

Jesus is . . .



A Study Guide To The
Good News of Jesus.

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Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
Jesus is . . .	
Son of God	3
Son of Man	5
The Adoption of Humanity	7
The One Who Believes	9
The Savior of the World	11
The Source of Humanity and the Last Adam	13
The Alpha and The Omega	15

Introduction

Religion has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man -- living in the sky -- who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever 'til the end of time!

But He loves you.

He loves you, and He needs money! He always needs money! He's all-powerful, all-perfect, all-knowing, and all-wise, somehow just can't handle money! ~ Comedian George Carlin

In one sense I have to agree with this quote from the comedian George Carlin. This is what religion has taught. It's not the good news of Jesus.

For Discussion: What do you think of Carlin's joke?

In fact, the good news of Jesus is far more bizarre than this. The good news about Jesus can give us a headache because it's so bizarre and hard for our intellect to grasp. But the gospel wasn't devised to flatter our vain intellect. It was prepared to feed our souls. (1 Cor. 1:18-19)

The gospel doesn't seek to convince people that there's an invisible man in the sky, it confidently declares, without embarrassment, that there are *three* persons in the sky – and they're not just in the sky, but present everywhere in all creation (Mark 1:10-11; Eph. 4:10.) The gospel says that two of these persons are spirits called the Father and the Holy Spirit and that one of these persons is fully spirit and fully human at the same time (Matt. 28:19; John 1:14.) The one that is fully spirit and fully human is the Son of the Father and his name is "Jesus."

This understanding of three divine persons who are one God is called the "Trinity." To think and speak of God in this way is to

speak and think of God in a “Trinitarian” way.

For Discussion: To what degree is your image of God a Trinitarian image?

The gospel isn’t too concerned with a list of “dos” and “don’ts” that these three put together (Rom. 10:4.) The gospel is concerned with what their life is like and how these three are so at one with each other that they are called “one God” (John 14:20, 26.)

The gospel confidently declares to us that the life of love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness which the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit share, is the source of all goodness anywhere in the universe – whether that goodness is found in believers like me or non-believers like George Carlin (Gal. 5:22-23; Acts 17:28.)

We human beings are not our own source of goodness. All that is good comes from the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Our sin often distorts that goodness but our sin does not and cannot change the source of that goodness.

For Discussion: How easy or difficult is it for you to see the good in other people? Do you see the good in them coming from the Trinity?

Unlike religion, the gospel is not a message about rewards and punishments or the financial needs of an institution. The gospel is not a sales pitch. The gospel is an announcement to all humanity that Jesus has included us all in this life he has with his Father and with their Spirit (Eph. 1:5; Rom. 5:18.)

It is a message of good news, like the good news announced to the world on May 8, 1945. On that day the announcement was made that World War II was finally over in Europe. It seemed too good to be true. Everyone was free to believe it or not believe it. But that news wasn’t made true by peoples’ belief. It was a fact, a message of good news to be announced.

That’s what the gospel is. It’s a factual statement of good news to be announced. To be even more precise, it is a factual person to be

announced: Jesus is the good news. He is the announcement to humanity that we are included in the good and perfect life of the Trinity (Col. 1:15-20.)

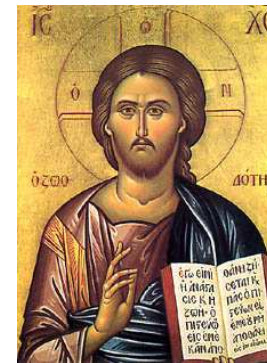
For Discussion: What’s the difference between an announcement of good news and a sales pitch? What makes the gospel an announcement of a fact and not a sales pitch?

That’s why this study guide is called “Jesus is . . .” If we know who Jesus is then we know the good news of God.

You need to know this good news – and so do I. That’s why this study guide exists. To help us know the good news of who Jesus is. When we know who he is then we will know who we are and we will know who our mates, children, friends, and fellow human beings are (2 Cor. 5:16.)

Jesus said “I am the truth. If you know the truth then the truth will set you free” (John 14:6, 8:32.)

For Discussion: Why is Jesus himself the good news? What do we already know, before we start this study, about how Jesus is the gospel?



Jesus is . . . Son of God

As we discussed in the introduction, God is not a solitary being living in isolation. God's nature is relational and he has always lived and existed in relationship (John 1:1, 17:5.) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are each God and have always existed in connection and relationship with each other.

Since God has this Trinitarian existence we sometimes refer to God as "Triune." The word "Triune" is the adjective form of the noun "Trinity."

Understanding God's Triune nature is of vital importance to understanding who Jesus is and what we mean when we say Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus is not the Son of God because God had sex with Mary and they had a baby together. This is what ancient peoples believed about their heroes, such as Hercules - they believed that these heroes were sons of gods because the gods had relationships with mortal women.

We also do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God because God chose to adopt him as his Son. The Scripture does not describe Jesus as a regular human being who was made into the Son of God by being "given a promotion."

What the Bible describes is a mystery by which God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, who is also called the Word (John 1:1,) took on a real, flesh and blood human nature and became the human being Jesus of Nazareth. We call this event the "incarnation," which is a Latin word that means "to become flesh" (John 1:14.)

For Discussion: Has your understanding of Jesus' Divine nature changed and matured over the course of your life? If so, how?

When he became human, the Son of God did not stop being the Son of God, instead he began to exist in a new way that he had not existed before. The Son of God began to exist as the man Jesus,

being fully God and fully human at the same time.

This makes Jesus unique in all of existence. Like the Father and the Holy Spirit he is fully God, but unlike them he is also fully human. Like humanity, Jesus is fully human, but unlike all of us he is also fully God.

There is no way to explain what it means to say "Jesus is the Son of God" without talking about the Trinity. This is why, as the theologian Baxter Kruger has said, "to say the name 'Jesus' is to say 'Trinity.'" If someone asks us "how is Jesus the Son of God?" then our answer has to be an answer rooted in the Trinity: "God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Jesus is the Son existing as the man Jesus."

For Discussion: Have you ever found it difficult to explain to others how Jesus is the Son of God? What makes it difficult to talk about the Trinity?

Each person of the Trinity plays his distinct role in God's nature and in God's relationship to the creation. In our discussion of Jesus we need to take note of the unique role that he plays, as the Son of God, in God's creating and sustaining of the universe.

In John 1:3, St. John tells us that all things were made through the Word. In Colossians 1:17, St. Paul says:

He [the Son] is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (NIV)

Hebrews 1:3 tells us that the Son sustains all things "by his powerful word" and in Acts 17:28 St. Paul says that we all live and move and have our being in the Son.

These verses, and others like them, are more than just empty rhetoric. They are important foundational statements about who Jesus is.

As the Son of God, Jesus plays the unique relational role of actively sustaining everyone and everything in the whole creation.

There is no part of the creation, and thus no person, who is not included in the creating and sustaining life of Jesus.

Most people do not know that they live and move and have their being in Jesus. Most people do not believe that their every breath is given to them by the grace of the Father, through Jesus, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Yet the gospel tells us that it is so.

This is yet another reason that the gospel is such good news. The good news is that every person has his or her life in and through Jesus - even though our fallen human nature causes us to be blind to the reality of how close God is to us .

When we understand that Jesus is in union with the creation then we understand that separation from God feels real to us in our fallen nature but is not the true state of our existence. We realize that when we speak of humanity as being “lost” it is not because the Father does not know where humanity is. He knows exactly where we are: humanity exists in Jesus, being sustained by him. To be “lost” means that *we* do not know where we are. We are living, moving, and having our being in Jesus and we are so lost that we don’t even know it.

For Discussion: Is the reality of all humanity existing in Jesus a new idea for you? What are the implications of this reality?

This fundamental connection between Jesus and the creation has sometimes been emphasized and sometimes neglected throughout the history of Christianity. In our modern era it has often been neglected. Most of us have participated in a form of Christianity that ignores this connectedness. It emphasizes the reality of our feelings of separation from the Son above the reality of how we are really all connected to God, and one another, by virtue of our creation and existence in the Son.

In order for us to have a clearer picture of ourselves we must have a clearer picture of Jesus and understand the connection we have with him apart from any decision on our part. By the grace of creation itself, the Father has rooted our existence in the Son and

breathed the life of his Spirit into us.

If we were to create an illustration of what it means that Jesus is the Son of God, it might look something like the picture below. As you look at it notice that the Father (on the left,) the Holy Spirit (in the middle,) and the Son (on the right,) are in union with each other as one God. The Son is wearing jeans, a t-shirt, sneakers, and a baseball hat to symbolize that he is Jesus: a human being like us who is also fully God. Under his arm he upholds the world, symbolizing the whole creation and all humanity. As the song says, he really does “have the whole world in his hands.”



For Discussion: In what ways does this Trinitarian image of Jesus in union with the creation challenge your thoughts about God? In what ways does it confirm your thoughts about God?

Jesus is . . . Son of Man

Calling Jesus the “Son of Man” is a significant and Biblical statement. Throughout the New Testament Jesus is called the “Son of God” and this is a title with which most of us are familiar. However, he is also frequently called the “Son of Man.” In fact, in the Gospels, Jesus uses the title “Son of Man” to refer to himself more than any other title.

The phrase “Son of Man” has its roots in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, where it means simply “a human being” (e.g. Psalm 8:4.) So, when Jesus refers to himself in this way he is saying “I am human.” Why would Jesus emphasize his humanity? I believe it is because he knew that by the time he finished walking on the water, raising the dead, and ascending into heaven, people would have a hard time believing that he is a real human being.

So, in Christianity, when we say that Jesus is “Son of God and Son of Man” we are saying that he is a unique person in all existence. He is the only person who is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and at the same time a real, flesh and blood human being like us.

Why did the Son of God become the Son of Man, Jesus Christ?

From the very beginning of creation the Father planned to include humanity in the relationship he has with his Son and their Holy Spirit . St. Paul described this plan in Ephesians 1:5:

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. (NIV)

This is the reason humanity was brought into existence: so that we might have by adoption the Father/Son relationship that the Son of God has always had with the Father by virtue of his nature as the Son. We were created so that God the Son could share with us the relationship he has with God the Father and therefore his Father could be our Father too.

The Father created humanity for the express purpose of choos-

ing us, through Christ, to be his adopted children. In the next chapter we will talk more about how the Son of God’s adoption of human nature, as the man Jesus, results in our adoption. For right now we want to see how Jesus is a real human being and what that means for us.

Sometimes people wonder, “isn’t St. Paul just talking to the believers in the Ephesian church? He doesn’t mean all humanity was created for adoption, does he?”

It is true that St. Paul addressed his comments to the Ephesians, but he is talking *to* them *about* humanity. If we suppose that St. Paul is only telling the Ephesians that they were predestined for adoption then we are excluded too because we are not 1st Century Christians living in Ephesus!

This issue also brings us back to our discussion in the last chapter about how all creation lives, and moves, and has its being in Jesus (Acts 17:28.) Since everyone was created by the Father through the Son, and everyone exists *in* the Son, it therefore follows that everyone is included in the Father’s plan of adoption through the Son’s humanity as Jesus Christ.

For Discussion: If the Father didn’t create all people to be adopted as his children then why did he create them? What would be the point of creating some people for adoption and creating others to simply destroy them?

Like many Christians you may be accustomed to thinking of “human nature” as something negative and sinful. And because of Adam we do have to admit that our human nature has become sinful. But the gospel is the good news that the Son of God “became sin” for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

In other words, the Son became what we are - taking on all the good and bad of our human nature - in order to accomplish our adoption and to heal the fallenness of our sinful human nature. We will talk more about how Jesus’ humanity heals the fallenness of our human nature in the upcoming chapter: “Jesus is the Savior of the World.”

If the Son of God had not also become the Son of Man then humanity would not be adopted into the Triune Life of God. Remember what St. Paul said in Ephesians 1:5. It is through Jesus Christ that adoption has taken place. Another way to say it would be to say that through the unique one who is both Son of God and Son of Man the Father's plan of adoption is fulfilled.

For Discussion: How does understanding why humanity was created in the first place help us understand who Jesus is?

The Son of God must continue to exist forever as the Son of Man in order for all people to forever remain adopted as children of the Father. This is because our adoption is the result of the Son of God becoming human as the man Jesus Christ. If the Son of God ever stops being the Son of Man then Jesus ceases to exist and we cease to be adopted.

Here's an analogy: a peanut butter sandwich is, by definition, bread and peanut butter. If the bread goes away then it's no longer a sandwich, it's just peanut butter. If the peanut butter goes away then it's no longer a sandwich, it's just bread. A peanut butter sandwich exists as long as peanut butter and bread are in union. Jesus exists as long as the Son of God is also the Son of Man. And how long will Jesus exist, according to the Bible? Forever (Heb. 7:24.)

Therefore we know that the Son of God will never stop also being the Son of Man and human beings will never cease to be the adopted children of the Father.

The Bible is quite clear about the Son of God remaining in human nature as the man Jesus even after his resurrection and ascension. In Luke 24:39 Jesus says, after his resurrection, "I have flesh and bones" and in Acts 7:56, after Jesus' ascension, St. Stephen says that he sees "the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." In 1 Timothy 2:5, St. Paul says that there is one mediator between God and people: "the man Christ Jesus."

Jesus' resurrected body, the flesh and bone he speaks of in Luke 24, is no longer capable of death and decay. It is the risen and glori-

fied body of the resurrection that St. Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44. St. John had a vision of what Jesus looks like in his glorified, resurrected humanity in Revelation 1:12-16. In that vision we see that Jesus is still the "Son of Man" (v. 13) and that as such he has feet, a chest, a head, hair, eyes, a voice, hands, a mouth, and a face. In short, all the parts of a normal human body but his body is now resurrected and glorified.

As the resurrected Son of Man, Jesus has promised to raise up all people by sharing his resurrection with us. As St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:22:

For as in Adam all die, in Christ so all will be made alive. (NIV)

Notice the parallel that St. Paul draws between Adam and Christ. In the same way that all people are fallen in Adam, so all people will be resurrected in Christ. This is how we know that St. Paul is not just talking about believers. It is not just believers who die in Adam - all people die in Adam. And since the Son of God has adopted all people into his relationship with the Father, by permanently assuming our human nature, all people share in the Son's resurrection life.

How else could we live forever as the adopted children of the Father? Our creaturely bodies are not immortal. They weaken, sicken, die, and return to the dust from which they are formed. The only way we can live forever as the Father's adopted children is if our bodies are made new and we are resurrected to eternal life.

And so Jesus, as the Son of God and Son of Man, has made humanity new in his own resurrection body and adopted us into the eternal life he has with his Father.

For Discussion: Do you have difficulty believing that Jesus lives forever as the Son of God and the resurrected, glorified Son of Man?

Jesus is . . .
The Adoption of Humanity

In 325 A.D. pastors and bishops from all over the Christian world held a council in the city of Nicea to discuss who Jesus is and come to an agreement over what all Christians believed about him.

The participants in the council wrote a statement of faith that we know today as the Nicene Creed.

When they formulated their statement about the Son of God's mission in becoming Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, they phrased it this way: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven."

Notice that this statement defines Jesus' mission in two distinct ways. The Son of God came down from heaven: For us men *and* for our salvation.

Like everything in the Nicene Creed, these two statements are drawn from the Bible. As we saw in the last chapter, St. Paul describes the Father's plan in sending the Son in Ephesians 1:5:

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. (NIV)

This is the first part of Jesus' mission: he came for us human beings. Like an older brother who walks into a school and says "I've come for my brother Timmy" so the Son of God came for us. He came to adopt us as children of the Father and take us home to our Father's house (Eph. 2:6, Col. 3:3.)

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 St. Paul explains how Jesus came for our salvation:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

God the Son entered our fallen, sinful human nature as Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, and transformed our sinful nature and saved us from the consequences of sin.

In this chapter we will talk about how Jesus is the adoption of humanity and how the first part of his mission was to come *for us*. In a later chapter we will talk about the second part of his mission: how he came for our salvation.

As we saw in the last chapter, Ephesians 1:5 says that humanity was created for the purpose of adoption through Jesus Christ. This is the reason the Father made us, so that we could be adopted as his children.

Notice that this adoption takes place "*through Jesus Christ*." We do not get ourselves adopted. In fact, it would make no sense to speak of getting yourself adopted. A baby doesn't pick out his adoptive parents. They choose him. Children in an orphanage don't go on bus tours through suburban neighborhoods looking for families that will adopt them. The families come to the orphanage and choose a child to adopt.

For Discussion: Do you think of your adoption as something you do by your own work or something that Jesus has done for you?

Since the Father's plan was to create humanity in order to adopt us as children, how was this plan to be accomplished? How would the Father make his creatures into his children?

I sometimes call this the "Pinocchio" problem. Do you remember that fairy tale? Geppetto made a wooden puppet he named Pinocchio but what he really wanted was a son. By magic the puppet came to life, but even though he could walk and talk he was still wooden - not a real, flesh and blood boy. There was something missing in his relationship with Geppetto. Only at the end of the story, when Pinocchio at last becomes a real boy, is the satisfaction of a real Father/Son relationship achieved between him and Geppetto.

In a similar way, the Father faced the dilemma of how to make us into real children. How could the Father make his creatures into real children who would share in his life in the same way that his eternal Son shares in his life?

Jesus is the answer to the Father's dilemma and the fulfillment of

the Father's plan. When the Son of God adopted human nature as the man Jesus Christ he shared with our nature his own life as the Father's Son and made our nature capable of participating in the Divine nature as real children (2 Pet. 1:4.)

All people are participants in human nature and God the Son has adopted human nature by becoming the man Jesus Christ. Therefore, all people are now adopted into the life of the Trinity - as Ephesians 1:5 says - *through Jesus Christ*. There is no part of human nature, and thus no human participant in human nature, that is not adopted into the life of the Trinity.

We can see an image of this adoption in Jesus' ascension. Luke describes it in Acts 1:9-11. What we see is Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, ascending into the heavenly life of the Trinity. As the Son of God he returns to the Father. As the Son of Man he does not abandon his human nature. He remains a risen, glorified human being and ascends to the Father's right hand (Acts 7:56.) Thus, human nature is adopted into the Trinity when Jesus carries that nature up to heaven in his ascension.

This gives us a clear mental picture of what has happened to our human nature. Our nature has been made righteous by the Son of God (2 Cor. 5:21) and through his ascension it has been taken up into the life he shares with the Father (Eph. 2:6.) Since Jesus is the adoption of human nature into the Divine nature of the Trinity, St. Paul tells us that all people have been made righteous (Rom. 5:18) and that we are now seated "in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6) and that our lives are now "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:4.)

For Discussion: Do you more often think of yourself as *in* Jesus, and therefore in God, or do you think of God as being far away?

How can we know that when St. Paul talks about adoption he is talking about all people and not just believers? Because this adoption is something that takes place through Jesus Christ, not through human belief or work. No human being could ever get himself adopted as a child of the Father, but by becoming what we are - a

Son of Man - the Son of God has accomplished humanity's adoption.

Understanding that Jesus is the adoption of humanity leads us to at least two surprising realizations:

1. Jesus would have existed even if humanity had never fallen into sin. The Father always planned to adopt us through Jesus Christ. Therefore Jesus was, as Baxter Kruger says, "Plan A" not the backup, emergency plan. The Father always planned to adopt humanity by having the Son become human.

2. The forgiveness of sins is not the main reason for Jesus' existence. The forgiveness of sins is a necessary step in accomplishing the Father's plan of adoption, but the plan was and always has been adoption. The Father saved us from sin through Jesus for the purpose of accomplishing the plan of adoption.

If we were to visualize humanity's adoption into the Triune Life it might look like the illustration below. Here we see God the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Son is clothed in a t-shirt and ball cap to symbolize how he has clothed himself in human nature. The boy seated on his lap symbolizes all people because Jesus' human nature is humanity's adoption into the Son's relationship with the Father and our baptism into their Spirit.



For Discussion: What does this illustration say to you about Jesus and humanity?

Jesus is . . .
The One Who Believes

So far we have talked about Jesus' identity as the Son of the Father, the second person of the Trinity, and his identity as the Son of Man, a real human being like us. We have talked about how Jesus, as Son of God and Son of Man, has accomplished humanity's adoption into the Triune Life as children of the Father.

What we have not yet discussed is the role that our belief plays in our adoption and salvation.

Most of us have been raised on a version of Christianity that makes our adoption as children of the Father dependent on our belief or action. So, for example, many of us were taught that the gospel says:

If you believe that Jesus died for you then you will become a child of the Father.

In that version of the gospel who is it that makes you a child of the Father? It's you! You start by not being a child of the Father. Then you believe something about Jesus and because of your belief you are transformed from not being a child to being a child.

In this version of the gospel Jesus is not the adoption of humanity. Jesus is an agent who creates the potential for adoption. Each human being must then get himself or herself adopted by his or her own belief.

Why not just cut Jesus out of the equation all together? After all, if we - by our belief - can get ourselves adopted into the Trinity then why do we need Jesus?

The answer is obvious: we cannot, by anything we do (including our belief) get ourselves adopted. We need Jesus in the equation because he is the one through whom we are adopted (Eph. 1:5.) This is exactly how adoption works. Children don't get themselves adopted, they are chosen by their adoptive parents and the parents do the work to make the children their own. The Father chose humanity through Jesus and the two of them, together with the Holy

Spirit, have done the work.

For Discussion: How much has this conditional, "if/then" understanding of the gospel influenced your life?

So, what does the Bible mean when it talks about belief? When the Bible encourages us to believe in Jesus it is saying:

You are adopted as a child of the Father in Jesus! Believe this truth about yourself.

What the Bible is not saying is:

You are not a child of the Father but you can make yourself into one by your belief.

This is why it is so important that we understand who Jesus is. He is the one through whom our adoption has taken place (Eph. 1:5.) As the union of the Divine nature of the Trinity with the human nature of humanity, he is the one who has made us children of the Father.

This issue of belief is one area where we need to take seriously what the Bible says to us about our fallenness.

Many of us have been trained to think that all humanity is sinful and fallen because of Adam and that we can't do anything good apart from Jesus. However, when we come to talk about belief we switch our thinking and say that our own belief is so un-fallen that it can accomplish our adoption. This is the same as saying that by our own knowledge and thinking we can know, understand, and participate in the life of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

How can we logically say that our fallen, sinful belief can accomplish our adoption? Let's set aside the fact that we are the Father's creation, and the creation can never unite itself to the Creator. Let's just ask ourselves how we can realistically believe that our twisted, sinful minds can truly know the Father as the Son knows him and

participate - by our own effort - in the communion they have with their Spirit?

I believe that this is one of the major reasons the Bible emphasizes our sinfulness to us. The Holy Spirit is trying to awaken us to the fact that we cannot get ourselves adopted, or save ourselves, by the exercise of our own, sin damaged belief.

In fact, the scripture makes it quite clear that we are saved “by grace” (Eph. 2:8.) What is grace? It is the English translation of the Greek word for “gift.” Our adoption is not something we earn by believing in Jesus. Humanity has been given its adoption through Jesus Christ as a gift from the Father to us.

What the Bible says about belief is that it is the means for us to experience and enjoy the adoption we have been given. In Ephesians 2:8 St. Paul says that we are saved “by grace” and “through faith.”

In other words, every human being is - by grace - adopted into the life of the Trinity and saved from sin and death. When we believe that truth about ourselves, the truth revealed in Jesus, then we begin to experience - through faith - all the blessings that come from that salvation.

For Discussion: If an adopted child doesn't believe his adoptive parents love him, how does that affect his life? Does his lack of trust in his parents undo his adoption?

What is even more remarkable is that St. Paul does not stop there. In the last phrase of Ephesians 2:8 he tells us that even our belief (our faith) is not something that we have on our own. The faith through which we experience the salvation we have been given is a faith that is also a gift from the Trinity!

Our weak, broken faithfulness as fallen human beings is not adequate to allow us to participate in Jesus as children of the Father. So, the Father not only gives us our adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, he also gives us the faith of Jesus so that we can believe that we are adopted!

Consider the following well known sentence of scripture from Galatians 2:20:

The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (NIV)

The NIV translates the Greek here as “faith in the Son of God.” Yet the Greek could just as easily, and correctly, be translated as the “faith of the Son of God.”

Which is the better translation? If we believe that we get ourselves adopted by faith in Jesus then we will go with the NIV translation. On the other hand, if we believe what St. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8 - that faith is the gift of God to us - then we have to go with the translation that says we live by the “faith of the Son of God.”

Interestingly, the King James Version chose to translate this phrase as “faith of the Son of God.” Those 17th century translators had a more Christ-centered view of humanity's adoption than many modern translators.

What we see, then, is that Jesus really is our everything and our all in all. Because the Son of God is in human nature as the man Jesus Christ, humanity has been adopted as the Father's children. And Because Jesus lives in us, and we live in him, he shares with us, through his Spirit, his own faith and thus enables us to live in this relationship as the children of the Father that we really are.

We know that our faith is often weak. Some days it is easier to believe in our loving Father in heaven and some days it is harder. The good news of the gospel is the good news that Jesus is the One Who Believes. He believes in the Father. He has faith in the Father's love and acceptance. And as Son of God, and Son of Man, and as our adoption, he shares with us his faith and his belief.

Jesus is . . . The Savior of the World

We have seen that the Father's plan for humanity is our adoption as his children. We have seen that he accomplished this plan by having his Son become human as the man Jesus (Eph. 1:5.) Now we are ready to talk about the problem of sin.

This is the second part of Jesus' mission that we talked about in the chapter "Jesus is the Adoption of Humanity." As the Nicene Creed says, "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven." Our adoption is expressed in the words that say the Son came "for us men" and Jesus' mission to rescue us from sin is expressed in the words that say he came "for our salvation." In this chapter we will be talking about the second element of his mission, the mission to save us from sin.

When Adam and Eve sinned they plunged the whole human race into the condition of sinfulness. From our existence within this condition we have each then committed our own, individual sins. (Rom. 5:12-14.) When we understand the Biblical description of sin we understand that it is more than just the wrong thoughts we have or the wrong things we do.

Sin is a condition of our hearts, souls, and minds, which makes us incapable of doing what is right - even when we know and agree with what is right! (Rom. 7:17-18.) The natural consequence of sin is death (Rom. 5:12.)

To think about this more deeply it is helpful for us to return to our first chapter about how Jesus is the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity. Before anything else existed, and before anyone sinned, the Trinity existed and sin did not exist. The Father and Son lived and loved each other in the communion and love of the Holy Spirit. When we say that the Triune God is holy and sinless what we are really saying is that these three Divine persons have always lived, and will always live, in a relationship that is perfectly loving and in which they never hurt or sin against one another.

Take the issue of trust for example. It should be obvious that the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit trust each other. Adam and Eve

were created to trust the Father. When they sinned by not trusting him they believed the serpent and ate the fruit. The sinful act of eating the fruit was an outcome of the deeper reality of what their sin really was. Their sin was in not trusting the Father.

Thinking of sin in the light of the Trinity helps us see why sin is more than just wrong thoughts and wrong actions. We were created to fully participate in the Triune Life as children of the Father in his Son Jesus. Sin is when we do not fully participate in this Life as we were created to do. The sin of not living in harmony with the characteristics of the Triune Life leads us to think sinful thoughts and commit sinful acts.

This is what the Son of God came to save humanity from. He came to make sure the plan of adoption could be fulfilled by rescuing us from our inability to live faithfully in the Triune Life. After all, what good would it do for the Father to adopt us in Jesus if we then continue sinning and remain incapable of participating fully in the life that the Father, Son, and Spirit share together? Our adoption required that the Son become what we are and that he dispel the blindness of our sin so that we could see the Father and participate in his life in a full and unhindered way.

For Discussion: If sin flows out of our inability to live faithfully in the Triune Life then will we be able to fix our own sin problem?

So, sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4.) But it is more than that. Sin is our failure to know, trust, and love the Father as the Son knows, trusts, and loves him, and sin is the lawlessness that results from this failure on our part.

At this point we should stop and contrast a Trinitarian understanding of sin with other, more legalistic, views of sin. When we define sin based on who Jesus is as the Son of the Father then we see that sin is far more than a legal failure that deserves punishment. Sin is like a disease that is eating us up from the inside. When God the Son tells Adam and Eve that if they eat the fruit then they will die (Gen. 3:3) he is not telling them "I'll kill you if you touch that

tree!” He’s telling them “living in love and trust with me is the only way you can live and not die.”

This is why the Son’s salvation of humanity is vital. We cannot fix our own sin problem but it must be fixed in order for us to live as children of the Father (Rom. 7:24-25.)

Many of us are accustomed to thinking of salvation in terms of rules broken and punishments administered. So, we define sin as breaking God’s rules and salvation as Jesus taking our punishment for us. In this model of sin and salvation God’s attitude towards us needs to be changed from angry to happy and Jesus’ death brings about that change.

For Discussion: Who needed to change, God or humanity? If we have a view that Jesus’ death changed God’s attitude toward us then when and how are we changed?

In fact, the Bible makes it clear that it was humanity that needed to be changed. We were dead in sin and our Father wanted us to be alive in Jesus (Eph. 2:1-6.) When the Bible talks about Jesus reconciling us to the Father it talks about the change that has taken place to transform our sinful nature. For example:

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 St. Paul says that the Son took on our sin nature and exchanged it for his holy nature.

In Colossians 2:11-12 St. Paul says that we were circumcised in Christ. His death was a cutting away of our sinful nature, the way Israelite men had their foreskin cut away in the ceremony of circumcision.

In Colossians 2:15 St. Paul says that Jesus’ cross was his triumph over the evil forces that held humanity captive.

In Hebrews 2:14-15 it says that Jesus’ death defeated the devil and set humanity free from the fear of death.

So, Jesus saves us by taking on our sinful nature and transforming it from unholy and sinful into a nature that is sinless and good. The Son of God has entered our nature and is changing us from the inside out.

So Jesus is the Savior. And who is it that he saves? As the Nicene

Creed says, he saves “us men.” That means all of humanity. The same Father who created all things and all people, in and through the Son, has forgiven and reconciled all things and all people to himself in the Son’s life as the man Jesus.

If Adam and Eve’s sin was strong enough to get everyone into sin then Jesus’ sinlessness must be powerful enough to get us all out of sin.

Numerous verses in the Bible speak to this reality:

Romans 5:18, “Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all people, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all people.”

1 Corinthians 15:22, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”

Colossians 1:19-20 “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven . . .”

1 Timothy 4:10 “. . . we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially those who believe.”

As the Savior of the world Jesus has taken on our sin nature in order to transform it into a holy and resurrected nature and thus enable us to live forever as the Father’s children. As we discussed in the last chapter, our faith does not cause our deliverance from sin. Jesus is humanity’s deliverance from sin and he is now sharing his faith with us so that we can believe that he is our Savior (Eph. 2:8.)

For Discussion: How does it change your view of your family and friends to see them as adopted and forgiven in Jesus even if they do not yet believe this truth about themselves?



Jesus is . . .

The Source of Humanity and The Last Adam

We all know who the Bible says the first human was, right? He was Adam, formed out of the dust of the ground by the Lord on the sixth day of creation.

And yet, the Bible also says that humanity was created in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26-27.) So even though Adam was the first human being he was not, according to the Bible, the basis for what human beings would be. He was not the “prototype” human. A prototype is the first of something, such as a car. A car manufacturer might build a prototype of a new kind of car and then base all the other cars of that kind on the design of the prototype.

What the scripture tells us is that the prototype of humanity was not Adam but God himself.

Interpreting this statement in Genesis 1 has occupied a lot of thinking among Christians and Jews over the millennia since it was first written. Some people have interpreted it to mean that we were given the ability to think and reason. Others have said that since God is Triune, as Father, Son, and Spirit, human beings are also triune as body, mind, and soul.

These, and other interpretations, all have their place in understanding this verse. However, as with everything in the Bible, I think it is better for us to start with Jesus in our interpretation. Notice what St. Paul says about Jesus in Colossians 1:15:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

If we were to ask ourselves “what is the image of God?” then the Biblical answer would be “Jesus.” Even though Jesus, as God the Son, is distinct from the other persons of the Trinity he is still of one substance with the Father and lives in inseparable communion with him in the communion of the Holy Spirit. This means, as Jesus himself says, that if we have seen Jesus then we have seen the Father (John 14:9.)

This is what St. Paul is pointing us towards when he says “he is the image of the invisible God.” Before the Father created anything in the Son, including Adam, the Father envisioned the Son becoming the man Jesus Christ so that the invisible nature of the Trinity would be made visible to the creation.

When we speak of Adam being created in God’s image, it is the image of Jesus that we are talking about. God did not create Adam and then decide that the Son would become like Adam. First God the Father envisioned the Son living as the man Jesus and then he created Adam in the image of Jesus.

That is why Jesus is humanity’s source. Or, as St. Paul calls him in Colossians 1:15, the “firstborn over all creation.” The whole human race, and the whole universe, has Jesus as its source. The Son of God in the flesh as the man Jesus Christ is the prototype for all created things. Everything that exists is based on the Father’s vision of the Son in the flesh as Jesus and everything that exists is derived from that vision.

For Discussion: In history, Jesus comes after Adam, but in the Father’s plan he comes before Adam. Is this a new idea for you?

This ties directly into what we discussed in the chapter on Jesus as the adoption of humanity. Since the Father’s whole purpose for creating the universe was to bring humanity into the glory of the Triune Life, it makes sense that the method for achieving this adoption - i.e. Jesus - was the first element of the plan to be envisioned.

So, the Father looked ahead to the ultimate goal of his plan: the adoption of humanity in Jesus. Looking ahead to that goal he created the man Adam in the image of what the Son would become, the man Jesus Christ. Fundamental to this image is Jesus’ relationship with the Father as his Son. Like Jesus, in whose image he was made, Adam was created to exist as a Son of the Father. Since all people share in Adam’s nature, all people therefore share in this purpose and have been adopted as children of the Father in Jesus.

This is why it is significant that in his genealogy of Jesus St. Luke goes all the way back to Adam and calls Adam “the son of

God” (Luke 3:37.) Adam did not make himself the Son of God. Adam was the Son of God because he was created in the image of Jesus, who is Son of God and Son of Man. Adam is God’s son because he was created from the Father’s foreknowledge of the image of the humanity that the eternal Son would take on himself when he became the man Jesus.

For Discussion: What does Adam’s creation in Jesus’ image tell us about the permanent connection between Jesus and humanity?

As we know, the story of Adam did not go well. He and Eve sinned, sending the whole human race down the road toward death and non-existence. Adam and Eve failed to live faithfully in the image of Jesus, the image in which they had been created. This failure threatened to destroy the image of Jesus within humanity and cause humanity to become a sin-deformed mess whose image was a twisted and distorted version of the image of Jesus the Son.

It is for this reason that we also speak of Jesus as the “last Adam.” St. Paul calls him this in 1 Corinthians 15:45. As Adam distorted Jesus’ image, and brought death to humanity, so also Jesus Christ - the last Adam - restored his own image in humanity and brought life to everyone (1 Cor. 15:22, Rom. 5:18.)

As the source of humanity, Jesus is the prototype upon which all humanity is based. As the last Adam, he is the one who restores the damaged, broken image of himself within humanity. Writing in the 4th century A.D., St. Athanasius of Alexandria compared Jesus to a man who sits for a portrait:

You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and then the likeness is re-drawn on the same material. Even so was it with the All-holy Son of God. He, the Image of the Father, came and dwelt in our midst, in order that He might renew mankind made after Himself . . . (*On the Incarnation*, 3.14.)

As humanity was created in the image of Jesus, so also humanity has now been recreated in the image of Jesus, who is the last Adam.

Understanding Jesus as the one in whose image we are created, and the one in whose image we have been recreated, can help us understand why the Bible says that God is the savior of all people, and that all things have been reconciled to God in Christ (1 Tim. 4:20, Col. 1:20.)

As human beings we are not independent, self-existent beings. We are dependent upon Jesus as the source of our existence and we are also dependent on him (because he is the last Adam) for our adoption and salvation. Because we all, through Adam and Eve, share this dependence on Jesus, we are all connected in him and to each other (Acts 17:28.) Humanity is not a category describing billions of independent persons. There is only one, new humanity in union with Jesus (Eph. 2:15) and the billions of individuals within this one humanity are distinct from each other and from Jesus, but they are never independent from each other or Jesus.

That’s why, when Jesus died, everyone died with him (2 Cor. 5:14.) And why humanity was raised up with Christ in his resurrection and seated with him at the Father’s right hand (Eph. 2:6.) As the source of humanity and the last Adam, Jesus is the one who includes the whole human race in the eternal life he shares with his Father in the communion of their Spirit.

For Discussion: How does it impact your view of your fellow human beings, of all faiths and ethnic groups, to see them as one, new humanity in union with Jesus?



Jesus is . . .
The Alpha and The Omega

In the course of our study we have learned that Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is unique in all existence because he is both fully God and fully human - no other being exists in that way. We have learned that Jesus is the one in whom humanity has been adopted as children of the Father, he is the one who believes in our adoption for us when we cannot or will not believe, he is the savior of the world, the source of humanity, and the last Adam.

All of this helps us understand that everything that exists in all creation, including all humanity, has its existence in and through Jesus. For most of us, for most of our lives, our concept of Jesus has simply been too small. Jesus is so big that he encompasses all things.

For Discussion: What in this study has been the most helpful to you in expanding your understanding of who Jesus is?

To put it in Biblical language, Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. “Alpha” and “Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, equivalent to “A” and “Z” in English. When Jesus says “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev. 22:13) he is telling us that he is everything from A to Z. He is the head and encapsulation of all things and all people. There is no creation, no existence, no life that is not bound up in the one who binds all things together and fills all things with his presence and life.

This means that Jesus is literally your “all in all”, as the Christian song says. There is no part of you, your life, or the life of humanity, or the creation, that is not bound up in Jesus’ life. Even our sin is bound up in, and forgiven in, Jesus.

Jesus is the start and the finish of your whole existence (Heb. 12:2.) Jesus started your adoption as a child of the Father and he will finish it. Jesus started your salvation from sin and he will finish it. Jesus started your resurrection from the dead and he will finish it.

Your role in your relationship with the Father is to simply believe that Jesus is who he says he is: your adoption, your salvation, and your resurrection, and to believe that you are who Jesus says you are: an adopted child of the Father, saved from sin and raised from the dead in Jesus.

Through his Holy Spirit the Father is saying to you:

My child, you have always been my child in Jesus. He is the start and the finish of your life, your existence, and your inclusion in my life. All that you are, or ever will be, is already given to you in Jesus and is now simply emerging in the process of time as you grow up to be the child I created you in Jesus to be.

To believe that Jesus is who he says he is, and to believe that you are in him who he says you are in him, is to simply accept reality as it is. The earth orbits the sun. The sky is blue. Humanity is adopted into the Trinity through Jesus Christ. These are basic facts of reality, these are fundamental statements about how the Father’s creation exists.

The Spirit speaks to all people and says:

Here, I give you the life of the Father and the Son, the life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. I give you the faith of Jesus so that you may believe that Jesus is who he says he is and you are who Jesus says you are. Receive and believe the truth about Jesus and about humanity. It is the gift of your Father to you.

To believe that Jesus is who he says he is, and that you are who he says you are, is to simply believe that what Jesus says to us is true. Jesus speaks to all people and says:

I am the first and the last, I am the way, the truth, the life, and the resurrection. You do not exist apart from me, you exist because of me and with me and in me. I have taken your body and blood and given it back to you, and given it for you, made per-

fect and whole in my resurrection. To know me is to know yourself. To know that I am the beloved Son of the Father is to know that you are a beloved child of the Father. To know I am the holy one is to know that you are holy. To know that I am the resurrection is to know that you are resurrected. You can know all this is true of you because you know that I am sharing all that I am with you and that I will share all that I am with you forever.

The great question of each human life is whether we will believe that we are who our Father tells us that we are in Jesus. To believe the truth about who Jesus is, and thus who we are in him, is to experience the heavenly life of the Trinity. To disbelieve the truth about who Jesus is, and thus who we are in him, can ultimately only lead to misery for us.

This is why Jesus stands at the door and knocks, asking us to receive the truth about him (Rev. 3:20.) The truth is that he is our adoption and salvation and that in him we are all loved and forever included in the life that he shares with his Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit.



The good news of Jesus:
You Belong! Believe It! Become more and
more filled with the life you have in Jesus.

Resources for Further Study

Available online:

The Adopted Life www.theadoptedlife.org

The God Revealed in Jesus Christ: A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology www.gci.org

The Surprising God Blog <http://thesurprisinggodblog.wcg.org>

Books by Baxter Kruger:

Across All Worlds

The Great Dance

Jesus and the Undoing of Adam

All available for purchase at www.perichoresis.org

Jesus is . . .

From the foundation of the world the eternal Father planned for you, and everyone you know and love, to be adopted into his life as his children through the humanity of his Son Jesus Christ. In fact, he even planned for everyone you hate to also be adopted.

This gospel of Jesus Christ challenges our prejudices, calls us to change our minds about what we think we know of God, and ultimately baptizes our souls in assurance.

For three years now *The Adopted Life* has been celebrating and explaining this good news of the Trinity and Humanity together in the person of Jesus. Now, in this study guide, we offer a systematic way for individuals and small groups to study and think about the good news of humanity's adoption as the children of the Father in Jesus.

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