

## Essential Bible Teachings

### 4. Jesus – the Son of God

This is the only way that the Bible describes the relationship between Jesus and God – Jesus is **always** God’s son, and God is **always** Jesus’ Father. The trinitarian language of God the Father, God the Son etc. did not start to be used until several centuries later. No-one can dispute those incontrovertible facts. But what we need to examine is whether the fundamental **concept** of the Trinity is embedded within the Scriptures, or whether it is an example of erroneous thinking that has come in later to stifle and ultimately replace clear Bible teaching.

There is a significant point of context to our examination of this topic that we need to take account of. The New Testament itself predicts that error will come into Church teachings. Consider these words from the Apostle Paul:

*I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;*

*and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:29/30)*

And these from the pen of the Apostle John:

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (1 John 4:1-3)*

The existence of erroneous views on what the Bible says ought therefore not to surprise us.

But let’s come to the fundamental question in front of us now – is Jesus the Son of God, or is he part of a triune deity, “co-equal and co-eternal” with God (to quote the language of the Athanasian Creed)?

Here’s an interesting ‘starter for 10’. In the Old Testament God is hardly ever described as a “Father” – a mere 18 times in total, of which the majority refer

to His way of behaving rather than in a relational sense. Here's a typical example:

*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. (Psalm 103:13).*

But when we come to the New Testament it's a very different story – on 260 occasions God is referred to as “Father”. Why the seed change? The most obvious answer is – God has now become a ‘father’ because He has begotten a son. Here are the words addressed by an angel to Mary to inform her that she will bear God's son:

*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. (Luke 1:35).*

For 9 months the foetus developed in the womb of Mary, fertilised not by human intervention but by the power of God's Holy Spirit. We are then presented with the image of a baby, entirely dependent on its parents (mother and step-father), then of a developing child with independent capacities but still subject to the authority of parents, and finally as a fully mature and independent adult. But what is remarkable is that the Bible presents us with a Jesus who, as both developing child and independent adult has a particular and special relationship with God. The gospel writer Luke in particular focuses on this relationship. He is the one who describes the 12-year old Jesus as gently chiding Mary and Joseph when they thought they'd lost him in Jerusalem:

*Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (2:49)*

Luke alone informs us that, at important moments in his life, Jesus is engaged in prayer to God:

- At his baptism (3:21);
- Prior to the selection of his 12 apostles (6:12);
- During his transfiguration (9:29);
- In the garden of Gethsemane. (22:39-46).

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that the prayers in Gethsemane were specifically addressed to Jesus' father. Here are the relevant words from Luke:

*"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." (22:42).*

There's something very significant to notice here, namely that Jesus speaks in terms of his “will” being potentially different to that of his Father. What he is praying for is the strength to subdue his own ‘will’ – namely, and understandably, to find an alternative to the pain and shame of the cross. But,

having articulated his personal, human desire to avoid the cross, he immediately declares that he is ready to submit entirely to the “will” of his Father. Luke then tells us that there is an answer from heaven to his prayer:

*And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. (v43)*

We may imagine that might be the end of the story – Jesus asks for help, and an angel from heaven comes to provide help. But, the record continues:

*And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (v:44).*

The continuing nature and sheer intensity of Jesus’ prayers are only comprehensible within the context of a ‘God the Father-Jesus the Son’ relationship, albeit a very special one. As ‘God the Son’ praying to his co-equal and co-eternal ‘God the Father’, they make no sense at all. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, later on in the New Testament, appears to be commenting on this very event:

*In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. (5:7/8)*

Once again there is a clear distinction being drawn between the one praying and the one being prayed to: the proposition that Jesus was praying to another facet of himself is fundamentally flawed, and makes the whole Gethsemane experience into a total and meaningless sham.

Just to conclude this consideration of the Bible’s emphasis on the relationship between the Father and the Son, let’s look at another event in the life of the Lord Jesus, recorded for us in Matthew 16. Jesus has asked his disciples what people were saying about him. Having given him several answers he then proceeds to ask them what THEY thought about him. Peter replies:

*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (v16)*

But note the response of Jesus to Peter’s declaration:

*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. (v17)*

Now, why did Jesus, on this **one** occasion, refer to Peter (whose alternative name was Simon) as “Bar-Jonah”? Well, ‘Bar’ means ‘son of’. So, Jesus addresses Peter as “son of Jonah”. Why? Because Peter had just identified Jesus as the Son of God. And Jesus is explaining that he was the Son of God in much the same way as Peter was the son of Jonah. People might well have said of Peter that he was very much like his father – a ‘chip off the old block’. And undoubtedly Peter showed lots of the characteristics of Jonah. But no-one

would have said that Peter and Jonah were the same person, just that they were closely related. What a simple but powerful commentary on the nature of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son!

Finally, we must address this question – does it matter how we consider the person of Jesus Christ? Is there really any significant difference between the (non-Biblical) title ‘God the Son’ and the regular (Biblical) title ‘Son of God’? And the simple answer is YES IT DOES MATTER. Jesus achieved something that God could not achieve Himself. It is an over-simplification to say that God is omnipotent and can therefore do anything. He cannot be untrue to Himself. For example, He cannot lie. The Bible records that God *cannot be tempted with evil* (James 1:13). And yet Jesus WAS tempted:

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus did what God could not do – he inherited from his mother a nature inclined to sin; he was tempted to do wrong things (eg Gethsemane!!), but **never did**. He experienced to the full the processes of human nature that lead all of us to sin, but uniquely in human history he overcame all those pressures to give in to natural promptings. He ALWAYS said *not my will but yours be done*. Here is the critical statement – Jesus the Son of God was capable of sin, but he did no sin. As ‘God the Son’ he wouldn’t even have been capable of sin.

The ‘Trinity’ has been described as “Christianity’s self-inflicted wound”. I didn’t come up with that combination of words myself, but they are spot on. If Jesus really was ‘God the Son’, then the following become true:

- Sin has not been defeated
- Death has not been conquered
- Salvation cannot be on offer.

But because he was ‘the Son of God’, then

- ❖ Sin HAS been defeated
- ❖ Death HAS been conquered
- ❖ The prospect of ultimate salvation in God’s kingdom here on earth IS offered to us.

***Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***