

A WINDOW INTO THE HEART OF GOD:

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*AsiAfrica Ministries, Inc.*

*Edited for readers whose first language is not English*

CONTENTS

A Window into the Heart of God:.....	1
An Introduction to Trinitarian-Incarnational Theology.....	2
Doctrine of the Trinity.....	4
A Window into the Heart of God.....	5
The Friend of Sinners.....	6
Abba.....	8
Jesus Our Judge.....	8
The Judge Judged in Our Place.....	9
Free to Forgive.....	10
Our Response.....	12
End Notes.....	13

## AN INTRODUCTION TO TRINITARIAN-INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY

If you could describe God in one word, what word would you use? Some might describe God as “sovereign”; others insist that God is “holy”; still others might describe God as “almighty.” But what word did the Apostle John use to describe God? John said, “God is love” (1John 4:8, 16). Note what John is saying: God *is* love. Love is not one characteristic among many other characteristics of God; love is not something God does; love is what God *is*, or better yet, love is *Who* God is.



But how does John know that God is love? In his First Epistle John says:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard we declare to you . . . (1 John 1:1, 3).

Who is John talking about? He is talking about *Jesus*. He wants to declare to us the things he has seen, heard and touched regarding *Jesus*. John knows that God is love because John knows *Jesus*! What John has done is to give us an important lesson in the right way to do theology. According to John, if we want to know about God, we start with *Jesus*, for *Jesus* is the *revelation* of God!

But what does it mean to say that *Jesus* is the “revelation” of God? How does *Jesus* *reveal* the Father?<sup>1</sup> *Jesus* portrayed his relationship with the Father in simple terms: He said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), Again, he said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). The apostle Paul later wrote that *Jesus* is fully God. Paul says, “In Christ, all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col 2:9). The writer of Hebrews assures us that the incarnate Son is the “exact representation” of God’s being (Heb 1:3). Finally, the Apostle John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1, 14). Not only that, John tells us that this *Word has made the Father known* (v 18).

What was the early Church to make of the scriptural account of *Jesus’* relationship to God? How could the Church take these varied New Testaments scriptures about *Jesus* and put them together in a coherent and meaningful way? To make sense of the biblical witness of Christ was something the Church was forced to do because some said *Jesus* was not fully God. They said *Jesus* was merely an exalted creature, perhaps like a great archangel, but he was not fully divine. Under the leadership of the great Athanasius, the Church was compelled to answer those who would deny the full divinity of *Jesus*, for as Athanasius understood, if *Jesus* is not fully God, we are not saved, for only God can save.

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### The Nicene Creed

summarizes the New Testament witness to Jesus as follows:

Jesus is God of God,  
Light of Light, Very God  
of very God, Of one  
being with the Father

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In the fourth century, the leaders of the Church gathered together at a little village called Nicaea in order to collectively hammer out a coherent summary of the New Testament witness to the exact relationship between Jesus and God. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they carefully and prayerfully contemplated the biblical witness to Jesus Christ, and collectively realized that the incarnate Son is *one in being and identity* with the Father. The Church Fathers enshrined their insights into the Nicene Creed, wherein they asserted that Jesus Christ is “God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten not made, Of one being with the Father.”

It’s that last phrase that I want to focus on. The early Church said that Jesus is “*of one Being* with the Father”; that is, Jesus is one in “nature” or “essence” with the Father. Said another way, Jesus is of the same “God stuff” as the Father; he is just as much God as the Father is God; he is equal with the Father in every way. At the same time, Jesus is not the Father and the Father is not the Son. While Jesus and the Father are *one* in Being or nature, they are *distinct* in personhood.

To say that Jesus is one in being with the Father is also to say that the *acts* of Jesus are the acts of God. In more precise terms, it is to say that Jesus and the Father are united in their activities. The Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) always act with *harmony* of intent, purpose and will. We should not be surprised to know that there is complete harmony in the acts of Jesus and the acts of the Father, for Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; *he can do only what he sees his Father doing*, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. . . (John 5:19, 20a).

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Jesus and the Father are *one* in being or nature. In other words, both are fully God.

At the same time, Jesus and the Father are *distinct* as divine persons. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. They are two (not one) divine persons.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three divine persons who are eternally united in a union or fellowship of love. Thus, we say God is “one.”

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Jesus acts in complete harmony and purpose with the will of the Father. The good news for us is that compassionate loving *acts* of Jesus reveal the Father’s heart! Because Jesus and the Father are one, not only in their “being” or “God-ness,” but also in their *actions*, shows that the heart of the Father is not different from the heart of the Son. In the self-giving, loving acts of Jesus, we see the Father’s will being done. This means that all the good things we say and believe about Jesus are also true of the Father.

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## DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

To say that Jesus is one with the Father, both in his nature (“God-ness”) and in his actions brings us to the doctrine of the Trinity. In many churches, it is common to hear that the doctrine of the Trinity is a confusing, incomprehensible subject, one too complicated for ordinary people to understand. How can God be both “one” and “three” many ask? It seems impossible.

All of that is simply wrong, however. While it is true that we finite humans are incapable of understanding all there is to know about the infinite God, it is *not* true that the doctrine of the Trinity is beyond our understanding. The whole point of a doctrine is to put into words, as well as we can, what we do know about God based upon God’s self-revelation of himself in the New Testament.



So why is there a doctrine of the Trinity in the first place? Why does the Christian Church speak of God as “one Being in three Persons?” The reason we speak of God as “one being in three persons” is because that is how God has *revealed himself* to us. The doctrine of the Trinity is nothing more than an attempt to make sense of the fact that God has revealed himself in salvation history as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Put yourself in the place of the first Christians. Most of them were Jews. In contrast to all the cultures around them who worshipped many gods, the Jews had always believed in “one God.” Yet the early Church believed that Jesus Christ is God, as the New Testament plainly teaches. They also believed that the Holy Spirit is God, again as the Scriptures attest. In fact, they worshipped, prayed, and baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (*see* Matt 28:19, 20). I doubt all this was something the first Christians thought much about. In fact, most of them were slaves who were unable to read and write, so they were probably not too concerned about how the worship of “three Persons” fit into their doctrine of “one God.” The first Christians simply believed that God had come among them in the Person of Jesus Christ and that God continued to be present to them in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Soon enough, however, the early Church came under attack regarding its doctrine of God. Pagan philosophers began to accuse Christians of worshipping three Gods, not one. They demanded to know how Christians could claim to worship only one God, when in fact they prayed and worshipped in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Someone had to answer these questions if the Gospel was to retain its theological and philosophical integrity in the cultural environment in which it was spreading. So theologians of the early

Church began to search for a way to explain how God can be “one Being in three Persons.” It took the early Church more than three hundred years to finally articulate what we know today as the orthodox statement of the Trinity as enshrined in the ancient creeds of our faith.

Now let me tell you what the doctrine of the Trinity does *not* say. The doctrine of the Trinity does not say, as is often wrongly supposed, that “one equals three” or “three equals one.” The doctrine of the Trinity does not say that God is only one Person who wears three different hats or plays three different roles like an actor in a play. Nor does the doctrine of the Trinity say that there are three gods out there, all going their own separate ways.

The classic statement of the doctrine of the Trinity says that God eternally exists as “one Being in three Persons.” The doctrine is saying that God is both a *unity*, that is, God is one in “being” or “nature,” and that God is also a *diversity*, that is, God is three. To say that God exists in both unity and diversity is not as difficult as it may at first seem. We deal with unity in diversity every day. Look at your hand. There is one hand in five fingers. Unity in diversity. Think about a cluster of grapes. There is one cluster with many grapes. Unity and diversity. Think about all the people in your Sunday morning worship service. There is one congregation with many members. That’s unity and diversity. Think about a husband and wife. The Bible tells us that the two shall become one flesh. Again, that’s unity and diversity. So unity in diversity is something we are all familiar with. None of these analogies are perfect of course; far from it. I can pluck off a grape from the cluster and eat it. I can lose a finger in an accident. A married couple can get divorced. But the three Persons of the Godhead can never be divided. They exist eternally in *union* and fellowship without division.

Despite the imperfection of analogies, however, they help us to understand how God is both one and three, that is, that God eternally exists in both unity and diversity in a triune fellowship of reciprocal love and delight marked by complete harmony of purpose, will and intent. Bearing in mind the unity of purpose of the Triune fellowship that we call God, let us consider the oneness in being and action between the Father and Son in the light of the cross.

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#### A WINDOW INTO THE HEART OF GOD

As with all the acts of Jesus, the cross must be considered in terms of the oneness in being and act of the Father and Son. We cannot understand the meaning of the cross if we fail to understand that the Father and Son are *united* in intent, purpose and will. In reflecting upon the meaning of the cross, we must always bear in mind that the heart of the Father is not different from the heart of the Son.

The cross of Christ is the ultimate demonstration of God’s unfailing love for humanity. To know that God is love, we need only look at Jesus on the cross. For in that act, *Jesus*, who is of one being with the Father, *reveals the heart of God*. According to the great theologian, T.

F. Torrance, the cross is a window into the innermost heart of God, wherein we see the exact nature of God's love for the whole world. In giving himself for us at the cross, God proves that he loves *us* more than he loves himself.<sup>ii</sup>

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## THE FRIEND OF SINNERS

In order to understand that the cross is a window into the heart of God, we need only take a moment to picture what happened at Golgotha, the place of crucifixion. Jesus hung on a cruel, rough Roman cross, his hands and feet pierced with heavy spikes. His open wounds burned as stinging salty sweat poured into the raw gashes across his back. Only minutes before he had been brutalized at the hands of a garrison of soldiers who stripped him naked, beat him without mercy, and mocked him with a crown of thorns. As he hung on the cross, his lips parched with thirst, laughing onlookers jeered him, mocking him to free himself from the cross. So obscene was his mistreatment that even the heavens revolted and the earth shuddered in revulsion (Matt 27:45, 51). As his blood oozed from his wounds, flowing downward toward the battle-hardened soldiers casting lots for his garments, he looked upon the taunting crowd. Yet his heart was not filled with hatred or righteous anger or thirst for revenge. Neither was he moved to avenge himself and execute terrible wrath upon those who had abused him. Rather, he looked upon his cruel tormentors with incomprehensible care, compassion, and love. While he could have called down heavenly legions to avenge him, instead, with unfathomable love for humanity, he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus has encountered humanity at its worst, yet he prays for forgiveness of the very ones who have crucified and abused him. Perhaps we should not be surprised by Jesus' unfailing



**Anointing at Bethany**

compassion, for his care for sinners did not emerge only at the cross. Jesus' prayer for forgiveness springs from the compassionate heart that, even now, continually goes out to sinners (Heb 7:25). To be sure, the religious elite scorned Jesus because they knew that he was, indeed, the *friend* of sinners (Luke 7:34). Jesus constantly angered the religious leaders because he frequently sat at table fellowship with unsavoury characters like tax collectors and others who

failed to adhere to the burdensome rules and regulations heaped upon them by the religious

authorities (Matt 9:10-12). Moreover, while at table with a prominent Pharisee, Jesus allowed a woman of bad reputation to wash his feet with her hair (Luke 7:36ff). When he was alone and thirsty, he defied tradition by stopping at a well to converse with a woman of

mixed race, a Samaritan whom most Jews would have regarded as worse than a dog, and even more so because she had been married five times and was presently living with yet another man (John 4:4ff).

On one memorable occasion, the religious authorities brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus for judgment. Yet not only did he refuse to stone her as the law required, but also he refused to condemn her. Instead, he told her to leave her life of sin (John 8:11). Yet, what would have happened had that same woman been brought before Jesus the next day, caught yet again in the act of adultery? The answer is not difficult. Jesus told his followers that if anyone sinned against them, they were to forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven times (Matt 18:21-22). Dare we think that Jesus offers any less forgiveness than he commands his disciples to render? Dare we think that the Father, whose heart is as equally compassionate as that of the Son, will do any less?

Often, however, we are not certain of the Father's intentions towards us, because we have failed to allow the Son to reveal the Father. Despite the apostle John's assertion that the Son has made the Father known (John 1:18), much "Christian" preaching and teaching splits apart the unity of God by pitting the merciful, compassionate Son against the bloodthirsty, vengeful Father, whose apparent sole delight is to dangle sinners over the mouth of hell, even in the face of Jesus' pleading on our behalf. How did this come about? Where did we get this split view of God that pits a loving Jesus against a bloodthirsty Father?

About 1,000 years after the time of Christ, theologians began to speak about the cross as something that was needed to "satisfy" God. They portrayed the Father as a "great nobleman" or "tribal chief" whose honour had been offended by the human race. These theologians argued that God's honour needed to be "satisfied." A few centuries later, during the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers began to talk about the cross in terms of the payment of a penalty. According to their thinking, humanity has sinned and someone has to pay. The Father is angry; he is red with rage, spitting nails in fury; he cannot stand the sight of sinful humanity; he's out for blood. According to this theory, Jesus the meek and mild Lamb of God enters the picture and volunteers to take our punishment upon himself. Therefore, the angry Father punishes Jesus instead of us! This is the view that is commonly held by most conservative and fundamentalist Christians. This is the view that I held for many years. But no longer.

This wrong view of the Father as vengeful Judge is contrary to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It divides the Holy Trinity by pitting the compassionate Son against the vengeful Father. Yet Scripture tells us that Jesus came to do the works of the Father (John 5:19, 20). Jesus does nothing of his own; he does only what the Father wills. Therefore, there is no division between the will of the Father and the Son. Jesus came to show us that his own compassionate heart is the perfect reflection of the compassionate heart of the loving Father (*cf.* Luke 15:11ff). The hearts of the Father and Son are united in loving care for all

humanity (*cf.* John 3:16; 17). We must not create a split in the heart of God by talking about a compassionate Jesus while, at the same time, talking about an angry vengeful Father. The Church's early assertion that Jesus and the Father are *one in being* will not allow us to do that. The Father and Son (and Spirit) are united in their loving purpose for humanity. To borrow a phrase from T.F. Torrance, there is no unknown God hidden behind the back of Jesus, for Jesus *is* the revelation of God. If you want to know the Father's heart, look at the heart of his Son, for the two hearts beat as one. This means that Jesus Christ, the God-man who walked this earth on two sandaled feet 2,000 years ago, allows us to see into the very Being or nature of the eternal God. *If we want to know what God is like, we must look at Jesus.*

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#### ABBA

When we finally understand that the heart of the Father is not different from the heart of the Son, perhaps we can begin to think of the Father as Jesus did. Jesus called the Father "Abba," a term of endearment that means something like "daddy" or "papa." One of my favourite illustrations of the "papa" nature of God comes from the White House, when young John F. Kennedy was president of the United States. The Kennedy presidency marked the first time in decades that small children had lived in the White House. When President Kennedy, the most powerful man in the world, was meeting with heads of state in the Oval Office, he had a standing rule that his children were allowed to enter at any time. Often, during an important political discussion, President Kennedy's children would dash into the Oval Office and jump into their father's lap, climbing all over him and his great presidential chair. Nothing in world politics was so important that the Kennedy children were prevented from visiting their father. That is a great image of our heavenly Father. "Abba's" door is always open to us, and he is never too busy to welcome his children who long to dash into the heavenly Oval Office in order to be embraced by their loving Father.

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#### JESUS OUR JUDGE

It should fill us with great joy and assurance to know that this same compassionate Saviour, the one whose mercy never fails, even in the face of utter brutality, will be our Judge on the last day. Our loving Father has entrusted his Son with our eternal destinies by turning all *judgment* and authority over to Jesus himself. According to both scriptural and creedal teaching, none other than Jesus Christ, the friend of sinners, who freely offered himself for the sins of the world, will return to judge the living and the dead. As incredible as it may seem, the very one who hung on the cross and prayed, "Father forgive them," is the one who will judge us at the end of our lives, for Jesus tells us that all judgment has been given to him (John 5:22; 3:35; Matt 28:18). In the words of T. F. Torrance, "The voice of divine forgiveness and the voice of divine judgment are one and the same."<sup>iii</sup>



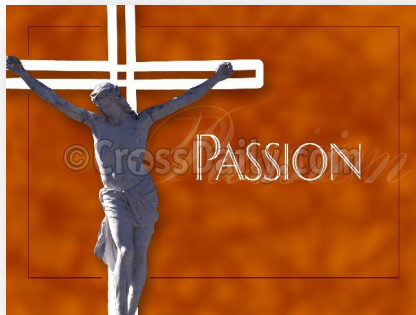
To understand that our Judge is the one who poured out his blood for the sins of all humanity should profoundly move us at the deepest levels of our souls, freeing us from the fear, dread, and anxiety that too often have been heaped wrongfully upon Christians in the name of Christ. We may rest in the assurance that “God does not and will not act toward any one in life or death in any other way than he has done, does do, and will do in Jesus.”<sup>iv</sup> None other than our loving, compassionate Saviour is our Judge. There is no God hidden behind the back of Jesus before whom we, in our guilty consciences, must shake with dread and terror. When Jesus tells us that he who has seen him has seen the Father, he leaves no room for fear and dread, for the hearts of the Father and Son are one. Our lives, our deaths, our final destinies are in the hands of God, and the hands of God and the hands of Jesus are the same.<sup>v</sup>

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#### THE JUDGE JUDGED IN OUR PLACE

Moreover, at the cross God not only judges our sins; he takes upon himself the verdict and judgment that should have been ours. As such, to borrow another phrase from the great

Karl Barth, he is “the Judge judged in our place.”<sup>vi</sup>



As shocking as it may seem, we human beings no longer occupy the place of sinners in the sight of God. Jesus himself has stood in our place and made our just punishment his own. The Bible says that “God made him who knew no sin to become sin *for us* that we might become the righteousness of God” (2Cor 5:21). “The verdict that ought to have been ours was pronounced

and

executed on

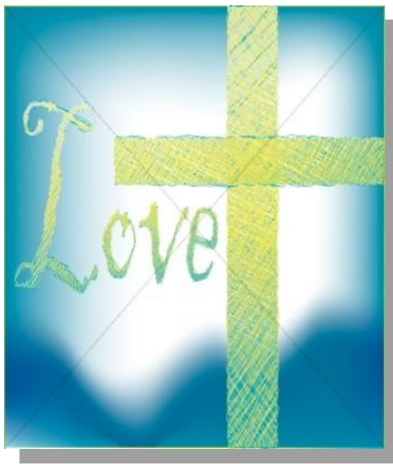
him, so that an end was made with us as sinners so that as such we have no more future. We are no longer in the place we occupied when we were sinners. This place is now occupied by him.”<sup>vii</sup> In short, Jesus Christ has taken away the sin of the world, long before you or I made a decision to believe and recited the sinner’s prayer. Thus when we stand before the judgment seat of God, we no longer stand before him as condemned sinners, for our sin is no longer our own; it is his, for Jesus has made it his own.<sup>viii</sup> He has borne our judgment upon the cross and has taken our sin upon himself (2Cor 5:21).

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At the cross, Jesus has *overcome* human sin and put Adam to rest, so that the human race *no longer stands condemned under Adam*, but stands as *pardoned, redeemed and reconciled under Jesus*.

“God made him who knew no sin to become sin *for us* that we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

I do not believe that the primary purpose of the cross is the punishment of sin or even the forgiveness of sin. What Jesus has done on the cross is far more basic and fundamental than merely taking upon himself the punishment that might have been ours. What Jesus has done at the cross is to *overcome* human sin and lay Adam to rest, so that the human race *no longer stands condemned under Adam*, but stands as *pardoned, redeemed and reconciled under Jesus*. The Bible tells us that as in Adam all die, in Jesus all are made alive (1Cor 15:22). If you look at Romans 5:12ff, you will see an ongoing contrast between Adam and Jesus. Scripture portrays Adam as somehow representing all humanity. There are different theories as to how we are all implicated in Adam's act, yet the theories assert that we are all connected to Adam in a very real way. The disobedience, condemnation and death that came as a result of Adam's sin have fallen upon us all. Because we are all somehow implicated in the sin of Adam, we are all subject to death as a result of that one original sin. At the same time, just as all are implicated in the disobedience of Adam, *all* are implicated in the obedience, justification and life of Jesus. To be sure, Jesus is greater than Adam. All that was lost in Adam has been restored in Jesus—and more!



How is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross related to Adam? In his unbounding love for humanity, the “Word” of God takes on human flesh at Bethlehem (John 1:14). Jesus takes on real flesh; he becomes a human being just like us. In theological language, he assumes fallen Adamic flesh. Then on behalf of all humanity, Jesus lives the life of perfect faith and obedience that you and I have failed to live. He does *for us* all the things we have failed to do and he refuses to do the sinful things we have done. In his life of total obedience to the Father, Jesus takes our place and lives his life for us from “inside” the “skin of Adam.” Jesus converts our rebellious hearts and minds and bends our twisted sinful will back to the Father. When Jesus dies on the cross, he puts the flesh of Adam to death; Adam is finally laid to rest and buried. Then Jesus rises from the dead as the *new Adam*. Now Jesus, not the old Adam, is the head of the human race. In the same way that all humanity was involved in the sin and disobedience of the first Adam, now all humanity is involved in the obedient life of the second Adam. Just as all die in the first Adam, *all* are made alive in Jesus (Rom 5:12-20). In Christ, God has reconciled the *world* to himself (2 Cor 5:19).

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#### FREE TO FORGIVE

What would happen if we could truly and fully realize that *all* humanity is included in the loving embrace of the Father, Son and Spirit? To bring it closer to home, what would happen if each one of us could truly believe that we no longer stand as sinners in the sight of God?

Sadly, we have all made Adam greater than Jesus. We have been unwilling to take seriously the biblical truth that Jesus, the Lamb of God, has taken away the sin of the *world* (John 1:29). Therefore, for centuries, the free salvation gained for us by the incarnate Son who died and the loving Father who gave him up for us in the Spirit has been buried under human-imposed *conditions* for salvation, so that we are heavily burdened with rules, regulations, and other requirements for entrance through the gates of heaven. Furthermore, we have been willingly complicit, for, like the labourers in the field (Matt 20:1-16), we are offended by the sheer *free-ness* of grace. Apparently many think God's gift of salvation should be offered only to those who keep the rules, however they may be variously defined. Thus, we have burdened ourselves and our fellows with man-made laws, rules, and regulations designed to set us apart and mark us as the chosen.

It is precisely because we do not realize we no longer occupy the place of sinners in the sight of God that we expend so much energy trying to improve our standing before our heavenly Father. Our failure to realize we are forgiven compels us to perform to gain God's approval and is at the root of the "works" mentality of legalism that drives many individuals, churches and denominations. Failing to realize we know longer stand before God as sinners, we are unable to enjoy the peace that transcends all understanding (Phil 4:7), choosing instead to pursue the tiresome path of performance in hopes of pleasing God.

Yet, as soon as we accept God's forgiveness and realize we no longer stand before God as sinners, we are free to accept ourselves as the sinners we are. When we understand that God has, in fact, confronted, named, and judged our sin on our behalf at the cross, we are free to stop denying and repressing our sin, to drop our masks (especially our smiley church faces), and to walk in the immeasurable freedom of the forgiveness provided us nearly two thousand years ago. When we realize that God accepts us as we are, we are free to accept ourselves as we are.

In addition, when we realize that we no longer stand as sinners in God's sight, we are free to step down from the judgment seat that rightfully belongs only to Jesus and to accept others as the sinners they are. Because we have not seen that we no longer occupy the place of sinners, we too readily judge those who values and lifestyles fail to meet our approval. Nonetheless, while it may be shocking to realize that we Christians no longer occupy the place of sinners, it is even more shocking, perhaps intolerable for many, to realize that *all* the "worldly" people around us no longer stand before God as sinners. The Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the *world*—even the sins we do not approve. Our job, as Christians, is to announce the Good News that "in Christ, God has reconciled all things to himself." That is the passionate



assertion that empowered the early Church and enabled them to spread the Good News about Jesus all over the known world.

That brings us to the important matter of our “witness” for Christ. How does it affect our witness to know that even “worldly” people no longer occupy the place of sinners in the



sight of God? How does it affect our witness to know that we will never meet another human being who is not *already* reconciled to God in Christ? Surely it will allow us to throw away all our “repent or burn” tracts because we no longer feel compelled to

proclaim a “bad news” gospel that God is outraged at the world and is looking for every chance to throw as many as possible into hell unless we repent and behave.

Yet to know that in Christ God has reconciled all things to himself does not free us from the responsibility as the Church to *proclaim the Good News* of universal reconciliation in Christ, for though all are reconciled in Christ, not all live reconciled lives. Many continue to live in darkness and confusion, not knowing they are loved by the Father; thus, they suffer all the heartache and pain that living an un-reconciled life brings. Our job as the Church is to proclaim to everyone that they are free in Christ, so act like it!

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#### OUR RESPONSE

Let’s end now on a more personal note. God’s gracious willingness to humble himself, to bear scorn and humiliation *for us* at the cross, demands a response on our part. We are summoned to a life of faith in Jesus Christ. Yet our faith is not a pre-condition for our reconciliation with the Father; our faith is the conscious, joyful *acceptance* of our reconciliation. We respond to God’s immeasurable graciousness on our behalf, when in humble gratitude we place our faith in our Saviour, bow to his Lordship, and live according to his commandment of love. Our repentance, faith and obedience, however, are never conditions for our forgiveness; our repentance, faith and obedience are the *consequence* of our forgiveness. In short, we do not obey to be saved; we obey because we are saved! What more sane response could there be to the salvation that is *already* ours than a humble willingness to obey our Lord, not out of fear of punishment nor dread of awful judgment, but from a heart filled with gratitude for the immeasurable self-giving of God for all humanity.

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Repentance, faith and obedience are not conditions for salvation; they are the *consequences* of salvation.

We do not repent and believe in order to be saved; we repent and believe *because we are saved!*

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At the cross we see God's righteous "No" to sin and God's gracious "Yes" to us, for real judgment is rendered at the cross, and real *pardon* is rendered to us. In his unfailing love for humanity, God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. In the determined love wherein he wills to share his Triune life with us, the Father sent his Son to bring us home in the Spirit. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom 8:31, 32).

**Note to reader:** If you are a pastor or teacher who uses this material to teach others, we would be encouraged to know it. Please tell us about your preaching/teaching experience by sending an email to [office@AsiAfricaMinistries.org](mailto:office@AsiAfricaMinistries.org).

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## END NOTES

<sup>i</sup> In the New Testament, the word "God" usually refers to the Father, although sometimes the word is used for Jesus or for the Holy Spirit.

<sup>ii</sup> T. F. Torrance, *A Passion for Christ: The Vision That Ignites Ministry* (Edinburgh: Handel Press, 1999), p. 14.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>vi</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, translation edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957-75), 4/1, pp. 211ff.

<sup>vii</sup> Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 208.

<sup>viii</sup> Barth, p. 238