

XVIII - THE FATHER AND THE SON

Because I taught predominantly Buddhists, I rarely had to contend with much of Christianity's confusing view of the Trinity as set forth in the Nicene Creed. I have never been able to understand how God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, could be seen as being one and the same person, particularly in view of dramatic instances where the Father and the Son interact, specifically at the beginning and the end of Jesus Christ's ministry on the earth. God the Father joyfully proclaimed at the baptism of Jesus Christ, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:7). Certainly, this does not sound like one person talking to himself or about himself. Further, Jesus Christ's plea in Gethsemane was even more clear in its evidence that while one in purpose, the Father and the Son were separate beings: "If thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Jesus Christ began His ministry performing simple miracles (comparatively speaking), such as turning water to wine. Then, through prayer to His Father, and fasting, He grew and developed in spiritual power and strength, and the nature and breadth of His miracles correspondingly became more fantastic and unexplainable, until ultimately He actually raised the decomposing body of Lazarus from the dead. His training was complete. The Father was satisfied that Jesus, His Son, was ready for the crucifixion. Jesus, too, knew of His divine destiny and waxed strong in His capacities so as to be able to perform His ultimate task. Even so, at Gethsemane, in prayer to His Father, Jesus Christ asked if there was some other way to perform the task that He had prepared a lifetime for.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ's sinless life for the redemption of all mankind was required, and Jesus Christ was raised up on the cross. This gruesome experience is one that, for some reason, Jesus Christ had to live through on His own without the support of His Father. In order to complete the task, the Father withdrew His spirit from His Son, and allowed Jesus Christ to experience the crucifixion on His own. This is clearly evidenced by Jesus Christ's exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). What could it have been like for the Father to step away from His Only Begotten Son in the flesh so that Jesus Christ could endure the pain of all the sins of the world by Himself?

The relationship between God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, is analogous to the relationship that I have with my own daughter Claire and a particular lesson that she learned one summer when she was six years old. We began the summer with a joint goal that she would be able to swim on her own by the end of the summer. We began with the simple tasks first, learning how to kick from the side of the pool and then with the use of a kick board. Claire then learned to use her arms to stroke and then learned to turn her head to the side to breathe during her stroke. All the time I was at her side giving her instruction and comfort and the

emotional support she needed to proceed with her task. I imagine that much the same relationship existed between Jesus Christ and His Father.

Near the end of the summer we were staying in Laguna Beach, California, and Claire and I took a walk down the beach to the Blue Lagoon condominium complex. There, we entered one of the pool areas. Initially, we only wanted to see how warm the water was. But as we both descended into the pool we realized that the time had come for Claire to swim on her own. We had spent the entire summer preparing for this moment, and we both knew that she was ready. I stood at her side and held her on top of the water. I will always remember the look that she gave me as I was about to let go so that she could swim on her own. She was ready. But for a brief moment, she did not want me to step away; she did not want to have to act alone, for up to that time she had always had my assistance. Maybe that is what the Savior was thinking when He asked why His Father had forsaken Him. As we looked at each other, I could see that she realized she was ready and this was the moment. After that brief hesitation, she put her head down in the water and swam all the way across the pool, all by herself.

There are some moments in one's life that seem quite simple but that teach you great lessons that never leave you. This was one of those moments. I got a slight view of what God the Father must have felt when He stepped away from His Son, Jesus Christ, with the thought in mind that His Son was well prepared. It was time for Jesus to perform His task and fulfill His own destiny. I also could see with much more clarity the apprehension that the Lord Jesus Christ must have momentarily felt as His Father withdrew His spirit from Him so that He could perform, on His own, the salvation of man. Truly, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are one and the same only in purpose. One is not merely a manifestation of the other, but instead God the Son truly is the offspring of His Father.