

Regarding "Jesus, Eternal Son of God, or Jesus, Son of the Eternal God? (Rev. 3.14) by Sam Storms Feb 22, 2007 (see Appendix for copy of article³)

Sam's article has a dash of truth mixed into an awful lot of doctrinal and logical error.

Sam has made some progress in understanding the role our Messiah fulfils as the second Adam.

Sam correctly acknowledges that Christ Jesus is the 'beginner and founder of a new humanity'. What a shame that he appears only to grasp a very little of the significance of Jesus being the second Adam, the 'firstborn' of a new creation; the first-fruits as a result of his resurrection; His becoming our High Priest after his resurrection and yet incredibly also being the wavesheaf offering to God Almighty (see my article 'Our Passover Lamb').

What are some of the errors Sam makes?

Firstly, Sam speaks of the difference between heaven and hell – it would appear he subscribes to the non-biblical understanding that believers go to heaven at their death rather than 'sleep' in the grave until the resurrection of the dead and that hell is a place of everlasting torment rather than the final annihilation of unbelievers after the final judgement and punishment. (I highly recommend Chap. 7 of Greg Deuble's 'They Never Told Me THIS in Church' – available from Koorong Bookstore, and 'Our Fathers Who Aren't In Heaven' by Prof. Anthony Buzzard)

Sam states that the Nicaean Council was conclusive. Was the Council of Nicaea really so emphatic?

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica: "*Constantine himself presided, actively guiding the discussions and **personally proposed the crucial formula** expressing the relationship of Christ to God in the creed issued by the council. "of one substance with the Father."*

So was their Roman emperor really the leading theologian of his day?!! Or was this simply a matter of political expediency?

While the Athanasius view carried the day in 325 AD, it appears it was mainly because of the political support of Constantine.

On the surface, the vote may appear to have been very clear-cut, but given the pressure applied by Constantine, this was not surprising. Given the changes over the years from 325 through to 381 and even to 451 AD it would seem this was really no vote or statement of a biblical doctrine but a political exercise. These conflicting positions had more to do with politics than with Biblical exegesis.

Please refer to the attachment – 'A Brief History of Church After Nicea' which illustrates this very well.

Sam states that Arius 'died in his sin'. Clearly Sam believes that Arius' position was not only wrong (and instead accepts the Athanasius position) but that Arius position on this issue meant he was not a true Christian and could therefore not inherit eternal life. Sam offers no

biblical support for the Anathanasius position or for his argument that Arius' error condemned him for eternity.

As already intimated Sam accepts and proposes that Jesus was eternally pre-existent without any biblical support and further, he offers no biblical support for his argument that anyone not adhering to this belief is to be damned.

Sam states the Servetus was of a similar mind to Arius. Servetus certainly had some very unorthodox views, though in many ways still more Trinitarian than anti-trinitarian, but they seem very different from Arius'. His understanding of the state of Jesus prior to his conception and begetting in Miriam (Mary) appears a little confused, but it also seems more biblical than most of his generation. His final plea to '*Jesus, Son of the eternal God*' is certainly in itself a biblical statement unlike Calvin's, '*Jesus, eternal Son of God*'.²

Sam states that Calvin 'preferred beheading' – clearly Sam, along with most of the Reformed Church of today which so blindly follows Calvin, seems to accept that a true Christian could wish and act to kill someone (for the greater good of course!).

Any reasonably in-depth study of the whole of God's Word should reveal that God and God alone has the prerogative over the taking of human life¹. The complete sanctity of human life is one of the most foundational principles of the Holy Scriptures (see Appendix). Sam mentions that he believes Calvin was kneeling in pray at a church when Servetus was burned at the stack – does he think that such hypocrisy from Calvin excuses him from the shedding of this innocent blood!

Not surprisingly, Sam misunderstands and consequently misappropriates some of the Apostle John's prologue (John 1). He also misunderstands Colossians 1:1-20 – see attached article by William M. Wachtel.

Finally Sam states the Jesus Christ is the 'eternal' Son of God without any biblical support and that NOT believing this is to have no part in the resurrection to eternal life (again with absolutely no biblical support)!

As a very simple contrasting quote from the New Testament, look again at Matthew 16:13-17 (NKJV)

13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Very simply we see that Jesus states that he is the Son of Man (of Daniel's prophecy); and accepts Peter's confession as true and accurate, that is, that he is the Messiah or Anointed One and that he is the Son of 'living' (*to live – not only the God of yesterday; the God of their Fathers, but the God of today and tomorrow, that is the 'eternal'*) God.

Peter was called 'blessed' for this confession (which is repeated in 8 other places), yet this very confession damned Servetus to burning at the stake.

Given Sam's insight on the pre-eminence of Jesus, there is perhaps a little hope that he may eventually come to see more clearly the full reality of who the Messiah really was.

Appendix:

1. God is Creator and Owner of all people (and therefore has sole rights over their day of death):

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

"Know that the Lord Himself is God: it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture." (Psalm 100:3, NASV)

"For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son." (Ezekiel 18:4)

"Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." (Isaiah 64:8)

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

"See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand." (Deuteronomy 32:39)

"The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up." (1 Samuel 2:6)

"You shall not commit murder." (Exodus 20:13)

"And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man." (Genesis 9:5)

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13)

"There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, **hands that shed innocent blood**, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers." (Proverbs 6:16-19)

2. from my article 'Let Us Revisit Our Christian Foundations':

Calvin & Servetus:

It certainly can be challenging to discern truth even within the Christian community when opposing camps give different renditions of some historical event.

In trying to discover historical truth I would suggest there are at least 3 approaches we can take:

1. We can look for sources who at least appear not to be pushing a particular interpretation,
2. we can look for statements that both sides affirm, i.e commonality
3. and we can look for illogical or contradictory comments and assume that the conclusions (supposed historical facts) from these are unlikely.

The debate regarding Calvin and the burning at the stake of Servetus is an example. Using approach 1, look at the following Encyclopaedia comment:

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Servetus, Michael , 1511–53, Spanish theologian and physician. His name in Spanish was Miguel Serveto. In his early years he came in contact with some of the leading reformers in Germany and Switzerland—Johannes Oecolampadius, Martin Bucer, Wolfgang Fabricius Capito, and probably Martin Luther. But he held views, concerning the Trinity in particular, that brought condemnation from the theologians of the Reformation as well as from those of the Roman Catholic Church. When he published *De trinitatis erroribus* (1531) and *De trinitate* (1532), the feeling of opposition was so strong that he assumed the name of Michel de Villeneuve, from the family home, Villanueva, and spent some time in Lyons, working on an edition of Ptolemy's geography and other scientific works, then in Paris studying medicine. There he is said to have seen John Calvin. He became well-known for his ability in dissection and had unusual success as a physician; he discovered that some of the blood circulates through the lungs. From 1541 to 1553 he lived in the palace of the archbishop of Vienne as his confidential physician. When (1553) he had a work setting forth his ideas of Christianity secretly printed, investigation was begun by the Inquisition. Servetus, arrested, tried, and condemned, escaped from prison. Several months later, while making his way to Italy, he was seized in Geneva by Calvin's order. There, after a long trial, in which Calvin's condemnation was a stern factor, he was burned on Oct. 27, 1553. See biographies by R. H. Bainton (1953) and J. F. Fulton (1954).

This encyclopedia comment, along with the following excerpts from a pro-Servetus site suggest it is fair to consider him to have had a great intellect and to stand for his principles.

From http://www.socinian.org/michael_servetus.html

"... At the same ceremony, professor of philosophy Otto Karmin said: "Amidst the most inhuman sufferings, he affirmed the principles of free thought which has triumphed since and the principle of free belief which became the Magna Carta of the Unitarian Protestants and of the liberal churches. These churches live by the doctrines for which Servetus sacrificed his life." ... José Barón Fernández, who emphasized the contribution of Servetus to medicine, which alone would guarantee him immortality, called him one of the brightest geniuses through whom Spain contributed to universal culture: "The profound knowledge of any of the disciplines on which he discoursed manifests the depth of his erudition combined with the rigor and honesty of the inquiry."

Now look at a Calvinistic site: <http://www.challies.com/archives/001318.php>

Michael Servetus was a Spanish theologian and physician who lived from 1511-1553. In his early years he came into contact with many leading Reformers and while he broke with the Roman Catholic Church and became at least nominally Protestant, he adopted a particularly heretical belief, denying that **Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He also denied paedobaptism**, a belief which further alienated him from Protestant and Catholic alike. . . Quoting Calvin: "Servetus wrote to me a short time ago, and sent a huge volume of his dreamings and pompous triflings with his letter. I was to find among them wonderful things, and such as I had never before seen; and if I wished, he would himself come. But I am by no means inclined to be responsible for him; and if he come, **I will never allow him, supposing my influence worth anything, to depart alive.**"

When Servetus, at last, arrived in the city, Calvin was left with the unenviable position of having to decide whether to allow the heretic to continue his teaching in Geneva, which would inevitably lead people to believe that the Reformed church was lenient towards heresy (softer even than the Roman Catholic Church that had already condemned this man to death), or to attempt to take action ...

In this pro-Calvin reference the statement is made that Servetus did not believe Jesus was the Son of God! It is a staggering statement to suggest that any theologian reading the Bible could come to this conclusion, as there are many scriptures that declare explicitly and directly that Jesus said he was the Son of God, as did the apostles, etc. This would certainly appear to be an illogical, erroneous conclusion.

What the Socinian (pro-Servetus) site states on this issue is much more illuminating and believable:

During the process at Geneva in the debate with Calvin he was ready to modify his views provided that his opponent's arguments were extracted from the biblical text. After he was condemned to death, Servetus with humility asked Calvin, who was directly responsible for his unjust martyrdom, for forgiveness. To be saved from the stake he only had to state "**Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God.**" Instead, his last words were: "**Jesus Christ, Son of the eternal God.**" He was convinced of the correctness of his reading of the scripture, which he revered, and died defending not his life but his doctrines Also from http://www.socinian.org/michael_servetus.html

There is absolutely no question that the Bible tells us that God is eternal; there is also no doubt that Jesus is the 'Son of God'. Where there is doubt is whether Jesus was pre-existent before His conception. Thus, Calvin was clearly trying to coerce Servetus to agree with his belief in Jesus as 'God, the Son' or some other pre-existence dogma.

Note also that the pro-Calvin site implicitly label's child (paedo)-baptism as a biblical doctrine. Also note, that the pro-Calvin site agrees that Calvin desired Servetus's death! (An example of commonality).

In summary, we can see that the pro-Calvin (Challies) site clearly contains some significant historical error as well as totally denying the error of Calvin in desiring Servetus' death, regardless of his apparent heresy! This can not be excused away by arguing it was the culture of the day – these were theologians who studied the Holy Scriptures! They have no excuse for believing it is acceptable to murder someone!

Regardless on the merit or otherwise of Calvinism and the TULIP doctrine, Calvin was unquestionably, and by his own words, to some significant degree culpable in the murder of a man who sought to seek the whole truth of God.

3.

Jesus, Eternal Son of God, or Jesus, Son of the Eternal God? (Rev. 3.14)

Sam Storms

Feb 22, 2007

*"Sam, are you playing theological tricks on us with that title? Come on. Does it really matter?" Well, let me put it this way: the difference between Jesus as "the eternal Son of God" and Jesus as "Son of the eternal God" is **the difference between heaven and hell!** Does that answer your question?*

Let me illustrate with the story of two individuals who knew well the difference between these two ways of describing Jesus Christ (and paid an eternal price for it).

The first is Arius (d. 337 a.d.), who served as a presbyter in the church district of Baucalis in Alexandria, Egypt. Arius affirmed, among other things, that "the Son, born of the Father before all time, created and constituted in being before all ages, did not exist before He was begotten." The Son, he argued, was a creature, a product ex nihilo (out of nothing) of the divine will.

Since the Son is a creature, said Arius, he must have had a beginning. "We are persecuted," said Arius, "because we say the Son had a beginning whereas God [the Father] is without beginning." Hence, the Arian slogan: "There was [a time] when He [Jesus Christ] was not."

Arius referred to Jesus as the Son of God only as an expression of courtesy because of his superior participation in the grace of God. He worshipped the Son and prayed to him, but denied his eternal deity.

The Council of Nicea in 325 a.d. spoke unmistakably to this heretical denial of the eternality of God the Son. Attached to the end of the creed was an anathema, which read: "But as for those who say, There was [a time] when He [the Son of God] was not, and before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change, these the Catholic Church anathematizes."

Arius denied that Jesus Christ was the eternal Son of God, and died in his sin (337 a.d.).

Michael Servetus, a Spanish physician who lived some 1,200 years after Arius, was of a similar mind. Upon his arrival in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1553, he was immediately arrested and charged with heresy. Although John Calvin preferred that he be beheaded (which by sixteenth-century standards was regarded as a more dignified and humanitarian punishment), Servetus was burned at the stake while Calvin knelt in church praying for him.

As Servetus was being led to his death, his last words were carefully chosen: "Have mercy on me Jesus, Son of the Eternal God," not "Jesus, Eternal Son of God." As Carter Lindberg has noted, "in that time a misplaced adjective could be fatal" (269). Of course, Servetus knew full well where to place the adjective and was careful and deliberate in making known his denial of the eternality of Jesus, the Son of God.

But if Jesus is without beginning or end, if he is the eternal Son of God, what did he mean when he identified himself in Revelation 3:14 as "the beginning of God's creation"? Is he saying that Arius and

Servetus were right, that he was the first created being in a long line of others, like you and me, who owe their existence to God? No.

There are two possible ways of understanding our Lord's identification as "the beginning of God's creation."

Most have taken this phrase to mean that Jesus is the one from whom all creation begins, that he is its ultimate source or origin. In other words, when Jesus describes himself as "the beginning of God's creation" he has in view much the same as did John in his gospel when he said of Jesus, the Word, that "all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3).

In Colossians 1:15 Paul describes Jesus as "the firstborn of all creation", or better still, "the firstborn over all creation." After all, in the next verse (Col. 1:16) Paul says that "by him all things were created" and again in v. 17 that the Son is "before" all things (cf. John 8:58). The word "firstborn" itself does not necessarily mean first in a sequence or first in time. It can also mean first in "rank" or "supreme in dignity." The point is that the Son, by virtue of being the image of God, has a pre-eminence and exercises a sovereignty over everything else that exists (see Psalm 89:27). The point, then, is that Jesus Christ is utterly unique, distinguished from all of creation because he is both eternally prior to it and supreme over it in the sense that he is its creator.

But there may be a better and more accurate way of understanding Jesus as "the beginning (Gk., arche) of God's creation." Contrary to what most have thought, this title of Christ does not have in view his relation to the old or original creation, but rather his relation to the new creation or the new cosmic order inaugurated by his resurrection from the dead.

Consider, for example, Paul's description of Jesus as "the beginning (Gk., arche), the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18). His point is that he was the beginning and founder of a new humanity, a new people, by virtue of his having been the first to rise, never to die again. When God the Father raised him from the dead and glorified and exalted him to the right hand of the majesty on high, he became the first-fruits of that resurrection guaranteed for all who are united to him (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-23; Rev. 1:17-18).

The resurrection of Jesus thus marks a new cosmic beginning. The use of the word "beginning" (arche) in both Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 3:14 points to "Christ's sovereign position in the new age" (Beale, 298). Thus we see that the description of our Lord in Revelation 1:5 as "the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth" is "interpreted in 3:14 as designating Christ as the sovereign inaugurator of the new creation. Consequently, the title 'beginning of the creation of God' refers not to Jesus' sovereignty over the original creation but to his resurrection as demonstrating that he is the inauguration of and sovereign over the new creation" (Beale 298). Therefore, "John has in mind not Jesus as the principle, origin, or source of the original creation, but Jesus as the inaugurator of the new creation" (Beale 301).

Regardless of which view is correct, of this we may be sure: Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, the uncreated creator of all things. As such he is sovereign Lord over all of creation, both the old and new. To believe anything less of him is to abandon all hope of eternal life.

Sam