

FOR CHRIST'S SAKE

INTRODUCTION

Who is Christ? That question has a simple answer. It was and is Jesus of Nazareth. But what the Christ is. Well, that's an impossibly complex answer. Nonetheless, humanity must understand to some degree. This piece will attempt to sort out a confusing segment of this question—for Christ's sake and for ours.

Smart people carefully reading the Bible come up with interpretations that vary. This likely means that the concept of Christ, meaning "God's anointed" (Messiah, in Hebrew), is not easy, or even possible, to fully understand. God tends to be that way. After all, we're talking about the concept of "Immanuel"¹: A mother, human, and a Father, God, virginally producing a child, both human and divine. A forever unique chosen, "anointed" Christ.

God claims Christ as His son. Jesus claims to be "son of man"². So, a being, both God and man. Not God, as purely God. Not man, as purely man. Biologically speaking, a hybrid. Yet the Bible doesn't describe this hybrid state as a mule—our most familiar hybrid—but rather as a lamb. The lamb of God. Moreover, the Bible clearly reveals he had a divine "soul", as it were, before he had a body—the Word of God.

Biblically, the Messiah, the Christ is primarily revealed using three concepts:

Word of God. Son of God. Lamb of God.

WORD OF GOD

The Bible doesn't say much about what God does to create and sustain the universe. He is spirit. Purely and totally spirit. More than that He is holy—meaning completely and totally different and separate from anything else. So He can't be part of His creation and be holy. He can't even be "in"³ or any part of it, because spirit means completely non-physical and beyond dimension.

Christ, or Messiah, means "anointed". Being anointed means being specially chosen for a special role. Whatever it is that went out from God to fertilize the

egg cell in the virgin⁴ Mary, was designated for a special role. Analogous to human sperm, this was and is of God's living essence from forever. The Bible refers to this as His Word (John 1:14).

Before the Word became incarnate, though, at the "beginning" (Genesis 1:1), God wielded this aspect of divine that does creation ("All things were made through him" John 1:1-3). God's Word: "be" and the universe came into existence. . . which humanity recently documented. We call it the Big Bang. Thus the specially anointed "Way" God, a spirit, both creates and sustains the physical universe. Not Him, but of and by Him—through His Word.

Creation and physical existence only through a specially conceived agent: Christ—as the Word of God. Thus, the necessity, efficacy and uniqueness of this being. Without him there would not only be no heaven, there would be no way to heaven. No universe. No anything. The Word of God is the "hand" of God.

SON OF GOD

God declared Jesus His son. Both biology and family teach us that a son is a unique individual. Not the same as either parent. But with life and substance of both. Thus, the son of God and Mary is one of a kind. The Word of God melded with flesh. If the Word of God is like the hand of God then human flesh is as a glove (Hebrews 10:5). Thus a gloved hand. Something a bare hand is not and something an empty glove is not.

A special hand in a special glove can do what neither the hand alone nor the glove alone can do. Those who say Jesus is divine and those who say Jesus is human are both correct. Those who say Jesus is only God and those who say Jesus is only man are both wrong.

The previous section discussed why God "needed" His Word. What does God gain by having a son? One obvious analogic corollary is that an adult son of an absentee father is his representative and advocate (Col 1:15)—charged with carrying out his business in all its facets.

Of course we're talking about Jesus Christ here. The perfect son of the perfect father. As such he's the perfect image of the invisible God. He carried out the Father's wishes perfectly. Even the impossibly agonizing burden of carrying mankind's sin to the cross—when his own humanity recoiled from it (Luke 22:42). In fact, this aspect of the Christ, being the agent of his Father is how nearly the entire New Testament couches the words and actions of Jesus.

The works that the Father has given me to do, the very works that I am doing, testify. . .that the Father has sent me (John 5:36). If you keep this “agent” concept of why God had a son in mind, as this verse explains, when you read anywhere in the New Testament, you'll get a deeper and more precious appreciation of the role of being the Christ.

Father and son are not interchangeable. Peppered throughout the entire New Testament, both the teachings of Jesus and the Apostle's accounts, almost invariably follow the same rhythm. If you read the whole passage you easily sense the authority and glory of God being carried out by His specially chosen agent. His son.

This is not servitude. This is how Jesus wants you to behold him in the true joy of his role. “Jesus, . . .who for the joy set before him endured the cross. . .and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2). Joy? Now you can see it. Earning the joy of his Father (Mt 3:17) through a life of joy by working perfect obedience. Culminating in that ultimate service at the cross, whose epitaph is the joy of the eternal reward—earning the status of God's “right hand man”, that is God's gloved right hand.

An equally important vital capacity in having a “one and only” son: The perfect role model for all His adopted children. The first born (Col 1:15 again), being the only one of His children according to the flesh (John 3:16—“begotten”), is the role model (1Corinthians 11:1). Not only avoiding the pitfall of Adam but living the perfect life recorded for us to try to emulate in the gospels.

One more and perhaps the most important reason God needed a son: Justice. Even though a son is “next of kin” and a “blood relative”, the biologic and familial

bonds do not connect his behaviors, debts or sins to other family members. A son is his own separate entity regarding legal jurisprudence. Whether it be real and actual guilt or guilt by judicial decree, this guilt is borne by the individual alone. It does not touch any other family member. Not brothers or sisters or fathers or mothers.

A Holy God cannot, in His very nature absolutely cannot, touch or have any connection to any guilt or any other aspect of sin. But, because of the nature of a son, He can remain perfectly Holy and be the redeemer of the children He chose to adopt by sending His son, His Christ, His chosen/"anointed one" to have all their guilt imputed to him.

Such a plan for a human father would be disgustingly heartless. Our Father planned this from all eternity so that we, for eternity, as well as this unbelievably painful and completely glorious arrangement would glorify Him throughout all this universe as the kingdom of God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only son. . ." so He (and he) could satisfy divine Justice. Amen (and Amen).

If you read the Bible with these understandings, you'll experience epiphany after epiphany. A son doing what heaven's-based Father didn't have to do. What the Father couldn't do since it is the role of a son—a son whose humanity makes him a bridge to and for the Father, or as Jesus himself says "I am the Way" (John 14:6).

LAMB OF GOD

By "marrying into" a family, the Father, from the resulting son, has direct and "legal" interests in the new kinship, the son being "a blood relative" to both sides. Why would God want to have a direct and "legal" interest in humanity? Well, the most obvious seems to be "for God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son. . ." (John 3:16 again). And that's where the Lamb of God comes in.

Humans are not "natural" children of God as Jesus is. We are composite creatures. The Bible calls us "living souls" (Genesis 2:7). The spiritual side—a soul. The flesh and blood side—a body. A living soul. Because Christ is the only begotten son, through a human mother, the Father, the adopting Father of and for believers, our Father, is not our blood relative like Jesus is.

But since Jesus is our blood relative, he is connected to us in a way the Father is not. Our blood, human blood, flows in Jesus' veins. In that blood is life (Leviticus 17:11). And something more than life—not something biologic or intuitive. That “something more” is hard wired somewhere in the human psyche. This “more” is atonement (again Leviticus 17:11). Throughout history and even in prehistory, blood sacrifice played a part in many of the religions of man. Certainly from the beginning of the Biblical revelation (Genesis 4:4).

What is it about spilling the blood of a sacrificial animal that makes people sense they are performing a rite that can assuage their god? As above, it is not biologic or intuitive or even rational. Yet according to the Bible it is true. From the sacrifice of Abel trumping that of Cain and Abel's blood calling out to God, to the blood on the doorposts that spared the Israelites a visit from the angel of death, to the entire worship paradigm throughout the history of Biblical Israel, one sees the spilling of blood. A bloodletting called for by God Himself.

Of course ceremonial sacrificial blood is, of itself, useless. For humans, without heartfelt repentance and trusting God for His redemption, it does no good (Hebrews 10:4). For God, because it has no divine intrinsic value (Isaiah 1:11), it does no good. But the blood of His own? His Christ? Well, Jesus is blood kin to God.

The blood that flows in the Christ is, in an inscrutable way, as the Father's own blood. It is infinitely valuable to Him. This blood can be a sacrifice that does something no other blood can do. It can carry the river of sin from the human side, which the Father's divine nature cannot, must not, touch. It can carry the river of purification from the divine side, which human nature cannot touch. And these rivers meet only in the Christ, a hybrid—the Lamb of God.

CONTROL

In its effort to squelch myriad rumors and heresies about the nature and being of Christ, the Roman Catholic Church overreached and branded all opinions but its own as heresy.

Although, until the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine there was no Roman Catholic Church. There was just the church. When Constantine adopted Christianity, church and state were separate no more.

As such, Caesar was no longer “god” but, instead, he now ruled by “divine right”. The Church, in granting this “right” intertwined with the councils and powers of men. The idea of rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s was now void.

What had been a collection of Christian communities, many with their own nuanced understanding of Scripture, were corralled into a “catholic”, that is universal, church government enforced by this Caesar who ruled all the known world.

COUNSELING GOD

Thus starts the era of the Church council. Councils that dictate what all Christendom must believe. After all, if there is one universal church, then it needs to have one voice. So, under the auspices of Constantine, informal gatherings of various church leaders for the purpose of “comparing notes” became a legislative directorate.

Not surprisingly, the first of these (325 AD) happened in the vicinity of Constantine’s new capitol, Constantinople (330 AD). Out of Nicea came the Nicene Creed. A series of statements declaring what believers are to understand when they read the Bible.

The Bible declares itself to be of divine origin. Every word of it. It also declares itself to be perspicuous—that is, understandable. It is of concern that men, even really smart and careful men are appointed to clarify and direct what it tells us. Not just preaching for general comprehension and utility. Rather setting constraints on conscience. One interpretation obliterating all others.

TRINITY

The boldest and most troublesome interpretation trying to understand what God revealed and who God is, emanated from these councils: the trinity.

Constantine's Catholic Church forced everyone down the trinity road as the single understanding of the reality we call Christ.

The trinity concept has 3 distinct persons making up a single God. Father. Son. Holy Spirit. Most commentaries on the subject reference Matthew 28:19 where Jesus gives a commission to his disciples to go into the whole world and baptize people "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

The wording of the Nicene Creed is not specifically Trinitarian. In fact, this creed doesn't actually stray from the words and verses in the scriptures. This creed was somewhat of a compromise. The council was attended by many respected men who were uncomfortable with the implications of the trinity concept. This group of believers were called Arians, after Arius, one of the proponents of the Father-Son concept.

Charitably, one must assume that the scholars who came up with the trinity dogma were not trying to misinterpret scripture. Actually the opposite. They were striving to come up with a powerful argument that Jesus was both fully God and fully human—both of which were being questioned.

The trinity concept came to be most fully and forcefully expressed in the Athanasian creed. The concept of three distinct, separate and equal persons. The Father. The Son. The Holy Spirit. All of the same "essence" as one God.

FAMILY

The Bible's author nearly exclusively uses biologic and family terms to analogize and help us understand both who God is and how we relate to Him. The author chose to reveal two of these "persons"—Father, son— using family biologic relationships.

The Father-son concept permeates the entire revelation. As do similar precious familial realities. Believers being children of God. The family of God. Him adopting sons and daughters. Becoming brothers and sisters to Christ, who, in turn, has the church as his bride.

But, using this preferred biologic frame of reference, the nearest descriptive analogy for the trinity concept is identical triplets. Three brothers sharing the exact same genetic, biologic flesh. Three distinct persons—one “essence”. The exact familial correlate for the Athanasian trinity.

God made up of three equal-in-everything brothers, as it were, sounds foreign and strange because it is nowhere to be found in the Bible. If the Bible’s author had understood God to be denominated and demarcated as this reality, then why use the inaccurate and confounding Father—son example?

NOT A BROTHER

The only logical Bible based context descriptor for Christ as Emmanuel is, in fact, a son. The “Word” aspect of God was eternally predestined to be forever welded to flesh when the Holy Spirit came upon Mary (Luke 1:35). And only the blood of the Lamb contained in the flesh-welded Word could extinguish Hell fire for mankind. The son concept, role and reality, in all its layers and implications, including a virgin birth, are precise and accurate. This being, the Christ, cannot be the Father’s identical brother. Not existentially. Not functionally. And not theologically.

God can certainly be trusted to incorporate all the concepts humanity needs to know about and of Him, in good measure, in the 66 books we call the Bible. The word trinity and the Athanasian concept are not mentioned or propounded in those books. Whereas the Father-Son analogy is throughout.

Trinity defenders often quote the Matthew 28:13 verse, above, as proof a trinity relationship exists. . .baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. The verse does not specify what the “in the name of” invocation implies.

If one reads anything into it using the context of the rest of revelation, one would see it as a picture of the process of salvation: Of the Father, through His son, by His holy spirit. Emphasizing the three step cascade of purification as the water washes down over the body. This cascade understanding of the “trinity” verse is derived from the context of scripture. Such an understanding holds trinity as a

process, not as a being. If one believes God provided perspicuous revelation then one should be able to get the basics correct without resorting to novel dogma.

WHAT ABOUT HIM?

A fad some time ago saw people wearing bracelets emblazoned with the letters : WWJD—What Would Jesus Do? If the preceding paragraphs are anywhere near correct, Jesus would be in tears over the idea that he was an equal partner in what's called a "Godhead". Were he in a typical modern evangelical church service that saw him elevated way above equal partner status into the position of near exclusive focus of worship², prayer and praise he would jump onto a pew and start berating everyone within earshot.

I don't think our coming lord and king is happy with the Athanasian trinity and its slope slipping into worshiping someone who is not his Father, Jehovah God. Yes, the blood flowing through his veins is divine. But he himself understood that he, Jesus, is not Him who is to be reckoned as God (John 20:17). Jesus was eminently clear and plain proclaiming "this is how you should pray 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. . .'" throughout the New Testament there is the similarly clear and plain distinction between "God" and "Jesus" over and over again.

As the perfect example of the perfect son of the perfect father, Jesus tried to teach us to "worship God alone" (Matthew 4:10/Luke 4:8). Of course, it's painfully obvious that we are not perfect students. It might be easier to render to Christ what is Christ's if we take into account the points above. If we recognize the unbelievably amazing gift the Father has given humanity in this unique and complex being—who gave, gives and will forever keep on giving to us what even God himself cannot give. For Christ's sake—and for ours.

1. Immanuel is a Hebrew contraction meaning “God with us” (Isaiah 7:14).
2. Neither the apostles nor Jesus himself ever clarified what “son of man” meant. That is almost certainly because it was assumed that readers would, by and large understand. Nonetheless, any search for literature reveals lots of controversy, as there is for most things touching on Jesus or religion in general. Einstein famously said “keep everything as simple as possible but not too simple”. Following that sage advice, almost all commentators agree that Jesus was at least recognizing that he was a member of the human race irrespective of what or who else he might be.
3. The English word “in” has a rainbow of meanings. The word as used in this part of the text means physically present. The English translation of the Bible sometimes uses alternate meanings for the word. As in Ephesians 4:7 where the implication of God being “in all” describes the Holy Spirit’s “presence” in the believer, similar to that believer’s being “in Christ”.
4. Virgin meaning virgin. No carnal relations could have occurred with a non physical spirit. Moreover the understanding from the law given to Moses was that both the physical act of sex as well as the female reproductive cycle was cause for ceremonial uncleanness. The Christ/Messiah had to be completely untouched by any ceremonial or other uncleanness. In his conception as well as in his life to be the perfect sacrifice—the lamb of God.
5. Certainly the Christ, a sinless being whose Father is the eternal God, is worthy of worship. But JHWH God is alone to be worshipped and no other (Exodus 20:3-6, Matthew 22:38). (See “Define Devine Worship”) Also, the Christ, by nature is worthy of and accorded “blessing and glory and honor and might” (Rev 5:13) which are “relative” merits. Relative meaning variable amounts of merit are awarded, or intrinsic to different objects. To whom one gives worship and to whom one addresses prayer, though, according to Biblical teaching (v.s.) are absolutes and belong to the One God.