

## BEING MINDFUL OF TRUTH AND ERROR ... part four

We make our beginning in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.  
"Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God." (Joshua 3:9)  
Dear Lord God, Sanctify us in Your truth, Your Word is truth. (John 17:17)  
We ask that Your Word would be a blessing to our lives. Amen.

This Bible study is the fourth in a series on Truth and Error. In part two, the view was presented that the human body of Jesus could have been formed by God without using one of Mary's eggs, then He transferred that human life of Jesus into Mary's womb. Although this explanation of the mystery of the birth of Christ is accepted by several denominations and is even included in some Bible commentaries, it is not the most faithful to the truth of God's Word. We'll review a few different views regarding the incarnation of Jesus and then we'll look at a very familiar incident from the Bible where truth was mixed with error. The lesson to learn is how easily error can be mixed with truth which then leads to an incorrect understanding. We need to see how very important it is to compare all the ideas we hear in the world with the truth of God's Word.

In part one of the Truth and Error series, we remembered Martin Luther (Reformation Day is October 31) whose goal was to expose and reform many errors in the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. He wanted to correct those errors with the truth of God's Word. His motto was Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fides – Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone.

In part two, we looked at the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception which is their answer to the question: 'How is it possible that Mary, a sinful woman, could have a holy son, Jesus?' Various Bible commentaries offer different explanations of how a sinless Jesus could have been conceived and born from a sinful mother. Examining this question from a human viewpoint, being mindful that our human reason has been influenced by our inherited sinful nature, we will look at three answers from the position of the truth of God's Word.

The first view is taught by the Roman Catholic Church - Jesus, the holy sinless Son of God, could only have been conceived by and given birth from a sinless, holy woman. Their doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary claims that, at the moment of her conception, she was:

- 1) preserved from the guilt of original sin;
- 2) not subject to the law of original sin;
- 3) purified while still in her mother's womb, therefore, she was born without sin.

This doctrine was proclaimed by Pope Pious IX in 1854, just 163 years ago. "The Immaculate Conception was truly pointed out in 1933 when Mary was formally canonized by the Roman Catholic Church." This was decreed 84 years ago. But according to God's Word, the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception presents a serious contradiction.

According to God's Word in **Romans 3:22-24**, "there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." God did not say that everyone except Mary has sinned. She is not an exception to the rule. Even Mary needed the redemption that is available and offered to everyone in Christ Jesus. She acknowledged her own sinfulness and her inherited sinful nature when she said in **Luke 1:46-47**, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Let's look again at the reasoning presented by the Roman Catholic Church. If Mary, born of a sinful mother and a sinful father, could have been preserved from the guilt of original sin, why won't they believe that Jesus was preserved from the guilt of Mary's original sin? If Mary, born of a sinful mother and a sinful father, was not subject to the law of original sin, why won't they

believe that Jesus was not subject to the law of original sin? If they can apply these exceptions to Mary, why won't they apply these same principles to the Son of God? If they believe Mary could have been purified while still in her sinful mother's womb, why won't they believe that God could have 'purified' one of Mary's eggs? They claim these ideas are possible for Mary, but they refuse to accept that they are possible for God's own Son. This demonstrates that the logical conclusions of sinful human minds can easily come to incorrect understandings of God's Word, and therefore wrong doctrines, doctrines of error, not doctrines of truth. This is especially true when human logic disregards and disallows the truth of God's Word. When doctrines and beliefs are based on human reason, perceptions, assumptions, and logic, rather than based solely on the Word of God, the result is easily an error and a deception, not a Godly truth.

'How could a sinful virgin conceive and give birth to the holy Son of God?' Biblical scholars have pondered over this issue and arrived at various solutions - some are contrary to God's Word, others are questionable. The view that Mary was holy is contrary to God's Word. A second view, using human reasoning and logic, was presented in Truth and Error ... part two. It stated that, because God CREATED all things, a pre-existing egg was not required when God created the first chicken, therefore, a pre-existing egg from Mary's body was not required to form the human body of Jesus. It is most certainly true that God created all things by His Word. In **Genesis 1:24** "God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures ... And it was so.'"

God did not require a pre-existing egg or sperm to create Adam. When God created man, it says in **Genesis 2:7**, He "formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." And God did not use an egg or a sperm to create Eve. He used one of Adam's ribs. God created everything by His Word but He created Adam in a special way by breathing His own life into him. Using human logic, it could be said that God did not require Mary's pre-existing egg to begin the human life of Jesus within her womb, because God can do all things and He is not limited to the 'usual order of things'.

But the idea that God did not require one of Mary's eggs to begin the human life of Jesus within her womb actually limits God's power. God's power and abilities are certainly not confined to what human logic can figure out or understand. But if God formed a human body for Jesus and then transferred it into Mary's womb, she would not truly be the biological mother of Jesus and there would be no direct biological connection to Adam, Abraham, and David. This would be contrary to God's plan of redemption and the promises and covenants in the Old Testament.

The covenants that God made with His people in the Old Testament clearly point out that Jesus, the Savior, had to be a biological descendant of Adam, Abraham, Judah, and David. These are just a few of the covenant promises that God made to His people in the Old Testament:

**Genesis 3:15** The LORD God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you (Satan) and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring (Jesus); he (Jesus) shall bruise your head, and you (Satan) shall bruise his (Jesus) heel." This is God's first promise of salvation and it was announced to the first sinners, to give them hope. The offspring, the descendant, of Adam and Eve was Jesus. This prophecy pictures the ongoing conflict between Jesus and Satan, between good and evil, and even between truth and error because God's Word is truth and Satan is the father of lies. God's promise was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross, which defeated Satan.

**Genesis 12:1-3** The LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God blessed Abraham and promised him many descendants and that all nations would be blessed through Him. Many generations later, this blessing was fulfilled in one of Abraham's descendants, Jesus, whose death on the cross won the blessing of forgiveness for all people.

**1 Chronicles 17:11 & 14** (The prophet Nathan spoke these words to King David) "When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, (when you die), I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. ... his throne shall be established forever." Jesus is this offspring, a direct biological descendant from David. Jesus' kingdom will be forever.

The first view, that Mary was holy, is contrary to God's Word. The second view does not 'fit' with Jesus being a direct genealogical descendant of King David and limits God's power, so there must be a better solution to the mystery of the incarnation, the conception and birth of Jesus.

A third answer was accepted by the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. These proclaim that Jesus was both fully God, begotten from the Father, and also fully man, taking His flesh and human nature from Mary. These two natures, human and divine, were united into the one personhood of Jesus. If God had formed a human body for Jesus, apart from Mary, and transferred that human body into Mary's womb, Jesus would not have received His 'humanness' from Mary. This is why the second view is contrary to the doctrines and beliefs that are upheld by Lutheran Church Canada and the LCMS in the States.

It is most certainly true that Jesus was not created; He was begotten by the Father from eternity. God said in **John 1:1-2**, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." God's Word says that Jesus already existed "in the beginning" therefore His existence, His 'life', did not begin in Mary's womb. However, the humanness of Jesus did have a beginning and it was begun by the activity of the Holy Spirit. These two Lutheran synods have always believed that Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary", as confessed in the Apostles' Creed and also in the Nicene Creed.

Gabriel announced to Mary in **Luke 1:31-35** "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." When Mary asked, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" the angel answered her that "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God." **Matthew 1:18, 20** The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. Mary was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. An angel told Joseph, that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

God created the laws of nature but He Himself is not confined to those laws. The Holy Spirit preserved and separated the holy nature of Jesus from the sinful nature of Mary. This was a work of God's divine grace and power and is pictured in **Psalm 103:12** "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." It is most certainly true that God can remove all our sins. Think of it this way: when the Holy Spirit 'came upon Mary' and when the 'power of the Most High overshadowed her', the Holy Spirit removed all sin, removed all inherited sin, and removed the nature of sin from Mary's egg which was used to form the human body of Jesus. But note that God did not remove the sin or the sinful nature from Mary herself.

That a virgin could conceive and bear a child is beyond all human understanding. That a sinful woman could give birth to a holy child, is beyond human understanding. That a human woman could give birth to the Son of God is beyond all human understanding. No amount of logic or reasoning can enable anyone to 'figure out' exactly how this could take place. No one can 'figure out' the ways of God. Jesus truly assumed human nature. He was born of true and natural human flesh and blood, yet He was always free from original sin and from a sinful nature.

Hymn 821, 'Alleluia! Sing to Jesus' says: "Faith believes, nor questions how." In His Word, God reveals everything we need to know. We can never figure out the 'how' of what He has done. By faith, we believe and trust that what He says is true. **Isaiah 55:8-9** "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Now let's look at a familiar incident in the Bible when truth was mixed with error. It took place soon after the Israelites were freed from Egypt. The event with Aaron and the golden calf occurred while Moses was with God on Mount Sinai, receiving the Ten Commandments. How sad that the people were breaking the commandments while God was giving them to Moses.

**Exodus 32:1-8** "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, they gathered together and said to Aaron, 'Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' So Aaron said to them, 'Take off the rings of gold that are in your ears and bring them to me.' So all the people took off the rings of gold from their ears and brought them to Aaron."

"And Aaron received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.' And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ('Play' implies immoral activity done to honor the 'god', the golden calf.)

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" (Even though Aaron had called their idol worship a 'feast to the Lord', it truly wasn't.)

Notice the phrase 'These are your gods'. Aaron is likely referring to the idol and also to Yahweh as the gods of Israel, mixing truth and error. Notice the phrase 'a feast to the LORD'. Aaron is mixing forbidden idolatry with the worship of the true God. He may have acted in fear of the people, but, nevertheless, he fully cooperated with them in this false idol worship. When God saw their mixture of truth and error, he regarded it as sin, as written in **Deuteronomy 9:16** "And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the LORD your God. You had made yourselves a golden calf. You had turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded you."

It is so very important to discern truth from error; to discern between the lies of the world, the lies of society, and the truth according to the Word of God. Throughout history, the truth of God's Word has always been challenged and, sadly, the truth has not always won.

If Jesus had not been fully human, He could not have died on the cross for us, as our substitute.

God showed His power when He created all things – by His Word;

God showed His power when He created Adam – by His breath (which is the Holy Spirit);

God showed His power when He removed the sin from Mary's egg – by the Holy Spirit;

God showed His power when the Son of God was made man - by the Holy Spirit.

In **Luke 1:37**, Gabriel said to Mary "For nothing will be impossible with God." He is beyond our understanding, so seeking to understand everything about the way of the Lord is futile.

We trust that His Word is true and that His ways are good, therefore, we accept it all in faith.

"He is good! For His mercy endures forever". **Psalms 118:1**

## OBJECT LESSON

Display three glasses of water and a plastic baggy with some dirt in it.

The clear water represents spiritual truth.  
The dirt represents spiritual error and lies.

Glass #1 . . . If you have a glass of good clear water (spiritual truth),  
and you mix into it one spoonful of dirt (spiritual error),  
would you drink that water?

Glass #2 . . . If you have a glass of good clear water (spiritual truth),  
and you mix into it just a little bit of dirt (spiritual error),  
would you drink that water?

Oh, come on ... there's still a lot of good water in the glass ... just ignore that tiny bit of dirt.

Glass #3 . . . If you have a glass of good clear water (spiritual truth),  
would you drink that water?

God does not excuse mixing spiritual error with spiritual truth – He regards it as sin.

Discernment is being able to see the dirt in the water and refusing to drink it.  
Discernment is being able to see the difference between spiritual truth and spiritual error.  
Discernment is recognizing spiritual error, lies, and deception and rejecting it.  
Discernment is learned when we know and understand the truth of God's Word.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, your Word is truth, your ways are awesome and they are for our good. Your grace, mercy and loving kindness endure forever. Bless us with the gift of discernment so we are able to distinguish your spiritual truth from spiritual error. Protect us from the deceit and lies of the evil one. Keep us faithful until we are safely home with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Closing Hymn: 568** in the Lutheran Service Book **If Your Beloved Son, O God**

If Your Beloved Son, O God,  
Had not to earth descended And in our mortal flesh and blood Had not sin's power ended,  
Then this poor wretched soul of mine In hell eternally would pine Because of my transgression.

But now I find sweet peace and rest; Despair no more reigns o'er me.  
No more am I by sin oppressed, For Christ has borne sin for me.  
Upon the cross for me He died That, reconciled, I might abide With you, my God, forever.

I trust in Him with all my heart; Now all my sorrow ceases.  
His words abiding peace impart; His blood from guilt releases.  
Free grace thru Him I now obtain; He washes me from ev'ry stain, And pure I stand before Him.

All righteousness by works is vain; The Law brings condemnation.  
True righteousness by faith I gain; Christ's work is my salvation.  
His death, that perfect sacrifice, Has paid the all-sufficient price; In Him my hope is anchored.

My guilt, O Father, You have laid On Christ, Your Son, my Savior.  
Lord Jesus, You my debt have paid And gained for me God's favor.  
O Holy Spirit, Fount of grace, The good in me to You I trace; In faith and hope preserve me.