

What Think Ye of Christ? A Study on Romans 1:3-4

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INTRODUCTION

This message from the Book of Romans will concentrate on the words “Son,” “his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,” and “the Son of God” from Romans 1:3-4. The question is, “Whose son is Jesus Christ?”

Some years ago a very nice lady and her teenage daughter came to my door selling the Watchtower magazine. Knowing that they were Jehovah’s Witnesses, I declined their literature and asked them if they had trusted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. They said that they had. Then I asked the leading question, “Who is Christ? Doesn’t the Bible say that he is God?”

“Oh, no,” the woman replied, “the Bible doesn’t teach that Jesus is God. He certainly is a divine son but not God.” She went on, “You don’t believe in the Trinity, do you?”

“I most certainly do,” I answered. “The church from its very inception has held to this concept of the triune God.” I went on to explain to her that if she did not believe that Jesus Christ was the God-man, God incarnate, then she couldn’t be a Christian because the very foundation of Christianity rests upon the fact that Jesus Christ is *both God and man* and to remove this fundamental tenet of Christianity is to destroy the Faith. I explained that if she did not change her belief about Jesus Christ she would go into a Christless eternity. She was willing to call Christ a son, the first created being from God, and in that sense a divine creature, but she would not say that he was God incarnate, the one who is very God and very man.

Christ asked the religious men of his day, “What think ye of Christ? whose son is He?” (Matt. 22:42). Is he a mere natural son? Is he a created son? Or is he the eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity?

The “gospel of God” which was promised by the Old Testament prophets and preached by the apostles concerns God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The gospel is summed up in God’s Son, who is one with the Father.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:1-3).

The one who is coequal with the Father is the very Christ whom all Christians worship.

God’s Son is called: “Jesus,” which speaks of him as the savior who delivers his people; “Christ,” which speaks of him as the Anointed One and the Messiah of the Old Testament; and “Lord,” which speaks of his deity and sovereign authority.

THE SON OF GOD AND THE TRINITY

In the Bible the term “Son of God” is used to declare the deity of Christ — that Jesus Christ is God. The word “Son” is used to express the eternal relationship of the Father to the Son. This is involved in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible refers to the Father as God: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). It calls the Son God: “But unto the Son he saith, ‘Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a

scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom” (Heb. 1:8). In Acts 5:3-4 the Holy Spirit is also called God:

“But Peter said, Ananias, ‘Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.’”

Yet they are one: “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19).

The Bible does not teach three gods (tritheism) or one God with three manifestations (modalism). The Bible teaches three persons subsisting in one Godhead; it teaches one essence or nature and three distinct personalities.

The Trinity is a mystery and incomprehensible to the human mind, but it is biblical. This is a divine riddle where one makes three, and three makes one. Perhaps God is trying to communicate to us in a heavenly language which we cannot completely comprehend. Our minds can no more comprehend the Trinity than a nutshell will hold all the water in the sea. To me, this is a definite proof of the inspiration of the Bible — no man could have conceived of a God in trinity; this could only come by special revelation from God. One of my sons once told me that he could not understand the Trinity. “Neither can I,” I assured him.

We live in the realm of trinities and accept them as everyday occurrences. One trinity is ice, water and steam. Another is an egg: shell, white and yolk. Still another is light: actinic, which is neither seen nor felt (the Father); luminiferous, which is seen but not felt (the Son); calorific, which is felt but not seen (the Holy Spirit). Of course, these illustrations do

not do justice to the doctrine of the Trinity, but they do help us begin to conceive of the real existence of the Triune God.

We accept the doctrine of the Trinity by faith because the Bible teaches it. “Where reason cannot wade, there faith may swim.” The doctrine of the Trinity is not against reason but above it; it is divine revelation. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, and the title “Son of God” refers to the fact that he is God. Someone has said, “If one tries to understand the Trinity, he loses his mind; if he rejects the Trinity, he loses his soul.”

THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

Christ claimed to be one in essence, substance, or nature with the Father:

“‘I and my Father are one.’ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?’ The Jews answered him, saying, ‘For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God’” (John 10:30-33).

Jews, because they were monotheistic, wanted to stone the Lord, for they understood that he was claiming to be God.

Christ claimed that to have seen Him was to have seen the Father: “Jesus saith unto him, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, “Shew us the Father?”’” (John 14:9).

Christ claimed to be eternal: “Jesus said unto them, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am’” (John 8:53).

When directly questioned by the high priest, Jesus Christ claimed to be the Son of God: “Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, ‘Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am; and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven’” (Mark 14:61,62).

Further, Christ made indirect claims that showed him to be God. For example, he called himself the bread of life: “And Jesus said unto them, ‘I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst’” (John 6:35). He also proclaimed himself the light of the world. “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life’” (John 8:12). Christ claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life: “Jesus saith unto him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me’” (John 14:6). Who but God could make these claims?

THE CLAIMS OF OTHERS

The Apostle John said that Christ was God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

The Apostle Paul said about Christ:

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

The Apostle Thomas witnessed that Christ was God: “And Thomas answered and said unto him, ‘My Lord and my God’” (John 10:28).

THE WORKS OF CHRIST

The Bible states: that Christ is the creator and sustainer of the world; that he pardons sin; that he raises the dead; that he rewards the saints; that he judges the world; and that he imparts eternal life. Who can do these things but God?

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DEITY OF CHRIST

Early in the fourth century there was a major controversy in the church in North Africa between Arius, a bishop, and Athanasius, a deacon. Arius believed that Jesus Christ was the first created being of the Father but that he was not deity. Athanasius, seeing the folly of this position, defended the fact that Jesus Christ was co-eternal with the Father, noting that if Christ were not God and eternal, he could not grant eternal life to believers. He was saying that there can be no salvation for men unless Christ is God. Arius said that Christ was homoiousias (like God in substance, but not God). Athanasius said that Christ was homoousias (the exact substance of God, thus that Christ was God). They divided over an *iota* in the Greek, the equivalent of the English letter “i.” In A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicea, the church declared its support for Athanasius’ position. It condemned Arianism as heretical, and affirmed the truth that Jesus Christ is very God and very man. This has been the official position of the church since that time. Interestingly, before Nicea, Athanasius suffered for his belief and was exiled eight times for his trinitarian convictions. But he “hung in there,” and preserved in the church the biblical view of the Trinity. Men used to say, “Athanasius against the world and the world against Athanasius.” Thank God for a faithful deacon! We ought never to think that theology is unimportant.

Today, Jehovah Witnesses are almost a duplicate of the Arian heresy condemned sixteen hundred years ago.

Even though many who had professed belief in Jesus Christ turned away from him after they heard his teaching on salvation and the requirements for discipleship, Peter realized that Christ alone had the words of eternal life, for Christ was the eternal Son of God:

“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, ‘Will ye also go away?’ Then Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God’” (John 6:67-69).

There is no salvation unless Jesus Christ is God.

CONCLUSION

“What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?” You have only two choices and you must decide on one or the other: Christ is either the eternal Son of God, coequal with the Father, and true deity, or he is a mere man. If he is only a man, then Christianity is a farce!

C. S. Lewis, a fine Christian scholar who before his conversion to Christ was a leading atheist in England, stated:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him (Christ): ‘Im ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice as to whether this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not

come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Your eternal destiny hangs upon what you do with the person of Jesus Christ. Reject the fact that he is God, and the Bible states that your destiny is eternal punishment. Accept him as your Lord, God, and savior from sin, and the Bible states that your destiny is heaven. Again the question is asked, “What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?”