



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Was Christ the Son of God before he came to earth?”

THIS question has been asked, I understand, because the questioner believed that Jesus was the Son of God before he came to earth, but has had doubts raised in her mind because of recent teaching which she has heard. It is certainly a very important question, because it brings into focus the deity, pre-existence, co-existence, and co-eternity that Jesus claimed with the Father, We can never understand all the teaching pertaining to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, but we can understand what is taught in the Bible, and it is to the Bible that we must turn in order to try to answer this question.

The Godhead

We cannot begin to understand the answer until we have defined the Godhead. Three related Greek words are translated “Godhead” in the A.V.

- a **THEIOS** - this means divine, and is used of the power of God, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things...” (2 Peter 1:3). In Acts 17:29 it is used as a noun with the definite article, to denote “the Godhead”, or the Deity, i.e. the one true God.
- b **THEIOTIS** - this means divinity as in Rom. 1:20, and it indicates particularly the attributes of God, His divine nature.
- c **THEOTES** - this indicates the divine essence of the Godhead, the Personality of God. In Coll. 2:9 we read, “For in him (Jesus) dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”. Here Paul is declaring that in the Son there dwells all the fulness of the absolute Godhead, and the apostle uses this word to express the essential and personal Godhead of the Son; in other words, Jesus was, and is, absolute and perfect God.

Although the doctrine of the Godhead is not concisely defined in scripture, we may express it in the following way.

These are obvious claims to pre-existence, and they are borne out by the words of Paul, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Let those who deny Christ's pre-existence explain just when Christ was rich, because he was rich before he became poor. Obviously, this is a direct reference to the riches in glory which he had with the Father prior to his advent; no other explanation will suffice.

The Claims of Christ

Having defined in brief terms the biblical teaching of the Godhead, we can now turn our attention to what Christ claimed for himself.

- i) Jesus claimed that he came down from heaven – "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven.....(John 3:13).
- ii) Jesus claimed that he was in heaven before he came to earth. "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascending where he was before" (John 6:62).
- iii) Jesus claimed to have been with the Father before the world was, "And now, O Father glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

- 1 The basic and fundamental truth expressed in the Bible is that there is only one God. (See Isaiah 42:8; 43:10).
- 2 But while the scriptures teach that there are not three Gods, they do teach that there is a plurality in the Godhead, e.g. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).
- 3 Therefore, there are three Persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- 4 These three Persons are equal in essence John 15:26; Gal 4:6, but with the Godhead there is a primacy of relation and order.
 - (A) The Father is recognised as God (John 6:27); and superior to the Son. (John 14:28).
 - (B) The Son recognises and acknowledges the authority of the Father (John 5:19-27).
 - (C) Both the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16).

Therefore, we can say that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are Three Persons, distinct from each other, but they are equal in Essence.

Furthermore, in order to confirm his pre-existence and his relationship within the Godhead, he said on one occasion, "..... Ye are from beneath; I am from above..... for if ye believe not that I am (he) ye shall die in your sins". (John 8:23-24). Note the use of 'I am (ego eimi)'. This is used four times in the N.T., and constantly used in the Septuagint O.T. when the name of God is referred to. In the same chapter Jesus said, "Before Abraham was (genesthai = was born), I AM" (v58). Verse 59 proves that the Jews understood the significance of this claim because the scripture says, "Then took they up stones to cast at him". Stoning, as we know, was the punishment for blasphemy, and the Jews evidently thought that Christ was blaspheming in claiming his relationship with God.

It is quite evident, then, that Christ plainly claims his Deity, emphasising his perfect harmony with God. If we read John 5:17-47 we shall see the many aspects of the Father which he claims for himself; life, immortality, power over death, judgment. He readily acknowledges the statement of the Jews when they said that if a man witnesses of himself then the witness is not true. In answer he said that John the Baptist had testified to him; the works had testified to him; the Father testified to him; and the scriptures testified to him. Jesus evidently refers to the O.T. scriptures, and it is very plain, although it would be the basis of a more detailed study, that many O.T. prophecies were fulfilled in Christ. The basic problem with the Jews was that they could have recognised Jesus from the O.T. Scriptures, and they should have, but they didn't, and this was their condemnation according to Jesus, "And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:19).

Pre-existence and Co-existence underlined

There are some who teach that Christ was an unidentifiable something known as 'The Word' before he was born in the flesh, and it was only when he was born that he became the Son of God. Are we seriously being asked to believe that the Christ was only an idea in the mind of God before that idea was identified in the flesh? Was Christ just a supreme liar in stating and claiming the things which he did? And what about the teaching of John in his gospel record, he testifies, ~~as~~ we shall see, to the co-existence and pre-existence of Christ, and if there was no divine intervention in the birth of Christ then we must conclude that the Christ was born illegitimately of an unmarried girl and an unknown father. We know, of course, that this is not true, as we are perfectly well aware that 'The Word' was not an abstract idea before its advent in the flesh; this is not the phraseology of the scripture. But let John speak.

John states, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us". I do not think anyone would disagree that 'The Word' which came in the flesh was identified as Jesus, the Christ, Therefore, if the Word existed prior to its becoming flesh, then Christ existed before as well. John says, "In the beginning WAS = 'een' = EXISTED the Word". You will note that John is not saying 'in the beginning the Word came into being', or that the Word was created in the beginning. The One about whom John writes existed before Creation. (See also coll. 1:17). Therefore, pre-existence is asserted. John also says, "The Word was with God", i.e., a living unity with God in the most complete sense; and realising this, it is only a logical step to John's next assertion, "And the Word was God". Therefore, not only is co-existence claimed, but also complete and fundamental deity.

'The Word' becoming flesh marked a new form of existence and not the commencement of existence. Jesus 'tabernacled' with us. His was to be a temporary stay before he returned 'to the glory that he had with the Father before the world was'.

Conclusion

This is a fascinating study, and could go on to state many more proofs that Jesus, the Christ, was the Son of God before he came to earth. We could speak about the testimony in the Epistles to this fact, but I am sure that I have said enough to verify to our sister that when she thought of the Saviour as Son of God in heaven prior to coming to earth, that I for one think she was absolutely right.