

# The Father and the Son

## WEEKLY READINGS:

Genesis, chapters 48-50;

1 Peter, chapters 1-3.

## READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Isaiah, chapter 45.



Once, when Jesus was praying to His Father, He used these words, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent" (John, chapter 17, verse 3). We must therefore know God the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ. Eternal life depends upon this knowledge.

And how else can we learn about God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, but by reading the Bible? It is impossible for us to know anything about God, unless we study the message which He Himself has given us.

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## One God and Father of all

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We can read about this in Exodus, chapter 33, verse 17-23, and then in chapter 34, verse 6-7, where God revealed Himself to Moses in these words:

"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."

When we think about God's goodness, we may well say with the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name" (Psalm 103, verse 1).

## **The Son of God**

Right from the beginning, God planned to send His Son to be our Saviour. There are many prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament, such as the one in Isaiah, chapter 7, verse 14, where we read, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

Immanuel means, "God with us", and God is here promising to send His own Son.

And so it came to pass. As the apostle Paul says, "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Galatians, chapter 4, verse 4).

Before His birth, the angel said unto His mother, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke, chapter 1, verse 35).

Before He began His work of preaching, Jesus was baptised in the River of Jordan. At this time, God gave Him the Holy Spirit, which meant that He had unlimited power; and God said to Him, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark, chapter 1, verse 11).

## The nature of Christ

Because Jesus was born of a woman, He had a nature just like ours. In Hebrews, chapter 2, verse 17, we read, "In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren."

Of course, Jesus was like us before His resurrection. After the resurrection, He was given a powerful immortal body.

Because Jesus was the Son of God, His character was perfect, even when He possessed a weak human nature.

## A wrong idea

Many people have neglected the Bible teaching about God, and so they have come to believe in something which they call "the Trinity". They tell us that God consist of three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, all equal with each other. (We shall be considering the Holy Ghost, or more correctly, the Holy Spirit, in the next lesson.)

The word "Trinity" and the phrase "God the Son" do not occur in the Bible. Indeed, the whole idea is opposed to Bible teaching. In the same way that a son can never be equal with his father, so Jesus can never be equal with God. He never claimed to be, but depended on His Father for all things. He said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do" (John, chapter 5, verse 19).

It is true that Jesus once said, "I and My Father are one" (John, chapter 10, verse 30).

But we also speak of being at one with a person if we agree perfectly with him.

In this sense, Jesus was also one with His disciples, for He prays in John, chapter 17, verse 21 that, "...they (the disciples) all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us."

Turn to I Corinthians, chapter 15, and read verses 24-28. Notice particularly verse 28,

“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 be all in all.”

This verse tells us that, even at the end of His 1,000-year reign on earth, Jesus will be subject to His Father; and God alone will be all in all.

## **Where did belief in the Trinity come from?**

The early Christians didn't believe in the Trinity. They believe what the Bible taught - that there is "...one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (I Timothy, chapter 2, verse 5).

It was not until over 300 years after Jesus was born that Christians began to believe in "the Trinity"; and this belief was based, not on the Bible, but on the ideas of the Ancient Greeks, who knew nothing of the one true God.

## **The true belief of the First Christians**

In the "Apostles' Creed", which was put together about 100 years after Jesus went up into heaven, and which sets out the beliefs of the early Christians, we read,

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."

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## **Summary**

1. There is only one God.
2. God is not "three-in-one". The doctrine of the Trinity is not in the Bible.
3. Jesus Christ is not God; He is the Son of God.
4. Jesus is a man, but He is far, far greater than any other man.
5. His birth was a great miracle, because His mother was a virgin. His only father was God Almighty.

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# Holy Spirit Gifts

## WEEKLY READINGS:

Exodus, chapters 7-14

Malachi, chapters 1-2.

## READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Ephesians, chapter 4

I Corinthians, chapter 14.



Jesus promised His disciples that they would be given the Holy Spirit. He said to them, "These signs shall follow them that believe; in My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark, chapter 16, verse 17-18). Why were these promises made to the disciples?

### **They proved that the message of the disciples was from God**

Jesus had been crucified; God had raised Him from the dead. He had gone into heaven, leaving His little band of disciples to "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark, chapter 16, verse 15).

It was a big task. Would people listen to them? Surely they would not believe the story of a man brought back to life after being dead for three days?

So the disciples were given the power to work miracles, as a sign that their message was from God. We read how, on the day of Pentecost, they preached to the Jews in languages that they had never learnt, and could not have spoken but for the power of God. This was called, "Speaking in tongues". No wonder the people were amazed; and no wonder they listened.

### **The Spirit gifts helped to guide the Church**

As a result of the preaching on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 men and women joined the disciples, and became Christians (Acts, chapter 2, verse 41). And so the Christian Church had made a good start.

But imagine the difficulties there would be. Such a big family of Christians would need some to guide and teach them, and to give them advice about the arrangements they would have to make. They could not learn from the New Testament, because it was not yet written.

So the gifts of the Spirit were sent, not only to convince outsiders of the truth of the apostles' message, but also to help and teach the early Christians, and to set the first churches in order.

## What were these gifts?

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 22 - the apostle Paul shows how different members of the Church possess different gifts, and how each member was to work for the good of the others. Then in verses 28-29, he gives a list of the gifts, "And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." The first three gifts - the most important - were for teaching the early Christians.

## What did these Gifts achieve?

We do not hear of miracles, tongues and healings after the end of the first century. But consider what the working of the Holy Spirit achieved in that time. Starting with a fearful, demoralized and confused group of 11 apostles, and other believers in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus, the Gospel had been spread with power and conviction over most of the Roman world, despite opposition and persecution. Those same apostles had witnessed so effectively that groups of believers were solidly established, thriving and growing throughout the Roman Empire.

## It was the Message of Salvation which was important.

The exercise of these powers was to bring people to listen to the **message of Salvation**. It was this **message** which worked on the hearts and minds of those who heard it. In Acts chapter 2, the first Pentecost, the miraculous bestowing of the Holy Spirit enabled the Apostles to speak to the Jews, assembled in Jerusalem from all parts of the then-known world, in all their different (totally recognisable) languages. Thus it attracted the attention of those Jews. But notice, it was the **Apostle Peter's message** which touched their hearts; so much so that they cried out, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

## Not all received these gifts.

If we read the record of the founding of the early church carefully, we will discover that these gifts of the Holy Spirit

- were not given to all believers (see, for example Acts 2:43; and 5:12 - only the 12 apostles performed miraculous signs.).
- nor did they expect to receive them (Acts 8:26-40 – there is no record that the Ethiopian asked for or expected to receive miraculous powers. Also Acts 11:19-21 gives no indication of special powers being bestowed on the new converts).
- nor did those who possessed them continually use them (Acts 17:16-32 – Paul relied on the power of the **message** to bring people to God,

v20, “In this way the **word of the Lord** spread widely and grew in power”. Also the Apostle Peter in Acts 12: 1-19, could not use his powers to rescue himself, nor could Paul use the Holy Spirit to save himself from the mob (Acts 21: 30-36) – a Roman soldier had to do that!

### **Speaking in tongues not considered important.**

The gift of speaking in tongues was evident in the Corinthian church, but was not rated highly by the Apostle Paul. Read what he says in 1 Corinthians 14: 18,19: “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others rather than ten thousand words in a tongue. Brothers stop thinking like children”.

### **Does anyone possess these gifts today?**

Some people claim to have these gifts today; especially they claim to be able to speak in tongues, and to heal the sick. Some even go so far as to say that unless a person has these gifts it is evidence that they are not true believers; and conversely that “possession” of these gifts is proof that a person is saved. We need to be able to test these claims.

Firstly, we have seen that not all First Century believers could work miracles or speak in tongues (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 11:19-21). Miraculous powers were not the distinguishing feature of all true believers – Acts 2:42 tells us that they concentrated on the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.

Secondly, possession of miraculous powers was not a guarantee that those believers were saved. Some believers in the Corinthian church could obviously speak in tongues (1 Cor.14). But the Apostle Paul had great problems with them - you can read about their bad behaviour (quarreling (1 Cor.ch.1), splitting the church (ch.1), tolerating incest in their midst (ch. 5), suing each other at law (ch. 6), committing fornication (ch. 6), being drunk at the communion service (ch. 11), having unruly meetings (ch. 14), denying the resurrection of the dead (ch. 15) etc.), which, unless they repented, would certainly risk their rejection by the Lord Jesus at the judgment day.

Thirdly, It is difficult to discover the purpose of speaking in tongues today. The writers have asked those with whom they have come into contact and received no convincing explanation other than “It makes me feel good because I’m speaking to God”. When asked if they understand what they are saying to God, all have said “No”. Would not plain speaking be preferable to the meaningless utterances of some ‘tongue-speakers’, especially if those utterances have to be interpreted? If they then have to be weighed against the words of Scripture for verification, would it not be better to use the words of Scripture to start with? These ‘tongues’ are certainly a contrast to the

powerful words spoken on the day of Pentecost when over 3000 people heard and understood the wonderful works of God spoken of in their own languages (Acts 2:8), leading to their repentance and baptism.

Fourthly, we have seen that the miraculous powers were to help attract the attention of unbelievers. But it was the preaching – the true **message of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ** which touched their hearts and converted them. The gifts were given to help the true Church – the true church is the one which believes and preaches the Word of God. Most of those who claim to have these powers today – if not all – preach things not taught in the Bible. We must therefore reject these claims. God, through the prophet Isaiah, ch. 8: 20, says: “To the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

Fifthly, we have to confess that we are not impressed by many of the so-called miracles. Many of the cures are soon seen to be no cures at all; others can be explained away scientifically. Hypnotists can often get the same results.

Those who believe that the Bible is God’s inspired Word (itself the work of the Holy Spirit – 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21) know that God is true and faithful and does not contradict Himself. They do not feel the need to work miracles, knowing that the Word of God is complete and sufficient for our needs. It is God speaking to us and He speaks to our hearts. Like the Psalmist we can pray: “Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things in thy law” (Psalm 119: 18) and we can be assured that He will reveal Himself to us through it. “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4: 12). Let us make it our own.

## **SUMMARY:**

1. The Holy Spirit gifts were given to Jesus’ 12 apostles and to some, but not all, of the early Christians.
2. They were for 2 purposes:
  - (a) to be a sign for unbelievers;
  - (b) to build up the early church
3. These gifts were not a distinguishing feature of a believer.
4. Those who possessed them did not use them all the time but for specific purposes.
5. The gifts did not guarantee that those who possessed them were saved.
6. It was the message of salvation which had saving power.
7. It is that same message, which, when understood and responded to, brings salvation today.

# The Cross

## WEEKLY READINGS:

Exodus, chapters 15-20  
Malachi, chapters 3-4.

## READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Psalm, 22;  
Isaiah, chapter 53.



## A prophecy of the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ

We can read about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels. But we have a fuller picture if we read some of the prophecies of the Old Testament as well.

Turn to Psalm 22. This Psalm helps us to understand how Jesus felt during the crucifixion,

“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, `He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him” (verses 6-8).

Not only the pain, but also the shame of being crucified weighed heavily upon Him. Read this Psalm very carefully. Perhaps more than any other words in the Bible, these words help us to appreciate what Jesus went through for us. Look again at verses 15-16,

“My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and My tongue cleaveth to My jaws; and Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death.

“For dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet.”

## **Why did Jesus have to suffer so much?**

As we think of Jesus hanging on that cross, and remember that He never sinned, but always did those things that pleased God, we ask ourselves, "Why did this have to happen to Jesus?"

One thing is certain: it was the only way by which men could be saved from sin. Jesus had prayed three times to His Father, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." (Though He was careful to add, "Nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done".) If it had been possible, we can be sure that God would have spared His son the agony. But it was the only way.

### **A fight against sin**

But still, we ask, why the suffering and disgrace of the cross? One answer is that as we look at Jesus hanging there, we see what human nature is really worth.

Let us try to explain. Jesus was a human being, just like us; and, just like us, He was constantly tempted to do and say wrong things. We read that He was "...in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 15)

Like us, He was tempted - but, unlike us, He never gave way to temptation. He never gave in to Himself, but always did what God wanted Him to.

Yet He still possessed a nature like ours - a nature that would have led Him into sin if He had not continually fought against it.

By pronouncing the death sentence upon Adam, God showed that - "...the wages of sin is death" (Romans, chapter 6, verse 23).

And by requiring the crucifixion of Jesus, this sinless child of Adam, God demonstrated that human nature at its best is only fit for shame and crucifixion.

Yet the character of Jesus had been faultless. He had never sinned in thought or deed. Because of this, God was able to raise Him to life without breaking the law that said that the wages of sin was death. And so God gave Jesus a new nature - a nature that could never be tempted to sin, and that would never die.

## **The lessons of the cross**

Through the death of Jesus on the cross, God showed us how evil we really are by nature. And we must know this before we can even begin to live a life that is pleasing to God.

But there are other impressive lessons. We do well to ponder the fact that the Lord Jesus was an acceptable sacrifice. He was like a lamb without blemish; and God was willing to accept this perfect sacrifice as the offering of all those who believe in Jesus as “The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John, chapter 1, verse 29).

Another important lesson is this: the cross of Christ shows the extent to which God’s love for us can go. Paul puts it like this: “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans, chapter 8, verse 32).

The cross is our way of life, as Paul says in I Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 18, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

## **A new life**

We are the children of Adam and, like Adam, we prefer our own ways to the ways of God.

But Jesus, when He gave Himself as a sacrifice for sin, made it possible for us to become the children of God.

Jesus said,  
“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke, chapter 9, verse 23).

## **We must be crucified with Jesus**

We have to crucify our sinful self. Instead of walking in our own sinful ways, we must die to sin, and walk with Christ in newness of life, always preferring God’s way to our own. The apostle Paul tells us, “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians, chapter 5, verses 24-25).

## Summary

1. Wicked men put Jesus to death by a slow torture called “crucifixion”. He was nailed to a cross and left to die.
2. God allowed this to happen, because it was the only way to save us from our sins.
3. It was the only way to make us realise how utterly wicked and deserving of death we are.
4. The Bible tells us to be “crucified with Jesus”. This means that our own sinful tendencies must be destroyed.
5. The crucifixion of Jesus also teaches us that, like Jesus, we must try to obey God always, however much it hurts.