. Jesus, as God's Firstborn is an heir—the heir of God. What will Jesus inherit from his Father? Try this: All of Creation and even what's beyond it—God's Kingdom! That means that Jesus eventually gets what the Devil offered him (the Earth and its riches), but legitimately! And he'll get much more than that.

Secondly, the father of a traditional family expects his firstborn son to be the example for all the other children. An oldest son will dutifully show his younger brothers and sisters the will of the head of the household. Jesus passed the trials God gave him in life and now has become the model for us to follow. Not only is he our *big brother*, he is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters.

... Jesus is not ashamed to call them [speaking of us] brothers and sisters. He says, 'I will declare your name [God's name] to my brothers and sisters...' And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me' (Hebrews 2:11-13).

Finally, a firstborn son is customarily treated with more discipline than the children who come later—and so it was with our Lord Jesus. The strict demands God placed upon him were designed to benefit all of us. Jesus eventually became highly disciplined. Today we can reap the fruit of his disciplined behavior—we have someone to really look up to!

... He [Jesus] would be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29; NASB).

iv. The only begotten Son of God

Another meaningful title for Jesus is God's *only begotten* Son. Here are five verses, all from John, where the expression is used:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14; NASB).

No one has seen God at any time; the only be-

• The strict demands God placed upon him were designed to benefit all of us.

• ...we have someone to really look up to!

gotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained him (John 1:18; NASB).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16; NASB).

...he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18; NASB).

God has sent his only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through him (1 John 4:9; NASB).

• Jesus is the *only one* in history who has been actually *born of God*.

We just studied how the term *firstborn* connotes that Jesus is first in order/position, but *only begotten* means something quite different. It has nothing to do with order or position.

Think about it (because the Bible doesn't use words in vain): For God to say that Jesus is his *only begotten Son* means that Jesus is the *only one* in history who has been actually *born of God*. Is that true? What about others who have been born miraculously, and what about Adam?

Let's compare Jesus with other people born by God's supernatural power to see if he is truly the only person ever *begotten of God*:

- **Isaac** was conceived miraculously in the womb of Sarah, who was 90 years old. That was a miracle from God, but since God used Abraham to do it, **Abraham was the father**—not God.
- Elizabeth was barren and an angel told her husband that she would have a baby, **John the Baptist**. John's was a miraculous birth, but **Zechariah was the father**—not God.
- **Samson's** mother was sterile also. The Angel of the LORD visited her to give her instructions about the child she would have, and then she had the child. But **her husband was Samson's father**—not God.

•...God was the *only one* responsible.

- Hannah, the mother of **Samuel**, wanted to have a child. She prayed and God answered her prayers. She became pregnant supernaturally, but **her husband was the father of Samuel**—not God.

• Mary was a virgin!

Now let's put Mary's pregnancy in perspective: As an unmarried virgin, she had no intimacy with any man until after Jesus was born. The one responsible for the miracle of her pregnancy was God—and God was the only one responsible. God did not just make Mary fertile. She was fertile already. He did not just send her husband to her. She had no husband. That's the point: Mary was a virgin! Never before in the history of the world had a virgin become pregnant. Since God did the miracle, he was the Father of the child.¹⁰⁵

j. A blessed boyhood

Jesus had to grow up just like any other child has to grow up. God used the family of Joseph and Mary to set our Lord on the path of sound childhood development, as psychologists call it. Jesus took gradual

- mental
- intellectual
- physical
- nutritional

¹⁰⁵ Muslims like to point out that Jesus is just like Adam and that his birth is no big deal. They argue that Adam was created directly by God, trying to prove that Jesus is not God's Son, just another person created by God. They like to say that the creation of Adam was an even greater miracle than the conception of Jesus. However, they fail to see the difference between Adam and Jesus: Adam was made by God; Jesus was born of God. Being born of God has much greater privileges than being made by him.

When Jesus was made flesh (in the conception), he had already been dwelling with God in Heaven as the Word, so he was not created. Adam was created. So the right terminology for what happened to Jesus was that he was *begotten* of God or *fathered* by God. That makes him the Son of God!

Adam was indeed *a son* of God as the Bible tells us in Luke 3:38. Amen. There's no need for us to try to prove to Muslims that Adam is not a son of God [very few Muslims know that the Bible says this, but feel free to point it out to them]. Adam is a son of God; however, Adam is much different from Jesus because he was never begotten of God. Jesus is the "only begotten Son of God." And if a Muslim friend asks why it's so important for us to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, tell them that a son inherits all that his father has. Jesus is God's heir! He will inherit the Kingdom forever.

- social
- and religious

steps towards maturity. His experience was just like that of any other boy born within a wholesome culture—and there still are some wholesome cultures in the world, particularly among God-fearing country folk.

i. Favor with God and man

• A good upbringing won't suffice... What we need is *grace*.

The Jewish culture (with its family order and religious structure) in which our Lord Jesus was immersed was very helpful for his development—but it was not enough to form him into the Messiah. A good upbringing is a boon for anyone, but it is not enough to give a person the holiness they need to see God.

Pursue... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14; NRSV).

Do you see? We need a special degree of holiness if we're going to enter into the Kingdom. A good upbringing won't suffice even for the children with the best temperaments. It didn't suffice for the Messiah. Don't count on it if you have a great family or come from a God-fearing culture. To mature in the necessary holiness, we need what Jesus had: God's favor as well as the favor of the people around us. What we need is *grace*—and grace is favor.

And the child grew... and the grace of God was on him (Luke 2:40).

Jesus grew... in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52).

ii. Childhood development

The Bible testifies to Jesus' healthy childhood development. This is an important point because if you study the lives of other religious leaders in history,¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ An example is Mohammed (the founder of Islam) whose father died 6 months before he was born, whose mother died when he was 6 years old, and whose guardian grandfather died when he was 8. After she had her baby, his mother

none of them demonstrate the balanced physical, intellectual, and spiritual development you see in Jesus.

And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom... (Luke 2:40).

Jesus was literate too.¹⁰⁷ Jesus learned the Scriptures by means of questions and answers, a method modern educators refer to as “active listening.” Jesus was a great listener and his life is an important reminder for us about how to transmit Bible truths to children effectively. Notice how the passage here uses both terms: “questions” and “answers.”

... they found him in the Temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening [actively!] to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers (Luke 2:46-47).

Jesus also lived in subjection to his parents, Joseph and Mary, which demonstrates that he had the virtue of obedience. Jesus was a submissive child. He knew how to follow orders. This, of course, was expected of children in the rural culture of Nazareth, where our Lord was raised.

• the virtue of obedience

... he [the boy Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them [Joseph and Mary] and was obedient to them (Luke 2:51).

iii. Jesus learned to obey

A lot of people who hear about the childhood of Jesus say

didn't keep him with her, but left him with a Bedouin woman in the desert to be raised there.

The point is that childhood crises can cause psychological problems for people, making them easy prey for the temptations of the Devil. God can heal us of any of those traumas in Christ; however, most of the time they produce long-term effects that are never resolved.

Mohammed would go on to marry 13 wives. The first (Khadijah) proposed marriage to him when he was 25. It was not Arab custom for a woman to propose marriage, but Khadijah was a very wealthy merchant, 40 years of age, and Mohammed was one of her employees. Long after she helped to establish him as a religious leader, Mohammed would marry again. The third of Mohammed's wives, Aysha, was betrothed to him when she was 6. Their marriage was consummated when she was 9 years old. One of the rules Mohammed passed down to Muslim men was that they could marry a maximum of 4 women. He told the Muslims that God revealed to him that only he could be the exception to the rule.

• Obedient to God didn't come naturally to him. He had to learn it.

¹⁰⁷ Mohammed never learned to read or write.

in their hearts “So what? He was the Son of God, of course he was a good kid.” But by saying that, they betray the fact that they don’t understand Jesus. It’s patent that they have failed to realize a major truth about Jesus: Obedience to God didn’t come naturally to him. He had to learn it. The fact that Jesus had such a blessed childhood was the result of discipline. The fact that he was obedient was due to Jesus’ suffering!

Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

So the next question is: Exactly how did God cause Jesus to suffer? In what ways did the boy Jesus suffer?

- He got disciplined by Joseph and Mary.
- He was corrected by other adult family members.
- He received discipline from teachers.
- His brothers and sisters had some conflict with him.
- His family was financially poor.
- He got sick with the illnesses common to children.

• God’s purpose in disciplining Jesus was to make him obedient.

• It was through obedience that Jesus qualified to be the Messiah.

These are the normal experiences life dishes out to all of us, and they didn’t traumatize Jesus. They all came in God’s perfect timing. All of his suffering came in degrees that the boy Jesus could handle. Still, the important thing isn’t whether Jesus got a cold or not, but the purpose behind his cold, or the purpose behind his teachers’ chastisement: God’s purpose in disciplining Jesus was to make him obedient. That’s God’s purpose in disciplining you too (whether you get a cold, or whether your teacher chastises you, or whatever way he chooses to do it).

Here’s another important question: Why was Jesus’ obedience to God so important? Are you ready for the answer? It was through obedience that Jesus qualified to be the Messiah. Why is your obedience to God so important? It’s how you qualify for inheriting the Kingdom, just like Jesus.

•...the boy Jesus didn’t ever lose his holiness.

Don’t forget that this kind of difficult life was prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus was born. It was not some new idea God came up with at the last moment.

... he [Jesus] grew up before him [God] like a tender shoot, and like a root out of

parched ground... a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face... (Isaiah 53:2-3; NASB)

iv. Up and coming

It's an amazing thing, but the boy Jesus didn't ever lose his holiness. He was not disqualified from being Lord, even having passed through boyhood with all of its wild adventures, silliness, and foolishness. David asked God:

Do not remember the sins of my youth
(Psalm 25:7).

Although Jesus had no sins in his youth, indeed like all children, Jesus too had foolishness "bound up in [his] heart" (Proverbs 22:15). Yet Jesus was freed from that foolishness. He never became a foolish boy. How did he overcome it? Through discipline.

• You get authority by respecting authority.

To be sure, Jesus didn't exercise authority over others while he was a boy—but that's precisely what qualified him to become the world's best authority as a man. Those who lead best are those who have proven themselves able to follow. The best leaders are first of all, great followers. The best parents have already been wonderful children. You get authority by respecting authority. Jesus was faithful in little; God put him in much.

G. Young man, undercover Lord

1. Keeping it a secret
2. Silencing demons
3. Christ finally made public
 - a. The three-year wait
 - b. Faith in God
 - c. How Jesus got engaged

We have seen what Jesus was like since before the Creation of the World all the way to the end of his childhood. Now let's look at Jesus from the time he was a young man. Was he the Lord then also? Did he maintain his holiness, or did he, like most young men, stumble into temptation? No—Jesus never sinned against God. He was successful in resisting all temptations, even the subtle temptation of being proud of who he was (and he very well knew who he was).

1. Keeping it a secret

Peter was the first person to ever declare that Jesus was the *Messiah*, which is equivalent to calling Jesus *Lord*.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, Jesus asked Peter and the other the disciples not to share this truth with others.

[Jesus asked] ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God’... Then he [Jesus] ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah (Matthew 16:15-16, 20).

Why did Jesus take such a hard stance on the disclosure of his identity? Pastors spend so much time encouraging their people to proclaim their faith in Jesus—why would Jesus do the opposite of thousands of pastors and insist that the disciples keep his identity (as Lord) a secret?

Why didn’t Jesus take advantage of the moment instead? Why didn’t he seize the opportunity to affirm before everyone that he was Messiah and Lord? Most Christian pastors today, if they had been there, would have taken Peter’s profession as an opportunity to launch an evangelistic campaign. Since no other human being in history had yet said what Peter said, wasn’t this Jesus’ golden opportunity to go public? No, for Jesus it wasn’t yet God’s timing.

•... for Jesus it wasn’t yet God’s timing.

2. Silencing demons

Not only Peter, but others also recognized Jesus as Lord—the demons. How did Jesus respond to them when they screeched out that he was the Messiah, *the Holy One of God*? Jesus would silence them. Pay special attention to how the word *because* is used in the following passages:

Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, ‘What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have

¹⁰⁸ Our comment here is based on a straightforward interpretation of Luke 2:11. That verse plainly shows that the titles *the Lord* and *the Messiah* are synonymous. It uses them in the same breath and with the same meaning:

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!

And Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him!’... he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was (Mark 1:23-25, 34; NASB).

... demons came out of many people, shouting, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah (Luke 4:41).

The way *because* is used in the two passages shows us that Jesus silenced demons for this simple reason: They knew who he was. Those demons were absolutely right. They were speaking the truth. So again, we ask: “Why was Jesus so secretive?” Why was such an important truth, the truth that he was the Lord and Messiah, to be kept a secret? There are two basic reasons: 1) Jesus was patient, and 2) Jesus was humble.

Firstly, Jesus’ patience kept his lordship a secret. Jesus knew that a great scandal would break out if it went public that he was the Messiah. Since the only human being that had ever professed it publically was Peter—and it was revealed to him in a special way by the Father—we can presume that very few people would have been able to accept Jesus as their Messiah and Lord. Jesus knew that, so he decided to wait until God Himself affirmed Jesus’ authority. God would eventually affirm it through the resurrection—amen—but the challenge was that Jesus would have to die to get that affirmation. Jesus was willing to wait for it. He was patient.

Secondly, Jesus’ humility kept his lordship a secret. He didn’t want the testimony that he was Lord to come through the lips of demons. Their profession of his lordship did not proceed from hearts of love, it proceeded from their desire to flatter him. It also proceeded from their fear: They didn’t want Jesus to be hard on them at the moment he cast them out—you can see that in their words: “Have you come to destroy us?” (Mark 1:24) and the others who

... were imploring him [Jesus] not to command them to go away into the Abyss (Luke 8:31; NASB)].

• (Jesus)...
decided to
wait until
GodHimself
affirmed
Jesus’ au-
thority.

Jesus was humble enough not to allow the demons' flattery to affect him. He knew that allowing flattery to influence his thoughts would distort his ability to judge. It's not easy to resist the temptation of flattering lips, but Jesus was strong enough.

The crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by the praise accorded him (Proverbs 27:21; NASB).

A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps (Proverbs 29:5; NASB).

•...only twice is the term Jesus Christ used in a gospel...

Anyways, what need did Jesus have of demons? Did he need them to validate his position as Lord? Not at all. Jesus needed God, who never lies, to affirm him. Demons lie all of the time. What was there to lend credence to their words? Nothing.

3. Christ finally made public

Pay close attention to this fact: Never in the four Gospels is Jesus referred to as *our Lord Jesus Christ* or *Christ Jesus our Lord*. As a matter of fact, only twice is the term *Jesus Christ* used in a gospel, the Gospel of John, as you can see here:

•...during his 3-year ministry, not once was Jesus publically proclaimed to be the Christ!.

• God declared Jesus to be Lord through the resurrection.

•...the apostles only preached "Jesus is Lord" after Christ's resurrection.

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3).

Take a good look at the context of these two passages: Neither of them was preached publically. The first was a parenthetical statement by the apostle John, given as he told the story of Jesus' life. John never actually said it during Jesus' ministry. The second was taken from a prayer that Jesus lifted up to God. Jesus was not speaking to any listening ears when he said it.

1. The three-year wait

The point is that neither of the two gospel occurrences of the term *Christ Jesus* were meant for people to hear. That means that during his 3-year ministry, not once was Jesus publically proclaimed to be the Christ! The doctrine of One Lord is

a doctrine of the apostles—but why did that doctrine belong to the apostles and not to Jesus? Because the apostles were witnesses of his resurrection.

God declared Jesus to be Lord through the resurrection, putting his seal of approval on Jesus. That’s why the apostles only preached “Jesus is Lord” after Christ’s resurrection—they were preaching what they were sure that God had showed them. Here’s an example from Acts:

... [Paul] taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! (Acts 28:31)

The four Gospels, which give us all the teachings of Jesus, contain zero public statements about Jesus being *the Lord Christ*. It is only in the Book of Acts (which deals with the ministry of the apostles) that we find the first use of the term *Christ the Lord*. And then there are a lot of them! You can find 217 different references to *Jesus Christ* from Acts to the Book of Revelation. So there is an important difference between the ministry of the apostles and the ministry of Jesus.¹⁰⁹

2. Faith in God

What does all this mean for us today? It means that our faith needs to be in God. Since the Church only proclaimed Jesus to be Lord after God resurrected him, that means that our profession of Christ as Lord is based on what God did in Jesus. Let me repeat that: The Christian doctrine *Jesus is Lord* is based on our faith in God.

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it... Therefore let all Israel

¹⁰⁹ This is an important fact to share with Muslims. They think that the only true Gospel is some original document, a lost collection of the teachings of Jesus. Muslim theology gives no credence to the writings of the apostles. Muslim clerics say that the apostles corrupted the original teachings of Jesus. We can agree with them that the two teachings are different—but only on this point: The apostles proclaimed that Jesus is the Lord and Messiah—Jesus didn’t do that.

Now that you know this, please make sure that you tell your Muslim friends why the teachings of Jesus and those of the apostles are different: Because neither Jesus nor the apostles wanted to say anything that God didn’t say first. The teachings of Jesus and the apostles are both based on patient faith in the One God! Any true Muslim should be happy to hear the affirmation of faith in the One God.

•...our profession of Christ as Lord is based on what God did in Jesus.

• The key for understanding the Jesus is Lord doctrine is inwhogave it validity, God.

• Jesus' authority was validated through the resurrection!

be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:32, 36).

If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

The key for understanding the *Jesus is Lord* doctrine is in who gave it validity, God. It was God who demonstrated his approval of Jesus by resurrecting Jesus. Have no doubt: Jesus' authority was validated through the resurrection! Since Jesus hadn't yet finished his trials while his three days in Hades¹¹⁰ were still taking place, it still would have been premature for him to claim any glory for himself while he was still there. God simply had not vindicated him yet.

What did our Lord Jesus do before those 3 days were up? He waited on God. He prayed to God. He asked God to justify him, resurrect him, and glorify him.

David said about him [Jesus]: 'I [Jesus] saw the Lord [God] always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the Realm of the Dead, you will not let your holy one see decay.

You [God] have made known to me [Jesus] the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence' (Acts 2:25-28).

... no one [not even Jesus] takes this honor [of being a High Priest] on himself, but he receives it when called by God (Hebrews 5:4).

Jesus got what he was waiting for. God did give him authority. In fact, God gave him all authority *in the heavens and on Earth*.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Since *Hades* is an actual place and the rules of English grammar are to capitalize a place that has a proper name, we capitalize this word in our book.

¹¹¹ Please remember footnote #40 where we explain that the expression "heaven and Earth" does not include the Third Heaven. Instead, it refers to Creation: Earth, the atmosphere, and space.

• Jesus got what he was waiting for...all authority *in the heavens and on Earth*.

Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to me [from God]...' (Matthew 28:18)

So our faith is not really in Jesus, but in the One who gave him authority, his Father who sent him. Jesus himself affirmed that many times. Here are a few examples:

If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is Another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true (John 5:31-32).

Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the One who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the One who sent me (John 12:44-45).

... the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God (John 16:27).

a. How Jesus got engaged

The story of how Abraham sent his servant Eliezer to find a bride for his son Isaac is an amazing parallel to the story of how Jesus got engaged to the Church.

What was it that inspired Rebekah to march off with a complete stranger¹¹² in order to commit her life to a man she had never met? The signs God gave Eliezer which demonstrated that she was the bride for Isaac made her decision easier, but the thought of marrying a man who was very powerful and wealthy influenced her the most. Rebekah, along with her brother and father, listened intently as her family heard about how Isaac had inherited everything from his wealthy father:

[Eliezer¹¹³ said]: 'I am Abraham's servant. The LORD has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. My master's wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he [Abra-

•...the thought of marrying a man who was very powerful and wealthy...

¹¹² We are speaking of Eliezer, Abraham's servant.

¹¹³ The name of the steward of Abraham's estate is given as "Eliezer of Damascus" in Genesis 15:2.

ham] has given him [Isaac] everything he owns...'

Laban and Bethuel [Rebekah's brother and father] answered, 'This is from the LORD; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has directed.'

When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground before the LORD. Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother (Genesis 24:34-36, 50-53).

•...how
Jesus was
given to the
Church, his
bride

Now let's consider the parallel to Genesis 24, how Jesus was given to the Church, his bride. It goes like this: God has sent his servant the Holy Spirit, who comes bearing (spiritual) gifts, to draw us into covenant with the Son. The gifts prove to us that Jesus truly is *Head over all things* and that his power, riches, and Kingdom are tangible.

... [God] raising him [Jesus] from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the Heavenly Places, above all rule and authority... and he [God] subjected all things under his [Jesus'] feet and gave him as Head over all things to the Church (Ephesians 1:20-22; LEB).

So we enter into covenant with Jesus out of our own best interest. We do it because God has given us a guarantee of spiritual blessing and power—and we can even get a taste of that power now through the gifts of the Spirit. The Church consists of those who have become convinced that Jesus is the Heir of all things. We are those who want Jesus to share that power with us.

So we as a Church go to Jesus because we believe that God has given Jesus to us—but in what way has God given Jesus to us? The Bible says it: as *Head over all things*. This bridegroom Jesus, this most eligible bachelor, is our best option for an eternity of happiness and blessing. Are we willing to leave all of our comforts to become his *help mate*? If we do,

we'll be one with him. We have to be willing to take the big risk of following the One his Father sent first. Who is our Eliezer? The Holy Spirit. Do we now dare to walk through this desert with the Spirit?

§

IV. He came in the human nature

There are thousands of different teachings popular in churches around the world, but there is only one properly called *the doctrine of Christ*. This doctrine is the true litmus test for fellowship—and that's a scary fact because when you explain the doctrine, the majority of so-called "Christians" either have never heard it before, or flat out reject it.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Let us give you four examples of what we mean. Here are four ways "Christians" deny the doctrine of Christ:

1. Immaculate Conception

Our first example of this is the subtle Immaculate Conception rejection of the doctrine of Christ. By teaching that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was "immaculately conceived" in her mother's womb, Catholic priests indirectly deny Jesus came in the flesh. According to them, the Immaculate Conception guaranteed that Mary would never have a sin-nature. Why has such a lie ever been taught? The frightening answer is that the Immaculate Conception is taught to hinder people from believing that Jesus came with a normal human nature.

Think about it: Why have Catholic teachers tried so hard to deny Mary's human nature? Because if she did have the human nature, it would have been transferred to her son Jesus. They don't want anyone drawing the conclusion that Christ had a human nature. This false Catholic doctrine under *mines* what the NT under *lines*: Christ's humanity!

2. Psalm 51:5

Another example is how some Christians are quick to apply Psalm 51:5 to themselves when they sin, but would never apply the same verse to Jesus. The Psalm says:

Behold, in iniquity I was born, and in sin my mother conceived me.

These words prove that it is the human condition to be brought into the world by a woman who has sin. Are we to say that this is the human condition for all people except Jesus? If we do, then Jesus is no Savior. We can't even relate to someone who is not like us. If we can't relate to someone, how could they ever save us?

The human condition was the condition of the Lord Jesus. That's saying little. We should say even more: Our Jesus had every human weakness and was tempted in every way. The thing is that he never made excuses. Jesus could have legiti-

•...to hinder people from believing that Jesus came with a normal human nature.

•...it is the human condition to be brought into the world by a woman who has sin.

•...Jesus
came to us
in the hu-
mannature,
the flesh.

mately complained to God. He could have cried out “Dear God, in sin my mother conceived me. I’m not responsible for my actions.” But he didn’t. And neither should you.

3. Mary’s sin

Thirdly, there are a lot of “Christians” whose false view of Mary blinds them to see her sin. Here’s a great question for those people: Would Mary have ever dared to contradict the Bible? The answer is “Of course not.” Okay. Then, if the Bible says that every human being has sin—would Mary deny that she had sin? Of course she wouldn’t deny it. She can’t deny God’s Word. And here’s what it says:

... Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one...’ (Romans 3:9-10)

If we [speaking of all believers] claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

If we [speaking of all believers] claim we have not sinned, we make him [God] out to be a liar and his Word is not in us (1 John 1:10).

Now, if Mary would agree with the Scriptures, why do Marianists disagree with the Scriptures by saying that she had no sin?

And what about the fact that Mary called God her *Savior* (Luke 1:47)? Now, why would she use the term *Savior* if she did not need to be saved? She needed salvation just like anybody else—and salvation from what? Salvation from sin—the sin within her.

4. Paul’s sin

Many “Christians” tend to make the apostles out to be perfect, but the apostles’ sins are pretty evident in the Bible. We see their shortcomings. The great apostle Paul even admitted straight out that he needed to be saved from the sin that lived in him. He called it “the evil present with me.” With all of his sufferings and the anointing that God gave him, Paul was certainly a very holy man, but still he had to confess his sin.

... good does not live in me, that is, in my flesh. For the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not... if what I do not want to do, this I am doing, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin that lives in me. Consequently, I find the principle... that evil is present with me... (Romans 7:18-21)

Conclusion: So here’s the million-dollar question: Could Jesus have said “Evil is present with me”? Could Jesus have said “Good does not live in me, that is, in my flesh”? You bet he could. That’s certainly the idea behind Jesus’ words when he said:

‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone’ (Luke 18:19).

But here’s the glory of our Savior: He had a victory over the evil within him. Jesus certainly could have added some words to what he said to the man who called

The doctrine of Christ is the apostles' teaching that Jesus came to us in the human nature, *the flesh*.

A. Not welcome

1. Sound good?
2. Stick with it
3. Who do you follow?
4. Starting all over again

When someone presents himself to you as a teacher of God's Word, but you notice that he does not give due recognition to the doctrine of Christ, you are obligated by God to stay away from him. You are commanded by the Scriptures to avoid him. Refuse to fellowship with him. Close your door because the doctrine of Christ is God's gold standard for fellowship.

... many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the Antichrist... If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them (2 John 7, 10).

1. Sound good?

The Gospel either stands or falls with this doctrine. To prove what we're saying, we challenge you to consider the following question: What news is there saying that someone with a divine nature can be holy? It's not news at all because a divine nature actually makes you holy. If it's not news, then it's not the *Good News*—it can't be the Gospel!

The Gospel is not that Jesus was holy because he had a divine nature, but that having a sinful nature, Jesus still didn't sin! Christian teachers who do not affirm the doctrine of

him good. Jesus could have said, just like Paul and every other covenant-keeping Christian should be able to say:

I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day (Acts 23:1; NASB).

I myself always do my best to have a clear conscience toward God and people (Acts 24:16; LEB).

•...the doctrine of Christ is God's gold standard for fellowship.

• The Gospel either stands or falls with this doctrine.

• The Gospel is... that having a sinful nature, Jesus still didn't sin!

Christ actually oppose the Gospel. They're not just "confused folks." They have the spirit of the Antichrist. They have not come to you on God's behalf.

Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist... (1 John 4:2-3)

2. Stick with it

Not only do we have to firmly believe in this apostolic doctrine from the heart—we have to stick with it. That is, if we do not persevere in the affirmation "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh," we do not have God. If we waver and drift away, God is not really our Father.

Whoever goes ahead¹¹⁵ and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God (2 John 9; NKJV).

3. Is your teacher free?

Since those who do not bring this doctrine are false teachers, we know that they are sinners. John boldly pointed out that they practice *evil deeds* (2 John 11), but how did John know that? Firstly, it's because anyone who lies practices sin. Secondly, since only the truth can set a person free, and the false teachers do not have the truth—they cannot possibly be free from their own sins.

Do you get it? Only a true understanding of Jesus' nature is able to strengthen a person against temptation. The false teachers do not have that understanding, so they are weak in the face of temptation, meaning that they could not possibly have the holiness required to be in fellowship with us.

Unfortunately, when a confused Christian follows someone who does not teach the doctrine of Christ, that confused Christian will eventually be condemned along with his teacher. Both will fall into the same pit. It's a law of nature:

¹¹⁵ The NKJV translates this as *transgresses*, but the translators give the footnote indicating that the original Greek says what it says here: *goes ahead*.

• Only a true understanding of Jesus' nature is able to strengthen a person against temptation.

If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit (Matthew 15:14).

If you consider how grave the situation of these fraudulent teachers is, and how grave it is to follow them, you'll understand why we are so strongly warned to stay away from them:

... by speaking high-sounding but empty words, they entice with desires of the flesh and with licentiousness those who are scarcely escaping from those who live in error, promising them freedom although they themselves are slaves of depravity. For to whatever someone succumbs, by this he is also enslaved (2 Peter 2:18-19; LEB).

•...learning
the elementary
truths...

4. Back to basics

Anyone who denies the doctrine of Christ has forgotten what they learned as a baby Christian (if they ever were one). If they were never taught the doctrine, they never could have believed it. What does that mean? That they were never a Christian in the first place. The only thing they can do now is to repent and start fresh. They have to go back to basics, learning the elementary truths the way pastors should have taught them in the first place. Nothing else will work.

... no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is... (1 Corinthians 3:11-13).

Poor deceived souls. They were deceived into thinking that they had started the Christian life, and now they are like a house with broken foundations—only demolition work combined with the laying of a whole new foundation can save them now. Only when that is done will they have the strength and light they need to persevere. Truly, these victims of religious deception need major work! Unfortunately, because of pride, few of them will be willing to undergo it.

... let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the

foundation... (Hebrews 6:1)

B. Going too far

1. The “God-man” lie
 - a. Speak Bible to me
 - b. An anointed man
2. To stop a storm
 - a. Joshua’s faith in God
 - b. Moses’ faith in God
 - c. Believe like they did
3. Not only God
 - a. Who can forgive sins?
 - b. Who can walk on water?
4. Was Jesus perfect?
5. Not natural to obey
6. He could have sinned
7. What no one had ever shown us
8. Don’t forget
9. Be a man
 - a. Have the Spirit
 - b. Be a success

• Evangelicals have also lost touch with the doctrine of Christ.

It’s not only Catholics and Protestants that have piled human teachings upon human teachings, multiplying theologies and subtracting from God’s Word. Evangelicals have also lost touch with the doctrine of Christ. That’s downright sad.

God has given Evangelicals a knowledge of the Bible—what a blessing—and in their Bibles Evangelicals read a simple message: that Jesus came in the flesh. However, Evangelical preachers have added much to the doctrine of Christ. Their pastors have replaced spiritual simplicity with human wisdom.

Consider what this verse says:

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the doctrine¹¹⁶ of Christ does not

¹¹⁶ Although we present the NIV translation here, and they use the word *teaching* is used, we’re going with the KJV-AKJV-NKJV translation of the Greek word διδασχί which is *doctrine*. We believe that it makes the meaning much clearer. The idea behind this phrase is not what Jesus taught (i.e., his teachings), but the

have God (2 John 9).

The excellent phrasal verb *runs ahead* in the NIV translation seen here comes from the Greek verb *proagon*.

We agree with the NIV translators that *runs ahead* makes for a very nice translation of *proagon*. The verb is only used twice in the NT, the other time being in Mark 10:32, which says “and Jesus was walking on ahead of them.” Fine.

This is a very important text. It describes the situation in the Church to a tee, so it’s urgent that we understand the passage with precision, especially the meaning of *runs ahead*. Let’s take it slowly. Again, here is the text:

Everyone who goes too far and does not remain in the doctrine of Christ does not have God (2 John 9; LEB with KJV doctrine).

We invite you to check out the way the skillful LEB translators translated *proagon*¹¹⁷ as *goes too far*. Now, notice that *goes too far* is even better than the NIV’s *runs ahead*. Why? Because it’s a logical way to translate *proagon*. John is making a contrast between *remaining* and *not remaining*, is he not? John is saying that people *go too far* because they do *not* remain. Here’s what his thought looks like mathematically:

go too far ≠ remain

The phrase *go too far* contrasts better with *remain* than *run ahead*, doesn’t it? And a contrast is what we’re looking for because the style of the Bible is parallelism. John was using parallel-contrasting ideas here. Anyhow, you can use either translation. The NIV and the LEB are both nice versions of the Bible; we’re just making sure that none of the meaning of the passage is lost in translation.

Why so much focus on this one passage? Well, this is a touchstone verse. It tells us that there is a tendency to *go too far* with our ideas about Jesus. Put differently, Christians have a tendency to abandon the simplicity of the doctrine

teaching about the Christ. Calling it the doctrine of Christ brings that out, and fits the context best, so *doctrine* is the best translation of διδασχία.

¹¹⁷ You can find information on the Greek at http://biblehub.com/greek/proag-o_n_4254.htm. Retrieved on March 27, 2014. The word we’re dealing with is προάγων.

• John is making a contrast between remaining and not remaining.

•...there is a tendency to *go too far* without ideas about Jesus.

•...Christians have a tendency to abandon the simplicity of the doctrine of Christ.

•Christians today don't even know *the Jesus the apostles preached*..

of Christ. This tendency has become a global trend. It has metastasized into Apostasy. Today, it's hard to find preachers who teach the humanity of Christ anywhere. That's a big reason for us to fear.

I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached... you put up with it easily enough (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

What is Paul saying here? Paul warned the Corinthians that they shouldn't have ever *put up* with preachers who didn't teach them about the Jesus of the Bible. Christians today don't even know the *Jesus the apostles preached*. Christians today have lost the simplicity of the doctrine of the apostles because they put up with any preacher who tells them anything about Jesus.

1. The “God-man” lie

Our first example of how professing Christians have *gone too far* and have abandoned the truth that Jesus came in the flesh is their calling him the “God-man.”

a. Speak Bible to me

First of all, this is a term that the Bible never uses, so anyone who uses it is not speaking Biblically. Both Solomon and Paul say that we should follow a principle in life: Only say what the Bible says. Don't say more.

Do not add to his [God's] words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar (Proverbs 30:5).

... learn from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written.' Then you will not be puffed up... (1 Corinthians 4:6)

• Jesus was God—he had a divine nature—but only when he was *with* God.

Since Jesus came in the flesh, and was 100% human, to give the idea that he was some sort of fusion of human and divine natures is certainly “going beyond what is written.” Using the term “God-man” transmits that fusion idea to oth-

ers—it makes people think that Jesus was some 50/50 mix of natures.¹¹⁸ He wasn't.

¹¹⁸ This brings up an important point: Why did Jesus let people worship him if he wasn't God? He was the same person after all—the Word. And the Word “was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:2-3). But, precisely, the Word *was* God—the verb was is the past tense. Jesus was God—he had a divine nature—but only when he was *with* God. When Jesus left Heaven and came to Earth to be with us, he was *not* God anymore. He was a man. He had no divine nature, so during that time it was not right to call him *God*. Jesus has *God* as a title, but only when it corresponds to his nature. In other words, we are supposed to use the title *God* for Jesus when Jesus is *in the divine nature*. If we use the title *God* for Jesus that way, it will demonstrate that we think Biblically and that we understand what Father God *does* in Jesus, won't it?

This is exactly the reason why we call Jesus *God* now—because he has the divine nature. So that's the sense in which Jesus is God now, in the sense that he has God's nature. That's why it was perfectly legit to call him *God* before the incarnation, and it was perfectly legit to call him God after the resurrection [like Thomas did, who said “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28)]. But no one called Jesus *God* while he was in the flesh. How can we call someone who doesn't have a divine nature God? Think about it.

But our explanation still doesn't answer the question: “Why did Jesus receive worship if he was not God?” That's such a great question that we would like to expand upon it. Let's formulate four others from it:

1. Why did God order angels to worship Jesus at Jesus' birth (Hebrews 1:6)?
2. Why did the magi bow down and worship him (Matthew 2:11)?
3. Why did the man who was healed of congenital blindness worship Jesus (John 9:38)?
4. Why did the apostles worship Jesus before he got his divine nature in the resurrection (Matthew 14:33)?

When the apostles worshipped Jesus after the resurrection, it was obvious to them that he had the divine nature (Luke 24:52; Matthew 28:9,17), and it's obvious to us now too. We can see why they worshipped him: Jesus deserved it, especially with the glory that God gave him. But why did God promote the worship of Jesus when Jesus was just born? Why did God promote it when Jesus didn't have any of that glory? Even more important: Why would Jesus allow people to worship him if Angels never let people worship them? Isn't that taking the glory from God?

The answer is that the human being Jesus was still the same person that created the World. He created the World before he was born, but he was the Word. Jesus was also the same person who would Judge the World someday. Jesus was that person, the Word, even during the days of his flesh. His spirit has always been the same!

Remember: Your spirit is the essence of your life. It's the essence of your personality—your true identity. The angels, the magi, the people who were healed

•...the sense in which Jesus is God now, in the sense that he has God's nature.

•...no one called Jesus *God* while he was in the flesh.

•...Jesus was still the same person that created the World. He created the World before he was born, but he was the Word.

•... As the Son of God, Jesus had every right to “make himself equal with God”

• The Son of God... is worthy of worship at all times...

• We must believe that Jesus left his divine nature behind him.

We must believe that Jesus left his divine nature behind him. He did not hold on to the equality he had with God (Philippians 2:6). That means that since Jesus did not have *the form of God*—calling him “God-man” obscures a very important truth, the truth of the incarnation. Now we hope that you understand why the Bible writers and Jesus never used the expression “God-man.” Don’t use it, or you run the risk of denying that Jesus came to us as a human. You run the risk of denying the NT’s most essential doctrine.

b. An anointed man

So what expression should we use to describe Jesus when he came to us? Better yet, what terms did Jesus use to refer to himself? Those are two very important questions. To answer them, consider this fact: Jesus called himself *Son of Man* more than any other name.

What does it mean for Jesus to have used *Son of Man* for himself more than any other title? It means that Jesus wanted to highlight his human nature. He made sure to tell us what we most need to know about him: that he was a man. Yes, Jesus was a man with God’s Spirit upon him.

That is essentially what Jesus was: An anointed man. In fact, he is *the Anointed One*, that is, the Messiah. In his first public preaching event, these were the first words that came out of his mouth: “God has anointed me.”

Unrolling it [a scroll], he [Jesus] found

by Jesus, as well as his disciples were making no mistake when they worshipped the Word. They were rightly giving honor to the One whose identity (name) was *Marvelous*. They did much better than most people, in fact. The majority of people who knew him were not at all able to discern the spirit within Jesus.

Those who did worship Jesus were demonstrating that they could discern who they were dealing with: the Son of God. As the Son of God, Jesus had every right to “make himself equal with God” (John 5:18). He called God his Father, didn’t he? The Son of God, by virtue of his equality with God, is worthy of worship at all times: whether he is in the divine nature or in the human nature.

It has been right to worship Jesus both before the Creation, after the Creation, during his incarnation, and since his resurrection. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever—amen. However, it would have been a mistake to call him *God* during the days of his flesh. Why? For this reason: without the divine nature, it would have been incorrect to use the title *God* for Jesus. He didn’t have the divine nature during his days in the flesh. Jesus had left that behind him. What he maintained was his essence, his very special identity as the Word. And the Word is worthy of worship!

• Jesus called himself

more than
• Jesus wanted to highlight his human nature.

• That is essentially what Jesus was: An anointed man.

•...without the divine nature, it would have been incorrect to use the title *God* for Jesus.

the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he [God] has anointed me...” He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:17-18, 21).

So, to be Biblical, we should call Jesus “the man who God anointed.” Now isn’t that quite different from saying that he was the “God-man”? Yes, it is. Let’s just follow the example of the apostles. Listen to how Peter referred to Jesus when Peter preached about him on Pentecost: He called Jesus:

... a man accredited by God to you (Acts 2:23).

For most Christians, “a man accredited by God” sounds too diminutive a way to describe Jesus; but it’s not. If you speak that way about Jesus, you are speaking Biblically. You have avoided *going too far*. You have said what God, in his Word, says about Jesus.

• a completely false premise

2. To stop a storm

Now, unfortunately, there are still bigger errors Christians make. How about the one that sounds like this:

Jesus stopped the storm because he was God.

•...Jesus stopped the storm through faith in God.

Did you know that anyone who says that is completely mistaken? Their interpretation of the storm-stopping passage is based on a completely false premise: that Jesus was using “his divine nature” when he stopped the storm. But if Jesus came in the flesh, then there’s no way he even had a divine nature that day, much less even *use* it.

The truth is that Jesus stopped the storm through faith in God—and it wasn’t even an extraordinary faith our Lord was exercising. Jesus used the kind of faith that anybody can use. If that isn’t true, then why did Jesus chastise his disciples for not having faith? Was he just being grumpy when they woke him up to use his faith, and he rebuked them by saying: “Do you still have no faith?” It’s not that Jesus had lots of faith, it’s that his disciples had *no* faith. That was the problem.

A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly

•...we should have enough faith to at least stop a storm!

swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:37-40)

The teaching of the passage is not that Jesus had a divine nature. The teaching is not that Jesus had enough faith to stop a storm. The teaching is that we should have enough faith to at least stop a storm! The apostles should have exercised faith on their own. If they hadn't been so afraid, they would have used their faith in God. But Jesus had to use his faith for them, and that was sad. It was bad. Jesus wasn't at all happy about it, and he's not happy with us when we are slow to act by faith either.

a. Joshua's faith in God

Do you remember that Joshua stopped the Sun and the Moon? That's quite a big miracle, isn't it? So how did a normal man like Joshua (just the simple assistant of Moses) do it? The answer is: by faith in God. How do we know that it was his faith in God that caused the Sun to stay still? We know because Joshua spoke to God in the passage. He didn't just speak to the Sun or the Moon.

•...the LORD was fighting for Israel.

Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, Moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." So the Sun stood still, and the Moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies...

The Sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a human being. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel! (Joshua 10:12-14)

To do great feats, all we need is for God to hear our prayer, right? After Joshua spoke to God, the Scriptures report that "the LORD listened." Anyone who reads the passage

is supposed to learn this lesson: that “surely the LORD was fighting for Israel.” That’s the conclusion: It was God who did it. Joshua was God’s instrument because he had faith in God—a faith strong enough to make the Sun stop in the middle of the sky for a day!

b. Moses’ faith in God

Everybody knows the story about how Moses opened the Red Sea—but have you ever noticed *how* he did it? The Bible says that it was through his faith in God. How do we know that? We know it because Moses was simply following God’s orders when he raised his staff. The Bible further affirms that God responded to Moses by driving the sea back.

[God said] ‘Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground...’ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land (Exodus 14:16,21).

You see that the actual miracle was from God. Moses was just God’s instrument acting by faith. Read it for yourself again if you like. Ask yourself these two questions:

- **Who** drove the sea back?
- **Whose idea** was it to divide the sea?

c. Believe like they did

Just like Jesus, Moses and Joshua acted by faith in God. Since they were sure that God wanted to accomplish specific purposes, they had no reason to doubt that God would hear their prayers. It didn’t cross their minds that the elements of nature (things like storms, the wind, the sun, a river, or a sea) would ever be able to thwart the purposes of God. That’s why they were so confident.

By the way, we should note that Joshua’s miracle of stopping the Sun and Moon is unquestionably greater than the storm-stopping miracle of Jesus. It is. Do you have any doubt about it? Let’s be honest—Jesus’ feelings won’t be hurt. Don’t worry.

•...Joshua’s miracle of stopping the Sun and Moon is unquestionably greater than the storm-stopping miracle of Jesus.

•...God doesn’t need to use Jesus to do miracles.

The lesson we learn from Joshua's faith is that God does great miracles through whomever he will. God doesn't need to use Jesus to do miracles; he's seeking anyone who will have complete faith in him. Why did God use Jesus so much then? Because Jesus had a very thorough faith in God. That's supposed to inspire us to have a thorough faith too. God will use anybody whose faith in him is strong. Jesus believes that we are capable of having his kind of faith, so he told us to *move mountains*. He said:

Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you (Matthew 17:20).

3. Not only God

Still another error Christians make which contradicts the doctrine of Christ sounds something like this:

Only God could have done the things Jesus did—so Jesus is God.

Again, this is what John the apostle calls *going too far*. In fact, like a cancer, this error (if you have it) will spread into a Christian's entire perspective of the Bible. Some use this false principle to interpret everything about Jesus' life. They have not heeded Jesus' warning:

The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness.

If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays (Luke 11:34-36; NASB).

Their *eye is bad*, so bad that "the light within them is darkness." Put differently, since they do not interpret the Scriptures according to fundamental truths, their teachings (which are supposed to be the *light* of Biblical truth), are actually darkness. They teach human doctrines—lies fabricated by the human imagination.

•...they do not interpret the Scriptures according to fundamental truths...

We invite you to investigate other manifestations of the “only God can” error:

a. Who can forgive sins?

Have you ever heard “Christians” try to prove that Jesus had a divine nature by using the same line of thinking as the Pharisees? It sounds unimaginable that Christians would imitate the Pharisees, but they do—and they use this text:

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, ‘Why are you thinking these things?’ (Mark 2:5-8)

It was the Pharisees who said “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7) but lamentably, in a mistaken effort to help Jesus’ cause, Christians repeat the Pharisees’ phrase in their own arguments. Their efforts are in vain because to say “only God can forgive sins,” they have to ignore the following passage:

[Jesus said to the 11 apostles] If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven (John 20:23).

The truth these deceived brothers and sisters ignore is that Jesus authorized *all* Christians to forgive sins. Jesus proved to the Pharisees that it’s not only God who forgives sins—and the Pharisees didn’t want to listen to him (that’s no surprise). However, neither do Christians want to listen to Jesus. That’s a surprise!

... [Jesus said to his disciples] whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven (Matthew 18:18).

Are you busy in your ministry of forgiveness, freeing people from condemnation by forgiving them? Are you *loosening* things on earth and freeing people from the judgment waiting for them from God in Heaven?

In a feeble attempt to give a reason for the authority Jesus wielded to declare people forgiven, many Christians insist that he must have been *God*. But the apostles are not each

•...Jesus authorized *all* Christians to forgive sins.

•...Jesus’ authority to forgive sins doesn’t make him God.

God just because of their authority to forgive sins, right? If the authority of the apostles to bind and loosen is real, and they can wield it as simple human beings, then Jesus' authority to forgive sins doesn't make him God.

b. Who can walk on water?

Then we have the shortsighted argument "Jesus walked on water because he was God." It's not only wrong; it's an illogical statement. Anyone who believes it is forgetting that Peter walked on water too!

- Was Peter God for a minute, or did **Peter have faith in God** for a minute?
- Was Jesus God because he walked on water, or did Jesus **have enough faith in God** to walk on water?
- If walking on water is what demonstrates that Jesus was God, then **Peter was God too**. He did the same thing.

The Gospels show us a mature Jesus whose faith never failed. He could always do the works of God because he believed in God all of the time. His faith didn't fail. Jesus was mature by the time he was a man. He had faith in God when it was time to walk on water—so he was able to do it. With that strong faith in God, Jesus was ready for anything: demons, temptations, enemies, tricky questions, and even death.

4. Was Jesus perfect?

Another error is to read the Gospels, study Jesus' life, and conclude that Jesus was perfect. Not only is that *going too far*; it's a direct contradiction of the Scriptures. The Bible says that Jesus was *made* perfect (Hebrews 5:9; 7:28); never does it say that he *was* perfect. Never.

When we say that Jesus was *made* perfect, we mean that he went through a process someone else administered. The "someone else" who perfected Jesus was God. Don't you understand that our Lord Jesus was born in weakness? Doesn't the Bible teach that he gradually overcame his weaknesses by trusting in God? The Father presented Jesus with many different situations designed to challenge Jesus to grow and to become perfect. If you don't understand this, then how does God work in your own life? Does God work

•...he (Jesus) went through a process

•...as Jesus grew up he certainly made mistakes.

• Mistakes are things we innocently do wrong.

differently in you than he did in Jesus? No, we're explaining how God treats all of his children—from the Firstborn Son, to the least of that Son's brothers.

Jesus never sinned—but as Jesus grew up he certainly made mistakes. Making mistakes is the only way *to* grow up! But what are we talking about? What are *mistakes* exactly? Mistakes are things we innocently do wrong. We commit mistakes because we don't understand what's going on. On the other hand, sin is intentionally doing what is wrong—and not just *wrong*, it's doing something contrary to your conscience.

As soon as his conscience alerted him of the sin around him or within him,¹¹⁹ the boy Jesus resisted temptations and did what was right. That is to say, when he understood the right and the wrong, he always chose the right.

Now, if Jesus had never made such an effort, we would not have such a wonderful Savior today—but, in fact we do. We have a Savior who shows us how to grow. From childhood to adulthood, Jesus grew closer to God by following this pattern:

- growing in the knowledge of God's Word
- listening to his own conscience
- choosing the right path

Jesus shows us exactly how we can mature. Won't you learn from him?



5. Not natural to obey

Very few people understand how Jesus' obedience to God was nurtured. They imagine that it just flowed naturally. They think that obeying God was easy for Jesus, but it was not. The Scriptures teach that Jesus "learned obedience

¹¹⁹ We're using the expression "the sin within him" not in the sense that Jesus sinned. Jesus had no sin, but we're using the expression in the same sense that Paul uses it when he says:

... good does not live in me, that is, in my flesh...
[it's the] sin that lives in me. Consequently, I find
the principle... that evil is present with me... (Ro-
mans 7:18-21)

• We have a Savior whoshows us how to grow.

•...obedi-
ence was
not natural
for Jesus.

• Jesus
fought
against his
flesh and
won!

from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). Do you get the meaning of the word *learn* in the verse? If he had to *learn* it it’s because obedience was not natural for Jesus, right?

•...establish
the premise
that Jesus
could have
sinned!

What *was* natural for Jesus? Selfishness, pride, worry, doubting, and fear. Isn’t that what each one of our human nature’s produce in each one of us? The Good News is that Jesus overcame his flesh. He didn’t follow his natural desires. Refusing to follow the law of the flesh, Jesus instead followed the law of the Spirit. Jesus fought against his flesh and won! Following him means fighting the same battle and getting the same victory.

•...you
won’t sin if
you follow
Jesus

6. He could have sinned

•the way to
overcome
sin and
temptation

Jesus never sinned, amen. But if there is going to be any power in the words “Jesus never sinned” we first have to establish the premise that Jesus could have sinned! You absolutely have to believe that Jesus could have sinned if you yourself will be saved. If you don’t believe it, you don’t have a Savior.

7. What no one had ever shown us

• He was
100% hu-
man.

You know that you are able to sin. That’s obvious. But did you know that you won’t sin if you follow Jesus? Our Lord showed us the path of holiness. Take it. Realize that Jesus showed us what no one else in all of human history has ever shown: The way to overcome sin and temptation. Confucius didn’t show it. Buddha didn’t show it. Mohammed didn’t show it. Not even Moses showed it. Jesus showed it to us. Jesus’ way is “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6; NASB). Walk it.

• Jesus is
still a hu-
man.

8. Don’t forget

•...being
human is
not bad.

Remember: Jesus had no other nature but a human one for some 34 years. Is that clear? From the moment he was conceived (9 months before his birth) to the instant before he left Hades, Jesus had nothing of the divine nature—he was 100% human. Philippians says that when he started those years, Jesus *emptied himself* of the *form of God* and he took *the form* of men (2:6-7; NASB).

•...Jesus
was a man
among
men.

9. Be a man

Jesus is still a human: He is “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim-

othy 2:5). If Jesus is a man today, that means that being human is not bad. The problem is our flesh, not our humanity. The flesh resists God’s Law—but after we are resurrected we won’t have flesh anymore. We will still be humans. We will have human bodies, human souls, and human proportions, but the nature of our bodies will be different. Our bodies will be *spiritual bodies*. They will have a divine nature!

During “the days of his flesh” (Hebrews 5:7; LEB) Jesus was a man among men. He proved to us that being a human being does not make you evil. During those years Jesus had the same flesh that you have today.

“But,” people say, “Jesus had the Holy Spirit.”

So what? Can’t you have the Holy Spirit? Will God refuse to give you the Holy Spirit? Will he be stingy with you? On the contrary, God wants his Spirit to dwell in human hearts more than anywhere else.

a. Have the Spirit

Sure Jesus was baptized with the Holy Spirit (when he was about 30 years old) but that didn’t stop him from being human. If you are born of the Spirit, you don’t stop being human either. When you are born of the Spirit, it’s not that you lose the human nature—you are still a *jar of clay*. What happens is that God makes his light shine from within the jar.

... God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay... (2 Corinthians 4:6-7)

•God wants to give you a treasure, the treasure of illumination.

God wants to give you a treasure, the treasure of illumination: the “light of the knowledge of God’s glory”—specifically that glory as it is displayed in “the face of Christ,” the “Sun of Righteousness” (Malachi 4:2). If God gives you his Spirit, the light of Jesus will shine in your heart. If you have been a sinner, then your heart was a place where darkness once ruled.

After you are baptized in the Spirit, from then on the Spirit lives within you permanently. You will still have your flesh—which means that you will still be subject to temptation. You

will still have “sin living in you” (Romans 7:20), but you will have the strength to resist it. Only when you get a new body in the Resurrection will you be completely free from “this body of death” (Romans 7:24; LEB), but God gives us enough power to be freed from “the law of sin and death” now. With the Holy Spirit, we follow a new law, “the law of the Spirit” (Romans 8:2).

b. Be a success

Do you get it? Your situation is the same as Jesus’ situation. The fact that Jesus had the Spirit does not mean that he didn’t have to struggle with fleshly desires. He had the Spirit, but he had the flesh too. He decided to follow God’s Spirit, not his flesh. Have you made that same decision in life? If you do make that decision, then you are following Jesus. All of God’s children make that decision.

... all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God (Romans 8:14; NASB).

Success in life is being led by the Spirit of God. Failure in life is either never getting the Spirit (very sad), or having the Spirit and not obeying him (tragic). Success is doing what Jesus did. Do you believe that you can? He’ll be your Savior if you believe in him. He’ll save you if you treat him as Lord.

• What was Jesus’ nature when he was born?

• Jesus was born to die.

C. What the Bible means by *flesh*

1. Flesh of sin
2. No advantages
3. His natural body

Here’s a big question: “How did Jesus come to us?” Put differently: What was Jesus’ nature when he was born? And here is an answer:

First of all, the nature Jesus was born with was the same one he had the day he died. That’s important because Jesus was born to die. The body that he offered as a sacrifice on the Cross had to be suitable to redeem human beings. Humans are made of flesh. Now you know why Jesus came in the flesh—it was so that God could legally condemn sin that flesh, the flesh of Christ.

... God, having sent his own Son, in like-

ness¹²⁰ of flesh of sin... has condemned sin
in the flesh (Romans 8:3; Darby)

The Scriptures make it evident that Jesus came in a human body, but they tell us more than that. He didn't just have a body, Jesus had the *flesh of sin*—and what is that? It's a human nature prone to temptation. Sound familiar? You have one. So do I. So Jesus had exactly what you and I have!

1. Flesh of sin

By *flesh*,¹²¹ the Bible means the human nature inclined towards sin. All human beings from the youngest baby to the oldest man have the flesh. It is our natural tendency towards doing what is wrong. Be clear on this: The flesh does not mean the human body. It means the sinful impulses of the human body.

Darby rightly translated Romans 8:3 (*sarkos hamartias*) as

¹²⁰ This word *likeness* is used in the same sense it is used in Genesis 1:26-27 which says

Let us make mankind in our image, in our *likeness*.

If you understand what Genesis 1 means to say, you should be able to understand what Romans 8:3 means to say too. Genesis 1:26 tells us that man is *like* God. The idea behind the word *likeness* there is that we are *similar* to the God who created us. We have eyes, ears, a nose, a mouth, hair, hands, and feet just like God does. We have a mind, a heart, and a spirit. We get all those things from God. We also have emotions and the ability to love. Aren't those from God? We can even rule and exercise authority, just like God does. All humans should know that we are made in the likeness of God.

Christians recognize that the Word became just like us: That's what the Bible means when it says that he came in our *likeness*. If anyone's interpretation of the word *likeness* in Romans 8:3 detracts from Jesus' humanity, their interpretation is greatly mistaken. The word likeness in Romans 8:3 shows us how *complete* Jesus' humanity was. The Holy Spirit has selected that word with great care. He does something very poetic with it, in fact: He contrasts the lesser glory of Creation with the greater glory of the New Birth.

Do you get it? Man became like God, then God became like man. The first happened in the Creation of the World, the second happened at the incarnation. Put differently, man was created in the likeness of God, and then God was manifested in the likeness of man! Romans 8:3 is not the only passage that says so:

God [Paul is patently speaking of Jesus here] was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory (1 Timothy 3:16; NKJV).

¹²¹ Greek σάρξ, transliterated as *sarx*.

•...man was created in the likeness of God, and then God was manifested in the likeness of man!

the *flesh of sin*.¹²² The flesh is bound to the mortal human body like the flesh of an orange is bound to the peel that surrounds it. Apart from a mortal human body, the flesh is dead, just like a fruit without its peel. They are intricately and intimately interconnected.

All of us are robed in flesh from the time we are first con-

¹²² We find the translation *sinful flesh*, which is used in the majority of today's Bible translations, to be flawed. It implies the false idea that flesh is *automatically* sinful. If we translate it *flesh of sin*, the concept is that the flesh *belongs* to sin—sin is the taskmaster of the flesh. That's the truth revealed to us in the Bible, not that "flesh is full of sin" which is what the term *sin-ful*/flesh makes you think.

The Bible reveals to us that the flesh is subject to sin, and that sin controls it, yes; but the Gospel is that the Spirit of God can break that subjection to the law of sin. The Good News is that Jesus frees us from following our flesh. He does it by establishing the law of the Spirit in our lives.

You should know that the false doctrine of original sin [which says that we are born with the guilt of Adam] has spawned from the idea of sinful flesh. Those who teach original sin lead others to believe that it is sinful for a person to simply possess a human nature. That, of course, could not be true. If it were so, every baby who was ever born would have been born a sinner—including the baby Jesus!

The false doctrine of original sin, if combined with the true doctrine of Christ (the teaching that Jesus came in the flesh), is an explosive combination. It would bring us to the conclusion that Jesus was a sinner! That's why sly teachers, in order to maintain their false doctrine of original sin have to sidestep the doctrine of Christ. That is, they have to avoid it completely. Imagine that! They have to avoid the most fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith in order to sustain their human teaching of original sin (which comes from Greek philosophers like Plato who taught that the human body is evil—it's not at all from the Bible).

We, on the other hand, are free to teach the truth: Jesus had flesh, but he didn't have sin. Far be it from us to say that Jesus sinned, but it would be just as bad to deny that he had the human nature—which is what original-sin teachers do!

What all babies in the world (including the baby Jesus) have always had is the flesh of sin (Romans 8:3)—the human nature prone to sin. With grace, the weaknesses of the flesh can be overcome. That is exactly what Jesus and his apostles have proven to us—that's the Good News! God saves us from being susceptible to sin by his grace.

Aren't all the children of Christian believers *holy*? Paul said to the believers at Corinth: "your children... are holy" (1 Corinthians 7:14). Likewise, Mary was told by the Angel Gabriel, "the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). So the baby Jesus was just like all other Christian children, holy and separated unto God.

Jesus was holy in his mother's womb, and he remained holy his entire life long! Isn't that fantastic? He obtained the maximum degree of holiness, a perfectly clear conscience, and he did it in spite of his *flesh of sin*. He got that clear conscience by overcoming temptations and always choosing what was right. By struggling against sin, Jesus gained the victory which today he shares with us!

•...he had no advantage over any one of us.

•...Jesus gained the victory which today he shares with us!

ceived in our mother's womb. The union of sperm and egg inside woman's uterus (the zygote) is the beginning of human flesh. Just like any other human being, Jesus had that very flesh—human flesh.

2. No advantages

Asking questions about Jesus' body will help us to understand him better. The answers will reveal that he had no advantage over any one of us. Here are three important questions for you to reflect upon:

1) Did Jesus have a perfect body?

No, the weak human nature (the flesh) was within his body. All human beings, even the Son of God have been **conceived physically imperfect**.

That doesn't mean that we are **guilty of sin**, though. We are all innocent of sin until, when we are around 12 years of age and we do something which is contrary to our conscience.

The perfection Jesus eventually obtained was not a physical but a **spiritual perfection**: God made Jesus completely mature.

God gradually developed **a mature conscience** in Jesus by sending trials and temptations Jesus' way, causing Jesus to wrestle inwardly. Those trials were designed to build Jesus' ability to submit to God's will. The maximum test was Calvary.

Jesus eventually would become perfect, but "perfect" in the Bible does not mean **physically** perfect. It means being able to discern good from evil in **any** situation, and being free to choose what is good in **every** situation.

[God made Jesus] perfect through what he suffered (Hebrews 2:10).

... once made perfect, he [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9).

... the Son [of God]... has been made perfect forever (Hebrews 7:28).

God wants to form that same "perfection" in us. He

•All human beings, even the Son of God have been conceived physically imperfect.

•...being able to discern good from evil in any situation, and being free to choose what is good in every situation.

knows that we cannot get it under the OT priesthood (Hebrews 7:11), so he has made a **New Covenant**. In it, we have a High Priest who can “save completely” (Hebrews 7:25) those who go to God through him. In fact, Jesus can make us “perfect forever” (Hebrews 10:14) because he “puts God’s laws in our hearts, and writes them on our minds” (v. 16).

Through the Old Covenant sacrifices of animals, people never got the clear conscience they desired (Hebrews 10:1). The reason was because it is impossible for the blood of animals to cleanse us of our sins (Hebrews 10:4). The blood of Jesus, which is the **only sacrifice God ever** has¹²³ or **will**¹²⁴ **accept** for human sins, can purchase forgiveness for us.

2) Was Jesus’ body a “spiritual body”?

No, in the days of his flesh Jesus did not have the “spiritual body” which Paul makes reference to in 1 Corinthians 15:44 (below). Jesus did not get a spiritual body until after he was resurrected.¹²⁵

¹²³ Old Testament believers like Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David offered animals as a sign of their faith in the Lamb of God who was to come. They did not do it believing that the actual blood of animals would save them. For them, offering animal sacrifices was an expression of their hope of the man described in Isaiah 53, the Messiah. When the offering of animal sacrifices was institutionalized in the Covenant with Moses, God’s was guiding them towards that hope, not replacing faith with works.

¹²⁴ Mortals in the Millennial Kingdom (that won’t include us because we will have already been resurrected) will offer the blood sacrifices of animals in the Millennium Temple just like the OT believers offered sacrifices in the Temple of Solomon. We hope that this doesn’t sound strange to you: The Millennium mortals will be doing the sacrifices with “backward looking” faith in Jesus’ blood. The OT believers did it with “forward looking” faith. Every time we take the Lord’s Supper now, we use a “backward looking” faith in Jesus’ blood, which is why the Millennium Temple sacrifices shouldn’t sound strange to you.

¹²⁵ We know that he had a *spiritual body* after having been resurrected because Jesus walked through walls (something nobody would ever be able to do with a natural body). He was also capable of:

- 1) disguising his appearance (passing for a stranger) among people who knew him
- 2) showing the scars on his hands and feet

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:42-45; NASB).

3) Did Jesus have a different kind of body than ours?

No, it was the same kind of body. **His body didn’t have any special powers**—his spirit did. Indeed, power proceeded from his spirit through his body. Through the anointing that God gave Jesus, his spirit got filled with power. That power was transmitted through his hands, but it didn’t change the physical composition of his hands.

Not even the transfiguration was an indication that Jesus’ body was different from a normal human body.¹²⁶

3) eating food such as fish and honey

4) being brought up bodily to Heaven

All of these activities were witnessed by the apostles. For them it was proof enough that Jesus had a real body after his resurrection. We hope that it’s proof enough for you. Anyways, you don’t need to just believe them. Believe the words of Jesus himself. He declared that he had a real body:

Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have (Luke 24:39).

¹²⁶ People ask about the transfiguration: “Did Jesus’ body change there?” Well, the Bible doesn’t use the words “his body changed,” so we shouldn’t presume that it did. Maybe it did, but even if it did, the change was temporary. Anyways, the Bible uses the word *appearance* for the change the apostles saw in him, saying:

... the appearance of his face became different, and his clothing became white and gleaming (Luke 9:29; NASB).

So, it was Jesus’ *appearance* that changed at the transfiguration. For example, his clothing looked bright and shiny.

• Je-
sus didn’t
transfigure
himself.

• God
honored
Jesus on
the Mount
of Transfig-
uration.

3. His natural body

Both Mark and Matthew reported that Jesus...

... was transfigured before them, and his garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on Earth can whiten them (Mark 9:2-3).

Taking Luke together with Matthew and Mark, we come to understand that the word *transfigured* is a synonym for *change of appearance*.

Furthermore, we do well to note that the verb *transfigured* is in the passive, meaning that Jesus didn't transfigure himself. To say "he was transfigured" means that Jesus was the object of the change of appearance, not the author of it. He wasn't "revealing himself for who he really was," as some preachers commonly say.

Rather, God honored Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. We know that because 2 Peter 1:17 tells us that:

... he [Jesus] received honor and glory from God the Father.

So the Scriptures are clear in telling us that the transfiguration was a temporary manifestation of God's approval designed to honor his Son in the presence of three apostles. God wanted to affirm their faith in Jesus, not to prove to them that Jesus' body was somehow different from theirs. If the fundamental doctrine of Christianity is that Jesus' body was not different from ours, why would God ever try to prove the contrary?

Peter tells us that he, John, and James were "eye witnesses of his [Jesus'] majesty" (2 Peter 1:16; NASB) so they saw the majesty—which means the divine glory—of Jesus on that mountain. That must have been the same glory of which Jesus referred when he spoke of "the glory which I had with thee [God] before the World was" (John 17:5; NASB). With the transfiguration, God gave those three apostles a glimpse of the glory of which Jesus spoke saying:

... the glory which thou [God] hast given me [Jesus] (John 17:24; NASB).

The effect of the *holy mountain* experience was that it strengthened the apostle's faith in Jesus (we hope that your idea of the transfiguration doesn't weaken yours). It became very clear to those three men that God had chosen Jesus—has that become clear to you? Is it clear to you that God has sent Jesus? Do you believe it with all your heart? Are you convinced? That's what God wanted to prove with the transfiguration. Jesus prayed to God for his apostles like this:

Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me (John 17:7-8).

Have you come to believe the same thing as the apostles? Do you believe that everything Jesus has comes from God? His glory comes from God. His transfiguration came from God. His life comes from God. Jesus offers that life for us! Let's take it.

•...everything Jesus has comes from God.

The body of Jesus is called “the body of his flesh,” and the majority of renowned Bible translators agree that this is the best translation of the Greek.¹²⁷

... now hath he [Jesus] reconciled [you] in the body of his flesh through death (Colossians 1:22; ASV).

So, we know that Jesus’ body was not a spiritual body, but a natural one. It was “the body of his flesh” as Paul put it in Colossians 1:22. But at this point you might be wondering: At what point in time does a body of flesh become a *spiritual body*? The answer is given in the following passage:

... [the human body] is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, “The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:44-45).

This passage proves that only when a Christian’s body is raised from the dead does it become a spiritual body. Even

¹²⁷ The expression “the body of his flesh” is preferred among Bible scholars, being used in the following 9 well-known versions of the Bible: KJ21, ASV, AMP, Darby, DRA, KJV, NKJV, WYC, and YLT. We’re happy to report to you that the “his body of flesh” (ESV, ESVUK) and the “his fleshly body” (NASB) translations retain the same meaning. So we have found a total of 12 translations that transmit the meaning of Colossians 1:22 accurately, not just 9.

Unfortunately, the expression has also been dynamically (not literally) translated as Jesus’ physical body in 9 other versions of the Bible (the CEB, CJB, GW, HCSB, LEB, MOUNCE, NIV, NLT, and TNIV). Since that translation does not give due recognition to Jesus’ human nature prone to sin, we suggest that you be extra careful with the Bible versions that use it.

It’s likely that the 9 *physical body* translations of Colossians 1:22 will cause those who read those versions of the Bible readers to view Jesus’ victory as something less glorious than it really was. Do you understand why? It’s because Jesus triumphed over his *flesh*, not just over his *body*. He overcame *the body of his flesh* not just his *physical body*. Where *flesh* is written in the Greek, it should be translated as such, and not sugar-coated. It means “the human nature inclined towards sin.” Jesus had it. Jesus overcame it.

Jesus didn’t just overcome sleep, sickness, and hunger (challenges we all face in the *physical body*)—He was victorious against his natural tendency to sin! He overcame temptation! That’s the Savior you and I need, one who can save us from temptation too! So let’s insist on saying that Jesus has...

... reconciled [us to God] in the body of his flesh through death (Colossians 1:22; ASV).

• He was victorious against his natural tendency to sin!

Jesus himself had to pass through the life → death → burial → resurrection process to get his spiritual body! How much more reason is there for us to go through the same process—we have sinned! Do you think you just have to be a human, and then you get a spiritual body for free? No—there’s a price to pay. You have to be resurrected to get a spiritual body. And you have to be in Christ to be resurrected!

D. What we needed

1. Power in weakness
 - a. A great truth
 - b. Wisdom from God
2. The process of maturity
 - a. God perfects
 - b. Mature Jesus
 - i. To minister
 - ii. To comfort
 - iii. To be tempted
3. Strong temptations for a strong man
4. Not a spoiled Son, a *disciplined* Son
 - a. Change the world?
 - b. Give us a break

•...even doubting it brings you dangerously close to denying God’s salvation.

• There is no salvation from a Messiah who was not like us.

• three ministries of the Messiah

At this point, you may be wondering: “Why is it so important to prove that Jesus had a human nature?” Are we a little overzealous about this subject? No, the reason why we emphasize it so much is that even doubting it brings you dangerously close to denying God’s salvation.

There is no salvation from a Messiah who was not like us. Only a Messiah who was tempted like we are can:

- show us **how to overcome** our weaknesses
- be **God’s** (human) **sacrifice** for our **sins**
- intercede** for us

• Jesus had the *flesh of sin*. He had it because we needed it.

Have no doubt about it: Without these three ministries of the Messiah (the ministry of being an example, of being a sacrifice, and of being an intercessor), there is no salvation from sin. If there is no salvation from sin, there will be no salvation from Hell. Without them we are lost, hopeless, and condemned.

- lost** because we would have no example

to follow

☒ **hopeless** because there is no other sacrifice for sin

☒ **condemned** because we would have no one in Heaven to intercede for us

So Jesus had the *flesh of sin*. He had it because we needed it. Jesus himself didn't need it. He didn't even want it. If Jesus prayer was "Do not lead us into temptation," why would he ever ask God for flesh? Doesn't flesh make a person vulnerable to temptation? Yes, it does.

People in churches don't want to believe that Jesus had the flesh of sin because they think that it would make him a sinner. They're wrong. Jesus didn't get the *flesh of sin* in order to be a sinner, but in order to help sinners. Jesus showed sinners how to have victory over sin. Most of all, Jesus became flesh because he wanted to fulfill God's plan of salvation for humanity.

1. Power in weakness

What did God's grace help the boy Jesus to do exactly? Well, first of all, it didn't give him supernatural powers. Jesus performed his first miracle when he was about 30. God's grace didn't change Jesus' physical appearance either. Just ignore the way Medieval and Renaissance artists have depicted him. They were far from the truth when they painted the baby Jesus with a halo over his head.

God gave his grace to Jesus—the same grace that's available to us today—primarily for Jesus to triumph over temptation. God's grace empowered Jesus inside, it didn't produce any changes outside. God's grace strengthened Jesus' spirit.

Paul called God's grace *Christ's power*, and Paul showed us that Christ's power is perfected in human weakness:

[God said] 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I [Paul] will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me (2 Corinthians 12:9).

• Jesus didn't get the flesh of sin in order to be a sinner, but in order to help sinners.

• God's power is manifested through weakness.

• Christ's life is a lesson in how God's power manifests itself in weakness.

a. A great truth

Paul heard God loud and clear. He got the message: It's God's grace that strengthens a believer, not anything physical. It's not that God makes us strong by giving us big muscles. God gives inner strength. That's why Paul could *boast* about his bodily weaknesses. Do you see why he would ever do so? He boasted about his weakness precisely because he believed that God's power is manifested through weakness. Isn't that a great truth?

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength (1 Corinthians 1:24-25).

• the very meaning of the Cross: human weakness

From the manger to the Cross, Christ's life is a lesson in how God's power manifests itself in weakness. Don't forget: Jesus made, yes *made* himself weak. How did he do it? By:

- becoming a baby
- being poor
- working as a village carpenter
- giving away all of his possessions
- fasting
- allowing himself to be crucified

•...never before in history had God's power worked so strongly in favor of mankind than when Jesus was crucified!

He did all of that in order to prove this singular truth: God's power is perfected in human weakness! God's success hinges on man's failures.¹²⁸ This is a central concept of the Christian faith. If you don't believe us, then explain the fol-

¹²⁸ To show this principle at work, consider the Crucifixion: Never before had man failed so miserably. The Jews, who inherited the prophets, the Scriptures, the true religion, the traditions, the Temple ministry, and even the very Messiah, sinned grievously. Mind you that the very Messiah God had long promised 4000 years previously was standing right in front of them, but they still utterly rejected him. He was their Savior, but they condemned him to death!

Sound miserable? Here's the Good News: God overcame the sin of the Jews through his mercy. The Savior they rejected accepted them. Jesus asked God to forgive them as he hung on the Cross—and have no doubts that God most certainly heard Jesus' prayer, forgiving the Jews for the sin of killing his Son. So God will succeed through man's failures. His wisdom is greater than our ignorance. His mercy is greater than our sin!

... where sin increased, grace increased all the more (Romans 5:20).

lowing passage. It teaches us the very meaning of the Cross: human weakness.

For to be sure, he [Jesus] was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power (2 Corinthians 13:4).

So the Cross is all about the power of physical weakness. Paul says that Jesus was *crucified in weakness*, but never before in history had God's power¹²⁹ worked so strongly in favor of mankind than when Jesus was crucified!

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power (1 Corinthians 15:42-43).

God is glorified through human weakness and not human strength for this reason: So that he might get the glory in everything.¹³⁰ When God is glorified, it's because we have been humbled. You can't have both at once. Even the things that we boast of can only be boasted of as God's accomplishments.

Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31).

b. Wisdom from God

Jesus shows us true wisdom: That's why the Bible says that Jesus "became to us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). What wisdom do we gain from him? We learn from

¹²⁹ At the Cross, God's saving power worked stronger than ever, but how so? We're not referring to the sky God darkened or the earthquake he sent. We're not referring to his rending of the Temple veil. The power of God was working most strongly through Jesus! Our Lord Jesus' faith in God prevailed in the midst of utter darkness. Their religion had failed the Jews, but their Savior did not fail them. He triumphed over their hate with love.

God's power is currently working through Christians in their gifts. You may have the gift of casting out demons. You may have the gift of speaking in tongues too, but if love is not working through you, you have nothing. Use your gifts. They are the power of God, amen. But the essence of God's power is love! Let it work through you today.

¹³⁰ Today's Prosperity Gospel preachers totally contradict this truth with a cheap message which centers on health and wealth, not the Cross. They call it the "Gospel," but it's not. They're making a way for the Antichrist who will offer the world just that: health and wealth. They're preaching the "Antichrist Gospel" of comfort and worldly rewards. They have abandoned the message of Jesus Christ.

• God is glorified throughout human weakness and not human strength.

• God uses human weakness as an opportunity to show his mighty power.

Jesus that God uses human weakness as an opportunity to show his mighty power. God has proven that the greed-ridden power-coveting system of this world is empty. Its glory is a fraud. God has revealed the sham of human wisdom.

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen.

The things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God (1 Corinthians 1:27-29; NASB).

• Jesus' process of maturity involved a great deal of suffering

The Cross is despised in this world. It represents human weakness, even disgrace. The fact that Jesus gave up Heavenly glory to be born in poverty and weakness, even humbling himself unto death on a Cross, has made you and me strong today. What wisdom divine!

... you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

2. The process of maturity

Let's not forget the price we need to pay if we are going to attain Jesus' state of maturity: We have to pass through great difficulties. Jesus' process of maturity involved a great deal of suffering (like rejection from family, the betrayal of a friend, and a painful and shameful death). Most Christians at one point or another have wondered about why Jesus had to suffer so much. Some common concerns few Christians dare to express, but which often pass through their minds are:

• Jesus suffered because God was making him mature.

- Did God want to make Jesus unhappy?
- Does God want all of us to be miserable?
- Was Jesus a masochist?
- Was Jesus looking for trouble?

- Did Jesus lack the wisdom to avoid the conflict he had with the Jewish leaders?

a. God perfects

Those are all normal questions based on normal concerns, but we want you to recognize something today: If you have them, it's because you're ignoring the main reason for Jesus' suffering: God was making Jesus mature.

... [Jesus] has been made perfect forever (Hebrews 7:28).

It's vitally important to understand that Jesus suffered because God was making him mature—why? Because God puts difficulties in your life for the same reason. It's the main reason why you suffer too! Don't worry, God doesn't want you to be miserable. He wants you to be happy—but God's kind of happiness is not the same as the happiness the world offers you. His happiness is deep. It's called *joy*. You get it through patience.

You are not yet perfect. Before the Crucifixion, Jesus was not perfect yet either. He only became perfect when he was resurrected by God. At his resurrection, it could finally be said that Jesus had been *made*¹³¹ *perfect*. That is, God was done testing Jesus at the Cross.¹³²

... he [Jesus] learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Hebrews 5:8-9).

b. Mature Jesus

¹³¹ Notice the passive voice: *God* was doing it. In English, the passive is formed by using the verb "to be" + a verb in the perfect tense. It means that the subject (Jesus, in this case) was not performing the action, but receiving it.

¹³² You may not have to be crucified, but God is hard at work trying to make you perfect as well. He even calls us "those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:14). The trials God sends our way perfect our conscience because they force us to discern between good and evil. It is only after we pass these trials that "authority to judge" will finally be granted to us (Revelation 20:4). Then and only then we will be ready to reign with Christ.

So what's the best way to get ready to reign? The key is to be among those mature Christians who...

... because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:14; NASB).

We don't want to give you the impression that Jesus was weak and carnal up until the day he was resurrected either. On the contrary, he got stronger and stronger as he grew. Maybe he was as spiritually strong when he was only at age 5 than you are today at age 50. Compared to most of us, the boy Jesus was quite strong, in fact. He matured at a very rapid rate.

i. To minister

For example, by the time he was 30 years old Jesus was mature enough¹³³ to minister to others with the gifts God had given him. At what age did you start to minister to others with the gifts?

ii. To comfort

Furthermore, minister of consolation have to have first been comforted by God. If they are going to comfort others, they must experience God's consolation. Jesus was being trained by God to be our Comforter. The Holy Spirit is *another Comforter*¹³⁴ (John 14:16), which means that Jesus our primary Comforter, doesn't it? But how did Jesus get the skills and heart for such a task? Here's the key: Jesus has already experienced much of the comfort God gives. By the time he began his ministry, he had been filled with comfort from God.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

iii. To be tempted

¹³³ Anyone who will serve in God's Church has to be mature. We know that because a pastor cannot be "a new convert" (1 Timothy 3:6).

¹³⁴ The Greek word for *comforter* is παράκλητος (*paracletos*) which is also translated as intercessor or advocate. Sometimes it's even transliterated as *paraclete*. According to the NASB translators, it means "one who is called alongside to help." The idea behind it is someone who acts as a defense attorney.

•...by the time he was 30 years old, temptations had to be very intense if they were going to faze Jesus.

Something else that reveals Jesus' level of maturity to us is the degree of temptation he had to bear. In the same way trucks are marketed according to the weight they can carry, God rates people according to the temptations they can bear. Jesus could resist powerful temptations. For example, by the time he was 30 years old, temptations had to be very intense if they were going to faze Jesus. That's why Satan assumed personal responsibility for doing it.

• The greater the calling, the greater the testing.

The Devil is a shrewd and crafty tempter. He only tempted our Lord Jesus when the opportunity was ripe for a possible fall. The Devil only came to Jesus when Jesus was at his weakest moments. For example, after his 40-day fast, and right after the betrayal of Judas, the Devil set temptations before Jesus. He sought how he could catch Jesus off guard.

When the Devil had finished all this tempting, he left him [Jesus] until an opportune time (Luke 4:13).

• ...a man is only as strong as his primary vulnerability.

You can see how strong the degree of testing was for Jesus. And why did it have to be so strong? It's simply because Jesus was destined to be someone great. The greater the calling, the greater the testing. What about you? Are you called to greatness? Expect big trials. Few metals pass through fire hotter than the fire of a steel mill—but that's because few metals are stronger than steel.

3. Strong temptations for a strong man

What do the Devil's temptations tell us about Jesus? They tell us that he was spiritually strong. Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, a man is only as strong as his primary vulnerability. What weaknesses do we see in Jesus at age 30? The Devil's temptations made nothing apparent, so he was very strong.

Jesus had impeccable character by the time he was a full-grown man. Don't forget that we're talking about someone who didn't have any character as a baby—nobody does. Jesus got some character as a child, and more through adolescence, but he had to wait until manhood for it to be the proven character that would give him a victory over life's toughest temptations. Study those temptations Jesus faced and you'll see why he is so worthy of being our Messiah!

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by the Devil. And he ate nothing during those days, and when they were completed, he was hungry. So the Devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, order this stone that it become bread!' And Jesus replied to him, 'It is written, 'Man will not live on bread alone.'

And he [Satan] led him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the Devil said to him, 'I will give you all this domain and their glory, because it has been handed over to me, and I can give it to whomever I want. So if you will worship before me, all this will be yours.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'

And he brought him to Jerusalem, and had him stand on the highest point of the Temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'on their hands they will lift you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You are not to put to the test the Lord your God'" (Luke 4:1-12; LEB).

You've read the Scriptures closely, now take a minute to reflect upon the extremely high degree of difficulty involved with these three temptations. If you think about them, you'll see that they were really difficult! They were the temptations of:

- **making a piece of bread to eat** after having completed¹³⁵ a 40-day fast and feeling the hunger of such a fast
- **getting authority over all the lands and riches of the World** by briefly worshipping

¹³⁵ Being tempted to break a fast is something different altogether. Jesus was tempted on the matter of *how* to break a fast, not *whether* he should break a fast.

before the beautiful¹³⁶ Prince of this World

- **getting immediate public recognition** as the Messiah by publically demonstrating faith in God's Bible promises¹³⁷

• God did not give Jesus special treatment.

4. Not a spoiled Son, a disciplined Son

If you are really going to understand how difficult Jesus' battle against temptation was, it won't be enough for you to comprehend their degree of difficulty; you will also have to know this: God did not give Jesus special treatment.

Son though he was, he [Jesus] learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

Why is this so important to understand? Well, if there was any favoritism involved in God's dealing with Jesus, then immediately Jesus' victories become unfair for us, right? How, after all, could we do what God's "spoiled" Son Jesus did? We would all feel as jealous as Joseph's brothers when Jacob gave Joseph the coat of many colors.

... Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him... So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—and they took him and threw him into the cistern (Genesis 37:3-4, 23).

• Jesus learned obedience. That means that it did not come naturally to him.

¹³⁶ We say *beautiful* because Satan surely would not present himself as an ugly horned creep in a red jumpsuit, at least not at the moment he was tempting Jesus to bow before him. The Devil is too smart for that. Certainly Satan was manifesting himself as *an angel of light* (2 Corinthians 11:14) during the temptation in the wilderness.

¹³⁷ This doesn't sound bad at all, does it? But there is something wrong about it. Can you perceive what the temptation in it was? It was doing God's things outside of God's timing. The temptation was to do God's things outside of God's plan.

• The righteous man shall live by faith, not by natural impulses.

Let's really let the truth of Hebrews 5:8 (above) sink in: Jesus learned obedience. That means that it did not come naturally to him. Precisely, what would have come naturally to him (being that he had the *flesh of sin*) was sin. Jesus didn't do what was came naturally to him. Rather, he acted by faith. Jesus acted contrary to what was natural—he did what was super-natural. The righteous man shall live by faith, not by natural impulses.

a. Change the world?

Jesus had his own social challenges to face. He wasn't privileged or rich. He wasn't highly-educated or part of a high social class. Rather, he was from a low-income family. He was also from a small village, making him non-cosmopolitan. Being a Galilean (who the Judeans saw as inferior), and living under the oppression of an foreign army, Jesus could easily have called for social reform. But instead, he focused on spiritual matters. Nobody can say that Jesus showed us how to change the world. Nobody can teach that Jesus changed the world—he didn't. Actually, the world It still runs by the same principles that governed it when Jesus lived here.

Being born during a time when imperialism ruled, there were social movements to be a part of: the Essenes and the Zealots were two of them. The Essenes wanted to reform the Jewish religion and the Zealots wanted to free the Jews from Roman rule. Were the Romans really that bad? Yes. Even God Himself said that the Roman Empire was hard like iron and terrifying as a giant beast!¹³⁸

¹³⁸ In Daniel 2:40, God said that Rome was like iron. Put differently, it was God's tool to break, smash, and crush the nations of the world and even Israel was included among those nations! Daniel's prophecy says that Rome is...

... a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others [kingdoms].

In Daniel 10, the Roman Empire is compared to a terrible beast, worse than all the kingdoms that proceeded it. Again, the symbol of iron is used, this time to describe the teeth of the beast. With this passage, reflect upon how terrible the Romans were as they expanded their empire:

... a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left (v. 7).

With all of the challenges we listed above, Jesus easily could have considered himself to be a victim of social conditions—but he didn't. Instead, he accepted his condition. He saw it as the will of God. It was the life God proportioned to Jesus. Our Lord took the difficulties in stride, using them as opportunities to develop godly character.

So Jesus' story is not about how to overcome social oppression. He never preached liberation theology, utopian ideals, democracy, or communism. He didn't speak against Roman taxes, slavery, or the Emperor. He never led a rebellion or tried to overthrow the government. In fact, Jesus hid from the people when they tried to make him a king.¹³⁹

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself (John 16:14-15).

Jesus' life is a lesson in how to overcome the spiritual difficulties which are common to all people like selfishness, laziness, and hypocrisy. Because Jesus taught about how to overcome temptation, both the rich and the poor can relate to him. The most powerful king of Europe and the poorest shoe-shiner in Africa can both relate to our Lord. Jesus transcends social barriers. We can preach him to the elite and the downtrodden. They will all be able to gain wisdom from Jesus' life.

a. Give us a break

If you can grasp the truth that Jesus had to be made perfect, you'll be more patient with yourself and others. Jesus had to grow, so his growth-experience has sanctified our own process of spiritual growth. Jesus made that process special. Because he passed through it, it is now an honor for us to go through it too. If you can recognize the necessity of that process, you'll feel patient with children and others who are spiritually immature. If you understand that nobody becomes perfect in love, faith, or hope unless they have been through a process, you'll become more compassionate. Ac-

• Jesus' life is a lesson in how to overcome the spiritual difficulties which are common to all people

• Jesus had to be made perfect.

¹³⁹ Compare Jesus to Mohammed, the prophet of Islam in this regard, if you dare.

ording to what we see in Jesus' example, that process is about suffering for the faith.¹⁴⁰

• Jesus endured suffering... because of the Kingdom rewards...

In bringing many sons and daughters [that's us] to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the Pioneer of their salvation [Jesus] perfect through what he suffered (Hebrews 2:10).

If we can comprehend how Jesus was molded and shaped by God, we'll feel more like believing in Jesus as Lord. If our confidence in the man Jesus Christ is high, we'll then be able to face our own suffering with much more endurance. The encouragement we'll feel comes from knowing that Jesus has "been there already."

Jesus endured suffering not only because it was going to make him mature, but because of the Kingdom rewards God promised him. If we have the same hope in Kingdom rewards, we'll also endure the trials that come our way. This is a really important truth: The fact that God has already given Jesus Kingdom glory guarantees future glory for us. But we have to follow Jesus' example. We have to suffer for doing what is right.

• Jesus actually died.

... our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all (2 Corinthians 4:17).

E. Subject to weakness

1. To destroy the Devil
2. Absolutely and completely human
 - a. What kind of man is Jesus?

• He died like a seed under the ground.

Jesus' participation in the human nature meant having a frail human frame. There's a lot of evidence to prove that he

¹⁴⁰ Another term for "suffering for the faith" is "bearing your cross." It is not suffering for doing what is wrong. If we are punished for doing what is wrong, we should praise God for his justice. If a young lady gets pregnant because she has committed fornication, it is a consequence of her sin. If a person loses all of their money because they speculated in the stock market, that is also a consequence of sin—the sin of greed. Most people who are suffering in the world today, are suffering for their sin. Suffering for faith is a unique experience. It's totally different from suffering for sin: It is doing what is right and then being incriminated for it, like Jesus at his crucifixion. Understand this: *Only* bearing your cross gets you a reward with God. There is no reward for the suffering produced by sin.

had a frail human frame, but the biggest piece of evidence is that Jesus actually died. He was subjected to death just like any other human being. Put differently, Jesus was a mortal just like us.

1. To destroy the Devil

Jesus died, but he didn't just die like a grape on the vine. He died like a seed under the ground. Seeds die to produce a new tree. Jesus died with a purpose: To give us a victory over the Devil. In fact, we can even say that Jesus died to destroy the Devil. He died that he...

... might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil (Hebrews 2:14; NKJV).

Did you get that? Follow the poetry of it: The Devil plotted Jesus' death wanting to destroy Jesus. The Devil came "to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10); but he failed. Satan was roundly defeated because Jesus' death actually destroyed him, the Devil. In other words, Jesus destroyed the one who came to destroy. How so? Through Jesus' death many millions of believers are justified.

The Devil loves to accuse us. He draws God's attention to our guilt as much as he can; however, Jesus cancelled that guilt was at Calvary! Jesus' death has made the Devil unable to accuse us any more. Our sin has been paid for.

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself [Jesus] likewise shared in the same, that through death he [Jesus] might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil (Hebrews 2:14; NKJV).

So Jesus took the sting out of the Devil's favorite weapon, death. Now the Devil can't use death to destroy us. He used it to destroy Jesus, but that's precisely why he can't use it now to destroy us. Jesus' death became the substitution for the punishment we deserve for our sins. If we claim the Cross for ourselves (and there's no other way to do that but through baptism), the Devil will have no more death grip on us. We are freed from death through the death of Christ.

• Jesus destroyed the one who came to destroy.

•...the substitution for the punishment we deserve.

•We are freed from death through the death of Christ.

• Jesus was absolutely and completely human.

• Jesus was 100% human.

That's why we call the death of Jesus *the death of death*.¹⁴¹

2. Absolutely and completely human

The Bible says that Jesus had to be made like us—"fully human in every way" (Hebrews 2:17). It's really important to reflect upon the meaning of the words *fully* and *every* in the passage at hand: They mean *absolutely* and *completely*. That means that Jesus was absolutely and completely human, which is why we insist (and it's necessary to contend fervently for this doctrine because of the vast number of Bible teachers who teach the contrary) that Jesus was 100% human.¹⁴²

Therefore, in all things he [Jesus] had to be made like his brethren (Hebrews 2:17; NKJV).

So the Lord Jesus had a totally human experience, through a completely human nature, in a genuinely human body. That complete human experience was what God used to prepare Jesus to be our intercessor and High Priest. Jesus' experience as a human being was designed "that he might be" a

¹⁴¹ This is a saying from Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD), who put it this way:

Where is death? Seek it in Christ, for it exists no longer; but it did exist and now it is dead. O life, O death of death! Be of good heart; it will die in us, also. What has taken place in our head will take place in his members; death will die in us also. But when? At the end of the world, at the resurrection of the dead in which we believe and concerning which we do not doubt (Sermon 233.3-4).

¹⁴² It's pretty straightforward Biblical interpretation for us to deduce that the words *fully* and *every* mean completely. Mathematically, *completely* would mean that Jesus was 100% human. Fine, but as to his divine nature, wasn't there any of it? Not even 0.1%? Most Christians blindly presume that there was somewhere around 50% of the divine nature in Jesus, but we disagree. Jesus had *no* divine power when he came to us. The Bible says that the Word "emptied himself" of that divine nature, meaning that there was none!

...although he [Jesus] existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6-7; NASB).

So, if when Jesus had the divine nature he emptied himself, then Jesus had nothing of it (0%) when he became man. That's what emptied means: *Nothing* was there—zero. In fact, the NIV translates "emptied himself" as "made himself nothing." Now, isn't nothing equal to 0%? Yes, so Jesus had nothing of the divine nature and all of the human nature!

•...the Lord Jesus had a totally human experience, through a completely human nature, in a genuinely human body.

• Jesus fully identifies with us, and he will have mercy on anyone who asks for it.

• Jesus had nothing of it (0%) when he became man.

• Jesus had nothing of the divine nature and all of the human nature!

faithful High Priest. God orchestrated it so that Jesus would be able “to make propitiation” for our sins. To understand these two purposes of Jesus’ human experience, read the passage below:

Therefore, in all things he [Jesus] had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17; NKJV).

Put differently, being fully human caused Jesus to gain a high degree of compassion for us. Jesus sympathizes with us because he has “been there, done that.” Have no doubt about this: Jesus fully identifies with us, and he will have mercy on anyone who asks for it. He was *made like* us for a very particular purpose: To present to God the atoning¹⁴³ sacrifice God requires for sins to be forgiven.

a. What kind of man is Jesus?

Jesus certainly was different from other people, but the difference between Jesus and other people was not his nature. The difference is that Jesus never allowed his nature, the human nature, to lead him to sin—we have allowed our flesh to lead us to sin. Jesus never allowed his flesh to impede him from being *the same* faithful person he has been since before the Creation of the World.

People noticed something different about Jesus. The apostles asked each other the question “What kind of man is this?” (Matthew 8:27) two thousand years ago, so if you hear it today, you’re not dealing with a new question. It’s okay if people ask it. It’s not a bad question. The problem

¹⁴³ The word *atone* comes from the Middle English word-combination at one. To *atone* means to make peace between two parties that are at odds, to make them one. The word is also frequently translated as *expiate*. To *expiate* means to appease the wrath of someone who is not pleased, like when one king makes peace with a neighboring king by sending him a gift.

Now notice how the expression “make propitiation” is used in Hebrews 2:17 above. If you want to understand the concept of propitiation, then remember the word *atone*. Jesus’ making propitiation for us is all about how he regained the favor of God for us. He made it possible for us to be at one with God again. How did Jesus do it? He did it by appeasing God’s righteous anger. God is angry with sin, so angry that he will give death to those who have sinned against him. But Jesus died for our sins on the Cross, taking that anger away.

• Jesus never allowed his nature, the human nature, to lead him to sin.

• “What kind of man is this?”

• ...there is only one true answer: Jesus was a man just like any other.

•...those miracles were from God, and God was trying to show everybody who knew about Jesus, that he approved of Jesus.

is not that someone asks it, but that most people answer it wrongly. You'll hear many different answers, but there is only one true answer: Jesus was a man just like any other.

So where do we get that answer? Jesus gave it. If you read the passage where the "What kind of man is this?" question is posed, you'll see that Jesus rebuked the apostles with these words:

You of little faith, why are you so afraid?
(Matthew 8:26).

What was our Lord saying exactly? He was saying that he was a man just like his apostles were—can you see it? Jesus' answer is implicit in his challenge to them. What was the challenge? For them to do the same things he did! Jesus was a man, a man to whom God had given authority. Even the crowds knew that.

... the crowd... [when they saw Jesus heal a paralyzed man was] filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man (Matthew 9:8).

Do you get the idea? Jesus was a man, indeed he was a man who did miracles—yes, but those miracles were from God, and God was trying to show everybody who knew about Jesus, that he approved of Jesus. As Peter said in his Pentecost message, Jesus was "accredited to us by God."

Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him (Acts 2:22).

Jesus did miracles, but the bottom line is that even though Jesus did miracles, he was still a man just like any other. He came to us in the flesh. He came to us as a man. He did not come to us in the divine nature. He did not come to us as God! Jesus was in the flesh, but he walked according to the spirit. Now isn't that exactly what any Christian is? Aren't we people who are in the flesh, but who live by the spirit? Yes, we are.

•identify the context

•...how the expression *the same* is used in the entire Book of Hebrews.

F. Jesus is *the same*

1. Start with the context
2. Even though his nature changed...
3. Why God is happy with his Son

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

To understand what it means to say that Jesus is “the same yesterday and today and forever,” we have to interpret two passages: one which begins and another which concludes the Epistle to the Hebrews. The one that concludes Hebrews is written here, and is pretty well-known among Christians. We have already looked at it briefly in a footnote (#36), but now we need to reflect on it more deeply.

1. Start with the context

To begin our reflection, let’s ask ourselves “What does *the same* mean in this verse?” Instead of just guessing at its meaning (which is what most Bible readers do), it would be wiser to first identify the context, wouldn’t it? By *context* we mean how the expression *the same* is used in the entire Book of Hebrews. Think about it: Since Hebrews was written by one author at one sitting, the author must have been using the expression *the same* with one meaning throughout the epistle (whether he used *the same* at the beginning or at the end of the epistle).

So, here’s the first time the author of the epistle to the Hebrews refers to Jesus as *the same*:

[God, speaking to Jesus, says:] In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the Earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end (Hebrews 1:12).

• “Jesus is the same” is about his eternal existence.

There, in the first chapter of Hebrews, the expression *the same* refers to the time for which Jesus *remains*. Can you see that? We hope so. It says that Jesus *remains* forever. In contrast to Jesus, the Creation (which includes the Earth along with the heavens)¹⁴⁴ does *not* remain. It will not abide forever. Unlike Jesus, it will wear out the same way that clothing wears out.

¹⁴⁴ Just as a reminder: *heavens* refers to the first (atmosphere) and second (space) heavens, not the Third Heaven. The Third will, in fact, remain.

Here's the idea of the passage in everyday terms: The day will come when your clothes will wear out. The day will come when the food in your refrigerator will expire. It has an expiration date, but Jesus *remains the same*—he has no expiration date.

Not just by understanding the context, but by understanding Hebrew parallelism,¹⁴⁵ you should be able to see that the expression “Jesus is the same” is about his eternal existence. Look at Hebrews 1:12 closely, especially the last part which says “you remain the same, and your years will never end.” Putting the two ideas of “being the same” and “years never ending” together is what we call *parallelism*. By using the two ideas together, the author of Hebrews is leaving no room for a misinterpretation of *remain the same*. It means that Jesus’ “years will never end.” In other words, Jesus’ sameness is all about how the quantity of time he will live, thrive, and abide.

•...the Gospel stands or falls on the doctrine that Jesus' nature changed at least twice.

•... in spite of all that happened to him... Jesus still remained faithful to God.

2. Even though his nature changed...

So, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8) has nothing to do with Jesus always having the same nature, as many preachers might lead us to believe. How could that possibly be the correct interpretation, being that the Gospel stands or falls on the doctrine that Jesus’ nature changed at least twice (from a divine to a human nature at the incarnation, and from a human to a divine nature at the resurrection)?¹⁴⁶ It’s simply impossible for the passage to mean that Jesus’ nature never changed!

Even if the doctrine of Christ (that his nature changed at the incarnation) doesn’t convince you, a straightforward

¹⁴⁵ Hebrew parallelism is a Jewish poetic device commonly used by the OT and NT authors of the Bible. It’s as common in Hebrew writing as the poetic device of rhyme is in English. If you know what parallelism looks like, you’ll be able to interpret the meaning of many Bible passages quite easily. Learn how to recognize parallelism and it will be one of your best tools in interpreting the Scriptures.

¹⁴⁶ And if these are not fundamental Christian beliefs, then how did Christmas (the celebration of the incarnation) and Easter (the celebration of the resurrection) ever become the two most important Christian holidays? What is so special about Christ’s birth and resurrection that these two holidays have become the holidays of greatest importance to Christians around the world? Is it not that at Jesus’ birth God was made flesh, and that at his resurrection flesh was made divine? The essence of Christmas and Easter joy is our faith that Jesus’ nature was actually changed!

reading of Hebrews 1 should. The whole gist of Hebrews chapter 1 is that in spite of all that happened to him (i.e., changes of nature, name changes, tests, trials, and tribulations), Jesus still remained faithful to God. Do you get it? The idea is far from

Jesus remained the same **because** his nature never changed.

The *because* in that statement is wrong. On the contrary, the idea of Jesus being *the same* is that

Jesus remains the same **even though** his nature has changed.

That's the idea! The Bible doctrine is that Jesus did not waver while he was in the flesh, but that he stayed true to God. Maybe some people don't get too excited about Jesus' consistent loyalty to God, but God sure does!

3. Why God is happy with his Son

It is God who is speaking in Hebrews 1:12—don't forget that. If you look closely at what he says, you'll get an idea about the satisfaction he feels with his Son:

In the Beginning, Lord [that's God's name for Jesus here], you laid the foundations of the Earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.

What we read in this passage is the voice of the One who delights in the fact that his Son stays true! Jesus demonstrated to his Father and to the whole world that he was dependable. How wonderful it is for any father to know that he has a son he can count on! God, who is Jesus' Father, is particularly happy with Jesus precisely for that reason: because he can always count on him.

God is pleased with Jesus' dependability. Are you? You should be—after all, your salvation depends on Jesus. If he's not dependable, you have no assurance of salvation. We have no reason to feel peace unless our salvation is in

the hands of someone we can trust, right?

Yet we can trust Jesus for a good reason: God trusts Jesus. Who else was both willing (and able) to pay the price of salvation? God couldn't find anybody else to save the world: Although Moses showed a willingness to sacrifice his own eternal salvation to save the Jewish people from condemnation, Moses eventually grew impatient with them. Moses even got angry with the Jews, proving that he wasn't their Savior.

Moses said to the people, 'You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.'

So Moses went back to the LORD and said, 'Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written' (Exodus 32:30-32).

The LORD said to Moses, 'Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.'

So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?' Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them' (Numbers 20:7-12).

Other prophets, like Jonah, refused to bring God's message of salvation to the Gentiles, turning away from God—but

•...then the
real heir
of David's
throne came
along.

Jesus was different. He was willing to both bring the message and to share it with love. And Jesus didn't just preach it, he embodied it. He actually became the Lamb of God. His own body became the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

•...let's compare him to Adam.

Jesus has always wanted to do the perfect will of the Father. Lots of God's messengers have let God down, but not Jesus. Lots of kings of Israel ignored God's plan of salvation to the World, but then the real heir of David's throne came along—then someone dependable came along, someone of whom God can say "Everything else will perish, but you remain the same." That person is the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ!

•...Jesus had a conscience, Adam didn't.

G. Jesus undid Adam's mess

1. From death to life
2. From sin to righteousness
3. We're impressed

Jesus was faithful to God—at this point in the book you should be able to give a hearty *amen* to that statement; but for a greater appreciation of what it means for Jesus to be faithful to God, let's compare him to Adam.

You already know that Jesus had many similarities to Adam because we have studied how Jesus came to us as a man, just like Adam. However, there is a major difference between the two. Do you know what it is? It might surprise you to find out! It is that Jesus had a conscience, Adam didn't.

• Contrary to Adam, who gave in to the one temptation, Jesus resisted every temptation.

Adam was created with no knowledge of good and evil. He didn't feel any shame as he walked naked through the Garden of Eden because he knew no evil. Adam was like a baby in a man's body. He was innocent and knew no shame. On the other hand, the boy Jesus, by virtue of his being born after the Fall, could feel the sinful tendencies within him. He knew shame from an early age because he had a conscience. Adam didn't feel any shame until he got a conscience, after the Fall.

1. From death to life

Now here's the Good News: Jesus, in spite of his human frailty, was able to overcome every temptation. Contrary to Adam, who gave in to the one temptation, Jesus resisted ev-

• Jesus came and undid what Adam did.

ery temptation. When Adam gave in to temptation, he made sin available to all. Because of that, many died. When Jesus resisted temptation, he made grace available to all. Because of that, many live.

... just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned... if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (Romans 5:12, 15)

Adam left humans in quite a predicament: Humans became weakened, easily tempted, sinful, and worthy of death. All humans who gave in to temptation subsequently brought condemnation upon themselves. That's why the passage above says: "death came to all people" (Romans 5:12). So sin became the knot that left humanity hopeless for many generations. People were tied to sin. They were bound by it. For thousands of years it couldn't be undone by anyone! But then Jesus came and undid what Adam did.

• The solution was for Jesus to give his body as a sacrifice to God.

2. From sin to righteousness

This is the most amazing story history has ever recorded. Consider how God wove a plan of salvation into the events of human history. Things were looking really bad for humanity after Adam's Fall. Even with Jews in the world, the bearers of God's revelation and the keepers of his covenant, everyone was under the power of sin:

... Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one (Romans 3:9-12).

The predicament seemed impossible to solve, until Jesus came along. Our Lord Jesus proved that Adam's Fall had a solution. The solution was for Jesus to give his body as a sacrifice to God. He would become the Lamb of God, the atonement for sin, the propitiation for the sins of all man-

kind. By sacrificing his body, Jesus would:

- justify those who believe
- become their source of life
- make them righteous

Jesus would restore believers from their dreadful sinful condition to glory of righteousness!

... just as one trespass [Adam's eating the forbidden fruit] resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act [Jesus' death on the Cross] resulted in justification and life for all people.

• Jesus has given back to us the ability to be righteous!

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many¹⁴⁷ were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).

This restoration of humans to righteousness would have been impossible if it weren't for a very special gift of God: the *gift of righteousness* (Romans 5:17). What does that gift equip us to do? It equips us to do what is right! So, although Adam took our ability to be righteous away from us; Jesus has given back to us the ability to be righteous!

3. We're impressed

We're impressed with what God has done through his Son. Winning us over by an act of such selfless love, Jesus is the guarantee that we will be transformed. The strength of our transformation is founded on his covenant, the New Covenant, which has been established in his blood. We are the Church: those who will be made righteous through Jesus! We are impressed with what he has done and how it works.

If you contrast Jesus with Adam, our Lord's accomplishments gleam all the more brightly. You're likely to be impressed by Jesus if you review this list:

- Adam taught us to **sin**, Jesus taught us to be **righteous**.

¹⁴⁷ Notice the use of the term *many* here. Paul chose to say *many* and not *all* because there are two very special groups of people who are never made sinners: children and the mentally challenged. Put differently, original sin [a doctrine which says that *all* human beings (including children and the mentally impaired) are guilty of Adam's sin] is a false doctrine. It is not inspired by the Scriptures.

- Adam showed us how to follow the **flesh**, Jesus showed us how to follow the **Spirit**.
- Adam demonstrated **unbelief**, Jesus demonstrated belief.
- Adam **neglected** his wife's spiritual needs, Jesus **satisfied** his wife's deepest need.
- Adam passed a **sinful human nature** on to us, Jesus passes **the holy divine nature** on to us.
- Adam's sin brought about **condemnation**, Jesus' sacrifice brings about **salvation**.
- Adam brought us eternal **death**, Jesus brought us eternal **life**.

H. Jesus' fight against temptation

- ...by doing what was right, his conscience became mature.
 - Jesus had to mature in order to love what God loves.
 - Jesus had to mature before he was able to hate what God hates.
 - Jesus had to become spiritual-ly mature before God would anoint him.
1. Maturity before anointing
 - a. A clear conscience is not enough
 2. Clear conscience unto death
 - a. No charges against him
 - b. The greatest victory
 3. Developing a good conscience
 4. Preventing Jesus from doing wrong
 5. Perfecting Jesus through punishment
 6. Jesus overcame temptations
 7. He did not *know sin*
 - a. An unfair death
 - b. A substitutionary death
 - c. One thing he never did
 - d. If Jesus had sinned
 - e. Living by faith in God
- Remember: Jesus had to fight against temptation his whole life long. From the time he was a child, and then through adolescence, the teen years, and young manhood—Jesus struggled against temptations. He was not automatically righteous; instead, by doing what was right, his conscience became mature. That is to say, Jesus' senses were trained in

righteousness.¹⁴⁸

Eventually, our Lord Jesus reached the degree of spiritual maturity all of us should strive for: He came to love justice and hate evil. Can you believe this: Jesus had to mature in order to love what God loves? If you are able to believe it, here's another challenge: Believe that Jesus had to mature before he was able to hate what God hates. It's true. In fact, these are *both* important Biblical truths, so if they are difficult for you to believe, then you'd do well to pause and reflect upon them. Until you are able believe them without any difficulty, our next point will be impossible for you to believe.

1. Maturity before anointing

The next point is that Jesus had to become spiritually mature before God would anoint him. Yes, God watched to see whether Jesus would remain holy in the face of all sorts of temptations, and *only* after Jesus had proven himself, did God finally anoint Jesus. To understand that, pay attention to how the word "therefore" is used in the following passage. As you read it, ask yourself "What's the *therefore* there for?"

[Speaking to Jesus it says:] You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy (Hebrews 1:9).

The "therefore" means that God anointed Jesus for a reason: It was because Jesus developed a good conscience. Put differently, there was an order and a process involved in how Jesus got the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Jesus didn't get the Spirit automatically (and neither will you). Jesus became spiritually mature first, and *then* God gave Jesus the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Does that motivate you to get more mature? It's supposed to.

a. A clear conscience is not enough

How about Jesus' clear conscience? To be mature, is it

• Jesus didn't get the Spirit automatically (and neither will you).

•...having a clear conscience does not necessarily mean that you are innocent.

¹⁴⁸ This is the very same process we also have to pass through in order to become mature Christians. Hebrews 5:14 puts it this way: "the mature... because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."

enough for a person to have a clear conscience? No. It wasn't enough for Jesus and it won't be enough for you. Paul stated very plainly that having a clear conscience does not necessarily mean that you are innocent. It is just a step in the right direction.

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

• Jesus' struggle against sin was only over when he died.

If having a clear conscience isn't enough for us to be sure of our innocence, then what is enough? The approval of God. And when does that approval come? When God gives us his Holy Spirit.

When God gives a person the Holy Spirit, it's his way of saying that he considers that person to have a clear enough conscience. It's like this: If you get baptized in water, you do it because you have repented of all of the sins you are aware of. You have examined your conscience as best as you can. You surely have sins that you're not aware of, but if God responds to your baptism in water by giving you the baptism of the Spirit, it's because your conscience is clear enough for him. The baptism of the Holy Spirit confirms God's approval of your repentance.

• God already judged Jesus, and his verdict was that Jesus is holy.

•...the resurrection of Jesus means something some people never reflect upon: It means that God approved of Jesus' life.

2. Clear conscience unto death

Our struggle with sin goes on until we die. Jesus' struggle against sin was only over when he died too. We know that Jesus had a clear conscience to the very end of his life—but how do we get that information? It's not because Jesus boasted of a clear conscience. He didn't justify himself. Instead, Jesus was justified by God! What Paul applied to himself must be applied to everyone, even Jesus:

It is the Lord [God] who judges (1 Corinthians 4:4).

Put differently, it is God who judges each person, even Jesus. In fact, God already judged Jesus, and his verdict was that Jesus is holy.

When did Jesus get justified by God? At the resurrection. What a day of victory (a victory Jesus shares with us)! Since

it was God who resurrected Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus means something some people never reflect upon: It means that God approved of Jesus' life. His was indeed a life free from sin, but we don't know that just because of Jesus' trials before the Sanhedrin and Pilate. Although it was clear that he had a clear conscience, that's not how we are sure of this holiness. We know that Jesus was free from sin because God told us. God's testimony is the only one that is valid:

[Jesus said] If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is Another who testifies in my favor [that's God], and I know that his testimony about me is true (John 5:31-32).

So consider what God did to affirm that Jesus was righteous: Instead of keeping Jesus in Hades with all of the people who were paying for their sins, God resurrected him.

a. No charges against him

At this point you should be able to understand another truth: why it was impossible for death to keep Jesus a prisoner. That is, you should now understand why Hades could lay no claim on Jesus' life. It's because Jesus had no charges against him. Unlike other people (like David or Goliath), Jesus was not guilty of any sin. Therefore there was no charge and no accusation that could be sustained against him. The Devil would have accused Jesus of wrongdoing if he could. It was the opportunity of a lifetime for Satan, but he kept silent.

God raised him [Jesus] from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, [why did God do it—why did he resurrect Jesus?] because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Acts 2:24).

So the simple legal logic behind the resurrection of Jesus is this: When someone doesn't deserve to be in Hades, God frees that person from Hades! God is just after all.

b. The greatest victory

Having done what God called him to do without sinning even once, our Lord Jesus could confidently declare on the Cross: "It is finished!" Jesus had succeeded against ev-

•...Jesus had no charges against him.

•...it was the most remarkable life ever lived!

ery temptation. Truly, it was the most remarkable life ever lived! In the history of the human race, has anyone ever kept themselves as pure and blameless? Has anyone ever had the kind of triumph over sin Jesus had? No, no one. Just Jesus.

I have brought you glory on Earth by fin-
ishing the work you gave me to do (John
17:4).

When he had received the drink, Jesus
said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed
his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:30).

3. Developing a good conscience

From the time he was a little child, Jesus progressively got to know the difference between good and evil. That is, he developed a sensitive conscience. He also developed a free will meaning that Jesus gained the ability to actually choose good over evil.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste (Isaiah 7:14-16).

•...this wholesome upbringing in Joseph's house...

Developing a good conscience and a free will is what modern psychologists call *moral development*. Being a Jewish boy in Nazareth, there was plenty of opportunity for Jesus to get moral training. Jesus was in daily contact with his siblings, parents, extended family, local elders, and teachers. Jewish traditions and ethics were upheld in his community, and that kept his life simple and devout.

•Jesus very well could have sinned during his adolescence.

•...the way God worked in the life of Jesus was through discipline.

Jesus' family would study the Scriptures and pray together. His parents made him aware that he was a descendant of the patriarchs, especially of the line of King David. Jesus learned that David's family had the promise of the Messiah. He also eventually came to know (whether it was from his parents or from his own personal Bible study, we don't know) that he was the Promised One. He came to understand that he was the descendant of David who would sit on

King David's throne!

It was through this wholesome upbringing in Joseph's house that Jesus developed a sensitive conscience and a good will. It was under the humble roof of Joseph the carpenter that our Savior learned how to live under the Covenant God established through Moses. It was there in Galilee that this special boy began to discover the hope of the Kingdom as he read and studied the writings of the prophets. The Scriptures allowed Jesus to experience a self-realization. He came to know who he was: the Chosen One.

4. Preventing Jesus from doing wrong

Be sure of this: Jesus very well could have sinned during his adolescence. Just like any adolescent, Jesus could have made mistakes in judgment or could have acted impulsively. Nonetheless, God was always there to give young Jesus the discipline he needed, and to help Jesus avoid slipping into sin.

It's vital for us to understand that the way God worked in the life of Jesus was through discipline. If we don't, then we won't understand Jesus or even ourselves. God worked in Jesus' life like a Father. God's love for Jesus was the love of a Father for his Son. That's what it means when the Bible says:

I will be his Father, and he will be my Son
(2 Samuel 7:14).

So this is how God loved Jesus. God didn't love Jesus by spoiling him or by making things easy for him—in fact, that's not true love at all. True love is “tough love.” God punished Jesus when Jesus did something wrong.¹⁴⁹ Punish-

¹⁴⁹ Since the Bible says in the two passages shared here that God corrected Jesus when he did wrong, we have to face the fact that Jesus did some wrong things as a boy. This *wrongdoing* was not intentional, and because it was not intentional, it was never sinful—it was simply part of the trial-and-error learning curve we all experience during childhood.

So Jesus made mistakes as he grew up such as: adding incorrectly, misquoting a Bible verse, judging a situation wrongly (according to his own and not according to God's criteria), forgetting to pray, or perhaps eating too much honey. To do wrong as a child does not constitute sin. God does not count childhood error as sin, but as innocent mistakes.

Any boy who is learning to be good makes mistakes and does some degree of wrong. Will God condemn them for it? Of course not, because they're still

• God punished Jesus when Jesus did something wrong.

• Jesus did some wrong things as a boy.

• Jesus made mistakes as he grew up...

ments were God's expression of fatherly love, his tool for leading young Jesus towards a life of faith, love, and righteousness.

• I will punish him with a rod...

5. Perfecting Jesus through punishment

I've never heard the following passage taught in a church. Pastors avoid it like the plague because it goes against the grain. It contradicts everything that's popular in these apostate times.¹⁵⁰ Because it's denied a place in churches, be sure to allow it a place in your heart.

• Jesus was under God's discipline for a very specific reason: to assure all of us that Jesus would become perfect in his conscience.

[God promised to David]: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his Kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his Kingdom forever [God is clearly talking about Jesus here].

• Jesus was physically punished sometimes.

I will be his Father, and he will be my Son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you (2 Samuel 7:12-15).

What does this passage mean but that Jesus was under the strict discipline of his loving Father! And Jesus was under God's discipline for a very specific reason: to assure all of us that Jesus would become perfect in his conscience. How did God shape Jesus into a man with a perfect conscience? It says it in the passage itself:

... with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands.

That means that particularly through Joseph and Mary, but also through other adults in the local community, Jesus was

developing their conscience. They are in "the age of innocence." They will not be accountable for their actions until they have their own free will, which is developed by around age 12. Be sure to let your kids know this.

¹⁵⁰ Such as the teaching that God doesn't punish anybody, the teaching that Jesus was perfect, or the teaching of the "Trinity."

sometimes physically punished.¹⁵¹ Yes, in accordance with the divinely-inspired wisdom given us in the Book of Proverbs, Jesus received corporal punishment as a boy.

Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death (Proverbs 19:18; NASB).

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him (Proverbs 22:15; NASB).

• By age 30, Jesus was completely

Can you believe that Jesus was punished physically as a boy? If you can't, then maybe you don't understand this: God was raising a Prince. God was not only training Jesus to be the High Priest of all humanity, someone able to intercede for God's people; God was forming someone worthy of being called his Son, someone who would rule the World forever. How demanding is it to be trained to be a prince!

• Jesus never got close to sinning.

For the Law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the Law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever (Hebrews 7:28).

The Father's project was a success. By age 30, Jesus was completely trained to be able to choose good and to turn from evil in every kind of circumstance. Even when Jesus was tested with death, he was strong enough to face it bravely. God did a great job in perfecting Jesus, don't you agree?

6. Jesus overcame temptations

Here's an amazing fact: Although Satan himself tempted Jesus on various occasions, Jesus never got close to sinning. Isn't that wonderful? It's supposed to be! You're supposed to marvel at that fact and say "What a great accomplishment!" Jesus gained enough wisdom to understand the process that leads a person to sin, and he had enough fear of God to always cut that process short in his life, avoiding sin in every temptation.

So what is the process of temptation? How does temptation

• He never allowed any of his desires to conceive and give birth to sin.

¹⁵¹ Ask yourself this question (it's a good one): If you can't believe that God gave Jesus physical punishment as a child, how will you ever believe that God gave him the death penalty as a man?

work in a person's life? You need to understand the process of temptation if you're going to follow Jesus' example successfully. After all, his understanding of it is what kept him safe from sin. Here's the Biblical explanation of how temptation works:

... each one is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own desires. Then desire, after it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is brought to completion, gives birth to death (James 1:14-15; LEB).

It all begins with our own disorderly passions (they're called the *evil desires* [James 1:14; NIV] or *lust* [NASB] of the human nature). Everybody has *natural desires* such as the hunger for food, the thirst for drink, and the desires for rest, pleasure, recreation, and sexual intimacy—but most people don't make much of an effort to control them. Jesus did make that effort, and he controlled his desires very well: He never allowed any of his desires to *conceive* and give birth to sin.

Not only did Jesus avoid sin itself, he never allowed any of his normal human passions to qualify as a *lust*. His desires never became *evil desires*. He never, for example, binged on a certain food. He never got addicted to a particular drink either. If an inappropriate thought about a female ever flashed through his mind, he immediately controlled it.¹⁵² He took those thoughts captive and made them obedi-

¹⁵² In fact, Jesus ended up completely controlling his *love of women* and decided not to get married at all. We want you to understand that a man's *love of women* (Daniel 11:37, Jubilee Bible) is natural and good. The Bible says that it is something that the Antichrist does not have. It says that he "will show no regard for... the *desire of women*" (Daniel 11:37; NASB). This, of course, makes the Antichrist unnatural, even perhaps homosexual. Jesus, on the other hand, had a healthy heterosexual attraction to women, which he controlled. Jesus made the decision, by faith, to see all females as mothers, sisters, and daughters.

But why did Jesus never get married if it's something that's not wrong? Well, it would have been wrong for him. One reason why he never married was because Jesus knew that he had to die an early death. Since it would have been cruel to knowingly turn a woman into a widow—it couldn't have been God's will for Jesus to be married. Joyfully accepting the will of God, Jesus put aside his natural desire for sexual intimacy.

Paul the apostle chose the same path of celibacy that our Lord Jesus did, and Paul told us why: He did it so that he could serve God without any worldly con-

ent to God, just like how we should take all of our useless thoughts now and make them obedient to Christ.

... we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Our Lord Jesus didn't ever get to the point of acting upon any lazy, selfish, or proud thought. Surely laziness, selfishness, and pride crossed his mind at times. He had the fleeting thoughts for sure. But that was not sin. If Jesus had acted upon any of those thoughts, it would have been sin, but he didn't. Nor did he dwell upon those thoughts. He didn't entertain them.

Although he still had his flesh to deal with, there was no spiritual weakness in Jesus by the time he was 30 years old. He was strong in the faith and mature enough to teach others about God. And yes, you need to be a mature believer to be able to teach others about God.

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife... and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the Devil (1 Timothy 3:2,6; NASB).

Reading this passage, you should now be able to understand why Jesus only started teaching at age 30—he needed to develop enough spiritual maturity to be able to handle the temptation of pride (becoming *conceited*) that goes hand-in-hand with leading a ministry. Oh how great Jesus' victory against sin was!

7. He did not *know sin*

cerns. That may be another reason why Jesus never married. Paul expressed this kind of commitment as a way to be free from "troubles in this life" and a way to be "concerned about the Lord's affairs."

...if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life... I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife (1 Corinthians 7:28, 32-33).

- Jesus never entertained a temptation.

- Jesus actually cut death out of his life.

- ...the reason he didn't belong in Hades.

- ...no person who is free from sin deserves to be dead.

• God resurrected Jesus because Jesus wasn't worthy of death.

The Bible says that Jesus “did not know sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). What does that expression mean? Well, it doesn't mean that he was never tempted. We have already established that Jesus was tempted, and he was tempted strongly. Rather, it means that Jesus never allowed his own desires to succumb to temptation. Jesus never entertained a temptation. His whole life was a story of how to resist temptations. Our lives have to be the same kind of story.

• Jesus' death was unfair.

Jesus turned away from temptations without delay. By cutting off the possibility of sin from his life, Jesus actually cut death out of his life—right? It's true. To be sure of it, remember these two passages:

... the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23)

... sin, when it is brought to completion, gives birth to death (James 1:15; LEB).

This cutting death out of his life was vitally important for Jesus because it was the reason he didn't belong in Hades. By living in holiness, Jesus wasn't just showing us how to overcome sin, he was also showing us how to be free from death. Jesus' life speaks a message to us: it's that no person who is free from sin deserves to be dead.

a. An unfair death

Let's get back to the issue of Jesus' resurrection, and deal with it directly: God resurrected Jesus because Jesus wasn't worthy of death. That's the reason clean and simple. God's law is “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4; NKJV) but because of Jesus' holiness, that law had no power over him. He didn't have to be subjected to the law of death. Nobody, not even God, could obligate Jesus to stay among the dead in Hades. There was no law that could keep Jesus there.

• Jesus' death became a substitutionary death the moment Jesus was resurrected.

When God took Jesus out of Hades, God was making it official news that Jesus' death was unfair—the crucifixion was against God's law, it was illegal. Since it was a punishment that Jesus didn't deserve, Jesus' death could then count for other people like you and me—people who actually deserve death for their sins. Aren't you glad God is not fair with us? Instead of subjecting us to his law of death (“the soul who sins shall die”), God has given us his mercy:

... [God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy (Titus 3:5).

So we have seen God's law of death, but now God's law of mercy cancels it out. Here it is:

We won't get what we do deserve
if we believe in the One
who got what he didn't deserve.

b. A substitutionary death

Let's look at the Cross from another angle:

- Since God made Jesus' death **void** for Jesus, God could make it **valid** for those who believe in Jesus.
- God **annulled** the crucifixion for Jesus, but **applied** it to us.

In brief, Jesus' death became a substitutionary death the moment Jesus was resurrected because that's when God told the world that Jesus' death penalty didn't count for Jesus. That's when God said that it can count for those who believe.

So Jesus' death on Calvary could officially count for others beginning the moment Jesus was resurrected. That's the theory. The reality is that it only really counts for each one of us when we die with Jesus in baptism. That's the specific moment in our lives when we actually die with Christ. To see this truth in the following passage, pay special attention to how the word *when* is used:

Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were... buried with him in baptism... When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God... forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge... which stood against us and condemned us... nailing it to the Cross (Colossians 2:11-14).

So reflect on this: Jesus' righteousness disqualified him from the Cross' condemnation, but qualified us for the Cross' salvation! The death of Christ, the Cross, is officially yours if you want to claim it. How so? Because God has shown that it was not what Jesus deserved! It didn't count for Jesus—

• Jesus' righteousness disqualified him from the Cross' condemnation, but qualified us for the Cross' salvation!

•...sin was one experience our Lord never had.

•...Jesus never allowed temptation to develop into something worse: sin.

but it will count for anyone who dies with Christ. Amen.

c. One thing he never did

Going back to the expression Jesus “did not know sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21), consider how it reveals to us that sin was one experience our Lord never had. Mark these words: Jesus had the experience of the *flesh of sin* and the experience of temptation, but he never experienced sin itself. Jesus never gave sin a foothold in his life. For somebody who is in the *flesh of sin*, that is a really big accomplishment! Are you impressed?

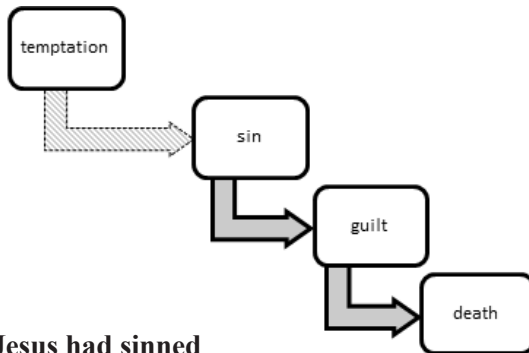
We are amazed with Jesus’ victory over temptation and sin. But Jesus’ accomplishment is even more amazing when we consider that Satan bombarded him with temptations in every possible way:

[Jesus] ... has been tempted in every way, just as we are —yet he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15).

So just like us, Jesus was tempted. But Jesus never allowed temptation to develop into something worse: sin. And since sin never got a foothold in his life, Jesus was never guilty. Because he was not guilty, he didn’t deserve death. That’s a technical description of the victory Jesus won for himself and for us, and we can actually make it into a diagram for you so that you can visualize it.

• God found no guilt in our Lord Jesus.

• Jesus proved that he had the righteousness which is by faith.



d. If Jesus had sinned

If Jesus had sinned, God certainly would have punished him accordingly—with death. If he had sinned, Jesus wouldn’t

have been resurrected, but would have remained among the dead with the punishment that corresponded to his sin (nothing very heavy since God would have considered all of Jesus' righteous acts performed previously), but the toughest thing for Jesus if he had remained in Hades would have been the bitter memory of how close he got to saving humanity.

This is the Good News, the Gospel: Jesus did, in fact, obey God to the very last breath (whew)! On the third day, when God resurrected Jesus, we were given the concrete proof that God found no guilt in our Lord Jesus. Halleluiah! That was the evidence that Jesus really was the Savior we needed! His mission really was completed.

e. Living by faith in God

How did Jesus obey God so well? What was his secret? Well, it was no "secret" at all, really, because the very message he preached reveals the source of his righteousness: faith in God. Jesus proved that he had the righteousness which is by faith. He proved that he lived in the hope of the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not love this world, but the coming world. He didn't love what he saw around him, but what he saw in God's Word. His faith was in God's promises, particularly God's promise of a Kingdom.

To prepare for the Kingdom, Jesus followed God. If he had done what he wanted, he wouldn't have ever freed himself from sin's power. We have to do the same thing Jesus did and do God's will, not our own. As you do, remember that Jesus didn't live by faith because he had some original or creative idea. He lived that way because he just believed in God's Word. Pretty simple, isn't it? If a person believes in God's Word, they will live by faith. That's how you get the righteousness that comes by faith.

... in the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith' (Romans 1:17).

'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'... to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited

• If a person believes in God's Word, they will live by faith.

as righteousness... he [Abraham] received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them...

It was not through the Law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith... he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.'

The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him [Abraham] alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead [God] (Romans 4:3, 5, 11, 13, 20-24).

§

V. How Jesus got so spiritual

At this point in the book, you should be absolutely convinced that we can follow Jesus. Christians are supposed to believe that (not individually but) together we can do what Jesus did. If you have been baptized, you are a Christian and have accepted the challenge of being Christ-like. Now it's time to ask yourself questions like these:

•...his closest friends knew that his power was derived from prayer.

•...we need to pray.

- What did Jesus **do** to get so spiritual?
- What was the secret to his **spiritual strength**?
- How did he get so much **anointing**?

Although obviously there are many factors that worked to-

gether to help Jesus to become spiritually mature, we are going to highlight just three of those factors here: prayer, righteousness, and faith. These three are keys for unlocking our own spiritual potential as well.

A. Prayer

1. What prayers God hears
 - a. Our intercessor
 - b. Fervor
 - c. Prayer support

Let's look a little at Jesus' devotional life. First of all, he had such a reputation for prayer among his friends that they asked him to teach them how to pray.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1).

It says a lot about Jesus that his closest friends knew that his power was derived from prayer, doesn't it? So, what do we learn about prayer from Jesus? Do we learn how we can get a reputation for prayer? No—it shouldn't matter to us what other people think of us. What we learn from Jesus is that we need to pray. If he needed it, then we definitely do too—or are we greater than him?

We also learn how to get answers to our prayers. That's what prayer is all about, isn't it? Getting answers to our prayers is the evidence that our relationship with God is strong. More than sending him our requests, we need God to answer us.

1. What prayers God hears

You might be surprised by this but the starting point to getting your prayers heard is knowing that God hears Jesus' prayers. If you want God to respond to your prayers, you have to believe, like Martha did, that God gives Jesus anything he asks for.

'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask' (John 11:21-22).

•...God hears Jesus' prayers.

•The secret to getting your prayers heard is to address them to God in Jesus' name.

• A Christian's confidence is not confidence in our own righteousness, but confidence in Jesus' righteousness.

• Jesus' righteousness has made him worthy to intercede for us.

a. Our intercessor

But why is it so important to know that God hears Jesus' prayers? Because Jesus' role right now is to be our Intercessor before God. The secret to getting your prayers heard is to address them to God in Jesus' name. Since God gives Jesus whatever he asks for, then having Jesus as our High Priest present them before God is the key to being heard by God. That's what Jesus meant when he taught us that if we ask for something in his name, we'll get it!

• Our faith in Jesus is supposed to produce righteousness in us.

I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it (John 14:13-14).

... whatever you ask in my [Jesus'] name the Father will give you (John 15:16).

... my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name (John 16:23).

A Christian's confidence is not confidence in our own righteousness, but confidence in Jesus' righteousness. If you can get this key idea straight in your mind: that Jesus' righteousness has made him worthy to intercede for us, then you'll pray better. When you pray to God in the name of Jesus, you're telling God that your confidence is not yourself, but in Jesus' righteousness. His faith in God—which was his righteousness—qualified him to intercede for others.

Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Romans 8:33-34).¹⁵³

¹⁵³ The passage goes on to describe very beautifully the depth of God's love for us. And what does that love consist of? It consists of the fact that he gave us Jesus as our Intercessor. God has given us a covenant and he has also given us a Priest to administer that covenant. Isn't that great? The firmness of our salvation stems from the fact that Jesus is highly committed to us as our Priest. He makes us secure.

Read below to see the continuation of what we already read above. Read these verses and you'll understand that Jesus will not abandon us or forsake us. Isn't that something to be excited about? These verses reveal that God gives us his love through Jesus' love. Nothing can separate us from the love of God if we are in Christ.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine

But let's mature. Let's deepen our faith. Using Jesus as our Intercessor shouldn't just about getting answers to our prayers. Our faith in Jesus is supposed to produce righteousness in us just like his faith in God produced righteousness in him! Our faith produces a superior righteousness, not self-righteousness, but the "righteousness that comes on the basis of faith." Consider the following passages to get a better understanding of this unique kind of righteousness that God wants each of us to have:

Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (Romans 10:3-4).

... that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:8-9).

b. Fervor

Here's a nice little insight into the prayer life of our Savior:

During the days of Jesus' life on Earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the One who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission (Hebrews 5:7).

What do we learn from this verse? We learn that when Jesus prayed, he prayed with zeal. For example, when Jesus

or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all Creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

• The most important element in prayer is not what you sound like, but the lifestyle that backs it up.

was in the flesh, he would pray with tears and loud cries. Now here are some questions for you to examine your own prayer life:

- Do you pray **passionately** or pathetically?
- Is there **meat** or monotony in your prayers?
- Do you pray with **pathos** or apathy?
- Are you **alert** or asleep when you pray?

c. Prayer support

Fervor is great, but let's not ignore the last point of the passage we just read. It says that although Jesus was fervent in his prayers, it wasn't the fervor which made his voice heard in Heaven. It was *because* Jesus was so submissive to God. That's the reason why the Father responded to Jesus' prayers: Jesus' submission. So here's something else we learn from Jesus: The most important element in prayer is not what you sound like, but the lifestyle that backs it up, your piety. The main condition that you have to meet if God is going to respond to your prayer, is piety.

•...doing
whatisright
is more im-
portantthan
doingwhat
is neces-
sary.

B. Righteousness

1. Needs were not Jesus' priority
2. Disapproval of hypocrites
3. Approval from God
 - a. It's all about a testimony

Another key to Jesus' spirituality was his righteousness. A simple definition of righteousness is *doing what is right*—Jesus did what was right. He was righteous. In fact, he was so righteous that the people who observed the way he lived declared that Jesus did *everything* well. Pretty good testimony, right? Can people say that about you? If they can, then you are probably pretty righteous.

People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak' (Mark 7:37).

1. Needs were not Jesus' priority

Jesus' commitment to doing what was right was strong. In fact, it even surprised John the Baptist. When Jesus came to be baptized by him, John said that doing what was neces-

sary was more important than doing what was right. John was wrong. Jesus kindly corrected him and told him that doing what is right is more important than doing what is necessary.

... Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need [and it was true—that was John's need] to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'

Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John consented (Matthew 3:13-15).

• Jesus spoke with the boldness that righteousness produces.

2. Disapproval of hypocrites

Jesus was a preacher, but much more than a preacher—he had zero hypocrisy. Jesus practiced what he preached. His actions backed up his message 100%. Jesus' words were consistent with his actions at a time when the religious leaders did not practice what they preached. Unlike other preachers of his day, Jesus was sincere and true.

That's why with great boldness Jesus confronted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees:

...they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for people to see... (Matthew 23:3-5).

So Jesus could speak with great authority against the hypocritical religious leaders of his day. There wasn't a shred of shyness in his voice as he confronted the Jewish teachers, particularly the Pharisees. What made our Lord so bold? Jesus spoke with the boldness that righteousness produces. He was so righteous that the light of his life exposed the darkness of hypocrites.¹⁵⁴ Jesus confidently asserted they were all appearance, and that they had nothing good inside

• The Father spoke from Heaven twice to express his approval of Jesus.

¹⁵⁴ We're supposed to do the same thing. That's why Paul exhorts us:

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them (Ephesians 5:11).

of them.

• Jesus' righteousness was good enough for God, it should be good enough for us.

• If we act righteously, then we will also be acceptable to God.

•...it's our testimonies that will stand.

Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like white-washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness (Matthew 23:25-28).

3. Approval from God

If the approval Jesus got from people and the disapproval he hurled at the hypocrites isn't enough to convince you of his righteousness, then perhaps God Himself will convince you. The Father spoke from Heaven twice to express his approval of Jesus. Besides the resurrection, these two audible signs were God's way of telling us about the righteousness of Jesus. What did he tell us? That Jesus pleased him.

This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased (Matthew 3:17).

This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him! (Matthew 17:5).

So, if God Himself has declared that he is pleased with Jesus, what other testimony do we need? Jesus' righteousness was good enough for God, it should be good enough for us. Amen?

a. It's all about a testimony

Now here's how to apply Christ's example to our own lives: If we act righteously, then we will also be acceptable to God. Our righteous behavior will get some degree of human approval for us:

... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy

Spirit... anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval (Romans 15:17-18).

... but human approval can't be what drives us. Just like they did with Jesus, eventually the enemies of the Gospel will certainly slander us. In the end, only our actions will speak. After we're gone, they will speak for us. Put differently, it's our testimonies that will stand. God willing, those testimonies will be a rebuke to those who hate us.

... keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:16).

Our enemies will eventually have to consider our good behavior. Righteousness speaks for itself.¹⁵⁵ Even if it's as late as the day the Rapture occurs, and they miss the boat, those who hate us will remember our blameless lives and hopefully give glory to God.

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (1 Peter 2:12).

C. Acting by faith

1. A child of the promise
2. Born of the Word of God
3. The bad news
4. God's promises are for you
5. Informed by prophecy
6. Informed by parents

The Jewish culture certainly steered Jesus towards God, but he still had to learn the Bible just like anybody else. Although he practiced the Jewish traditions, Jesus took his faith beyond the traditions, making a personal effort to believe in God's Word. As Jesus learned more of the Scriptures, he obtained a stronger faith. Why is that? Simply because faith comes by hearing the Word of God.

... faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17; NKJV)

• Jesus took his faith beyond the traditions.

• Jesus needed to do what God said.

• Jesus was born according to prophecy.

¹⁵⁵ Just like Jesus said: "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds" (Matthew 11:19; NASB).

Another important truth is that just like any of us, Jesus needed to do what God said. He needed to put his faith in action. He needed to put God's Word into practice. That's all that counts as far as God is concerned.

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Galatians 5:6).

... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead... I will show you my faith by my deeds... faith without deeds is useless... a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone (James 2:17, 18, 20, 24).

Although "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22), it's not enough to be a Jew. It's not enough to be a son of Abraham. What matters are our actions, and that principle was as true for Jesus as it is for us today.

• Jesus was born with a clear purpose.

... do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Luke 3:8-9).

1. A child of the promise

If we're going to understand exactly how our Lord exercised faith, the best starting point is to recognize that Jesus was born according to prophecy. You'll see why this is the starting point in just a minute. But know this: Like Isaac and many others,¹⁵⁶ Jesus was a *child of the promise*.

... it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son'

• God speaks things into existence.

¹⁵⁶ What we mean by "many other people" would include Samuel, Samson, Jeremiah, and all those who throughout history have been born with a prophecy of God on their lives. That is, each of these men's parents received a promise from God about the child who would be born to them—most of the time the prophecy was about the child's future ministry. Do you know anybody who was born that way?

(Romans 9:8-9).

Jesus was not born according to the will of man. He did not come to us because of some human decision, but through the will of God. God promised that Jesus would be born, so he was. Jesus therefore is counted among those who have been born of God (and there are a lot of us).

... children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:13).

The fact that he was born of a promise of God meant that Jesus was born with a clear purpose. As he discovered that purpose, he directed his life accordingly. Directing your life according to what God reveals about it is what it means to live by faith.

2. Born of the Word of God

Contemplate this: Jesus' birth was foretold just like Isaac's birth was foretold. The Angel of the Lord told Abraham

I will return, and Sarah will have a son (Romans 9:9).

Since "Sarah will have a son" was God's Word, and Isaac was born subsequent to the faith Abraham and Sarah had in that Word, Isaac was a "son of the promise." He was literally born of the Word of God.

To be born of the Word is to be born of God. Why is that? For a simple reason: God speaks things into existence. From the Beginning, God has always used his Word to give life. You remember how the Bible starts:

And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light (Genesis 1:3).

We hope that your own personal experience is one of getting life from God's Word. All Christians are born through the Word of God. It is our source of life.

For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

... you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is,

• Those who are merely born according to the flesh hate those who are born of the Spirit.

through the living and enduring Word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

Jesus' birth was not some oddball experience, but a model for all people. It is the most common experience Christians have—a new birth. Some Christians get the Word in them very early in life, such as those who are born according to promises given to their parents during their mother's pregnancy. Others get the Word planted in them later, when they believe it as adults. Whether you get it early on or later, the Word is the source of life for anybody who is born of God—and that includes Jesus, you, and me. It is like a seed planted in our hearts.

This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the Word of God... the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the Word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop (Luke 8:11, 15).

3. The bad news

The fact that we can all be born again is good news, but the bad news is that anyone who is born of God will be persecuted. That's a hard pill for us to swallow, but it's simply an effect of your spiritual birth: rejection.

Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born according to the flesh [Ishmael] persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit [Isaac]. It is the same now (Galatians 4:28-29).

Those who are merely born according to the flesh hate those who are born of the Spirit. We're talking about people who notice God's grace in our lives and are jealous of it. You have read how the Jewish leaders plotted Jesus' death. The Bible says that

... the chief priests had handed him over because of envy (Mark 15:10; NASB).

The same envy drove Cain to kill Abel, Ishmael to hate Isaac, and 10 of the patriarchs to sell their brother Joseph into slavery. This all shouldn't sound strange to you because the first opposition in a Christian's new life in Christ

is normally family. Our family members have a strong natural relationship with us and they expect that relationship to continue like it always was, but our new birth makes us so different from what we were before, it's not natural. The old natural bond has changed so much that they cannot accept it.

Jesus experienced this kind of conflict with his family:

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.' He replied to him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?'

• Do you have enough faith to claim God's promises for yourself?

Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven is my brother and sister and mother' (Matthew 12:46-50).

4. God's promises are for you

Jesus became conscious of his calling because he studied the Scriptures. By faith, he had the assurance that his Father was God. You can get that same assurance for yourself from the same Scriptures. If Jesus knew by the time he was 12-years old that he was a child of God, shouldn't you also know by now?

When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival... When his parents saw him [they lost track of little Jesus], they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' (Luke 2:42, 48-49)

Jesus was able to believe in the Scriptural prophecies that were about him. Can you believe what the Bible says about you? Do you have enough faith to claim God's promises for yourself?

5. Informed by prophecy

Being a righteous man, Jesus lived by faith in the promises

• Jesus became aware that he was that descendant!

of God. Did you know that all of the righteous live by faith? Jesus was no exception.

The righteous will live by faith (Romans 1:17 from Habakkuk 2:4).

The Scriptures confirmed Jesus' identity to him. They informed him in particular that he would become great. Prophecies Jesus studied from childhood gave him the assurance that God would make him into a King. Jesus clung to those promises. Jesus trusted in all of the Scriptures, and the ones that promised his kingly reign were especially important for him.

Imagine Jesus growing up, finding life to be difficult, but getting encouragement through the Scriptures. That's exactly how he got through adolescence, the teenage years, and young adulthood. At one point Jesus must have read this promise God gave to King David:

... I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his Kingdom. He is the One who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his Kingdom forever.

I will be his Father, and he will be my Son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him (2 Samuel 7:12-15).

We see here that God promised David that one of his descendants would reign in David's place. Can you imagine the moment when Jesus became aware that he was that descendant! How old might Jesus have been when he first came to understand that this prophecy was about him? We don't know, but it must have been an exciting moment in his life.

And what about this next one from Isaiah? It revealed to Jesus that he would have a great government forever. Did Jesus believe in it as well? You bet he did. Against all odds—even hanging on the Cross—he did!

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,

and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne and over his Kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:6-7).

6. Informed by parents

Jesus was first informed about his high calling by his parents, Joseph and Mary. They were keenly aware of the greatness of their child. Could they have hidden their knowledge from him? It would have been a travesty if they did, but it's obvious that they didn't.

Mary and Joseph had to deal with a very intelligent and curious boy. If Jesus was aware that he was the Son of God before he ever began adolescence (the story of 12-year old Jesus in the Temple shows us that), then a period of self-realization preceded that event. It would have been quite natural for the boy Jesus to come to his parents with questions based on his knowledge of Bible prophecy. As Jesus sought answers about these prophecies, it would have been a crime for Joseph and Mary to keep silent. Consider what they knew:

(1) That Jesus would be King of Israel forever, and that he was the Son of God.

You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his Kingdom will never end... the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:31-33,35)

(2) That Jesus was the Savior, someone who would shake things up in Israel, the Messiah¹⁵⁷

... Simeon took him [the child Jesus] in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord... my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.’

The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too’ (Luke 2:25-35).

(3) That Jesus was very special, someone who would redeem Jerusalem.

There was also a prophet, Anna... Coming up to them [Joseph and Mary] at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38).

As Jesus grew, could Joseph and Mary possibly have kept quiet about these revelations? Could they have hidden them from him, a boy as studious of the Bible as he was? It’s highly unlikely. Even if they were hesitant for a time, Jesus eventually would have asked them questions that would

¹⁵⁷ The passage begins by telling us that Simeon was *righteous* and *devout* and that the Holy Spirit gave him a revelation: He would not die before he had seen the Messiah. The Holy Spirit actually stirred him to enter the Temple on that very day, the day that Jesus was being presented to God, to see this Messiah. His words are the words of someone who believed that the baby was that Savior-Messiah.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the Temple courts...

• Jesus emphasized his humanity often.

have demanded answers. Surely they were prudent and didn't share things that were too weighty for the mind of a child, but they would not have denied Jesus a knowledge of any truth he needed.

D. The Son of Man

1. Emphasis on his humanity
2. The Son of Eve
3. The One who would rule
4. Not just any old son of man

Now, please consider three examples of Jesus' use of the term *Son of Man*:

The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed... (Luke 22:22)

Jesus asked him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' (Luke 22:48)

... from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the Mighty God (Luke 22:69).

We already briefly looked at how Jesus chose to refer to himself with the title *the Son of Man*. If you recall, he used it more than any other self-designation. In this section, we're going to look more deeply at what the title *Son of Man* meant for Jesus.

1. Emphasis on his humanity

No one can deny that Jesus chose to use the term *Son of Man* frequently, and no one can deny that the term puts emphasis on his humanity. We know that Jesus emphasized his humanity often.

Jesus was speaking to Jews, people who knew the OT well, as he used *Son of Man* to refer to himself. Those Jews understood the basic meaning of *son of man* to be human being. That's because most of the time *son of man* is used in the OT, it simply means *man*. It was synonymous with *man*. You can see this from the parallelism used in the following passages:

God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that he should repent; Has he said, and will he not do it? or has he spo-

• People already knew that Jesus was a man.

• Jesus' difficulty was trying to get people to see that he was the Messiah.

ken, and will he not make it good? (Numbers 23:19; NASB).

How then can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman? If even the moon has no brightness and the stars are not pure in his sight, how much less man, that maggot, and the son of man, that worm! (Job 25:4-6; NASB).

What is man that you take thought of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than God, and you crown him with glory and majesty! (Psalm 8:4-5; NASB).

Who are you that you are afraid of man who dies and of the son of man who is made like grass? (Isaiah 51:12; NASB)

But why did Jesus emphasize his humanity so much? Was Jesus trying to get people to understand that he was simply a human being just like them? There was no need to do that—People already knew that Jesus was a man. Our Lord’s difficulty did not lie in showing others that he was a man. Jesus’ difficulty was trying to get people to see that he was the Messiah.

• The Son of Man would be the man God would choose to rule over the Earth!

2. The Son of Eve

If we look closely at the OT, we find that certain passages refer to someone called the Son of Man. The first passage that promises this Son of Man [but without using the expression *Son of Man* directly] is in Genesis 3, where the promise of a *seed* was given to Eve.

So the LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel’ (Genesis 3:14-15; NASB).

Notice that the *seed of Eve* would be the One who would crush the head of the Devil. The Devil would “bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15), but this Son of Eve would destroy the Devil.

To be sure that the Son of Man is the one the passage is referring to, we need to understand that since Eve was the mother of all humans, she represents mankind. Because of that, the person who would be born of Eve would (by default) be the Son of Man. Put differently, the seed of Eve is the *Son of Man*, meaning the special person to come, given to humanity as a gift from God, but born as an authentic offspring (seed) of human beings too.

3. The One who would rule

Here are some additional promises of a Son of Man. In them, you can see that the term *Son of Man* began to take on a much wider meaning than just the One who would *bruise* the head of the Devil. The Son of Man would be the man God would choose to rule over the Earth!

Look down from Heaven and see, and take care of this vine, even the shoot which your right hand has planted, and on the Son whom you have strengthened for yourself.

It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of your countenance. Let your hand be upon the Man of your right hand, upon the Son of Man whom you made strong for yourself. Then we shall not turn back from you (Psalm 80:14-18).

Then I continued to watch... In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of Heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his Kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

Can there be any doubt that *Son of Man* means the Messiah? If you doubt it, look at how Jesus himself used the term. He understood the Son of Man to be the One who would sit at God's right hand in Heaven, and then come to Earth to reward the righteous, and rule—Sounds like the Messiah

to us!

• Jesus chose to speak of his role as the Messiah indirectly.

[Jesus warned] Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven. And then all the peoples of the Earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30).

... I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of Heaven (Matthew 26:64).

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval (John 6:27).

4. Not just any old son of man

So, the expression *Son of Man* has a broader meaning when it is applied to Jesus than it does in other contexts such as the book of Ezekiel where all of the 94 occurrences of *son of man* simply mean *human being*. Almost all of them are the words of the angel who was speaking to Ezekiel:

He said to me, 'Son of man, now dig into the wall' (Ezekiel 8:8).

Then he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark...? (Ezekiel 8:12)

Therefore, prophesy against them, son of man, prophesy! (Ezekiel 11:14).

Those are three examples from the book of Ezekiel. We invite you to compare them to the times Jesus uses the term for himself. If you do, it becomes obvious that Jesus meant something more than *human being* when he spoke of the Son of Man.

Jesus was conscious of his role as the Messiah, so when he used the term *the Son of Man*, he was very prudently and cautiously alluding to his own role in the world. What we mean to say is that Jesus chose to speak of his role as the Messiah indirectly. He wisely avoided being direct, not wanting to cause a public uproar—but he was still revealing

(ever so subtly) who he was. He used the term Son of Man for the ears of people who were perceptive. Those who had *ears to hear* were supposed to understand what he was really saying (just like you are understanding it today).

E. Doing God's will unto death

1. Conditional glory
2. The price of glory
3. His own purpose in suffering
4. Lord of all
 - a. Lord of the dead
 - i. Dead sinners
 - ii. Dead saints
 - b. Lord of the living
5. Why God exalted Jesus
 - a. Going so low, reaching so high
 - b. Proving himself
 - c. A higher purpose
 - d. For the glory of God
 - e. The sin of the Devil
 - f. Seeking God's glory

Jesus struggled within his own heart. He wrestled against his own flesh, choosing to do the opposite of what he wanted to do. In order for him to do what God wanted, he had to make many sacrifices: leaving his family, renouncing hometown comforts, and quitting his job. He gave away his finances, and would even give up his own very popular ministry, a ministry that had many tens of thousands of followers.

... I seek not to please myself but him who sent me (John 5:30).

I have come down from Heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me (John 6:38).

Eventually, as you know, Jesus would sacrifice his own body to do God's will. It was at the Garden of Gethsemane that he made his final decision: death would be better than disobedience.

'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet

• If Jesus hadn't gone to his death, he wouldn't... be the Lord he is today!

not what I will, but what you will' (Mark 14:36).

Since the sacrifice Jesus made at Calvary was the maximum act of self-denial, God would reward Jesus with the highest honor: To sit down at his right hand. Jesus expected that—and he got what he expected.

•...if Jesus had not glorified God by going to the Cross, God would not have glorified Jesus.

... the High Priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am,' said Jesus. 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of Heaven' (Mark 14:61-62).

Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit... "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" (Acts 2:33-35).

• God did not just make Jesus Lord by decree.

• Jesus had to show a complete willingness to obey God first.

• He will honor us only if we take up our cross.

1. Conditional glory

Now, check out this truth: It was due to Jesus' sacrifice at the Cross that he was glorified by God. What we mean to say is that Jesus' glorification was conditioned upon his humiliation. If Jesus hadn't gone to his death, he would not have been glorified by God. Jesus would not be the Lord he is today!

Jesus knew all this. He knew that he had to be completely obedient to God (even unto death) in order to get the glory promised to him. Notice how Jesus used the word *if* (meaning that there was a condition) as he explained to his apostles what it would take for him to get glory from God:

... the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once¹⁵⁸ (John 13:31-32).

What is the message here? What was Jesus trying to say? He's saying that since he glorified God, God would glorify him. Conversely, if Jesus had not glorified God by going to the Cross, God would not have glorified Jesus. That's the

¹⁵⁸ The *at once* (which Jesus tagged on to the end of his lesson) means that God wouldn't delay if Jesus wouldn't delay: God would glorify Jesus immediately after Jesus promptly glorified him.

straightforward logic of what it takes to get glory.

2. The price of glory

How much was hanging in the balance when Jesus made the decision to go to the Cross? Our salvation, yes, but there was more: God would not have resurrected Jesus, and God would not have made him Lord if Jesus hadn't gone to the Cross! Jesus made a tough decision out of obedience to God, yes; but Jesus also made a decision to get glory for himself on that day.

It's really important to keep in mind that God did not just make Jesus Lord by decree. God has a good reason for everything he does. He didn't just say to Jesus "You are the Lord." Rather, Jesus had to show a complete willingness to obey God first. Only after passing the great trial of crucifixion would Jesus be exalted.

• Jesus died so that he might be the Lord!

Today Jesus has a seat at the right hand of God. That's the reward God gives to the man who honors God with his life, and his death. Seating Jesus on a throne is how God glorifies Jesus, and Jesus will do the same thing for us, but there is a condition: He will honor us only if we take up our cross.

Sound familiar? Sure it does because it's the same condition God placed upon Jesus. Everything is fair then: Jesus didn't get anything for free and neither will we. Jesus will honor us the same way that God honored him. We have to play by the same rules: Jesus got glory because he glorified God first, and we get glory if we glorify Jesus first!

3. His own purpose in suffering

Why did Jesus have to die on the Cross? Some people might think he had a death wish. Was he masochistic? Was he suicidal? To some he might seem that way, but the answer to all those questions is a resounding *no*. We know that Jesus wasn't anywhere near suicidal because he begged God to free him, if it were possible, from the death he was facing.

Complying with the will of God, Jesus gave his life. There were three main reasons why he did so:

1. to **obey God**
2. because there was no other way for God to **save us**

3. because there was no other way for
Jesus to be **made Lord**

Yeah, Jesus wanted to be made Lord too! Who wouldn't want to be Lord? Practically nobody knows this but Jesus died so that he might be the Lord! He actually went to the Cross with some of his own interest in mind. I've never heard anybody ever preach this, have you? We are supposed to teach the Jesus who was a healthy man with a healthy self-interest (is there anything wrong with that?) The Jesus of the Bible channeled his own desire for success towards his eternal destiny, not some selfish temporary desire to get worldly rewards—but he still channeled his own desire for success, okay? Although it wasn't selfishness that drove him, Jesus was motivated by a healthy self-interest, and you can be motivated by a healthy self-interest too.

Jesus was absolutely sure that if he would give his life, then God would give it back to him. Like Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice Isaac in order to get him back again,¹⁵⁹ Jesus was sure that God would resurrect him. He knew that the purpose of the crucifixion was not to reduce him to a curse and a disgrace forever. It was simply the path Jesus needed to take to be constituted in the Lord that he is today.

4. Lord of all

You really need to understand this next verse if you are going to interpret the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus the right way. As you reflect on it, here's a tip: The key to interpreting it correctly is understanding how the words *so that* are used. Focus on those two little words and you should be able to get the meaning of the verse.

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the Dead and the Living (Romans

¹⁵⁹ The Scriptures say:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death (Hebrews 11:17-19).

• Jesus died and returned to life to be Lord of All!

• By having spent time among the dead souls in Hades, Jesus earned their respect.

14:9).

The meaning is not difficult to understand, but it's quite difficult to believe, isn't it? We learn from this verse that there was a reason for Jesus to have died and returned to life and that reason was for him to become the Lord of the Dead and the Living. Jesus died and returned to life to be Lord of All!

a. Lord of the Dead

To understand what it means to be *Lord of All*, let's first define what it takes to be Lord of the Dead. Jesus became the Lord of the Dead by dying, yes; but not by simply dying. By dying, he became a dead man. By having spent time among the dead souls in Hades, Jesus earned their respect. It was during his visit to Hades that he confidently preached to them, his captive audience. His preaching consisted of two parts: one for sinners and one for saints.

i. Dead sinners

Part one of Jesus' preaching was to proclaim to dead sinners that God had fulfilled his promise. That promise he declared to them was the same one they didn't believe when messengers such as Adam, Enoch, and Noah spoke to them. What exactly was that promise? Jesus himself. He was the proof that the Messiah God promised to the world had really come. Jesus proved that God was true.

... Christ ... was put to death in the body but made alive in the spirit. After being made alive,¹⁶⁰ he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built (1 Peter 3:18-20).

• Perma-
nently pass-
ing through
those Gates
was no
small mat-
ter.

ii. Dead saints

Part two of Jesus' preaching was to the dead believers (from Adam to John the Baptist). All of these were awaiting their resurrection. Jesus preached the Gospel to them, giving them enough hope so that they might hang on a little longer

¹⁶⁰ This expression "being made alive in the spirit" refers to the spiritual life that Jesus had after the crucifixion and previous to the resurrection. Being *in the spirit* is supposed to contrast with being *in the body*—Jesus' condition when he was made alive again at his resurrection.

until the resurrection would take place. The idea behind preaching the Gospel to them was to give them enough encouragement to wait until all believers who would come after them, including us, have completed our service to God.

... this is the reason the Gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body,¹⁶¹ but live according to God in regard to the spirit¹⁶² (1 Peter 4:6).

... all these [Gideon, Barak, Samson, and all those who have suffered for their faith in God], having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised [the resurrection glory], because God had provided something better for us [reigning over a Worldwide Kingdom, not just inheriting the Promised Land], so that apart from us [until we get the resurrection reward we deserve] they would not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:39-40; NASB).

• Jesus
is Lord
of many
billions of
souls!

After his preaching was done, Jesus then left the dead because God freed him to pass right through the Gates of Hades. Permanently passing through those Gates was no small matter—it's something which all of them (even to this day) long to do, but which none of the dead have done.¹⁶³ Jesus' time there qualified him as Lord of the Dead. It earned him their respect. It earned him the right to be their Lord.

¹⁶¹ That is, they were good people, but they were condemned by worldly-minded people while they were still in the body. Those worldly-minded people used *human standards* to judge these believers, and killed many of them.

¹⁶² Jesus, by giving them the guarantee of the resurrection, allowed them to be made alive in their spirits. How did they become alive? Through the power of God's promise of a resurrection. It produced a living hope within them.

¹⁶³ Except perhaps (1) Samuel who left Hades temporarily as a ghost, (2) those who were resurrected by Jesus (or the apostles), (3) those who were resurrected by prophets such as Elijah and Elisha, and (3) those who were resurrected the day Jesus was crucified. But again, they did not leave permanently like Jesus did, but temporarily—so still Jesus was the official firstfruit of the Resurrection.

Just as a side note, remember that there are many billions of dead souls under the Earth at this very moment, so for Jesus to become their Lord was no small accomplishment. Although there were probably just a few million souls in Hades when Jesus first appeared there, with all those who (by dying) have joined the number of the dead over the past 2000 years, for Jesus to be Lord of the Dead today means that Jesus is Lord of many billions of souls!

b. Lord of the living

After getting out of Hades, Jesus then became Lord of the Living because he spent time among the disciples. The disciples saw him, believed in him, and even worshipped him as their Resurrected Lord. Jesus established his authority as Lord among the living because he actually walked with, ate with, and taught his disciples for 40 days. The fact that we—who are currently among *the living*—believe in him today, also proves that Jesus is Lord of the Living.

... after his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

So Jesus died in order that he might become the Lord of the Dead, and he was resurrected in order that he might become the Lord of the Living. Today he is the Lord of All!

Lord of All is a very important title for Jesus. He didn't get it until he had finished both his time among the dead in Hades (which was 3 days) and his time among the living in Israel (which was 40 days). The apostles did not declare that Jesus was Lord until Jesus had finished those 43 days. For example, Peter's Acts 2 sermon, a detailed explanation of Jesus' death and resurrection, explains the whole process Jesus went through to become Lord. Not surprisingly, the message concludes with these words:

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus... Lord (Acts 2:36).

5. Why God exalted Jesus

Do you want to know why God exalted Jesus so highly? A

• A good solid reading of Christ's Passion is the best way to understand why Jesus deserved to be glorified by God.

•...you should be amazed at the fact that Jesus would stoop so low.

• God raised Jesus to life because Jesus lowered himself to death.

- Don't suppose that Jesus got his authority without first having to prove himself!
- You reap what you sow.

good solid reading of Christ's Passion¹⁶⁴ is the best way to understand why Jesus deserved to be glorified by God. We have included a precise account of the Passion in Appendix 2. We have included it so that you might have an accurate idea of what the Passion was like. It's important to free ourselves from the movie versions of the Passion and to read the real story. As you read it, your guiding principle should be to understand Christ's humiliation. If you do, you will comprehend his glory. Study Jesus' suffering, and you'll see why he so deserved to be exalted.

a. Going so low, reaching so high

Now, when you read the Passion narrative, you should be amazed at the fact that Jesus would stoop so low. He was so willing to humble himself. Why was that? Why motivated him to stoop so low? It's not natural for a person to let themselves be humiliated to the point of death—but Jesus knew the job God had for him. He had to give his body as a sacrifice, so he mustered up the humility to obey God. As Paul said,

... [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"
(Philippians 2:8)

God exalts the humble. He gives his glory to those who do not covet glory. God raised Jesus to life because Jesus lowered himself to death. You'll understand that truth if you get the meaning of the *therefore* in the next verse (it is the verse that comes right after the one we just read above):

Therefore [because Jesus humbled himself] God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name... (Philippians 2:9).

If you diligently study his death, you'll understand why Jesus was exalted to *the highest place*.

Understanding Jesus' death is the key to understanding why God made Jesus Lord.

¹⁶⁴ Try not to confuse this word with the English word *passionate*. When we use the word *Passion* in the context of the Crucifixion, it has nothing to do with desires. Rather, it is from the Latin *passio* [and from the Greek *pashō*] which both mean *suffering*. The Passion of Jesus includes the events of Jesus' crucifixion. It shows most dramatically the way Jesus suffered for our salvation.

b. Proving himself

Don't suppose that Jesus got his authority without first having to prove himself! Nobody gets authority in the Kingdom of God without proving themselves first. Even Jesus is subject to the life principle: You reap what you sow. This principle is so hard-and-fast that God exhorts us not be deceived about it. God has established the principle like a law of nature. No one will be permitted to *mock* God by violating it and getting away with it. It's universal.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.
A man reaps what he sows (Galatians 6:7-8).

Jesus proved at Calvary that he was worthy of being Lord, and here's the proof he gave: He sowed his life there. He delivered it into God's hand as a sacrifice. Jesus gave his body to God, so God gave it back to him forever. By sowing his life like a seed, Jesus reaped eternal life for himself—and for many!

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds (John 12:24).

c. A higher purpose

God had a purpose in the death and resurrection of Jesus and it was not just that Jesus would have the “name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). Making Jesus Lord was part of God's purpose, but God's purpose went beyond Jesus. The same passage (Philippians 2) goes on to reveal that the purpose of God was to touch the hearts of everybody in Heaven, on Earth, and even under the Earth!

...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

From this passage, it's evident that God wants all people to honor Jesus and to glorify him. God made sure that Jesus was crucified and resurrected so that we would give glory to Jesus. God wants all people to bow before Jesus and to

•...an even broader goal: that all people would glorify God.

• If we glorify God for what he has done in Jesus, we will have faith that God will do the same wonderful things in us!

• Jesus is the proof that our resurrection glory is a sure hope.

• God gets the glory.

confess with our lips that he is Lord.

God wills this glorification of Jesus in order to reach an even broader goal: that all people would glorify God. He who honors Jesus honors the God who has done such wonderful things in Jesus. So few Christians have this perspective, but we invite you to be different from the majority.

• Jesus got glory precisely because he didn't covet it.

• ...his effort to obtain glory was a much different thing than coveting glory

• Jesus never coveted God's Throne, but got it anyway!

• Jesus' glory is the ultimate rebuke to Satan!

So here's a tough question: How does glorifying God for having made Jesus Lord affect us on a practical level? Well, it would probably change the way Christian songwriters compose the lyrics to their music—practically all of it focuses exclusively on Jesus to the exclusion of the Father. But that's not what we would most like to see changed. Rather, the revolution in Christian thinking would be this: If we glorify God for what he has done in Jesus, we will have faith that God will do the same wonderful things in us! God has given us Jesus as a model and example of what he so earnestly desires to do in us. Furthermore, Jesus is the proof that our resurrection glory is a sure hope.

d. For the glory of God

If Christians read the Bible attentively, many are sure to have the question “Why is this all for God's glory—shouldn't we bow our knee to Jesus for Jesus' glory?” According to the previous passage, we bow our knee to Jesus for God's glory. How does that work? Well, since it was God who resurrected Jesus and who glorified Jesus as Lord, God gets the glory. After all, God thought the whole Gospel-thing up and then made sure that it happened, didn't he?

The glory Jesus has today is a testimony to God's great faithfulness to our Lord Jesus. How so? God was not only faithful to give Jesus the strength Jesus needed to face the fury of hypocrites, the abandonment of friends, and the pain of death (even at times sending angels to comfort Jesus through the difficult moments)—God was faithful to eventually fulfill the promise that sustained Jesus all along: the promise of a resurrection. When God resurrected Jesus, Jesus was fully vindicated for having lived by faith in God. God did not let Jesus down.

Remember that Jesus didn't have *the highest place* when he

was in the flesh. When he carried his Cross up Calvary, he actually took the opposite of the highest place, he took the lowest place. But God exalts those who humble themselves, and by doing so, God deserves the praise.

e. The sin of the Devil

Jesus got glory precisely because he didn't covet it. He strove for glory according to the calling of God, but his effort to obtain glory was a much different thing than coveting glory—coveting God's glory is the sin of the Devil. There's a big difference between Jesus' pursuit of God's glory and the Devil's pursuit of vain-glory: Satan coveted God's Throne and got condemned for it; Jesus never coveted God's Throne, but got it anyways!

... I [Jesus] was victorious and sat down with my Father on his Throne (Revelation 3:21).

Think about it: Jesus' glory is the ultimate rebuke to Satan! When the Devil looks at Jesus today, he has to admit that God will not withhold glory from those who humbly seek it. The Devil has to admit that God gives thrones to those who serve him.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory... he will sit on his glorious throne (Matthew 25:31).

How sad for the Devil, once a guardian cherub, to have to remember Jesus' glory in the Lake of Fire forever.

You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone... Your settings and mountings were made of gold... You were anointed as a guardian cherub... You were on the holy mount of God... You were blameless in your ways (Ezekiel 28:12-15).

The Devil is like Judas, who will have to remember for all eternity that he could have reigned with Christ in the Kingdom of God. Jesus offered to Judas the opportunity to rule over one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, but Judas forfeited his opportunity.

• Jesus obtained the very glory they most desired...

• Jesus obtained glory through faith in God.

• Jesus will likewise share his throne-glory with us.

Jesus said to them, ‘... you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ (Matthew 19:28).

Harder still for Judas and the Devil will it be for them to have to remember forever that Jesus obtained the very glory they most desired, and that God was glad to share it with him.

f. Seeking God’s glory

The Devil and all those who think like he does is a miserable failure. On the other hand, what a success story is Jesus! What a victory for all those who have the faith that he had! How did he get the Throne? Not by coveting it, but believing in the unselfish God who sits on it! God is love. Jesus obtained glory through faith in God. He got it by refusing to seek glory from men, and by instead seeking the glory that is from the One God.

... [Jesus rebuked the Pharisees saying to them] ‘You receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the One and Only God’ (John 5:44).

Now don’t forget this fact: As the One God shared his throne-glory with Jesus, Jesus will likewise share his throne-glory with us. We get it if we are victorious against sin, tribulation, and the world-system.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his Throne (Revelation 3:21).

- Behold Jesus’ love for God **on the Cross**.
 - Behold God’s love for Jesus **on the Throne**.
- Jesus wore **a crown of thorns** because he loves God.
 - Today he wears **a crown of gold** because God loves him.
- Jesus chose **the Cross** as his place.
 - God chose **his Throne** as Jesus’ place.

•...let’s think of what Jesus got out of his death and resurrection.

•...the very reason why Jesus died and was raised from the dead was to be made Lord!

•...Jesus also acted in his own interest.

•...Christianity is not empty altruism.

F. Seeking his own benefit

1. What Christianity is not
2. Seeking the highest joy
3. Follow the leader

We tend to focus on the standard “Jesus died for us” theme when we read about his death and resurrection. He did die for us, but for a minute let’s resist the tendency to just see the Cross in terms of our salvation. Instead, let’s think of what Jesus got out of his death and resurrection. Did you know that he benefitted from them? Although we’ve already looked at it briefly, let’s read Romans 14:9 again to see how:

For this very reason Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

According to this verse, the Cross and resurrection made Jesus the Lord of the Living and the Dead. In fact, the *very reason* why Jesus died and was raised from the dead was to be made Lord! That means that he didn’t die just to save us.

Follow this line of reasoning: If we understand Jesus’ experiences in the light of how they benefitted him, and we take Jesus as our example, we will realize that the benefit he sought for himself (authority and glory) is something that we can seek for ourselves as well. We learn that we should strive to have authority and glory too. That’s a lesson of the Cross that you hardly ever hear preached.

1. What Christianity is not

At Calvary Jesus sought to glorify God, amen. Jesus also sought to save humanity, amen. But Jesus also acted in his own interest—amen? We’ve got to understand that Christianity is not empty altruism. Jesus never taught altruism. On the contrary, he designed us as creatures which take care of themselves. That’s our sense of self-preservation and there’s nothing wrong with it.

Jesus has programmed us to seek our own benefits—that’s just his design for humans. Self-preservation is not bad, it’s natural. Because of it we change our habits to become healthy. Because of it we change our behaviors to avoid getting in trouble with the law. With patience, that is if we can

• If we could only... give our lives to serving the poor, then we would be true Christians.

aim it towards getting our eternal benefits, and away from selfishness, then it is good.

Love... is not self-seeking (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

Lots of us were taught as kids that Christianity is about “living for others.” When I was a kid there was this idea floating around churches that the greatest Christians are people like Mother Teresa.¹⁶⁵ “If we could only live like she did and give our lives to serving the poor, then we would be true

¹⁶⁵ There is no doubt that Teresa’s actions in favor of the poor, blind, naked, and lepers were good works and that she will be rewarded if she has not been rewarded already. Her acts of charity and love are commendable, but that doesn’t mean that she has any right to teach the Christian faith to anyone. Her very common practice of praying to Mary, often by praying the rosary, actually disqualify her as a teacher of the Scriptures.

Very few people know that Teresa experienced serious doubts and struggles over her faith and that those doubts lasted some 50 years until the she died. We can let Mother Teresa speak for herself about how spiritual she really was. She is quoted by her biographer Fr. Van Der Peet, a Catholic priest, as saying the following:

Where is my faith? Even deep down ... there is nothing but emptiness and darkness ... If there be God—please forgive me. When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul ... How painful is this unknown pain—I have no faith. Repulsed, empty, no faith, no love, no zeal, ... What do I labor for? (Retrieved from Kolodiejchuk, Rev. Brian (2007). *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*. New York: Doubleday, and quoted at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_Teresa).

I call, I cling, I want ... and there is no One to answer ... no One on Whom I can cling ... no, No One. Alone ... I dare not utter the words & thoughts that crowd in my heart ... & make me suffer untold agony. So many unanswered questions live within me afraid to uncover them ... because of the blasphemy ... I am told God loves me ... and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul (Written in the 2000s, Retrieved on April 1, 2015 from http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mother_Teresa).

Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me, the silence and the emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear. — Mother Teresa to the Rev. Michael Van Der Peet, September 1979 (Van Biema, David (2007). *Time Magazine, Mother Teresa’s Crisis of Faith: Her secret letters show that she spent almost 50 years without sensing the presence of God in her life*. Retrieved on April 1, 2015 from <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1655720,00.html>).

• pursuing
eternal joy
through a
complete
willingness
to do what
is right.

Christians,” we thought. It seemed like such an impossibility to truly please God because none of us really felt much of an urge to live for others. On the same note, we felt guilty when we did things for our own benefit.

But we were wrong. Our desires are not necessarily bad. We can please God and please ourselves at the same time. David said:

Delight yourself in the LORD; and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4; NASB).

The Christian life is not about living for others, no! It is about living by faith in God’s Word. He may lead you to make sacrifices for others, but all the while, your goal must be to do what God wants—not what other people want. While you do God’s will, it’s okay for you to seek your own long-term glory. Indeed, anyone who serves God pursues their own eternal benefit by serving him.

God promises eternal joy to those who will suffer for righteousness now. Christianity is just that: pursuing eternal joy through a complete willingness to do what is right. If you are persecuted for righteousness, it’s not the same as “living for others,” is it? No, it’s not. In fact, it is relatively easy to “live for others” compared to what it takes to suffer for righteousness. And why is it so much more challenging to suffer for righteousness? It’s because before you ever suffer for righteousness, you have to actually be righteous—and that’s something that most people who “live for others” never accomplish during their entire life.

Being righteous doesn’t come easily. It’s much more challenging than “living for others.” You can’t get righteousness automatically. You can’t get it by just giving your things away to the poor. That might be the beginning of a life of faith. It would be the start of a life which invests in eternity, but it’s not the goal. The goal is to follow Jesus until the end.

... a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” ... ‘If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.’ ... ‘All these I have kept,’ the young man said. ‘What do I still lack?’

• We are not striving for martyrdom. We are striving forwards.

Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then come, follow me' (Matthew 19:16-17, 20-21).

Giving away your possessions to the poor may be a gesture to say that you're not going to go to live by the World's system anymore. It may be a way for you to say that you want rewards in Heaven. That's okay. It's the attitude you need to start, but then you'll have to live by faith. If you will live by faith, you will suffer. Forgiving the people who hate you because of that faith, and triumphing with love, is what makes you a real Christian.

•the reason
why we
have to
face such
difficulties

... if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name ... (1 Peter 4:16).

2. Seeking the highest joy

So Christians are people who seek the highest joy, just like Jesus did.

... Jesus, the pioneer [author] and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the Cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Christians seek this joy by faith. They live in righteousness and put up with any suffering that comes their way because they know that the joy set before them far outweighs the temporary suffering they have to go through for Jesus.

... our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all (2 Corinthians 4:17).

For a Christian, the goal is joy. We get it by following Jesus. He will lead you through suffering in this life—you don't have to go looking for it. Suffering in itself has little value. Suffering for the name of Jesus has great value, great rewards. We are not striving for martyrdom. We are striving for rewards. If martyrdom is the way to get those rewards, then we'll be martyrs. But the Bible doesn't say that we best please God by being martyrs. It says that we must love. It says that love is indispensable.

If I hand over my body to be burned and give all I have to the poor but do not have love, I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

Jesus is not seeking martyrs. He is calling us to seek God's Kingdom and the rewards that it entails. In God's way and in his time, each of us will face difficulties and suffering. That's a given. Will we deal with those difficulties in love? Will we pray for those who bring suffering upon us? That's the question.

Anyhow, most Christians don't know the reason why we have to face such difficulties: It's because God wants us to get the greatest reward and the supreme joy! If you want Kingdom joy, you'll have to suffer to get it. You can count on great rewards in the Kingdom if you suffer for Jesus in this life. He has promised us that many times:

Blessed [joyful] are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in Heaven (Matthew 5:11-12).

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name... (John 15:20-21)

Now that you've read these passages, as an afterthought, did you notice what they say about why believers suffer? It's not because we look for suffering, but because we represent Jesus. We suffer *because of him*. We suffer *for his sake*. We suffer *because of his name*. If that's how your suffering comes about, then be very happy. Your reward is great in the Kingdom!