



# In. Light of the Son

Seeing everything through the Father's love for the Son

**ANDREW MOODY**

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For Emma and Jack.  
Praying that you would always rejoice  
to know Jesus as your true brother  
and God as your true Father.



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Father hold fast to us and teach us to love and serve his Son  
through all our remaining days.

# Introduction

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

I can tell you the exact moment this book began—when I began to see things differently. It was 1986, and I was an architecture student at Melbourne University. I was sitting on a couch studying the Bible with the other members of my church home group.

The passage under discussion was John 15, where Jesus calls himself the vine and explains the necessity of abiding in him. But I was stuck on verse 10: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love”. I wondered what this meant. Why does Jesus need to obey God when he is God? What does our obedience have to do with his obedience?

The group leaders weren’t sure what to make of it either. They suggested that I read more of John’s Gospel, research what others had said on the topic, and present my findings as a study the following week.

That was a turning point in my life. During that week I came into contact with an idea that would captivate my mind and change my understanding of the world. This idea has pursued me through decades of study, work, ministry and family life. It has made me think harder about the Bible and brought me into contact with ancient creeds and forgotten theologians. It has forced me to grapple with the meanings of strange words and to appreciate the concepts of orthodox tradition. This idea led me into controversy in the mid 1990s and subsequently into eight

years of doctoral research. It has brought me trouble as well as teaching opportunities and years of thinking, praying, reading and rethinking.

This book explains that big idea and what I have learned about it since that first encounter on the couch.

## **The big idea**

The big idea that began to grab hold of me all those years ago is simply this: that the fundamental reality in heaven and earth is the love that God the Father has for his Son. You and I and everyone and everything else exist because God loves his Son and wants others to know, love and glorify him too. This love explains our creation and our salvation and defines our past, present and future.

When I explain this idea to people I often find that it stirs them at a deep level. They say that it rings true and resonates with what they have read in the Bible and experienced of God through Christ. I pray that this book will enrich your understanding of Scripture and that you will be persuaded, or reminded, that your life is not about you but about something much greater. I pray that this understanding will help you think and speak and live, and that it will help you to explain your faith and celebrate the gospel of Jesus Christ in this dying world.

This big idea sounds simple—and in one sense it is. But it also leads to other, more complex, insights. When we read the Bible using the relationship between the Father and Son as our lens, we see new things. We discover how the Old Testament, and even the structure of creation, prepares the way for Jesus. We find that God's wisdom and control over history are greater than we ever imagined. We unearth startling facts about ourselves and about our part in God's plans.

Focusing on the Father's love for the Son as we read the Bible can also help us understand more about who Jesus is and the significance of what he's done for us. This focus can also help us explain the doctrine of the Trinity—and how it's expressed in creation, redemption and our glorious future—in terms that make sense to people of other faiths. The Father-Son relationship unveils a way of looking at the world that isn't just more coherent, but more wonderful.

To put it simply, when we look at the world in the light of Jesus and his sonship, everything is illuminated.



# Chapter 1: Unlocking the Trinity

Rivers of medieval ink, not to mention blood, have been squandered over the ‘mystery’ of the Trinity, and in suppressing deviations such as the Arian heresy. Arius of Alexandria, in the fourth century AD, denied that Jesus was consubstantial (i.e. of the same substance or essence) with God. What on earth could that possibly mean, you are probably asking? Substance? What ‘substance’? What exactly do you mean by ‘essence’? ‘Very little’ seems the only reasonable reply. (Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*)<sup>1</sup>

Speakers’ Corner, London, 2011: The Christian is looking alternately perplexed, earnest and nervous. He touches his forehead as he attempts to defend himself. His moustache, tartan shirt and padded vest complete the picture. Suburban churchgoer out of his depth.

The Muslim apologist, a tall Jamaican man surrounded by his bearded companions in robes and kufis, stands next to him. He leans forward and touches the Christian lightly on his shoulder as he presses his case. His voice is deep and confident.

“The very core of your faith is irrational. When you add three things together you don’t get one, you get three. The Trinity is something that theologians have been trying to explain for centuries, but they gave up and now they say it’s a mystery. You talk about God dying. But all the prophets speak about God as being one who has no beginning or end. To speak about God dying is irrational.”

The Christian believes he can see a way out.

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<sup>1</sup> Houghton Mifflin, New York, 2008, p. 54.

“Yes, but dying doesn’t mean ceasing to exist. Dying means that your body dies, not your spirit. Jesus suffered physical death, not spiritual death.”

Unfortunately, the Muslim is more familiar with Christian doctrine than its defender.

“Yes, but was it only Jesus’ spirit that was God, or was it his body too? Doesn’t your Bible say that the Word became flesh?”

“Well, I believe he came down to earth in the form of a man... I believe he was God... not the body...”

A laugh from the other man cuts him off.

“You’re getting confused”, the Muslim says. “The reason is that your Bible says, ‘In the beginning was the Word... And the Word became flesh’. It means that the body of Jesus was God. If only Jesus’ spirit were God, then that would be something I could understand. But this...”

The Christian looks hunted. He starts talking about the blessings of a relationship with God through Jesus, sharing ideas that are true and helpful under different circumstances but that are of no help here while the serious intellectual challenges stand unanswered. The debate is lost. The Christian has been unable to articulate and defend the central claims of his faith.<sup>2</sup>

## **Vague ideas and a missing dimension**

How would you have answered the Muslim’s challenge? Would you have been able to explain how God can be three and one at the same time? Would you have been able to explain the divinity of Jesus the man with greater clarity?

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Hyde Park Speakers Corner: Is Jesus God? Dr. Bilal Philips answers’, video recording, MuslimByChoice YouTube channel, 21 October 2011 (viewed 11 May 2015): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoQkhzRnKJk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoQkhzRnKJk)

I suspect that few of us would. Most of us who call ourselves Christians have some idea of the Trinity. We know that Jesus and the Spirit are somehow God—even though there is only one God. Some of us can recite the great creeds. If we’ve read a book or two we might even be able to throw in a few big words and advanced concepts.

Yet these vague ideas about God’s oneness and threeness don’t help much when questions get specific. Are we dealing with one powerful entity or three? Do the three persons each have power in their own right or are they just expressions of a single being? How should we answer if we are asked whose power it was that made the world or whose idea it was to save us? For many of us, there is some truth in Richard Dawkins’ accusation that we understand “very little” of what we are talking about.

If your brain shut down as you were reading those questions then you can see the problem. There’s something wrong with our way of talking about the Christian God. The concepts of oneness and threeness are so abstract, and we have such a dim understanding of what they mean, that we can’t talk about them with any clarity or conviction.

I am not saying that the oneness-threeness approach is wrong, because it’s not. It’s true—but inadequate. Because the concept doesn’t have enough substance to make things clear, it ends up sounding like a contradiction. It doesn’t help us to understand the Bible or the doctrine of the Trinity.

The problem is that we’ve left something out. We’ve lost sight of a key concept that’s part of how the Bible explains the oneness and threeness of God. And this big idea is central for understanding not just the Bible, but also the doctrine of the Trinity and the work of our Christian forebears.

Let’s begin looking for this missing dimension in Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

## Colossians 1: Jesus Christ, God's perfect image

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15-20)

Paul was writing here to a bunch of people who were tempted to abandon the gospel in order to follow a religion that sounded more exciting. The church at Colossae had made a very good start with Jesus, but then outsiders came along with talk of secret wisdom, angelic visions and impressive religious rules and ceremonies. The Colossians were in danger of turning away from their faith to embrace a system that made them feel more spiritual.

But Paul wanted the Colossians to know that this was a con because it isn't possible for a religion to be more spiritual or more enlightening than Christianity. Jesus Christ isn't just a guy with a few insights about God; he is the key to, and the reason for, the universe. Jesus stands at the centre of everything—he has all the power, all the wisdom, all the meaning, all the access. When we meet Jesus, Paul says, we meet the one through whom and for whom “all things were created” (v. 16). Jesus has the supremacy in all things (v. 18).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> So NIV: “And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy” (Col 1:18, NIV2011).

These are all very exalted claims for Jesus. To some people (both then and today) they sound too exalted. Isn't God supposed to have the supremacy and be at the centre of everything? Doesn't this celebration of Jesus take something away from God?

The quick and easy answer for Christians is that Jesus is God, so there's no problem. End of discussion (at least until someone asks us what that means). But that's not how Paul answers the question in Colossians. For him, there's no conflict or competition, because Jesus is God's representative and agent. When Paul says that Jesus is creator it doesn't mean God isn't, because God created "through" him (v. 16). When he says that Jesus saves us it doesn't mean that God didn't, because God dwelt in him and reconciled the world through him (vv. 19-20). When Paul says that Jesus is supreme it doesn't mean that God isn't, because Jesus is seated at God's right hand (3:1).

If we know the Bible, this should be familiar territory. The Old and New Testaments are full of people who are honoured because they represent God in various ways. There are prophets and apostles whose words are God's words. There are kings who bring order to the world in God's name. There are priests who symbolize God's holiness and who serve as judges over God's people.

There's also a more basic sense in which all humans serve as God's representatives. Genesis 1:26 tells us that God made humans in his image and likeness to rule over all the fish, birds and animals. Being made in God's image means to be a living symbol of God on earth. That's why the Bible contains stern warnings against mistreating human beings (Genesis 9; Jas 3:9-11). As God's image they represent God, and so an attack on them is an attack on him.

So when Paul calls Jesus God's "image" in Colossians 1:15, the word should bring to mind this long tradition of God using

creatures—and especially humans—as his representatives. God’s work in history has prepared us to understand who Jesus is and how he stands in relation to God.

But this statement might raise another objection: doesn’t it take something away from Jesus? Doesn’t this representation idea reduce him to the status of a servant—even a creature? Isn’t Jesus supposed to be equal with God? Isn’t he supposed to be God?

Yes he is. But to say that Jesus represents God is not to say that he is not God. Jesus is equal with God because he represents God in every way in absolutely everything. While prophets, priests and kings represent God in limited ways, Jesus represents God completely. He isn’t just the “image of the invisible God” on earth; he’s also the creator of the earth. He isn’t just a man with a few words of wisdom; he is the perfect mirror of God’s wisdom. As Paul puts it, “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9).

Professional photographers sometimes use what they call a slave flash. It’s a powerful flash that stands on its own, away from the photographer, but it has a sensor that fires the moment it detects the flash on the camera. So when the photographer takes a picture, this other flash fires as well and the two work together in perfect harmony—even though one starts the process.

In some ways the relationship between God and Jesus is a bit like that. Whatever God does, Jesus does, and the two work in perfect harmony. In fact, this is almost exactly how Jesus himself describes the relationship in our next passage.

## **John 5: Jesus, equal but dependent**

In John 5, Jesus has seriously offended some of his Jewish opponents. After healing a man on the Sabbath he made matters worse by comparing his work to God’s work: “My Father is working... and I am working”, he tells them in verse 17. The



result of this, John tells us, is that “the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (v. 18).

So there we have it: Jesus is equal with God because he is the Son of God. But what does that equality and sonship look like? Does it mean he’s another god? Is he a son of God like those children of pagan gods who quarrelled with their parents and sometimes even killed them?

Certainly not. When Jesus begins to explain his relationship to God it turns out to be more like the relationship between the two flashes. Here’s what he says:

<sup>19</sup> So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. <sup>21</sup> For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. <sup>22</sup> The Father judges no-one, but has given all judgement to the Son, <sup>23</sup> that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.” (John 5:19-23)

This is an unusual and mysterious kind of equality isn’t it? On one hand, Jesus “can do nothing of his own accord”: he is dependent; all the initiative belongs to God the Father. Yet, at the same time, God operates in such a way that he always includes the Son: “whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise”; the Father “shows” the Son whatever he is doing and the Son does the same.

It’s not immediately clear what work Jesus is referring to here. Does this ‘doing’ and ‘showing’ include the work of creation? Is this a cosmic vision such as we see in Colossians 1:15-17, where God creates through Jesus and “all things hold together” in Jesus?

Or is Jesus talking about the work he is doing as a human on earth?

In either case, the way that the Father and Son work together is the same. Everything begins with the Father and everything is done through the Son. Jesus says he is the one who “gives life” and has been given “all judgement”. The rabbis of the day would have said that only God could do these things. The Jews were correct—Jesus was indeed “making himself equal with God”.

Contrary to the idea that as God’s agent or representative Jesus is less than God, the very fact that God works through him demonstrates Jesus’ equality. If we think Jesus is less than God because he’s dependent, then we’re going to find ourselves arguing with God—because Jesus says that things are set up this way “that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father” (v. 23).

Some might still think, however, that these verses are talking about Jesus as a man. Paul writes in Philippians 2 that when Jesus became a man he “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (v. 7). The writer of Hebrews makes a similar comment when he says that Jesus “learned obedience” during “the days of his flesh” (Heb 5:7-8). So is it possible that Jesus had a different, less dependent relationship with God before he was born as human?

These are important questions, and we will have to come back to them in the first half of chapter 5. For now, we should notice two things.

First, John 5 seems to be saying that Jesus is equal with God while he is a man. Although other passages tell us that becoming human was a humbling act for Jesus, these verses make it clear that humiliation doesn’t stop him from being equal with God. Jesus the man is still the one who gives life. Jesus the man is still

the judge of the world. Jesus the man is still the one through whom God does all his greatest works.

Second, the things that might make us think the earthly Jesus is less than God—the fact that he comes from God and that God works through him—are also true of the eternal Son. He’s the one Colossians describes as being the image of God. He’s the one “through whom” the world was made. Other passages, such as John 1:1-3 and Hebrews 1:1-3, paint a similar picture by describing Jesus as God’s “Word”, “radiance” and “exact imprint”. One important passage in 1 Corinthians, chapter 8, shows that these ideas of ‘from’ and ‘through’ are central to what it means for Jesus to be God.

## **Jesus and the gods of Corinth**

The church in Corinth to which Paul writes his first letter was plagued with problems. Its members had divided into competing factions. They had filed lawsuits and had wild ideas about sex that ranged from ‘anything goes’ to absolute celibacy. Some people had been going to church early so they didn’t have to share the Lord’s Supper with others. Others had been denying the resurrection of Christ. Church services had turned into a chaotic free-for-all.

Part of the problem for the Corinthians was that their culture was all about competition. Greek society at that time was a patchwork of haves and have-nots—slaves and masters, prostitutes and perverts, poor and rich. Some were so rich that they were above the law, and others were cast out and so not protected by the law. Life was a zero-sum game of winners and losers. Paul describes it elsewhere as a life of being “hated by others and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

The Greek religion, which revered its warring gods and goddesses, both reflected and reinforced this world view. These

deities were promiscuous, vengeful, vain, greedy and pugnacious, and the Greeks blamed pretty much everything that happened in the world on their selfish acts. In Corinth itself, for example, the local geography is said to have been shaped by a dispute between Helios (god of the sun) and Poseidon (god of the sea). Corinth's first king was Sisyphus, a notorious trickster whose crimes earned him the punishment of having to push a boulder up a hill for eternity.

The gods of Greek mythology were terrible characters. But the God that Paul preaches is a good God of absolute power. He doesn't need to compete with other gods because he has no needs, and because there are no other gods that could give him anything. Instead of taking things from people, this God gives. In his plans "all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28) and even hardships turn out to be a blessing in the long run for those who trust him (Rom 5:1-11; 2 Cor 4:16-18). In this world in which he is sovereign, the last word isn't dog eat dog but love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7).

This context helps us to see that, in Paul's first letter to them, he is trying to reorient the Corinthians to a Christian perspective on life. He emphasizes the idea of Christian interdependence and the need for holiness. He attacks selfishness and party spirit. He reminds them that they weren't wise or noble before they were chosen and that they have no grounds for pride now.

Yet Paul knows his audience. He knows that if the Corinthians could divide Christian from Christian—even Paul from Jesus (1 Cor 1:11-12)—they are likely to go on dividing things that should stay together. Paul knows it is only a matter of time before the Corinthians will try to divide God the Father from Jesus Christ. The 'natural' mistake for the Corinthians in their polytheistic

context will be to turn the Father, Son and Holy Spirit into three gods with different powers and wills.

To head off this error Paul makes a passing comment in 1 Corinthians 8 that has great relevance for our discussion. In contrast to the “many ‘gods’” and “many ‘lords’” of pagan religion, he explains, Christian worship is undivided:

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Cor 8:5-6)

This is one of the pithiest and most precise explanations of Christian theology in the New Testament. Paul uses the words “one God” and “one Lord” to echo the classic confession of Jewish monotheism, the great Shema recited by Jews every morning and night: “Hear, O Israel: the LORD [Yahweh] our God, the LORD is one” (Deut 6:4).<sup>4</sup> These verses are a Christian version of Judaism’s first article of faith.

Paul does not contradict Old Testament faith but enriches our understanding by putting it under a microscope and pointing out that there is more to see. He explains that the terms ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ aren’t two ways of talking about the same person. Rather, they show a complexity within the life of God. The one God of the Old Testament turns out to be God the Father along with his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> See the discussion to this effect in, for example, JDG Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996, pp. 179-83; R Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999, pp. 37-40; and LW Hurtado, *How on Earth did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2005, p. 49.

There is even more to it than that, however. While Paul says that the Father and Son are, together, the one God of the Old Testament, he calls the Father “God” and says he is the source and goal of everything:

...there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things  
and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
through whom are all things and through whom we exist.  
(1 Cor 8:6)

So the Father and Son are one God. Yet the Father is also God.  
How can we make sense of that?

### **‘From’ as well as ‘through’**

In order to understand this, let’s think more deeply about what it means for one person to work ‘through’ another.

When two human beings work together, often one person supplies the initiative, plan or authority and the other uses his resources to execute that plan. Some parts of the work they achieve together, therefore, belong to the one who began the action, and other parts belong to the one who carried it out.

Yet this can lead to conflict. The person who made the plans might want something that the person who has to carry them out doesn’t like. And the person who’s doing the work might feel like a slave—like the person giving the orders is exploiting him.

But now imagine a family business where a father and son work together in loving harmony. The son fulfils the father’s plans, but he doesn’t feel pushed around because his character and desires line up with the plans of his father. He doesn’t feel like a slave because he knows that he shares in all his father’s achievements. He doesn’t feel like his strength is being exploited because he knows that every ounce of that strength comes from his father.



A father-son relationship is completely different, and it's that natural 'fromness' that makes all the difference. The Bible shows that Jesus is 'from' God. He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15); he does "only what he sees the father doing" (John 5:19); and he receives power from God the Father "from whom are all things" (1 Cor 8:6).

Jesus, therefore, isn't just a person through whom God works. Because he himself comes from God perfectly and completely, he's a full participant in everything God is and does.

## **How the Son is like the sun**

The Fathers of the church in the early centuries often spoke of the Father and Son being like the sun and its radiance. When we talk about the sun we're usually referring to the burning ball of gas at the centre of our solar system. If someone asks about its size we do a quick Google search and answer, "It's about 1.4 million kilometres in diameter".

But this measurement is just the diameter of what is called the chromosphere. If you asked a child to draw the sun, he or she would include the spiky points of the sun's radiance. Children instinctively think of 'the sun' as the sphere and its rays together—which makes a lot of sense. After all, the sun wouldn't be the sun without its rays and we can't see the sun apart from its rays. The two things are inseparable.

In 1 Corinthians 8, the Father is like the orb of the sun "from whom" all things come. Jesus is like the rays that the Father sends forth from his own being. Jesus is not the same as the Father, but he belongs inseparably with the Father and he is the only way we can really know the Father. Everything the Father sends forth, whether life or judgement or salvation or knowledge, comes through Jesus. And Jesus is so completely connected to the Father's existence that the Father wouldn't be himself without

him. As we read elsewhere, Jesus is the “radiance of the glory of God” (Heb 1:3).

When we think about it this way we see more clearly why the Bible usually uses the term ‘God’ for the Father but also calls Jesus God. The Father is God because he is God—he is the source and reason for everything that exists. But Jesus is God too, because everything that makes the Father God is also shown forth in Jesus. Everything that God is and does comes through him.

## **The missing dimension**

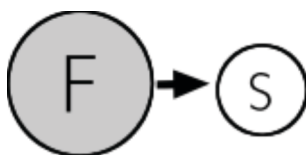
We’ve covered a fair bit of territory in this chapter, all of which leads us to this crucial truth. The Bible doesn’t just explain God as one and three. Rather, it shows us how that oneness and threeness fit together. It shows us that Jesus comes from God and that God works through him. It shows us that Jesus is God’s representative in a way that is similar to—but infinitely greater than—the way God works through humans.

This pattern—this relationship of ‘fromness’ and ‘throughness’—is the missing dimension, the key concept whose loss we noted above that’s part of how the Bible explains the oneness and threeness of God. Understanding this relationship can help us move beyond the simple contradiction of ‘one and three’ because we can see how those things work together (see Diagram 1).

## Diagram 1: Four models for thinking about the relationship between the Father and the Son

The first three models below are all common ways of thinking about the relationship between God and Jesus. They are all partly right but inadequate. The fourth diagram is my attempt to show how the Bible presents the relationship between the Father and the Son (and also how the ancient church understood that relationship).

### 1. Jesus is just a creature through whom God works



Jehovah's Witnesses and some other groups understand Jesus in this way. While they rightly observe that God works through Jesus just as he works through other creatures, they fail to notice three important distinctions: 1) God's way of working through his Son is infinitely greater; 2) the eternal Son is exactly like his Father; and 3) the Bible also describes Jesus as God's Word and glory—which means he is a necessary part of who God is.

### 2. Jesus just is God



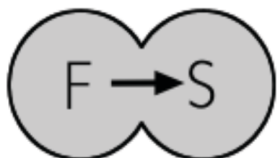
The idea that Jesus and God are the same person is an ancient error. Today it's taught by Oneness Pentecostals. They rightly remind us that Jesus and the Father are one God, but they fail to see that the Word was also "with God", and that he was loved by God before the creation of the world.

### 3. Jesus and the Father are mysteriously united but distinct



Many Christians think about the relationship between the Father and the Son in the same way they think about the Trinity (don't worry, we'll get to the Spirit)—simply as a mysterious paradox of unity and distinction. God is one and three—end of story. The problem with explaining the Trinity this way is that when we say God is one and three, we don't understand how that works—and we run the risk of ending up like the Christian at Speakers' Corner. The paradox doesn't help us when it comes to difficult questions like, for example: Whose power created the world? And whose idea it was to save us? This 'mystery model' makes true statements but fails to explain how the Bible puts them together.

### 4. Jesus is God from God, light from light



This is how the great church councils explained the relationship between the Father and Son. They began with God the Father—as the Bible does—but they explained that God does everything through his eternal Son. They stressed that the Son is perfectly like God and inseparably one with him.

When we see Jesus as the one who comes ‘from’ God, and as the one ‘through’ whom God works, then we have a better way to begin talking about his divinity—because ‘fromness’ and ‘throughness’ should be familiar concepts for us. From the start of creation God has always been working through creatures who draw their power and authority from him. He creates humans in his image to rule the world; he sends prophets to speak his words; he ordains priests to mediate his forgiveness; he raises up kings to exercise his justice. None of these creatures is ‘God’ of course; nor do they have an independent source of authority or power. But when they deliver God’s commands and act on his behalf, they have to be honoured and obeyed as if they were God.

God’s way of working through these created agents prepares the way for Jesus. When Jesus shows up he’s revealed as the true man; the true prophet; the true priest and king. But more than this, the New Testament reveals that Jesus is the one in whom God has always been expressing himself and acting. He is the eternal Image of God, who shares every one of God’s characteristics. He is the Word of God, through whom God creates the world.

Jesus, in other words, is ‘God’ because he shares, and has always shared, in everything that God is and does.

Let’s conclude this chapter by looking at how these ideas might be helpful in a real-life discussion. We’ll rewind the tape on that debate at Speakers’ Corner and try again.

Speakers' Corner, London, some other time: The Jamaican apologist leans forward and touches the man lightly on his shoulder as he presses his case. His voice is deep and confident.

Muslim: The very core of your faith is irrational. When you add three things together you don't get one, you get three. The Trinity is something that theologians have been trying to explain for centuries, but they gave up and now they say it's a mystery. You talk about God dying. But all the prophets speak about God as being one who has no beginning or end. To speak about God dying is irrational.

Christian: You're asking difficult questions. But sometimes three things can be one. Tell me, when we read the words of Scripture, are we hearing God, or God's word, or words written by humans?

Muslim: The words of Scripture are God's words, not human words.

Christian: Yes, but they're revealed through humans. They were written down by humans. The only way to know about God is to listen to his prophets.

Muslim: That's true. But we don't say that the prophets are God, they're just his apostles. We don't say that they are God as you say Jesus is God.

Christian: Yet the prophets speak for God. When a prophet speaks God's words we should obey him as if it were God speaking. We must listen to him as if we were listening to God. And God appoints people to rule for him. Romans 13 says that whoever rebels against the government is rebelling against God. So God sometimes speaks and rules through people. But the Bible says Jesus isn't just an apostle who has God's word, or a ruler over part of God's creation. Jesus says that God has given him "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18). He himself is God's Word and image, so he represents God in every way.



Muslim: It's true that Jesus is a great servant of God, but this doesn't make him God. In the Quran it says, "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him".

Christian: Jesus is a messenger. But he is more than that. God has given him a "name that is above every name" so that everybody must bow down to him (Phil 2:9-10).

Muslim: Then that's idolatry! We must worship God alone.

Christian: When we bow down to Jesus we are bowing down to God. Paul says that it is "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:11).

Muslim: You're adding partners to God. Jesus says, "I spake unto them only that which Thou commandest me (saying): Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord" (Sur 5.117).

Christian: We only worship and obey one God. But part of the way we honour him is by honouring the rulers and representatives he sends. Jesus is the greatest of these. He says that "whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (John 13:20). He says that God has given him the power to judge and even to give life, so that everyone will honour him just as they honour God (John 5:21-23).

## The way ahead

Of course no real conversation ever goes as smoothly as one we imagine on paper. The Christian here will still have to explain how Jesus can die or display ignorance if he is God.<sup>5</sup> He will probably have to fend off arguments that Allah cannot be compared to anything. But the main point should be clear. Once we understand that there is a legitimate connection between Jesus

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<sup>5</sup> Those who are interested in these questions will find some useful answers in chapter 5.

and God's other representatives and agents, we have a new way to talk about him. We can do more than cry "mystery" and change the subject. We can talk about his equality with God in a way that resonates with our experience as human beings and follows the path God himself laid down through his Old Testament revelation. In chapter 2 we'll see how this works in a bit more detail.

Thinking about Jesus' relationship to creatures isn't only helpful for apologetics. It can also help us to understand ourselves and what it means to be human. In the chapters ahead we'll think about these things more deeply. We'll talk about what it means for Jesus to be God's "son". We'll think hard about how God's plans for Jesus fit together with his plans for human beings. And we'll explore the mysterious role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life and in ours.

End of Sample.

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