

THE EVANGELISTS

M A G A Z I N E

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Christmas Mourning

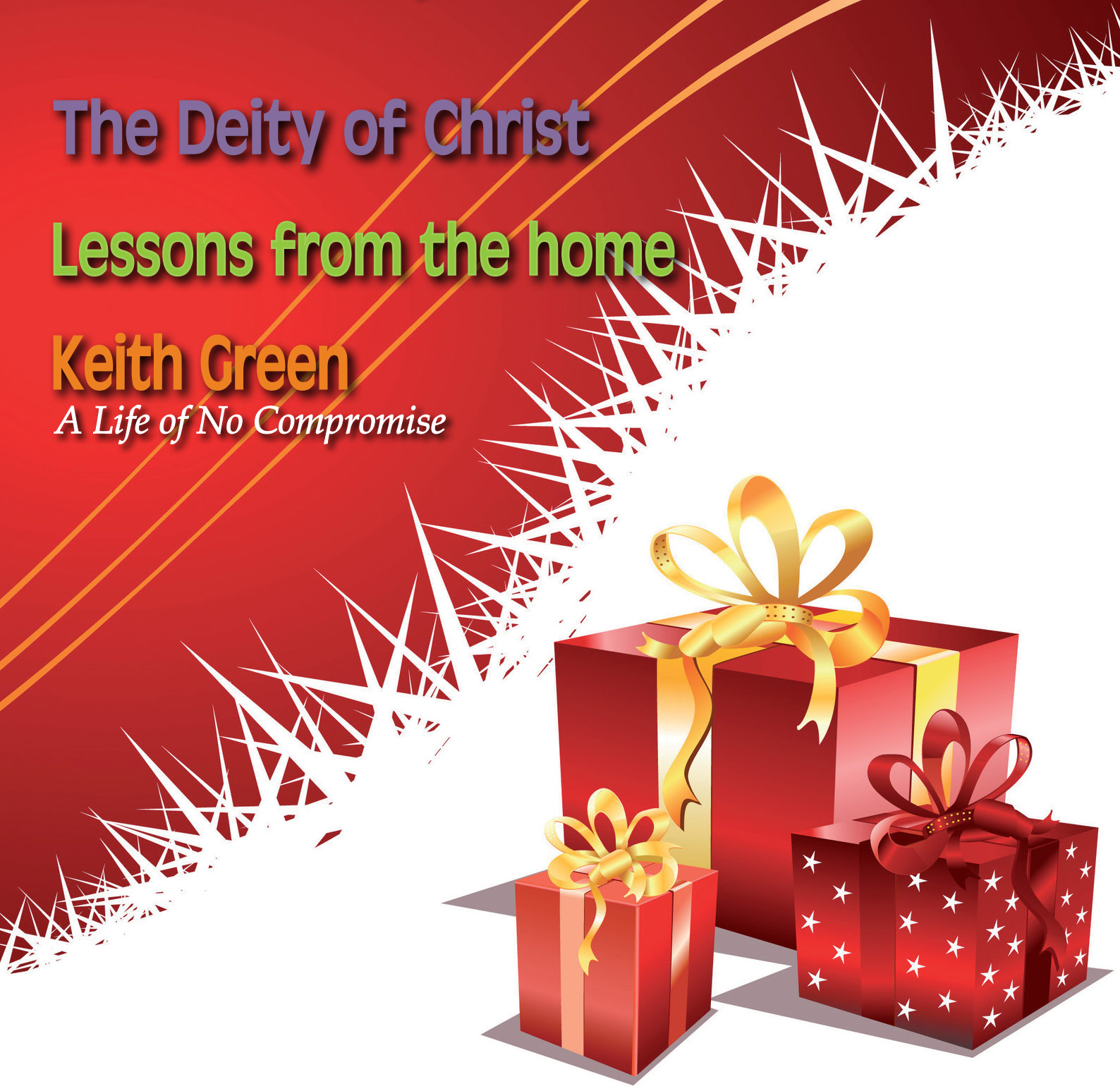
A Classic Sermon from Keith Green

The Deity of Christ

Lessons from the home

Keith Green

A Life of No Compromise



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Soldiers of the Cross, founded by Tim and Leah Knowing, is dedicated to evangelising the lost and seeing the church become the mighty, mature and fully-functioning army of God it is meant to be, in a war that has already been won through Christ's atoning death and resurrection.

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At the time of the year when many are overcome with Christmas 'fever', we do well to remember the mandate given by Christ himself to "...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15

The classic Christmas carol written by Charles Wesley in the 18th century, and still as popular to this day whenever people gather to sing Christmas carols can be a good place to start when speaking to people about the good news of the Gospel.

*Hark the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled"*

The last line of this verse alone tells us the reason why the 'Christ child' was sent into the world.

This was the message confirmed to Joseph by an Angel of the Lord in a dream.

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Matthew 1:21-23

As with the many hymns that were written by Charles Wesley and others during that era, the words contained within this carol give us a short theology lesson as we can see when we examine each line.

"Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!"

This speaks of Christ's divinity and deity as we have just read in Matthew 1:23 "...and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

"Hail the Son of Righteousness!"

"And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Philippians 3:9

"Light and life to all He brings"

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." John 8:12

"Ris'n with healing in His wings"

"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." Malachi 4:2

"Mild He lays His glory by"

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Philippians 2:6-8

"Born that man no more may die"

"But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel!" 2 Timothy 1:10

"Born to raise the sons of earth"

"And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" John 6:39

"Born to give them second birth"

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." John 3:7

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" John 1:12

**"Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"**

As I wrote earlier, as believers we have a mandate to declare the good news to the world around us. So amongst all the pageantry and other things that can blur people from the Greatest Gift given to mankind, I pray that the Lord would grant us much grace to proclaim these simple truths.

Let us be bold in joining in with the chorus that was resounded by the angels, *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."* Luke 2:11

This issue, we have included a number of articles which we hope will inspire all who read them to focus, perhaps for the first time, on Who it is we should celebrate every day of the year.

Report from SOTC Kenya

"We are quite doing well and the work which God started in us is progressively doing well, we are arranging to be involved in evangelism over the season of December as this is the time that many are carried by the wind of celebration to the point of forgetting the love of God upon humanity.

"To add on top of this, I'd like to be so thankful to God and for you together with the SOTC board for having a passion and a burden for Africa to see the unreached being reached with the message of the cross."

Totally inspired by article



"I was blessed with your wonderful Magazines called TEM, really I was totally inspired with an Article called Imitating Christ [Issue 13]. What a wonderful article God has given you dear brother.

"I have shared this [with] many of my friends, this is wonderful and thank you very much for the article ... God has put strong burden for lost souls in Australia, God will change many lives through your wonderful work there.

"... our Lord will touch the people in Africa, India and many other Nations, Pray for this, God will fulfil HIS willing through you and in your life, Amen. I am requesting you that please kindly send TEM regularly."

KK, India

If you have been encouraged by this magazine, or have a testimony to share of how God is using you in His harvest field, please let us know, that others may also be encouraged. Write or email us at the contact details on pg 2.



New TEM Digital Version a success

Last issue we launched the Digital version of The Evangelists Magazine. We thank the Lord for directing our path this way. We have had a good response from our regular readers, as well as number of new subscribers wanting the digital version. And our postage costs have been dramatically reduced, which means we have been able to be a blessing in other areas.

Some of reader's responses:

"So happy the digital version is an option for you! Thanks for your service to The King!" AL, USA

"Thank you! It [The Evangelists Magazine] is indeed encouraging. I do not need to receive the print version, in fact, would prefer the digital version as it is easier to share." LM, USA



Lessons from the home



The Bride of Christ

Over the past nine years I have learnt many things about my walk with Christ through becoming a wife and mother. During the next few issues, I would like share some of these insights and how they have helped me to grow as a child of God.

The first 'event' that took place nine years ago, was becoming a bride to my wonderful groom, Tim. This event, and the ensuing years, has taught me about my relationship with Christ as His bride. Before I was married, I knew, as a Christian, that I was part of the bride of Christ. However, until I was engaged and preparing to be married, I had never really understood what it meant to be a bride. Nor did I fully comprehend until

then, that being a 'bride' is not just about the Wedding Day. Our courtship was somewhat different to the 'norm', as it took place in what could be described as a 'closed environment'. We met in The Tent of Promise, an Australian tent evangelism ministry where we were both ministering, along with a team of between 6 and 20 others (team numbers fluctuated as some people only joined for short mission trips). These team members were like family to us and the leaders, Ps Barry and Sandra Cunnington, like spiritual parents. We all lived 'on-site' (wherever that may be, as we did evangelistic crusades in a different town each week), so we ate, worked and lived together 24/7. Please note - our sleeping

arrangements were such that the ladies slept in our 'pantech' (a 48' furniture van converted to accommodate 8 people and all the Tent 'stuff'), whilst the single men (of which Tim was one) slept in single tents inside the big marquee as security. Every care was taken by both the leaders and the team members to be of the utmost integrity and purity.

Because of the nature of this ministry, our friendship and later courtship, engagement and marriage was on constant display, not just with the 'Tent team', but with the local churches wherever we went.

From the moment we are born again of God's Spirit, we are betrothed to Christ and become His bride, and our whole life is on

display for all the world to see. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" The world is watching us. This does not mean, however, that we then start performing and try to be what a good Christian should be and do. Rather, the fruit of our life will only confirm (or in some cases, deny) our true position in Christ.

Purity

When Tim and I first shared our feelings for one another, we spoke to our leaders, Ps Barry and Sandra. They in turn, after much prayer, gave us some 'ground rules' for our relationship; the main one being that there was to be no physical contact between us. So no holding hands, kissing or

affectionate touching. No sex was just a given. The purpose being that we develop our friendship without clouding it with lust.

Some may read this and ask what right did they have to make such a rule. To those I would answer: They were accountable firstly to God and secondly to the local church, to maintain openness, integrity and purity in the ministry God had given them. Our choice was simple: Submit and obey or leave. We chose to obey the rule, not out of law, but because God had already prepared our hearts to remain pure.

I have to say, in hindsight, remaining pure and abstaining not just from sex, but from all intimate physical contact, was the better road and one I would recommend

to any single young (or older) man or woman. Abstinence is easier than self-control.... But that is another lesson for another day.

As far as being Christ's bride is concerned... We are to remain pure and faithful to Christ, not because of the law, but because of love. As the Apostle Paul wrote "*I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.*" 2 Corinthians 11:2

Preparation

Probably the biggest similarity was in preparation as a bride. I'm sure any married folk reading this can relate to the virtual mountain of 'stuff' that has to be done in preparation for a wedding and beginning a life together. For myself, a number of 'big

“We are to remain pure and faithful to Christ, not because of the law, but because of love.”

things' such as setting a date, finding my wedding dress and a bridesmaid's dress pattern, organising the groom's and groomsmen's tuxedos and booking a reception hall were all completed in the first week or so after our engagement. This was a miracle in itself. Total grace.

So, too, as new Christians, we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). As such, the Lord does an initial cleans-

ing work in our hearts as we come to Him in repentance and faith. For most of us, it's the 'big things' that change first. The sin we used to love, we now hate and the righteousness we used to hate, we now love. Again, total grace.

Sanctification

However, as we all know it is the little things that seem to take all the time. As a newly engaged woman, all my other wedding preparations were done 'on the road'. Every time you thought things were organised, something else needed to be done. Similarly, as Christians, the rest of our walk with Christ is a process of sanctification. Just when you think you've got it all together, the Lord will show you something in your character or attitude that needs to be adjusted - all part of preparing us as the bride of Christ (James 1:2-4).

The Helper

However, in all our preparations, whether earthly or heavenly, God does not leave us alone. My Wedding Day would not have been organised without the help of my Mum. She was the one at home, telling me what needed

to be organised and helping me do it.

As Christians, God has given us His Holy Spirit, to convict us of sin, but also to be our helper, teacher, counsellor and guide. We can not and will not be prepared as a pure and faithful bride without Him (John 14:26; 16:7-13).

Becoming One

Finally, becoming a bride taught me the truth about being one, with another and with Christ. Even before becoming one in flesh in marriage, throughout our engagement there was the sense of becoming one in heart, mind and spirit. As Jesus prayed in John 17:22-23 "... that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity."

Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom, has gone to prepare a place for us (John 14:2). One day He will return for us and we will join Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). Let us, His bride, be ready to meet Him.

"For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready." Revelation 19:7

Christmas Expectations

By Leah Knowling

Of all the times in the year, Christmas would be my favourite time for evangelism. Now, don't misunderstand me. I love sharing the Gospel with anyone and everyone at any time of the year - as should we all. However, during the lead up to Christmas, it is almost as though 'Christmas cheer' overtakes even the most hardened and of unbelievers a simple 'Merry

Christmas' can lead into a wonderful time of witnessing for Christ.

For the last two years, our family has attended the annual Christmas Parade in Rockhampton, with the express purpose of handing out Christmas postcard tracts with a very clear Gospel message on the back. This year we put 100 Christmas tracts into the hands of unbelievers. For the first time, our two older children were involved in giving them out. We had explained to them that most of the people that we would meet wouldn't know Jesus and that these cards explained the message about the Christ we were celebrating.

Prior to the parade starting, we walked up the main route and handed out tracts as we went. Our children, especially our 7 year old, both excitedly and enthusiastically gave these tracts out to everyone they met, with a cheery 'Merry Christmas' and received a similarly cheery 'Merry Christmas to you too' from all but a few.

Unfortunately, as far as we could see, that was probably about the only true Christmas message that was given in any form at the parade. Not one float had anything about Christ on it, not even a nativity. All it seemed to be about was businesses and various sporting and other groups promoting themselves and handing out lollies (candy to overseas readers) to the kids. Santa was on about three floats of course, but the message of Christ's birth was conspicuously missing. And it was missed.

I spoke to unbelievers after the parade who were disappointed there was nothing about 'Christmas' in

it. It was a shame on the local churches, although to be fair, because of rain, the parade had been postponed, and not all floats (one of which I know was a local church) could participate that week.

However, the point I want to make is that people expected it. Unbelievers expected to see the Christian message of Christ's birth being proclaimed. No matter where you live, no matter whether the church is active or not in your community, regardless even of all the commercialism that is relentlessly forced upon consumers, at Christmas-time, the world expects to hear about Christ's birth. And if we don't tell them, who will?

This world is lost and without hope and above any other time of year, people - whether they believe or not - view Christmas as a time of hope. Christians already have the hope the world longs for. We only need to share it.

“Christians already have the hope the world longs for. We only need to share it.”

And when you do share this hope and talk about the true meaning of Christmas, which actually means 'Celebration of Christ', don't just stop at explaining Christ's birth, but go onto share about why God Himself would humble Himself and become a man - Emmanuel, which means 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23). Explain about our sin, by using the law (Romans 3:19-20), about the punishment for sin (Romans 6:23) and how this Christ, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, suffered and died a terrible death to take that punishment that we deserve upon Himself (Romans 5:8-11; Ephesians 2:1-9), so that we can receive eternal life through the resurrected Christ (John 3:16; 11:25-26). That is the Good News.

So, this Christmas 'season', (and then all year round), I encourage you to be witnesses for Christ and to testify of this hope we have. The world expects it.



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The Deity of Christ

By Ray Comfort

So many mistakes are made in religions today because of a failure to acknowledge that Jesus Christ was God in human form, not just a good teacher, but God Himself.

The Bible gives us a fascinating insight into the deity of Christ in Matthew 16:13–17. Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was.

Peter replied that He was the Son of God. Here Jesus made an interesting statement. He said, *“Blessed are you, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father which is in heaven.”*

In other words, the Father must be the one to reveal to humanity who Jesus truly is. We can try to correct the popular, erroneous teaching that Jesus is less than God, but unless our Father opens the eyes of the individual, our argument is in vain.

The Attributes of Christ

God has certain attributes, many of which are also attributes of man. There are, however, attributes or qualities of God that He reserves for Himself.

Man is not omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, or omnipresent. These are qualities that God alone possesses. Man cannot forgive sin, create from

nothing, or know the future. These are qualities that make God who He is, and that separate Him from man. We will look at some of these qualities of God, and see that Jesus Christ had these same attributes.

1. God is omniscient:

God knows all things. He knows the hearts and thoughts of men. He knows the past and the future. He knows the number of grains of sand, and the number of the stars. There is nothing He does not know.

Christ is omniscient:

- *“But Jesus did not commit himself to them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man”* (John 2:24,25).
- He knew the whereabouts of Nathaniel: *“Nathaniel said to him, Where do you know me from? Jesus answered and said to him, Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”* (John 1:48).

- He knew the plot of Judas: *“Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spoke of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon”* (John 6:70,71).

- He knew the heart of the Pharisees: *“And Jesus knew their thoughts”* (Matthew 12:25). *“But when Jesus perceived their thoughts”* (Luke 5:22). *“But he knew their thoughts”* (Luke 6:8).

- He knew the history of the Samaritan woman (John 4:16–29).

2. God is worshiped:

Only God can rightly be worshiped. *“For you shall worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”* (Exodus 34:14). Whenever a man was worshiping another man, he was immediately rebuked: *“And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a*

man” (Acts 10:25,26). See also Acts 14:11–15 where Paul refuses worship. Even the angels refuse worship of men: *“I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then said he to me, See you do it not: for I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God”* (Revelation 22:8,9).

Christ is worshiped:

- He was worshiped by the wise men: *“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him”* (Matthew 2:11).
- He was worshiped by the leper: *“And behold, there came a leper and worshiped him”*

(Matthew 8:2).

- He was worshiped by the ruler: *“While he spoke these things to them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshiped him”* (Matthew 9:18).
- He was worshiped by the angels: *“And again, when he brought in the first begotten into the world, he said, And let all the angels of God worship him”* (Hebrews 1:6).

There are many other examples of people worshiping Christ. At no time did He rebuke them. He accepted their worship.

3. God forgives sin:

Only God can forgive sin, because all sin is against a holy God. No man can truly forgive sin. *“Who can forgive sins but God only?”* (Mark 2:7).

Christ forgives sin:

- *“When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, your sins be forgiven you”* (Mark 2:5).
- *“And he said to her, Your sins are forgiven”* (Luke 7:48).

4. God creates:

Only God can truly create. To form something where before was nothing takes an act of God. Man can refashion

or reform something that already exists, but only God can create.

Christ creates:

- "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (Colossians 1:16).
- "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3).

5. God saves:

"Salvation belongs unto the LORD" (Psalm 3:8).

Christ saves:

- "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11).

- "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:56).
- "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17).
- "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world" (John 12:47).

Jesus Christ has the attributes of God, even the attributes reserved solely for God. There are many other attributes of God that are attributes of Christ as well. The following chart lists just a few.

Taken from 'The School of Biblical Evangelism', Lesson 49 with permission. Available from www.biblicalevangelism.com.

Ray Comfort



Ray Comfort is the best-selling author of more than 70 books, including *You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence But You Can't Make*

Him Think and Nothing Created Everything (with special cover-condemnation by Richard Dawkins). His booklet "The Atheist Test" has sold more than a million copies.

He is the co-host of an award-winning television program (with actor Kirk Cameron), blogs daily to hundreds of atheists at "Atheist Central" and has debated atheistic evolution on ABC's *Nightline* and the BBC.

He is a New Zealander, who lives with his wife, Sue, in Southern California where they have three grown children.

Description	Father	Jesus Christ
God	Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 45:6,7	Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; John 1:1,14; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1; Matthew 1:23; 1 John 5:20
Yahweh, "I AM"	Exodus 3:14 Deuteronomy 32:39	John 8:24; 8:58; 18:4-6
Alpha & Omega	Isaiah 41:4; 48:12 Revelation 1:8	Revelation 1:17,18; 2:8
Lord	Isaiah 45:23	Matthew 12:8 Acts 7:59,60; 10:36; 1 Corinthians 2:8; 12:3 Philippians 2:10,11
Savior	Isaiah 43:3; 43:11; 63:8 Luke 1:47; 1 Timothy 4:10	Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11; John 4:42; 2 Timothy 1:10; Titus 2:13
King	Psalm 95:3; Isaiah 43:15; 1 Timothy 6:14-16	Revelation 17:14; 19:16
Judge	Genesis 18:25 Deuteronomy 32:36; Psalm 50:4,6; 75:7; 96:13	John 5:22 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1
Light	2 Samuel 22:29; Psalm 27:1	John 1:4,9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5
Rock	Deuteronomy 32:3,4; 2 Samuel 22:32	Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 10:3,4; 1 Peter 2:4-8
Redeemer	Psalm 130:7,8; Isaiah 43:1; 48:17; 49:26	Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:12
Our Righteousness	Isaiah 45:24	Jeremiah 23:6; Romans 3:21
Husband	Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:16	Matthew 25:1; Mark 2:18,19; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 21:2,9
Shepherd	Genesis 49:24; Psalm 23:1; 80:1; 95:7	John 10:11,16; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4
Creator	Genesis 1:1; Job 33:4; Psalm 95:6; Isaiah 40:28; 43:1; Acts 4:24	John 1:2,3,10; Colossians 1:15-18; Hebrews 1:1-3
Giver of life	Genesis 2:7; Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6	John 5:21; 10:28; 11:25
Forgiver of sin	Exodus 34:6,7; Nehemiah 9:17; Daniel 9:9	Matthew 9:2; Acts 26:18; Colossians 2:13; 3:13
Omnipresent	Psalm 139:7-12; Proverbs 15:3	Matthew 18:20; 28:20; Ephesians 3:17; 4:10
Omniscient	1 Kings 8:37-39; Jeremiah 17:9,10	Matthew 9:4; 11:27; Luke 5:4-6; John 2:25; 16:30; 21:17; Acts 1:24
Omnipotent	Isaiah 40:10-31; 45:5-13; Revelation 19:6	Matthew 28:18; Mark 1:29-34; John 10:18; Jude 24
Pre-existent	Genesis 1:1	John 1:1,2; 3:13,31,32; 16:28; 17:5
Eternal	Psalm 102:26,27; Habakkuk 3:6	Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; John 8:58
Immutable	Malachi 3:6; James 1:17	Hebrews 13:8
Receiver of worship	Matthew 4:10; John 4:24; Revelation 7:11; 19:4; 19:10	John 9:38; Philippians 2:10,11; Hebrews 1:6
Who gets the glory?	Isaiah 42:8; 48:11	Hebrews 13:21; John 17:5

"Why does the Old Testament show a God of wrath and the New Testament a God of mercy?"

The God of the New Testament is the same as the God of the Old Testament. The Bible says that He never changes. He is just as merciful in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament. Read Nehemiah 9 for a summary of how God mercifully forgave Israel, again and again, after they repeatedly sinned and turned their back on Him. The psalms often speak of God's mercy poured out on sinners.

He is also just as wrath-filled in the New Testament as He is in the Old. He killed a husband and wife in the Book of Acts,

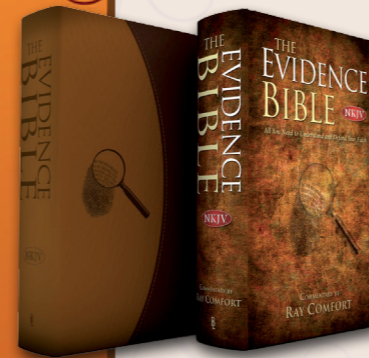
simply because they told one lie. Jesus warned that He was to be feared because He has the power to cast the body and soul into hell. The apostle Paul said that he persuaded men to come to the Savior because he knew the "terror of the Lord." Read the dreadful judgments of the New Testament's Book of Revelation. That will put the "fear of God" in you, which incidentally is "the beginning of wisdom."

Perhaps the most fearful display of His wrath is seen in the cross of Jesus Christ. His fury so came upon the Messiah that it

seems God enshrouded the face of Jesus in darkness so that creation couldn't gaze upon His unspeakable agony. Whether we like it or not, our God is a consuming fire of holiness (Hebrews 12:29). He isn't going to change, so we had better ...before the Day of Judgment. If we repent, God, in His mercy, will forgive us and grant us eternal life in heaven with Him.

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I'll never forget the incredible joy and expectation of Christmas. Our house smelled like a Douglas fir. The tinsel and ornaments sparkled in the colored lights. Friends and relatives came to visit... all with smiles and laughter... and all with presents!! The season was full of life, warmth, and giving. They are the very best memories of my childhood. The air outside was cold and crisp. And inside, always the smell of something baking. If anyone asked me to describe "joy" in one word, it would have been Christmas.

I remember taking a drive to an area of town where a whole street prided itself on their Christmas displays and lights. The whole neighborhood spent thousands of dollars to light up their front lawns with scenes of snow, Santas, reindeer, and mangers. I always used to wonder what the manger had to do with Santa, candy canes, and jingle bells, but it didn't bother me enough to ask.

When I was about 10 or 11, I noticed the word "Xmas." I wondered what the "X" was for. I concluded it meant "criss," as in "crisscross." It never even entered my mind that it replaced "Christ"! Yes, there were school Christmas plays and other things that talked about the birth of Jesus having something to do with Christmas, but it never really was the main emphasis in my young mind. I only wished that it would be Christmas all year, and Jesus had nothing to do with it! But when I was 21, I met Jesus, and since then it has been Christmas all year... and Jesus has had everything to do with it!

The Origin Of Christmas

In the third century A.D., a wonderful thing happened. Constantine, the Roman emperor, became a Christian. For almost 300 years the Christians had been praying for their emperor's salvation. Nobody believed it was true! But then came the royal decree... Christianity was made the religion of the state. Everyone was strongly urged to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and only deity. At the risk of seeming uncooperative (and believing that it would be safest politically and socially), almost everyone in the empire made "professions of faith" in the new religion. This, of course, delighted Constantine.

After a while there arose a great problem. What were they to do with all their other gods? And what about all the great feasts and celebrations, especially the winter solstice and the spring equinox? Before Constantine's conversion, the whole empire would lustily celebrate these festivals to their gods and goddesses. What would they do now? Constantine knew that, although almost everyone had outwardly confessed Christianity, they were in no way prepared to give up their cherished celebrations. What he had on his hands was a kingdom full of "unconverted converts"!

As the restlessness and dissatisfaction of his people grew, the emperor knew something had to be done. So, in desperation, he declared two major "religious" holidays. They would correspond exactly to the times of the old great celebrations. He declared December 25 (for centuries celebrated as Saturnalia, the birthday of the

sun) as the celebration of the birthday of Christ. (Although historians say that Jesus was probably born sometime in October.) A great mass or religious service would be held in honor of Jesus' birth on that day (hence, Christmas). He also declared the old holiday of the spring equinox to be the celebration of Christ's resurrection. (The old emphasis of the festival was the worship of the goddess of fertility-which is where we get the Easter Bunny.) The grumbling masses were thus quieted when they realized that they could once again celebrate their great holidays. Oh yes, the festivals might be called something different, and they might have to go to some "religious ceremonies," but for the most part, things could get back to normal, and their old festivities could again be heartily resumed.

St. Nick

The history of the man Nicholas (who was later made a saint by the Roman Church) is vague and sketchy. But one thing stands out about his character - he loved the poor and needy, and at every Christmas he used to give gifts to the widows and orphans. He was loved by all, especially children. This is how the tradition and practice of gift-giving was started. The folklore fantasy called Santa Claus grew over the centuries and now is the central image of a secular Christmas, where an average of over \$150 each is spent on gifts for every man, woman, and child in the United States alone!

The True Meaning Of Christmas

I've heard a lot of talk (especially by Christians) about the true meaning of

Christmas. I've seen Christians go in for all the trappings and trimmings. They spend hours, even days, in department stores trying to figure out what to buy for friends and relatives who already have everything they need ... sitting around the tree and watching nervously while someone opens up the present you got them, as they try to look surprised and squeal with delight... parents teaching their young what they call "a harmless fairy tale" - the story of Santa and how "he's gonna bring you lots of presents, so you better be good." And all the while, a world full of starving, deprived people are silently, invisibly looking in through your living room window begging for a scrap of food, a rag to keep them from shivering to death, and an answer to their misery, suffering, and oppression.

When we consider all the money spent by all of us, during a season that's greatest meaning is the Father giving us His only Son to come live and die for us, we must cry out against the injustice of an American, Christian people, who have so much and do so little. The true meaning of this season should be to give ourselves to the work of spreading the Gospel. Proclaiming freedom to the captives! Giving them bread to eat, then pointing them to the Bread of Life, to fill

their hungry souls.

Some Suggestions

As a part of your Christmas celebration this year, we suggest taking your children to a ghetto, to a hospital, to an orphanage, to an old-age home. Teach them the meaning of giving. Teach them it is foolish for us to spend money on things we don't need, and on things that others don't need. Let them spread joy to those who are miserable! Let them give a smile to an old woman's face, whose own children have forgotten and abandoned her in a convalescent hospital. Let them empty their piggy banks and send the money to missions and the poor. Let there be giving! Costly giving! Let us

give our Lord Jesus the whole world for His birthday! The world and the Lord await our response...

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Christmas MOURNING

By Keith Green





KEITH GREEN

A LIFE OF NO COMPROMISE

◆ Leah Knowing

Keith Green would have to be one of the most well-known and loved contemporary Christian artists and yet his ministry spanned only a few short years over 30 years ago. What is it that makes his life and music as relevant today as it was back then?

I first heard about Keith Green almost 20 years ago. Back then, I was still fairly new to modern Christian music, having been raised in a traditional Anglican environment, where church music was the organ and, in my opinion, boring. Of course, I wasn't a Christian then either, just an occasional church-goer, so everything was boring.

But when I heard Keith Green's music for the first time, it stirred something in me. There was a purity, not only in his voice, but in his music that could only be from God. Only later did I learn his story that brought him to this point.

Keith Green was born in New York in 1953. His mom

had been a singer with the Big Bands, his dad a schoolteacher. Before he was two his mom said Keith had perfect pitch as he sang his baby songs. A year later his family moved to California.

Keith's parents made sure he learned how to play guitar and piano at a young age. He liked piano best, but got bored playing the long classical pieces. So instead of learning to read sheet music, he'd memorize each piece, then pretend to sight read when his teacher was there. But his grandfather, who started Jaguar Records, the first rock and roll label, taught Keith how to play chords on the piano... and that was the end of classical music for him. From that moment on Keith began writing and singing his own songs. He was only 6 years old at the time.

When he was 11, Keith signed a recording contract with Decca Records, singing his own songs. However, after some minor success, by the age of 14, he felt like a total failure, a 'has been' which was very difficult for someone who had been groomed all his life to be a pop star.

At 19, Keith met a fellow seeker/musician named Melody. They were inseparable and got married a year later -- now he had a partner as his spiritual quest continued. Then when he had nearly given up hope, Keith found the truth he had been looking for. He now was 21 and never looked back.

Keith had grown up reading about Jesus in the Bible, but was confused when he figured out he was Jewish, a fact his family had hidden from him. But now what once confused him made sense as Keith proudly told the world, "I'm a Jewish Christian." As soon as Keith opened his heart to Jesus, he and Melody opened their home. Anyone with a need, or who wanted to kick drugs, or get off the street, was welcome. Of course, they always heard plenty about Jesus at what fondly became known as "The Greenhouse."

Not only did Keith's life take a radical turn, but by then he was a highly skilled musician and songwriter, so all of his songs changed too. His quest for stardom had ended. Now his songs reflected the absolute thrill of finding Jesus and seeing his own life radically changed.

Somewhat reluctantly, Keith was thrust into a "John the Baptist" type ministry - calling believers to wake up, repent, and live a life that looked like what they said they believed. He made audiences squirm by saying, "If you praise and worship Jesus with your mouth, and your life does not praise and worship him, there's something wrong!"

The radical commitment Keith preached was also the kind of faith he wanted his own life to display. Keith's songs were often birthed during his own spiritual struggles. When he pointed his finger at hypocrisy, he knew he had four fingers pointing back at himself. He penned honest and vulnerable lyrics - but left room for God to

bring conviction. He knew the journey to heaven often twists through rocky valleys, and saw no value in portraying his journey as otherwise.

With Keith's honesty, he would have chafed against a glossed-over reading of his own life. So when he made mistakes, he would talk about them to portray his life honestly. He believed we miss something essential when we overlook the frailty and humanity of others as well as ourselves. He knew he was far from perfect, but he passionately hungered and thirsted after righteousness.

Keith was constantly praying, asking the Holy Spirit to, "Please change my heart, and convict me of my sin." And when he was convicted, he took action. If he needed to repent, he repented. If he needed to phone someone to ask forgiveness, he made the call.

Keith's views on many subjects were often controversial — especially when it came to charging for his ministry. With his albums at the top of industry charts, Keith decided to give his albums away for whatever people could afford, even for free. Keith's heart was to make sure those who could not afford to buy his music could get it. Since Keith and Melody felt their songs were musical ministry messages, they did not want anyone left out due to lack of funds. At last count at least 15 years ago over 200,000 albums were sent into prisons and to the poor, without charge.



The same issue arose with Keith's concerts, which he felt were nights of ministry. After a few years of trying different ways of funding his concerts there was just one idea that gave him peace. He decided his concerts would be free so anyone who wanted could come. The ministry would rent a hall or stadium and Keith took one

offering for LDM to help cover the expenses. He and Melody did not receive any of the offerings because they were able to support themselves with their music royalties.

Doing free concerts along with Keith's new album policy were moves that sent shock waves through the Christian music industry, causing some record labels, bookstores, or other artists to question his motives. In the end it was understood he was just following his convictions.

The Lord had taken Keith from concerts of 20 or less, to stadiums of 12,000 people. At his concerts Keith always gave an altar call and led many thousands to the Lord, and just as many firmly recommitted their lives fully to serve the Lord.

Keith began to appear on many television and radio programs. He talked about his walk with God and played a song or two. But his heart was to please the Lord. His childhood dream of becoming a superstar had been cleansed from his heart years before with something better — being a servant of God.

Keith said, "I only want to build God's Kingdom and see it increase, not my own. If someone writes a great poem no one praises the pencil they used, they praise the one who created the poem. Well, I'm just a pencil in the hands of the Lord. Don't praise me, praise Him!"

For Keith, meeting Jesus was one thing, becoming more like Him was another. He struggled with the same things we all do — developing self-discipline, deadlines, bad attitudes, selfishness, and ministry issues screaming for attention. He was also trying to disciple the 70 new believers who had come to be part of their Last Days Ministries, which by now had moved to East Texas. Besides all this, Keith still had music to write, articles to finish, and a growing family and wife to take care of.

After striving for years to measure up to God's holiness, at times even ques-

tioning his own salvation, Keith came into a deeper understanding of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross - both to forgive his sins, and to clothe



him in His righteousness. It was like a huge weight had been lifted off of his chest.

It wasn't that Keith became less concerned with purity and holiness. But now he was more motivated by love and less by fear in his pursuit of Jesus. He learned so much more about God's grace and the importance of pausing simply to behold His glory and enjoy His presence. That is, perhaps, what Keith loved most.

However, on July 28, 1982, there was a small plane crash and Keith went home to be with Jesus. The crash also took the life of his three-year-old son Josiah, and his two year old daughter, Bethany. Melody was home with their one year old, Rebekah, and was also six weeks pregnant with their fourth child, Rachel. Keith was only 28 years old.

Although Keith is now with Jesus, his life and ministry is still making a huge impact around the world. His songs and passionate delivery are still changing lives, and his writings have been translated into many languages. Keith once said, "When I die I just want to be remembered as a Christian." It's safe to say he reached his goal.

Keith Green was a man of conviction. When his convictions led him to Christ, he sold all that he had - ambitions, possessions, and dreams - to possess His love. In so doing, he became a man of devotion. He also became a man remembered, and still missed, by millions around the world.

For more information about Keith Green, go to www.lastdaysministries.org.



Merry Christmas

Christmas is Real

◆ A. W. Tozer

The birth of Christ was a divine declaration, an eternal statement to a race of fallen men and women. The Advent of Christ clearly established: First, that God is real. The heavens were opened and another world than this came into view.

Second, that human life is essentially spiritual. With the emergence into human flesh of the Eternal Word of the Father, the fact of man's divine origin is confirmed.

Third, that God indeed had spoken by the prophets. The coming of the Messiah-Savior into the world confirmed the veracity of the Old Testament Scripture.

Fourth, that man is lost but not abandoned. Had men not been lost no Savior would have been required. Had they been abandoned no Savior would have come.

Finally, that this world is not the end. We are made for two worlds and as surely as we now inhabit the one we shall also inhabit the other!

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