

From the June 4, 2008 Issue

## **Eeek!**

Eeek!! A Mouse!

Remember that line from the old Tom and Jerry cartoons? All we saw were the maid's feet, perched on a stool, and Jerry the mouse looking as frightened as her un-seen face must have appeared.

It was Tom the cat's job to chase Jerry down and save the frightened lady from the evils of rodentry. Of course he never did succeed, it was a cartoon after all, and the dramatic tension had to come from somewhere.

A few months back I was listening to a brother in Christ lecture me on how God cannot be in the presence of sin. He was quite elaborate in his description, and as he waxed eloquent on how a holy, righteous God cannot tolerate even the slightest speck of sinfulness I suddenly saw an image of God as the maid in the Tom and Jerry cartoons.

He sees sin and jumps up on a stool screaming "Eeek!! Sin! Get it away, get it away!"

So, if God can't stand to be around my rodent nature, then what hope do I have? What hope do you have? We can't fix our own sin problem. (If you think you can, you need to ask your family to give you a reality check on how well you're doing on that project). And if God cannot be in the presence of sin, then he cannot fix our problem either. We're up the creek without a paddle.

A lot of Christians solve this dilemma by simply creating a massive split in the Trinity. The Father abandons the Son on the cross, leaving him - like Tom the cat - to handle the sin problem while he remains aloof and removed from the dirtiness of the situation. Where do I begin in describing all that's wrong with that picture?! If the Father deserts the Son, then the perfect communion of the Triune nature has been broken and God ceases to exist. And if the Son can be around sin but the Father can't, then the Son is less than God! And nothing less than God can save us.

Some Christians say that the Son never entered into our sinful condition to begin with. They say Mary was conceived without original sin (the immaculate conception) and that the flesh she gave to the Son when he became incarnate as Jesus was sinless, perfect flesh.

We must respond to this idea in the strongest possible terms: Any theology which has a holy, law-keeping God standing aloof from the sinful human condition is heretical. Because the gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that our Father loves us so much that he sent his Son right into the midst of our fallen, blind, sinful flesh to make us whole (holy) and make our relationship with him right again (righteous).

It's all there in the scriptures, like 2 Corinthians 5:21 - "he made him to be sin that we might be righteous."

It's the great exchange. The Son carries away humanity's sin and leaves it buried in hell. In exchange he gives us the right and wonderful relationship that he and the Father share in the Spirit. What a bargain! We are given everything and pay nothing in return.

If Jesus isn't fully, really human (e.g. he is incarnate in "immaculate" flesh) or if he isn't fully, really God (e.g. the Trinity splits apart and the Father abandons him) *then we are not really saved.*

The early Church Fathers were fond of phrasing it this way: "The unassumed is the unhealed," or "The unassumed is the unredeemed." What they meant was that the only way our brokenness could be healed is if the fully divine Son assumed (took to himself) our sinful human nature and then lived out a sinless life, death, resurrection, and ascension from within that sinful nature. By doing that he put to death our sinful nature and raised us up to new life at the right hand of his Father.

The gospel is fun, but it's no game - and it's certainly no cartoon (although I see the gospel peeking out from behind cartoons as varied as the *Simpsons* and the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*). The Father doesn't look at you and me and say "Eeek!" He looks at you and me and says "Cool! I think we'll keep 'em"

~ Jonathan Stepp