

# THE ALPHA AND OMEGA AGAIN

In the June issue, in an article entitled "The Alpha and Omega" I offered a few thoughts on the deity of Christ and the Godhead: placing Christ on an equality with God. This view is, of course, like much else in the Bible, subject to challenge and indeed was denied as far back in history as 320 AD, by Arius and his disciples. As a result of the article I have received a letter from a good brother in India informing me that some members of the sect known as "Jehovah's Witnesses" (J.W.'s) have been attending his Bible Study Meeting and have been claiming that Christ was never co-equal with God but clearly shown in the N.T. to be much inferior to God. Individual members of the J.W.'s are, of course, not allowed any independency of thought on scriptural matters but simply repeat the doctrines into which they have been brainwashed by the teachings prepared for them in their magazines from Brooklyn, USA. This, however, is no reason for not considering what they say and measuring it against the things revealed in God's word. I know also from years of experience in discussion with J.W.'s, that nothing I say is likely to have the slightest effect, but I will say it, nevertheless. We should not be too surprised that J.W.'s do not accept the deity of Christ, in view of the fact that they accept very little of what is plainly taught in scripture: e.g. they deny the bodily resurrection of Christ: they deny man has a soul: they teach Christ was but one of God's creatures: they deny that heaven will be open to all faithful Christians, and also deny the possibility of hell: they deny that the earth will be destroyed and teach that Christ's return to the earth occurred in 1914, to mention but a few of their variances with scripture. It is not surprising, therefore, that they describe the "Trinity: as a doctrine from Satan."

## HUMAN REASON & LOGIC

When confronted with the question of the deity of Christ, J.W.'s say, in their literature, (Quote): "To hold that Jehovah God the Father, and Christ the Son, are co-eternal is to fly in the face of reason . . . The advocates of the Trinity admit that it is not a subject of **reason or logic** and so they resort to terming it 'a mystery'. But the Bible contains no divine mysteries. It contains sacred secrets . . . there is a vast difference between a secret and a mystery. A secret is merely that which has not been made known, but a mystery is that which cannot be understood." (Unquote). J.W.'s justify their claim that everything to be believed must "be reasonable" on the basis of Isa.1:18 where God said, "**Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord . . .**" As this tenet of 'reason' is basic to what J.W.'s find believable and thus acceptable in God's word, we should, I think, first of all, consider it on its merits.

When God (through Isaiah) said to man, "**Come let us reason together**" it was (as we shall see if we finish the quotation) in the context of God asking man to mend

his ways, and, in return, receive the forgiveness of God. God said, **“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”** This is a far cry from God suggesting that God and man are equals in any sense whatsoever, and that man could renege on any suggestion of God that “flew in the face of reason”. When God said, “Let us reason together” he was not suggesting that man would, or could, find a reason for all that God says or does, or that man could, even in a very tiny degree, plumb the depths of God’s mind or actions. Indeed God has, elsewhere, assured man that **“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”** (It was the same Isaiah who said this: 55:9). In other words, God’s thoughts and ways are light-years away from man: and the very wisest of men have little chance of plumbing the depths or scaling the heights of God’s thoughts or ways. And Paul could say, **“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory for ever.”** (Rom.11:34). Just because God said, at a certain point in history to the Jews, “Let us reason together”, it does not follow that we will find ‘reasons’ for all that God has said and done. J.W.’s say that they can’t believe things like the deity of Christ because ‘reason’ rebels (human reason, that is) against its acceptance. Anything “which flies in the face of reason” they can’t accept: yet there are countless things in the Bible for which God has never given a reason.

#### REASON VERSUS FAITH

Certainly, as human beings, we must use our powers of reasoning in the understanding of God’s word: indeed we use our reasoning faculties every day in all walks of life. However, many things in the scriptures confound human reason, and we must believe and accept them solely on the basis of **faith**. Most ordinary people (not just J.W.’s) say that the idea of life after death is not ‘reasonable’ to believe, and so they reject the idea. Equally they say that ‘it flies in the face of all reason’ to suppose that a dead man could come to life again and rise from his tomb; and so the N.T. teaching on the resurrection is denied and rejected. When reason is impossible **FAITH** comes into play. It flew in the face of reason that Abraham (at the age of 100 years and him as good as dead) and Sarah (long past child-bearing age) could ever, as God had promised, have a child, much less a progeny as numberless as the sand of the sea. It was so ‘unreasonable’ that it was a matter for mirth and levity: but, **by faith** Abraham never doubted it. The concept of ‘reason’ is virtually irrelevant when we are dealing with God, for God has given us no reasons for a host of things: like Satan; sin; blood sacrifices; human emotion; sleep; pain; ageing; life; death etc. etc., many of which appear unreasonable to us.

As Walter Martin remarks in his book *The Kingdom Of The Cults*, the term “reason” (and all its derivatives) is used some 88 times in the Bible but only once in reference to man; (i.e. in the portion already quoted Isa.1:18 “Come let us reason together, saith the Lord.”) and even that quotation can never lead us to suppose that we shall always find a reason for God’s words and ways. Many of God’s ways are clothed in mystery, so much so that even the hymnwriter discovered that God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out. One of the greatest mysteries in the Bible is with reference to the incarnation (taking of bodily form) of Jesus: and, in consequence, His deity. Paul says, **“And without controversy GREAT IS THE MYSTERY of godliness, God (He who; RV) was manifest in the flesh . . .”** (1 Tim.3:16). J.W.’s may say

that there are no mysteries in the Bible but Paul and John mention several, including this 'great' mystery regarding God being born of a woman, in the likeness of men. The first part of the mystery is that "God" was manifest (seen visibly) in the flesh. The RV and RSV state that the oldest MSS render for "God" in this passage "He" or "He who" but this does not materially alter the weight of the verse for, if Christ had not been immeasurably superhuman there was little point in the apostle mentioning that "He" (God) was "manifest in the flesh." Had a man been manifested in the flesh Paul's statement would have been a nonsense. Had an angel been manifested in the flesh it would have been of some interest but nothing new. But when Paul says that God was manifested in the flesh, then that was, without controversy 'mind-blowing' and certainly worthy of being referred to as a 'great mystery'. E. M. Zerr says on this passage (referring to the word "God"), "We should bear in mind that the word 'God' is a family name, and that each member of the Deity or Godhead is entitled to the name. Hence the present passage means 'God, the Son' for it was He who was on the earth in the flesh."

#### MYSTERIES OR SECRETS?

In order to destroy this great element of mystery surrounding Christ's incarnation, J.W.'s have chosen to try and deny that there are such things as mysteries in the Bible and, as we saw in the quotation from their literature, reduce them all to 'sacred secrets'. If this were true (that there were no mysteries in the Bible) then why should the sacred writers refer to "mysteries" at all; and why do it 24 times? The Greek word for 'mystery' is *Musterion* (a completely different word than that used for 'secret') and means "that which is known to the initiated." Sometimes mysteries and secrets may come into close proximity but they are really quite separate. Nicodemus was a "secret" disciple but surely this was no 'mystery', whereas Paul said that Christ's incarnation was "a great mystery". How Christians could be members of Christ's body, flesh and bone; or man and woman be one flesh; was baffling to Paul and he said this was "A great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church". (Eph.5:32). The Jews were completely baffled as to how David's 'Lord' could also be his 'son' (and this mystery was only solved by Christ's teaching about His pre-existence: because Christ was David's Lord and also David's Son. Matt.22:45). Yes, there were and are many mysteries in God's word. If we don't find anything mysterious about God it must mean that we know as much as He does.

#### CHRIST'S KENOSIS

The brother in India mentions two passages of scripture in particular, which J.W.'s have presented to him as proof that Christ was not equal with God but inferior to Him. The first is Mark 3:32 where Jesus said, concerning the end of the world, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." This, it is claimed, shows Christ's inferiority; being ignorant of something known only to God. The other passage is in 1 Cor.15:28, "For He (God) hath put all things under His (Jesus) feet. But when He sayeth all things are put under Him it is manifest that He (God) is excepted which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may all in all." Again it is claimed that this shows that Christ is subject to God and thus inferior.

These verses certainly indicate that Christ was subject to God the Father, and there are many more such. Jesus said, "I do always My Father's will," and "My Father is greater than I." God was the sender: Christ was the sent. In the matter of the headcovering in worship Paul said that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is man, and "the head of Christ is God." Many other such passages to like effect could be quoted. After stressing Paul's words that Christ's incarnation was a

mystery, I am not likely to try to explain it, but would suggest that we closely examine Phil. 2:5-11 where Paul describes Christ's kenosis, or demotion of Himself from Godhood to manhood. He says, **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."** This passage clearly states Christ's equality with God, but also His kenosis, or the divesting of Himself of power and status; accepting subjugation to God the Father, as a puny man. Jesus did not count it 'robbery' to claim equality with God, but evidently J.W.'s do. The word "equal" (equal with God) is the Greek word *Isos* which Young defines as "equal to; the same as", and which Vine defines as "the same in number, size and quality." Thayer defines it as "Equal in quality as in quantity; to claim for oneself the nature, rank and authority which belong to God." Paul's declaration here that Jesus prior to His incarnation was co/equal with God is supported by the fact that in John 5:18 **"the Jews sought the more to kill Him"** for breaking the sabbath and for **"making Himself equal with God."** Although truly God, Jesus became truly man, and subjected Himself, quite voluntarily, to all the weaknesses and frailties of humanity. This is difficult to imagine; and how Jesus could be truly God and truly man, both at the same time, is part of the mystery. A footnote in the RSV on Phil.2:5 says, "Kenosis' is the theological name often used in connection with Christ's incarnation, and means He 'emptied Himself', or 'stripped Himself', or 'divested Himself' of His divine powers and prerogatives as God the Son, when He assumed the limitations of becoming a true human being. It was a voluntary, self-imposed limitation. Christ in human form was both God and man — two very distinct natures united in one person. Yet scripture does not make clear the full implication of the Kenosis. There are aspects of mystery connected with it which the minds of finite men are not able to fathom." There certainly were many contrasts, and apparent contradictions, in Christ's life which we, with our limited understanding may fail to comprehend. Jesus could walk on water yet get 'tired' on a journey; He could read men's thoughts yet often 'marvelled' at man's disbelief; He could feed 5,000 yet had to send his disciples out to buy victuals: He made the worlds yet had nowhere to lay his head; He could raise the dead yet sweated (as great drops of blood) at the prospect of His own demise:and readers will think of many other similar puzzling incongruities. Jesus had to be protected by flight as a vulnerable babe, and had to grow and learn like the rest. **"He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."** (Luke 2:50). Surely in the context of Christ's **humanity** we can understand 1 Cor. 15:28; that Christ needed God to put all things under His feet, and that God the Father is the exception when **all things** are made subject to Christ. Surely we understand that in 'divesting Himself' Christ limited Himself in knowledge and power. Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem, and the end of the world, and stated that, even as He spoke, the day and hour of the latter event was within the ken of the Father only. In view of Phil. 2:25, Christ's drastic kenosis, that should not surprise or perplex us a great deal. I'm sure Jesus has that information now.

### CONCLUSION

Space has more than gone but a few final remarks. Clearly, while Christ was in the body, He was subservient to God, and even prayed to God the Father. Nevertheless, as we have just seen from Phil. 2:6, Christ was co-equal with God, a fact that cannot be gainsayed, even by J.W.'s. There are many confirmations of this. John (1:1) said, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and was God."** Again this means co-equality with the Father. Paul said, **"in Him (Christ) dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead, bodily."** (Col.2:9). Isaiah described the Messiah to come as,

**“Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace.”** and these are, of course, powerful terms; especially **“the Mighty God”**, and the **“everlasting Father”**. Christ is also described as (Rev.1:8) **“the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”** What more can be said? We either accept these statements or reject them. If we can't understand that Christ's temporary demotion, from true God to true man, has its mysterious aspects, then not much can be done. The deep things of an infinite God do not always conform to human (finite) reason or logic, and quite often genuine Bible students are mystified. Indeed much in scripture **“flies in the face of reason”** and that's why we walk **by FAITH** and not by sight, and **“have great confidence towards God.”**

**EDITOR**