

February 2021

Dear Brethren:

King Solomon was inspired to record, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Yes, there really is nothing new under the sun when it comes to the thoughts, habits and proclivities of human beings. Even after nearly six thousand years, today's religionists debate the same old topics concerning who is man, and who is responsible for the reality of all that exists. Even as with every previous generation, some today believe in a "higher power," others do not, and still others are uncommitted. Among those who believe in a *purposeful Creator*, there is still rife disagreement over who and what is that "God," really. Even among those who claim to be Christian in faith, there is every imaginable idea about who is Jesus Christ today, let alone what was His origin.

Many of the Christian sects today can still trace their beginnings to splits that occurred millennia ago over divisive interpretations about the nature of God and Jesus Christ. Is God a single being (Monotheism, Unitarianism)? Is God perhaps manifested in three specific aspects (Trinitarianism)? Or is God something else entirely? Whatever God is today, how did that deity get to be here? Did all aspects of God exist from eternity, or did some aspects called "God" have a specific point of origin? Since we are focusing upon Christianity in particular, was Jesus Christ an *ever-existent entity* like the Father, or did He come into being sometime later on?

As members of the Church of God, why do we care about this debate? Do we not know what we believe about the nature of God? We should! We are not Trinitarians, nor are we Monotheists. The world would call us *Binitarians*, believers in *two Beings* that currently make up the *God Family*. But you might be amazed at the number of questions still arising and being debated among God's people which originate from authors steeped in these contrary concepts about who and what is God. We have a tendency to grab on to some specific tidbit of an assertion by some writer that we stumble upon—which is comparable to a twig—forgetting to test the veracity of any notion by first tracing such twig back to its *branch, trunk, and root*.

### Test the Fruits!

Jesus Christ said, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matthew 12:33). Oh, that

God's called people would always remember to do just that! Do you think you have gleaned some *nugget of value* from the writing or speaking of one of these many "teachers" in the world? Well, have you tested the "tree" from which that teacher sprang? If not, why not? Why bring to us—the ministry—questions generated from these *alternative sources* that you encounter, before you have investigated the premise of their thinking? Why spend time contemplating the *maybes* of a twiggy concept that you hear about, giving it great time and consideration, before you have performed the very *first requirement* for proving or disproving a religious concept? In other words, *have you considered the source?* Did you do your *investigative due diligence?* Is it a good tree or a defiled tree? Jesus Christ requires you to perform that test!

If you need our help, we are happy to assist. But if you do your homework well, you may in many cases even answer your own question about some of these topics that arise. For instance, it might not be a great idea to spend time mulling some *intriguing point* asserted by the Dalai Lama. Why? We have nothing in common with Tibetan Buddhists. Their convictions in pantheism and reincarnation is bad fruit from a bad tree. The same is true of "Christian" teachers who do not even know the first basics about who and what God really is.

What about the provocative theory that the true *Holy Grail* of antiquity was the "secret knowledge" that Jesus actually had children with Mary Magdalene, and that their descendants—their holy bloodline—are preserved on earth today? This has been touted by many scholars over the centuries (as well as by a number of secret societies), and even sensationalized in books and Hollywood movies in recent decades. They claim to have titillating evidence. Do such claims give you pause? Do you feel you need to "check it out," just to be sure? Is your faith now in jeopardy until you do so? In the movie, *The Da Vinci Code*, based upon the book by Dan Brown, the lead character played by Tom Hanks sums up the whole notion at the end of the film. He says:

. . . the only thing that matters is what you believe. History shows us Jesus was an extraordinary man, a human inspiration. That's it. That's all the evidence has ever proved. . . . Why does it have to be human or divine? Maybe human is divine. Why couldn't Jesus have been a father and still be capable of all those miracles?

This is a classic example of Satanic bait and switch. It is subtle. It is intended to entice us into considering the possibility that maybe the whole idea of God becoming a man and then being glorified once again as God is just fantasy. It certainly sounds like fantasy to "the educated" within this world. And as Tom Hanks' character infers, why is it not enough that Jesus became *a great man* because he did extraordinary things in teaching love

and peace and helping the downtrodden? Why is it not enough to build a religion around the "truth" of an *inspiring man*, without having to fabricate bits and call him God? Does not the goodness of Jesus on earth during his lifetime give us enough? That is what we are asked to accept.

What is the answer? If you have taken to heart the Truth about the ever-existence of God, the real purpose for man upon this earth, the means by which God is offering salvation to humanity beyond this physical realm, and the veracity of the Bible as God's holy confirmation of that Master Plan, then all of these sensational myths are exposed for the frauds that they really are.

With that in mind, the real intent of this *Monthly Letter* is to point out how timeless is our knowledge about the nature of God and Jesus Christ. If you are ever inclined to think that those foundational topics are "too basic" for your *achieved spiritual level*, and more appropriate for novices, think again. It is amazing how many doctrinal challenges today can be answered by going right back to the most *foundational teachings* that we received from God through a chosen servant. There truly is "nothing new under the sun," and those basic principles never go out of style.

### **Is Jesus God?**

"*Is Jesus God?*" was the title of an article written by Herbert Armstrong and published in *The Plain Truth* magazine in February 1950. In that issue, the article was relatively short (one page), but later was expanded and republished in 1955 and 1958. This article contains the most simple and important evidence to support what we believe about the nature of Jesus Christ.

In particular within this article is a phrase that was used to explain why we believe that Jesus *had to have been* an eternal member of the God Family—ever-existent—even as we believe concerning the Father. Here it is:

He is our Maker and therefore God, and His life which He gave was of greater value than the sum-total of all humans.

This statement was made in various ways over many decades within the Radio Church of God to describe *the very first reason* that we believe that the promised Messiah *had to have been* an immortal, ever-existent member of the God Family. To capture the real significance of this concept, here is the entire paragraph from that 1950 article:

Yes, Jesus is God. Otherwise He could not be the Saviour of mankind.

1st) if Jesus had been only human, His death could have paid the penalty for but *one* other human who had incurred that penalty by transgression of God's spiritual Law. Since God the Father created all things by Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:9), and since all things, including man, were made by Jesus Christ (John 1:1–3 with verse 14; verse 10; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:12–19), He is our Maker and therefore God, and His life which He gave was of greater value than the sum-total of all humans.

How simple, and how compelling! Here is a straightforward explanation that goes to the very heart of the matter, upending reams of pedantic and contrary scholarly writings, and showing truly the simplicity of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Why must Jesus have been God from eternity? Because only *the death of God* could pay for the sins of the whole world! As the very Creator of man, *His single life* was worth more than the collective total of lives of all human beings who *have ever* or *will ever* be born. Genius!

And if that is not true, then man has no hope of life after death. It is not just about accepting "the inspiring example of Jesus' life on earth." It is about fulfilling the very purpose for our creation! Satan would love for us to believe that there is no hope of living eternally in God's Family. Every false notion extant today about the nature of God is a part of that *insidious denial* of the true eternal hope for man.

Of course, to accept the Truth about Jesus and His sacrifice requires a deep respect for the immutability of the Law of God. Anyone who dismisses the relevance of *real Laws* in the universe—Laws which require a price to be paid when broken—will never fathom the importance of Christ paying the death penalty for us all. And that is why so many have been seduced by one or more of these false concepts promulgated in the world.

### **It All Comes Back to *Sin & Law***

How many today take it to heart when God says, "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4)? Very few, indeed. Contained in this edict from God is a confirmation that His Law exists—even still today, never having been done away—because there would no longer be any sin in the world if there were no *active Law* in the world that still confirms sin. Sin is the transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4). If the Law has been nullified, then so has the entire concept of sin. You need no *forgiveness of your sins* if you are living in an era of

time since the Law of God was neutralized. If there is no binding Law anymore, there is likewise no transgression of the Law. And if I am not a sinner—because there is no longer any Law for me to sin against—then why do I need a Savior?

These are the contradictions plaguing many Christian sects today, which admit that they are sinners needing redemption, but simultaneously claim that Jesus Christ did away with the Law so that they do not have to keep it. It is inane!

But many of those who believe that the Law *was not done away* are likewise missing the boat. How so? Those practicing Judaism, for example—who do not believe that the prophesied Messiah has yet come—believe that the Law is binding but yet contend that God is forgiving them of their sins *right now*. They are not waiting for the Messiah to come and to *eventually* take away their sins. They only expect the Messiah to take over rulership upon the earth, along with them. Forgiveness of sin does not enter the picture! They believe that they can be forgiven of sin *right now*, without delay.

How is that possible, if God said that His Law requires *human death* as a consequence of sin? The whole principle behind the Law of Moses emphasizes restitution *in like manner* for any infraction of God's Law: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:24–25). The sacrificial system established for Israel did not offer a means to pay the *real price* for sin. Jews speak in terms of atonement—showing God that they are sorry and asking for reconciliation—but they do not really believe that every sin committed makes the sinner guilty and subject to the death penalty. In essence, they teach that God just *waves away* the penalty for sin if He sees enough remorse and willingness to *do better* in the future. So once again, though they are supposedly *champions of the Law*, in actual practice, they do not at all believe that the wages of sin is death. They do not accept that God requires blood as a price for the violation of His immutable Law.

If all it takes is just *being sorry enough for past mistakes*, then how are those practicing Judaism really any different than those who claim that the Law is done away? In both cases, they believe *functionally* that the Law does not really exact a death penalty. So much for respect for God's declaration that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Neither one of them really believes it!

But Herbert Armstrong taught us that the Law *does indeed* require a human blood sacrifice as a consequence for every sin, and he also explained the very means by which *one man* can legally pay that price for every one of us. According to this unique and unparalleled understanding, the death penalty *is not abandoned* as a requirement, but neither is hope extinguished for human beings who come under that penalty because of their personal sins.

What other interpretation of the Bible upholds *the fullness of the Law and its penalty*, while at the very same time providing a way for *a happy ending for any human being who really wants it*? There is no other answer.

If we fail to appreciate the value of this *simple understanding*, we make ourselves vulnerable to the foolish concepts of blind scholars out there who try to interpret the Bible while *understanding nothing* of the first principles of God's work with humanity. Why would we listen to them? The wise among God's called children will not.

### **The Only One Who Ever Knew?**

Was Herbert Armstrong the only one (in our age) who ever taught that the reason Jesus Christ was able to pay the price for all humanity was because *He was first of all God*? No. We have found at least one other religionist who seems to have grasped that particular piece of the puzzle.

J. F. Strombeck was a layman from Moline, Illinois, who wrote a book in 1940 entitled, *So Great Salvation*. Here is a citation from that book:

Being the Son of GOD He was infinite. His life was greater than the sum total of all finite human lives. That is why His life could be a ransom for all – all mankind. The ransom price was greater than the sum total of all human sin.

Is it possible that Herbert Armstrong read that book and gleaned this important concept from Mr. Strombeck? Possibly. If so, would that fact preclude our belief that God led Mr. Armstrong divinely to understand the real Truth? Not at all! For evidence of the way God taught His chosen servant in our time, please refer to chapter nine of our book, *A Peculiar Treasure: The Enduring Legacy of Herbert & Loma Armstrong*. It confirms that there are *many nuggets of Truth in the world*, but none of these other writers were able to put them all together into *the whole* that reveals God's Master Plan. Herbert Armstrong was the only one to do that.

In spite of Mr. Strombeck's grasp of *one particular key*—the necessity of the "infinite God" paying the ransom for man's sins—he understood very little else of God's Truth. He was a member of the Evangelical Free Church (a member of the National Association of Evangelicals), that teaches the Trinity heresy and a false notion about the origin of sin, just for starters. In other words, he was steeped in many false doctrines that precluded him from grasping the real Truth of the Bible, even though he obviously grasped a few valuable nuggets.

There is also no indication that he grasped that Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament—man's Maker—which became key in Mr. Armstrong's explanation. We were not just taught that Jesus had to be the "infinite God" to be our Savior, but also that He must be the very One who was "our Maker." This knowledge is a great step beyond Mr. Strombeck's understanding. Only Herbert Armstrong was able to put all of those elements together to reveal the *total tapestry* of God's intent and purposes upon earth.

### **A Brief Summary of the Evidence**

Why do we believe that there are two Beings legitimately called God, neither One of which ever had a beginning?

In the beginning was the Word [*Logos*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God (John 1:1–2).

This Word, the *Logos*—or Spokesman—was both *God Himself*, and also *with God*, confirming that two beings are involved. This Being who became the Savior was "equal" with God, qualitatively—meaning, in substance:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God (Philippians 2:6).

Whether you interpret "robbery" as "something to be grasped at," or as "an *illegal act of grasping*," in either case, it confirms that the One we call Jesus Christ began as God. It was not heretical for Him to have been equal with God, or to desire to recapture that same glorified state *after His suffering was completed*. But that *divine, God state* was not something that He *demand*ed to keep at all costs, since He willingly gave it up for you and me (He did not grasp at it and refuse to fulfill the Father's will). By either interpretation, this text confirms that God Himself became our Savior. And that Savior is called by the very name of God (Titus 2:10; Jude 24–25).

Jesus Christ also became a real human being—as human as any of us are human. If He is *legally permitted* to be our sacrifice, that is another requirement. Why? We have already seen that God condemned *human beings* to death for their sins. Animal sacrifice will not do as a substitute. The price for human sin is *human death*. For Jesus to take upon Himself the penalty for any human transgressor, He Himself had to die being *a human sacrifice*. Therefore, God—the *Logos*—was actually made flesh:

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).

He was not just masquerading as a human being. There was no pretending. He was born of a human mother and thereby took on *every single human trait*, without exception (Matthew 1:18, 16, 25; 2:2).

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same (Hebrews 2:14).

So what do we have thus far? Jesus Christ was One of two eternal God Beings from everlasting. He then gave up that immortality and became a true human being. But what else is required if He is to qualify as our Savior?

The Savior also had to be the very Creator of man. And He was!

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:3).

This is the *Logos*, and God confirms through the Apostle John that the very Being highlighted in the Old Testament as interacting with man was not the One we call the Father, but the One who came to be our Savior.

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, *who created all things by Jesus Christ* (Ephesians 3:9) [emphasis mine].

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell (Colossians 1:16–19).

The Lord God of the Old Testament—*Yahveh*, or Jehovah—did the creating, and was the Being who interfaced directly with men (Genesis 2:16, 18; Exodus 2:20). John the Baptist prepared the way before "*Yahveh*" (Isaiah 40:3), and that *Yahveh* was Jesus Christ (Mark 1:14–15).



The *Rock* of the Old Testament that Israel followed was Jesus Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 10:1–4). That same *Rock* is *Yahveh* (Deuteronomy 32:3–4; 2 Samuel 22:2–3; Psalm 18:1–2). We are talking about the very same Being who years later was willing to divest Himself of His glory and to show us how to actually *live the Law* that He had delivered to Adam, and later to Moses. This God who made man—and was the very Being who pronounced the death sentence upon all human beings who commit sin—is also the very One who gladly offered to take our place in death so that we could preserve hope in a glorious future. It is all the very same Being, the One true Redeemer!

By this we confirm that the particular representative of the God Family who created all that exists, including man, is the very One who divested Himself of His eternal glory and became subject to death as a human being. According to the Master Plan devised under the authority of God the Father, the only One who could fulfill this role as Savior for mankind was the One who did the actual creating. This God Family member was equal in substance to the One who became the Father, including as having no beginning of days. Because He was *truly God*, and because He became *truly a human being* by birth to a human mother, His perfect life in the flesh without sin became eligible to substitute for the death penalty of another. Not only was He able to substitute for the death of one other human being, but because He was God in the flesh—because God was His Father, and because He had been the actual Maker of all human flesh—His single death was worth more than the sum total of all human beings that He had created.

His single death could therefore pay the price required for *all sinners* under the immutable Law of God. Only by this configuration is there confirmation of an existing and binding Law that has not been done away—a Law that requires a real penalty for every infraction—but likewise a means by which guilty human beings can be redeemed and attain salvation. The Law is upheld, and at the very same time grace is manifested, and all of this is made possible by the sacrifice of the very God who made us.

There is no alternative set of conditions that can compare to this understanding. In every other scheme, something critical is omitted which undermines one or more of the requirements of God.

### **Those Who Should Know Better**

The world is understandably ignorant of these divine Truths concerning the true role of Jesus Christ as Savior, since God has intentionally kept them in spiritual darkness until a future time of revealing. But what about those whose minds were opened miraculously to receive this understanding—called to be part of His firstfruits Work—but who have since turned away from that knowledge? They are without excuse.

Sadly, how many who were taught this perfect understanding have since picked it apart and replaced it with some version of their own? Even a number of ministers who were taught at the very feet of Herbert Armstrong are now contending with one or more elements of this divinely-revealed doctrine. Some now claim that the Father is the One who did the creative work. Some claim that Jesus Christ was not originally God, but was created later to become our Savior. But as we have demonstrated, trying to remove *even one single piece* from the puzzle structure destroys the whole entirely.

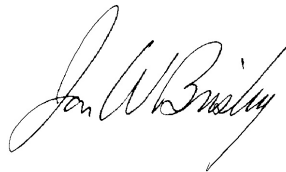
It was perfect as God originally chose to reveal it, and this understanding of the nature of God and Jesus Christ, the role of sin and Law, and the means by which God can legally pay the price for our guilt, is still as glorious and meaningful today as when the Church of God first received it in the early twentieth century. It is also the key to being able to recognize and discard very many false teachings extant in the world today. Anyone who does not understand this Truth cannot be a source of true wisdom for the people of God.

Never forget that the most basic knowledge, if it was divinely inspired, is still the most meaningful, and it never, ever goes out of style. Why is it that we have confidence in God to redeem us out of sin?

He is our Maker and therefore God, and His life which He gave was of greater value than the sum-total of all humans.

That is why!

Your servant and devoted friend in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Jon W. Brisby