

THE WORD WAS GOD

There have always been heresies and religious cults, but it seems the United States has produced more than its fair share. Robert Dabney, writing one-hundred and fifty years ago, noted that the northern states generated “loathsome isms ... as rankly as the slime of Egypt its spawn of frogs.” He lamented the North’s “Mormons, her various sects of Communists, her Free Lovers, her Spiritualists, and a multitude of corrupt visionaries.” (*Defense of Virginia*, 285) Within a few years of his writing, one Charles Taze Russell revived the ancient heresy of Arius, and founded an organization which would come to be known as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Mormons and Jehovah’s witnesses are the Christian heresies with the greatest number of followers. There are about eight million Jehovah’s Witnesses in the world today, and about twice that number of Mormons. Mormons believe that there are many gods, and that one of these gods begat Jesus through relations with one of His many wives. Jehovah’s Witnesses, like the heretic Arius of the ancient Church, believe that the Son of God is the first thing God created. Both Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the doctrine of the deity of Jesus, which doctrine that the Christian Church put into credal form nearly two-thousand years ago, and which is fundamental to the Christian faith.

The first book of the Bible is Genesis, the book of beginnings. It opens with the line, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) This means that the world had its beginning when God created it. Before He created it, there was nothing but Himself. This is the bedrock of the Christian worldview: the absolute distinction between the Creator and His creation. God revealed Himself to Moses as the One who has always existed and is self-sustaining. When God commissioned Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, Moses asked God the name by which Israel should know Him. God answered him, saying, “I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” (Exodus 3:14) God depends upon nothing, and everything depends upon Him. So Isaiah the prophet said of God, “He that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein.” (Isaiah 42:5); and Saint Paul told the philosophers of Athens, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.” (Acts 17:24, 25)

The Scriptures speak often of other gods, but they are not gods like Him. They are mere creatures that He has made. They are mighty, because God made them that way, but He is Almighty. King David wrote in the Ninety-fifth Psalm, “For the LORD *is* a great God, and a great King above all gods.” (Psalm 95:3) Men must recognize the great power of these angels, and must have proper respect for them, but they may not worship them. They must worship God alone. (Jude 8, 9; Colossians 2:18; Revelation 22:8, 9) The law of Moses says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,” and “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which *are* round about you; (For the LORD thy God *is* a jealous God among you).” (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; Deuteronomy 6:13-15; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8) So, Christians “believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things, visible and invisible.” (Nicene Creed)

There is one only one true God. Yet, this God exists in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are not different modes of God’s existence, as some heretics say. They are three distinct Persons. The Old

Testament does refer to God the Father and His Son. Their relation is first revealed in God's promise to David that He would give him an heir to sit on his throne forever. He said to David:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

King David in the Second Psalm recorded God's speaking to this future king, saying, "Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee." (Psalm 2:7) In the Eighty-ninth Psalm, Ethan the Ezrahite wrote of the heir to David's throne, "He shall cry unto me, Thou *art* my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." (Psalm 89:26, 27) In the Proverbs, Agur, son of Jakeh, wrote, "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what *is* his name, and what *is* his son's name, if thou canst tell?" (Proverbs 30:4) No man, Agur writes, has ascended into heaven to obtain wisdom from God, and no man has descended from heaven to impart such wisdom. God has all wisdom, and so does His Son. Agur here alludes to the eighth chapter of the Book of Proverbs, and its reflections on the Divine Wisdom, which the author personifies. There the Divine Wisdom says of Himself, "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old," and "Then I was by him, *as* one brought up *with him*: and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him." (Proverbs 8:22, 30) The Divine Wisdom was brought up with God, and has been with Him from the beginning. Solomon did not fulfill these promises, and neither did any other descendent of David, until Jesus Christ. His reign began well enough, but he ended badly, and he certainly did not rule the world.

The children of Israel came to expect, not only that a descendent of David would inherit his throne, but that this heir, this Christ, would be the Son of God. Jesus of Nazareth is that Son of God. When the angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary, he told her, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:31-33) When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, God spoke from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17) When Jesus first met Nathaniel, Jesus told him that He, without seeing with His eyes, had perceived Nathaniel sitting under a fig tree. Jesus's supernatural knowledge caused Nathaniel to confess, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." (John 1:49) In the earlier part of Jesus's earthly ministry, many of His disciples abandoned Him, but the twelve remained. When He them if they would also abandon Him, Saint Peter said to Him, "And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:69) After the death of Lazarus, his sister Martha was stricken with grief. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" She answered Him, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." (John 11:25-27) People held different opinions of Jesus, and when He asked His disciples who they believed Him to be, Saint Peter confessed, "Thou art

the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16) At the end of Jesus’s earthly ministry, the religious leaders of Israel arrested Him and interrogated Him. He refused to answer them. The high priest put Him under oath, and said to Him, “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus finally spoke, and, appealing to the prophecy of Daniel, said, “Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:57-64) From start to finish, Jesus presented Himself as the Son of God, and the son of David, heir to David’s throne.

Saint John begins his Gospel with these words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:1-3) The apostle opens His Gospel with the same phrase with which the Book of Genesis opens, namely, “In the beginning.” He sets the relation of the Word to God, not in time, but in eternity. Before there was a creation, there was the Word, and it was by that Word that God created all things. The Word Himself is uncreated, Saint John says, for He was always with God. Moreover, He is uncreated because He created all things. John states, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:3) If there is no created thing that was not created by the Word, then the Word is not created, but uncreated, and if uncreated, then eternal. Yet, the apostle denies that there are two gods. He says that the Word was God. He does not say that the Word was divine, or that the Word was a god. He quite clearly identifies the Word as God, and only a dogmatic bias would cause a reader to understand John otherwise. To say both that the Word was with God, and that the Word was God does offend reason. However, reason is not an authority by which to judge the Scriptures, but a tool by which to understand them. Faith does not determine what the Scriptures must say, but rather humbly receives what they do say.

God brings to pass His will by His Word. He creates something out of nothing with His Word. In the beginning, He said, “Let there be light: and there was light,” and so throughout the creation God spoke, and it was accomplished. (Genesis 1:3) This is an article of faith. As Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” (Hebrews 11:3) The Thirty-third Psalm says, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” (Psalm 33:6) Saint John explains that God’s Word is a Person, and that by that Person He created all things. God not only created all things by His Word, but by that Word upholds all things. (Hebrews 1:3) Through the prophet Isaiah He told His people that He determines everything that comes to pass by His Word. He said, “I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it.” (Isaiah 46:11)

This Word of God not only brings about God’s will, but He reveals God, because He is God. He became man so that He might live among men, and make God known to them. John writes, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) When Philip asked Jesus to show him and the other disciples, the Father, Jesus said to Him, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father?” (John 14:9) On another occasion, Jesus said, “And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.” (John 12:45) Saint John wrote, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.” (John 1:18) Jesus is the only begotten Son of God,

begotten and not made. As such, He is both eternal and the image of God. Saint Paul says that He is “the express image of his person,” “the exact representation of His nature.” (Hebrews 1:3) If anyone would know what God is like, He must consider Jesus. Men cannot see God, but they can see Jesus.

The Word of God reveals God, and He also reveals God’s will for men. He is the Wisdom of God. Agur son of Jakeh asked, “Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what *is* his name, and what *is* his son's name, if thou canst tell?” Agur was skeptical about man’s efforts to know God. Jesus is the answer to his questions, the assurance of his doubts. He is the Son of God, and the Wisdom of God. He is the one who was in heaven with God, and He has descended to earth to reveal Him to men. When He was teaching Nicodemus, a one of the religious leaders of Israel, He said to Him, “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven.” (John 3:13) Saint Paul wrote to the Colossians that in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Colossians 2:3) Jesus said, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.” (John 7:16) God has commanded that people listen to His Son, and obey Him. At the Transfiguration, God spoke from heaven, saying of Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” (Matthew 17:5) Jesus said that God sent Him into the world, not to condemn it but to save it. Yet, He also said that those who did not hear Him and obey Him, did not hear and obey His Father who sent Him. He said:

And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak. (John 12:47-50)

Jesus at His First Advent did not come to judge men, but to save them. He came to tell them that they would be saved if they would hear Him and obey Him, for in so doing they would be hearing and obeying His Father who sent Him. Yet, the Father has given His Son the right to judge, and judge men He will at His Second Advent. (John 5:22, 23) Saint John wrote both his Gospel and his first Epistle so that his readers would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so have eternal life. (John 20:31; 1 John 5:13)

Let us study Jesus so that we might know God and His will. Let us study the Word of God, so that we might know Him. Let us recognize that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and let us pledge allegiance to Him. Let us hear His Word and obey it, that we might have eternal life with Him.

Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. *Amen.*