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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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**"What is meant when we ask people if they believe that Jesus is the Son of God? This is before we baptise them, of course. Also do converts have to believe in the deity of Jesus before their sins can be forgiven?"**

The questioner asks this question because he/she (unsigned letter) knows of a major religious sect (Christian) who believe Jesus was a 'created being' and not a Jehovah God. A passage of scripture John 8:24 is quoted. It seems to me that we need to clarify one or two points inherent in this question.

### **BEING**

I consider the phrase 'a created being' to be a contradiction in terms. The verb 'to be' means to exist, therefore 'being' means 'existing'. If we refer to a 'created being', then we refer to someone who was created by someone else who must Himself have been **uncreated**. In the Bible, as I understand it, the 'Uncreated' we refer to as God. The implication inherent in the question is that Jesus was 'created' by God. If we can show that 'being' is 'uncreated existence', then we shall be in a position to advance our thinking a little further. As I have pointed out on a number of occasions, metaphysics as a philosophy is not easily understood at human level.

We must now look at a statement made by the apostle Paul in Philippians 2:6. This is referring to the Christ of God, Jesus, "**Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery (a thing to be grasped at) to be equal with God**". The word 'being' here is the Greek word HUPARCHON which means 'existing', and is the present active participle of HUPARCHO (without getting too 'bogged down' in grammar, a participle is a verbal adjective; part verb, part adjective). This construction "always involves a pre-existent state, prior to the fact referred to, and a continuance of the state after the fact" (W. E. Vine, Ex. Dic. N.T. Words). In explanation, this means that Jesus possessed all the essential attributes

of God in His pre-incarnate state, and also in His incarnate state in the flesh on earth (EN MORPHE THEOU, 'in the form of God').

"Ah", someone will say, "But doesn't v7 say that 'he emptied himself'? Surely that means He became just a man. If I empty a cup there will be nothing in it of what was previously in it". The word 'empty' is rendered in the Greek by the word KINOO, which is an old verb from the word KENOS. There is a so-called theory of KENOSIS, which says that when Jesus became a man, he became like any other first-century Jew. It is true that He left His glory and took 'the form of a servant'; it is also true that He became; in the likeness of men'. I would not deny that He had the limitation of space when He came to earth. But it was impossible for Him to become something other than that which He essentially was; "being in the form of God", He was a Person of the Godhead and as such He had Godhood. He was still 'Son of God' when He came to earth to be 'Son of Man'. His deity was intact: He did not empty Himself of that. Therefore we can say that if anyone believes in Jesus, that person also must believe in His deity

### BELIEVING

I now turn to the passage of scripture quoted by the questioner, John 8:24. I believe that J. B. Phillips gives the best rendition of this, "That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that *I am* who *I am*, you will die in your sins". This brings to mind the instruction which God gave to Moses when He sent him back into Egypt, "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you". Ex. 3:14. Now if anyone can say 'I AM', then what is being said is, "He was, He is, He always will be", in fact, eternal, as God is. It seems to me that Jesus, according to John's Gospel, is claiming the same eternal nature as God.

We now need to look at what those in the 1st century believed, and how they responded to the Gospel. I cite the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8:29-40. This man was reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip, the Evangelist, who had joined himself to this man's chariot said, "Do you understand what you are reading". The answer was, "How can I unless someone explains it to me". So Philip explained by preaching unto him Jesus. This illustrates a fundamental point; our belief and consequent faith must be based on understanding. As they continued on their journey they came to a certain water. The eunuch said, "Here is water; what hinders me from being baptised". Philip said, "If thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest". The eunuch replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God". So there we have it: Belief in Jesus as the Son of God; confession of faith out of a truly repentant heart; immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins; rejoicing in the fruits of obedience. There is one other thing we should mention here. Philip said to the eunuch, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest". The belief in Christ must be from the heart and not just the mind. In Jer. 31:33 we read, "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people". The stony heart which just responds to the letter of the law is no longer acceptable.

### COMMITMENT

When I say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God", I am, in fact, making a commitment to Him, and undertaking a responsibility. That responsibility is a Divine imperative. It involves complete obedience to the deity I have named. I have understood that obedience to Him will absolve me from sin. I have also understood that no mere human could offer me forgiveness of sin. My responsibility includes not only the Saviour, but extends to all others who have been obedient to Him and are consequently members of His Body, the Church.

It is true that in the 1st century A.D. there was a sect called the Docetic Gnostics. They believed that Jesus was a 'phantom' Christ. They argued that Deity could not dwell in a body

of sinful flesh. Paul, however, says, "**For He hath made Him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him**" 2 Cor. 5:21. This means that Jesus could be our **sin-bearer** only because He Himself was **sinless**. The Hebrew Writer also makes it clear that Jesus had the full approbation of God, His Father, "**But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows**". Heb. 1:8,9. Yes, Jesus the Son of God, certainly came in the likeness of sinful flesh, but Satan could do nothing with Him; the 'wilderness temptation' proves that. His brow was pierced with the thorns which they pushed down on to His head. and it was **real blood** which flowed. Doesn't it make our salvation all the more breath-taking when we realise that God Himself stepped down from heaven in the Person of Jesus, His Christ? When we, in faith and obedience, accept Christ as Saviour, we accept Someone, who, yes, changed His environment, but who could not change His **essential nature** from that which He was in Heaven. Is that too much to believe? Would we rather place our eternal destiny in the hands of some fallible man? I'm sure we all know the answer to **that**.

In conclusion, let me remind you of Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost, "**Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**". This means God's presence with us by the other Person of the Godhead. So we have the determinate counsel of God arranging our salvation; Christ Jesus procuring it; and the Holy Spirit confirming it by in-dwelling us. How can anyone exclude Deity **in every step** of our salvation?

(All questions, please to Alf Marsden, 20 Costessy Way,  
Winstanley, Wigan. WN3 6ES)