

THE CHRIST-CENTERED FAITH

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THE CHRIST-CENTERED FAITH

“I do not pray for these alone, but for those who believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, That they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

Jesus Christ, the Son of God

(John 17:20,21)

It was God the Son in His incarnate ministry on earth who uttered the above words in reference to His twelve apostles. In the historical context, Jesus was in a personal conversation with the apostles in John 17. Knowing that they would undergo tremendous persecution for the sake of preaching the gospel of the atoning death of the cross and resurrection to eternal life for all those who believed, Jesus wanted the testimony of their unity to be a life-style declaration that what they preached was from the one God of heaven. They accomplished their mission. They remained united. They preached the gospel in their unity. They all died as a witness to the fact that the simplicity of Jesus’ message will produce unity. But something has since gone wrong. Christendom today is divided about as much as it could be divided. It is so divided that the unbelieving world is totally confused. The unbelieving accuse that if the Christian’s Savior would produce so much disunity, then they will have nothing to do with it. The division that prevails in Christendom is a testimony to the fact that the problem is not with the message, for the apostles remained united. The problem is with us. We have sought to follow our religiosity rather than the simple message of Jesus. Men have arisen among us with a desire to promote themselves and personal traditions over the message of the cross. And so, we live with the consequences of religious men who have gone astray in their efforts to carry out their religiosity among men according to their own desires. It is for this reason that we call for a restoration from man-made religions to following a Christ-centered message that brings unity. We call for men to restore their lives to the preaching of the message that produces the unity that the apostles retained throughout their ministry.

Chapter 1

Knowing Who We Are

Christianity is a response-defined faith. It is a behavioral conduct of life that is oriented around an obedient response to a loving Creator. It is such because of revelation from a loving God who created man after the spiritual and aesthetic nature of His own being. When the creature recognizes and acknowledges the origins of his existence, there is response. It is not a response out of legal compulsion, but out of a heart of thanksgiving that seeks for instructions from the Creator (2 Co 4:15). It is a worshipful response from one who recognizes that he is the result of a loving Creator who wants his companionship throughout eternity.

Paul said it this way, *“And He has made of one man all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth ... so that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him, though He is not far from every one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being ...”* (At 17:26,27). We were created to religiously “grope” after our Creator.

When the greatness of God’s love was revealed on an atoning cross two thousand years ago, it was then that faith-defined servants drew closer to their Creator. Our “groping” was satisfied in the cross. The love revealed on the cross was

the definition of God’s love, and subsequently, the defining nature of Christianity. It was the manifestation of God’s intended destiny for all those who through faith would give themselves in obedience to Him. Eternal dwelling was thus guaranteed by the cross to faithful respondents who have groped after and found their Creator.

But herein is revealed the failure of man-made religions, and at the same time, the definition of false religion itself. False religion is different from Christianity in the fact that false religion originates from those who seek to define their own means by which to acquire a clear conscience before their Creator. God created man to be a religious being. Religious people who would either reject the revelation of God, or simply be ignorant of God’s revelation, will create for themselves various religious beliefs and systems of religious behavior. They will do so, first because we were created with enough sense to know that this world is not all there is (Rm 1:20), but also because men must worship in order to appease their own consciences. We are religious beings, and thus, we must be religious.

Unfortunately, religion apart from the direction of God is the manifestation of either rebellious hearts or ignorant minds. Those who create their own religion are either rebellious against God’s

**The cross
revealed
the heart
of God.**

revelation, or simply ignorant of it. In either rebellion or ignorance, people religiously function outside the realm of God's divine directives concerning worship and behavior. The result of such religious functionality is a world of assorted religions that are created after the desires of men. Idol gods are always an invention, not the result of revelation.

When we consider Christendom, we are challenged with the religiosity of men who have invented an assortment of religions that are based on an ignorance of the will of God. We would use the word "Christendom," therefore, as an umbrella term that does not define true Christianity. Christendom is filled with false religions, but true Christianity is not defined by the religious confusion of Christendom. Please do not misunderstand this point. It is our task to move past our religiosity in order to be simple Christians. **All Christians are religious, but not all religious people are Christians.** Every person, therefore, who might claim a stake in Christendom is not necessarily a Christian.

We are challenged with the task of defining true Christianity in a confused Christendom of religious people. In order to define true Christianity, we must first take a closer look at what we would define as religion, and then go to the Scriptures in order to define what we mean by being Christian. If we are not

Bible-oriented religious people, this will be a daunting task. In fact, we would say that it will be impossible for the religious person to determine if he is a Christian in a world of religious confusion if he is not into the word of God as a zealous student. We would thus challenge every religious person to find a Bible. This will not be a pleasant journey for some, especially for those who have given themselves over to false religions. The very foundation of our religiosity, therefore, may be challenged as we take this journey from religion to Christianity.

But this is exactly what James did in taking his readers from the behavior of Sadducean hypocritical religion to the purity of true faith. In chapter 1, James challenged the religionists among his readership. *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (Js 1:22). The religionist who does not get into the word of God is deceiving himself. **By getting into the word of God we mean that the word of God gets into his life.** If one is not controlled by the word of Christ, then he is deceiving himself by thinking that he is a "Christian," when he is really only being religious. The religionist is like the man who sees himself in the mirror of the word of God, but refuses to change from that which he sees (Js 1:23,24). However, the true man of faith *"looks into*

True Christians are Bible defined and revealed by obedience.

Christians are religious, but not all religious people are Christians.

Christians are captivated by the Word of Christ.

the perfect law of liberty and continues to abide in it ...” (Js 1:25). James then challenges the religionist who thinks he is a Christian. *“If any man among you seems to be religious, and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is useless”* (Js 1:26). Since one’s speech betrays his unholy heart. The religionist is found to be only religious, not Christian, because of his lack of obedience to the law of liberty.

Life-style religion before God and the Father is manifested in the loving obedience that one manifests in his relationship toward the unfortunate.

“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to take care of the orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (Js 1:27). This was a challenge to those who boasted in their religiosity, but were void of the loving heart of true Christianity. It is for this reason that we must challenge ourselves to understand the difference between simply being religious and being Christian. We must continually remind ourselves that all Christians are religious, but not all religious people are Christians.

All the essentials that are necessary for a healthy faith are found in Christianity. (1) Man needs a faith that includes an omnipotent, omnipresent and merciful God of all things. (2) Man needs a Savior for his inability to justify himself through perfect keeping of law. (3) Man needs a Holy Spirit that is active in his life. (4) Man needs words of instruction from his Creator in order to cohabit with his fellow man. (5) Man needs a faith

that is alive and dynamic. (6) Man needs a faith that is practical and applicable to daily living. (7) He needs a faith that produces a good conscience toward his God. (8) And finally, men of faith must have a hope for the afterlife that is sure and steadfast. In true religion God has provided all these things in order that we believe and obey according to His will. But those who would ignore or distort what God has revealed have created their own religion.

Christianity provides all spiritual essentials for the soul of man. Man-made religions in the past and present have tried to nurture spiritual things in the minds and hearts of men. But all attempts of man-made religion fail in comparison to the truth of Christianity that is revealed in the word of God. When men start inventing their own religions after their own desires, they always twist the Scriptures, and by doing such, destine themselves to destruction (2 Pt 3:15,16).

There is a difference between being a religionist and being a Christian who expresses his religiosity according to the will of God. The use of the term “Christian” in the first century is our initial definition of what a Christian is. The term “Christian” was probably a derogatory statement that was first used by unbelievers in their identity of those disciples of Jesus who were of the Way (At 9:2). Luke recorded in Acts 11:26, *“And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”*

Those of the Way, the disciples of Christ, were called Christians by the religionists of the day. There were many

religions and religious people of the first century. But there was only one group of religious people who had given themselves to be disciples of Jesus Christ. These people were called Christians, or the religious group who followed the teachings and behavior of Christ. Therefore, they were called Christians because they were Christ-centered people who were obedient disciples to the word of Christ.

If the name Christian was the “new name” of God’s people about which Isaiah prophesied (Is 62), then regardless of who came up with the name, whether unbelievers or the disciples of Jesus

themselves, the name identified all those of the early religious world who were living Christ-centered lives. We would be called Christians today in a world of religious confusion. We would be called after Christ in order to be separated from those who are carrying out their religiosity according to their own religious inventions. And for making such a commitment, we would gladly suffer under the name of Christian from all religionists who have created their own religions (1 Pt 4:16). And yes, we were easily persuaded to be a Christian because we believed in and sought instruction from Jesus Christ, the Son of God (At 26:28).

Chapter 2

Man-Made Religiosity

The nature of man-made religion can always be identified by the behavior of the adherents. Because many religions have a mix of some Bible together with many religious inventions of men, it is often difficult for those who have little Bible knowl-

**The one God
is plural
in being.**

edge to separate the true from the man-made in reference to Christianity. Protestantism is an umbrella term that is used for all sorts of religious mixtures with which Christianity must often compete. But we must never make the mistake of classifying true Christianity as just another religion in the “shopping center” confusion of Protestantism. Protestantism is defined as such by those who seek some acceptance by others of their syncretism of Bible and Baal. Christianity

is defined by the revelation of its Originator, and nothing else. The religious nature of man must never be used to define Christianity.

It is incumbent on us, therefore, to first define what we would call man-made religion, and then compare this definition with the nature of Bible-revealed Christianity. Our task to define religion might be somewhat challenging since our efforts are frustrated in digging through the assortment of man-made religious inventions, which inventions are sometimes allowed in reference to the freedom that God gives us in our response to His commandments. However, we must seek to discover the true definitive characteristics of Christianity in the word of God in order to discover those beliefs and religious behavioral practices that are

contrary to Christianity. It is easy to identify that which is false, simply because a passage from revelation would reveal the error. It is also easy to identify that which contravenes what is true. But in defining religion in contrast to Christianity, some preliminary concepts of man-made religion must be identified.

Jesus surely had the syncretism of false religion and true religion in mind when He stated, “*Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven ...*” (Mt 7:21). The religionist who seeks to fall under the name of Christendom will cry out “Lord, Lord,” but his heart is revealed by what Jesus said in the last part of the statement of Matthew 7:21 concerning what the religionist does. He does not do “*the will of My Father who is in heaven.*” Our challenge is to separate the “Lord, Lord” religionist from the “does-the-will-of-My-Father” Christian. Identifying the ekklesia (church) of Christ on Sunday morning involves more than finding people who cry out “Jesus, Jesus,” or those who perform certain ceremonies they have invented to validate their identity. In order to discover true Christianity we must identify the primary concepts that would define man-made religiosity.

A. Religion is always legal.

The adherents of man-made religions seek to appease their deity and soothe their consciences by legal obedi-

ence to religious rites and rituals, which rites and rituals are the invention of the adherents of the religion. Since the religionist functions outside the realm of God’s revelation, humanly invented rites

Religionists invent rites and rituals to validate their religion.

and rituals are invented that must be legally performed in order to bring a sense of religious satisfaction to the worshipers. Once

the rites and rituals are established, authorities are established in the religious hierarchy in order to marshal the behavior of all adherents to conform to the prescribed rites and rituals of the religious heritage. Temporal punishments are often inflicted on the rebellious in order to discipline the adherents into conformity to the established performances that both validate and identify the religion. The result is that the obedient adherent feels a sense of ease once he has conformed to the established codes of conduct of the religion. His legal performance both validates his faithfulness to the religion, as well as it gives him a sense of peace of mind.

This is what Jesus had in mind in reference to the “Jews’ religion” that He defined in Mark 7:1-9. Later in life Paul looked back on the religiosity that Jesus confronted in Mark 7, and subsequently, he made the statement concerning his former performance in the Jews’ religion, “*For you have heard of my behavior [or, performance] in the past in Judaism ...*” (Gl 1:13). Judaism was the “Jews’ religion.” By the time of Jesus it was no longer the faith revealed from God, but a

religion that was based, as Jesus stated in Mark 7, on the doctrines and commandments of men. And in these doctrines and commandments of men, Paul said, “*And I advanced in Judaism above many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions*” (Gl 1:14).

One of the strong motivations to move Christianity into the realm of simply being a religion is to make it a system of legal rites and rituals that are the invention of men.

The religionist often seeks to use even the Bible as a legal code book.

The legalist turns Christianity into a religion of rites and rituals.

He does so in order to establish a legal system by which he can identify his “Christianity,” as well as bring himself peace of mind in knowing that he has performed “his duty” in conforming to the demands of what he believes should validate his religion as true.

Efforts to make Christianity a mere religion leave little room for a healthy theology of grace in the Christian’s relationship with God. Once one seeks to legally justify himself before God through works of law, he focuses little on the grace of God. Those of Christendom who seek to make Christianity just another religion of men always legalize their performance of law before God, and thus, they make demands on God for salvation because of their works.

B. Religion is tradition oriented.

Remember what Paul said in Gala-

tians 1:14, that he was extremely zealous for his ancestral traditions? In order that the adherents of a particular man-made religion might know that they have legally conformed to the identity and validation of their religion, statutes must be identified for strict obedience. The origin and authority for such statutes, codes or creeds is the tradition of the fathers. Religionists have a high regard for their heritage and the traditions of the fathers. The religionist has a great sense of peace when he has obeyed the traditions of the fathers. “This-is-the-way-it-has-always-been-done” acts as the authority and identity of the religion. The adherents are thus intimidated into following the heritage of the fathers in order to honor the fathers. One’s religious heritage (traditions) is thus exalted to the status of both being the authority and the identity of the religion.

It is for this reason that the religionist finds it very difficult to conceive of the idea of restoration, for in doing such he has to turn from the heritage of his father and mother, as well as the religious leaders of his past. Very few religionists cry

Religionists are identified because they do not call for restoration.

out for restoration to Christianity simply because such a cry is contrary to the very nature of their religion. **One can thus identify a religion of men by the lack of a plea for a Bible-based faith that is directed by the word of Christ.**

There are never any restoration movements that take place among traditional religionists. Restoration move-

ments come from the individuals of many religious groups who realize that all religions of men have moved away from the authority of the word of God to the authority of the traditions of the individual religions. Tradition-oriented religions, therefore, work against the restoration of Christianity. They do not move people closer to a Christ-centered life that is based on the word of Christ. **A person cannot be Christ-centered in his faith if he is not focused on the word of Christ.**

C. Religion is performance oriented.

Since man-made religion is legal oriented and tradition bound, it of necessity must be performance demanding. The adherents must focus on the performance of the unique rites, rituals and traditions that identify the religion in order to be identified with any particular group. This is why Paul wrote in reference to his former behavior in the “Jew’s religion.” He wrote that he “*advanced in Judaism ... being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions*” (Gl 1:14).

Religions that are more strict in their demands for performance advance to being cults. **Cults are religious systems of cloned adherents.** Most religions allow slight infractions against the traditions of the fathers, but cults become harsh in reference to violations of the codes of the religion, and thus, exclusive in their introverted religious co-

Religions are inherently exclusive, not inclusive.

oons. Though cults will clone, all religions of men will socially intimidate adherence into conformity through the individual adherent’s desire to be accepted by the members of the social religious body. If one does not perform according to the norms of the social religious group, then he or she is ostracized from the group. Obedience to social religious norms, therefore, determines the acceptance of the members of themselves in the religion. Those who perform the most, or best, in carrying out the rites and rituals of the religion are considered to be the most faithful.

D. Religion is production defined.

Faithfulness in a legally defined religious group is defined by the performance of the individual adherents. The performance is defined by what adherents produce. Once the adherent of a particular religion is confirmed to be a member, he is expected to produce, or evangelistically stated, to reproduce himself. The product of one’s religious performance is usually to capture or convince, or “convert” in order to grow the religion. Through an assortment of legally performed good works, one identifies himself as “faithful.” Western cultures lend themselves to developing great religions simply because the culture of the West is productivity oriented. Efficiency is the identity of success. Productivity is the manifestation of efficiency. A religionist of the West is considered “unfaithful,” therefore, if no results can be seen on a spreadsheet of productivity. If no

products are witnessed, then it is assumed that there is no legal performance of the adherent. The unproductive adherent, therefore, is subjected to systematic reprimand or intimidation until enough guilt is produced to move the unproductive into action. Western originated religions are good at this. They are so product oriented that their religious work is governed by results, not realizing that when working in the spiritual realm, the work of God cannot be calculated on an end-of-the-month report.

This does not mean that the Christian is to be unproductive. The point is that a Christian can exist in the middle of a very hostile environment. He can remain faithful though his environment is “unproductive” (unreceptive). The growth of the early church was measured by Luke in recording a great many converts (At 2:41; 4:4). But the purpose of Luke’s record of these figures was to emphasize the impact of the disciples’ preaching of the gospel, not to glorify the disciples by the legal performance of preaching the gospel.

The church grew in the first century because of the message of the gospel, not because of a legal performance of the great commission on the part of the disciples. Many great man-made religions today grow because the membership is avidly dedicated to work. The Mormon church grows because the members are simply zealous performers in their efforts to promote their religion. Because there are a great deal of vehicles parked outside a particular place of worship does not mean that the truth of the gospel is

being preached inside. We must never forget that growth in Christianity is the product of the gospel message, not the result of our legal performance of law, less we boast in our works (Rm 11:6).

E. Religion is man centered.

In a world of narcissistic people who focus on themselves, it is only natural that independent religious groups would pop up throughout the world that are centered around dynamic individuals. Traditional religions that were based on dynamic Reformation leaders have been around for centuries. However, there seems to be a tidal wave of independent churches springing up throughout the world today that come in every color possible. Many of these groups are established in developing world economies as a means of support for the originators. They are not the result of religious people who have been searching the Scriptures in order to restore Christianity. The phenomenal rise of the independent church movement throughout the world to a great extent, therefore, is simply a continuation of religious men seeking to create religion after their own desires. They are thus man-made religions simply because their origins were not based on a desire of men to return to the authority of the Scriptures. They are only the result of religious people who seek to help their fellow man to be only religious.

Religion is promoted by men, Christianity by the gospel.

In order for such religions to per-

petuate themselves, emphasis must be placed on those who are skilled in speaking, or in the case of traditional religions, on those who know and speak the traditions of the fathers. Since the authority of religion is man-originated, then of necessity the religion must be based on either personalities or precepts of men. Man-made religion, therefore, is inherently man focused and directed by those who know the traditions of the fathers, or adherents who follow the leadership of charismatic personalities.

Because some religions of men are so man focused, they lend themselves to being spontaneously generated by dynamic personalities. Dynamic vocal leaders who misuse their gift to speak often flatter adherents into a “church,” and then preside over the huddled group by proclamations from the pulpit that “God told them” or they “had a dream.” When the self-proclaimed “apostle” or “prophet” goes away or dies away, his sheep are often scattered, revealing that the “church” (religion) he started was sterile of Jesus and a commitment to His word. The clergy of such religions are often sterile steers financially feeding off the good will of deceived cows.

This is the religiosity about which Paul wrote in Romans 16:18. *“For they who are such serve not our Lord Christ but their own belly, and by appealing words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the innocent.”* Religionists do not serve our Lord Christ. Their leadership is based on “appealing words” and “flattering speech.” The result of a religiously dedicated person who has the gift

of appealing words and flattering speech is a “church” full of innocent people with “deceived hearts.” For this reason, one should never judge whether a church is of the truth by the number of members who attend the assemblies. We must remember the words of Paul. *“And this I say so that no one should deceive you with persuasive words”* (Cl 2:4).

F. Religion focuses on assemblies.

Since religionists cannot validate their man-made religion by the unchanging authority of God through His word, their primary validation for existence beyond the keeping of their traditions is their assemblies. **Man-made religions are audience oriented.** The assemblies are focused on what the individual attendees receive when they attend. The planners of the assemblies, therefore, place great emphasis on performances during the assemblies that insure that all attendees “get something out of the assemblies.” The planners know that an uninspired audience at the end of the assembly will be less in number next Sunday morning. Therefore, the assemblies of man-made religions are very organized, inspirational and orchestrated for attracting attendees, **for the number of attendees present is used as a measure of identifying the strength and continuation of the religion.** The clergy of audience-oriented religions take great pride in the number in attendance in order to determine their status among other reli-

Religion seeks validation by large assemblies.

gious groups. And in competitive cultures of the world, particularly the West, the number in attendance on any given Sunday morning is a measure of success of the preacher and planners of the assemblies.

The “worship” assemblies of man-made religions are usually not focused primarily on worship. **They are focused primarily on entertaining the attendees.** People are thus encouraged to enjoy the attractions of presentations in order to be emotionally stirred. The attendees are not necessarily stirred to pour forth worship that is in their hearts, but by an inspirational atmosphere from outside, they are stirred to emotionalism, which is often confused with true worship. The emotion of the hour is stirred from the environment, not from the inner man who pours forth worship from his heart. **The difference between entertainment and worship is that entertainment focuses on the people and worship focuses on God.** Man-made religions must focus on entertaining the people in order to build the religion. It is for this reason that religions are primarily audience-oriented, and thus, they validate their existence by their assemblies.

An interesting modern phenomenon for religious assemblies has been the move toward “concert assemblies” that are patterned after the rock concert culture of the last half century. We find nothing as such in the assembly behavior of the first century church, though such concerts attract a great deal of religious people who are drawn by the instrumen-

tal noise and emotional chaos that sometimes prevails in such assemblies. A well-planned concert seems to attract audiences that are given to entertainment. The invention of electricity has made it possible for electronic amplifiers to drive monstrous loud speakers to the point of measuring a great assembly by how much one’s ears ring when the assembly is over. It would be interesting to see how many adherents of these religious groups would show up at such assemblies if the electricity failed, or the electronic instruments were unplugged. Those who would show up at these assemblies after the electronics are all gone would be those who were truly searching for truth.

One is reminded of the great religious assembly at the Temple of Artemis (Diana) in Ephesus in Acts 19. The adherents of this man-made religion carried on for two hours crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.” This was certainly a dynamic “church.” Could it be that this religious assembly gives us a New Testament example of religion that is so typical of many assemblies today in the concert-oriented worship of the modern Christendom?

G. Religion is miracle obsessed.

We must not confuse ourselves when discussing this point in defining religion, specifically those religions that classify themselves under the umbrella of Christendom. We understand that God works providentially to heal the sick in a non-miraculous manner (See 2 Kg 20:5; Js 5:13-16). He works to provide Chris-

tians with the necessities of life (Mt 6:9-13). He opens doors (1 Co 16:9; 2 Co 2:12; 2 Th 3:1,2). He provides an escape from temptations and trials (Rm 8:28; 1 Co 10:13; Ph 1:9; 2 Pt 2:9). He works to deliver people from evil doers (2 Co 1:9-11; 2 Tm 4:18). He aids the saints in times of need (Rm 15:30-32). There are countless other things that God would choose to do in a **non-miraculous** manner. We would affirm, therefore, that God still works, but He has chosen to work today in a providential manner. This work is not meant to either confirm the word of God or his messengers. It is simply God working in the lives of His people to bring about the purpose for which He created the world.

By non-miraculous we mean that God works “behind the scenes” in a providential manner in order to bring about that which is good for the saints. This would be the work of God that is **perceived by faith, not sight. A confirming miracle, however, would be a work of God that was empirically witnessed.** In the New Testament record of Jesus and the apostles’ miracles, there was no questioning of the fact that a miracle of God had occurred (See At 4:14-16; 26:26). The presence of the supernatural work of God was clearly evident in confirming miracles of the New Testament (Jn 3:2; 11:43-45). But we now live in an era when men in their lack of faith obsessively seek confirming miracles to reassure them in their re-

**Providence
is perceived
through faith,
miracles
through sight.**

ligion. They are as Thomas who would not believe unless he had personally experienced the resurrected Jesus (See Jn 20:25).

The religious world, whether of Christendom or non-Christian, is so obsessed with miracles today that whole religions are built upon those who supposedly work miracles to heal the sick and raise the dead. Contrary to what is claimed, the obsession with supposed confirming miracles identifies a religious group as a religion. Though we might argue concerning the work of God in our lives, one thing the modern-day religionist must deal with is the testimony of non-Christian religionists who also claim the miraculous work of their gods in their lives. When spiritists who do not believe in Jesus claim to be healed because they have touched some stone or tree, the modern-day miracle worker must deal with this claim. If he claims that a true confirming miracle took place in the life of the spiritist, then he must accept the non-Christian spiritist in his religion.

We have found that there is such an obsession with miracles today that few religionists have taken the time to use the Bible to define the nature of a true miracle of God. In fact, their obsession with miracles hinders them from considering the definition of the true miracles in the Bible. Their obsession has blinded their minds.

The context of Paul’s comments in 2 Corinthians 11:12-15 could not be more definitive of the modern-day miracle worker who masquerades himself as a Christian. Paul introduced such people

in verse 12. *“But what I do I will continue to do so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.”*

Masqueraders seek recognition.

These supposed miracle workers wanted “to be regarded” as special people, just as the apostles of Christ. They love to be first, stand before the people, and be regarded as key figures in their religiosity. But they are *“false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ”* (vs 13).

We live in a day where self-proclaimed “apostles” and “prophets” pop up everywhere in order to promote all sorts of religious nonsense. We are not uninformed, nor surprised at such, for Paul continued to exhort us in 2 Corinthians 11, *“And no wonder, for Satan masquerades himself as a messenger of light”* (vs 14). Since Satan is in competition with Jesus, the

religions of men are in competition with Christianity. In view of this competition,

Masqueraders want to be apostles and prophets.

Paul concluded, *“Therefore, it is no great thing if his [Satan’s] ministers also masquerade themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”* (vs 15; see Rv 21:8). Those who would not be deceived must understand that there are a host of religious “apostles” and “prophets” out there with flattering lips and “miracles” who want to be regarded as somebody in a

confused religious world. We must remember that they are “deceitful workers.” They are *“masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ.”*

Since people who claim to be Christ-centered in their belief and lives have thrown away their Bibles in defining true miracles, any discussion of this subject is often filled with contention. Masquerading “apostles” will fight for their miracles. But we would at least make some suggestions here concerning the subject. Since religionists have little faith in the word of God to confirm their religion and their miracles, they are driven to validate their faith through other means. That other means is usually some confirming miraculous work in their personal lives. If it is not in their personal lives, we have found that they seek to have their faith confirmed by some miraculous happening about which they heard in a some far away city or other land. But we would challenge these religionists concerning their obsession with miracles. We would challenge them because their obsession with miracles results in the following:

1. They are seeking to walk by sight and not by faith. Paul wrote that Christians walk by faith, not by sight (2 Co 5:7). The religion of the miracle-obsessed person is that he turns this around. He seeks to confirm his religion by sight, not by faith, especially a faith that is based on the word of God. He forgets Romans 10:17. *“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.”* If we understand this passage

correctly, the truly Christ-centered person seeks to increase his faith by focusing on the word of Christ, not by seeking to personally experience miracles.

2. *The sufficiency of the word of Christ is minimized:* It is common that all religionists, even those who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, claim to be working confirming miracles in order to validate their faith. But in the realm of those religions that seek to fall under the umbrella of Christendom, their dependence on confirming miracles in order to substantiate their faith leads them to have little concern for the word of God in reference to their faith. Paul wrote, “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ... so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tm 3:16). We have found few people who are obsessed with miracles who really believe this statement of the Holy Spirit.

3. *The recorded confirming miracles of the Bible are minimized:* John wrote, “*And Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through His name*” (Jn 20:30,31).

There are only seven confirming miracles of Jesus recorded in the book of John.

Obsession with miracles indicates a lack of faith.

Jesus worked many other miracles, but the Holy Spirit inspired John to record only these seven. Therefore, the initial

recipients of the book of John had enough evidence in the recorded seven miraculous works of Jesus that they could believe and have life through Jesus. No more miracles are thus needed to believe and have life than just these seven recorded miracles. What we are blessed with today is a whole Bible full of miracles. What more would we need. Those who seek to base their religions today on modern-day confirming miracles are ignoring the evidence of God’s work that is recorded in the Bible. This leads us to believe that their claim to work miraculous wonders is more about drawing people unto themselves and their religion than in bringing people to believe in Jesus.

4. *Through miracles, religionists encourage people to come to Jesus for selfish reasons.* In 2 Timothy 4:20 the apostle Paul left brother Trophimus sick in Miletus. We wonder why he did this. Could it be that confirming miracles were not meant for the believers, but to be worked only on unbelievers in order that there be no denial of their occurrence? Since a confirming miracle was not worked on Trophimus, then we wonder if his faith was shaken because he was not miraculously healed. We think not. We do not believe that Trophimus originally came to Jesus to be healed. He, as all Christians in the early church, responded to the gospel of Jesus’ death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4). They did not respond in order to be healed.

The early church was not composed of people who came to Jesus to be healed.

Members of the church in the first century became sick. But the church was not a membership of people who had no sicknesses. If it were, then the world would have flocked to this group of people among whom there were no sick people. What would have happened is that people would have selfishly come to Christ to be healed, rather than responding to the message of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. The church of the first century was not composed of a membership of “sickless” people. And we would add that those religionists today who claim to heal miraculously the sick are still full of people with various infirmities, regardless of their obsession with miracles.

Someone always asks how we would be able to simply identify if a miracle is either true or false. The answer to the question is simple (Please read chapter 8). If the one who claims to have worked a miracle is not with Christ, that is, he has not obeyed the gospel of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection by baptism, then you can know for sure that

the phenomenon that he “performed” was not a miracle from God. How, or why, would God allow any miracle to be worked through the hands of one who is not a Christian? Would God allow the non-Christian religionist to work a true miracle in order to draw people away from Christianity to a false religion?

Countless religions have been invented by man throughout history for various reasons. They were born out of darkness and dispelled by the light of the truth. Jesus came that we might know the truth (Jn 8:32). As the light of the world (Jn 8:12), Jesus Christ has judged all man-made religions as false. He is the only way, truth and life (Jn 14:6). He is the one who came and fought against the darkness with the sword of His mouth (Rv 2:16). Through Him, therefore, we have overcome the darkness of man-made religion by walking in the light of His truth (1 Jn 1:7). The answer to man-made religion, therefore, is Jesus Christ. He is the way, truth and life to lead us out of the darkness of men’s religions.

Chapter 3

Focusing On The Eternality Of Christ

Making a distinction between man-made religion and Christianity depends on how one views Jesus Christ the Son of God. Those who do not accept Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, but carry on with religious rites and rituals of men, are certainly religionists, but not Christian. The Muslims and Hindus are often very religious, but they are not Christian.

However, we also live in a world where there are many people, who to some extent accept Jesus, but only as a historical figure. These people too would be understood to have a religion, but the fact that they do not accept Jesus as the Christ and Son of God would classify them as simply religionists. Then there are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the

Son of God, but have no knowledge of Him according to the word of God. These people are often very religious, but their lack of knowledge of who Jesus is would classify them as simply religionists. They would fall under the identity of what Paul explained in 2 Timothy 3:5. “... *having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. And from such people turn away.*” These are those who are “***always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth***” (2 Tm 3:7). Therefore, not everyone who cries out “Lord, Lord” would be considered a Christian. They would simply be religious, though they recognize Jesus as more than a historical character (See Mt 7:21-23).

We live in a religious world where there is an assortment of beliefs concerning Jesus Christ who walked on this earth two thousand years ago. We would expect such an assortment of beliefs among religious groups that claim to be a part of Christendom, but have little knowledge of the Bible. Most non-Christian religious groups may accept Jesus as a great teacher or prophet. But their beliefs fall far short of the claims of the Bible that would identify them as Christian. There are also those who seek to accept Jesus for all He claims to be, but do not do His will. These too are simply religionists. They are “Lord, Lord” religionists who do not the will of the Father.

What is striking is the fact that there are those who would bring themselves under the umbrella of Christendom, but at the same time deny the full essence of

the deity of Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul wrote, “*Therefore, from now on we know no man according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more.*” Deity in reference to Jesus is assumed in this statement. His eternity is assumed. Paul was affirming that Jesus walked on this earth “according to the flesh.” But now He is beyond the nature of the flesh that He embodied on this earth. He is now dwelling in a glorious body beyond this world as King of kings and Lord of lord (See Ph 3:21; 1 Tm 6:15). Such an existence assumes eternity. But what was the nature of Jesus’ “dwelling” **before He came to this world**? Some have denied His existence before His coming to this world. They have concluded that Jesus was a part of creation, and thus, they deny the eternity of Jesus.

There are those today who teach that Jesus was not an eternal deity before the creation of the world, but was part of the creating work of the eternal God. It is stated that “He [Christ] was the first of Jehovah’s creations.”¹ As the “firstborn,” Christ was the first of all that God created, and thus, He was the first to be created.² It is affirmed by some, therefore, that Christ was not part of the eternal Godhead.³ Some have taught “that Jesus Christ is not God, as Jesus himself declared, but is the Son of God.”⁴ They assume that the phrase “Son

**Christians
no longer know
Jesus according
to the flesh.**

**God did not
create God.**

of God” indicates that Jesus was created by God. All such claims affirm that Jesus is not eternal as God, but the result of God.⁵

Some have assumed that Jesus was totally human, and thus, He could not have been eternal in existence before the creation. Some have stated, “When Jesus was in the flesh, he was a perfect human being; previous to that time he was a perfect spiritual being; and since his resurrection he is a perfect spiritual being of the highest or divine order.”⁶ Granted that as God Jesus was a spiritual being before His incarnation. But we must affirm that He was more than a “spiritual being.” He was God. He was not, as some have affirmed, a spiritual being who descended on the human Christ at the time the man Jesus was baptized. Such is the old Gnostic belief of the second century. The Gnostics believed that once Jesus died, He would remain dead forever.⁷ But if one believes the Bible, he

must reject such teachings on the basis that it is affirmed in the Bible that Jesus is eternal. There was no beginning to His eternity. There will be no end. His incarnation was a momentary revelation in time for the purpose of bringing finite beings, that is us, into an eternal dwelling with Him.

In order to be Christian, one must accept the teaching that Jesus was one with God the Father before the incarnation. Though being in the form of God, and on an equality with God, in His incarnation Jesus was still one with God in purpose. In His present state of existence, He is not in the flesh in which we now exist, but is reigning as God over all things. These beliefs define the theology of the faith of the Christian concerning who Jesus is. This understanding of Jesus begins our quest as to whether one is a Christian, or simply a religionist who accepts Jesus only as a good man, or simply a prophet.

Chapter 4

The Preexistent And Eternal Son

The Bible teaches that Christ existed before the creation of the world. He not only existed, but was eternal in existence before He personally created all things. Jesus was in the form of God, and thus, He was God.

A. Jesus was in glory with God.

Jesus was in glory with the Father before the creation of the world. He thus preexisted with God in glory as God.

Jesus affirmed, “*And now, O Father, glorify Me with Yourself with the glory that I had with You before the world was*” (Jn 17:5). Jesus was in glory with the eternal God before the creation of the world, for He prayed, “... *You loved Me before the foundation [creation] of the world*” (Jn 17:24).

Before Jesus was sent “into the world,” He existed with God apart from the world

The eternal Son existed with the eternal Father.

(Jn 3:17). When the world was created, Jesus was then manifested in the flesh. “*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn 1:14; see 1 Tm 3:16), for God prepared for Him a body in which to dwell (Hb 10:5).

From these few passages it is clear that the Bible teaches that Jesus was with the Father before He came into this world. However, these statements do not directly answer the assumption that Jesus was created. They only state that He existed before the creation of the material world. However, John wrote, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God*” (Jn 1:1,2). What is interesting in this statement is not brought out in English translations. The Greek word for “was” is in the imperfect tense, that is, it expresses continuing action in the past. Before His incarnation, therefore, Jesus was in continual existence with God before the creation of the world. Jesus had no beginning.

**Jesus was the
revealed Word
from the
Godhead.**

B. Jesus was of the eternal God.

Genesis 1:26 is an important statement that lays the foundation for discussions concerning the eternity of Jesus. The Hebrew word for “Us” in Genesis 1:26 and 3:22 indicates a plurality of Deity at the time the world was created. Jesus was not created to be a part of the eternal God. He was of the eternal God who created. Moses wrote, “*Then God*

said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness’” (Gn 1:26). Since the passage is talking about the spiritual image of God, then we would assume that the context is not talking about the cloning of eternal beings. God did not make little gods. Man has been created after the spiritual image of God in the sense that there is a spirit within every man.

In Genesis 1:26 the word “Us” is plural. There was thus a plurality in the essence, nature and being of God. Jesus was a part of this plurality, and thus, He was part of the Divine Godhead. He would eventually become the message (“Word”) of God to all men in that He would reveal God to man (Rv 19:13). And since He was the “Word” of God to man, He dwelt in heaven with and as God before the creation (Jn 1:1,2). Jesus was the “bread of life” that “came down out of heaven” (Jn 6:51,62). He existed in heaven before He “came down” to this world.

This point was affirmed by Jesus when He referred to His existence before Abraham was born. “*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, ‘I AM’*” (Jn 8:58). Jesus was talking to the Jews at the time He made this statement. Though they did not believe that He was the Messiah, they believed “*that the Christ abides forever*” (Jn 12:34-36). They were right. Unfortunately, many Jews did not believe that Jesus was the Christ who was in eternal existence with the Father before the creation of the world. They were not, therefore, disciples of Jesus during His ministry. Those who would not accept Jesus today as the revealed

God of heaven, would also not be disciples of Jesus. They might believe in Jesus, but if they do not accept Him as the Christ and Son of God, then they are not Christians (See Jn 8:31). Their theology does not classify them as Christian, even though they may accept Jesus as a good teacher or simply a prophet.

C. Jesus existed in the form of God.

In this discussion, Philippians 2:5-11 is a vital context of teaching. Paul wrote that before His incarnation, Jesus was “*in the form [morphē] of God*” (vs 6). That is, He was existing in the nature, essence or eternity of Deity. He was “*equal with God*” (vs 6). Being equal with God, and in the form of God, cannot mean that He was created to be equal with God in form. God does not create God, for God is eternal. Before His incarnation, therefore, Jesus was God in the totality of all that God is. As God, He did not create Himself.

In order to incarnate in the flesh of man, He “*made Himself of no reputation*” (vs 7). He took “*the form of a bondservant*” (vs 7). In other words, Jesus “morphed” from the essence and nature of God in eternity in order to manifest Himself in the likeness of man. His morphing was an action that He did, not one that was taken by the Father. When He morphed into the likeness of man, this did not mean that He changed who He was, or the purpose for which He existed as the God who cre-

ated man. He was simply God on a mission to bring those of His creation into eternity with Him. Jesus, as God, sent Himself on a mission in order to evangelize the world.

D. Jesus is “from everlasting.”

In Micah 5:2 a prophecy was made of the Messiah to come. “*But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you are small among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you He will come forth to Me who is to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.*” This very same passage was quoted by Matthew in Matthew 2:6 in reference to Jesus as the Messiah. Micah 5:2 was a direct reference to Jesus as the Messiah. We must keep in mind that the prophecy spoke of the Messiah as One “*whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.*” Jesus, the Messiah, existed before His incarnation. His existence was eternal. He was the manifestation on earth of the eternal God who existed throughout eternity.

In the languages of men, there is no better way to state the eternity of Jesus. He was “from everlasting” in reference to our confinement to time. He was also “everlasting” on earth, and now He has gone “into everlasting.” He is the Lord God “*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*” (Rv 1:8). Christianity is defined by those who believe in the “everlasting” existence of the Jesus who was momentarily incarnate on earth as a bondservant in order to accomplish the redemption of man. Any faith that claims

**The Son
morphed into
the likeness
of men.**

to be under the umbrella of Christendom, but does not believe in the eternal existence of Jesus the Son of God is claiming to be something that is totally foreign to

Christianity. If any would claim to be Christian, he must at least believe that Jesus is the Christ, who was, is and will be in eternity.

Chapter 5

Jesus Is Deity

The *New International Version* translation of Jesus' statement in John 8:24 significantly introduces the subject of this chapter. *"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."* What Jesus was saying was that in order to have remission of sins, one must first believe in all that He claimed to be. Those who would be Christians, therefore, must believe all that is revealed in the entire Bible concerning who Jesus is. There can be no options or exceptions in reference to what Jesus claimed to be. We must believe all that He defined Himself to be.

In His incarnation, Jesus became as man. He gave up being in the form of God and on an equality with God in nature. However, before His incarnation, we must not confuse His existence in His state of incarnation with His existence before He came into this world. As Paul said, we do not know Him now according to the flesh (2 Co 5:16). We must also understand Him before His incarnation that He existed in a state that was **"not according to the flesh."**

A. Jesus is Deity.

Jesus is part of the eternal Godhead.

The Greek word *theotatos* (Godhead) is used in the New Testament only in Colossians 2:9. In some translations the word "Godhead" was manufactured to translate the word *theotatos*. However, a better translation would be, *"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."* *Theotatos* in

**The Godhead
is the Father,
Son and
Holy Spirit.**

this text refers to a state of being God or Deity. The word "Godhead" is an invented English word to define God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Since there are no words in any language of man that would adequately define the nature of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then the word "Godhead" must be defined exclusively by the revelation of God through His word. There is nothing wrong with the word as long as we use the Bible as the dictionary to define its meaning.

In His present state of existence, Jesus as God dwells as the resurrected and reigning King of kings. This is the Jesus we do not now know according to the flesh (2 Co 5:16). In reference to His state of existence before creation, Jesus was God (Jn 1:1,2). The Christian is defined by his theology of understanding who Jesus is as God. Christians un-

derstand Jesus beyond the physical nature of His existence in His incarnation. Christians, therefore, do not confine their understanding of Jesus to His state of incarnation.

There is more to Jesus than what is defined in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, for the records of these historical books were written by the Holy Spirit with the words of men. Unfortunately, in understanding who God is we are confined to the definitions of our own words. Our words are defined by our experiences and relationships with all that is of the physical world. Therefore, we must not limit God to the definitions of our words. The fullness of Jesus is thus beyond the definition of our words. But what is revealed of Him in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John gives us sufficient understanding to believe, which belief will take us into eternity with Him.

B. Jesus is God.

The Bible emphasizes the deity of Jesus by referring to Him as God. Before His incarnation, John affirmed that Jesus “*was God*” (Jn 1:1). Matthew 1:22,23 is a quotation of Isaiah 7:14, a prophecy and reference to Jesus being “*God with us.*” And in reference to Jesus, Paul wrote, “*Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever*” (Rm 9:5). When Thomas had touched the resurrected body of Jesus, Jesus did not correct him when he spontaneously proclaimed, “*My Lord and my God*” (Jn 20:28). Jesus is our God and Savior (2 Pt 1:1; see Ti 2:13). He is our true God

and eternal life who was revealed in the flesh of man (1 Jn 5:20). No man could ever be proclaimed as such, and thus, Jesus was not just any other man. He was the incarnate revelation of God to man. If there are those religious people who do not accept the totality of what is revealed of Jesus as God, then they are simply religious people promoting a religion that is confined to the minds of men.

C. Jesus is the Mighty God.

Isaiah 9:6 is a prophecy in reference to Jesus. “*For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given. And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, **Mighty God**, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*” Some have affirmed that this passage indeed refers to Jesus as the Messiah, but they fail to consider the

**The Mighty God
was revealed
through Jesus.**

fact that the passage speaks of Jesus as the “Mighty God.” Prophecies as Isaiah 9:6 that refer to the Messiah, therefore, were more than prophecies in reference to the coming of a unique person in the history of Israel. The prophecies were of God coming in the manifestation of the Messiah.

Consider Isaiah 9:6 in the context of Isaiah’s Messianic message to Israel. In Isaiah 10:21 Isaiah wrote, “*The remnant will return, even the remnant of Jacob, to the **Mighty God.***” The context of verse 21 is in reference to “*the Lord, the Holy One of Israel*” in verse

20. Since the same Hebrew word for “mighty” that is used in Isaiah 9:6 is also used in Isaiah 20:21, we would conclude that both contexts are speaking of the same God. And since Isaiah 9:6 is a prophecy in reference to Jesus, then we would conclude that the remnant of Israel would be restored to the Mighty God Jesus.

The same word for “mighty” is also used in Jeremiah 32:18. Jeremiah referred to the “*great and Mighty God*” (See also Is 45:22). We must conclude, therefore, that the phrase “Mighty God” is a reference in prophecy to Jesus as God. Jesus was in existence with and as the Mighty God before He was revealed through His incarnation. Before His incarnation He was one with the Mighty God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

D. Jesus is inherently eternal.

God is inherently eternal. He cannot go out of existence since He is God. And since we are affirming that Jesus is eternal, then we must affirm also that He cannot go out of existence. When we speak of Jesus being inherently eternal, then we are speaking of Jesus as God who is inherently omnipotent, for all that exists must have originated from God. If Jesus is of the eternal and omnipotent Godhead, then we would expect the Scriptures to teach such. And they do, especially, when Jesus spoke of His “death.” Since God cannot die, then we would assume that He spoke only of the death of His physical body, not His eternal being, for God cannot cease to exist.

In John 2:19 Jesus said to the Jews, “*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*” (See vs 22). In this statement Jesus spoke of the resurrection of His body. He had the power to lay His body down in death, and He had the power to raise it up. “*Therefore, My Father loves Me because I lay down My life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again*” (Jn 10:17,18). If Jesus were not one with God the Father, then we might conclude that there is a contradiction with the statements of John 2:19; John 10:17,18 and what is stated in Acts 2:32 and similar statements that God raised Jesus from the dead. Peter proclaimed on Pentecost, “*This Jesus God has raised up, to which we all are witnesses*” (At 2:32; see Cl 2:12). We must conclude that in His death, Jesus did not cease to exist (See 1 Pt 3:18,19). He did

The Godhead raised Jesus from the dead.

not cease being one with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When Jesus stated that He had power to lay down His body in death, He as a part of the eternal Godhead, had the power to raise it up again. When it is stated that “God” raised Jesus from the dead, then we must conclude that the Godhead (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) worked as one in raising the incarnate body of the Son from the dead.

E. Jesus is the LORD Jehovah.

Depending on the particular trans-

lation, the words “LORD” or “Jehovah” are used to translate the Hebrew *Yahweh*. Most translations today use the word “LORD,” in all capitals, instead of Jehovah. *Yahweh* is the Hebrew word that is used in the Old Testament to refer to all that God is. It is thus interesting to follow the use of this word throughout the Old Testament, specifically in Old Testament passages that are quoted in the New Testament in reference to Jesus being one with *Yahweh*.

1. Isaiah 6:5: “*Woe is me,*” Isaiah stated, “*for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of armies.*” In a prophetic vision, Isaiah saw the glory of the King, the LORD (*Yahweh*) of armies. In John 12:37-41, John quoted from the context of Isaiah 6:8-10 and affirmed that the prophecy was of Jesus whom Isaiah had seen. Thus Jesus was the LORD Jehovah whose glory Isaiah saw. In His preexistent state, Jesus was one with God, and thus, He was the LORD Jehovah who was revealed to the prophets.

2. Isaiah 40:3-5: “*Prepare the way of the LORD [Yahweh]. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God*” (vs 3). “*And the glory of the LORD [Yahweh] will be revealed and all flesh will see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken*” (vs 5).

Now consider the fact that John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy that one
Jesus is one with the eternal Yahweh.
 prepare the way for

the LORD (Lk 3:4; Mt 3:1-3; Mk 1:3; Jn 1:23). However, John prepared the way for Jesus (Mt 3:1-3). The logical conclusion is that John prepared the way for the prophesied LORD, who is *Yahweh* (God). We would thus conclude that Jesus was of the *Yahweh* about whom Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 4:2-5.

3. Isaiah 43:11: “*I, even I, am the LORD [Yahweh], and besides Me there is no savior.*” According to this statement, there is no Savior other than the LORD Jehovah. Paul wrote in Titus 2:13 that Jesus is our Savior. Thus Jesus is the LORD Jehovah who is our Savior.

4. Isaiah 44:6: “*I am the first and I am the last, and besides Me there is no God*” (See Is 41:4; 48:12). Only the LORD Jehovah is the first and the last. But in Revelation 1:17 and 2:8 Jesus claims to be “the first and the last.” Since Jesus is one with the LORD Jehovah about whom Isaiah wrote, then Jesus is also the LORD Jehovah since He is the first and the last.

5. Isaiah 45:5: “*I am the LORD [Yahweh] and there is no one else. There is no God besides Me.*” There is no other God than the LORD Jehovah. John affirmed that Jesus is God (Jn 1:1). Thus Jesus and the *Yahweh* (the LORD) of Israel are the same. Jesus is one with God, and thus, He is God.

F. Jesus is worshiped as God.

We are the result of the creative work of God. Specifically, we are the result of the creative work of God the Son. Paul wrote, “*For by Him [the Son]*

all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him" (Cl 1:16).

**The Son
was the Creator
of all things.**

And John added, "*All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*" (Jn 1:3; See Hb 1:2). Now it does not take a lot of reasoning to make some logical conclusions from the fact that Jesus was the creator of all things. First of all, since only God can create, then Jesus must be God. Second, since only God is to be worshiped, then Jesus, as God is to be worshiped.

The worship of Jesus throughout His ministry took place on several occasion. At His birth, wise men came and worshiped Him (Mt 2:1,2). During His earthly ministry different people came and worshiped Him (See Mt 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 18:26; 28:9,17; Jn 9:38). After he came to his senses in reference to the resurrected Jesus, Thomas worshiped Jesus (Jn 20:28). In His present ascended position at the right hand of God, Jesus is worshiped by the angels (Hb 1:6). Add to this the fact that throughout the epistles the holy writers wrote in a worshipful manner in reference to Jesus (See Ti 2:13; 2 Pt 1:1; 3:18).

Only God is to be worshiped. And since there is no condemnation in the

New Testament of any man or angel who worshiped Jesus, then we would conclude that the Holy Spirit's inspired record of men and angels who worshiped Jesus assumed the deity of Jesus. Men must honor the Son as they honor the Father (Jn 5:23). And for this reason, they must worship the Son as they would worship the Father.

Neither men nor angels are to be worshiped (See At 10:35,36; Rv 10:10; 22:8,9). If Jesus were just a man, then it would have been wrong for men to worship Him. But the fact that He accepted the worship of men proves that He was God and worthy of worship. If He knew that He was not God, but a mere man, then it would have been arrogant on His part to accept the worship of men. In fact, His acceptance of worship if He knew He was only a man, would negate Him as any trustworthy religious leader. He would have been arrogant to accept the worship of men.

The Hebrew writer quoted from both Psalm 97 and Psalm 102 in the first chapter of Hebrews. The psalmist referred to the LORD Jehovah (Yahweh) in the contexts of both Psalms. But in Hebrews 1 the two Psalms are quoted in reference to Jesus as the LORD Jehovah. He is the LORD Jehovah who is worthy of worship and praise. Christians, therefore, accept Jesus as God who is worthy of worship.

Chapter 6

Was The Son Created?

In view of the truths of the preceding chapter, it seems almost superfluous to make the arguments of this chapter. Nevertheless, we must focus our attention on the subject of this chapter simply because there are those who call themselves under the umbrella of Christendom, and yet, they deny the eternality of Jesus as one with the eternal Godhead. Because they make such a claim, they would be considered religionists, but not Christians.

One of the interesting teachings that was taught in the last century was the concept that Jesus the Son of God was simply the creation of the eternal God. He was not eternal, but as the Son of God, originated as a created being in order to become a sin offering for man. This teaching was derived from some unfortunate erroneous interpretations of words and phrases in the Bible. Therefore, we need to take another look at the so-called proof texts of this theology. The following are the key passages that have been misunderstood in reference to the existence and ministry of Jesus:

A. Jesus was “brought forth.”

Proverbs 8:22-24 is a personification of wisdom. *“The Lord possessed me [wisdom] in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. From everlasting I was established, before there was ever an earth. When there were no*

depths, I was brought forth” The context of this verse is an exaltation of **wisdom**. It is not a verse of prophecy in reference to Jesus. It is a verse of personifying the beauty and value of wisdom. Wisdom existed before the creation of the world simply because all wisdom was inherent in the eternal Deity who created all things.

B. The Father is greater than Jesus.

John 14:28 is a statement that was made by Jesus during His earthly ministry. *“... I go to the Father, for My Father is great than I.”* If taken out of its historical context, this statement would indicate that the Father was greater than Jesus in being and existence. But Jesus is not stating that He is divinely inferior to the Father. In order to bring the statement into the historical context of Jesus in relation to the Father while He was on earth, Jesus said in John 5:23, *“... all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.”* The context of John 14:28 is Jesus’ personal conversation with His immediate twelve apostles. The historical context is found in verse 25. *“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.”* Jesus was present with His disciples on earth, while He was in a state of having given up being on an equality with the Father and being made in the likeness of man (See Ph 2:6,7). The Father was greater than

the Son in form while the Son was on earth, for the Son was in the form of man.

The earthly ministry of Jesus was only temporary in reference to His eternal work of redemption. After His earthly ministry, He ascended to the Father (Dn 7:13,14). He ascended on high to be seated at the right hand of the Father (Hb 8:1). He is now reigning with all authority (Mt 28:18), as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). He will exist as such and in such a position until His final coming and the consummation of all things. At that time, the end of time, God will be “all in all” for eternity (1 Co 15:28).

C. Jesus is the firstborn and beginning of creation.

Colossians 1:15 and **Revelation 3:14** teach the superiority of Jesus over creation because He was the creator of all things. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:15, “*He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*” It is assumed from the statement “firstborn of all creation” that Jesus was the first to be created by God the Father. But take another look at the context of the statement. The context is the preeminence of Jesus as stated in verse 18. Jesus is the “head” and “beginning” and “firstborn” “*so that in all things He might have the preeminence.*” Preeminence refers to being first and above all else. Reference is not to creation, but to the Son’s value and dominance over all things. This is brought out in verse 17. “*And He is above all things and by Him all things hold to-*

gether” (See Hb 1:3). But the crowning thought that dispels the irreverent concept that Jesus was created is found in verse 16. “*For by Him all things were created*” Jesus was not created, for He was the creator of all things.

Only God can create. God the Father did not create a god in order that this god create all things. Jesus was not the “agent” through which the Father created. As “God all in all,” the Son created all things of His own power and essence. He was the representative of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to carry out the work

**Jesus represented
on earth the
Godhead in
heaven.**

of creation. A work of His eternal ministry was to create all things, including man, and then bring the obedient of His creation into eternal existence with Deity. This is brought out in the last part of Colossians 1:16. “*All things were created through Him and for Him.*” God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit created through the medium of the creating ministry of the Son for the purpose of the Son’s redemptive work. In this way, all men have been created for Jesus and His atoning ministry to bring the obedient into the eternal presence of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The word “firstborn” in the context of Colossians 1 is thus used as a metaphor. In the Old Testament usage of the word, the firstborn had legal precedence over all the other children. The firstborn was first, and thus, he had the legal responsibility to carry on with the heritage of the father. In the context of Coloss-

ians, the metaphorical meaning is in reference to the responsibilities of Jesus as the firstborn of all creation. The metaphorical meaning emphasizes **responsibility** and **privilege**, not origin, or creation.

Now in the context of this point, take another look at Revelation 3:14. “*And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, ‘These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, **the beginning of the creation of God.**’*” The Greek word *arche* (beginning) that is used in this passage refers to that which begins to exist. Reference is to origin and that which causes the existence of something else.

Jesus was the origin of all that exists (Cl 1:16). He was that which caused everything to come into existence (Jn 1:3). This corresponds with Paul’s statements in the context of Colossians 1:16,17. Jesus was “*in the beginning of creation*” since all things originated from Him.

Consider also that the Greek phrase *tou theou* (“of God”) is in the genitive case. It is thus to be translated “of God,” not “by God.” Jesus was the source of the creative work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He was not created **by** God, and then used by God to create. He was “of God,” and because He was “of God,” He had the power to create, for only God can create.

D. Jesus is divine.

John 1:1 has been a disputed passage because of the translation work that

was done many years ago by the translators of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*. The translators of this version rendered the passage, “In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was **a god.**” The *International King James Version* correctly translates the verse, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” All major translations are similar to this rendition.

The *New World* translators assumed that since the indefinite article “a” was not in the text in the statement, “*the Word was God,*” they could add the article, and thus, claim that Jesus as the Word was only “a god.” It is true that there is no indefinite article in this Greek text with the word “God.” In some texts where the indefinite article is missing, it can be added without changing the meaning of the text. However, the text of

**Jesus
is
Divine.**

John 1:1 does not call for the addition of the indefinite article. Its addition changes the meaning of the text. The rule for adding the indefinite article is that it can be added if the meaning of a particular text is not changed. But if the meaning of the text is changed to make it contradict clear statements that are made in other passages, it cannot be added. By adding the indefinite article to the text of John 1:1, the text changes in meaning, and subsequently, is made to contradict other teachings in reference to Jesus.

When the indefinite article is absent from the text, emphasis is on **quality**. When the indefinite article is present, the

emphasis is on **quantity**. The meaning of the text of John 1:1 is the **quality** of the Word. The Word was God, or divine. The Word was Deity and this Deity became flesh (Jn 1:14).

The *New World* translators are not consistent in their use of the indefinite article in the context of the entire chapter of John 1. The indefinite article is not found in verse 6 with the word “God.” Neither is it used in reference to God in verses 12 and 13. But in the text of these three verses, they do not add the indefinite article “a” to the word “God.”

The quality of Jesus as Deity is emphasized in John 1:1. This point is even emphasized in the verb “was” (*eime*). It is imperfect indicative in tense, and thus, emphasis is on **continuous action or state of being in past time**. The Word was in continuous state of existence before the beginning of all that was created. If the Word was only a created being at some point of time in the past, then John would have used the aorist tense which expresses a completed action in the past. But the fact that he did not use the aorist tense emphasizes the fact that he did not want us to understand that the Word was created, and thus was simply “a god.”

Some have argued, however, that the Greek word *eime* (“was”) is **inceptive** imperfect. Therefore, the emphasis should be placed on the **beginning** of a

past action rather than the continual being of that action. But this context does not warrant this meaning. Since only the context can determine if a verb is to be understood as inceptive, descriptive or iterative action, then we must understand the statement of John 1:1 first in its initial context, and also in the context of all other passages that refer to the nature and essence of the Word.

Matthew 5:2 is an example of the inceptive imperfect (See also Lk 5:3; Mk 5:37; At 3:8). Matthew 5:2 could be translated “Then He opened His mouth and **began teaching them**.” The context would allow this translation. In other words, Jesus began at that point in time to teach and His teaching continued thereafter.

John 1:1, however, is saying that the Word was in continuous being at the point of the creation of all things. The Word was not created before all other things, neither was the Word a part of all that was created. There is no translation that renders John 1:1 with the inceptive imperfect. All translations are in agreement that the Word was in existence at the time all other things began. The context of the passage is focused on the divine nature of the Word, and thus, because the Word was God, “*all things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*” (Jn 1:3).

Chapter 7

God Is More Than Jesus

When discussing the incarnation of Jesus as the Son of God, there always arises the question concerning whether Jesus is all there is in reference to God.

Some have concluded, “Since Jesus is God, then we must assume that all that God is can be identified in Jesus.” In other words, there is no such thing as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism in Matthew 28:19 is unto a relationship with Jesus only as all that God is. Some have referred to this teaching as “Jesus-only theology.”

When Jesus stated that He and the Father were one, then some have concluded that Jesus only is God (See Jn 10:30). Jesus said, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (Jn 14:9). But we must not conclude from this that Jesus only constitutes all that is God. When Moses wrote “*the Lord our God is one God,*” we must not conclude that Jesus only is the revelation of all that God is (Dt 6:4). Though we may not understand the nature of the triune God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we must not conclude that Jesus only is all that God is. The following are some points to remember concerning this discussion:

A. God is “Us.”

We must remind ourselves of the statement of Genesis 1:26. “*Let Us make man in our image, after our likeness.*” This is the first indication in the Bible that God is “plural.” Though Genesis 1:26 does not identify the nature of the plurality of God, we must conclude that the one God is in some way plural in essence, nature and being.

The plurality of God is revealed in the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which word is used in Genesis 1:1: “*In the beginning*

God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth.” The root meaning of the Hebrew *El* means God. When *El* is placed with *ohim*, then the subsequent word, *Elohim*, is plural. Thus in the beginning *Elohim* (God) created the heavens and the earth.

**The one God
is plural
in being.**

When the statement is made that God created, the verb “created” is singular. Thus the God of plurality functioned with a singular purpose in order to create the heavens and earth.

The statement of Genesis 3:22 coincides with the context of Genesis 1. “*Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become as one of Us, to know good and evil.’*” After the sin of Adam in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam came to know good and evil as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit knew the evil of Satan. The same plurality is again mentioned in Genesis 11:7. “*Come, let Us [God] go down and there confuse their language ...*”

We must not conclude from the statements of Jesus in the New Testament that He only constituted all that God was and is. The plurality of God was affirmed in the Old Testament. Though the Jews did not understand the totality of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they were at least prepared in their thinking that God was plural in nature. Therefore, when Jesus came as a revelation from the “Us” (*Elohim*) of the Old Testament, they could not refer to the Old Testament in order to refute Jesus’ teaching concerning the coming of the *Elohim* from heaven to earth. They refuted the fact

that Jesus claimed to be from God, but they could not base their refutation on the fact that God was singular, and thus, could not be revealed on earth in an incarnate body.

B. God the Father and Jesus the Son have separate works.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus we can conclude nothing other than the fact that Jesus functioned in His ministry separate in state of being from the Father who was in spirit in heaven. However, both the Father and Son functioned as one in purpose in order to bring about the redemptive work of the Son. We would thus expect that the Father and Son would communicate separately during the ministry of Jesus on earth in His incarnate state. Their communication to man, therefore, manifests that they were two in part functioning as one in purpose.

John 17 is a key discussion of Jesus in reference to this subject. The entire chapter was a prayer of Jesus to the Father. The fact that Jesus was praying to the Father would certainly refute the idea that Jesus only constituted all that God was. Jesus began this personal prayer between Himself and God the Father by making the statement, “*Glorify Your Son so that Your Son **also** may glorify You*” (vs 1). The word “also” begins the identity in the prayer that there is a difference between the incarnate Son on earth and the Father who was at the time in spirit in heaven. The word “also” is used again

in verse 21. “... *that they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they **also** may be one in Us ...*” (vs 21). As the Father and Son are one, so Jesus wanted the apostles to be one in purpose. Jesus could not have used the phrase “one in Us” unless He was one with the Father in purpose.

The apostles certainly did not become one person. They were twelve, but one in spirit and purpose, as also was the Father and Son. The meaning is also expressed in Matthew 19:5 where it is stated that a man and woman become one in marriage. They remain two individuals, but they become one person in the eyes of God. The man and woman remain two different individuals in their function in life, but they become one in the unity of a marriage bond.

God the Father and Son are two in function, but they remained one in spirit when the Son was incarnate on earth. Because they are spiritually one in essence, nature and existence does not mean that they are one in function. In the redemption of man, the Father and Son have two functions in order to bring man into eternity. But they work as one in order to accomplish this mission.

John wrote, “*This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son*” (1 Jn 2:22). The word “and” separates the identity of the Father and Son, but the essence and nature of God is always one. This is brought out in 1 John 4:14. “*And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*” The Father was the “sender” and the Son was the “Savior.”

Now take this thought back to John 1:1. “*In the beginning was **the** Word, and **the** Word was with God, and **the** Word was God.*” The definite article “the” is used to identify something that is specific. If the article is not used, then something generic is indicated. For example, when we say “the man,” then we are referring to a specific individual. But when we say “man,” then we are referring to mankind in general. In John 1:1 the Word is identified as “the” Word. The Word was with God. It does not say that the Word was with “the” God. The Word was specific, but God was generic. In other words, “the” Word (Jesus), was with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Word was incarnate (Jn 1:14). But the totality of God remained spirit (Jn 4:24). The Word was sent into the world, but God the Father and Holy Spirit remained in spirit form.

There are numerous references throughout the Bible that teach the plurality of God. In reading these passages, one cannot come to the conclusion that Jesus is all that God is. The totality of God is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Though we do not understand this totality, we accept it as true.

PLURALITY OF GOD

Psalm 110:1; Matthew 27:46; Mark 13:32; John 6:38; 14:16, 28; 15:26; Acts 2:33; 7:55; 1 Corinthians 15:28; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 3:14; 4:4-6; 5:18-20; Hebrews 2:3,4; 6:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20,21

C. Baptism is unto God.

The “Jesus-only theology” is in some way encouraged by the erroneous conclusion of some people concerning what some suppose they must say at the time they baptize someone. Some have believed that there is almost some “magical” or “spiritual” connotation placed on what is said at the time one is baptized. At least, some believe one’s baptism is validated by what is said by the baptizer. But in the New Testament, **nothing is said concerning what must be said at the time one person baptizes another.** The fact that nothing is said in the New Testament that must be said, leads us to conclude that nothing need be said.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, “*Going, therefore, disciple all the nations, baptizing them **into** the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit.*” Some have erroneously used this passage to establish a creed that these words must be said at the time one is baptized. But this is not what the passage is saying. Jesus speaks of **what is done**, not what is to be said. One is baptized **into** the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word “into” comes from the Greek word *eis*. The meaning is that one is baptized into a relationship, specifically a covenant relationship, with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is emphasizing what happens at the time the disciplined person is immersed. To make what is done into a formal statement that must be said, is certainly going beyond the meaning of the text, if not establishing a creed of men that is based on an errone-

ous interpretation of the text. We must keep in mind that Jesus did not command His disciples what to say at the time they baptized someone. He simply revealed to them what to do. And when they did what He said, He explained what took place in the spiritual realm concerning the one who was baptized into a covenant with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Throughout the book of Acts, Luke used the phrase “in the name of Jesus” as in his quote from Peter in Acts 2:38. “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus ...*” (see also At 10:48, compare 1 Co 1:13). Notice carefully what Peter meant. It is similar to the statement that Jesus made in Mark 9:37. “*Whoever receives one of the little children in My name, receives Me.*” Jesus was not speaking of something that must be said when the little children came unto Him. Receiving the little children was representative of receiving Jesus. The receiving in the name of Jesus was something that was done, not something that was said. The receiving of little children, therefore, was not validated by something the apostles were to say when they received little children.

In Acts 2:38 Peter used the word *epi* in the phrase “in [*epi*] the name of Jesus.” He thus commanded them to be baptized “on the basis of” the name Jesus Christ. Their immersion would be valid only if it were based on Jesus. The validation of the baptism, therefore, was not based on something the baptizer was to say at the time he baptized someone.

Working “in the name of Jesus” means working under the authority that

goes with that name. Consider these passages: “*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk*” (At 3:6). “*And they called them and command them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*” (At 4:18; see 5:40). Paul “*preached boldly in Damascus in the name of Jesus*”

Christians are the representatives of Christ.

(At 9:27). Paul “*spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus ...*” (At 9:29). “*I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her*” (At 16:18). In the book of Acts, when one spoke or worked as a disciple of Jesus, Luke wanted us to know that that person did such as a representative of Jesus. Upon the authority of Jesus’ commission, the early disciples went forth into all the world. The phrase “in the name of Jesus” had nothing to do with what they said in reference to what they did.

What a disciple does is not validated by what he says. If one does proclaim that a work he does is “in the name of Jesus,” the proclamation is to the unbeliever as a statement of identifying himself as a representative of Jesus. A statement need not be made, however, to validate one’s work.

Colossians 3:17 states, “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*” This statement speaks of the total Christ-centered life of the Christian. All that the Christian does is a reflection of his submission to Christ as his Lord and King. One’s life must reflect the fact that

he lives as a representative of Jesus Christ. His works in the name of Jesus, therefore, are a proclamation of Jesus as his Lord.

The phrase “in My name” is also used in Jesus’ statement of Mark 9:41. *“For whoever will give you a cup of water to drink in My name because you belong to Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.”* Christians are representatives of Christ. Therefore, when one does a good deed as a Christian, he is doing the deed to the glory of Christ. Actions, not proclamations, are the evidence of one’s identity as a Christian.

In Acts 10:48 Cornelius was baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ.” The Greek word used here for “in” is *eis*. Cornelius was thus baptized unto a relationship with Jesus Christ. We are not told of any statements that were made by Peter at the time Cornelius was baptized. We are told only what happened, that he was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Because there is no record in the New Testament of any statements that were made by the baptizers, then we must conclude that it is not necessary to make any statements immediately before one is baptized.

“In the name of Jesus” is not a spiritual statement that is made at the time one is baptized in order to validate one’s baptism. Emphasis is not on a statement that is made, but on an action that is accomplished. When one works in the name of Jesus, he is working as a representative of Jesus. When one is baptized in the name of Jesus, he is being bap-

tized as a representative of Jesus’ work of the atoning cross, burial and resurrection for our hope. To degrade “in the name of Jesus” to some simple legal formula of words that is to be stated at the time one is baptized is to minimize the atoning ministry of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection. Obedience to the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the most important event of one’s life. It is one’s obedience to the gospel that manifests his discipleship to Jesus. The sacred event of obedience to the gospel is not made spiritual by what the baptizer might say at the time one is baptized. When one is baptized, all focus is on the one being baptized, not on what someone else is saying at the time of the baptism.

To make the statement, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” or “I baptize you in the name of Jesus,” is not wrong to say when one is baptizing another. However, we must understand that in making the statements, we are proclaiming

There are no recorded statements as to what must be said at the time of baptism.

to those present what is taking place. The one who is baptized should already know why he or she is being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The proclamation, therefore, is not to the one who is being baptized, but to the audience who is present. If the one being baptized does not know the meaning of the proclamation, then he should not be baptized in the first place, for he does

not understand what he is doing or what is happening at the time he obeys the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. If there are unbelievers present, then it is certainly appropriate to proclaim to them what is happening at a baptism. For this reason, we would make the proclamation that one is being baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The baptizer is proclaiming that he is baptizing as a representative of Jesus Christ, and thus he is baptizing in the name of Jesus.

Neither Jesus nor the apostles gave any formula of statement that must be said at the time one is baptized. No specific phrase in reference to what happens when one is baptized is consistently used throughout the book of Acts. Because no specific statements are recorded that must be said, then we would understand that it is the liberty of the baptizer to say what he feels is appropriate at the time he baptizes another person.

Chapter 8

Beginning And Continuing With Jesus

We come to this final chapter that focuses on the primary response that one must make in order to begin a Christ-centered faith. This is the focal point that distinguishes Christianity from all religious groups that would like to be classified under the umbrella of Christendom. This is the determining factor as to whether one is a Christian or simply a religionist. The sad point that will be brought out in this chapter is that there are so many people who claim to have a Christ-centered faith, but have neglected one very important response in their lives that manifests to God that they have joined with Christ in life in order to be with Him in eternity.

A. Our hope:

We begin this discussion with the primary desire of every human being. Because of the sufferings of this present world, and the brevity of life, we seek to

have life beyond this world. All religions of man have some system of theology by which people can live beyond this world. Whether under the umbrella of Christendom, or some invented non-Christian religion of the world, men seek immortality. Of all faiths of the world, Christianity has a hope that is unsurpassed by all the inventions of men. Christians have a hope that is *“an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters within the veil, where Jesus, the forerunner, has entered for us ...”* (Hb 6:19,20). Our hope is based on the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Those who believe what Jesus claimed to be, have a hope that is far beyond any invention of man-made religions.

Our hope to live beyond this world is based on one absolute. That absolute is that we must be **with** Jesus and **in the presence** of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Since only God is eternal, then only those who would seek**

eternality must be in the presence of the eternal God. This truth is revealed in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. In the context of Paul's revelation of this truth, he wrote that Jesus will be coming in flaming fire to take vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel. Those who do not obey the gospel, he said, will be "*punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power ...*" (2 Th 1:8,9).

When Jesus comes again, the condemned will be turned "away" from the Lord Jesus and "away" from the glory of His power that is able to sustain them for eternity. All those who **do not obey the gospel** will suffer such a fate when Jesus comes again. The obvious and urgent desire of all men in realizing this fact should be **to be with Jesus**. The hope of the Christian is that his being with Jesus in this life guarantees his being with Jesus for eternity.

The Christian seeks to be with Jesus, both in life and in eternity. The Christ-centered faith is a faith that keeps us close to Jesus in life in order that we be with Him in eternity. The apostle Paul emphasized this desire in his own life. To the Corinthians he wrote, "*We are confident, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*" (2 Co 5:8). He wrote a similar statement to the Philippians. "*For I am torn between the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is much better*" (Ph 1:23). In order to be **with** Christ in eternity, the

"with" must start in life. As Bible students, our goal is to determine when one begins his journey "with" Christ in life that will extend throughout eternity.

B. Beginning "with" Christ:

We now come to the point of determining the true distinction between religion and Christianity. Of all the "theologies" we might address in reference to this subject, this point is the principle truth in determining whether one is a Christian destined for heaven with Jesus, or simply a "believer" who suffers from the deception of man-made theologies in a confused religious world. When we discuss those religions that seek to hover under the umbrella of Christendom, it is this point that will determine those who are Christians, and those who are simply masquerading as Christians. One context of Scripture will identify those who are Christians, and those who are not, and subsequently, those who will not arrive at the desired end of their faith. One of the primary contexts of revelation that reveals this truth is **Romans 6**, specifically verses 1-11.

The historical context of Romans 6 is Paul's reminder of how people of faith in Rome became alive in Christ. He explains when their life **with** Christ began.

1. Questions concerning beginnings of the Christ-centered life: In verses 1-3 Paul asked three questions concerning the Roman Christians' immersion (baptism). The questions were based on exhorting them not to continue

in sin simply because they had “died to sin.” When they were “baptized into Christ,” they were baptized into the death of Christ. He asked the questions of the first three verses, knowing that the Roman disciples knew the answers. Nevertheless, in verses 4 and 5 he answers the question concerning their immersion into the death of Jesus.

2. Buried with Jesus: We seek to be with Jesus in eternity. In answering the questions of Romans 6:1-3, Paul explains that the disciple who is baptized is “buried **with**” Christ. We seek a new life. Jesus was raised from the dead never to die again in

order to give us this life. If we are buried **with** Christ, then we will be raised to walk in newness of life **with** Christ. Our bodies in this new life will suffer physical death, but our souls will never spiritually die. The reason for this is that the faithful Christian will be **with** Christ in eternity because he has been buried **with** Christ in this life. The eternity of the soul, therefore, depends on whether one has been buried with Christ. When we find those who have been buried with Christ, then we will find true Christians.

Paul may have assumed that the Roman Christians did not fully understand what he was saying in verse 4. So he repeats the meaning of verse 4 again in verse 5. Herein is revealed our joining with Christ in preparation for being **with** Him in eternity. Paul wrote, that “*if we have been united together in the likeness*

of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resur-

*rection.” Our walk **with** Jesus in life, therefore, begins when we are united together with Him in baptism. Our eternity with Him begins in life when we are raised from the waters of baptism.*

3. Crucified with Jesus: Our walk with Jesus actually begins before we are immersed with Jesus in His burial. Verse 6 is crucial to understanding the concepts of Romans 6. Before we are baptized, Paul wants us to know something. He wrote, “... *knowing this, that our old man was crucified **with** Him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer be bondservants to sin.*” Before one goes to the tomb with Jesus, **he must first be crucified with Jesus.** When Jesus was crucified, His body died on the cross. Metaphorically speaking, everyone who desires to be **with** Jesus in eternity must first be crucified **with** Jesus in life. His old man of sin must die. When one dies with Jesus, the natural desire is to seek life **with** Him. Therefore, until one goes with Jesus to the tomb in order to be resurrected to “walk in newness of life,” **he is dead.** There is no life in him until he is raised with Christ from the tomb of water in baptism. **Dead men naturally seek to live again.** And so it is with those who have truly died with Jesus on the cross of repentance. Repentance does not bring us life. We bury the dead. **Those who have died with Jesus on the cross of repentance must be buried in order to live with Christ.**

Before there can be life there must be death and burial.

Those with Jesus have been crucified, buried and resurrected.

We know of many religionists who fervently preach that one must die with Christ on the cross. But they have failed to tell the people how they can become alive in Christ. They leave dead men walking around with a false hope, allowing them to believe that they have life without going to the tomb of baptism with Jesus. They give them the false hope of being with Jesus in eternity without going with Jesus to the tomb of water. **The difference between the religionist and the Christian is that the Christian has died with Christ on a cross of repentance, and also has been buried with Christ in baptism in order to be raised to walk in newness of life.** The religionist who believes in Christ, but has not gone to the tomb of water in baptism, is simply a walking dead man. He died on the cross with a repentant experience, but has never gone to the tomb with Christ.

4. Live with Christ: The religionist cannot have the hope that Paul revealed in Romans 6:8. *“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him”* Paul’s focus is on crucifying the old man of sin in order that the resurrected man might dwell with Christ in eternity. In verses 1-6 he explained the transition from death to life, mentioning baptism as a necessary part of this transition. From verse 6 and throughout the chapter he does not mention baptism again. Some feel, therefore, that we can allow dead men who have been crucified with Christ to continue without burying them for the purpose of raising them to walk with Christ in life. But we must not allow ourselves to miss

the importance of baptism with Christ. Our journey with Christ is initiated at the cross, but our new life with Him in this life begins when we are raised with Him from the waters of baptism. And unless we are raised with Him, we cannot be with Him in eternity.

Jesus followed the same transition of death to life in Mark 16:16. *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe will be condemned.”* Some have erroneously concluded that baptism with Christ is not necessary because in the last phrase of this statement of Jesus, Jesus did not mention baptism. But it is like eating food. He who eats food and digests it will live. But he who does not eat food will die. There is no sense talking about digestion when one does not eat food. Likewise, there is no sense talking about baptism if one does not believe.

The conclusion is that the Christ-centered life begins when one believes that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God, and then repentantly crucifies the old man of sin. However, one’s crucifixion with Christ is only the beginning of his journey to the new life. Crucifixion brings death, and there is no life in the dead. Crucifying oneself in repentance does not bring life. Dead men seek life. The person who has truly died with Christ will seek to live. **The only way we can discover those who have truly died in repentance is if they are looking for a tomb in which they can be buried and from which they can be raised to live again.** If the dead are not looking for a

tomb, then they have deceived themselves into thinking that they have life in their death. We must never forget that which is most important to do in order to be within the eternal preserving power of Jesus forever is where Satan will do his best work. And certainly in the religions of the world, Satan has performed marvelously in keeping dead men dead. He has deceived the dead into believing that they are alive outside obedience to the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We would conclude by defining a Christian as a dead man who found a tomb of water in order to be bur-

ied **with** Jesus. He was buried with Jesus in order to be raised **with** Him to walk with Him in newness of life. Religions that do not teach people to obey the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, are simply religions. They are not Christianity.

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