THE CORNERSTONE
OF OUR FAITH

JESUS CHRIST
THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE
EPHESIANS 2:20

Following Jesus
Michael Brown

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about the author

Michael Brown serves as the Senior Evangelist for the Westview church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama. He is a native of Trenton, New Jersey and has served the church in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Alabama. He has authored several books (*Faithful Legacy*, *Get Thine House in Order*, and *In Search of the Narrow Way*) and a previous cornerstone book, *Life in the Holy Spirit*.

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how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called The Foundation. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God’s Word.

The second part of each lesson is called The Cornerstone. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section “preach.” God’s Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called The Inscription. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God’s Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking Discussion Questions that help you explore God’s Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.
The glorious name of Jesus rings various sounds of thought throughout humanity. Among Christians, no name can be more potent. Jesus is declared to be the Son of God, our Savior, our Lord, and our ultimate sacrifice. We praise Him and we profess Him. However, do we really understand Him? Do we genuinely know Him?

It is my hope that this series of lessons motivates readers to probe more deeply into understanding who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him. The lessons are designed to deepen our thoughts about Jesus and to challenge us to know Him experientially. Each lesson ends with discussion-stimulating questions geared to enhance the understanding and application of the lesson.

I believe that you will find great blessing in this study. May the Lord use it to draw you into a deeper understanding of and relationship with the God-Man as we busily await His coming to gather His church into eternity.
The Person of Jesus

Philippians 2:5-8

Though the name is universally known and greatly reverenced among millions, the fact remains that Jesus is more popularly unknown. Some consider Him a mere man who made audacious claims about God. Others consider Him a spiritualist of sorts – one of a few socially transcendent historical figures. To orthodox Christians, He is God’s eternal Son and our Savior. However, it is critical to our daily walk as Christians that we come to know Him as the Scriptures reveal Him to be.

Key Concepts

Christology is the study of the person of Jesus. It investigates the claims of Scripture about Jesus with an aim of developing a comprehensive view of Him. Though other sources of information are included in this pursuit, the critical source from which to learn of the person of Jesus is the inspired Scriptures. All other sources for such knowledge are subservient to what God has placed in the Scriptures.

The Bible provides powerful statements concerning the identity of Jesus. Among these is Paul’s powerful declaration to the Christians in Philippi. Written against a backdrop of
disharmony in the church, Paul’s words provide unique insight into our Lord’s person.

Some scholars consider Paul’s words about Jesus to be a hymn of the early church. Whether an ancient hymn or not, these words expand our thoughts about Jesus as they move us to discover the marvel of His person.

The term Lord means “one with control or mastery over another.” Historically the concept of lordship combines the two elements of power and authority. In God the Father, we meet the true realization of the unity of these two elements. The term is also used of Jesus (Philippians 2:6-11). It implies a position equal to that of the Father. Similar texts present this same truth (Romans 10:9; Acts 2:36).

**God the Son**

To think of Jesus as God’s Son requires some reorientation of thought. For us, a child has a beginning. A male and female come together to conceive a child, and that child is then brought forth from the womb. However, Paul’s teaching presents a drastically different concept. He taught that there was never a time when Jesus did not exist (Philippians 2:6). “Being in the form of God” conveys several significant thoughts. The verb “being” means “eternally present existence.” From the beginning, Jesus is. To speak of the beginning is to refer to pre-creation (Genesis 1:1). God the Father has no starting point. There is no point in which God came into being. The same can be said about Jesus. He has no start point (John 8:56-58). At the beginning, Jesus is (John 1:1).

The “form of God” means that Jesus is God in His very nature. Jesus is in essence God. When we are fingerprinted, the image of our fingers is made on paper. Those fingerprints
identify us whenever they are viewed. Similarly, God the Father is identified wherever Jesus is viewed (John 14:7-9; Hebrews 1:3). These claims of Jesus are what moved the Jewish authorities of his day to take His life. They considered it blasphemy that Jesus would have the audacity to place himself on the level of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (John 8:59). They could only conceive of Jesus as the natural-born son of Mary.

Today we can view archeological programs that present Jesus as an historical figure. Though these programs can be informative, they often reduce Jesus to an exceptional human that lived and died. Such views fail to see Jesus for who He really is and who He revealed himself to be.

**Jesus the Man**

Paul proclaimed that the eternal Jesus did not selfishly cling to His God-nature (Philippians 2:6). This is the thought conveyed by the words, “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” When all humanity was hopelessly lost and destined for eternal destruction, the love of God called for the sending of Jesus into the world. When all humanity was utterly helpless and fated to eternal separation from God, the eternal Son of God left His heavenly abode to bring salvation to the world. Paul was pointing to Jesus as the ultimate example of selflessness. In doing so, he provided tremendous insight into who Jesus really is.

The Scriptures teach that Jesus emptied himself of the personal use of His divine nature (Philippians 2:7a). This is the meaning of “made himself of no reputation.” We should not take this to mean that Jesus ceased to be God the Son. His God-nature can never cease to be because this is His very essence. At no time did Jesus stop being who He is. Still, He took on human likeness (Philippians 2:7b, 8a). While He was in this world, He reduced himself to ordinary human experi-
ences. He experienced hunger (Matthew 4:2). He needed rest (Mark 4:38). He experienced times of anger and sadness (John 2:14-17; 11:35). Ultimately, He experienced the emotional anguish and the physical torture of the cross. However, in all of this, He did not rid himself of His divinity. God the Son lived among humanity as humanity (John 1:14).

We should not miss the fact that Jesus took the essence of a bondservant (Philippians 2:7). This is another forceful statement of His selflessness. It is an amazing concept to consider. God actually came into His creation in the person of Jesus, and He came as a slave within it.

It is hard to imagine how anyone within the church at Philippi could still seek to push for his or her own agenda in light of this teaching about the selfless, humble Jesus. We can only hope that those within the early church in Philippi allowed this unparalleled example of Jesus move them to consider others better than themselves. This example of the selflessness of Jesus should remain the motivation for how we function as a church family in contemporary times.

**Jesus Our Lord**

The willingness of Jesus to give up His heavenly abode and His divine prerogative in order to save us was mightily rewarded. God the Father gave Him supreme authority (Philippians 2:9-11). The reaction that all should have toward Him is as that of the Father. Jesus has been exalted as Lord, and all should bow in reverence to Him (Isaiah 45:23). The opportunity to voluntarily reverence Him is prior to His second coming. When He returns, all will reverence Him without exception (Romans 14:10-12).

The person of Jesus was clearly recognized at the Pentecost celebration following Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 2:1-37). Peter’s message, which included powerful prophetic testimony concerning Jesus, struck at the very hearts of those who heard it.
Their fearful response revealed their understanding that Jesus must be reckoned with. Their subsequent response to Peter’s instruction exemplified the appropriate reaction to the authority of Jesus (Acts 2:41). They serve as a timeless example as to how all should respond to the Lord.

Who is Jesus? He is the God-Man.
He is eternal, yet He came into time.
He came into the world voluntarily.
He came into this world to bring us salvation. He gave His life for us. He returned to His heavenly abode where He calls to everyone to give an obedient response to His saving call (Mark 16:15, 16).

We should never think of Jesus as merely man. To do so is to disregard the full testimony of Scripture regarding His divinity. However, we should never dismiss the fact that Jesus did become man and live as humans must do. Jesus’ ability to feel what we feel, to know our human struggles, to face the onslaught of temptation, and to experience the highs and lows of life is directly tied to His becoming man. His dying completed the known cycle of our human experience.

The implications of Jesus’ humanity are staggering. They impact every aspect of our lives. They give insight to what God expects of us and what we should expect of ourselves. They speak volumes to the intimate knowledge and understanding that the Father has of us. As we follow Jesus, we must know that He leads us through a path that He has already traveled. It is because of this that He implores us to follow Him.

Questions for Discussion
1. Why is it so difficult for us to conceive of existence without a beginning?
2. What is the difference between Jesus being the Son of God and our being children of God?

3. Why did many Jewish leaders seek to put Jesus to death?

4. What are some human experiences Jesus underwent?

5. What are some of the emotions Jesus displayed?

6. What main lesson did Paul want the original readers of this letter to receive?

7. How should we be applying this same lesson today?

8. Why is it proper to refer to Jesus as the God-Man?

9. Why do some today consider Jesus as a mere historical figure?

10. What comfort do we have in following a humanly experienced Lord?

**Just for Further Thought**

Discuss what the humanity of Jesus means to our daily experience as Christians.

Discuss how the humanity of Jesus can be both a comfort and a warning to us.