

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## MALIGNED AND EXPLOITED

Greg S. Deuble, a former Church of Christ minister, in a compelling book entitled: *They Never Told Me This In Church*, states: "There is a consensus among many New Testament scholars that much of what the historical Jesus and his apostles taught has been submerged by an influx of post-biblical tradition. Subtle foreign influences, mostly from pagan Greek philosophy, which neither Jesus nor his first-century followers would recognize or endorse, have obscured the original Gospel as Jesus preached it. Most churchgoers accept without question, unbiblical traditions which they never seriously investigated." The Apostle Peter wrote: "False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words" (II Peter 2:1, 2). Some time ago, commenting on another subject, I wrote: "It is with a certain amount of trepidation and ambivalence that I write these words. Yet for the sake of the truth I must stand against thousands of years of tradition, contradict most learned theologians, go against all accepted creeds of the church, contradict what I have been taught, risk being maligned, misunderstood and misrepresented, but the only thing I ask is that if what I have to say is rejected, it will be rejected upon the basis of Scripture and not assumption." I apply these words to this article.

William Barclay in his *Daily Bible Study* comments: "The human mind has an amazing faculty for rejecting that which it does not wish to see. Men still accept the parts of the Christian message which they like and which suit them, and refuse to understand the rest." Jesus said: "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear my word...Because I speak the truth you do not believe me...He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God" (John 8:43-47). This is an important principle. The *words* of Jesus and the *words* of God are important. If what is preached and taught is not the *word* of God it is a false teaching. False teaching is one of the most prominent subjects in Scripture and perhaps the most neglected. Warnings of the false prophet are replete in the Old Testament, especially in the Prophets. Jesus warns, time and time again against false teachers and prophecies that will be present in the future. The Apostles also in the epistles deals at length with this subject. The last words of Peter covers three chapters, two of them given over to warnings against false teaching. The whole book of Jude is about this danger. The book of Revelation deals almost exclusively with the problem. In the Old Testament false prophets were to be put to death (Deut. 18:20, 13:5). Note Jeremiah 23:16-32, 28:8,9, 15-17. In contrast to false teaching the phrase "It is written" appears over 105 times in the N.T. Paul warns we are "not to exceed, or go beyond what is written" (I Cor. 4:6). He states his teaching was "not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (I

Cor. 2:13). This says if it is not in Scripture it is a false teaching and should be rejected. Acts 17:11 states that the Bereans examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul taught was true. My premise is: If it is not in Scripture it is a false teaching.

High on the list of some prominent teachings held sacred by most churches that are not found in Scripture are: The trinity, the rapture, the immortal soul, the destruction of the earth, the age of accountability, and the worship service. Let's begin with the doctrine of the trinity. Before you tear up this paper and throw it away let me say: To not believe in the trinity is *not* to believe Christ is not divine. Christ is divine, the divine Son of God. God is often referred to as "the Triune God" described by the phrase "God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit." The problem with this is this description is not found in Scripture and Jesus never claimed to be God. Believers in the trinity will marshal a host of Bible verses to disprove this, but nowhere will they find a definite verse that supports their claim. Is this an important subject, or are we just nitpicking? I heard an Elder in a local Christian church say "It makes do difference to me if there are three Gods (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) that just means I can praise Them three times as much." If this man was "apt to teach" such things he should never be an Elder.

If this is not found in Scripture what is the origin of the doctrine? There is no record of a doctrine of the trinity taught or believed in the early church. Perhaps the reason for this is it is not in the Scriptures. Richard E. Rubenstein in *When Jesus Became God* states: "During the first three centuries after Jesus' crucifixion, the idea that the Savior was separate from God and subordinate to Him was not particularly shocking. To patriarchal Romans, the very titles Father and Son implied a relationship of superiority and inferiority. Two of the most brilliant and influential of the Eastern Church Fathers, Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria, had taught that Jesus was inferior to God. And the idea of a hierarchy of power and glory in heaven matched what people saw on earth, as well as what they read in the Gospels." The year is about 319. In a meeting of the presbyters (priests) in Alexander the "Bishop" of Alexander, coincidentally named "Alexander" began to lecture on the theological mystery of the "Holy Trinity". One of the presbyters by the name of Arius, a native of Libya, dropped a bombshell on Alexander's meeting by announcing: "If the Father begat the Son, then he who was begotten had a beginning inexistence, and from this it follows there was a time when the Son was not." This is beyond what those opposing the trinity today would say, but Arius gained a following which was destined to shake not only the professing church but the entire Roman Empire and result in a conflict so fierce that intense persecutions from both sides gripped the entire civilized world. Most theological teachers today look upon any doctrine akin to Arius as heretical and blasphemous. This means that in most church circles today to not believe in the trinity is to deny that Jesus is divine and make him a mere man on the level of all other men. So as in Arius' day anyone who is not a Trinitarian is also labeled heretical and blasphemous.

The quarreling and contentions among the two arguing sides which erupted into physical battles and persecutions came to the attention of Emperor Constantine, the first “Christian” emperor, who decided in the year 325 to put an end to the controversy by convening a council of Bishops. The small town of Nicaea was chosen and it was Constantine’s aim to not only put an end to the quarreling but to establish a standardized creed which would bring about some unity of faith in the church. According to Norman P. Tanner in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* “the council of 318 “Bishops” opened on June 19<sup>th</sup> in the presence of the emperor, but it is uncertain who presided over the council. The aim of Constantine to present a creed that would foster unity of the faith did not work out as planned. From the beginning of the session of the developers of the creed there was much division over the statements of the creed. The Emperor Constantine had ordered the council of Nicaea to resolve the differences in theology on the Godhead. This council developed into a heated battle that ended in victory for the Trinitarians. The Trinitarian position was strengthened by a new Nicene creed that was carefully worded to prohibit any belief that was not Trinitarian and to strengthen the Trinitarian conceptions. No other views were allowed. St. Augustine, a century later, developed this teaching into a doctrine of the Trinity, in which all three persons were separate personalities, all co-equal and co-eternal.” It is sad to see a belief held so sacred today by the majority of Christians was actually given birth by quarreling “Bishops”, a questionable creed and a Roman Emperor who knew little about the teaching of Scripture. Why do not those who believe the doctrine of the trinity based upon the Nicene creed also accept the doctrine of the first council of Ephesus which proclaimed the Virgin Mary was the “Theotokas” (God-bearer) or more commonly called “the Mother of God”? Or for that matter why not believe the conclusions of all the councils?

The Nicene creed which establishes the belief in the trinity is itself ridiculous. Note this description of Jesus from the creed: “the son of God, begotten from the Father, only begotten, that is from *ousia* (substance) of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, *homoousia* (same substance) with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made.” How could such a confusing creed become the basis of Christian belief?

The common defense of the trinity is it cannot be explained or understood, but we are to believe it in spite of this. As Steve Berg stated in *Christianity Today*: “The trinity can’t be explained, it is mysterious, it can’t be understood, but that doesn’t make it untrue.” Deuteronomy 29:29 states: “the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of the law.” God’s word is a “revelation” and we are commanded many times in Scripture to know and understand the “mysteries” which have been revealed. We “have received the Spirit from God, that we might know the things freely given us by God” (I Cor. 2:12). If God has revealed Himself in His Son, to make it something mysterious, complicated and unable to be understood is a contradiction of God’s revelation in Scripture. They can’t explain or understand it because it is a confusing doctrine based upon man made creeds and not Scripture.

Add to this the silly and inane ways preachers try to explain the trinity. Common expressions are: “the trinity is like water, ice and steam, different but the same.” Try this one: “it is like cherry pie, top crust, bottom crust and filling.” Or (Lord forgive us) “it is like an egg, the shell, the white and the yoke”. The common expression “God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit” is nowhere found in Scripture and Jesus never in anyway indicated that he was God. He did confess to being the Son of God (John 10:36) but usually used the expression “son of man”.

It is unfortunate that many accepted authors and teachers are so mesmerized with the Trinitarian doctrine. For example, Dave Hunt, author of many Scriptural studies, stated in his September, 2000 *Berean Call*: “The One whom the Bible calls ‘the God of Israel’ is so designated 203 times.” He continues: “Unquestionably the Hebrew prophets all agree that God exists as a Tri-Unity, three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but one God that in the Messiah He becomes man”. He cites no Scripture for this assertion, perhaps because there is none. It is remarkable that an “accepted scholar” in the religious world would make such a statement, but even more remarkable that many Christian people believe him.

There are too many scriptures to quote from the Old Testament that shows God is one God, not three persons. For example the single person “I”, “Me”, “Him”, is used countless thousands of times. No single pronoun can refer to more than one person. God declares over and over “Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is One.” Trinitarians say that when the Bible speaks of God as one, it is speaking of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Athanasian Creed states “we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity. Neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. So the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God, yet they are not three Gods but one God”. (from *The Catholic Encyclopedia*). Note Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 8:4 “...there is no God but one.” Trinitarians add that the one God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But Paul continues “but there is but one God the Father, of whom are all things and we exist for Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (verse 6). Notice that the “one God” is distinct from the “one Lord”. The word God in this passage refers to the Father alone. Here the term means “Supreme Sovereign and Head of all,” and refers exclusively to the Father, not to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Paul further says “the head of Christ is God” (I Cor. 11:3). If one were to read through the New Testament and substitute the phrase “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” in place of the term “God” it would be seen that the Trinitarians definition could not possible apply. In John 17:3 Jesus refers to God as “the only true God”. He tells His apostles that “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). Jesus referred to himself as “the Son of man”. Only once did he say “I am the Son of God” (Jn. 10:36), but he does say “the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God” (Jn. 5:25) and “the son of God may be glorified” (Jn. 11:4) although many times when he is speaking of the Father he refers to Himself as “the Son” and the New Testament repeatedly declares that He is the Son of God. The expression he uses most is “Son of man”. Trinitarians say that the title “son of man” is a divine figure taken from Daniel 7 and indicates more than a human figure. This argument disintegrates when we read the book of Ezekiel and find Ezekiel is referred to as “son of man”.

The term used in Daniel is said to be a designation of his deity because he was given dominion, glory and kingdom (ver. 14) yet the same chapter states that the everlasting kingdom is given to the saints (ver. 27). There is no indication in the New Testament that the term means anything other than the fact that Jesus was and is a man (not an ordinary man, having the nature of Adam as all other men do, but a sinless man, born of a virgin and begotten by God, having the nature of God, not the nature of Adam. At this point I must establish the truth of the above statements and show that Jesus was a man not a “God-man”.

Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise his head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” God never promised to send Himself to redeem mankind. Rather, He promised that the “seed of the woman” would come and that this man would do it.

Numbers 23:19: “God is not a man”. There is nothing in Scripture that indicates God can become a man, because he is God.

Matthew 1:20: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been *begotten* in her is of the Holy Spirit.” A literal translation of Luke 1:35 reads: “And the angel answered and said to her ‘the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason the holy thing *begotten* shall be called the Son of God’.” Both the Nicene and the Athanasian creeds state Jesus was “begotten before the worlds”. To be “begotten” is relative to humankind. Luke, Matthew and Gabriel state that Jesus was begotten in the womb of Mary, not before the worlds.

Acts 2:22,23: “Men of Israel listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene *a man* attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as yourselves know, this *man* delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death.” Peter is emphasizing that Jesus was a man and it was God performing signs and wonders through him. The Trinitarians would say that “God performed these signs and miracles through God.” This doesn’t make sense. If Jesus were God why did he have to be attested by God?

I Corinthians 15:45-47: “For since by a man came death by a *man* also came the resurrection of the dead...So it is written, ‘The first man Adam, became a living soul the last Adam became a life-giving spirit, the first man is from the earth, earthy, the second *man* is from heaven.’” It was through a man that sin and death came, so it is through a man, not a God-man that forgiveness and life comes into the world.

I Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and man, the *man* Jesus Christ.” Jesus came into the world as a man and is still a man as our mediator. Trinitarians cannot accept that Jesus was man while upon earth, much less accept that he is a man in heaven. I will believe Paul not their creeds.

Hebrews 2:17: “Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in all things, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the

sins of the people.” A “God-man” could not be like his brethren in all things. He partook of our flesh and blood (ver 14).

## EXAMINATION OF VERSES USED BY TRINITARIANS

John 1:1-3: The way this passage is usually interpreted and read as: “In the beginning was the Son and the Son was with God and the Son was God.” As all can see the text simply says: “In the beginning was the word”, it does not say “In the beginning was the Son of God.” In fact there is no direct mention of the son of God until we come to verse 14, where “the word (not the Son) became flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, glory as the only begotten (unique son) from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The son is what the word became. But what is “the word”? According to *The Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* “the standard meaning of *word* is ‘utterance, promise, command etc.’ It never meant a personal being, never ‘the Son of God’.” There is wide meanings for “word” and “person” is not among these meanings. It further states: “The noun *davar* (word) occurs some 1455 times. The word of the Lord has power because it is an extension of God’s knowledge, character and ability.”

Verse 3 and Colossians 1:1-16,17 are favorite verses the Trinitarians use to prove that Jesus was actually the creator not only of the world, but creator of all things.

Verse 3: “All things came into being through him (the word) and apart from him nothing came into being what has come into being”. Isaiah 44:24: “Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the *one* who formed you in the womb, I the Lord am the *maker of all things*, stretching out the heavens by *Myself*, and spreading out the earth *all alone*. Isaiah 45:12,18: “It is I (singular, one person) who made the earth and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with my hands...for thus says the Lord who created the heavens, He is the God who formed the earth and made it. He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited, I am the Lord and there is *none else*.” God *alone* and *none else* created.

Colossians 1:16,17: “For in him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him, and he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Without considering the context Trinitarians have a good case, but when the context of Paul’s words are studied their case dissolves. The context of Christ being the creator of *all things* is not concerning the physical creation of the universe, but the post-resurrection glorification, exaltation and empowerment of Christ. The phrase “all things” occurs before and after the things that were said to be created and therefore defines them. The “all things” here are the “things” for the Church, not “things” of the original creation. Connect these verses with the parallel passage in Ephesians 1:20-23: “He raised him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenlies far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age, but in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him as head over *all things* to the church which is his body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Chapter 2 and verse 14 of Ephesians speaks again of what he created: “that in himself he might create of the

two into one new man, thus establishing peace.” The context is the “new creation” not the original creation.

John 8:58: “Jesus said to them ‘truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am’.” “I am” is capitalized in most versions equating Jesus with the “I AM” of the Old Testament. To the Trinitarians this means that Jesus existed before Abraham as the great I AM, which was God Almighty. However Jesus is speaking in the context of his being the Messiah. He said “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad.” God had revealed to Abraham that the Messiah would some day come. This day was in the mind of God before Abraham was born. Just as Christ was “the lamb slain before the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8 KJV), so he was the Christ, the Messiah before Abraham was born. Cambridge New Testament scholar J.A.T. Robinson in *Priority of John* wrote: “The indention of Jesus’ ‘I am’ statement with the ‘I am’ of Exodus, I believe to be misreading the text. To take the ‘I am’ as the divine name (of God) is a misreading which cannot be shown to be such by careful attention of the text of John. The ‘I am the bread, the shepherd’ certainly do not imply that the subject is God. The ‘I am’ statements do not carry with them the implication that he is Yahweh, indeed in the latter two (John 8:28, 13:19 there is a contrast with the Father who sent him, but in contrast, ‘the Christ, the son of God’.”

Philippians 2:5-8: “Have this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.” This passage is the flagship of Trinitarians. To them it teaches the dual nature of Christ by the interpretation of the fact that he “existed in the *form* of God” and “emptied himself.” The Greek word “form” is “*morpha*” which Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines as “external appearance” (Vol. 4 p 742). It is used several times in the N.T. for example, Mark 16:12 “And after that he appeared in a different *form* to two of them while they were walking on the way to the country.” Mark is referring to Luke 24:13ff. The *form* was a human (outward) form, but different from that which Jesus bore during his earthly ministry. He did not have a different “essential nature”, he simply had a different outward appearance. The word is used in II Tim. 3:5 where Paul speaks of evil men who have “the *form* of godliness” or an outward appearance of godliness. Trinitarians assert that the word “form” refers to Christ’s inner nature as God. The NIV wrongly translates verse 6 as Jesus being “in the very nature of God.” The majority of Greek scholars do not agree with this rendering. This verse does not say “Jesus being God,” but rather “being in the *form* of God”. If Jesus is God why did Paul not simply say so? Paul is simply saying Jesus represented the Father in every way. This agrees with Jesus’ statement in John 14:9: “he that hath seen me has seen the Father” and with II Cor. 4:4: Christ was “the image of God.” The Scriptures teach that God cannot change and that God is not a man. As one manifesting the Father, he did not, as Adam, grasp at being like God, the last Adam emptied himself of all his rights to claim divinity and took the *form* of a bondservant and claimed to be “the son of man.” If Jesus were God how could he grasp to be

equal with God? This would say he did not grasp at equality with himself.

Verse 7: This verse has been variously translated: “But made himself of no reputation” (KJV), “but made himself nothing” (NIV), “but laid aside” (Living Bible), “but emptied himself” (NASB, RSV, NRSV). The Greek word is *kenos* which literally means “to empty” (Kittel). Dr. Just Gonzales in *A History of Christian Thought* states the Trinitarian position on the “dual nature of Christ” by saying: “The divine and human natures exist in a single being, although how that can be is the greatest mystery of the faith.” As I already noted Biblical truth is not an incomprehensible mystery that cannot be known. In fact we are commanded to know and understand that which has been revealed. If Jesus was God he could not empty or lay aside his divine nature because this would force God to change and God cannot change. Remember “God is not a man” (Num.23:19) and “I the Lord do not change” (Mal. 3:6). Peter said “Jesus a man attested (accredited) by God” has now been made “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:22,36).

John 17:5: “And now, glorify Thou me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” Notice he does not say “give *back* to me the glory which I had.” Just as Jesus was “the lamb slain before the foundation of the world” he had glory with God before the world was. Jesus existed in the foreknowledge of God before creation. Christ was the *logos* (word, plan) of God from the beginning and became flesh when he was born in Bethlehem. II Timothy 1:9 states: “grace was granted to us in Christ from all eternity.” Before the beginning of the world God granted us grace. In the same way God granted Christ glory before the world.

John 20:28: “Thomas answered and said unto him ‘My Lord and my God!’” Thomas is certainly addressing Jesus as the living Messiah. There is not a hint in all the gospels that the Apostles believed Jesus was God. They had trouble believing he was the Christ, much less God. Having Thomas proclaiming Jesus to be God is to directly contradict John’s own stated purpose in writing the Gospel. He has said these things “have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God” (John 20:31). When Thomas said this he was at last recognizing that the resurrected Jesus was the Messiah. Thomas is using language typical of O.T. concepts and traditions. The expression is grounded in O. T. examples showing that the word “God” can refer to one who represents God. For example: Exodus 3: 2, 6ff. Acts 7:30-33; Judges 6:11-14, 22,23, Gen. 32:24-30, Hosea 12:4. Thomas was a Jew, grounded in O.T. history and faith that God is one, Jehovah. The Messiah is also called God in a relative and royal sense rather than in an absolute sense. Note also John 10:33,34.

Some will try to say “the angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament was actually Jesus. This cannot be because God did not speak through His son until “these last days.” In the O.T. He spoke to the fathers in the prophets, not His son (Heb. 1:1,2). Jesus was the divine son of God, virgin born and sinless, but not God. He was able to do his mighty works, not because he was God, but because “God *anointed him with the Holy Spirit and power*, and he went about doing good and healing all oppressed by the devil *because God was with him*” (Acts 10:38).

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