



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## Is Jesus God? Part 4: Trinity, Oneness and “Eternal Sonship”

### Surfing, snorkeling and scuba diving

**W**as the reader aware when we began this series concerning the deity of Christ that there was so much in the Bible on this topic? At the outset (FMS #5), we freely admitted that nowhere in the Bible does Jesus ever openly declare “I am God.” That would have made it too easy, wouldn’t it? Anyone can benefit from “surfing the Scriptures,” (riding the waves, just skimming the surface of the holy water of life that is the Bible). But the Author openly tells the surfer that there are hidden treasures for those who will dive beneath the surface.

**Proverbs 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.**

So we left the surfers on top and in the past three issues we have been discovering numerous and conclusive proofs of the deity of Jesus Christ. True, he did not say “I am God,” but he came very, very close. We did not need to dive too deeply to discover what was veiled when he declared “Before Abraham was, I AM!” He did not say “I am God,” but yet he did—when he declared “I AM!” We have only been snorkeling so far. Now we must strap on our scuba gear as we go deeper. As in deep sea diving, so also diving deeper into the Word of God can bring incredibly beautiful (in-)sights to behold and treasures to find. But there are death-dealing dangers in the deep as well.

“Scuba” is an acronym for Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus. It is the diver’s only source of oxygen and life. Surfers can freely imbibe of the air; it is everywhere available. It is the “common grace” of the Holy Spirit available even to non-believers as they skim the surface of the Scriptures. But the Christian who embarks on journeys into the deep water of the Word of God must have a personal and internal supply of the Holy Spirit

as his source of life, light and understanding beneath the waves. The Spirit has also given gifts (Ephesians 4:11; as pastors, teachers, etc.) to help guide and build up the believers.

With our scuba tank of the Holy Spirit we will explore a few fathoms deeper this time. We will serve as guide and diving instructor as we take our readers down under and share some deeper insights as well as point out some very dangerous locations doctrinally. Our goal is not to be anyone’s permanent guide, but to teach others how to safely dive by themselves with the Holy Spirit. We long ago discovered the tyranny of religious hierarchies and those who would claim authority over others’ spiritual growth and demand their allegiance and obedience. We see ourselves merely as an elder brother desiring to help younger brothers and sisters to grow to a stage of maturity where we are no longer needed. We are not worried about lack of work anytime soon.

During this particular dive the great spiritual abyss which we wish all fellow divers to notice is the one marked by spiritual pride in relation to the deity of Christ. (While surfers can be proud, it is not spiritual pride because their spiritual life is either shallow and superficial or non-existent.) To be spiritually proud, one must first have attained to (been given by God) much spiritual understanding. Only then can the temptation arise in our hearts to believe that we “have arrived,” that we are really some great one, with all manner of wisdom and knowledge and understanding of the jots and tittles of the Bible. While an individual may have begun his Christian walk in full belief in the deity of Christ (because that’s what the preacher said), somewhere in maturity some think they have discovered some arcane arguments which purportedly prove that Jesus was not God after all! These arguments don’t bother surfers or snorkelers because they never have gone deep enough to discover this “great truth.”

Ministers, theologians and Bible scholars are especially susceptible to this trap. Surveys of Christian ministers have revealed astonishingly high percentages of them, particularly in the mainline denominations, who deny the deity of Christ—along with the virgin birth, the blood atonement and the bodily resurrection of the savior. What kind of savior is that? They are left with a “savior” who cannot save.

### Trinity or oneness?

One of these “deeper” arguments concerns the pre-existence of Jesus Christ and how it relates to the doctrine of the trinity. The argument revolves around the sonship of Jesus. We believe in the trinity, but before any unitarians<sup>1</sup> tune out, we request that you wait until we define our terms. Frankly, we believe that much of the doctrinal squabbling between the trinitarians and non-trinitarians can be traced to semantics. Words are used too loosely and without being put into proper definitional contexts. Words like “begotten, person, office, Godhead,” etc. are used willy-nilly, with the author meaning one thing while some of his readers interpret it as something totally different.

We, for example, have just stated that we hold to the “trinity,” but we most assuredly do not hold that there are three Gods! We are not tri-theistic. There is only one God. But in the Scriptures he is known as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That does not constitute three separate, individual Gods. Nor does each of the three comprise one-third of the Godhead. To put it simply, we agree with the “oneness” doctrine, as well as with the trinitarians. We do not consider them to be mutually exclusive when terms are properly defined.

We can say we agree with both the trinitarians and the oneness Christians because both groups believe in the deity of Christ and the deity of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, we have never met a trinitarian Christian who actually thinks there are three Gods. However, many of them simply do not think through the ramifications of their beliefs and this easily leads to inconsistency and confusion, especially regarding the deity and sonship of Christ. As God, Jesus pre-existed for all eternity. But did he pre-exist as the Son, the so-called “second person of the trinity?” This is one area where some trinitarians stumble because they sometimes use the term “the eternal sonship” of Jesus Christ. The oneness groups, on the other hand, excoriate the trinitarians for such hymn book theology as “God in three persons, blessed trinity.” Let’s explore these questions further.

### The mystery of the incarnation

Each year around Christmas time, we are treated to numerous public performances of Handel’s masterpiece oratorio called “The Messiah.” The text for one of the choruses is from Isaiah 9:6 and is a prophecy of the coming of Jesus the Christ.

**Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.**

This is as clear a proof as one could ask for that Jesus is God. It openly states for all to see that this manchild to be born would be “The mighty God, The everlasting Father.” All Christians believe that Yahweh is the everlasting Father. He is eternal; he had no beginning; he will have no end. But in this verse, it is also the son who is said to be the everlasting Father! Notice that he (Jesus) is not said to be the everlasting or eternal son.

Isaiah is saying that Jesus **IS** the Father! That is to say, the Son IS the Father! In the natural, that statement is an absurdity. But remember, we are speaking of the supernatural here and “all things are possible with God.” The key is to understand that Jesus had a *dual nature*. He was not half God and half man. He was fully God and fully man. That is yet another statement or concept which is not “natural.”

Jesus is unique. The history of the human race has never seen another individual who was fully God and fully man. Therefore, to try to conceive of someone who is fully God and fully man is alien to our natural thinking and because we cannot logically (i.e., with the natural mind) explain it, the natural mind tends to reject the concept. But let us remember that there are mysteries within the Bible, for which God gives the gift of faith; so that even though we do not (yet) see, we may nonetheless believe that it is true. So whether or not we can fathom how an individual can be fully God and fully man, the unmistakable statement of Scripture affirms this fact. Speaking of our Lord, Paul says:

**Col. 2:9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.** [“Godhead:” Greek: *theotes* means divinity, the state of being God.]

Note that: It says the Godhead is in Jesus. It does not say that Jesus is part of the Godhead; i.e., as though he were one-third of God. No, the Godhead dwells fully in Christ Jesus. And again, Paul affirms the deity of Christ in his letter to his protege, Timothy, while noting that it is indeed a mystery:

**1 Timothy 3: 16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, ...**

## The dual nature of Jesus Christ

Perhaps in the resurrection, we will understand the mystery of the incarnation. Yet there are deep concepts in the Scriptures which we can understand now. We can catch glimpses of the mystery of the incarnation. As we continue to explore the dual nature of Jesus Christ, we can de-mystify this “eternal sonship” idea. It is false. Jesus was both God and man, and so when we speak of him as the son of God, it always refers to his humanity, not to his deity. If we keep that in mind as a rule-of-thumb, it will help us avoid stumbling at the deity of Christ, as so many have done.

In his deity aspect, that is, as God, Jesus had no beginning (John 8:58 ...Before Abraham was, I AM. Cf. Mic. 5:2.) As God he was not “begotten;” otherwise, he would have had a beginning, which, by definition, cannot be. [“to beget:” From the Hebrew and Greek means to bear (a child), to gender, to cause to be born.] The terms “father” and “son” in the natural sense always have relation to time. One precedes another. A son is engendered by a father. A son has a beginning. Therefore, to speak of the “eternal Sonship” of Jesus is an oxymoron, because the term “Son(-ship)” is always related to the dimension of time. But when Isaiah says that the Son is the Father, it deletes—it cancels out the “Sonship” element, the time dimension; so that the entity who inhabits eternity (Isa. 57:15) is not the Son, but God alone. God is the Father and the Son as one and the same being outside of the time dimension! Now consider the humanity aspect of the Son:

**John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....**

**14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, ...**

If God the Word became flesh, that means that the Word was not always flesh. The Word became the Son. The Son had a beginning as the Son. The Word in the beginning was Christ as God, as one and the same with the Father before he became the Son (became flesh), and dwelt among us.

**14 ... (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth....**

**18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.**

The phrase “only begotten” is of utmost importance. Again, Jesus is unique for he alone is the (or “an,” as it should be translated in v. 14) only begotten Son. The article “the” or “an” makes no difference since “only begotten” implies that there is only one. Though all Christians

will ultimately become “sons of God,” it is not in exactly the same sense that our Lord is the Son of God. This is because Jesus was actually physically begotten by the “Father” through the agency of “Holy Spirit” in the womb of the virgin Mary. Thus Jesus is the one and only begotten Son of God. In other words, as pertaining to his humanity, Jesus had a beginning—in the womb of Mary.

The Holy Spirit inspired King David to record the words of Yahweh the Father to Yahshua (Jesus) the Son as a prophecy in Psalm 2:

**Psalm 2:7 I will declare the decree: YHWH hath said unto me [Jesus], Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee.**

“This day” points forward to a specific day in the time dimension when “the seed of the woman”<sup>2</sup> would be caused to germinate by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and thereby cause the Son to have a beginning as man. The Father would have a Son. The fullness of the Godhead would be clothed in a human body. This verse is quoted in the first chapter of Hebrews and the context makes clear that it is speaking of the birth of the savior. However, it is also true that this verse is a dual prophecy in that it also speaks of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, as noted in Revelation 1:

**Revelation 1: 5 And from Jesus Christ, *who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead*, ...**

Thus Jesus was begotten the first time at his birth through Mary and he is the first to be begotten again (“born again”) at his resurrection to immortality.

Think this through once again: If the Sonship of Jesus refers to his deity, then God had a beginning on a certain day, and therefore God was not eternal—which, by definition cannot be. The inconsistency is exposed. But if the Sonship of Jesus refers to his humanity, then all the Scriptures are clear on this subject and we have no man-made confusion regarding the alleged “eternal Sonship” of Jesus Christ. Seeing the dual nature of the God-man Christ Jesus is the key.

### If Jesus were merely a man...

Let us for a moment consider the converse of this idea. What if Jesus were merely a man? ...A very spiritually advanced man, a very good man, but just a man, nevertheless? If Jesus were only a man, then Romans 3:23 would have applied to him as it does to all the rest of mankind..

**23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.**

And if Jesus were a sinner, then his sacrifice on the cross would have been a martyr’s futile gesture. It could have no validity or efficaciousness for us. He would not

have been a spotless sacrifice. His death and shed blood could not cleanse us from sin. It would not have met the requirements for atonement set by the Father. Where would that leave you and me and the rest of the world insofar as any hope and assurance of eternal life? There would be no hope whatsoever. That is why we have stated in the past that if Jesus Christ were not God, then I would likely forsake Christianity. It would have nothing more to offer humanity than does Buddhism, Islam, or any of the myriad other religions. For if indeed this life of a few short years is all there is, then as Paul said “we would be of all men most miserable.” So we can see how the very essence of Christianity rest so very strongly on the doctrine of the deity of Christ. In these last several issues of FMS, we have hopefully provided ample evidence from the Bible to edify your faith in this vital doctrine.

There are also those who try to straddle the two positions (1. Jesus Christ is God. 2. Jesus Christ is not God.) by claiming that somewhere in his life, Jesus “reached Godhood.” We have seen discourses on this position which are very smooth and persuasive—to a degree. (Check your scuba tanks!) Under this alternative, the claims vary as to when Jesus achieved deity. Some point to his baptism by John when the Spirit was seen by John descending and remaining on him. Others maintain that the critical moment did not occur until sometime in his last 24 hours; either in Gethsemane when he gave over his will entirely to the Father, or when he cried out on the cross “it is finished.”

However, all of these variations on the theme overlook a fatal flaw to their theory. If Jesus were only a man until he attained Godhood somewhere in his adult years around age 30 or after, that means as a boy and man up until that time, not only would he have been subjected to all the temptations to sin (as we know Christ was), but that indeed he would have succumbed to temptations somewhere along the line. For without the fulness of God dwelling in a man, a man *will* sin. Look at you and me, Christian. We have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in part (the “earnest”) and yet we still cannot keep God’s laws perfectly. (I have met those who claim they no longer sin, but their fruit belies their lips.) If John the Baptist were filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15), then certainly the savior could have experienced no less! Jesus was fully God and fully man from the moment of his begetting (conception).

Yet one more increasingly popular theory, similar to the above, is that Jesus is basically no different from you and me. He is just our elder brother who leads the way back to the Father. He is honored as the firstborn and pre-eminent son, but just as he attained Godhood, so will you and I. In fact, the teaching goes, you and I pre-existed with

Jesus as part of the “God-family” before the foundations of the world. At some point, we volunteered to “put on blinders” (i.e., have our memories erased of our previous glory in heaven) and to come down to earth to teach and show others the way back to the Father. This doctrine has the convenient feature that no one “in the earth plane” can prove to another that he did not have his memory erased! If our memories of pre-existence have been erased, we wouldn’t remember the erasing process, would we? This might sound far-fetched to some, but this short summary admittedly does not do it justice. But it is included as yet another danger-in-the-deep about which we need to be forewarned.

We are out of space in this issue and it is likely that we will move on to another subject in the next FMS. There are many, many more evidences of the deity of Christ which we have not brought forth in these studies, but we trust that what we have set forth will provide impermeable armor for Christians at all levels of spiritual maturity. Let me close with one more “zinger” pair of Scriptures.

**Revelation 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, who... washed us from our sins in his own blood,**

**Acts 20:28 Take heed ...to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.**

A comparison of the two verses proclaims loudly that the blood of Jesus Christ IS the blood of God manifest in the flesh. Jesus is God!

#### ENDNOTES

1. We are not referring to the denomination of the Unitarian-Universalists here, but merely use the term as a synonym for non-trinitarians. Some non-trinitarians describe themselves as “oneness” believers. I suppose they chose that term to distinguish themselves from the Unitarian denomination which merged some years ago with the Universalist denomination. The “UU” denomination has strayed far from the Bible in many areas, so we cannot blame the “oneness” people for distancing themselves, even though that leaves them stuck with the awkward-sounding moniker of “oneness.”

2. Of course, the female of the human species does not have “seed;” that is supplied by the male. The female provides the egg, which gets fertilized by the seed, and thus conception occurs. Thus when the Scripture speaks in Genesis 3 of the “seed of the woman,” since the Holy Spirit (God) is no dummy and knows all about his creation and who has the seed and who has the egg, this puzzling phrase is now seen for what it is: a veiled reference to the virgin birth!

*Feed My Sheep* is a part of the teaching ministry of James Bruggeman and is sent out freely upon request. The tithes and gifts of those who are fed by it make it possible for us to continue in ministry. Contributions may be sent to Stone Kingdom Ministries, P.O. Box 6388, Asheville, NC 28816.