

## **NCF (CSF) Weekly Gathering - October 5**



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### Theme for Semester - **What is God like?**

How we answer this foundational question will impact every single area of our lives. *What is the purpose of life? How do I make things right when I make mistakes? What should I do with my money? What career should I pursue?* We all have some assumptions about what life is about, whether we believe in God or not. These assumptions, if we think of them, are connected to our understanding of what is Ultimate Reality. “God” is simply the word we use for this ultimate reality. It begs the question - who or what is God? How do Jesus and the Holy Spirit relate to God? Is God far off or near? What does God desire of me? This semester we are going to investigate these questions.

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*Today: God Is Jesus*

**Ice-Breaker Question:** How would you explain the Trinity to someone? How do you understand it? Perhaps most importantly, do you see it as important for your daily faith or just a theological add-on to believe?

### **Read Philippians 2:5-11**

This passage is one of the earliest we have that speaks of God becoming human in Jesus. Paul's letters were written prior to the Gospels and many scholars think that here Paul is quoting a hymn sung in the early church. So if Paul wrote Philippians in the 50s he may be quoting a hymn from the 40s, only a decade after the resurrection.

Go through it verse by verse:

6 - What does it mean for Jesus to be in the very form of God?

What does it tell us about Jesus to say that Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be exploited?

7 - What do you think it means that Jesus “emptied himself” of equality with God?

What is Jesus' relationship to humanity based on this - is he part human or not human at all or human like we are?

8 - Why do you think it is significant that God did not just become human but went to the cross and died?

9 - When did God exalt Jesus in this way? What event from Jesus' life do you think this is talking about?

10 - (Read Isaiah 45:22-23) What does this say about who God is in Jesus?

11 - What is the promised future here?

Based on this passage, how is Jesus related to God?

- \*Jesus is just a human - not God?
- \*Jesus is just God pretending to be human?
- \*Jesus is both God and human at the same time?

Go back and reread 2:4-5. Based on this, how are we supposed to live?

In other words, is God becoming human in Jesus just something amazing Christians believe about God that makes us different or does it impact our daily lives? If so, how?

### **A Bit of History**

Skeptics sometimes say that no one believed Jesus was God until the Council of Nicea, 300 years after Jesus' life. Besides the Bible which affirms Jesus as God, we have piles of testimony from early church writers after the Bible, If you're interested, here are a few:

Ignatius of Antioch (died 108 AD)

- Epistle to the Magnesians – "...there is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word..." (ch. 8)
- Epistle to Polycarp – "I pray for your happiness for ever in our God, Jesus Christ"

Aristides (wrote 123-129 AD) - "The Christians, then, trace the beginning of their religion from Jesus the Messiah; and he is named the Son of God Most High. And it is said that God came down from heaven, and from a Hebrew virgin assumed and clothed himself with flesh; and the Son of God lived in a daughter of man."

Polycarp (wrote 110-130 AD) – Epistle to the Philippians: "For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist" (ch. 7).

Justin Martyr (died 165 AD)

- First Apology – "The Father of the universe has a Son; who also, being the first-begotten Word of God, is even God" (ch. 63)

Athenagorus (wrote 176-180 AD)

- A Plea For the Christians – "Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order, called atheists?" (ch. 10)

Irenaeus of Lyons – Against Heresies (Written about 180 AD)

- "Christ Himself, therefore, together with the Father, is the God of the living, who spoke to Moses, and who was also manifested to the fathers." (quoted from Hall, 34)

### **Key Points:**

1. The New Testament includes testimony that Jesus is divine and God but also human and subordinate to the Father. Any understanding of Jesus' identity must include both.
2. Early Christian writers consistently affirmed Jesus' humanity and divinity.
3. It was not just studying scripture that led to this belief, it was daily worship and prayer which centered on Jesus in the Christian community.
4. While the Bible does not explicitly teach the Trinity, the seeds for that later theological conclusion are found there and we can say Trinitarian understanding of God is an accurate understanding of scripture