

An Appeal for Plain Christianity

By John Lemley - Vancouver, Washington

The declaration, "all Christians confess Jesus is God," is adamantly proclaimed on Christian radio and television programs and websites and printed in magazines and books. It isn't always stated with exactly the same words, but the idea comes across clearly. This exclusive statement is unfortunate. It causes unnecessary concern when whether or not a person is a true Christian is linked to their "correct" mental concept of and allegiance to this statement. This teaching would exclude both the Old and New Testament saints, as well as many believers up to today who wear the title "Christian." Thankfully, the Bible gives no such requirement.

It is said that there are three responses to Jesus - curse, worship as God, or indifference. This article suggests a fourth - worship Jesus as the Son of God.

For these Christians Jesus is seen as God's only begotten Son Whom God sent to be the Savior of humanity. Jesus is the long-awaited-for Messiah. Sinners are forgiven when His blood cleanses them of sin. These Christian men and women base their position on the plain statements of scripture prior to the formulation of creeds.

Of the many examples of conversions to Christianity in the Bible, none of them mention the "vital test of faith" stated above.

For example, notice Acts 8:37. Philip baptized the eunuch upon professing, *"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."* The eunuch did not say "God the Son" and Philip did not correct him for saying "the Son of God."

Another example is in Acts 16:31. The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* They replied, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house."* Paul did not say, "Believe on the God Jesus Christ."

The Apostle Paul's conversion experience, recorded in Acts 9:3-6, is equally revealing. After being surrounded by a bright light and falling to the ground he hears a voice calling him by name and asking, *"Why do you persecute me?"* Paul asks in return, *"Who are you, Lord?"* The voice responds, *"I am Jesus whom you persecute."* Jesus did not say, "I am Jesus, the second person of the Trinity" or "I am God the Son." Scholars assign A.D. 36 as the year this occurred.

Paul had not changed his theology about twenty years later when he wrote to the church at Rome. He wrote, "That if thou shalt confess with your mouth the Lord

Jesus (not the God Jesus), and shalt believe in your heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Near the end of the first century John emphasizes the same truth. “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God (1 John 4:15). Jesus' identity had not changed during the nearly seventy years since His crucifixion. His followers continued to believe, teach and write about Jesus, the Son of God, their Savior, Christ and Lord; never their God.

Paul clearly explained in 1 Corinthians 8:6, “*But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.*” So, he did not teach that Jesus was God. He stated that the one God was the Father of Jesus. Equally explicit is Jesus' instruction to Mary in John 20:17. He told her, “*...go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God.*”

Jesus' own words in John 17:3 are also significant in this regard. “*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*” From Jesus' point of view, there is only one God. That one God is not Himself, but is the One Who sent Him. Jesus' words are more impressive than the traditions of some ancient council that formulated a creed. Many reference books will confirm that both the Trinity and Dual-nature theories had their origin in later church councils and are extra-biblical.

Rather than using the divisive mental concept of this theological issue as the litmus test for determining the reality of one's conversion the Bible bases salvation on receiving Jesus as one's personal Savior. Mankind needs a Savior in order to experience the new birth. An idea cannot save anyone. The miracle of salvation occurs when a sinner accepts Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross as payment for his sins. Teaching any requirement for the gift of salvation beyond trusting in Jesus as Savior counters the beloved truth of John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*”

The Bible tells the beautiful story of God sending His Son, not Himself. Jesus is the One Who experienced the rigors of this mortal life, not God. Jesus is the One Who paid the penalty for our sins, is serving now as our great high priest, and is seated at God's right hand. “*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (I Timothy 2:5).

The Scriptures do give grave consequences to those who “*deny Jesus before men*” (Matthew 10:33), “*be ashamed of Jesus and His words*” (Mark 8:38), “*love not the Lord Jesus Christ*” (I Corinthians 16:22), “*deny that Jesus is the Christ*” (I

John 2:22), and "*confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*" (2 John 7). But, nothing is said about needing to believe Jesus is God. Many years would go by before men,, trained in Greek and Gnostic philosophies, would introduce the "Jesus is God" idea into the church.

According to Jesus, the main identifier of His people is to be their unity. John 17:21, "*That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*" The Christian life is to be characterized by harmony rather than discord. Labeling non-Trinitarians as non-Christian violates this principle. Such labeling creates artificial barriers, places Christians in separate camps, and gives non-Christians reason for having no interest in the Jesus of the Bible. Trinitarianism actually causes people to stumble, miss finding the true Jesus and, therefore remain lost in sin. I have personally heard both Jews and Moslems cite the "Jesus is God" teaching as their reason for not wanting to look any further into Christianity.

I wish the theologians would leave the Christians alone and stop dividing us into their man-made groups. Such sectarianism creates non-Biblical hoops through which we must jump in order to be, in their minds, legitimate followers of Jesus and it makes non-Christians shake their heads in disinterest. The exclusivity statements in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds are contrary to the unifying Christianity that our precious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ taught and prayed for (John 17:21-23). They are fourth century teachings which have divided Christians ever since. Jesus, His disciples, the Apostle Paul, and the Christians of the first few centuries knew nothing of such anathemas. Those who cling tenaciously to the truths about who God is and who Jesus is experience sweet release from the bondage of theological elites who proudly insert themselves as an essential interpretive filter between believers and the Bible. The Bible alone is totally sufficient for clearly communicating what God intended when He inspired His Word. The Bible clearly introduces mankind to God as the Father of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

What a person does about the blood of Jesus shed for his/her sins is the most crucial decision of a lifetime. H.A. Ironside is credited with writing, "Oh, the lives eternally wrecked by the yellow gospels of the day – the bloodless theories of unregenerate men that send their hearers to their doom instead of stopping them on their downward road!" What shall wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

Three points summarize the above:

(1) One's position as a child of God comes from receiving His Son, Jesus Christ, as personal Savior and Lord, plus nothing. It does not come from agreement with a theological statement.

(2) The only faith that justifies is faith in Jesus as Savior. The nebulous, logically contradictory, complicated, and admittedly mysterious nature of the Trinitarian creeds make them so impossible for ordinary people to understand that they are taught to accept them on faith. The Bible nowhere teaches God's people to blindly accept this mental concept. A letter from a Trinitarian friend states, "Triunity is a reformed position held by many and is one of the 200 or more forms of Trinitarianism." Which form is the necessary form upon which our salvation is presumed to hinge? Faith in Jesus plus any Trinitarian or Binitarian explanation of Him adds excess baggage to the pure gospel and meets the definition of "another gospel" (Galatians 1:6-9). Christ died to save sinners, not to confuse them.

(3) Once the Trinitarian theory was put on the pedestal of essentials it started a precedent that has continued throughout the centuries of adding this or that new dogma on the pain of eternal condemnation. This succeeded in strengthening the power of the church, but it polluted the simple gospel message, weakened the foundational faith of our fathers, and complicated the basic Christian confession.

"Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Jesus gave us our mission before He ascended back to His Father. He said, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). The gospel is the good news that Jesus "*Christ died for our sins...was buried...and that he rose again...*" (I Corinthians 15:1-4). While Christians are busy exalting creeds these words from an old song become sadly true. "Souls are crying and men are dying." When Christians stop being divisive over their understanding of ideas that effect neither salvation nor lifestyle (justification nor sanctification), get back to doing the Father's business, and show Jesus as the answer to the world's pain, perplexity, and problems, then, and only then, can we expect to hear the words, "*Well done, good and faithful servant,...enter into the joy of your lord*" (Matthew 25:23).