



THE PASTOR'S PEN

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Doctrines of the Christian Church Jesus of Nazareth

In this month's doctrinal study, it is time to take a very quick look at Jesus of Nazareth. The entire truth and validity of the Christian faith rests on the person and the nature of Jesus. He claimed to be the Son of God and that He came to provide salvation for all humanity through His death, burial and resurrection. If this is true, then we have no other option for salvation except through His teachings and our acceptance of them. If His claim is false, then the Christian faith is worthless. Paul echoes this sentiment in 1 Corinthians 15:14-17 when he states that:

¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But if he did not raise him, then in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

Therefore, the questions of who is Jesus, what is Jesus and why does Jesus of Nazareth exist, are at the crux of our faith and the basis of the existence of the Church.

So how do you prove that Jesus of Nazareth is real and that He is what He claimed to be? How do you prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and the salvation of the world? The problem that so many both inside and outside of the Church have with these questions is that they really do not know what to base their faith on in this matter. The truth is that we must base our faith in the existence of Jesus on the same methods that we use for establishing and proving any other historical character or event. What works for proving George Washington, Richard the Lionhearted, Alexander the Great, or Socrates, also applies to establishing and proving Jesus of Nazareth is real. Our everyday belief in any historical character or event is based upon a certain degree of faith because we were not a direct, personal witness of them. In faith we accept the historical proof of people and events everyday and think nothing of it. This same type and level of faith also applies to our acceptance of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and makes Him just as real.

In establishing any historical character or event as real, there are a set of guidelines that must be followed. It is based on collecting eye witness accounts, collecting historical documentation, collecting artifacts and then evaluating the archeological evidence (if any exist). In short, this is how we know that George Washington lived and was the first president of the USA, since none of us were alive at the time to know about it firsthand. We accept, by faith, that the historians and archeologists have been fair and honest with their analysis that George Washington was a real person and did what history records him as living and doing in the eighteenth century.

In the same way, we look at Jesus through eyewitness accounts (the Gospels), the historical documentation of Josephus, The Talmud, The Babylonian Talmud and The Jewish Talmud all of

which state that Jesus existed and did mighty works (miracles), talk of his disciples, and confirm some of the biblical claims we hold to be true. Even hostile, non-Jewish writers record their view of Jesus from the early works of Thallus (about AD 52) up to the present day. Thallus' work stands along side of the other historical records from the first century that contains information about Jesus of Nazareth. This body of witnesses includes works by Tacitus, Mara bar-Serapion, Phlegon, Pliny the Younger and Suetonius. In the second century, other secular writers researched Jesus and added their findings about Him to the historical record. Their numbers include the likes of Lucian of Samosata and Celsus. The fact is, that we have more varied historical references to the life and ministry of Jesus today than we do about the majority of other historical figures from this time period that no one questions at all.

Last month we found that the internal and external evidence from the Scriptures proved them to be reliable archeologically and historically. Their evidence adds to the list of historical writers and critics of Jesus proving that His existence and His ministry is as well established as is the life and actions of Alexander the Great, Cleopatra or Socrates. So historically, with the evidence and the substance needed to support our faith established, we can say that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical person, that He taught and performed miracles, that He had many committed disciples and that He was crucified by the Romans outside of Jerusalem. When we add the validity of the biblical statements about His teachings and their accounts about His Divinity, then we can also establish that Jesus is the Son of God and that through His death, burial and resurrection we too can share in His resurrection and eternal life. It is through this process of taking the historical facts along with the eyewitness accounts of the Scriptures that we are able to have this reliable basis for our faith and our beliefs.

Because of all of the historical and the biblical information that we have, the Christian Church (DoC) websites states that the official position of the denomination about Jesus of Nazareth claims is this:

“Deity of Jesus: As members of the Christian church, Disciples confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.”

Of course, there is more to Jesus than just His Divinity and His role in our salvation. Officially though, this is as far as the published record goes in trying to give a simple statement of doctrine that everyone can use as a basis for their faith. When it comes to the biblical accounts of miracles the General Church's stance is that each individual is free to decide their own opinions concerning miracles. When it comes to the concept of the Trinity, then the General Church affirms the persons of the trinity: the creator God, the redeemer Christ, and the sanctifying Holy Spirit (They also baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) without going into any detail about the nature and workings of the Godhead. Of course, these are topics for other discussions and study times.

The scriptures give us a lot of information about who Jesus is and what He does. For your own study and reflection, here are some verses to read and study as you come to your own conclusions about who Jesus is and why He came into our world. I hope you read over them and take them to heart.

Continuing the study,

James