

Focus on the Kingdom

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My Spiritual Journey

by Diane M.

This is a revised version of a presentation made at the 2004 Theological Conference.

When I was young, my parents called themselves fundamentalists. As I grew older, they began to use the term evangelical. (In my experience, the difference between the two is mostly one of tone: the manner of presentation of doctrine rather than the substance of doctrine. The stance of an evangelical toward the world is less confrontational and less wary than the stance of a fundamentalist.)

The theology I was taught, and believed, from adolescence through most of my adult years I call evangelical orthodoxy. Some major doctrines are the Trinity, the dual nature of Christ, salvation by faith evidenced by works, eternal security, the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, the immortality of the human soul with immediate heaven or hell after death, and the everlasting suffering of the damned in hell.

I trusted Christ for salvation when I was about five years old. This is how it happened. Since I was the youngest child by eight years, I was often alone with my mother. One morning we went shopping, and one of the things Mom bought was a coloring book for me. It was a special coloring book in which the pictures would turn various colors when painted by plain water. I was very excited by this, and when we got home, I wanted to do it right away. But my mother told me to wait until she could supervise me, so I wouldn't make a mess. She went about her business, and I was left alone with my temptation. Of course, I deliberately disobeyed my mother by painting in that coloring book all by myself. And of course, I made a mess.

Mom was exasperated with me, and thought she had better do something different than just sending me to the "naughty chair" as usual. So while she made lunch, she evangelized me. As I listened to Mom tell me about the temptation and disobedience of Adam and Eve, and about God's promise of a Savior, and about the obedience, death, and resurrection of Jesus, I became more and more convicted of my sin. Mom didn't ask me to pray after her or with her. She just kept making lunch. I don't remember eating lunch, or being punished. All I remember is going to the living

room couch by myself, and lying on it face down, and quietly crying out to God to save me through what Jesus did for me.

Several times during my childhood years, when I became convicted of sin, I prayed again for God to save me, just in case the first time wasn't for real. I wanted to be sure I was saved. In each case, I did this alone, on my own, and not as a result of an appeal in a church meeting.

When I was about twelve or thirteen, I was outside our house with a neighbor friend, and Mom was with us too, probably working in the garden. Somehow the subject of church came up. My friend was going to confirmation classes, and told my mom that their church believed in something called the Trinity, and that it was hard to understand. My mom told my friend that we believed that too, and tried to explain it better to my friend. I was shocked at her explanation, because I hadn't heard anything like it before. I'm sure I had heard the word "Trinity," but it was just one of those religious words that kids know they can't understand. The idea that God was some mysterious Three-in-One seemed strange to me. I didn't understand, but I didn't say anything. I kept my questions to myself.

Shortly thereafter I was baptized. During the preparation interview, I told the elders how I had trusted Christ for salvation when I was younger. I was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, not really understanding what that meant.

As I grew older, I believed as I was taught, that the disembodied souls of the dead went straight to heaven or hell, and that true believers would be raptured into heaven before the tribulation and the subsequent return of Christ with his saints to set up his kingdom on earth.

After high school I went to a Bible school. I don't remember the specifics of what was said in my theology classes about the Trinity and about Jesus. I adopted a theoretical agreement with what I was taught, but I didn't really try to think through the implications, or ponder the many so-called paradoxes, since they were supposed to be mysteries no one could understand. I knew Jesus was a human being, and I figured if the Bible said he was God too, who was I to argue? I never really questioned whether my teachers were correct.

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My husband and I met at the Bible school. We married a year after we graduated. The years went by. We had two boys to raise.

In 1993, we moved to another area. Not too long after we moved, a neighbor invited me to go with her to a non-denominational Bible study nearby. I attended those classes for six years. One day toward the end of those years, I was sitting in the discussion group, sharing my answer to one of the questions. The question was something like, "What are some of the major blessings of your life that you are thankful for?" Part of my answer was, "that I have had good Bible teaching through the years."

As I spoke, a voice in my head said, "How do you know it was good teaching? You've never questioned it."

I believe now that it was God's voice. It was certainly not my own thought. At the time I wasn't sure if it was God speaking or a temptation from an evil spirit. I considered what the voice said very cautiously. I didn't want to succumb to temptation, if that was what it was. But I didn't want to ignore God's voice, if that's what it was. I tucked the voice's question into the back of my mind, and considered it occasionally. I became interested in how we know what is true. I wanted to know more about how to interpret the Bible, and how to think logically. When information came across my path, I paid attention.

At that time in my life, our boys were in their teens. The older one was quiet and very smart and stubborn. He had a strong inner direction. The younger one was all over the place, and all over everybody. He was gregarious, charming, inquisitive, restless, boisterous, contentious, fearless, impetuous, and often in minor trouble.

The difficulty of dealing with our younger son put a strain on our marriage. Neither of us was really competent to parent him. My husband could retreat into his work, but I was on the front line with the problem child. Nothing I tried with him seemed to work. I felt like a total failure. I feared for my son. What kind of trouble would he get into next? I feared that he might disgrace the name of Jesus Christ.

When I knew that I was at the end of my emotional rope, I went into the shower, turned on the water full blast, and sobbed and cried out my pain. I cried out to God, begging Him to bring healing to my family relationships, and to bring all of us to a place of total commitment in service to Him and His kingdom.

Then I heard His voice in my head, saying, "Are you asking this because you want your own life to be easier? What if your life got much harder?"

I thought for a minute. Then I said, "No matter what it takes," and I meant it.

God said, "Hold on tight to Me; you're on a roller coaster and the ride isn't over yet."

I was able to hold myself together emotionally after that, and to deal a little more intelligently with my situation. I determined to keep holding on tight to God, no matter what might happen.

Some time later, our younger son bought a second-hand mini motor bike, which he rode out on the main road sometimes, even though we warned him of the danger. Only weeks after he got the bike, he was thrown from it when it collided with a car at an intersection near our home. He was not wearing a helmet.

He was unconscious when the EMTs arrived. He had very serious head trauma, as well as internal injuries. He remained in a very deep coma, but was breathing on his own. We prayed together for his recovery, if it was God's will. We knew that God could heal him, and we kept up hope.

On the seventh day after the accident, we got the telephone call from the hospital, saying that about a half hour before, he had gone into cardiac arrest, and could not be revived.

Before the shock wore off, I determined to trust and praise God even when I didn't feel like it. When the shock did wear off and the full severity of grief set in, I kept on trusting and praising God. I knew there was nowhere else to turn.

As time went by, the grief began to fade into the background of my consciousness. Then one day, I asked myself questions I had never dared to ask before: What if the evangelical orthodoxy I had been taught wasn't really based on a proper interpretation of the Bible? What if the Reformation hadn't recovered all the essentials of truth that had been perverted during the Roman church's monopoly? What did the Bible really teach?

I knew that to search earnestly for the answers to those questions was risky. What if I found out that I had believed wrong doctrine all these years? How could I know for sure? But I couldn't "un-ask" the questions that were now resonating in my head. Anyway, I figured that if evangelical orthodoxy represented the truth, it would withstand careful scrutiny.

So I committed myself fully to the search for the answers. I began to pray that God would lead me to the information I needed. I prayed for wisdom as I never had before. I trusted God to help me to sort through the

welter of conflicting ideas that I found from every Google search.

For a while I was dizzy with confusion. But even though I didn't yet know which of the many possibilities in major areas of theology might be the truth, gradually I became convinced that something was seriously wrong with the evangelical orthodoxy I had grown up with. For many months, all I knew for sure was that God exists, as the creator of all, and is in some manner the Father of Jesus, who is the Savior-Messiah, in whom I trusted for salvation. Slowly, carefully, I evaluated all the historic options and logical possibilities for each major area of doctrine, testing each possibility against Scripture. I began to build up a coherent theology piece by piece, by eliminating rejected possibilities.

As I began to firm up my new understanding of major doctrinal issues, the web sites that helped me most were the Restoration Fellowship website, the Jesus the Messiah and His Kingdom website, and ABC-COGGC.org. I had bought only one "unorthodox" book before my husband became alarmed by my final rejection of orthodoxy and forbade me to buy any more books. It was *One God and One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*, by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit. By the time I had read it through for the third time, most of my nagging doubts regarding my new beliefs about God and Jesus Christ were resolved.

I have now firmly rejected the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity, the dual nature of Christ, the immortality of the human soul, hell as everlasting torment, "going to heaven" as the reward of the faithful, and eternal security in the sense of "once saved, always saved." I have now firmly embraced what I believe to be the Bible's clear teaching of the absolute unity of God, the true humanity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God who came into being in the womb of a virgin, the sleep of the dead, and the final destruction of those who are unrepentant and of apostates. I believe the promise to believers of resurrection to immortality in the coming kingdom of God on earth to be an integral part of the Gospel message.

When I had become firmly convinced of my new beliefs, I knew that I had to figure out how to explain my transformation to family and friends. Since I have always felt more comfortable writing than speaking, I decided to prepare myself by writing out my new belief system. The process of putting it all on paper helped me greatly to clarify things in my own mind. During the process of writing and revising, I

researched again on many topics, to re-test my new beliefs against the Bible. I am now confident that I have discovered the true Bible teaching on the major doctrinal issues. I still don't have a firm understanding of some of the less basic issues of theology and practice. I'm glad that I don't need to know and understand all the details of theology in order to walk with God.

I realize now that my emotional roller coaster ride will not end until I die. Every hairpin turn, every hillcrest, brings a new combination of difficulties into my life. I'm glad that I don't know what those difficulties will be until I'm actually in the middle of them. I'm glad that God is with me, keeping me safe through it all. I'm looking forward to the end of the ride, and beyond, to resurrection: I'll be reunited with fellow believers who have died. I'll actually see and be with Jesus. I'll be like him.

I'm looking forward to life in the coming Kingdom. What sort of responsibility will I qualify for? Whatever it may be, it will be a welcome challenge, unsullied by personal failure or defeat.

And after that? All evil will be judged and destroyed, and I will live forever in blissful intimacy with God and Jesus and everyone else who remains. I'll be able to use the water of everlasting life to paint the full color of meaning into the promise that is only a black and white sketch to me now. I'm sure it will be worth the wait. ✧

John on John: Breaking Loose from the Tyranny of Dogma About God

The Christian world is plagued by an enormously problematic doctrine. That doctrine proposes that God died! Church members are invited to embrace a theological system in which the Son of God who died is actually fully God Himself. Pew-sitters are assured that *both* the Father and the Son are equally God, but they are immediately told that this does *not* mean that there are two Gods. No explanation of this amazing contradiction is offered, but questioning is discouraged. Since churchgoers have no analogy for the proposition that A is X and B is X, but this adds up to one X, they flounder consciously or unconsciously. The psyche is not helped by feeding it incomprehensible illogicalities.

The average believer has not given much thought to the issue of who God really is. They are expected to hold in their minds the following propositions. Jesus is God. God is the heavenly Father. Jesus is not the heavenly Father. There are not two Gods.

In addition they are urged to believe that Jesus, the Son of God who is also God, died. This latter idea surely adds to their perplexity. After all, Scripture declares in I Timothy 6:16 that the Father of Jesus “is the only one who has immortality dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see.” This text does not deter the churchgoer. He is apparently content to believe that the Father is *not* the only one who has immortality. He is assured that the Son of God also has it, and has always had it, since he is an uncreated being as much as his Father.

Most astonishingly, this same Son of God who they think is immortal — incapable of death — actually died.

It is surprising that intelligent members of the public, who sing the praises of critical thinking in other spheres of human endeavor, do not raise a hue and cry about this standard view of God — presented to them as unquestioned dogma and the only true faith. They are even able to bring themselves, without wincing, to sing these words of Charles Wesley: “Tis mystery all, the immortal dies. Who can explore His strange design?...How can it be that Thou, my God, should *die* for me?”

A God who dies? An immortal God who dies?

Are these concepts worthy of intelligent church members, professing to love God and the Messiah with all their hearts and minds? Or will Jesus have something stern to utter to those of us who sit week by week in church without flinching at the evident crucifixion of intelligence and language involved in the Church’s professed central dogma?

In reply to our complaint the opening of John’s Gospel may be advanced as good biblical support for the mind-numbing notion that God is One, and yet Father and Son are *both* equally God.

But would John, who wrote with the single purpose of getting us to believe that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (20:31) and that we should find the Life of the Age to come in that superb truth — would he have been able to sing or speak of “the immortal who dies”?

In order to understand the opening verses of John’s Gospel it is wise to consult the author John’s own commentary on the Gospel. This he provided in the opening verses of his first epistle.

If we combine John’s own commentary from his epistle we gain this understanding:

“In the beginning was the **word** [= *epistle*: “**that which** was from the beginning,” *ep*: “**word of life**”] and the word was *with* God [= *ep*: “**eternal life** was **with the Father**”] and the word was God.”

John shows us five times in the early verses of the epistle that he meant “*that which* was from the beginning.” He did not say “*he who*.” This demonstrates the fact that he did *not* mean that another person, the Son or the Word (as a person) was with the Father from the beginning. John first defines the word as exactly that, a *word* or self-expression of God. It was in fact that “word of life” or “the life” (I John 1:1-2). That same “eternal life was **with the Father**” (I John 1:3). It was later manifested to the apostles, when they met Jesus. The Son of God is what the word or promise became.

So, then, “the word became flesh” (John 1:14) cannot mean another “who” or person became a man, but that *the promise* of eternal life, the word, appeared as flesh, a human person. Later John says that “eternal life” was *promised* to us (I John 2:25). John also defined “God” for us in John 1:1. It was the Father (I John 1:2).

Since the Father is God in John 1:1, let us try reading the opening words like this: “In the beginning was the second member of the Trinity, the Son, and the Son was with the Father, **and the Son was the Father.**” That will not work. One cannot switch the word God, from Father to something else in the same sentence.

Try this: “In the beginning was the second member of the God family, and the second member of the God family was with the Father and the second member of the God family **was the Father.**”

That won’t work either. So another model must be tried. The only model that makes sense of John 1 and I John 1 is the one which treats “word” really as “word” and not *another Divine Person*. Note that Paul can speak of the Gospel = word as remaining “with (*pros*)” the converts, i.e. in their hearts (Gal. 2:5). The things “with (*pros*) God” are the things which concern God (Heb. 2:17; 5:1; Rom. 15:17).

What we are proposing is simply that the “word” of John 1 means word. The same word “word” had already meant “word, decree, promise” — but never once a person — in all of its 1400 occurrences in the Old Testament. And every scholar knows that John was thoroughly steeped in the concepts of his Hebrew background.

Translations of the Bible, starting with the King James, but not before, try to convince us that the word was really *another person* alongside the One God. They misleadingly put a capital W on word and then refer to it as “him.” The Greek does not require this at all. The “doubling” of God — introducing *two* different Persons as God — caused untold strife, division, excommunicating and the imposing of a tyrannical

“orthodoxy” which was not really orthodox by the Bible’s standards. The results are obvious in today’s divided churches.

What John wrote was this: “All things were made through IT” (the word, John 1:3). That was how Tyndale (1534) and the Bishop’s Bible and the Geneva Bible translated John’s precious account. There is no warrant at all for calling “word” a person, until it (not he) was manifested as the Human Being, the Son of God of verse 14.

Making the word a second Person leads to belief in two who are God and thus “two Gods.” This breaks the foundational principle of all sound religion. The *Shema* had said that “the Lord our God is *one Lord*” (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:28ff). One Lord cannot be two Lords. Two Xs cannot equal one X. Yahweh is the personal name of the *single Person* who is God, and it appears with singular verbs 7,000 times. A further 15,000-20,000 singular personal pronouns and verbs describe God in the Old Testament as One Person, and in the New Testament the *Father* is called God 1300 times. Hank Hanegraaf’s definition of God as “three Who’s in one What” is obviously false. Where in the Bible is God ever called a “what” or “thing”?

If we pay attention to John’s own commentary on the Gospel we should read:

“In the beginning was the promise or word of eternal life, and that word of eternal life was with God the Father [things which are ‘with God’ are things He decrees and promises for the future], and the word of eternal life was God, the Father” (or if we take *theos* in the adjectival sense, as many scholars do here, “the word was expressive of God, had the character of God”). God is said to BE light and love and spirit; Jesus said he IS the resurrection. The word WAS God means simply that God is what He thinks and His word is His creative activity and Plan, just as Jesus said “the words I speak to you *are* spirit and life” (John 6:63), i.e., spirit-imparting and life-giving. You cannot get closer to the heart of God than understanding His word. The word of God reveals to us who God is and what He is doing in His creation. The human being, the Son of God, procreated miraculously within the human biological chain in Mary (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35; 1 John 5:18, not KJV), reveals the very character and will of the One God, his Father. Jesus reveals God. Jesus is the perfectly obedient agent and Son of God. Jesus models the way human beings are to be in relation to God. To say that Jesus IS God simply destroys the monotheism of Jesus’ Jewish heritage, disturbs the first

commandment, and makes him a totally unsuitable model of a human in relation with God.

Can an immortal Person who is God really provide a suitable pattern for us who are human? Would not a human being, mortal and subject to temptation as we are, fit immensely better the requirement of a perfect role model for the rest of mankind?

John tells us that “the word was with God in the beginning.” What else is “with God”? “Light dwells with Him” (Dan. 2:22). Wisdom is “with him” (Prov. 8:30). God supplies wisdom, knowledge and power (Dan. 2:21). All these are summed up as the light which is with God (Dan. 2:22). Life and light are said to be in the word in John 1:4. This is the creative energy of God and these qualities were manifested in the man Jesus. God must be permitted to produce His Son at the time He chooses. The Son *was not*, until he came into being in Mary (Luke 1:35; Gal. 4:4; Rom. 1:3). This exciting story is spoiled if the Son was always alive and active in Old Testament times. If the Son was active in the Old Testament where is he mentioned? What did he do?

Psalms 36:9: “For *with You* is a fountain of life; in Your light we see light” (cp. “The word was *with God*”). The light that is “with God” is the light of God. And so the word that was with God was God’s word, His creative expression and His creative activity. That activity was uniquely displayed in a human being who is the model of man in unity with his Creator. Jesus is the perfect example of the created man, God’s masterpiece, in harmony with his Creator. The whole story is wrecked if it turns out that the model, masterpiece man, the Son of God, is in fact God Himself! Then the whole point of the Son of God as a human model is lost. Satan has in fact triumphed, because it is Satan who says: “The Son is too marvelous to be a man! He must be God.” No. God has ordained that His masterpiece created Son — the pinnacle of God’s purpose to produce sons for immortality, starting with Jesus (quite illogical if Jesus already had immortality!) — God has ordained that Jesus be the perfect human model whose sinless life and direct creation by God qualifies him, with his obedient cooperation, to do exactly what God ordains. And since God permitted even a turtledove to atone in some sense for sin, it is ridiculous to say that the life of the supreme sinless creation of God, whose glory is that he was tempted yet sinless, is inadequate to cover the sins of the world. It is in fact an attack on God to deny that His supreme creation, the second Adam, is incompetent or inadequate to atone for man’s sin. The people marveled rightly that “God had given such authority [to forgive

and heal] to men” (Matt. 9:8). All this is undercut if in fact Jesus was God!

There are 1,440 occurrences of the Hebrew word *davar* (“word”) in the Old Testament and never once does it mean a person, or spokesperson. On what basis would one then import into John’s very Jewish theology a meaning for the word unknown to the Old Testament? This would be the essence of wrong method, since the fatal thing in theology is to cut oneself off from the Jewish roots of the Old Testament.

There is nothing in John 1 to lead us to think of another *person* with the Father from the beginning. That would make two who are God and Jesus himself said that the Father is “the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3). If God is “the only Person who is truly God,” Jesus cannot be the only true God. Jesus is the one *Lord Messiah* (Ps. 110:1; Luke 2:11; Rom. 16:18; Col. 3:24). He is not the Lord God. He is never called the Almighty. There is only one Lord God, and that is the Father. Jesus is the *Lord Messiah*. The Messiah is a created human being, the descendant of Eve and David, promised throughout the Old Testament, but never said to be *already* in conscious existence.

He is said to come into existence in the womb (to be begotten is “to come into existence”). As an ideal ambassador of the One God, Jesus expresses the will and character of his Father perfectly, such that to see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14:9). Yet no one has actually ever seen God literally (John 1:18). One can “see” God in the life and teaching of the perfect, supernaturally procreated Son. That virginal begetting is what makes Jesus uniquely the Son of God (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35; I John 5:18, not KJV). Jesus is the perfect *shaliach*, the Hebrew word for ambassador, “one sent on behalf of another,” of whom it is said “the agent is as his principal’s person.” Thus Thomas addressing him as God is only doing what was done to the angel of the Lord, given a divine title (Gen. 18:3), without actually being God. Rather the angel in the Old Testament and Jesus, God’s Son who was never an angel, are the accredited agents of the One God. Thomas finally realized that “God was in Christ,” just as the name of God was invested in the angel of the Lord (Exod. 23:21).

Psalms 110:1, which is the controlling Christological text of the whole New Testament, cited some 23 times, carefully tells us that the one at the right hand of God is not God. He is not ADONAI (the Lord God, all 449 times) but *adoni* (my lord), a non-Deity superior, all 195 times. Some Bibles have

misleadingly put a capital letter on that second lord in Psalm 110:1, trying to force Deity on the Messiah. The RV, RSV and NRSV have correctly removed that capital L and written “my lord,” which is never a title for Deity.

Scholars of the first rank understand the meaning of “word” in John 1 well:

Dr. Colin Brown at Fuller: “To read John 1:1 as if it means ‘In the beginning was the Son’ is patently wrong.”

Dr. T.W. Manson of Oxford: “I very much doubt whether John thought of the Logos as a personality. The only personality on the scene is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth. That personality embodies the Logos so completely that Jesus becomes a complete revelation of God. But in what sense are we using the word embodies?...For John every word of Jesus is a word of the Lord.”

But did not Jesus say “I am God”? It is well known that he never uttered such a statement. When accused of usurping the Father’s position, Jesus always countered by stressing his entire reliance on and submission to the One God, his Father. Jesus certainly made extraordinary and unique claims. This was because of his unique origin without a human father. “Of the ‘I am’ sayings in this gospel, those with a predicate (I am the bread of life, the door, the way, the good shepherd, etc.) certainly do not imply that the subject is God.”

“T.W. Manson has proposed that the formula [*ego eimi*] really means, ‘The Messiah is here.’ Mark 13:6 says: ‘Many will say, I am,’ which Matthew understands to be ‘Many will say, I am the CHRIST’ (Matt. 24:5).” John wrote his whole Gospel to convince us that Jesus is the CHRIST (John 20:31).

Note: “In John 4:26 ‘I am (he)’ (as the original reads) obviously means, ‘I am the CHRIST.’”

It is true that in the Old Testament God the Father speaks the words “I am.” But in Exodus 3:14, God said “I am the Existing One” (*Ego eimi ho own*). Here the name of God is *ho own*. Jesus never used that title of himself. It is inaccurate therefore to claim that Jesus used the language of Exodus 3:14 in John 8:58. *Ho own* is used of the Father, not Jesus in Revelation 1:8. Red-letter Bibles which make that verse the words of Jesus are misleading. Having the same title does not prove that one is identical with another with the same title. Many are saviors in the Bible, but the Lord God is the only ultimate Savior-Deity. Jesus is the supreme Messiah-Savior. Many are lords in the Bible, but God the Father is the only ultimate Being who is Deity. The Son is the Lord Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Others

can bear the title Lord or God without being the one supreme Lord or God.

John 17:11, 12 says that the Father has *given* Jesus his name. Jesus therefore can bear divine titles as God's representative. The Son is like his Father as a true "only begotten of a father" (John 1:18), but he never claimed *identity* with God. He claimed to function in perfect harmony with God and expected his followers to do the same (John 10:30; 17:11, 22). He denied that he was usurping the position of God in any way, since he "could do nothing of himself" (John 5:19-24). Jesus said he was the Messiah, but never said he was God.

Note John 1:15: "He who was following me has moved ahead of me because he was (always) my superior" (*protos mou*, my chief, my superior). Note the Geneva Bible: "He was better than I." *Pro* is the much commoner word for before in time, in John. No verse says that Jesus *returned* to God, but note the false translation in NIV at John 13:3, 16:28, 20:17; KJV is correct. Jesus went to God, not returned to God.

John 17:5: "The glory which I had with You." You can "have" something as a reward laid up "with God" without meaning that you were actually there conscious when the promise was made in advance. Christians had already been given the *same glory* (John 17:22, 24), although they were not yet born. This is glory in prospect and promise, not actuality. Christians are said to be "in Christ" before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). "Grace was given to us in Christ before the ages" (II Tim. 1:9). Christians were also foreknown (I Pet. 1:2). So was Jesus (I Pet. 1:20). So was Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5). Moses was planned from the beginning in Jewish writings (Assumption of Moses). In Jewish theology the name of Messiah was named before the world was created. In Revelation 13:8 the lamb was crucified before the foundation of the world, and all things "were and were created" (Rev. 4:11). Of the latter passage Dr. Mounce says in his commentary: "This unusual phrase suggests that all things which are, existed first in the eternal will of God and through His will came into actual being at His appointed time." So the Son of God "existed" in the Plan of God and then was brought into actual existence by creation, *begetting*, at the appointed time. To say that the Son or a Second Person was actually in existence before coming into existence is to confuse the whole issue, by making Jesus a hybrid and turning God into two Persons! This results in a plain contradiction, when it is then asserted that God is One. ✧

Comments

"I am always thankful to God, and to you and all those behind you, when I receive the monthly *Focus*, and begin reading straight away, circumstances permitting. I fully agree with all you wrote about the Son of God, and have done for years. The teaching that the Father and Son are co-eternal is ludicrous. By the time of the Council of Nicea the world was already in the 'dark age.' Also, the article by Paul Fiorilla, on 'accepting Jesus as your personal Saviour,' a term I have never used in my 55 years in Christ." — *England*

"I have recently been trying to reconcile my study of Jewish customs and culture with Trinitarian Christianity. Your book *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* has shown me that it cannot be done. This text along with *When Jesus Became God* are now almost handbooks during my personal Bible study. I prefer to refer to myself as a Messianic Gentile Monotheist — how's that for a mouthful?" — *Missouri*

"At the Theological Conference we met many interesting and inspiring people. The speakers were so knowledgeable. They had so much to share and often I couldn't begin to absorb it all, but I am glad to have those written copies of their material so that, as I have time, I may go over them again, and be further enlightened. How touching and inspiring were all the personal accounts we heard! It makes us want to hear and learn more and more. What an outstanding sermon on truth Kent Ross delivered on Sunday morning!" — *Texas*

2004 Theological Conference DVDs

DVDs of the 2004 Theological Conference are available for \$10 each or \$65 for the entire set of 7 (plus postage for international orders). Please email Steve Taylor at staylor@abc-coggc.org or call 800-347-4261. Sets of the papers from the conference are available for \$10, including postage. Email JillT@abc-coggc.org for papers.

DVD #1	"The Identity and Mission of the Servant in Isaiah" Alex Hall
	"The Struggle for the One God Against Binitarianism" F. Paul Haney
DVD #2	Faith Stories 1- Friday
	"Babylon in the Last Days" Greg Deuble
DVD #3	Faith Stories 2 - Friday
	"Scandalous Folly: The Cross or the Sword?" David Maas
DVD #4	"Colossians 1:15-20: Preexistence or Preeminence?" Bill Wachtel
	"The Shape of the Jesus Question" Colin Brown
DVD #5	"The Hermeneutic of the Apostolic Gospel" Robert Hach
	"The Gospels Revisited" Colin Brown
DVD #6	"The Abrahamic Faith: Taking Courage from the Words of Modern Scholars" Anthony Buzzard
	Faith Stories 3 - Sunday
DVD #7	"Truth in Short Supply" Kent Ross