

JESUS CHRIST - SON OF GOD not God the Son

Nothing can be more important to Christianity than the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In spite of this a large proportion of people who profess Christianity do not understand who Jesus is. The reason for this is that while the only reliable source of knowledge about Jesus is the Bible, many people pay little or no attention to its words and rely instead on human traditions.

The most commonly held of these traditions is that Jesus is God, part of a triune Godhead, equal to his Father and co-eternal with Him. In addition to this there are two other traditions in popular circulation: some people believe that Jesus is a pre-existent angelic being, and yet others believe that Jesus was a very good, but otherwise ordinary, man. None of these traditions is found in the Bible; the scriptural picture of Jesus is both simpler and deeper than any of them. The Bible teaching about Jesus is that he is the Son of God and the Son of man; that he is a complete revelation of God, and that he is the only way by which we can approach to God. We shall consider each of these aspects of the nature of Jesus under a separate heading.

The Son of Man

Jesus called himself the Son of man on many occasions; for this reason it is important to have some understanding of the meaning of the phrase. In the natural sense of the statement, a son is the product of the union of two parents, and inherits some of the characteristics of each of them. The Bible states that this is the case with Jesus: Jesus is a son of man in the natural sense of the phrase. Here are some passages from the Bible which support this assertion:

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matthew 1:1)

"God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." (Galatians 4:4)

"The patriarch David . . . being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath unto him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne." (Acts 2:29,30)

Jesus is descended from actual human individuals, and is not simply made in the general form of mankind. He is descended from a woman; he is the son of Abraham; he is the fruit of David's loins. The Bible goes on to say that his descent is *"according to the flesh"*, in other words, in the same way as ordinary descent from parent to child.

The fact that Jesus is the Son of man in the natural sense of the phrase means that he inherited some of the characteristics of human nature found in his parent and ancestors. For example, he inherited a human body, and hence the limitations of the body of an ordinary man; he became tired, he was sometimes hungry, felt pain, and died. The Bible's comment on this is:

"In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren." (Hebrews 2:17).

Other characteristics that Jesus inherited from his human forbears were limited knowledge (although his knowledge was far greater than that of any ordinary man) and man's predisposition towards sin (which he successfully and completely resisted). We shall consider these points again later.

The Son of God

Besides describing himself as the Son of man, Jesus also describes himself as the Son of God. This description of him was also used by the apostles and prophets, and even by the voice of God, speaking from heaven. Again, it is quite easy to understand the term "Son of God" in the natural sense, that Jesus had God as his father, and that he therefore inherited some of God's characteristics. We can see this point made more fully in the birth narratives of the gospels, which describe how Jesus had no human father, but was the result of the action of God's spirit on the virgin Mary. The words of the angel who explained to Mary what would happen are:

"The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

We can see from this that Jesus is the Son of God in a literal sense; it is because he is the product of the action of the Holy Spirit on his mother that he is the Son of God:

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son ..." (John 3 :16)

This shows that Jesus is the only person who is the Son of God in a direct literal sense; other people are called "sons of God", but their relationship to God is different. They are only adopted sons.

The difference between an adopted son and a begotten son is that an adopted son inherits none of the physical or mental traits of his adopted father. Jesus was the begotten Son of God, and therefore he inherited much of God's character. Here are some of the character traits that Jesus inherited from God:

Justice: *"And yet if I judge, my judgement is true" (John 8:16)*

Love: *"... the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge . . . (Ephesians 3:19)*

The ability to see into men's hearts and to know their thoughts:

*"Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men."
(John 2:24)*

Most important of all, Jesus inherited from his Father a moral strength which enabled him to overcome temptation:

*Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."
(Hebrews 4:15).*

It is because of this last trait that Jesus could overcome sin and be a sacrifice for our sins. It is also because of this that Jesus was able to go into heaven for us as our mediator with God.

Note. While Jesus is frequently referred to by the term "Son of God" in the Bible, he is never referred to as "God the Son". The two phrases have different meanings, and the title "Son of God" does not imply the title "God the Son". There is no Scriptural justification for ever using the term "God the Son" to describe Jesus.

A Revelation of God

God has revealed himself in a wide variety of ways since the beginning of creation. In the Bible, God's revelation of himself is called "*the word of God*". In the very beginning, the word of God was spoken; God said "*Let there be light*" and thus caused the creation to come into being. The Bible comments on this with the words:

"By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." (Psalm 33:6)

Later the word of God came to the prophets, and was written down as Scripture. It is common for the prophets to refer to their messages as "*the word of the LORD*"; for example: '*The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel*' introduces the book of Joel (Joel 1:1). Many of the other prophets are introduced in the same way; see Jeremiah 1:2; Ezekiel 1:3; Hosea 1:1 and so on.

On some occasions the same word of the LORD was revealed as an angel. An example of this is found in the prophecy of Zechariah:

Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month . . . came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah ... saying... Then said I [Zechariah], O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said ..." (Zechariah 1:7,9)

The word of God was expressed in speech at creation, as the written word in the Scriptures, and as an angel at various times. Last of all this same word was revealed to us as Jesus, the Son of God. The Bible puts it like this:

*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."
(John 1:14)*

We can look on Jesus as not only the Son of God, but as the last and most complete revelation of Himself that God has ever given. The simplest summary of this is given at the start of the epistle to the Hebrews:

*"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son ..."
(Hebrews 1:1,2).*

However, the following passages all express this same truth in different ways.

". . . and they shall call his (Jesus') name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." (Matthew 1:23)

Jesus is given the title "God with us" as the revelation of God in our midst.

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself ..." (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Note that this passage does not say that Christ was God, but that God was in Christ. This speaks of the revelation of God in Christ, and is very similar to this saying about Jesus:

"For in him dwelleth all fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:9)

Again, this passage states that the Godhead (another word for God) dwells within Christ.

Colossians 1:15 describes Jesus as *"the image of the invisible God"*. This text does not state that Jesus is the invisible God, but that he is the *image* of the invisible God. The idea of an image in this context is similar to the idea of what one might see in a mirror or on a television screen. One would easily understand what was going on if, during a broadcast from parliament, someone were to point to a television screen and say "Look: there is the Prime Minister". That person cannot actually see the Prime Minister; all he can see is the image of the Prime Minister in the phosphors on the screen. It is in the same way that, by looking at Jesus, one can see the image of the invisible God. Man also is made in *"the image and glory of God"* (1 Corinthians 11:7), but Jesus is a far better image of God than any ordinary man. In fact, so close is the likeness that Jesus could say:

"he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

God uses several different names to refer to Himself. Each of these has a meaning, and describes some aspect of the nature or character of God. Jesus has been highly exalted by God, and has been assigned a name which is above all names, the greatest honour that could be given

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow..." (Philippians 2:9,10).

It is therefore fitting that we should *"honour the Son, even as they honour the Father."* (John 5:23)

Our Mediator with God

As men we cannot approach God because of our sinful condition. There is thus a need for a mediator to appear before God on our behalf and to intercede for us. Jesus is this mediator, and the Bible states categorically that there is no other mediator.

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5).

The existence of a mediator is essential for our salvation, because it is only through Jesus our mediator that we can have a proper relationship with God. There is no other route. Jesus said:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).

This has particular application in prayer; prayer should be made to the Father through the Son, and never to or through anyone else.

Reasons for Believing that Jesus is not God

There are a few texts in the Bible which are sometimes quoted in support of the belief that Jesus is God. However, the majority of these texts are actually expressing the closeness of Jesus to God. There are no passages in the Bible which, when they have been thoroughly examined, teach that Jesus is God. On the contrary, there are many passages which show that Jesus is not God. These passages can be divided into seven separate reasons as follows.

Reason 1: No-one has ever seen God

"Thou cans't not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. "
(Exodus 33:20);

"No man hath seen God at any time; " (John 1:18);

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God."
(1 Timothy 1:17);

"I give thee charge in the sight of God... whom no man hath seen, nor can see:" (1 Timothy 6:13,16);

"No man hath seen God at anytime." (1 John 4:12).

These and other texts from the Bible proclaim that no-one has ever seen God, and that God cannot possibly be seen. However, by the time that most of them were written, Jesus had walked the earth and been seen by great multitudes of people. From this it follows that Jesus cannot be God.

Reason 2: Jesus has a separate will from God

"And he (Jesus) went a little further . . . and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. "(Matthew 26:39);

"I can of mine own self do nothing... I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." (John 5:30);

"For I came ... not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38);

"For even Christ pleased not himself;" (Romans 15:3);

Jesus "humbled himself and became obedient unto death." (Philippians 2:8).

Jesus had separate thoughts and desires from God; for example, when he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane he did not want to die on the cross. But despite this, Jesus submitted his own will entirely to that of God and humbled himself, becoming obedient to the death. If Jesus had been God, then there could have been no difference between his will and God's, and he could never have submitted his will to that of God.

Reason 3: God has always known Everything

That God knows everything, and always has, is clear from large sections of the Bible. In particular, God declares that he knows the future in every detail, declaring the end from the beginning:

"I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done." (Isaiah 46:9,10)

Jesus knew far more than any ordinary man could ever know, but there were still some things that he did not know, and over which he had no power. When two disciples came to Jesus asking for positions of authority in the Kingdom of God, he said:

"but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." (Matthew 20:23).

Jesus also had no power over, or knowledge of, the time of his own return.

"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." (Acts 1:7);

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." (Mark 13:32).

From this we can see that Jesus did not know some of the things known to God. Clearly Jesus cannot be God.

Reason 4: God cannot be Tempted

" God cannot be tempted with evil..." (James 1:13).

God is not able to sin, and it is not possible to tempt him. Jesus, on the other hand, was severely tempted on many occasions.

Jesus said:

"Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations." (Luke 22:28).

The Scriptures say of Jesus:

"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." (Hebrews 2:18);

Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

The temptations that Jesus suffered were just as real as the temptations that we suffer; there is no possibility of their being a mere charade put on for our instruction. The fact that Jesus could really be tempted to sin implies that, although he never sinned, it would have been possible for him to have committed sin. Jesus himself acknowledged this when he declared that he was not good. When a rich young ruler referred to Jesus as *"Good master"*, Jesus replied with the words:

"Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." (Mark 10:18)

This is clearly a correction of the young man's ideas, and it is very hard to imagine any single statement that could be a clearer rejection of any idea that Jesus was God.

Reason 5: God never Changes

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." (Luke 2:52).

This passage declares that not only did Jesus grow in God's favour, but that his wisdom increased. Both of these points represent changes of a kind not open to God, who has been infinitely wise from the very beginning.

God is perfect; because of this he has no need to change. Jesus, however, did not achieve perfection until he was raised from the dead.

"Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." (Luke 13:32);

*"For it became him, for whom are all things,... in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."
(Hebrews 2:10);*

*"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation ..."
(Hebrews 5:8,9).*

Even the way that Jesus' nature changed on resurrection and ascension to heaven illustrate this development of person. Before he was raised to life, he could be tempted to sin; now he cannot. At the resurrection Jesus passed from death to life; before he ascended, Jesus did not know all things. Finally, before he was made perfect. Jesus' person developed; now he is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Reason 6: God is more Exalted than Jesus

In the Scriptures, God says of Jesus:

"Behold my servant, whom I have chosen;" (Matthew 12:18);

*"the head of every man is Christ;... and the head of Christ is God."
(1 Corinthians 11:3);*

"then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Jesus himself said:

"My Father is greater than I." (John 14:28)

Again, nothing could be clearer. If God is the head of Jesus, just as Jesus is the head of man; if Jesus is God's servant, and if Jesus will be subject to God even in the age to come, then God must be greater and more exalted than Jesus. But the matter doesn't rest with these words. The Bible doesn't only proclaim that the Father was, is and always will be more exalted than Jesus; it goes further and shows that the Father is Jesus' God.

Jesus said:

"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

*"I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."
(John 20:17)*

"Him that overcometh with I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God:" (Revelation 3:12).

The scriptures contain many other references to *"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus"* including Romans 15:6, Ephesians 1:17; Revelation 1:6.

It is not possible to be equal with ones God because of God's very nature, so the description of God as the God of Jesus shows that Jesus is not God. The fact that God is still Jesus' God even after Jesus has ascended to exalted status in heaven shows

that there is no question of Jesus even being raised to equality with his God and Father.

Reason 7: The Bible distinguishes carefully between God and Jesus

In all passages where Jesus and his Father are mentioned together, the Bible is always careful to point out which of the two is God. For example:

"Jesus of Nazareth [was] a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you." (Acts 2:22);

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36);

"That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:6);

*"To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.
(1 Corinthians 8:6);*

"And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:11);

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5)

In these quotations it is clear which, out of the Father and Son, is God. In all the verses it is the Father who is the only God. Even the so-called "Trinitarian formula" of the grace is careful to make the distinction between the Son (who is not God), God, and the Spirit of God:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Every time this verse is used in a Church, it should be a reminder that Jesus is not God. Jesus himself was quite clear that only the Father, Jesus' God, is God. Jesus prayed to God using these words:

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3).

These seven points provide overwhelming evidence that Jesus is not God. In particular they show that Jesus is not co-equal with his Father, and that he does not share all of God's attributes.

Pre-Existence

Some people believe that Jesus existed before he was born to Mary; we shall refer to this as belief in the "Pre-existence" of Jesus. This doctrine is found in two basic forms: the belief that Jesus came into existence somewhere before creation and the idea that he has never had a beginning, but is "co-eternal" with God. There are at least three kinds of reason for believing that Jesus did not pre-exist, but that he came into being at his birth to the virgin Mary. These consist of a simple argument based on the normal meaning of the word "son", a many-stranded argument based on the consideration of a wide selection of passages about Jesus, and a linguistic argument based on the exact meaning of the text of the birth narratives.

The Simple Argument

Jesus is, as we have already seen, the son of Mary and the descendant of various named people in the Old Testament. If someone is a son, he cannot have existed before his mother and his ancestors. The fact that Jesus is the Son of God places no restraint on the point at which Jesus came into existence, as God has always existed, but the fact that he is the descendent of David, after the flesh (Acts 2:29,30), shows that he must have come into existence later than the birth of David, and the fact that he is the son of Mary shows that he must have come into existence later than the birth of his mother in the first century BC. As this is the case, Jesus cannot have existed through all the ages before his birth.

The Many - Stranded Argument

We have already seen that Jesus' character developed and that he increased in wisdom (Luke 2:52); we find that Jesus was tempted to sin (Hebrews 4:15) and that he "learned obedience" during this ministry (Hebrews 5:8,9). This poses an insuperable problem for those who wish to believe in the doctrine of the pre-existence of Jesus, because that doctrine requires one to believe that before Jesus' birth there was a being who had lived since the creation, or even for eternity, but who could learn wisdom as a child on earth, who was not perfect, and who could be tempted to sin. This is completely against the tenor of the scriptures.

In the Old Testament, God declares that he is alone:

"I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no god beside me; ... that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me; I am the LORD, and there is none else." (Isaiah 45:5,6).

This is because Jesus did not exist at that time except in the foreknowledge of God. In New Testament times matters had changed, and when God is mentioned, so is Jesus.

"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things... and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (1 Corinthians 8:6).

The Linguistic Argument

We read in Matthew's account of the birth of Christ:

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise:" (Matthew 1:18).

If we check out the word "birth" in an analytical concordance, we shall find that it is the Greek word "genesis", which means beginning. The same word is used in Matthew 1:1; *"The book of the generation (Greek "Genesis") of Jesus Christ."* This word "genesis" is the name of the first book of the Bible, which describes how the world came into existence; the word cannot be used to simply denote a change of state from one kind of being (the pre-existent Christ) to another (the baby Jesus). It is not possible to have two moments of genesis. It is because of this that the word genesis was unacceptable to the theologians who wrote the creeds of the third and fourth centuries, as a description of the birth of Jesus, and the word "incarnation" was invented instead. To these men, as to all Greek speakers in the ancient world, the word "genesis" meant absolute beginning.

The creation in which we live had its genesis in the beginning, when God said *"Let there be light."* (Genesis 1:3). Jesus had his genesis at the time when he was born of

the virgin Mary. The Bible is quite clear about this: there is no prospect of Jesus' pre-existence.

Two Problems

Many people are brought up to believe that Christianity is equivalent to the belief that Jesus is God, and that any community which teaches that Jesus is not God cannot be Christian. This is an unfortunate belief, because the Apostles of the first century who founded Christianity did not believe that Jesus is God, but that he is the Son of God. It is perfectly clear that the original Christianity of New Testament times did not include the teaching that Jesus is God; it follows therefore that modern Christianity need not include that belief.

The second problem is that some people believe that to account Jesus with anything less than full equality to God is to fail to honour Jesus as much as he should be honoured. This problem vanishes as soon as we are willing to admit that the real Jesus is not God, and is not equal to his Father. Given that this scriptural picture of Jesus is true, to state that God is equal to Jesus is to fail to give God the full honour due to Him, and to deny the absolute sovereignty of God.

Summary

The belief that Jesus is God, co-equal and co-eternal with his Father, is a sincerely held belief which holds sway in many minds. Despite this it is a false belief; the Biblical picture of Jesus is of the Son of God who is also the Son of man, and who came into existence at his birth in a stable in Bethlehem, almost two thousand years ago. As the only begotten Son of God, Jesus is unique; there is no-one else like him.

A large part of the confusion that exists about Jesus is because men tend to try to liken Jesus to someone else. This is, of course, doomed to failure. As long as we ask only the question "Is Jesus God or is Jesus an ordinary man?" we shall miss the truth about who Jesus is. It is only when we can rid our minds of the pre-conceived notions of Jesus put there by tradition and upbringing, and approach the nature of Jesus with prayer and a heart willing to accept the word of God that we shall be able to make progress in understanding his nature, through the scriptures.

John Thorpe

All the verses quoted in this booklet are from the Authorised (King James) version of the Bible. They have had to be quoted briefly to reduce the bulk of the booklet; please look them up in your own Bible, consider the context, and make certain that their message is really what is stated in the text above.

