

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

- A. Introduction: In our present series I'm challenging you to become a regular reader of the New Testament. To that end, we are addressing obstacles that sometimes prevent Christians from effective Bible reading.
1. It isn't unusual to hear some people say that the Bible is a book of myths and that it is filled with errors and contradictions. If you are unable to answer these charges, they can undermine your confidence in the Bible and dampen your enthusiasm to spend time reading it.
 - a. For the last few weeks we've been talking about why we can trust the Bible. When we understand who wrote the New Testament and why and then examine the evidence for how it was written, transmitted, and preserved, it's clear that we can trust the Bible's accuracy and truthfulness.
 - b. We've made the point that the men who wrote the New Testament did not set out to write a religious book. Neither was their motive fame and fortune. They received none of that, and most of them died gruesome deaths as martyrs due to their faith in Jesus.
 1. All of the authors were eyewitnesses of Jesus (or close associates of eyewitnesses), and Jesus commissioned these eyewitnesses to tell the world what they had seen—Jesus alive after He was dead. This singular fact transformed their lives and motivated their writing.
 2. These eyewitnesses wrote the documents that make up the New Testament to facilitate the spread of a vital message: Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, salvation from sin is now available to all who believe on Him. Luke 24:44-48; John 20:31; Luke 1:1-4; etc.
 2. Last week we addressed the charge that some make that the first Christians didn't believe that Jesus is God or that He rose from the dead. Critics maintain that those are myths added many years later.
 - a. But we pointed out that in some of the documents Paul the apostle wrote there are several creeds and hymns used by the first Christians. In the last lesson we looked at I Cor 15:1-4 and Phil 2:6-11.
 1. These creeds and hymns can be dated to just a few years after the resurrection—before any portion of the New Testament was written.
 2. These early oral traditions make it clear that, from the beginning, Christians believed that Jesus is God and that He rose from the dead.
 - b. Col 1:15-20 is another early creed. It states that Jesus is the image of the invisible God and the creator of all things and that He rose from the dead. Consider a few points for now.
 1. The Greek word for translated image (v15) means the very substance or essential embodiment of someone or something. The first Christians believed that Jesus is the very substance or essence of God. In Him all fullness dwells (v19).
 - A. Paul amplified this statement later in his epistles (Col 2:9) when he says that in Jesus dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Godhead means deity.
 - B. Col 2:9—In him there is continuously and permanently at home all the fullness of absolute deity in bodily fashion (Wuest).
 2. Jesus is the firstborn of every creature (v15)—a reference to the fact that (as God) He is the Creator (Gen 1:1). They believed that Jesus created all, is before all, and sustains all (v17).
 - A. Jesus is the beginning. Beginning means the origin or active cause. He is the uncreated first cause. They believed that Jesus was the first to come out of death, and through His blood we have been reconciled to God (v18-20). Firstborn means preeminent or superior.
 - B. This creed exalts the preeminence (superiority) of Christ. Firstborn means preeminent or superior. Jesus is supreme. Col 1:18—He is the Beginning, the First-born from among the dead, so that He alone in everything and in every respect might occupy the chief place—stand first and be pre-eminent (Amp).
- B. To fully appreciate who Jesus is and what the first Christians believed about Him, we need to repeat and add

to some things we said last week about the nature of God.

1. The Bible reveals that God is one God (one Being) who simultaneously manifests as three distinct Persons—the Father, the Son (or the Word), and the Holy Spirit.
 - a. These three Persons are distinct but not separate. They co-inhere or share one Divine nature. They are Persons in the sense that they are self aware and aware of and interactive with each other.
 1. God is not one God who manifests three ways—sometimes as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Holy Spirit. You can't have one without the others. Where the Father is, so is the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father is all God and so are the Son and Holy Spirit.
 2. This is beyond our comprehension because we are talking about the Infinite God who is eternal and without limits—and we are finite or limited beings. All efforts to explain the nature of God fall short. We can only accept what the Bible reveals and rejoice in the wonder of God.
 - b. Two thousand years ago the Word incarnated or took on a full human nature and entered this world. The Holy Spirit formed the body (or human nature) of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He took on flesh so that He could take our place on the Cross and die for our sin. Heb 10:5; Heb 2:9-15
 - c. Jesus is God become fully man without ceasing to be fully God. While on earth, Jesus did not live as God. He veiled His deity and lived as a man in dependence on God the Father and God the Holy Ghost. John 14:9-10; Acts 10:38
2. Luke 1:35—When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and she would give birth to a son, Gabriel told her that this holy person would be called the Son of God.
 - a. Because Jesus is called the Son of God, people get confused about who and what He is. Some mistakenly think that Jesus is somehow less than God, less than the Father, or not God at all.
 - b. This is where understanding how to read the Bible is so important. Remember that everything in the Bible was written or spoken by someone to someone about something. The first question we must answer to properly interpret any statement is: What would this have meant to the people to whom it was first written or spoken? How would they have understood it?
 1. At that time in that culture (Middle Eastern or Semitic) the phrase son of sometimes meant offspring of. But it more often meant on the order of or one who possesses his father's qualities. The ancients used the phrase to mean sameness of nature and equality of being. I Kings 20:35; II Kings 2:3,5,7,15; Neh 12:28; etc.
 2. That's how the first century Jews heard the statement. That's why, when Jesus said that He was the Son of God, unbelieving Jews wanted to stone him to death. John 5:18; John 10:30-33
 - A. Phil 2:6-8 informs us that although Jesus was equal in nature with God, He humbled Himself and became a man for the purpose of accomplishing our redemption at the Cross. Equality of being and subordination in a working relationship are not contradictory.
 - B. When the Word voluntarily left Heaven, took on a human nature, and entered this world, He took a role of submission to the Father. This subordination to God is mentioned in reference to Jesus only after He took on flesh—never before He incarnated.
 - C. Jesus was given His name when He was born into this world. Jesus means Savior. Jesus took on flesh so that He could die and save humans from sin. Matt 1:21; Luke 1:31
3. Jesus is the God-man—fully God and fully man. John, one of Jesus' twelve apostles and an eyewitness to Jesus' entire ministry up to and including His death and resurrection, wrote his gospel to prove that Jesus is God—the Son of God. John 20:30-31
 - a. In the opening passage of his book John makes it clear that Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God: John 1:1—In the beginning the Word was existing. And the Word was in fellowship with God the Father, and the Word was as to His essence absolute deity (Wuest). And, the Word was made flesh and dwelled among us (John 1:14). At a specific point in time the Word took on a human nature and became the God-man.

1. John used two different Greek words for *was* to make his point: *en* (was) which denotes continuous action in the past and *egeneto* (was) which denotes a time when something came into existence. *En* is used for the Word (Jesus before He incarnated, v1-3) and *egeneto* is used for created things (v6, v10), including when the Word was made flesh (v14).
 2. John 1:14—John calls Jesus the only begotten of the Father. The word begotten (*monogenes*) means unique or one of a special kind. Jesus is unique because He is the only Man who pre-existed with God, the only Man whose birth did not mark His beginning—the only God-Man.
 - b. When we read statements about Jesus we must determine if they refer to Jesus' human nature or His divine nature. Obviously, when the Bible says that Jesus was tired, hungry, and tempted to sin, it is a reference to His human nature. Mark 4:38; Mark 11:12; Heb 4:15; etc.
 1. But He was also fully God at the same time, as demonstrated by the fact that Jesus accepted worship and forgave sins—which only God can do. Matt 8:2; Matt 9:6; Matt 9:18; etc.
 2. John 20:17—Note an important point about how to read the Bible. Some say that this verse proves that Jesus was not God, and that He and His disciples knew it. But just a few verses later Jesus allowed Thomas to call Him God (v28-29). Jesus didn't correct Thomas, rather, He blessed him. The man Jesus was not an atheist. His God was God.
 - c. We noted earlier that the creed in Colossians tells us that the first Christians understood Jesus to be the image of the invisible God, the visible representation and manifestation of God to His creation
 1. John made reference to this fact in his gospel. John 1:18—Absolute Deity in its essence no one has ever yet seen (Wuest); the Only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom [that is, in the intimate presence] of the Father, He has revealed Him, brought Him out where He can be seen; He has interpreted Him, and He has made Him known (Amp).
 2. Heb 1:3—Jesus is the brightness of God's glory. Brightness means a shining forth (as opposed to a reflection) of the very character, attributes and essence of God in Christ. Jesus is the express image or exact representation of God's being. The Greek word translated exact representation means the actual mark or impression made by an engraving tool or stamp, and stresses the complete similarity. Jesus is the image or impress of God's substance or essence.
- C. At this point in our discussion we need to remember the big picture or the point and purpose of God's plan. God's purpose in creation was and is to have a family with whom He can live forever.
1. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters and He made earth to be the home for His family (Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; etc.). Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin.
 - a. All humans are born with a sin nature and, through their freewill actions, become guilty of sin before a holy God—disqualified for relationship with God. Because of Adam's sin, the family home has been infused with a curse of corruption and death. Rom 5:19; Eph 2:1-3; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12
 - b. Almighty God devised a plan to recover His family and the family home through Jesus. He would incarnate (take on human nature), be born into this world, and pay the price for sin at the Cross.
 - c. Because of Christ's sacrifice, all who believe on Him are declared not guilty and transformed from sinners into sons and daughters of God (many lessons for another time). Rom 5:1-2; John 1:12; etc.
 2. Gen 3:15—Since the fall of man in Eden, God has progressively revealed His plan to recover His family through Jesus until we have the full revelation given in Jesus—His incarnation, death, and resurrection.
 - a. In another of the hymns that Paul recorded he refers to the mystery of godliness. Scholars believe this was a hymn (creed) because of the way it is written. It has short, unconnected sentences, equal numbers of syllables, and juxtaposed ideas (flesh and spirit; angels and Gentiles; world and glory).
 - b. I Tim 3:16—Confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness; who [Christ Jesus] was made visible in the sphere of the flesh [His humanity], vindicated in the sphere of spirit [as to His deity], seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up into glory (Wuest).

1. There's much in this that we aren't going to discuss tonight. But note one point. The mystery of godliness refers to God's plan embodied in Christ. Col 1:27; Col 2:2-3; I Cor 2:7-8
 2. God obtained His family through Jesus. Because Jesus incarnated, He was able to die as a sin sacrifice, satisfy justice, and bring us to God when we put faith in Him. I Pet 3:18; John 1:12-13
 3. Let's go back to John 1:1. This verse reveals something about God's plan in and through Jesus. Not only has the Word always existed, He has always been in a loving relationship with the Father. The Greek word translated with (*pros*) has the idea of intimate, unbroken fellowship.
 - a. John 1:1—In the beginning the Word was existing and the Word was in fellowship with God the Father (Wuest). God, through Jesus, has invited us into this loving relationship that the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit have enjoyed since forever.
 1. Eph 1:5—His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure (NLT).
 2. I Cor 1:9—By Him you were called into companionship and participation with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (Amp).
 - b. Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God. While on earth He did not live as God. He lived as a man in dependence on God as His Father. In doing so, He showed us the kind of relationship that God the Father wants to have with those who are His sons through faith in Christ.
 4. When we examine the evidence objectively, it is clear that the idea that Jesus is God and that He was raised from the dead is not a myth that was added to the Bible many years later.
 - a. The men who wrote the New Testament walked and talked with Jesus and came to realize that they were interacting with the visible manifestation of the invisible God—God incarnate. Matt 16:16
 - b. Their motivation in writing the New Testament was to help others recognize that Jesus is God and that through faith in Him all of us can participate in a loving relationship with God.
 1. II Pet 1:16—For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the power of our Lord Jesus Christ....We have seen his majestic splendor with our own eyes (NLT).
 2. I John 1:1-4—The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ, the Word of life. This one who is life from God was shown to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and announce to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was shown to us. We are telling you about what we ourselves have actually seen and heard, so that you many have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (NLT).
 5. One of the most important reasons to become a regular reader of the New Testament is to get to know Jesus as He truly is so that you can participate in and experience this loving relationship with God.
 - a. The Scriptures are ultimately about Jesus because He is the one through whom God the Father obtained His family. Jesus reveals Himself to us through His written Word. John 5:39; John 14:21
 - b. We need to find out who Jesus is from people who actually saw Him. Not only will this strengthen your faith, it will help you recognize false christs and apostate doctrine. Both Jesus and His eyewitnesses said that the years prior to His return will be marked by both. Matt 24:4-5; I Tim 4:1
- D. Conclusion: We have more to say next week. But let's close tonight's lesson with another of the creeds that our first century brothers and sisters joyfully proclaimed, Rom 11:33-36—Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods! For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor? And who could ever give him so much that he would have to pay it back? For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory evermore. Amen.