

Approaching the Fellowship of God

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John Rayner

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Introduction

This book is written as part of my personal journey of faith. It arises from challenges made against my belief structures and from the desire to examine myself, whether I am in the faith or whether I am merely fooling myself. Have I blindly accepted the doctrines I have been taught, without personal study to submit myself to the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints? I believe that constant re-evaluation is necessary to avoid staleness and to avoid concrete opinions – I mean the ones that are thoroughly mixed and permanently set.

Some years ago our son walked away from home when he was just fourteen years old. We knew where he was living on the other side of the city but we seldom saw him in the next five years. When we did see him it was obvious that his lifestyle ran contrary to the Christian principles we so wanted him to adopt. Many prayers ascended for him in those years and I began to understand something of the father's yearning in the story of the prodigal son.

This led me to thinking about God in ways that had not occurred to me before. I began to catch a different sense of God's love for a rebel against the family values and the authority figures who wanted only the best for him. My son saw me as harsh, unloving and hypocritical. I have to agree that I'm by no means the perfect, model parent. He seemed to think I had no redeeming virtues, at least none that he could trust and still enjoy himself.

Then one afternoon while I was working in our back yard there was this stranger walking up the street, untidy, dirty, with unkempt hair. As he came near it was obvious it was our son. I thought he had returned home for a visit. As we greeted each other and hugged, he asked if he could come home!

Could he come home? Well of course he could! But then I realised the consequences for the rest of the family. When a person with scabies needs treatment each family member must also be treated. Additionally, all linen and bedding must be washed in hot water. This is to be sure the problem does not spread. So, should the rest of the family be subjected to the inconveniences simply because he was home again? We decided, yes, of course. Soon the physical problems were behind and there was no more physical treatment necessary.

Again these events set me thinking about God and my relationship with Him. Was I somehow better than He that I had continued loving the rebel when he was unrepentant? Was it acceptable to lay burdens on the family who had not left home, to cater for the prodigal who had returned? If I had been one of the other children, would I have resented the special treatment that the returning son received and the impositions on me because of his health problems? A great deal of self examination ensued.

I concluded that there were a great many things I did not understand about my heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Although I had been a Christian for many years. I formed a special interest in discovering as much as possible about them and in defending them when I had opportunity.

One day as a lay preacher I touched on the topic of the Trinity. A friend asked me after the service whether I believed in the Trinity. He admitted he couldn't. This started an email correspondence that lasted many months. I was surprised at many arguments he presented because they were not based on either historical or Biblical fact. At the same time, His probing revealed weaknesses in my own position and I found it necessary to shake my lamp of truth so it would shine more steadily.

This book is one result of self examination in the light of thoughts about God resulting from my son's return and the need for me to clarify the nature of my fellowship with God. It

also deals with some of the challenges to my understanding of the Biblical revelation of God, leading to where I am today.

This book is not a defence of Trinity dogma. In fact, I prefer not to use the term “Trinity,” but rather the Biblical term “Godhead.” To my mind, the usual understanding of trinity has been too much influenced by too many aspects of Greek philosophy and the application of Greek philosophical presuppositions to the interpretation of Biblical data. Besides this, the usual creedal statements about trinity rely on precise word meanings that differ from common modern usage. This has arisen from the fact that the statements attempt to disarm common historical misunderstanding of the doctrine of God and how Father, Son and Holy Spirit inter-relate.

The Bible presents the Father, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit united in a unique communion or fellowship as one God. The Bible sometimes uses the term “God” to refer to one or other of the three members of Godhead and sometimes to the union of the three.

This work explores some of the Biblical revelation that bears on this issue and how it relates to whom we should worship. In places it also examines issues of salvation that are associated with the doctrine of who God is.

It is my prayer that this book should be both an introduction to the doctrine of God and sometimes a deeper probe into some aspects of Godhead. While the language is not basic English, I have tried to make it easy to read and understand. It is meant to give triggers to initiate discussion or to provoke personal study and not as an authoritative exposition of the doctrine of Trinity. I trust you will be left with a deep, abiding trust in the God of the Bible and a commitment to walk in His ways.

How Big is God?

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
For You have made him a little lower than the angels,¹
And You have crowned him with glory and honor. Psalm 8:3-5

Touching the Infinite

It's humbling to try to plumb the Infinite with the finite intellect and language of a human being. Trying to discover how big is God without ourselves being divine and we soon discover our limitations. In spite of the serpent's lie to Eve, "You will be like God, knowing good and evil," we do not know God completely. Our best understanding of His being falls far short of reality. Though we use words like omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, to describe His qualities, our minds simply cannot encompass the full extent of His superlative Godhood.

Simultaneously, it's exhilarating to discover that this transcendent God has a personal interest in each one of us. The Bible repeatedly recounts His efforts to dwell among men and to have each person accept Him willingly as his or her personal God. When mankind sinned they rebelled against God and separated themselves from God and His plans. However, the transcendent God tabernacled with us and, during His incarnation He provided the means to restore the fellowship broken by sin.

We must always hold these two aspects of God's nature in balance. If we stray too far towards thinking of God as

transcendent we fall into the fallacies of deism. God is then, according to deists, the original Prime Source and Designer of nature. He does not however involve Himself beyond that, leaving us as the arbiters of our own destinies. Collective “God-given reason ... will lead to limitless personal and societal progress!”¹ If, on the other hand, we stray too far towards thinking of God as immanent we become engaged or aligned with pantheism, where God and nature are considered equivalent and synonymous.² We then are part of God, and God’s wisdom and knowledge are the collective sum of all that is natural in the universe.

If we stray towards either of these poles, the effect is that we corrupt our view of God’s plan for our salvation. On the one hand, we can see God to be too transcendent to be involved with our daily living. That would mean He leaves us largely to our own devices. So we keep God’s laws as best we can and trust we can at last reach the perfection necessary to be judged worthy of salvation. On the other hand, if we see God as part of us or ourselves as part of God, we see whatever we may do as His will. In one case we rely on our own mind because we think God provides salvation initially then leaves us to our own devices. In the other case we rely on our own mind thinking God has taken it over and will make all our decisions for us.

¹ “God gave us reason, not religion.”

http://www.deism.com/deism_defined.htm

² “Pantheism promotes the idea that God is better understood as an abstract principle representing natural law, existence, and the Universe (the sum total of all that was, is and shall be), rather than as an anthropomorphic entity.”

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheism>, quoting Owen, H. P. Concepts of Deity. London: Macmillan, 1971.]

Common Ground and Issues That Divide

As Christians, we are Theists who believe that reality's ultimate principle is God — a personal, omnipotent, omniscient goodness that is the creative source of everything other than itself. We are monotheists, holding the view that there is only one such God.³ We also believe that God Himself has given us as complete a revelation of Himself as necessary to restore us to the fellowship we had with Him when He first created mankind.

The first epistle of John shows that the whole proclamation of the apostles was bent towards drawing humanity back into the fullness of joy made possible only within this fellowship.⁴ How tragic that one of the issues that still divides God's people is argument about fellowship. Specifically, the issue crystallizes in the question of the nature of God – was there ever a distant time when there was no fellowship between God the Father, and the Son of God? What is the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son of God? Is the Son of God divine and, if so, doesn't that mean we have two Gods and not only one? Where does the Holy Spirit fit into all of this?

Some say the Father alone is eternal God and there was a time when He existed alone, in the beginning. They are divided between those who consider the Son of God to have emerged from God's being far in the unimaginably distant past, and those who see Him as a created being. The former believe He was "begotten" of God and thus emerged as the Son of God in an amoeba like process. Others claim that the Son of God was created by God as the first and greatest of His

³ "Monotheism," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/monotheism/#7.2>

⁴ 1 John 1:1-4

works. Still others see the origin of the Son of God in Mary's womb as He became incarnate. The common thread in these latter views is that God, the Father, existed alone from eternity past for some unspecified period of time. He alone has intrinsic and underived eternal life. It is original with Him alone, independent of any other source. He alone is the Supreme God, the "One God" of the Hebrew scriptures, Almighty God.

One has only to talk with those who believe like this to recognize their sincerity. They are students of the Bible and each in his own way takes the words and thoughts of scripture seriously. They are people who earnestly seek to discover God and His will. They are dedicated to sharing the message of salvation and to following each "Thus says the Lord," that they find in the Bible. To be fair, I have found many of them within my circle of acquaintance who express themselves in thoughts that have come to my own mind as I have read certain passages of scripture. So my present position comes from wrestling with these thoughts. I have tried to be true to the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints and to contend for it.

These are all people who find the thought of a trinity to be unbiblical. Their reasons vary. However they all seem to be genuine in their desire to fathom the mysteries of God and to probe the limits of the Almighty.⁵ We seek unity with these people by bending our efforts to study the Bible, diligently reasoning together, allowing our individual misunderstanding of God to evaporate as it is exposed to the Bible alone, without suppressing the guidance of the Spirit who inspired it.

There is a better way of drawing together all the Biblical strands of God's self revelation than to stop with our indi-

⁵ See Job 11:6-8 NIV

vidual current knowledge. While we, with finite minds and human language, may never be able to understand fully the transcendent God, we seek for expression that is true to the Bible, accepting all the Bible says without interpolating our own presuppositions .

God in Fellowship

The Bible not only supports the idea of one true God but also teaches that this one true God is a communion or fellowship of divine “persons.” The Bible is replete with accounts of such a union of One called the Father with another, equal and co-eternal, called the Son of God. There is further evidence of still another One of the fellowship called the Holy Spirit.⁶ Whether you use the word "trinity" to describe this communion or align with the Biblical term "Godhead" doesn't destroy the Biblical idea of a fellowship of three united as one.

The emphasis here is on unity. In a human fellowship, each member would think separately and perhaps reach full agreement together after some negotiation. Within the unity of the three divine “persons,” their wills and thinking are concurrent and identical. Though this is a mystery beyond our human grasp, perhaps this facet of conforming harmony results from each sharing omniscience.

This undivided will is supreme and belongs to Godhead. Cricketers will recognize that it takes three stumps to make one wicket. Yet each stump is also called an individual wicket. Just so, despite there being three distinct “persons” in communion, there is only one God. The Biblical Godhead is not a pantheon of three gods at odds with each other, each

⁶ Compare 1 John 1:1-7, 2Cor 13:14, Phil 2:1, where the Greek word *koinonia* describes this communion or fellowship.

with His own agenda, each striving for supremacy, but a single triune God, united in all respects.

Furthermore, love requires fellowship or communion unless it is self love. So the Bible reveals that the Word who was with God from the beginning was also God.⁷ The eternal life that was from the beginning was also with the Father, in fellowship.⁸ The force of “with” in these occurrences is that it means togetherness. It means that each is associated with the other in an indissoluble bond. The gospel teaches that God draws us into and attaches us to this fellowship of love where only we find fullness of joy.

Back to Common Ground

Having indicated our approach we gladly acknowledge that there seems to be general agreement between those on both sides of the discussion about the qualities that characterize divinity. We outline the most significant of these qualities here:⁹

- Omnipresent – personal but present everywhere in His creation. Psalm 139:7-12.
- Omnipotent – having unlimited, universal power. Matthew 19:26.
- Omniscient – having unlimited knowledge and understanding. Psalm 139:1-4

⁷ John 1:1,2 – Later discussion will examine if this should be “a god,” meaning a being of lesser stature and ability than God Almighty.

⁸ 1 John 1:1-7

⁹ Adapted from Whidden, Moon & Reeve, *The Trinity*, Review and Herald, Hagerstown, 2002, p46.

- Eternal – having neither beginning or end; not dependent on any other for life, or the source of being. Psalm 90:2.
- Immutable – not subject or susceptible to change in form or quality or nature. Malachi 3:6.
- The source and epitome of faithful covenant love. 1 John 4:8.
- Absolutely good; without any darkness or evil. Ps 145:9; Ps 19:7-9; 1 John 1:5.

Only a divine Being can possess these qualities, undelivered from some external source.¹⁰ We shall examine these distinguishing attributes of divinity as we proceed and show their importance in the story of redemption.

¹⁰ Adrian Ebens argues that the measure of divinity is not on the basis of “highest inherent power” but is “only ascribed by the Father through *relational* inheritance.” (Unpublished manuscript, *The Return of Elijah (5th Draft)*, Section 5 –Performance-Based-Thinking and the Doctrine of God, pp91ff.) Thus, in the Biblical record the Father can declare the Son to be God and to possess all the qualities of divinity despite His being “begotten,” and thus not co-eternal.

Classifying Creator and Creation

Orders of Being

Taxonomy is the classification of organisms into groups based on similarities of structure or origin or function etc. In the broadest sense, the Christian worldview divides all that exists into what has been brought into being and what is the source and cause of all creation.

The Bible starts with the words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." There follows a description of the process of creation, preparing for and culminating in the creation of mankind. In this biblical account, man is the pinnacle of God's earthly creation and bears a resemblance to his Creator because He was formed by the Creator, "in our image and after our likeness."¹¹ God made man a personal being, like Himself.

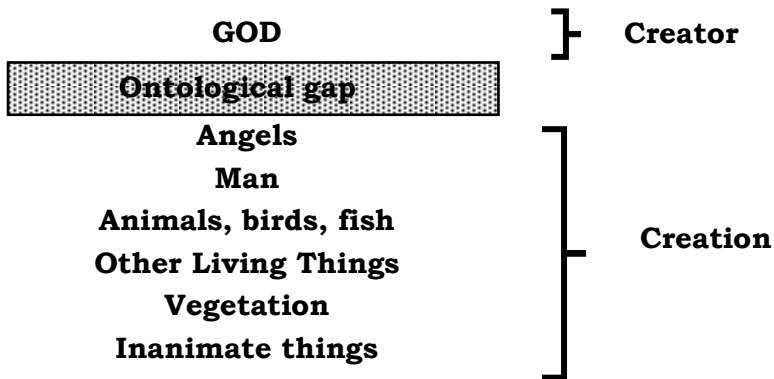
In a taxonomic sense then, we see two great gaps when it comes to living entities. The first is an ontological gap between the Creator and His creation. There is no bridge across this gap for the Creator is the source and sustainer of life in His creation. The Bible does not support the Mormon doctrine of exaltation, "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."

The second gap lies between mankind, formed in the image of God and after His likeness, and other creatures. In spite of science's declaring mankind to be an advanced evolutionary development from animals, the Bible teaches we were made in the image of God. People are personal beings who relate to each other and to God as individual persons. We can not relate with animals, even the higher orders, in the per-

¹¹ Gen 1:26

sonal way we relate with other human beings and with God. Nevertheless we are still creatures who depend on the Creator for our existence, our lives, our sustenance.

If we include angels ¹² in the picture we have a hierarchy of the universe that looks something like this:



As far as His being is concerned, God possesses qualities that cannot belong to anyone else. He alone is from everlasting to everlasting.¹³ He alone is omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent. He alone has eternal life in Himself.¹⁴ All other life is dependent on God as its source and sustainer. While it may eventually continue without end as a gift from God,¹⁵ it certainly was not there from everlasting. It was not there in the beginning.

Since we are made in God's image and after His likeness, we would also expect to find aspects of His character which define qualities that He calls us to emulate. Take love

¹² Heb 2:6-7

¹³ Psalm 90:2

¹⁴ 1 Tim 6:15-16

¹⁵ Rom 6:23

for example. When John speaks about love in his first epistle, he both defines it and describes its actions by referring to God. “God is love;”¹⁶ “This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”¹⁷ So God both defines and exemplifies love. This is true also for all aspects of God’s character. When Moses asked for a revelation of God, he was sheltered in a cleft of the rock and “the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”¹⁸ While Moses could not actually see Him at this time, God revealed His character, an epiphany of His activity amongst humankind.

Spirit and Presence

There are many ways we can recognize a particular person or animal apart from their physical appearance. We call the essential nature of a living person or animal the spirit. We use the word “spirit” to identify many of the non-physical aspects of personality and mind, will, memory and mood. So, for example, we may speak of a person being in high spirits, or as having a spirit of cooperation, or as being a loving spirit. It may be that you know of identical twins who are more easily distinguished from one another by their spirits rather than their appearance.

We can get to know a person fairly well without ever seeing them or hearing their voice, or touching them. Every day, people fall in love without any tangible contact, simply

¹⁶ 1 John 4:8,16

¹⁷ 1 John 4:10 His love was perfect for imperfect subjects; ours imperfect for a perfect subject.

¹⁸ Ex 34:6

by communicating through letters or email and often without even voice contact. Many have even entered into marriage by proxy, never having seen their partners. However, one glaring fact is that straw hat kisses are no substitute for those that are felt. Our satisfaction with communicating spirit to spirit depends on our knowledge that there is a real, flesh and blood person who is the physical presence which embodies the spirit that we know.

Greek philosophy tended to devalue the physical aspects of being, seeing the spirit as being imprisoned within the material body, eagerly awaiting release and detachment from physical restraints. This runs counter to the Biblical principle that spirit needs presence (or form) to be a complete person. The Bible presents a holistic view of God's personal creation where a person cannot be bifurcated, the spirit existing, formless, without a supporting body or substance (or form or presence.) Once the body dies, the spirit ceases to exist.

We take it that, when the Bible says, "God is spirit,"¹⁹ that it is also speaking holistically. God's presence is known even when it is not manifest. Similarly, the angels are said to be "ministering spirits"²⁰ and in the hereafter, mankind will become like the angels.²¹ In all of these cases, God, His angels, redeemed and glorified mankind, the concept of holism is preserved. Every spirit being possesses its own recognizable "spirit" which is distinct and inseparable from its presence. We rely on the Biblical principle of holism to distinguish places where the word "spirit" refers to a complete spirit being rather than merely the ethos of the being without its presence.

¹⁹ John 4:24 "God is spirit" or, some versions. "God is a spirit."

²⁰ Heb 1:14 -- See also v 7.

²¹ Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25

It is necessary for us to understand that God has substance, even though He is not visible to mankind. However, God made Himself manifest to men many times in the Old Testament record and particularly in the form of His Son during His incarnation. So God is a personal spiritual being who can materialize at will and who has a mind, will, memory, personality etc all comprising the “spirit” which can never materialize but that still relies on the “substance” for its existence.

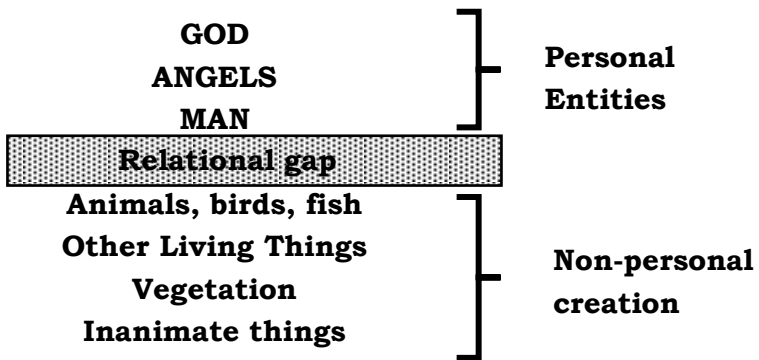
Differentiation

When God filled the earth with inhabitants, and created Adam and Eve in His own likeness, He gave them dominion over the rest of creation.²² He made them to be His loved and loving companions in intimate fellowship with Him. Even when they sinned, He loved them with an everlasting love and with loving kindness drew them back to Himself.²³

Accepting that angels too are personal beings in fellowship and service with God, we see that there is a relational gap that separates God and those in a personal relationship with Him from the rest of creation.

²² Gen 1:28 “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

²³ Jer 31:3; John 3:16,17



We can see that when we try to describe where Jesus Christ fits within this taxonomic arrangement, we need to distinguish between His being and His relationships and His relative authority. As to His being, which side of the ontological gap does He occupy? Is He God or creature? Or is He a being of a different order not specified above? What does it mean that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God? What effect does the incarnation play when we describe Jesus' being?

How do the answers to these ontological questions affect our understanding of His relationships with other personal beings – with the Father, with angels, with people? What is His relationship with the Holy Spirit?

Whether Jesus Christ is Creator or part of creation makes a difference to the way we compare Jesus with the Father and with men and angels. Further, the issue of the incarnation complicates the picture of His being. We must consider any differences between his earthly being and His heavenly existence and whether His heavenly existence preceded His incarnation as well as followed it.

A very common question we may ask about someone we're about to meet is, "What is she like?" or "What is he

like?” If we were asked to meet this unknown person for the first time to pick them up from the arrival lounge at an airport, we would expect answers that spoke of physical appearance and unique mannerisms – things that enable us to identify them amongst a crowd of other people. However if we were about to meet a potential new friend, we may still want to know some idea of appearance but we would be more interested in his or her personal qualities that could make a worthwhile friend or that may put us on our guard. If we were a potential beneficiary of a life changing grant about to meet an interviewer who would decide our eligibility, we may wish to know his or her authority in relationship to making the decision or determining any conditions.

We need to recognize that the Bible speaks about Jesus in each of these ways. Some statements deal with Him in an ontological sense that teaches us about His being -- about where He fits in the Creator/creature spectrum. Other passages speak of Him from a relational point of view. They describe how Jesus relates to the Father, to angels and to people. Still other passages relate to what role He has as our benefactor and Saviour and judge. We need to make a judgment about where any particular Bible passage fits into this scheme of things.

For example, when Jesus says, “My Father is greater than I,”²⁴ is He speaking in an ontological sense or in a relational sense? Similarly, when Jesus claims, “My Father is greater than all,”²⁵ is it merely a statement about the Father’s omnipotence or is it a statement that He alone is a divine being? As we shall see, the Bible makes both of these statements without any immediate context to resolve the issue definitively. Therefore we must find answers in the wider con-

²⁴ John 14:28

²⁵ John 10:29

text of John's writing or of other Bible writers. It is simply not a tenable position to decide based on our own presuppositions without considering the wider context.

We are in great danger of misinterpreting passages of scripture about aspects of Jesus' person and personality if we rely on our own presuppositions. If we come to a text expecting the words "father" and "son" to carry only their common meaning in every day life when they are applied to God and the Son of God, we would ignore some of the special ways we use the words on special occasions. We may also be guilty of trying to make God in man's own image, forgetting His transcendence.

Everlasting Father, Only Begotten Son

There is no divine language available for us to describe God without misunderstanding. We are left to make the best use we can of human language. We need to recognize also that we sometimes use words in colloquial speech in ways that are metaphorical or figurative rather than direct. The Bible does this too.

Take the words "Father" and "Son" for example. When we speak of fathers and sons in every day speech the words carry concepts from our every day experience. We think of father and son as two generations of the same family. The son comes to be as a result of procreation – biological union of father and mother begetting offspring. We expect the son to be human, of the same species as father and mother. The father lives before the son is brought forth.

We also have cultural expectations about the relationship between father and son. Since the father has a duty of care and protection for his son, at least until the son's maturity, we expect the son to honour and obey his father. The father provides for him, teaches him, sets his boundaries, in-

fluences the direction of his life. The father's authority exceeds that of his son unless there is some particular circumstance involved.²⁶

We should not expect all these things to be necessarily true of our Father God and His Son, Jesus Christ. The heavenly Father is not the biological progenitor of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has no divine mother as a cooperative consort to produce a son. The Bible is very clear that there is a whole different set of circumstances when it comes to Father God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Using the concrete example of the Son of God, notice how the writer of Hebrews speaks of the priesthood of Melchizedek.

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, ... to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," **without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God**, remains a priest continually.²⁷

The Hebrew people's priesthood was carefully preserved exclusively for the lineage of Levi. Anyone was excluded who had no recorded lineage or birth records. Melchizedek would be excluded from this priesthood. However, for our purposes we need to "reverse engineer" the metaphor the writer uses comparing Melchizedek to the Son of God. What

²⁶ Take for instance the case of Jesse and David after David was anointed king.

²⁷ Heb 7:1-3

was metaphorically true of Melchidezek because there was no written proof, was literally true of the divine Son of God. In an ontological sense, He was without father, without mother (until His incarnation,) without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. We can't say that of human beings or of angels.

The LORD, God of Israel, is extolled many times because He lives from everlasting to everlasting.²⁸ Passages that prophesy the coming incarnation of the Messiah speak in similar language. Micah speaks of the “One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”²⁹ Isaiah prophesies, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder. and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”³⁰

When we consider these passages, it is very clear what John meant when he began his gospel, “In the beginning, ... the Word was with God.” He simply emphasized that the Son of God (who was the Word) existed as long as God had existed. In the very beginning of all beginnings, both were there already, with one another. That cannot be true of any creature.

It is very important that we see how strongly the Bible asserts that there are differences in the way we should regard the relationship between heavenly Father and Son from the way we regard human fatherhood and sonship. We must never let down our guard and impose our own cultural expectations on God because the Bible uses words that are common in every day use when speaking about God.

²⁸ See Ps 106:48; Ps 90:2, 1 Chron 16:36; *et al*

²⁹ Micah 5:2

³⁰ Isa 9:6

Begotten

If the Son of God is without descent, having no father and no mother, why does the Bible use the term “*Son of God*” to refer to Him? Further, why does it use the term “begotten” in ways that we can interpret as speaking of origins?

The first Biblical passage that mentions the begotten Son reads,

“I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
You *are* My Son,
Today I have begotten You.”³¹

We note first that the Psalm, like much good poetry, has multiple levels of meaning. At the surface level it speaks of David and his kingship and how it is threatened by his enemies. It speaks of how God will protect His anointed king and destroy the threats against him.

“My king” is David at this level. He is the anointed king in the LORD’s holy hill of Zion. The decree establishing him as king is “declared” as the LORD (Yahweh) proclaims, “You are My son, today I have begotten you.” So “begotten” does not refer to David’s birth but to his anointing and inauguration as king.

We too may be “begotten ... again unto a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”³² We are thus appointed as kings and priests unto God.³³ When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, He called this process, being “born from above.” We can smile at Nicodemus’ reactive questions, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter

³¹ Ps 2:7

³² 1 Peter 1:3

³³ Rev 1:6; 5:10; 1 Peter 2:9

a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" However, we make the same mistake when we insist that the term "begotten" always refers to generation of a new being out of nothing or to the first appearance at birth, or to amoeba like duplication where one becomes two.

At the second level, the Psalm is Messianic, speaking prophetically of the Anointed King who, on David's throne, would be established to eternity over all nations³⁴ Those who would not embrace Him as ruler would eventually perish as His wrath was kindled. Those who put their trust in Him would be blessed.

Again at this level "begotten" does not refer to Jesus' birth but to His inauguration as the enduring King of the God's covenant people, on the eternal throne of David. He acknowledged this title before Pilate. When asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "It is as you have said."

At this level, "My king" is Jesus Christ. For most of His life this was apparent only by faith to a few people but not so during the triumphant entry to Jerusalem in the week of His crucifixion. He accepted the adulation of the people as they cried, "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!"³⁵

In this setting the Psalm reaches to the day sinners are destroyed and one pulse of harmony beats through the entire universe. "He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."³⁶ Again, "begotten" does not refer to His literal birth

³⁴ Luke 1:31-33

³⁵ John 12:13; also Matt 21:1-11, Mark 12:9-10

³⁶ Acts 17:31

but to God's decree that set Him as King on David's throne as He assumed His redemptive role.

At the third level, the Psalm speaks of eternal matters, It speaks of heaven's preparations before the foundations of the earth were laid. The Godhead in fellowship designated and appointed One of their number to put the group plans into action. This One would do the "hands-on" work of creating the earth and all that should be in it. This One would uphold all things by the word of His power. Should rebellion and attempts to overthrow God's rule arise, this One would become Son of Man to make redemption possible of all that would otherwise be lost. So, at this level, the Psalm points to this dedication or appointment of one member of the eternal divine fellowship to these responsibilities.³⁷

Consistently with the other layers of meaning, "begotten" describes His inauguration to a particular position in relation to plans for this earth. He was brought forth or begotten of the Godhead, appointed with special responsibilities for everything to do with this earth. He thus became the unique or "only begotten" entity dedicated formally as the mediator between God and man.

If He were eventually to bridge the ontological gap between divinity and humanity and become Son of Man, what title could better describe Him in His divinity than, "Son of God." The title is proleptic at this stage for it anticipates the angel's announcement to Mary that her promised Son would be called "the Son of the Most High" and "the Son of God."³⁸

He had been brought forth from the Godhead, appointed to represent Godhead in all matters pertaining to this

³⁷ 1 Peter 1 18 "Christ, ... indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."

³⁸ Luke 1:33,35

earth, retaining all the divine qualities, His relationship to the Godhead was as a son to a father.

In Proverbs we see Wisdom personified “brought forth” as the first of God’s works, “appointed from eternity.”³⁹ In my youth I recall watching a newsreel of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Following her coronation she was “brought forth” to meet the screaming multitudes of her subjects. Technology changes and in 2009 I watched on television as President Barack Obama, born August 4 1951, was “brought forth” to be sworn into and take up his presidential office, January 20, 2009. He was brought forth not in the sense of beginning his life but in the sense of taking up special responsibilities.

Hebrews speaks of this same inauguration and the installation of the Father/Son relationship in these words:

For to which of the angels did He ever say:

“ You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You”?

And again:

“ I will be to Him a Father,
And He shall be to Me a Son”?

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

“ Let all the angels of God worship Him.” ...

But to the Son He says:

“ Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.

You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You

With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Pron 8:22,23 (See Amplified version and NIV)

⁴⁰ Heb 1:5,6,8 (quoting several Old Testament passages.)

Could it be that the use of the future tense as the Father says, “I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son” indicates the beginning of the Father/Son relationship. It certainly seems to indicate that something new was beginning, something that was different from the past?

We notice particularly the recommitment to the original terms of the divine agreement when the Son of God was born of Mary. Though He took on Him the seed of Adam, still He would be worshipped by all God’s hosts of messengers.

Peter also speaks of this ordination in his first epistle where he says:

... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. ²⁰ He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.⁴¹

There are several passages in the New Testament (tabulated below)⁴² that speak of Jesus’ coming forth or proceeding forth from God or the Father. These passages are often quoted by Unitarian commentators as evidence that Jesus Christ is a natural Son of God and not an appointed or figurative Son. However, that conclusion depends on a presupposition that “God” and “Father” both refer to a single person of Godhead as a unit. We will show later that the Bible often uses the terms “God” and “Father” when referring to the unity of three persons in Godhead.

⁴¹ 1 Peter 1:18-20

⁴² From Gary Hulquist in an article on God-Head.com. When I tried to verify the table and bibliographic details on 30 January 2011 my access to the site had been blocked without explanation.

When we cast aside the preconception that “God” and “Father” always refer to a single “person,” we see that these verses reinforce the remainder of Bible teaching outlined above. Jesus Christ was singled out of the Godhead and “proceeded forth,” or “came forth,” or “came out” from the union that is Godhead. He was appointed to be its special representative in things pertaining to this earth.

John 8:42	Jesus proceeded forth from God (ek tou theou exēlthon -- εκ του θεου εξηλθον)
John 13:3	Jesus had come forth from God (apo theou exēlthen -- απο θεου εξηλθεν)
John 16:27	Jesus came out from God (ego para tou theou exēlthon -- παρα του θεου εξηλθον)
John 16:28	Jesus came forth from the Father (exēlthon ek tou patros -- εξηλθον εκ του πατρος)
John 16:30	that you came forth from God (apo theou exēlthes -- απο θεου εξηλθες)
John 17:8	Jesus came out from the Father (para sou exēlthon -- παρα σου εξηλθον)

These passages demonstrate that Jesus had to come out from the closely knit unity of the Godhead in order to be seen as an individual person who was still God in His own right. The Biblical concept of Godhead is not that three disparate Gods are united as one in some mystical way so that One or Other is in view when God is mentioned or when the Father is named. In the Biblical view of Godhead, it is impossible to separate One from Another. If you address the Father, you are still addressing the unity of three. If you speak of “God,” like it or not all three are encompassed.

Isaiah witnesses to the fact that Jesus Christ did not receive His divinity by inheritance. He brings the message

from YHWH Himself. As we contemplate this proclamation in the light of New Testament revelation, it becomes abundantly clear that the God we know is a unity rather than a unit. Additionally the unity of the three all share the same name(s) and all three are co-eternal. The idea that any One came into existence before or after the others simply makes a mockery of YHWH's own proclamation.

“You *are* My witnesses,” says the LORD,
“ And My servant whom I have chosen,
That you may know and believe Me,
And understand that I *am* He.
Before Me there was no God formed,
Nor shall there be after Me.
I, *even* I, *am* the LORD,
And besides Me *there is* no savior.⁴³

It is the easiest thing in the world for finite minds, Christians included, to think of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three separate “persons” in the same way that Jesus is a separate, individual person. However, this is tritheism. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, can only be seen as a separate “person” because He was appointed and came forth to be God manifest in the flesh.

This will remain true until that time when the great controversy between Christ and Satan is at an end. Sin and sinners will be destroyed and will not rise again. “And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”⁴⁴ The objectives for having One of their number being appointed and coming forth to represent Godhead on earth will have been accomplished. We shall

⁴³ Isaiah 43:10,11

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:28

know even as also we are known.⁴⁵ We shall worship and serve the true, triune God through all the ages of eternity.

“Only Begotten”

It would seem that the term “only begotten” that appears in many Bibles is simply a form of “begotten” modified by the adverb, “only.” This expression was first used in the King James Bible where it seems to be a mistranslation of the Greek word, «*monogenES*». The «*mono*», part of this word means “sole” or “only,” while the «*genES*», part of the word was taken to come from «*gennaW*», which means “to be born” or “to be begotten.” This is now considered incorrect. The *genES*. Part of the word comes from «*genos*», which means “type” or “kind.” So what the King James Bible translators mistakenly translated as “only-begotten” is more accurately translated as “unique” or “one of a kind.” This is reflected in most of the newer versions.

So, Hebrews⁴⁶ can call Isaac Abraham’s “only begotten” son even though Abraham had an older son, Ishmael, who was not the son of promise. Isaac was set aside or ordained by God to be the one through whom God’s promises to Abraham would be fulfilled. He was the son of the covenant between God and Abraham. “Only begotten” refers to Isaac’s anointing as Abraham’s heir and progenitor of the promised numberless descendants.

This exemplifies how the King James Bible (and other versions that follow it) use the term “only begotten” in relation to Jesus. The original Greek text is emphasizing His uniqueness as one of a kind who is ordained for a particular purpose.

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:12

⁴⁶ Heb 11:17

Biblical Use of “Son”

Opponents of the trinity doctrine sometimes insist that we should take the Biblical words “Son” and “Father” in their simplest literal sense when they apply to the Heavenly Father and the Son of God. We agree that good Biblical interpretation requires us to take Bible words in their literal sense unless there is good reason to take them figuratively. We also agree that the terms provide a convenient and reasonable framework to teach about divine relationships and their human counterparts. However, the Bible uses the word “son” in several different ways, just as we do in every day communication.⁴⁷ We must consider this additional usage before we decide the issue. Here are examples from Old and New Testaments.

David’s biological father was Jesse.⁴⁸ However, Saul refers to him as “My son.”⁴⁹ David also refers to himself as Nabal’s son.⁵⁰ There are many occurrences like this where “son” is used but not in the usual sense of male offspring, successive generations of the same family.

When Judges uses the term “sons of Belial”⁵¹ it means “perverted men” and not Belial’s progeny. Similarly, “sons of the pledges”⁵² speaks of hostages, while “son of my house”⁵³ means “servant,” and “sons of oil”⁵⁴ means “anointed ones.”

⁴⁷ Luther Engelbrecht, Ernest Hahn have useful lists in *Jesus as the Son of God*, <http://www.answering-islam.org/Hahn/son.html>

⁴⁸ Ruth 4:17,22

⁴⁹ 1 Sam 24:16

⁵⁰ 1 Sam 25:8

⁵¹ Judges 19:22

⁵² 2 Kings 14:14 YLT

⁵³ Gen 15:3 Hebrew - “*ben bithi*”

⁵⁴ Zech 4:14 YLT

The New Testament has similar usage. Examples include, “sons of the bridegroom,”⁵⁵ “a son of peace,”⁵⁶ “the sons of this age, ... sons of light.”⁵⁷

It is obvious from these examples that we cannot simply assume that the word “son” carries the suggestion of “progeny” or “offspring” when it comes to Jesus as Son of God. In fact, God’s transcendence means that all our language is inadequate to describe His being.

Human beings are finite while God is infinite. Similarly human language is useful and can be accurate for natural communication where we can explain the natural unknown with other natural things which we do know. But what figure of speech in natural language shall we use to try to explain the infinite? If we think we can do it fully with our natural language and concepts, we are bringing God down to our level, trying to explain the supernatural in terms of the natural. This method can, at best, give us some limited information, a vague approximation.

In particular, a human father lives for years before His first son is born. However, the Bible is very clear that the Son of God was *with* His Father from the beginning of all beginnings, from everlasting. Additionally, a human father usually takes precedence over the son when it comes to position and honour. In the case of the heavenly Father and the Son of God, both are to be honoured equally.⁵⁸ Equal honour implies equality in both being and activity.

⁵⁵ Matt 9:15 – “wedding guests.”

⁵⁶ Luke 10:5 – “a peaceful man.”

⁵⁷ Luke 16:8 – “people of this world” and “people of the light.”

⁵⁸ John 5:23 “that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.”

The Father/Son designation is most like the natural meanings of the terms during the incarnation and subsequently. Jesus became a natural Son of Man and this related to His full identification as a human being. At this time He also began to be called "Son of God" by virtue of His full deity but this term had been true proleptically since the counsels in eternity past that anointed Him as earth's Creator and as the visible face of Yahweh on earth and Saviour. These uses are wholly consistent with other Bible uses of the terms "son," "begotten," "only begotten," "Father," etc.

When you look at the Bible, the closest and most intimate relationship between human males is the relationship between adult father and adult son. (We could also probably add situations like that with Samuel and Eli.) In this case the son will defer to father as a cultural courtesy and as obedience to the commandment of God but in other respects the relationship is one of equality. In fact, while the father is responsible for the son in his childhood, the position is reversed in the father's old age. So there is a mutual dependency. It seems quite appropriate for the relationship between supernatural Heavenly Father and Son of God to be expressed in these natural terms without necessarily implying either that One pre-exists the Other or that the very deity of One is dependent on inheritance from the Other. It is grossly improper to expect that when the words "Father" and "Son" refer to God-figures that we should take all that is implied in a creature setting to apply also in the supernatural.

Biblical Use of "Son of God"

In Luke's genealogy of Jesus, Adam is said to be "the son of God." Throughout the Bible there are numerous references to "sons of God" and "child of God" and "children of God." All of these verses speak of human beings or other cre-

ated beings. Max Hatton quotes George Eldon Ladd⁵⁹, who divides the different ways these terms are used in the Bible into four classes.

1. The nativistic sense – “Sons” owe their existence to God’s creative acts. (Luke 3:38; Ex 4:22,23)
2. The moral-religious sense – Of a special, loving relationship with God (John 1:12; Matt 5:45; 1 John 3:1; Rom 4:18,19; Gal 3:26, 4:5)
3. The messianic sense – The Davidic king is designated the son of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps2:6,7:89:26,27)
4. The theological sense – Jesus is the unique Son of God. (Luke 1:35; Heb 4:14)

The term “the Son of God” appears only in the New Testament where it is reserved for Jesus, with the single exception of Luke’s genealogy.⁶⁰ Several times He is called, “the only begotten Son.”⁶¹ How should we interpret these names or titles?

Son of God and Son of Man

In the cultural setting of the Bible, names and titles were closely associated with the perception of their owners’ life purpose and character. This was certainly true of Jesus Christ. When Gabriel told Mary she was to bear a son he also told her, “You shall call His name Jesus.” When the angel informed Joseph, he gave the reason for this name -- “You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their

⁵⁹ Max Hatton, *Understanding the Trinity*, Autumn House, Alma Park, Grantham, Lincons. England, p33,34, with minor adaptation.

⁶⁰ Luke 3:38

⁶¹ John 1:18; 3:16,18; Heb 11:17; 1 John 4:9

sins.”⁶² Gabriel also informed Mary, “That Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”⁶³ Matthew tells us, “All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet (Isa 7:14) saying, ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’”⁶⁴

There is much food for thought in these passages. Jesus was given His name by command of God. Mary was also told that He would be called, “the Son of God.” Matthew identifies Him with the name Immanuel from the gospel prophet. The reasons are also given. “Jesus” spoke of His mission – to save His people from their sins. “The Son of God” resulted, at least partly, from the role of the Holy Spirit of God in His conception. “Immanuel” affirmed that He was very God Himself with us. As John states in his first epistle, “... that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us.”⁶⁵

Mark also identified Jesus as the subject of his Gospel. “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”⁶⁶ He quoted the prophets, “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare your way before You.” “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight’”⁶⁷ In these verses, Mark introduced the name “Christ” which means “the Anointed One.” He confirmed the name. “the Son of God” and spoke of this name as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that Jesus’ way, the way of Yahweh, would be prepared and His paths be made straight by Jesus’ cousin, John Baptist. This

⁶² Matt 1:21

⁶³ Luke 1:35

⁶⁴ Matt 1:22

⁶⁵ 1 John 1:2

⁶⁶ Mark 1:1

⁶⁷ Mark 1:2,3 Verse 3 quotes Isaiah 40:3 where “LORD” is Yahweh.

was Mark's way of identifying Jesus with the LORD, Yahweh God of the Old Testament.

During Jesus' ministry, many others spoke of Him as the Son of God. From the announcement at His baptism, "This is my Beloved Son,"⁶⁸ to the similar proclamation at Jesus' transfiguration⁶⁹, God Himself acknowledged the title. In the wilderness temptations,⁷⁰ Satan tried to plant doubt in His mind that He was indeed the Son of God. His friends and associates called Him the Son of God.⁷¹ His enemies condemned Him for calling Himself the Son of God.⁷² Demons called Him by that name,⁷³ as well as unclean spirits,⁷⁴ and so did officials overseeing His crucifixion.⁷⁵

A look at the reaction of the priests and Pharisees to Jesus' bearing the name "Son of God" shows exactly what the name and title really meant in the religious vernacular of the day. In an exchange recorded in John 10, Jesus claimed first, "I and the Father are one,"⁷⁶ then, "I am God's Son,"⁷⁷ and, moments later, "The Father is in me and I am in the Father."⁷⁸ These are parallel claims but Jesus pointed out that the Jews accused Him of blasphemy very specifically because of His claim to be God's Son. The Jews were equally specific when they said, "For a good work we do not stone You, but

⁶⁸ Matt 3:17

⁶⁹ Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35

⁷⁰ Matt 4:3,5; Luke 4:3,9

⁷¹ Matt 14:3; Luke 22:70,71; John 1:34, 49;

⁷² John 10:35-39; 18:7

⁷³ Matt 8: ; Luke 4:41

⁷⁴ Mark 3:11

⁷⁵ Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39

⁷⁶ John 10:30

⁷⁷ John 10:36 i.e. "I am the Son of God"

⁷⁸ John 10:38

for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.”

Two things here need special notice. Jesus’ claim to be God’s Son or the Son of God, was interpreted to be a claim to be God Himself and thus blasphemy. Their justification was no doubt the command in Leviticus 24:16.

“And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death.”

The second point is obvious when you consider the scriptural reason for the Jew’s concern. Blasphemy is the crime of assuming to oneself the rights or qualities of God. Leviticus specifically mentions the name of the LORD or Yahweh. So the Jews claimed that using the name “Son of God” was a claim to be Yahweh, the covenant keeping God of Israel.

The Jews raised this very point again as Jesus stood accused before Pilate: “We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.”⁷⁹

When Jesus kept silence before Caiaphas, the high priest said to Him.

“I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!”

Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at

⁷⁹ John 19:7

the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.⁸⁰

Under oath, Jesus admitted that He was indeed “the Christ, the Son of God.”

Why would the High Priest frame the question in the way that he did? The answer may surprise us. There was a general expectation amongst the religious teachers of the day and those under their influence that the Anointed One to come would be the divine Son of God and not a man. They could have accepted a Messiah who met their expectations of how God should look and act. But they rejected Jesus. He appeared to be a mere man, a suffering servant. When He acknowledged that He was indeed the divine anointed One in spite of His appearance, it was interpreted as a matter of blasphemy.

When Jesus had multiplied the food supply, when He had raised the dead, at first the crowds had flocked to Him. These were ideal qualities for a warrior king who could lead them to cast off the Roman yoke. They were about to take Him by force to make Him king.⁸¹ But when He preached the bread of life sermon the next day⁸² calling them into account to do all the will of God as He did, “many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.”⁸³ They were so focused on the fact that He was the son of Joseph, whose father and mother they knew,⁸⁴ that they would not believe He had come down from heaven.

⁸⁰ Matthew 26:64

⁸¹ John 6:15

⁸² John 6:22-65

⁸³ John 6:66

⁸⁴ John 6:42

When Nathanael acknowledged Jesus' mission he exclaimed, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"⁸⁵ He had not yet been trained by Jesus at the time. This exclamation confirmed the fact that Nathanael was among those who believed that the promised Messiah, to become King of Israel, was to be the divine Son of God. Jesus' visionary greeting and the exchange between them when they first met had convinced Nathanael that there was more to Jesus than a mere man.

It is also very likely that Saul, before he became Paul, could not accept that "the promised Messiah, the Creator of all worlds, the Giver of all blessings would appear on earth as a mere man."⁸⁶ He had witnessed Stephen's martyrdom, hearing his testimony, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"⁸⁷ He was trembling and astonished when the light shone around him from heaven and the voice of the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."⁸⁸ With this revelation that the man Jesus was really His divine Lord, Paul's belief and life were turned upside down.

We conclude therefore that the name or title "Son of God" as it applied to Jesus Christ supports other New Testament teaching that He was Immanuel, God with us; that He was the eternal Word who was not only with God from the beginning, but was Himself God; that in Him all the fullness of Godhead dwelt in bodily form. Its acceptance by Jesus confirmed what had only occasionally been directly hinted at in

⁸⁵ John 1:49

⁸⁶ Ellen G. White, *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, pp 256,257 ([http://egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm](http://egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates$fn=default.htm))

⁸⁷ Acts 7:56

⁸⁸ Acts 9:1-8 has the story. See also Acts 26.

the Old Testament – that the One God of Israel was indeed a united fellowship, a unity and not merely a unit.⁸⁹ New Testament writers and believers seemed to be very comfortable with this name, fully understanding its meaning in the religious vernacular of the day.

Biblical Use of “Son of Man”

The term “son of man” appears many times in the Bible when it obviously does not apply to Jesus Christ. Yet it appears that to Jesus Himself it was a favourite title or name. It is significant that when Jesus admitted to being the Son of God before the High Priest that He added prophetically, “hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”

It seems most likely that Jesus associated the name Son of Man with the apocalyptic Son of Man of Daniel 7.

... behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.

Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the *one* which shall not be destroyed.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ E.g. Gen 31:11-13 Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, ‘Jacob.’ And I said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ... I *am* the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar *and* where you made a vow to Me.” The angel or messenger of God calls Himself “God of Bethel.”

See also Gen 48:15,16; Gen 32:30; Hos 12:3-5 etc. We acknowledge that it is far easier to see the connection with the New Testament record available than it would be before Jesus lived.

⁹⁰ Dan 7:13,14

Jesus often associated the name Son of Man with the final restoration of the rule of God in the eschatological kingdom of God.⁹¹ He asserted that the Son of Man had the power to forgive sins,⁹² which is an exclusive right of God. The Son of Man is LORD even of the Sabbath.⁹³ The Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost.⁹⁴ The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.⁹⁵ The Son of Man gives everlasting life.⁹⁶

When Jesus asked, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”⁹⁷ Jesus immediately commended Peter and then taught a great truth – the Father in heaven is the only One who can plant this truth in the heart. Flesh and blood cannot discover this truth without divine revelation.

From this and other similar evidence we conclude that the title Son of Man encompassed far more than the fact that Jesus was fully human. While “Son of God” reveals something of the veil of humanity that covered Christ’s divinity, “Son of Man” reveals something of the divinity masked by the humanity. It particularly inspires hope that the Man of sorrows will finally return victoriously, bringing all sorrow to an end as He reigns triumphantly.

⁹¹ E.g. Matt 13:41; 16:27,28; 19:28; 24:27,30,37,39; 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; Luke 17:24 and many others

⁹² Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24

⁹³ Matt 12:8; Mk 2:28

⁹⁴ Matt 18:11; Lk 19:10

⁹⁵ Mark 10:45

⁹⁶ Jn 6:27

⁹⁷ Matt 16:13,16

Biblical Use of “Father” for God

There are very sparse allusions to God as “Father” in the Old Testament. However, after Jesus is born the flood-gates of allusion are opened and the New Testament abounds with references to “God the Father,” “our Father,” “My Father,” “His Father,” and other similar expressions. God had become manifest in the flesh of Jesus Christ. For the first time God clearly revealed to humans that He was more than one person as well as One God. Man’s experience of God had changed.

In order to preserve man’s understanding of God as essential unity while part of God could be seen and heard and handled God chose to represent their relationship as the closest human male bond, that of Father and Son. This would also model the ideal bond that man was created to enjoy with God. God’s plan, formulated before the world began, was firmly established. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.⁹⁸

We should not think that the Bible always refers to the first person of the Godhead when it uses the term “Father” in relation to God. Isaiah prophesied of Jesus Christ,

For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁹⁹

The long desired Child, the Son to be given, the seed of the woman in whom the whole world would be blessed, was to be named “Everlasting Father.” The essential unity of the

⁹⁸ 2 Cor 5:19

⁹⁹ Isa 9:6

Godhead was displayed not only in essence and character but also in title. So we have as much right to call Jesus Christ our Father as any other member of Godhead.

This is one case in particular where we need to remember that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three separate persons, each an independent God in Himself. We must always recognize that there is only one God, a unity or communion or fellowship of three divine persons. It is quite proper to use the term “Father” when we mean the unity of Godhead and not merely when we refer to the One Being we usually call God the Father.

There are many places in the Bible where we may question whether all members of Godhead are in view or whether one or other individual member of the trio is the focus when the terms “God” or “Father” are used. Of course, in these cases, it is often our preconception or prejudice rather than context or objective judgment that guides our interpretation.

When we pray, “Our Father in heaven,” we do not necessarily address only the first Person of the Godhead – it depends on the way we are thinking at the time. . Each person of Godhead is “Our Father in heaven,” for they are all unified as One God. They may be distinguished one from another but not separated.

We find it easy to forget how simplistic were our childhood concepts of God and how much our understanding of His person has grown over the years. In our daily relationship with God we will not often contemplate His essential nature. He has not provided us with any single passage that defines the essence of His nature, However, as we are involved in communion with Him and in forming a deep personal relationship with Him we will have serendipity moments when

God will reveal as much of Himself as it is good for us to know.

Biblical Use of “God”

The term “god” is widely used in the Bible in many places where it does not refer to the One and only true God. The most significant of these occurrences refer to false gods who are worshipped by deluded people. They stand in stark contrast to the Creator God. “For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.”¹⁰⁰

Satan himself is called the god of this world¹⁰¹ – Satan, whose original self ambition was to be like God;¹⁰² whose seduction of Eve infected her and all her descendants with the desire to be like God;¹⁰³ who still opposes and exalts himself above everything that is called God or is worshipped.¹⁰⁴

Sometimes the Bible refers to men as gods without implying they are divine, gods to be worshipped and served.¹⁰⁵

Excluding all these references to gods who are not truly divine beings, what does the Bible mean when it uses the term “God?” Specifically, does the term always refer solely to the one, singular personal God or can it refer to one or other of different persons in a united communion of divine beings or to the Godhead itself, collectively?

Let’s take some examples.

1. John opens his gospel with the assertion, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and

¹⁰⁰ Ps 96:5

¹⁰¹ 2 Cor 4:4

¹⁰² Isa 14:14

¹⁰³ Gen 3:5

¹⁰⁴ 2 Thess 2:4

¹⁰⁵ eg Ps 82:6; John 10:34,35

the Word was God.”¹⁰⁶ This statement is so clear that the Word was God that it is decisive providing the translation conveys the true sense of the original Greek. So there are those who dispute the translation, “... the Word was God.” They point to the fact that the Greek text has no definite article with “God” in this clause and so it should be rendered, “... the Word was a god.”

Leaving aside the grammar for the present, we ask how reasonable is this meaning? What kind of being is meant? It certainly does not refer to a false god! It is an eternal being for it was indisputably “with God” in the beginning. The Word was obviously not flesh from the beginning because verse 14 asserts, “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” It possessed “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹⁰⁷

Some draw on the wording of Isaiah 9:6 to say that the Word is a “Mighty God” rather than Almighty God. However, that explanation leaves us with a hierarchy of two Gods much like the polytheistic heathen deities. It certainly contradicts the fact that the true God is one God. We conclude that the rendering “... the Word was a God” is not supported by either the immediate context or the wider context of Scripture.

Additionally, the strongest grammatical case can be made that “... the Word was God,” conveys the true meaning of what John wrote. “The Word” and “God” (without the definite article) are subject and predicate of the past tense of the verb “to be.” If both subject and predicate contained the definite article the meaning would be that the subject and predicate were interchangeable. So we would have “the Word was God” being exactly equivalent with “God was the Word.” This

¹⁰⁶ John 1:1

¹⁰⁷ John 1:14

is simply not so. When subject and predicate both have the definite article and are connected by the verb “to be,” one is a definition for the other.

When the predicate of the verb “to be” has no definite article, the meaning is that the subject possesses all the qualities of the predicate. Thus an unwieldy but correct translation could be, “The Word was everything that God was,” or, “The Word possessed all the qualities that make God to be God.”

John is not hesitant to use the definite article attached to *theos* (the Greek word for God) because he reports Thomas’ worshipful response to Jesus, “My Lord and my God,”¹⁰⁸ when he was convinced Jesus was indeed resurrected.

2. Hebrews 1 speaks of the appointment of the Son of God as the heir of all things. It speaks of His responsibilities as Creator and Sustainer, His mirroring all the glory and power of divinity. It speaks of how He purged our sins and was restored to His position in heaven.

For to which of the angels did He ever say:

“ You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You”?

And again:

“I will be to Him a Father,
And He shall be to Me a Son”?

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

“Let all the angels of God worship Him.”

¹⁰⁸ John 20:28 The Greek has ο κυριος μου και ο θεος μου, “the Lord of me and the God of me.”

And of the angels He says:
“Who makes His angels spirits
And His ministers a flame of fire.”¹⁰⁹

The Son of God is addressed directly in verse 8 with this assertion from Psalm 45: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.” The very next passage quoted is from Psalm 102:

You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.
They will perish, but You remain;
And they will all grow old like a garment;
Like a cloak You will fold them up,
And they will be changed.
But You are the same,
And Your years will not fail.¹¹⁰

We thus see that Hebrews also applies the word “God” and “Lord” to Jesus Christ. We dare not suggest that this is speaking of Jesus as a mere man or as a false god.

There seems to be no telling reason in fact that we should not interpret the first word of the chapter to speak of Godhead rather than God the Father. The Son of God is as much the Son of Godhead as He is Son of the Father alone.

3. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy that God appeared in a body so that was certainly not the One we normally think of as the Father.

Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:
God appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,

¹⁰⁹ Heb 1:5-7

¹¹⁰ Heb 1:10-12

was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.¹¹¹

There is much more evidence, but what has been presented supports the fact that the word “God” in the Bible does not always refer to God the Father. It often refers to the Son of God and even to the Godhead in unity. And this is with due recognition that there are many occasions when the word “god” refers to false gods, to men or to Satan Himself.

¹¹¹ 1 Tim 3:16

Togetherness

And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. [John 17:5](#)

The Gospel of John begins with the assertion, “In the beginning ... the Word was with God.” Whatever John says subsequently about the divine nature of the Word, it is clear that “God” was not ever alone as a single divine Being. John distinguishes here between two great “beings” who have always existed together. Whatever beginning we may contemplate, John asserts that God and the Word were already there, together.

John re-emphasizes this concept of togetherness in the introduction to his first epistle – “That which was from the beginning, ... that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us” John tells us “that eternal life” is no mere abstract concept. It is personified in the One who became manifest, who came to be seen, looked upon and handled even though previously He was with the Father from the very beginning. John asserts further that the gospel proclamation is to draw us into this “fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

It is clear that John considers the eternal fellowship of the Father with His Son, Jesus Christ to be the model also for the fellowship of God with all created beings. The very proclamation of the gospel depends on this union. Further, being drawn into this fellowship and partaking in it is the unique source of fullness of joy.

From his place as the disciple whom Jesus loved, John continually uplifts both the Father and Jesus Christ as the

source of eternal life. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You ... and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”¹¹² He demonstrates that the source of eternal life is only where there is loving fellowship between God the Father and Jesus Christ. It is available only to those who believe in Him/Them and who proclaim and promote His/Their kingdom.

Similarly, when brotherly love flourishes between people, it is only ever because people are connected with its source – the loving fellowship that exists between God and the Word, Jesus Christ. Eternal life would be a burden without this loving kindness between all who live eternally.

The Son of God and Eternal Life

One of the most important texts brought against the concept of trinity is John 17:3. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” The verse is interpreted to speak of the Father as “the only true God,” excluding Jesus from being truly God. It is said also to imply the Father’s greater authority as One who “sent” the Son to do His bidding. In isolation from its immediate context and without regards for all that the incarnation means, this seems to be a strong case.

This intercessory prayer has to do with preparation for the closure of Jesus’ incarnate mission. This means that we must consider the special things that applied to the nature of Jesus Christ during that time. The New Testament briefly informs us in several places of the significant changes that the incarnation involved. In this very chapter, Jesus asserts that He had glory with the Father before the world was. Notice the

¹¹² John 17:3 We will return to the phrase, “the only true God.”

language of togetherness that applies to shared time before the incarnation.

“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”¹¹³ The last part of this sentence has Jesus proclaiming His pre-existence with the Father before this world was created. He was “with You.” It is significant also that Jesus prays that the Father should glorify Him “together with” His Father.

Up to the time that iniquity was found in Lucifer, he was nearest to God of all creation. Leader of the heavenly host, perfect in his ways, full of beauty, He allowed his splendour to corrupt him. His desire for self exaltation was manifest in a desire to ascend above the clouds and to be like the Most High.¹¹⁴ He tempted Eve with the same selfish ambition – “you shall be like God, knowing good and evil.”¹¹⁵ Paul speaks of the same burning ambition inspired by Satan in “... the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”¹¹⁶

If Jesus were not God, His prayer here in John 17 expresses the same corrupted Satanic ambition to be like the Most High. His request to be glorified with the same glory that the Father possesses would be presumption unless He is requesting to be restored to His former glory. Thus we can see that His statement, “The Father is greater than I,” can only result from His speaking as the human Jesus. He gives due respect to the divine Father. As well, there is doubtless an el-

¹¹³ John 17:5

¹¹⁴ Isa 14:14

¹¹⁵ Gen 3:5

¹¹⁶ 2 Thess 2:3,4

ement of His promoting the interests of the Other ahead of His own – the principle of selfless esteem for others.

The same principles motivate Jesus' expression, "... Whom You have sent," Because He is always manifest only as a man to His audience, He makes the same claim as the prophets and other messengers of God. He asserts that His authority for all His mission is that He has been sent from God. This is language His hearers could understand. Whenever He was more direct with them about being the Son of God (with all that meant in the common vernacular), they took up stones to stone Him. He wanted to influence them, not to alienate them. The pity is that they had killed the prophets and stoned those sent to them by God. They were so blinded to their own condition that it took the parable of the wicked vinedressers to convince them He was speaking of them,¹¹⁷ By then it didn't matter to them that He was sent from God. They killed Him anyway.

My Father is Greater Than I

Another important text brought against the concept of trinity is John 14:28 as Jesus prepares His disciples for His departure.¹¹⁸ Jesus says, "I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I." This is taken to be an unqualified declaration that Jesus is less than God in His essential being. It is said to prove either that He was no God at all or that His divinity was subordinate to that of His Father. Of course, when taken in context, it does neither.

Whenever we interpret things Jesus said while on this earth we must always remember that His hearers heard Him

¹¹⁷ Matt 21:33

¹¹⁸ See the next chapter where this discourse with His disciples is covered in more depth.

as if He were only a man. His divinity was not on show. As a man He had no form nor comeliness, no special beauty to draw people to Him.¹¹⁹ However, He was the exemplary and representative man and His attitude of deference to God was an example for people to follow. Nevertheless, His message was from God Himself.¹²⁰

Consider the implications of these verses (from the same chapter) on the meaning of verse 28”

- “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.” (v7) He could say this because He was God manifest in human flesh.
- “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” (v9) Jesus spoke here of seeing with deep understanding in the way Peter saw when he proclaimed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
- “I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.” (vv 10, 11, 20) The first two of these quoted verses refer to the intimate communion of Father and Son while the last includes the disciples. This is exactly as John has it in the first few verses of his first epistle. The eternal communion or fellowship between Father and Son was to be extended to all through proclamation by these disciples.
- “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” (v23) Is it only the Father who responds with love? Will Jesus not love the one who loves Him simply because it does not specifically mention Him? It would seem rather that here is another example of the intimate communion or fellowship be-

¹¹⁹ Isa 53:2

¹²⁰ John 14:10,11,31

tween Father and Son as the source or spring of human/divine love and communion.

Jesus had taught earlier that His Father was greater than all and had then said immediately, “I and my Father are One.”¹²¹ In spite of the fact that “my Father” is the invisible God; in spite of the fact that I am at present a human being like you so He is greater than I; in spite of the fact that I will soon be suspended on the cross bearing the curse of God, abandoned by men, forsaken by my Father – in spite of all these things, if you have seen me you have seen the Father; if you have known me, you know the Father, because I and my Father are one.

We need to determine what is the basis for comparison in any comparative declaration. The context to Jesus’ statement, “The Father is greater than I,” shows He is not dealing with permanent ontological differences. He is speaking in His human capacity and of relational differences. At that time and in that place, Jesus was saying that His disciples trusted God as their Creator and Sustainer, though He was unseen. God was all powerful and could be trusted to fulfil His promises. Soon their Lord would be invisible also. His disciples could then have the same confidence in Him as they now had in their invisible God because He and His Father were One.

Whenever we find a Bible passage that compares Father God and the Son of God in some way, it is most important that we clearly determine whether it is speaking of matters of ontology or of relationships. If there is an ontological element to the comparison, we must determine further whether the passage is comparing the human Jesus during His incarnation or the glorified Jesus. And finally we must remember that the words, “God” and “Father” can sometimes

¹²¹ John 10:29,30

refer to an individual person of the Godhead and sometimes to the unity of their communion. We must determine carefully what is really meant of these possibilities before we are satisfied we understand the passage.

Family Resemblances

As well as aspects of the communion between the Father and the Son of God mentioned earlier, the Bible identifies many shared characteristics. In their work, *Putting Jesus in His Place*,¹²² Bowman and Komoszewski group all the Biblical claims relating to Jesus' divinity under the acronym H A N D S. Using about fifty pages for each, the book shows how Jesus shares the Honours, the Attributes, the Names, the Deeds and the Seat of God. The authors sum up, "Any one of these five lines of evidence would be good support for belief in the deity of Christ. All five lines of evidence, considered together, prove beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus Christ is God."¹²³

These shared characteristics go beyond mere family resemblances and distinguish the Father and the Son as equal in every aspect of their being. Their capacities and authority and will are equivalent and united even though their persons may be differentiated.

Some opponents of trinity accept the full deity of Jesus Christ, as divinity bestowed on the Son by the Father. Some are even prepared to acknowledge that this means that there are two Gods, One Almighty God, the Other merely Mighty God. By some smoke and mirror reasoning they cannot see

¹²² Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, "Putting Jesus in His Place - The Case for the Deity of Christ," Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids Mich., 2007

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p274

that this is polytheism. Heathen deities were simply multiple gods in an hierarchical structure with some greater or more dominant than others. Our God is not like that.

It does not matter that one of the two Gods is Almighty God; this is still polytheism, unless the two are united in some sort of arrangement as one God. Having an Almighty God and a Mighty God defies the Biblical concept that the God of Christians is only one God just as it was in Old Testament times.

How the Bible Reveals God

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds. Hebrews 1:1,2.

God Reveals Himself

We are introduced to God in the Bible with these words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” What is revealed about God does not come from some theoretical exposition of His being. It comes from stories about how He has acted in relationships with people and their environment. Occasionally we may be told, “God is like this ... ,” but usually the message is, “This is how God acted when ...” So the first passage of the scriptures uses the name “God” and relates the story of creation and subsequent rest.¹²⁴

The Bible does not inform us how long was the time between the creation of Adam and Eve and their fall. We are left with the impression that it was a short interval. An immediate effect of the fall was that Adam and Eve separated themselves from contact with the “LORD God,” hiding in embarrassment as they realized their nakedness. This is the first stage of alienation from God that Paul mentions – “although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Gen 1:1 – 2:2

¹²⁵ Rom 1:21

There was no retreating to their earlier position of righteous innocence. They had surrendered their dominion to Satan and he exulted that he had wrested something precious to God away from Him. The only hope for mankind was that God should reconcile man to Himself, redeem man from slavery to Satan, forgive his trespass, justify him before the broken law. That is exactly what the Bible says God set out to do. Indeed, the story of God's involvement continues. He immediately seeks out the guilty pair and reveals something of His plan to crush Satan's dominion at its head while bruising the heel of the seed of the woman.

We need to understand clearly that man is incapable of knowing God or even knowing about God or discovering God unless God initiates the contact. The gods that men have imagined or created for themselves all fall far short of the Creator God who reveals Himself in the pages of the Bible. Human languages do not have special vocabulary to describe God as He really is. We must rely on common words and common grammar to point us to a limited understanding of issues that are far too big for our intellects to invent or even grasp completely.

Because God transcends human intellect to such an extent, human language has no words to describe Him directly. At best we can use figures of speech, particularly simile, metaphor and analogy. So we depend on imprecise language to convey descriptive knowledge of the divine. Therefore we must hear and interpret the stories of the Bible with a mental ear tuned to the guiding voice of Holy Spirit to lead us ever closer to the truth.

Immediately following man's rebellion, God began to reveal some of the lasting consequences that will result from Adam's act of rebellion that separated him from God. As well as personal consequences for Adam and Eve and their de-

scendants, there would be environmental consequences for the earth and its vegetation. So God is revealed as One who knows the future.

In these few chapters that outline the stories of creation and the fall we see that the Bible also reveals a great deal about God. First, God has existed as God from eternity past, “in the beginning.” God is the prime source of all else. He is revealed as Creator of heavens and earth and all things on and under the earth and sea. Thus any claim that any part of this creation should be worshipped as supreme being or god is obviously extremely foolish. To worship sun or moon or stars, to worship as a god anything God has created or anything man has formed with his hands is treason against the true God.

Subterfuge and Chicanery

It has been well said, “If God seems far away, guess who moved?” These early chapters of the Bible reveal that man chose to separate himself from God and alienated Himself from his Creator when he sinned. The beguiling serpent had claimed that to eat the forbidden fruit would bring a whole new and desirable level of existence. If we examine the serpent’s claims we discover three lies which all denigrate the God who is Creator and Sustainer of all creation.

We see that the Bible reveals a cosmic conflict between invisible supernatural forces for the hearts and minds of all mankind. While the Bible reveals as much about God as it is necessary for humanity to know, it also warns of a deliberate smear campaign by Satan and his hosts to undermine the truth about God and His character. He deceived the trusting Eve with deliberate misinformation. By word and action Eve was led to see the forbidden fruit as something that was good for food, pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom.

By delaying her gratification and heeding the revealed word of God, Eve could have preserved her innocence and avoided the terrible consequences of disobeying what God had said.

The fundamental underpinnings of the serpent's three lies are still alive and well here in the twenty-first century. "You will not surely die," claims that life is possible quite independent from God's being involved; God is not necessary to sustain life. "You will be as gods," suggests that people do not need personal guidance and direction from an external God. It asserts that each of us has the capacity within to know what is best the course of action personally and for others. We need no divine guidance to judge what is best for us and our society. "Knowing good and evil," speaks of being able to discern good from evil, right from wrong, without reference to external standards.

The significance of these matters to our case is that Satan wants to destroy God's influence in our lives. He will misrepresent God's character and His will and His purposes, to keep us blinded to our true condition. He desires we shall not see our enslavement to his own will and ways.

God has provided the only reliable guide to a true knowledge of Himself and His saving activity in the Bible. This book contains the only sure revelation of our own true condition and of the God who alone can cure it.

... the Holy Scriptures, ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ 2 Tim 3:15-17

We should trust only the Bible as the true revelation of the person of God and His character and His great love. It is only this love that leads Him to do all that is possible to provide a way to escape from being subject to Satan and his deception.

Revelation Progressive and Cumulative

People often excuse their scepticism about God because there is nowhere in the Bible that contains encompassing biographical notes of its ultimate author in a single easily accessible place. Even Moses, who probably had more contact with God than anyone else who has ever lived, once prayed to Him, “Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight.”¹²⁷ Moses would meet with God in his special tent, pitched outside the camp, far from the camp. There “the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”¹²⁸

In this special “tabernacle of meeting,” Moses once said, “Please, show me Your glory.”¹²⁹ God’s reply reveals the reasons He cannot reveal all of Himself to us who are still sinners. He said,

“I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” And the LORD said, “Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes

¹²⁷ Ex 33:13

¹²⁸ Based on Ex 33:7-11

¹²⁹ Ex 33:18

by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.”¹³⁰

Even though Moses spoke face to face with God, to see the LORD’s face in all its glory would have destroyed him. So it is for our protection that God does not confront us with the “all at once” that we sometimes fondly desire. He gives us sufficient revelation of Himself to satisfy our real needs. As we accept what He reveals and obediently follow where He leads, He reveals still more of Himself.

Isaiah shows us that to see the LORD’s glory is to become exceedingly conscious of our own sinfulness and to have an overwhelming desire to obey the LORD’s will.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said:

“ Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory!”

And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

So I said:

“ Woe is me, for I am undone!
Because I *am* a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ Ex 33:19-23

¹³¹ Isa 6:1-5

God's self revelation is shown here to be sufficient to meet our current needs. It depends upon our willingness to obey His calling. While we are willing to follow His directions, He will always lead us into deeper knowledge of Him and fellowship with Him.

The history of God's dealing with people shows that He has progressively revealed more of Himself as there was need. He discloses His unfolding plan for mankind gradually. However, there is always sufficient divine guidance available to meet our current need. God makes no demand that cannot be met by what He has already provided.

Revealing God's Names

In the first chapters of the Bible we find three different names used for God. They are "God," "LORD God," and "LORD." In the story of Abraham and Melchizedek He is also called "God Most High."¹³² Hagar, fleeing from the wrath of Sarah, coined her own name for Him, reminding herself of His saving activity – "You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees."¹³³ The One who spoke to her is first referred to as "the Angel of the LORD,"¹³⁴ and then "LORD."¹³⁵

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.'¹³⁶ This passage introduces the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant. This promised that his descendants would be as numberless

¹³² Gen 14:18, 19, 20, 22

¹³³ Gen 16:13 Hebrew *El-roi*.

¹³⁴ Gen 16:7, 9, 10, 11

¹³⁵ Gen 16:13

¹³⁶ Gen 17:1,2

as the sands of the seashore and that all nations of earth would be blessed through him.

Generations of God's people had been subjected to slavery in Egypt that almost wiped out their attachment to Him. He finally "remembered them" and nurtured and empowered Moses as a leader to guide and deliver them. God revealed Himself to Moses at a burning bush and there He gave some very specific names for Himself.

God had often been called, "The God of Abraham," starting with Abraham's servant who was seeking a bride for Isaac.¹³⁷ As generation followed generation of these fathers of the covenant people of God, He was called "the God of the fathers," or "the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." It is very important to recognize that in Old Testament times, each of these names or titles referred to the same God and not a multitude of gods.

God Speaks His Name

"And the Angel of the LORD appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush *was* not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"

And he said, "Here I am."

Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground."

I *am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.⁷ And the LORD said: "I have

¹³⁷ Gen 24:12

surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey,¹³⁸

Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What *is* His name?’ what shall I say to them?”

And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations.’¹³⁹

The very ground where God appeared to Moses was said to be holy and God commanded Moses to act in reverence. Only one God spoke throughout this passage but He used several of the names by which He was known to the Old Testament people of God:

- “The Angel of the LORD” – the messenger of the LORD. The speaker is identified later in the passage as the LORD Himself. See below for LORD.
- “The God of your father” – “God” here is *elohim*, plural of *eloha*, which is the ordinary word for any god. In the plural, especially with the definite article it usually refers specifically to the supreme Creator God.¹⁴⁰
- “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” – “God” here is again *elohim*.

¹³⁸ Gen 3:2-8

¹³⁹ Ex 3:12-15

¹⁴⁰ Refer to Strong’s notes

- “The LORD” – the sacred name of God. In English translations of the Bible in this capitalized form, it stands for the four letter (tetragrammaton¹⁴¹) name of God that was too sacred to be pronounced. It is sometimes transliterated as YHWH or JHVH. These in turn are sometimes expanded to Yahweh or Jehovah.
- “God” – “God” here is again *elohim*.
- “I AM WHO I AM” – Literally, perhaps, “I shall become who I am becoming. It is an emphatic statement of unique self existence.
- “I AM” – the abbreviated form of I AM WHO I AM
- “The LORD God of your fathers” – a combination of “*elohim*” with the sacred name of God, YHWH. This is the same God who guided the fathers and whom they worshipped.

Each of these names has a special significance in the relationship between God and His people. However, there are many other names that are used by other writers in the Old Testament as they refer to the Supreme God, the Creator of heavens and the earth, the covenant keeping God who sustains His people with compassion and loving kindness. Here is a partial list:

- Adonai – Lord, Master.
- El Elyon – God Most High.
- El Olam – The Everlasting God.
- El Shaddai – LORD God Almighty.
- Elohim – God.
- Jehovah Jireh – The LORD Will Provide.

¹⁴¹ “Tetragrammaton” simply means “four letters.”

- Jehovah Mekoddishkem – The LORD Who Sanctifies You.
- Jehovah Nissi – The LORD My Banner.
- Jehovah Rapha – The LORD Who Heals.
- Jehovah Sabaoth – The LORD of Hosts.
- Jehovah Shalom – The LORD Is Peace.
- Jehovah Shammah – The LORD Is There.
- Jehovah Tsidkenu – The LORD Our Righteousness.
- Jehovah-Raah – The LORD My Shepherd.

The purpose of each of these names seems to be descriptive, so some aspect of God's activity or of His relationship with His people would be rehearsed each time the name was used. To the uninitiated it may seem that, with so many names for their God, Israel also had a panoply of gods like the surrounding nations. This was certainly not so.

The Shema

Just before the Israelites crossed the Jordan to possess the promised land, God called on all Israel to hear and perpetuate in their culture an emphatic declaration of monotheism.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You

shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.¹⁴²

In contrast to the nations they would dispossess in the land of promise who were polytheists, the Israelites were to remember perpetually the one God who had first created them and then delivered them from bondage. Christians have adopted this strong statement of monotheism as part of their heritage too. The fact that God's people have often faltered in their practice of this principle does not diminish it to the least degree as God's requirement.

The Shema asserts that the only proper response to knowing God as He is, is to love Him unreservedly. This will grow out of appreciation of His attributes, His steadfast love, His compassion, His covenant faithfulness. It will not be mere duty as was demanded from all worshippers of false gods however capricious or fickle their actions were seen to be.

Exclusive fidelity to God and God's unity are the two major concepts of the Shema. The first demands that no system of value--not just another religion but an ideology, art, success, or personal happiness--be allowed to replace God as the *ultimate* ground of meaning. God's unity, conversely, asserts that all experienced moments of beauty, good, love, and holiness are not in and of themselves; they are disparate and scattered signals of the presence of the one God.¹⁴³

Because Satan is so determined to undermine these principles, they should be recounted every day and displayed prominently to capture the attention.

¹⁴² Deut 6:4-9

¹⁴³ Alan Mintz, *The Shema*,

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Liturgy_and_Prayers/Sidur_Prayer_Book/Shema.shtml Alan Mintz is the Chana Kekst Professor of Hebrew Literature and chair of the Department of Hebrew Language at The Jewish Theological Seminary

The LORD is My Rock

In a song that Moses gave the people on the last day of his leadership he repeatedly refers to the LORD God as the Rock. The song recounts salient episodes from the exodus when God worked miraculously for His people and sometimes earned His censure.

For I proclaim the name of the LORD (Yahweh):
Ascribe greatness to our God.

He is the Rock, His work is perfect;
For all His ways *are* justice,
A God of truth and without injustice;
Righteous and upright *is* He.¹⁴⁴

“But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, You are obese! Then he forsook God who made him, And scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation.¹⁴⁵

Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, And have forgotten the God who fathered you.¹⁴⁶

How could one chase a thousand, And two put ten thousand to flight, Unless their Rock had sold them, And the LORD had surrendered them? ³¹ For their rock *is* not like our Rock, Even our enemies themselves *being* judges.¹⁴⁷

Other later writers picked up this same theme of the LORD (Yahweh) as the Rock and emphasized His regard as deliverer, the Rock of salvation.

¹⁴⁴ Deuteronomy 32:3,4

¹⁴⁵ Deuteronomy 32:15

¹⁴⁶ Deuteronomy 32:18

¹⁴⁷ Deuteronomy 32:30

And he said: "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;

"For who is God, except the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?

"The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let God be exalted, The Rock of my salvation!"¹⁴⁸

The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted."¹⁴⁹

When we come to the New Testament we find that Paul often uses Old Testament passages to support his case. When he writes to the Corinthians, he asks that they not follow the evil practices of the Jewish forefathers who lived during the exodus from Egypt.

"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert."¹⁵⁰

Paul makes it very clear that the Rock who was called LORD in these Old Testament passages is none other than Christ Himself. So we have direct New Testament evidence that the Jesus Christ who was born of Mary was called LORD (Yahweh) in the Old Testament, at least on some occasions.

God As Creator

From the very first words of Genesis God is presented as Creator in the Old Testament.

¹⁴⁸ 2 Samuel 22:2,32,47

¹⁴⁹ Psalm 18:46

¹⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:1-5

In Job, it is the LORD (Yahweh) who asks,

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements---surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”¹⁵¹

In Exodus it is also the LORD (Yahweh) who made heavens and earth and established the Sabbath to memorialize the fact of His creation.¹⁵² In Nehemiah, people of Israelite descent supported Ezra as they “read from the book of the LORD their God.” They were called to worship in these words:

“Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.”

“Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.”¹⁵³

The Psalms also contain many references to the LORD (Yahweh) as Creator:

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.
He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;
he put the deeps in storehouses.

“Let all the earth fear the LORD,
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
For he spoke, and it came to be;

¹⁵¹ Job 38:4

¹⁵² Exodus 20:8-11

¹⁵³ Nehemiah 9: 4,5

he commanded, and it stood forth.”¹⁵⁴

Here we notice that it was the word of the LORD that accomplished the works of creation by the breath of His mouth. We must keep these facts in mind when we come to the New Testament and its disclosures. Psalm 8 starts, “O LORD, our Lord” and adds another piece to the accumulating witness when it says,

“When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established;
what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?”¹⁵⁵

“O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures for ever.

...

to him who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
to him who spread out the earth upon the waters,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
to him who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures for ever; ...”¹⁵⁶

As we review these verses it is clear that they speak of the LORD, not merely as the architect who formulated the plans for creation but specifically, as the builder, the One who brought the plans to fruition.

¹⁵⁴ Psalm 33:6-9

¹⁵⁵ Ps 8:3

¹⁵⁶ Ps 136:1, 3-9

God As Unity

We have seen that the Old Testament records many names for the true God, the creator God. As God's people experienced His leading over the centuries and as new aspects of His person and character were revealed, these were memorialized in descriptive names. However, while the names multiplied, one concept stood unchanged – the God of Israel was one God. There were linguistic hints that God may be a unity of persons, but it is apparent that Israel passionately believed that their God was one, a unit.

From our perspective as heirs to the Old Testament but also to the New Testament, it is profitable to examine some of these hints that God may be a unity rather than a unit (as it were.)

By far the most common word translated as “God” is *elohim* which is the plural form of *eloha*. This word appears in the very first verse of the Bible and is abundant throughout the Old Testament. In the creation story, God speaks on occasion, referring to Himself using first person, plural pronouns. When He is about to create Adam, He says, “Let Us make man in Our image after Our likeness.”¹⁵⁷ After Adam's fall, “... the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil.”¹⁵⁸

Two more occurrences of somewhat similar grammar come from the story of Babel and the call of Isaiah. In the former, the LORD (Yahweh) sees the wickedness of those who build the tower designed to reach heaven, and says, “Come, let Us [plural pronoun] go down and there confuse [plural form] their language, so that they will not understand one

¹⁵⁷ Genesis 1:26

¹⁵⁸ Genesis 3:22

another's speech."¹⁵⁹ In the latter, following his vision of the LORD in His temple that leaves him feeling undone Isaiah "heard the voice of the Lord [Adonai] saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"¹⁶⁰

Inventive critics who know of the first Queen Elizabeth's "We are not amused," simply dismiss these as instances of the plural of majesty. They bring several verses from the Bible as evidence that the plural of majesty was used in the Bible.¹⁶¹ A very careful reading of each of these verses will show that they do not use the plural of majesty. In each instance, with the possible exception of Ezra, "we" is simply used inclusively in exactly the same way that we use it in every day conversation.

In the verse from Ezra, "the document you sent to us," was addressed to Artaxerxes so it is possible that it represents a use of the plural of majesty. It is much more probable that it represents the customary formal use of diplomatic language. Besides, it is centuries after Moses wrote and from an entirely different culture when the suzerain of the empire also spoke for the kings of the puppet states attached to the empire.

The Shema itself asserts, "The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" However the Hebrew word translated "One" here is not the word *yachid* that the Hebrews used to mean absolute oneness. Rather, the word is *echad*, which is used to convey the idea of oneness of a group. This is the word used to describe how "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one [*echad*] flesh."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Genesis 11:7

¹⁶⁰ Isaiah 6:8

¹⁶¹ Ezra 4:18; John 3:11; 2 Corinthians 10:7,8; Gal 1:8; 2 Chronicles 10:8,9 and 1 Kings 12:9

¹⁶² Genesis 2:24

The twelve spies that surveyed the land of promise, “came to the valley of Eshcol and from there cut down a branch with a single [*echad*] cluster of grapes.”¹⁶³ Other examples amongst numerous occurrences include these:

1. All the people answered with one[*echad*] voice ...¹⁶⁴
2. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness [*echad*] of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them.¹⁶⁵
3. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one [*echad*] people with you.¹⁶⁶
4. The whole [*echad*] assembly numbered 42,360,¹⁶⁷

We understand that God fearing people in Old Testament times clung to their belief in God as a unitary, indivisible figure in spite of these matters. There is no censure in this for God had not yet given His fullest revelation of Himself. “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”¹⁶⁸

It was not until New Testament times when Jesus came to minister that an additional part of the mystery of Godliness was revealed. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” It is only through the light shed by all the New Testament writers on the essential deity

¹⁶³ Numbers 13:2

¹⁶⁴ Exodus 24:3

¹⁶⁵ Jeremiah 32:38,39

¹⁶⁶ Genesis 34:16

¹⁶⁷ Ezra 2:64

¹⁶⁸ Deuteronomy 29:29

of Jesus Christ that the significance of this Old Testament witness becomes plain. While the principle of monotheism is preserved, God is shown to be a unity rather than a unit.

God Manifest in the Flesh

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God was manifested in the flesh**, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16

The Promised Messiah

We have considered some small part of God's staged self revelation in the Old Testament. All that was revealed there of His person and character was preparing for the greatest disclosure of Himself in the coming of Messiah.

When Adam and Eve first sinned, God already had a plan in place for their rescue from sin's consequences. Eve's "Seed" who would destroy the serpent and his works, would Himself be damaged (bruised) in the process. Each animal sacrificed at God's command pointed forward to the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. The ram caught in a thicket and sacrificed in place of Isaac typified the sacrifice that God would provide in Himself. Each new mother in Israel fondly hoped that her newborn son would be the promised Deliverer. Over the centuries, God sent prophets to keep hopes of the promised Deliverer alive amongst His people. He chastised them for their waywardness yet with loving kindness drew them back towards covenant faithfulness. As time progressed so knowledge of the Messiah accumulated when additional prophetic revelations were made.

Along with further news of His sacrifice there were proclamations of the establishment of His righteous kingdom. Isaiah could prophesy,

“For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of *His* government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”¹⁶⁹

The Psalmist could sing:

“Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
The nations *for* Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron;
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”¹⁷⁰

The prophet Daniel could write:

“... the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never
be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people;
it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it
shall stand forever.”¹⁷¹

“... behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,

¹⁶⁹ Isaia h 6:9,10

¹⁷⁰ Psalm 2:8,9

¹⁷¹ Dan 2:44

And His kingdom *the one*
Which shall not be destroyed.”¹⁷²

However, along with these forecasts of One who would appear as king and judge and Mighty God to set up a glorious, everlasting kingdom and rule, there was also much that presaged a suffering Messiah. Isaiah may well write also of the suffering servant.

“He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.
He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, *our faces from Him;*
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.”¹⁷³

The Psalmist can sing:

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My groaning?
O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;
And in the night season, and am not silent.
But I *am* a worm, and no man;
A reproach of men, and despised by the people.
All those who see Me ridicule Me;
They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying,*

¹⁷² Daniel 7:13,14

¹⁷³ Isa 53:2-5

“He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him;
Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!”¹⁷⁴

Daniel can prophesy, “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.”¹⁷⁵

From our perspective in the start of the twentyfirst century after Christ, it is easy enough to discern that some of these prophecies referred to Christ’s coming as Messiah while others point to His return in glory. It seems very likely that the two events blended into one from the perspective of their authors and their contemporaries and even to later readers. It was when God became manifest in the flesh of Jesus that the reality was revealed.

Despite the numerous Old Testament references to sacrifice and suffering, by the time Jesus was born, it was the prophecies of Messiah as divine Deliverer, King and Judge that occupied the attention of the religious leaders and teachers. They expected the Messiah to appear as God, the great Judge who would vindicate them as his people and destroy their enemies. At very least He would come with all the pomp and ceremony of an earthly sovereign returning victorious from battle. No wonder they rejected a simple, unpretentious carpenter who came with none of the trappings of royalty.

How prone we still are as God’s people to bask in the benefits God provides without recounting their terrible cost! Or to expect the crown without having to bear the cross.

God’s Ultimate Self Revelation

Just as the arrival of Jesus clarified the temporal prophetic elements of His two advents, so His presence and

¹⁷⁴ Psalm 22:1,2,6-8

¹⁷⁵ Dan 9:26

teaching clarified understanding of other Old Testament themes.

The apostle John records how the Word of Life (about whom they had only heard previously) came to be a tangible presence among them.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life — the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.”¹⁷⁶

He commences his gospel also speaking of the Word Who was with God, Who was God and Who became flesh.¹⁷⁷ He tells us simply that “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son [marginal reading – “only begotten God”] who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”¹⁷⁸

Having earlier met Satan’s temptation by quoting, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve,” Jesus readily accepted worship from Thomas¹⁷⁹ and from all the angels in heaven at the Father’s express command.¹⁸⁰ By doing this, He either acknowledged His right to receive worship as LORD [Yahweh] and God, or He is a blatant blasphemer.

As a human being, Jesus always deferred to His Father in His speech. However, He did proclaim, “I and my Father

¹⁷⁶ 1 John 1:1,2

¹⁷⁷ John 1:1,14

¹⁷⁸ John 1:18

¹⁷⁹ John 20”28

¹⁸⁰ Hebrews 1:6

are One.”¹⁸¹ He also did proclaim, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father. ... I am in the Father, and the Father in Me”¹⁸² He did assert, “...all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”¹⁸³

Unfolding Old Testament Truth

These assertions that Jesus was God and that He was God from the very beginning who later appeared in the flesh raise the issue of other Old Testament concepts of God that may be explained further in the person of Jesus Christ. Let us take two examples.

The first deals with the Creator God. The first verse in the Bible says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” and the record continues to show He created all that was in them and heavenly bodies as well. As we have seen. The word “God” is here translated from the plural, *Elohim*.

In Isaiah, we find additional facts revealed that still leave some clarification to be completed in the New Testament.

Thus says the LORD,
The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker.
I have made the earth,
And created man on it.
I—My hands—stretched out the heavens,
And all their host I have commanded...¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ John 10:30

¹⁸² John 14:9,10 This unity is the source of the unity that Jesus prayed for in all who believe on His name. (John 17:20) All other unity is derived from the Oneness of divine Father and Son.

¹⁸³ John 5:23

¹⁸⁴ Isaiah 45:11a, 12

Isaiah plainly says here that the LORD (Yahweh) did the hands-on work of creating the earth and man on it and stretched out the heavens and their host.

In the New Testament, there is distinctive testimony in many places that Jesus Christ did active work of creating. For example:

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”¹⁸⁵

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”¹⁸⁶

“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”¹⁸⁷

There is in these verses an unfolding of information about the Creator God. He is first introduced using a word of plural number. He is revealed as the LORD (Yahweh) who is said to do the active work of creating. And finally, the New Testament reveals that all things were created by Jesus the Anointed One (ie Christ or Messiah.) The later information does not contradict the earlier. Rather it complements and expands it, giving us a clearer view.

When we hold all these revelations together it is impossible to conclude (as those who oppose the concept of a triune Godhead do) that the supreme God (Yahweh, the Father) alone conceived the plans for creation which were then

¹⁸⁵ Hebrews 1:1,2

¹⁸⁶ John 1:1-3

¹⁸⁷ Colossians 1:16,17

put into action by a lesser God, Jesus Christ. It is also plain that the LORD (Yahweh) who made the earth and created man upon it at least includes Jesus Christ, who created all things by the word of His power. So the word LORD (Yahweh) refers to Jesus Christ at least on some occasions in the Old Testament.

The second example concerns another name of God which He Himself revealed to Moses. It has been noted already that God requested He should be known as “I AM THAT I AM” to the Israelites whom He was about to release from captivity. In its abbreviated form this name is simply, “I AM.” It’s meaning encompasses the self existence of the LORD God. Without doubt it is another name for Yahweh Himself.

Within the New Testament, Jesus used this name and applied it to Himself. He brought the wrath of the religious authorities of the day down on Himself by claiming, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” By saying this, Jesus invoked the name that the LORD (Yahweh) gave to Moses to identify Himself when He was about to deliver His people from Egypt. In the New Testament Jesus used merely the generalized sense of the “I AM,” applied as He was about to deliver the world from the stranglehold of sin. Other particularized instances appear when He used the following metaphors to describe His mission:

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.	John 14:6
I am the Door	John 10:7
I am the Bread of Life	John 6:15
I am the Good Shepherd	John 10:11
I am the Resurrection and the Life	John 11:25
I am the True Vine	John 15:1

The apostle John has Jesus making similar “I am” claims again in his apocalypse.

I am the Alpha and Omega	Revelation 1:8
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I am the First and the Last

Revelation 1:17

We should also consider the way God dwelt and communed with His people in the wilderness tabernacle and its following “permanent” replacements. The Epistle to the Hebrews and the book of Revelation both demonstrate aspects of the sanctuary structure and furniture and services that presage and inform us of the coming Messiah and His objectives.

As a small example: Jesus was prefigured as the Light of the world, the Bread of life, Sacrifice, Sinbearer, Lamb of God and High Priest. The whole sanctuary system portrayed reconciliation, forgiveness, redemption and justification, all by substitution. Additionally, all the altars and furniture were arranged so that, in plan view, they represented a cross!

Hymns, Doxologies and Benedictions

In the brief preceding outline we have noted some of the changes that the New Testament witness brought to the way God was perceived by the people. Very early in New Testament times the perception of God as a unit shifted to seeing Him as a unity of three present and active “persons.” One of the indicators that Jesus’ appearance as the Messiah and His teaching about His relationship had affected the people’s perceptions of God is early hymn fragments and doxologies and benedictions that seem to have been commonly accepted among the early Christians.

The epistle to the Philippians was written about thirty years after the crucifixion while Paul was “in bonds” in Rome.¹⁸⁸ Most commentators agree that Paul quotes the words of an early Christian hymn in chapter 2:5-12. We will examine this passage more extensively later. Notice however that it strongly emphasizes the equality of the pre-incarnate

¹⁸⁸ Phil 1:7-14

Son with the Father, the voluntary “emptying” of the Son and His subsequent restoration. Paul has set this hymn as a jewel into a three pronged mount formed by the communion of Love and Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁸⁹ This communion epitomises and exemplifies the principle of selfless esteem for others.

Paul could include this hymn fragment as he wrote under inspiration. However its use demonstrates that the concepts of Jesus as God that the hymn espouses were well established in the minds of believers and in their public worship well before Philippians was penned. It indicates that those who had observed Jesus’ life and listened to His teaching had evangelized their conviction that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. In the vernacular of the day that title referred to God Himself. So God was already widely accepted as a unity rather than merely as a unit well before Paul wrote to the Philippians.

Other early hymn fragments preserved in Paul’s writings (so it is believed) include the following from Colossians (57 AD earliest – 63 AD latest) and 1 Timothy (62 AD earliest – 67 AD latest):

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ See Philippians 2:1 and vv 2-4

¹⁹⁰ Colossians 1:15-20

“God^l was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.”¹⁹¹

The singing of Psalms and hymns is a very effective vehicle for fulfilling the advice of the Shema – “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up ... ” Singing psalms and hymns reinforces the messages that poets and musicians have combined to make repetitive rehearsal pleasing and memorable.

The following verse encapsulates the truth that God has given to men gifts to meet humans need. When these gifts are applied to the preservation of revealed truth, God’s church is blessed and strengthened.

For the common things of every day
God gave men speech in the common way.
For the deeper things men think and feel
God gave the poets words to reveal.
For the heights and depths no word can reach
God gave men music the soul’s own speech

Ralph P. Martin has assessed the use of Old Testament poetic passages in the New Testament as well as these new compositions. His work includes this observation:

“... these hymns seem—from all the evidence at our disposal—to have been created *de novo* as spontaneous creations of gifted, Spirit-filled members of the community (1 Cor. 14:15; Col. 3:16f.; Eph. 5:18-20), who may be further identified as ‘proph-

¹⁹¹ 1 Timothy 3:16

ets'. If this title is accurate, it suggests that their role was one of instruction and 'exhortation' (*paraklēsis*), according to 1 Corinthians 14:3. And their ministry was intended to 'build up' the congregations, and to do so in one specific regard, namely to ward off erroneous teaching by a positive statement, at services of worship, of how the faith was to be understood and applied with particular reference to Christ's redeeming mission."¹⁹²

How blessed is the Christian Church to possess such a resource as its great teaching hymns. The great musical themes elevate the soul to worshipful response to the messages conveyed by the lyrics. While we have lost the musical accompaniment to these New Testament fragments, the lyrics continue to inform and bless us.

Benedictions.

In the New Testament, benedictions are the blessing of God bestowed by apostles on their audience. These epistles were written to be read in a worship setting so benedictions continue the Old Testament practice of the priestly benediction on the congregation.¹⁹³ We select three examples from Paul's epistles.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."¹⁹⁴

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Ralph P. Martin, "Some Reflections on New Testament Hymns," Harold H. Rowdon, ed., *Christ the Lord. Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982. Hbk. p44

¹⁹³ See Numbers 6:24-26 for instance.

¹⁹⁴ Romans 15:13

“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you¹ what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.”¹⁹⁶

Immediately it is apparent that these apostolic benedictions invoke all three members of Godhead, though only the second example brings the three into one benediction. It seems strange that first generation Christian believers would accept this without query unless each member of Godhead had equal standing as God in their eyes. After all, there was considerable conflict over far less significant departures from Old Testament beliefs.

Consider for a moment the phrase “God and Saviour” in these two verses - “... looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great **God and Savior** Jesus Christ,”¹⁹⁷ and, “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our **God and Savior** Jesus Christ.”¹⁹⁸ The phrase is ambiguous in the English language. It could be referring to either one or two entities. However, the Greek grammar is unambiguous. The conjunction “and” in this particular construction indicates that both “God” and “Saviour” refer to exactly one and the same person.

The point is that both Paul and Peter could quite comfortably use the word “God” to refer to Jesus Christ. When they used the term “God” they were not necessarily referring to the Father alone. This is additional evidence that both Pe-

¹⁹⁵ 2 Corinthians 13:14

¹⁹⁶ Hebrews 13:20

¹⁹⁷ Titus 2:13

¹⁹⁸ 2 Peter 1:1

ter and Paul (as well as their readers and contemporaries) were comfortable with seeing God as unity rather than as a unit. It raises questions about the use of the word “God” in many other New Testament passages. Does “God” always speak of the Father exclusively or is it an inclusive term where any one of the members of Godhead is encompassed, or all?

There are good indications in the New Testament benedictions and doxologies that the term “God” often encompasses God as unity rather than as a unit.

Doxologies.

In Romans 9 Paul speaks of Israel’s rejection of Christ. He outlines several of the special blessings God granted them. He asserts that to them, “pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”¹⁹⁹ That sounds for all the world like a doxology praising Christ as being the eternally blessed God who is over all.

Again in Romans 11 Paul writes another obvious doxology.

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!
“*For who has known the mind of the LORD?*
Or who has become His counselor?!
“*Or who has first given to Him*
And it shall be repaid to him?!”

¹⁹⁹ Romans 9:4,5

“For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.”²⁰⁰

We are confident that this applies to Jesus Christ because it reflects Paul’s less formal expression in Colossians. “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.”²⁰¹

Paul’s charge to Timothy also contains a doxology where the most reasonable reading suggests that God is unity rather than a unit. It reflects a similar passage in the first chapter of the epistle.²⁰²

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.²⁰³

The same title. “King of kings and Lord of lords,” appears in two passages full of apocalyptic imagery in the book of Revelation. Both speak of the final destruction of sin and the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of

²⁰⁰ Romans 11:36

²⁰¹ Colossians 1:16

²⁰² 1 Tim 1:17

²⁰³ 1 Timothy 6:13-16

lords and King of kings .”²⁰⁴ The lamb is none other than Jesus Christ, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”²⁰⁵ In the second passage, the title is given to One who is called “faithful and True” and “The Word of God.” He, Himself is represented as treading the winepress of of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.²⁰⁶ This is unquestionably speaking of Jesus Christ

We cannot help but see that Paul addresses the same time frame and the same events and the very same Godhead with His focus firmly on Jesus Christ as he writes to Timothy in the passage cited. The very form of his words indicates that he expresses what we call a doxology. It is evidently a doxology that was well known amongst the Christians of His era. They were completely at ease with this form of glorifying God as a unity rather that a unit. Jesus Christ was comfortably accepted as part of Godhead.

There are several other passages in the Pauline letters that are also well attested as doxologies familiar to Christian believers as the gospel spread. Where these doxologies glorify or address a combination of names, they laud each equally. As the following examples show.

“Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, accord-

²⁰⁴ Revelation 17:14

²⁰⁵ John 1:29

²⁰⁶ Revelation 19:11-16

ing to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”²⁰⁷

“If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”²⁰⁸

While these passages are usually interpreted as extolling to individual divine beings, it is only tradition and our presuppositions that indicate this. God the Father could equally well be speaking of Godhead, the union of all three divine beings. In fact, we reiterate that there many passages of scripture where the term “God” or “Father” could well be interpreted as embracing the special kind of united communion that is called “Godhead.”

Here are some further examples of doxologies in the New Testament

“To God our Savior,
Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever.
Amen.”²⁰⁹

This doxology is addressed to God our Saviour. We have every right to interpret this verse as speaking of Jesus

²⁰⁷ Gal 1:3-5

²⁰⁸ 1 Peter 4:11

²⁰⁹ Jude 25

Christ because both Paul and Peter refer to Jesus Christ as “God and saviour.”²¹⁰ Furthermore, there are very similar themes explored in Jude and 2 Peter. This gives us further confidence that Jesus Christ is the focus of these doxologies. It also signals that the New Testament readers of the day were used to thinking of Jesus Christ as both God and Saviour.

“And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me* for His heavenly kingdom. To Him *be* glory forever and ever. Amen!”²¹¹

In this passage “the Lord” is unquestionably Jesus Christ, as shown by Paul’s closing verse of the chapter where He is designated, “The Lord Jesus Christ”²¹²

²¹⁰ Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1

²¹¹ 2 Tim 4:18

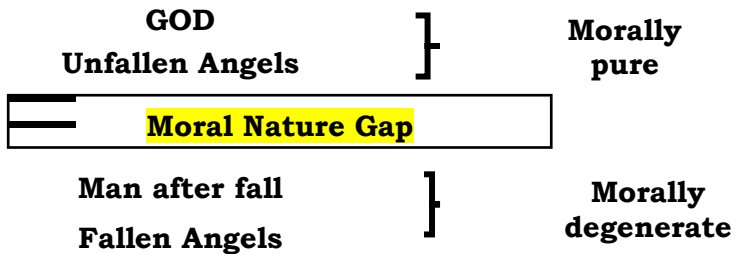
²¹² 2 Timothy 4:22

Separation

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Cor 5: 21

Sin is antithetical to the character of God. When Adam and Eve sinned, they separated all mankind from the trusting relationship they personally had enjoyed with God. In Adam, all humanity came under condemnation of death, ²¹³ “because [by] one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” ²¹⁴ So sin has caused another gap between God and mankind apart from the ontological gap.

“Your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear.” ²¹⁵



It is not our purpose here to deal with the rift between God and fallen angels. However, the Bible informs us of sev-

²¹³ 1 Cor 15:22

²¹⁴ Rom 5:19

²¹⁵ Isa 59:2

eral consequences that the gap has for mankind (the gap which is caused by sin).

“The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ²¹⁶

The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.

Who can understand it?” ²¹⁷

“Alas, sinful nation,
A people laden with iniquity,
A brood of evildoers,
Children who are corrupters!
They have forsaken the LORD,
They have provoked to anger
The Holy One of Israel,
They have turned away backward.
Why should you be stricken again?
You will revolt more and more.
The whole head is sick,
And the whole heart faints.
From the sole of the foot even to the head,
There is no soundness in it,
But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.” ²¹⁸

Paul draws on several Old Testament passages to sum up man’s hopeless position.

²¹⁶ Rom 8:7

²¹⁷ Jer 17:9

²¹⁸ Isa 1:4-6

“There is none righteous, no, not one;
There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.
They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.”
“ Their throat is an open tomb;
With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;

“ The poison of asps is under their lips”;
“ Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”
“ Their feet are swift to shed blood;
Destruction and misery are in their ways;
And the way of peace they have not known.”
“ There is no fear of God before their eyes.” ²¹⁹

The Bible makes a very persuasive case that sin is a terminal, infectious disease that has thoroughly infected the whole human race. None is immune. We are all born with the disease. Sinners defy God’s law; sinners fall short of God’s requirements; sinners are bondslaves of Satan; sinners have deceitful hearts; sinners are alienated from the life of God. All of these lead to and perpetuate the sinner’s separation from fellowship with God and consequent alienation from Him.

Since the great inauguration of the Son of God as the special representative of Godhead in the things of this earth God has deliberated over the possibility of sin’s arising. Since rebellion rose in the heart of Lucifer, God has dealt with the actual presence of evil in His creation. And since Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, God has activated His long standing plan to contain the damage of sin to this earth and

²¹⁹ Rom 3:10-18

to provide a way of escape from eternal destruction for those caught up in its grasp.

Habakkuk well expresses God's dilemma. While God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, yet He must bear with evil and evildoers in order to provide a time of amnesty in which He provides a way to escape a fiery destiny and save those who gratefully accept His provisions.

“Are You not from everlasting,
O LORD my God, my Holy One?
We shall not die.
O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment;
O Rock, You have marked them for correction.
¹³ *You are* of purer eyes than to behold evil,
And cannot look on wickedness.
Why do You look on those who deal treacherously,
And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours
A *person* more righteous than he?” ²²⁰

Until God's plan could be consummated, His justice and His mercy could both be misrepresented as being compromised. His eternal law could be made to appear a flawed imposition on His creation.

Even the mighty intellect of Lucifer could see no way to reconcile God's mercy and His justice. If He were just, the penalty of the broken law must be imposed and man destroyed without mercy. If God were merciful, it seemed, it would be tacit acknowledgment that His law was too harsh. The law made no provision for mercy – it merely defined the right way and paid the wages of transgression in the currency of condemnation to death.

However, God's unthinkable plans were already in place. “Like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed

²²⁰ Hab 1: 12, 13

path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay."²²¹ Who could imagine that One of the Godhead, already appointed for the very purpose, would be made sin and bear its full penalty that mankind could again become the righteousness of God.²²² Those condemned as breakers of the law could be justified. Those separated from God by sin and iniquity could be reconciled to Him again. The debt of obedience owed to God because man had fallen short of meeting God's requirements could be forgiven. Those held as Satan's captives could be redeemed. Justice and mercy could be seen to be in harmony and not dissonant.

To achieve all of this, the Son of God would need to become the Son of Man. The nature of the fellowship between the members of Godhead would be changed as the anointed Son took on humanity, took on Himself the guilt of all its sin, to die an ignominious death, forsaken by God and man. To paraphrase an unknown source, "The Eternal One would be divided. A union which existed from eternity would be breached. God would be forsaken of God."

²²¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p 32

²²² 2 Cor 5:21

The Incarnation

Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which is translated, “God with us.” Matthew 1:23

Breaking the Omnipresence Bond

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”²²³ In these few words John tells us that Jesus bridged the ontological gap between God and man. “The mystery kept secret since the world began [was] now made manifest.”²²⁴ “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh.”²²⁵

“... Christ Jesus, ... being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.”²²⁶

God came to earth as a man? That’s exactly what the Bible says. “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who are under the law, that we might receive the

²²³ John 1:1-3, 14

²²⁴ Rom 16:25,26

²²⁵ 1 Tim 3:16

²²⁶ Phil 2:5-8

adoption as sons.”²²⁷ The Son of God took humanity on Himself and became the Son of Man. He was born as a human baby to a virgin called Mary as the power of the Highest overshadowed her. While He became the Son of Man He was not the son of a man.

The creative power of God was involved in Jesus’ conception and He was fully human. Adam in all his perfection came forth from the creative hand of God and stood as the head and representative of the whole human race. His fall enslaved him to Satan and brought death and deterioration on the whole race. Born of a woman as the result of a creative act of God, Jesus was also one who could stand as the head and representative of all humanity. The success of His mission brought redemption, forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation within the reach of all. In fact, everything that was lost to mankind in Adam was much more restored in Jesus Christ who is called the second Adam.

Since Adam, generation after generation of people had been affected by the laws of heredity. As a man, Jesus did not measure with Adam’s stature or his mental or physical capacity. Hebrews has it,

“... as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ... Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”²²⁸

We note the care taken here to identify Jesus Christ as fully human. However, we must be careful not to press too far

²²⁷ Gal 4:4,5

²²⁸ Heb 2:14,15,17

the meaning of the phrase, “In all things,” in a way that declares Christ to be a human sinner, exactly like the rest of mankind. Christ’s heart was never deceitful. He was never alienated from God or at enmity with Him. He was never in need of a Saviour. He was never infected with sin although “the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,”²²⁹ and “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.”²³⁰ All our sin was reckoned to Him and He bore it to Calvary. Thus the sin that Jesus bore to Calvary was not His sin but our sin, It was imputed to Him. It was on Him and not in Him. He was af-fected by sin but not infected with sin. He, Himself, remained always, “that Holy One.”²³¹

The Unassumed is Unhealed

One of the early heresies that entered the church during the falling away period was that Jesus was not a real person but only seemed to be human. The phrase, “The unassumed is unhealed,”²³² was coined in response to this error. It pointed out that it was necessary for God to assume real human existence if the sin problem was to be healed. If Jesus Christ were not truly human, He could provide no more than an imaginary salvation.

It was only as a human being that Jesus Christ could become the sacrifice for our sin. However it was only as God that He could be our Saviour.

We need to be clear that it was not necessary for Jesus to assume every aspect of our natures in order to provide sal-

²²⁹ Isa 53:6

²³⁰ 2 Cor 5:21

²³¹ Luke 1:35

²³² γαρ απροσληπτον θεραπευτον – From Gregory Nazienzen’s Epistle 101

vation and healing. (These two concepts are virtually synonymous in both the Hebrew and Greek languages.) If we stretch the words, “The unassumed is unhealed,” to mean Jesus could not heal sin unless He also had a sinful moral nature like ours, we have gone too far.

We can best see the limits of the phrase by considering the matter of physical healing. Jesus did not need to be infected with disease (like leprosy for instance) in order to heal human disease. He did not need to have broken bones to heal broken bones. He did not need to be lame in order to restore strong legs to those born palsied. In the same way, He did not need to be infected with sin in order to provide a cure. When He bore our sin, it was because it was laid on Him, not because He was infected with it.²³³

Even though Jesus Christ was human through and through, He was still “God manifested in the flesh”²³⁴ of mankind. His humanity did not replace His divinity. He came to be as much human as if He were not God; and He remained just as much God as if He were not human. However, He kept His own divine power dormant.

He voluntarily laid aside the prerogatives of divinity. Whenever Jesus’ circumstances called for the exercise of divine power, He relied on His Father to provide it. When Jesus performed a miracle, it was by His Father’s power. When Jesus spoke, it was as a human being, but His words carried the full authority of His Father whose will was supreme in His life and on whom He always relied. “... when He came into the world, He said: ‘Behold, I have come – In the volume of the book it is written of Me – To do Your will, O God.’”²³⁵ “... I do

²³³ Isa 53:6

²³⁴ 1 Tim 3:16

²³⁵ Heb 10:5,7

nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”²³⁶ This is surely a profound mystery.

In the incarnation, the ontological gap between divinity and humanity was bridged in the person of Jesus Christ. He was uniquely qualified to do this since He alone was both God and man. As God, His value far exceeded that of all humanity. If every creature were annihilated, He could recreate. In His infinite love, He preferred to redeem, restoring the image of God in man and bestowing immortality. However, it was as man, the second Adam, that He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree”²³⁷

We must be careful that we understand this point correctly. It was not simply that the Son of God had worth by virtue of His divinity sufficient to redeem mankind, atoning for an infinite weight of sin. The principle of redemption is typified in the Kinsman Redeemer. Just as Boaz could redeem Ruth by assuming all the debts of her husband and his family,²³⁸ so Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in His humanity, took on Himself all the sin of mankind. He redeemed man by becoming sin for us of the human race. It was sufficient for the Messiah to die on Calvary in His human nature, because it is impossible for deity to die.

To redeem transgressors of God’s law and simultaneously to preserve its integrity, God needed to allow Himself to be vulnerable. In Satan’s kingdom the underlying principle is “I will have my way, by force if necessary, whatever it may cost anyone else.” God does not work like that. His way is to

²³⁶ John 8:28,29

²³⁷ 1 Peter 2:24

²³⁸ Ruth 3, 4

provide everything necessary to preserve His creation at whatever cost to Himself, except compromising His own character. It is only when people themselves choose irrevocably to be separate from God, His influence and His protection that He eventually and reluctantly accedes to their will in that choice. However, to be separated from God means to be separated from the only source of life in the universe. Life cannot continue. The second death ensues with its annihilation.

Selfless Esteem for Others

Paul reveals several details of Jesus' transformation from God to God/man in His letter to the Philippians. He first speaks of the Philippians' suffering for the sake of Christ and teaches. "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me."²³⁹ Paul continues in the very next verse,

"Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind."²⁴⁰

These words are far more than mere exhortation to love, to be of one accord and of one mind. They attest that these qualities characterize the way God is and that we all are already recipients of His grace. I am reminded of the consolation the Philippian jailer found as Paul and Silas told him of Jesus. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."²⁴¹ The mercy and hope we have received from Jesus Christ ourselves should shape our own responses to others.

²³⁹ Phil 1:29,30

²⁴⁰ Phil 2:1,2

²⁴¹ Acts 16:31

The next verses contain principles that originate in heaven. They startle us with the way they cut across our modern socialization where “Me first,” and “If it feels good, do it,” and the survival of the fittest, and “Do others before they do you,” seem to be the foundation principles for relating with others.

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”²⁴²

They are reminders that these things were exemplified in Jesus Christ, because Paul immediately asserts we should have this same attitude which was in Him.

Imagine the fellowship of the Godhead before there was ever a creature. Here is the principle on which never ending, joyous communion is based. Never in the Bible will you find any one of the Godhead promoting Himself above the other. While Jesus was on this earth, He was always promoting the Father mainly but also the Spirit before Himself. Similarly, the Holy Spirit would “not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He [would] speak.” The Father also promoted His Son and assigned to Him glory and praise and honour.

Whenever God’s church does not acknowledge and practice this selfless esteem for others and promote the interests of others, it is a dying church. When individual people do not acknowledge and practice this principle it is a sign that they are losing contact with the will of God.

God does not require of His people anything He is unwilling to practise Himself. The message of the Bible is that from the beginning of all beginnings this principle has regu-

²⁴² Phil 2:3,4

lated the fellowship between those the Bible calls the Father, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. Here is the basis of enduring and joyous and eternal fellowship!

The Humbled and Exalted Christ

Paul continues. He quotes from what is believed to be an early Christian hymn as he points to the attitude of Jesus in laying aside His divine prerogatives. Notice the steps mentioned.

1. Christ Jesus was in the same form of God.
2. He was equal with God – He didn't need to grasp for the power and title (as Lucifer did.)
3. He made Himself of no reputation. He emptied Himself. (ARSV)
4. He took the form of a servant.
5. He was made in the likeness of men.
6. As a man He humbled Himself.
7. He became obedient unto death.
8. He accepted God's curse by dying on a cross.²⁴³

The first two speak of His pre-incarnate existence as a divine entity, in the form and with all the prerogatives of God. The remaining points all deal with personal choices He made without being coerced or submitting to anyone else's orders. He laid aside His own power and prerogatives as God to add humanity to His own being so that He could bear in His own body, on "the tree,"²⁴⁴ the death penalty demanded by God's broken law.

²⁴³ See Gal 3:3

²⁴⁴ 1 Peter 2:23

The only passive statement involves the matter of His conception. "He was made in the likeness of men." Here the creative power of the Holy Spirit was involved. God's angel messenger told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."²⁴⁵ However, we have already seen that the Son of God participated in the decision making process that planned this event before the foundation of the world was laid.

When we read this list, we begin to understand just how much Jesus demeaned Himself to become human. For the Creator to become a creature is a step that defies the imagination. It astonishes us because it is so unthinkable. It is no wonder that even Lucifer with his great intelligence could not imagine that God would go so far to reconcile His justice with His mercy, and save those who defied His law. And Jesus did not take the highest position in the hierarchy of human power and glory. Instead, He became a bond slave and died an ignominious death that was regarded as the curse of God.

He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.²⁴⁶

In His appearance, in His mental and physical capacities, in His humanness, Jesus was like any ordinary man of His era. It could not be said of Him as it was said of Israel's

²⁴⁵ Luke 1:35 See also Matt 1¹⁸⁻²⁰:

²⁴⁶ Isa 53:3,4 New International Version

first king, "... a choice and handsome son ... There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people."²⁴⁷

This is part of the mystery of Godliness, that God was manifest in human flesh,²⁴⁸ having emptied Himself" of some of the prerogatives of divinity so that He could actually die. It seems so contrary to human logic that part of Godhead, who alone possesses immortality, should willingly become subject to death. It seems impossible that the omniscient God could limit His intellect to that of humanity; or to constrain His omnipotence and omnipresence.

From His birth to His ascension Jesus voluntarily shackled His divinity with the limitations of humanity. He could have abandoned these constraints at any time and left us to bear the full consequences of our own sin, but He was true to His mission. The miracle working power He exercised came from His Father. His words did not thunder as they had at Sinai frightening the people until they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."²⁴⁹ He spoke as His contemporaries would speak but His words carried all the authority of His Father to whom His will was subject every moment. "... I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him."²⁵⁰

If Jesus Christ was to be the Saviour of lost mankind, He must pay all the penalties due to their disobedience. He

²⁴⁷ 1 Samuel 9:2

²⁴⁸ 1 Timothy 3:16

²⁴⁹ Ex 20:19

²⁵⁰ John 8:28,29

must be able to provide merit to compensate for mankind's shortfall in service due to God. Sin is not only in committing sinful acts but in failing to do all that God requires. Only as a man Himself could He provide these gracious benefits but the value of His life and sacrifice must be sufficient to provide for all humanity. Any Saviour must be human in order to represent all humanity; must be human in order to suffer death for all mankind; must be human to demonstrate that the demands of God's law are not beyond man's capacity to meet. Simultaneously, any Saviour must have infinite value to be a substitute for all mankind and this could not be provided by any creature but only by Creator God Himself.

Jesus Christ was the only One in the whole universe who met all these criteria. This is the precise reason that Jesus volunteered before the world was ever created, to be everything mankind needed in every eventuality. This is the reason that He was appointed to the position of Creator and Sustainer and Saviour. This is the reason He fully deserves the title bestowed on Him, the only begotten Son of God.

Restoration

The record of Christ's humiliation in Philippians 2 is immediately followed with the record of the restoration of all He had laid aside when He became a man.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Phil 2:8-11

When Jesus had achieved all that was necessary as representative man, God restored to Him the full position and privileges He had surrendered voluntarily to become a man. The name that is above every name was restored to Him.

In the Jewish culture of the day, that is more significant than apparent. “By what power or by what name have you done this?”²⁵² the high priest and his cohorts asked Peter and John after the paralytic was healed. “Power” and “name” were synonymous in their way of thinking. When David faced Goliath He said, “I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied”²⁵³. By calling on the Name he invoked God’s power. A letter in the king’s name carried all the power and authority of the king himself.²⁵⁴ This Biblical principle makes it apparent that the name that is above every name could only refer to the Being who is above every created being. This put Jesus back on an equal footing with the Father in every respect, having the same name, Yahweh

His claims to divinity would not be contested in heaven! There He was received with all the worship, praise and ceremony due to Him as a member of Godhead. Psalm 24 records the antiphonal response of the heavenly choirs to His return.

Lift up your heads, O you gates!
And be lifted up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who *is* this King of glory?
The LORD (Yahweh) strong and mighty,
The LORD (Yahweh) mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O you gates!

²⁵² Acts 4:7

²⁵³ 1 Sam 17:45

²⁵⁴ See for example Esther 3:12; 8:10

Lift up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The LORD (Yahweh) of hosts,
He is the King of glory.²⁵⁵

The King of Glory had returned to His rightful place where every knee in heaven bowed to Him as the LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle, the LORD of hosts. Every heavenly tongue confessed, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” to the glory of God the Father.

²⁵⁵ Ps 24:7-10

Plans for Departure

Prelude

We need to backtrack to examine the way Jesus prepared His disciples for His impending departure. John spends more than three chapters of his gospel explaining this. Let's put this discourse in its setting. The events of the final Passover dinner were almost complete. Jesus had identified Judas Iscariot as His betrayer by dipping a piece of bread and giving it to Him. "Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night."²⁵⁶

There are two related issues in the remaining verses of John chapter 13 that bear directly on the following three chapters. Jesus first speaks about His approaching glorification. He then clearly informs His remaining disciples that He will be with them only a little longer. They will look for Him but they will not be able to follow where He is going for the present.

Glorifying the Father and the Son

When Judas had departed Jesus first gave one of the clearest insights into His deity, in speaking of His looming glorification.

So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately."²⁵⁷

Throughout his gospel, John closely associates glorifying the Father with being glorified Himself. In His first chap-

²⁵⁶ John 13:30

²⁵⁷ John 13:31-32

ter, He tells us that the Word who was with God in the beginning and who was also God, “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”²⁵⁸ In the second chapter Jesus’ first miracle in Cana of Galilee, “was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

In chapter 7 Jesus speaks as the One sent from the Father who claims that “He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.”²⁵⁹ In this same chapter, John reports that Jesus was not yet glorified, thus reminding us that Jesus had laid aside His glory for the duration of His incarnation. John 8 sees Jesus asserting, “I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges.”²⁶⁰

These last three occurrences of the glory theme remind us particularly of Paul’s teaching that each, in all lowliness of mind, should esteem the other better than himself. Paul specifically identified Jesus with this principle saying all should be of the same mind. He then continues to speak of Christ’s pre-incarnation equality with God and His subsequent voluntary humiliation.²⁶¹ Paul continues, to tell of His restoration to the highest place, His receiving the name that is above every name and the worship of every knee in heaven and on earth.²⁶²

When glory and honour are shared in human situations the glory and honour of one usually competes with that of the other. It is as if there is only a certain total amount of

²⁵⁸ John 1:14

²⁵⁹ John 7:18

²⁶⁰ John 8:50

²⁶¹ Phil 2:3-9

²⁶² Phil 3:10-11

glory and honour available at any one time and these must be shared amongst those who are worthy. Increasing the glory and honour of one reduces the glory and honour of the other. However, this glorification of Christ Jesus does not diminish the Father's glory in the least but rather intensifies it. It is the same in John. Jesus Christ does not merely share the Father's glory but intensifies it, and vice versa.

In His intercessory prayer, reported by John, Jesus refers to "the glory I had with you [the Father] before the world was."²⁶³ This is a very plain statement that Jesus pre-existed His incarnation. In Philippians Paul also writes of Jesus before His incarnation. He plainly states that it was not necessary for Christ Jesus, who possessed the form of God, to grasp futilely for equality with God (as Lucifer had done.) He already possessed the very nature of God²⁶⁴. He continues, saying Jesus voluntarily laid aside His equality with God to become a man, a bond slave in order to suffer death.

John also raises the issue of Jesus' pre-incarnate glory in chapter 12. Jesus refers to the failure of the Jews to believe in Him in spite of their witnessing the triumphal entry to Jerusalem and many miracles. He quotes from Isaiah to show that their unbelief was prophesied. Isaiah had spoken about the earth being full of the glory of the LORD (YHWH) of hosts.²⁶⁵ His response to this spectacle of the glory of Almighty God had been to exclaim,

"Woe is me, for I am undone!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;

²⁶³ John 17:5

²⁶⁴ Phil 2:6

²⁶⁵ Isa 6:3 – NIV translates LORD (YHWH) of hosts as LORD Almighty

For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD (YHWH) of hosts.”²⁶⁶

In the columns below, the extent of Jesus’ use of Isaiah 6 in this situation is most apparent and the reason for John’s explanatory comment in verse 41 becomes clear.

Isaiah 6

³ “ Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!”

⁵ So I said: “ Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.”

⁹ And He said, “Go, and tell this people:

‘ Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

¹⁰ “ Make the heart of this people dull,
And their ears heavy,
And shut their eyes;
Lest they see with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their

John 12

³⁷ But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, ³⁸ that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke:

“ *Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*” (Quoting Isa 53)

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

⁴⁰ “ *He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.*” (Referring to Isa 6:9-10)

⁴¹ These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. {See Isa 6:3}

²⁶⁶ Isa 6:5

heart,
And return and be healed.”

It is most important to consider the full force of John’s explanatory comment, “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.”²⁶⁷ John thus sees Jesus Himself as the source of the glory that Isaiah sees emanating from the LORD Almighty. It is a plain claim that the king that Isaiah saw, the LORD (YHWH) of hosts, was none other than Jesus Christ. We do well to remember that it is the beloved apostle who interprets this Old Testament passage in this way under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It is no wonder that Paul can extol Jesus as “God manifest in the flesh ... received in glory.”²⁶⁸ He is truly Jehovah Immanuel.

Disappointing News

Having described His imminent glorification, Jesus links this with His imminent departure. Immediately the hearts of the disciples are troubled and they question Him concerning His intent. Despite Peter’s assurance that he would lay down his life for his Lord, Jesus prophesies that Peter will betray Him before the rooster crows.

This then is the setting for Jesus’ discourse about the implications of His impending departure. As He instructs His disciples, He demonstrates heaven’s plans to compensate them and His followers for their loss of His manifest company and guidance.

²⁶⁷ John 12:41

²⁶⁸ 1 Tim 3.16

Quieting Troubled Spirits

We should not underestimate the disappointment and sense of frustration that Jesus' announcement aroused in His disciples. They had been excited at the adulation of Jesus during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He had fed multitudes with a mere handful of food. He had healed many who had the most grievous sickness and brought the dead to life. Their hopes, that He would release them from the Roman yoke, seemed close to fulfilment.

Even if His previous brief declarations had passed all but unnoticed, they could not now mistake His meaning as He told them He was leaving. This shattered their hopes and initiated the grief that comes with the thought of permanent loss of a close associate and friend.

So Jesus sets out first to calm their fears, telling them not to let the news of His departure trouble them. He reminds them that they believe in the Father who is intimately present amongst them though unseen. He encourages them by requesting that they should believe about Him in exactly the same way when He departs physically.

It is totally unwarranted that some should teach that here Jesus emphasizes the differences between Him and the Father. He is not saying that the Father is God and He is not God. He has just reminded them that, in His imminent glorification, the full parity of His glory and the Father's glory will be re-established. Jesus is encouraging His disciples with the assurance that what is and will remain true for the Father will also be true for Him when He will be physically absent.

It is here that Jesus gives His well loved promise to return. He first mentions that heaven is preparing a future home and assures them that He will prepare a home for them with the express purpose of coming again to receive them to Himself. Then they can be with Him where He dwells rather

than in a hostile earth where they dwell and where He has no place to lay His head. He will return in glory to take His disciples and us, His followers, to be with Him.

John records Jesus' words, "I will come again to receive you unto myself." The apostle Paul adds some detail.

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."²⁶⁹

By comparing these two passages, we see that both are presented to provide comfort. But both also speak of Jesus coming to receive His people, either dead or alive. There is no suggestion here that people are escorted individually to heaven as their life ends. Jesus comes in clouds of glory at the last days, raises those who are dead and escorts the multitude of rejoicing saints back to where He has prepared many mansions or much room for them.

Promises

Jesus then teaches the disciples about His plans for them after His departure. He shows how the fellowship between God and man, established during His presence will be continued just as intimately during His absence. He reveals even more about His relationship with His Father. During this discourse He also affirms matters that not only fortify His claim to equality with His Father but also establish that the Holy Spirit is another member of the united fellowship of the Godhead.

²⁶⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

We should recall that in these three chapters Jesus is speaking of a time of transition. He is still incarnate with the self imposed limits that being human has entailed. He still cannot afford to use any of the special powers of His own divinity. He still depends completely on His Father for divine power. He is still found in fashion as a man. He is still humbling Himself as He carries His obedience towards death on a cross.²⁷⁰

At the same time He is anticipating the time when He will again be glorified and given the name which is above all names.²⁷¹ He needs to give the troubled disciples hooks on which to hang their faith. While maintaining His attitude of selfless esteem for others, Jesus Christ implants in His disciples seeds of confidence in His heavenly authority as they will later recall His teaching with converted hearts.

Self Identification

When Thomas claimed the disciples knew neither where the Father's house was located nor the way to get there Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well".²⁷² Three aspects of these words reinforce the fact that Jesus is divine.

The first is that He points to Himself as the source and substance of what truth is and what (eternal) life is. This is far more than merely exemplifying or representing the way and the truth and the life. He, Himself, is the definition of the way, as well as the truth, and also the life. His very own being epitomizes each of these. Jesus' testimony, "I am the way and

²⁷⁰ See Phil 2: 7-8

²⁷¹ See Phil 2:9-11

²⁷² John 14:6,7

the truth and the life” is a statement of the same quality and vitality as John’s declaration that defines love, “Everyone who loves is born of God ... for God is love.”²⁷³

The second is Jesus’ assertion that to know Him is to know His Father. If we wanted to say how similar a father and son are in appearance, manner and character, we might say colloquially that they are made of the same stuff. Though He appeared as a man, Jesus was also essentially divine and He manifested all the divine character. “... in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”²⁷⁴

The third is the emphatic form of grammar²⁷⁵ translated as the simple statement “I am.” Some time previously during a debate over His origin and the source of His authority Jesus had also mentioned He was going away.²⁷⁶ The debate ended when Jesus claimed as steadfastly true, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” Here Jesus, appearing to be a mere man, identified Himself using the eternal name the LORD (Yahweh) had revealed to Moses at the burning bush²⁷⁷ The Scribes and Pharisees immediately recognized the import of His words.

²⁷³ 1 John 4, 7, 8 10

²⁷⁴ Colossians 2:9

²⁷⁵ Εγώ ειμι. *egō eimi*. This emphatic grammatical form is the Greek equivalent of the name of the self-existent God of Israel who called Himself “I AM WHO I AM.”

²⁷⁶ John 8:12 ff

²⁷⁷ Ex 3:14,15 And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations.’”

They took up stones to stone Him, the traditional punishment for blasphemy, but He escaped from them.

“I AM the light of the world!” Jesus had claimed, to begin the discourse that led eventually to this conclusion. “He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”²⁷⁸ Jesus here claimed to be the source and substance of light just as John has stated in His epistle that, “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all”²⁷⁹

When Jesus used this emphatic form of grammar with a claim to be source and substance, or definition of some quality like “light” or “truth” or “bread of life”, or “door” (for example), these are just particular instances of the more general claim to be the “I AM” who pre-dated Moses.²⁸⁰

The Promised Holy Spirit

We now turn to consider the promise Jesus gives to the disciples about providing a substitute after His departure so they would not be left feeling like abandoned orphans. If He could assure them that someone like Himself would be available at every moment when He was gone, it would provide comfort and support to them. If that presence could also do all that He had done for them, and more, they would not feel so abandoned and disempowered.

The passages about the Holy Spirit in this discourse are the clearest direct statements in the whole Bible about the identity and work of the Holy Spirit. Good exegesis requires that we apply the plain meaning of the most direct passages when we interpret more oblique references rather than vice versa. Those who deny the per-

²⁷⁸ John 8:12

²⁷⁹ 1 John 1:6

²⁸⁰ These all come from John in his gospel and Revelation. Rev 1:17; 22:16; John 6:35,41,51; 8:12; 10:7. 9. 11. 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5;

sonality of the Holy Spirit often work the other way round. Taking their cues from more oblique passages they construct a logic web of what the Holy Spirit should be and then shake that web to blur these plain meanings and catch the unwary.

Jesus tells His disciples:

I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper (*Gr: paraclEton*), that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

... the Helper (*parakletos*), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.²⁸¹

The plainest reading of these words is that, when Jesus should depart, the Holy Spirit would be a functional, personal substitute, One of the same kind exactly as they were losing. The Greek word *parakletos* has been translated in many ways because we have no exact equivalent in English. It carries nuances of “Comforter”, “Advocate”, “Counsellor”, “Helper”. It particularly carries the idea of a “friend in court,” a legal advocate or counsellor acting *pro bono*, and with a supportive rather than judgmental mindset.

The word is used only by John in the New Testament and it is significant that he uses this word referring to Jesus Christ in his epistle.

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate (*parakleton*) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world,²⁸²

²⁸¹ John 14:16-18, 25

²⁸² 1 John 2:1,2

John emphasizes the personal nature of Jesus' advocacy by using the linguistic form "Himself." He further specifies that the propitiation and advocacy extend to the whole world and not merely to those who will believe.

Returning to John 14 it is obvious therefore that Jesus comforts the disciples with the assurance that their support system will not be affected, although there will be a change in personnel. His replacement will be one of the same kind as Himself, a divine personal Being with the same objectives, the same connection with His Father, appointed in the same way that He was appointed and sent in the same way that He was sent. It does not say specifically but it implies that the Holy Spirit will be omnipresent, not constrained to one place at one time as Jesus was in His incarnation.

There are several things here that specifically exclude the possibility that the promised Spirit would be merely an influence emanating from the Father. He would not be a mere light with the Father as the source illuminating them spiritually. Neither would He be merely an energy from God that would empower them, or the voice of the Father that would teach them and prompt their memories.

1. The combination of the term Holy Spirit with the term Helper or Counsellor or Advocate (*parakletos*) indicates we should not interpret the word "Spirit" as merely "breath" in this instance. It is used in the same way that Hebrews speaks of the angels as "ministering spirits"²⁸³ or as John earlier says, "God is Spirit."²⁸⁴
2. John breaks all the rules of Greek grammar that require pronouns to agree in gender with the nouns they represent. "Spirit" is neuter gender but John persis-

²⁸³ Heb 1:14

²⁸⁴ John 4:24

tently uses masculine pronouns when referring to Holy Spirit. Now it would be acceptable to use masculine gender pronouns to stand for *parakletos* but John uses male pronouns even where the Greek grammar obviously refers to the neuter gender noun, “Spirit.”

3. A little later in the same discourse, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will not speak on its own authority but will speak whatever He hears. It is only if the Spirit is differentiated from Father and Son that this expression can be at all meaningful. If the Spirit was merely an influence emanating from the Father (or from both Father and Son) then it stands to reason that it would have no separate existence apart from its source. An impersonal influence does not have to “hear” things from the Father because it would have no separate intelligence. It would be just the breath of God expressing the thought of God – God’s direct power and message divested from His person.

In fact, Jesus is here using the same language He used earlier in the discourse when He said, “all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”²⁸⁵ Just as Jesus did not speak on His own authority, but spoke what He heard from the Father, just so the other Advocate, the same kind as Himself, would not speak on His own authority but what He heard from the Father and from Christ.

Rebuttal

There are those who take licence from Jesus’ declarations, “I am ... the truth ...” and, “I will come to you,”²⁸⁶ to as-

²⁸⁵ John 15:15

²⁸⁶ John 14:6, 18b

sert that the “Spirit of truth”²⁸⁷ is the breath or influence or detached spirit²⁸⁸ of Jesus Himself. In fact, some go so far as to say that the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself, stripped of His humanity, because He said, “**I** will come to you.” They thus deny that Jesus is promising the personal presence of another Comforter, a third member of Godhead, another just like Jesus Himself who will be His representative.

Just as Jesus had represented the Father to such an extent that He could claim, “He that has seen me has seen the Father,” so His disciples will recognize Him in His representative. Just as Jesus had always glorified the Father and promoted His interests, so the promised Comforter would glorify Jesus and not speak on His own behalf. Those who claim that the Holy Spirit is simply Jesus’ own animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms, have Jesus glorifying Himself. This He would never do for He was true to the divine principle, “let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”²⁸⁹

We recall Jesus’ promise that He was going to prepare a place for His disciples and followers and He would come again to receive them unto Himself. This promise to return with the express purpose of taking them to be with Him is inconsistent with the idea that, as soon as He was gone, He would return unseen as the promised omnipresent Holy Spirit.

²⁸⁷ John 14:17 *et al.*

²⁸⁸ “Spirit” is seen to mean the incorporeal part of His person consisting of His mind, personality, will, memory, driving force etc, rather than as a holistic spirit being.

²⁸⁹ Philippians 2:3,4

Jesus has just said, “If you love Me, keep my commandments.”²⁹⁰ The plain reading of the words and grammar require that “another Helper (Comforter)” cannot refer to Jesus Himself but to someone recognizably distinct from Him. Just as Jesus could say, “I and my Father are one,”²⁹¹ so there is oneness between Him and the other Comforter (or Helper) who would take His place. The disciples would not sense that they were left as orphans because He would be replaced by another personal paraclete whose divinity and power and ministry were identical to His.

The Witnessing Factor

The concluding verses of chapter 15 speak of a witnessing chain that progresses from one link to another like that in the introductory verses of John’s first epistle.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”²⁹²

Here the witness proceeds from the fellowship of Father, Son and Spirit to the disciples when the Spirit is sent to earth to replace Jesus. They in turn will bear witness.

In his epistle John says:

“... the Word of life ... was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with

²⁹⁰ John 14:15

²⁹¹ John 10:30

²⁹² John 15:26,27

His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.”²⁹³

Here the witness proceeded from the fellowship of Father and Son to the disciples when the Son was manifest on earth. The disciples bore witness in similar fashion. The result is that disciples and we are drawn into the eternal, divine fellowship. This fellowship continues to expand through experiencing it and witnessing about it. The end result is fullness of joy.

Notice how perfectly these teachings fit with other Bible passages. We will consider three sample passages here, but there are many others.

Firstly, Paul closes his second letter to the Corinthians with this benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion (or fellowship) of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen.”²⁹⁴ Fellowship takes place in a group situation where the “fellows” are personal, living beings. The same is true for “communion.” It is unthinkable that one can have communion or fellowship with some ethereal influence.

The second is found in the close of the gospel of Matthew with Jesus’ command, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.”²⁹⁵ Here it speaks of the apostles’ authority to witness and make disciples, drawing their contacts into fellowship. Their authority is to be the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have seen

²⁹³ 1 John 1:1-4

²⁹⁴ 2 Cor 13:14

²⁹⁵ Matt 28:19

previously that the name of a person carries the whole weight of authority and power of its owner. A mere influence does not need a name – it's simply an aspect of its owner's being with no separate power or existence..

This commission mentions teaching hearers to obey all things Jesus had commanded. This simply reminds us of Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit where He said, "He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you; He will guide you into all truth; He will take what is mine and declare it unto you; He will testify of Me." These are all essential elements for making disciples and drawing people into fellowship or communion with God.

There are some fundamentalist anti trinitarians who teach that the clause. "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," is a later insertion that did not appear in Matthew's original manuscript. This is the only way that they can neutralize the power of this text as a witness to the trinity. However, the Biblical teaching of triune Godhood does not stand or fall on a single verse. Not only so, but it is strange that liberal scholarship (which is disparaged as that which led the church to adopting the doctrine of the trinity in the first place) should be accepted as an authority in trying to discredit the thrust of this truth. We prefer to accept the verse as it stands.

The third text we consider is again from Paul. "Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind."²⁹⁶

Here Paul refers to the source of solace and strength in the face of struggle and suffering such as he and the Philippi-

²⁹⁶ Phil 2:1,2

an believers have experienced. While he names Christ and the Spirit, the Father is not specifically named. Instead, His qualities of love and comfort stand in His place. As the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the source of authority in the gospel commission, here the three are the spring of love and comfort and fellowship and affection and mercy for Paul and all who suffer like him for the sake of the gospel. And further, this heavenly trio exemplifies the attribute of selfless esteem for others.

These passages have recorded the benediction that issues from Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three persons of the Godhead are all intimately associated in empowering those who take the gospel commission seriously. They sustain and comfort those who suffer for their faith and witness. The word “trinity” may not appear anywhere within the Bible but the verses all carry the unmistakable connotation of three divine beings unified and acting as One for the reconciliation and salvation of mankind.

Difficult Times Ahead

Another aspect of the disciples’ need for another personal Comforter is that they will be persecuted as followers of Jesus. The world will hate them without cause. Their lives will be threatened. They will be put out of the synagogues and even killed by those who think they are doing God a favour. This information is necessary for the disciples as fortification against these threats when the time comes.

Jesus then returns to the work of the Holy Spirit as One to take His place, walking unseen by their sides. It is this other Helper, Advocate, Comforter who will do God’s convicting work in the world. It is He alone who will differentiate between what is sin and righteousness and who will convict

people of God's judgment of behaviour that is prompted by the ruler of this world, Satan.

The Helper to be sent would expose the sinfulness of all who do not believe in Him, He would stand in Jesus' place as a testimony of righteousness. He would also bring conviction that people would face judgment for the choices they make between sin and righteousness. As the Spirit of truth He would complete the work Jesus had not completed of guiding them into all truth. Just like Jesus, He would not speak on His own authority but with the full authority of God-head behind Him. It is the very essence of Godhood to be completely united and not to speak or act independently of One another.

In the final few sentences of this final discourse with His disciples prior to His death, Jesus explains that He has been using figurative language or proverbs or allegories during His discourse. However the hour is coming when he will be able to speak openly in plain words rather than in figures of speech. He says

In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.²⁸ I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father."²⁹⁷

We catch Jesus' commendation to the disciples for believing that He came forth from God.²⁹⁸ This speaks of His coming from the Father in His incarnation. It is immediately apparent from the fact that He is going again to the Father that this is not speaking of His originating in some amoeba

²⁹⁷ John 16:26-28

²⁹⁸ John 16:27 ("Came forth from God" is, literally, "beside of **the** God came out.")

like subdivision process, emerging from the Father to become Son of God.

Jesus brings this discourse to a close forecasting that they will abandon Him in His coming hour of trial, leaving Him alone. Yet He will not be alone because the heavenly Father is always with Him. Like Him, they will have tribulation in the world but the knowledge that He has overcome the world is to bring them good cheer.

Forsaken

He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Isa 53:3

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might
become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Cor 5:21

The Root of Rejection

What was there about Jesus Christ that caused so many religious leaders of His nation to reject Him? Pilate believed that it was out of envy that they delivered Him up²⁹⁹ to be crucified. They could easily have envied Jesus' popularity with the crowds, or His clear teaching style, or His miracle working power. His lifestyle and message were in stark contrast to their own stuffy, legalistic brand of religion.

The truth was however, that He wasn't what they expected Messiah to be, He had not come triumphantly as an all-conquering king. He had not driven out the Roman invaders and restored their own dominion as the rightful rulers. They were looking for a hero like a Gideon to repel the invaders with the blast of trumpets and the sword of the Lord; or a Samson who would use sheer brute strength; or a David with a sling and a few small stones who would rout the invaders by slaying their champion with his own sword.

Their vision of Messiah resembled the Son of Man of Daniel's vision.

“... *One* like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,

²⁹⁹ Matthew 27:17 The *New English Bible* has “malice.”

And they brought Him near before Him.

Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom *the one*
Which shall not be destroyed.³⁰⁰

They were blinded to Isaiah's vision of Messiah as a suffering servant.

He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

³ He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

⁴ Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.³⁰¹

A Messiah who appeared to be unable to restore the kingdom immediately was unpalatable to them.

This strange refusal to see the Messiah as a suffering servant is still widely repeated in the Christian world today. At least, many argue that because He is divine He is incapable of change or of suffering or of sinning. Those things only affect God's creation and God has no part in them. They believe we must interpret the words of the prophet by the logic

³⁰⁰ Dan 7:13,14

³⁰¹ Isaiah 53:2-5, but see Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

of human philosophers. In our estimation one should rather interpret the reliability of the philosophers by God's own revelation in the Bible. "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." ³⁰²

The truth is that scripture has very often been interpreted through the lens of Greek mystical dualism and concepts of the ideal. The Greek philosophers reasoned that, if some god were perfect, any change would mean it was no longer perfect. Similarly, if it were affected by pain or pleasure, compassion or passion, feeling or emotions it would shift from its previous perfection. This is simply human logic. The Bible must not be interpreted simply to reinforce our human misunderstanding. It is too easy to distort God's self revelation into something that was never intended. Let us learn from what the Bible plainly teaches even if we must give up our present way of thinking.

God certainly claims that He is the God who does not change, ³⁰³ but this is in the setting of His covenant faithfulness despite the covenant treachery of His people. There are notable times when God prophesied with either implicit or explicit conditions, ³⁰⁴ or repented of His prior actions, ³⁰⁵ or was persuaded to abandon threats He had made. ³⁰⁶ If one views these revelations through the lens of Greek mystical idealism and explains the unfathomable nature of infinite God in ways that seem reasonable to finite men it is making God in man's own image.

³⁰² 1 Corinthians 3:19

³⁰³ Malachi 3:6

³⁰⁴ E.g. Jonah's forecasting the fall of Ninevah after forty days. (Jonah 3:1-4, 10); God's granting Hezekiah fifteen extra years to his life. (2 Kings 20:1,5)

³⁰⁵ E.g. Genesis 6:6 – The LORD "was sorry" or "grieved."

³⁰⁶ E.g. 1 Chron 21:15 – God relented from destroying Jerusalem.

God has given His word, the Bible, to be a clear guide to what we need to know about Him. He has promised us the guidance of His Spirit to help us interpret it and guide us into all truth. Anyone who comes to the Bible in simple faith and who will abandon human philosophical preconceptions will find in it a true guide to knowing God and His salvation.

“The Holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”³⁰⁷

“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness.”³⁰⁸

He Emptied Himself

Returning to Paul, in his letter to the Philippians we examine more deeply what it means that Christ Jesus “emptied Himself.”³⁰⁹ It is obvious that it involved some change in His divine person or power or prerogatives in order to become a new representative man, the second Adam. It was not that Jesus humbled Himself to occupy a human body only to cast it aside when He was crucified, then take it up again at the resurrection. It was the very One who had existed in the form of God from eternity who took humanity on Himself. He took the form of a bondsman. He became obedient to death.

It was the very One who created the world; the One who had revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush and called Himself the I AM; it was the One who had written His

³⁰⁷ 2 Timothy 3:15-17

³⁰⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:19

³⁰⁹ Phil 2:7 The Greek *εκενωσεν* (*ekenosen*) means “emptied.” The noun form of this verb is the origin of the theological term “kenosis.”

law in tables of stone at Sinai, not once but twice; it was this divine Being who retained His identity as God but was born as a man. From eternity He had possessed the nature of divinity but in the year 4BC He took human nature on Himself.

This immediately raises questions about His personality and consciousness. Did each nature have its own personality and consciousness, its own “spirit”? Did His divine nature somehow retain omnipotence and omniscience and omnipresence while His human nature struggled on with normal human attributes? Though God is personal, can a person be God without being omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent and immortal?

As a baby and as He grew to manhood, was His divine nature still controlling the universe? Could it create and heal; was it subject to temptation? Did it give Jesus an advantage over us so there was never a time when He “didn’t see it coming” or wasn’t sure which way to choose? Did He understand His destiny through omniscience? Was His sinless life due to an inability to sin?

Edward Heppenstall examines these questions in two chapters of his book, *The Man Who Is God*. Here is a brief synopsis of his analysis:

Self-emptying by Christ affirms that He is free to accept the limitations of human life—to accept suffering and death—without surrendering His deity. In accepting these limitations the Son of God does not cease to be God. The kenosis declares that God is not far removed from man, since man was made in the image of God. Our being made in God's image does not exclude God's being able to become man. To become man is not impossible or incongruous for God. But in becoming man Christ, as God, took a position of unceasing dependence upon His Father throughout His life on earth. Even though Christ was the very fountain of eternal life Himself, yet the glory of His character is seen in the surrender of the exercise of His deity and divine attributes. His chief delight and source of power was

that each moment the Father kept charge of His life in response to His life of faith.³¹⁰

“To what degree did human limitations apply to the mind and being of the Son of God? Jesus entered our world as a human babe. In the emptying of Himself the Son of God adjusted His divinity to the human Jesus. God in some way limited Himself so that the deity of Christ did not overwhelm or make of none effect the distinctly human aspects of His personality.”³¹¹

Throughout His entire incarnation, Jesus emptied His omnipresence, His omniscience, His omnipotence and His immortality. The Bible does not tell us exactly how God – Father and Holy Spirit – dealt with these aspects of His divinity. However, the Philippian passage does inform us that, because He was obedient unto death, even death on a cross,” afterwards God “highly exalted Him.” We deduce that this included full restoration of those capacities that had been emptied.

We need to have it quite clear that these capacities were immediately available to Christ at any time at His request. They were simply not active in Jesus day by day. Had they been active, the very infinite aspects of their nature would have overwhelmed any capacity of His human nature.

From the time He became aware of His origins, there was a constant temptation to recall His infinite capacities from His Father’s keeping and exercise for Himself the divine power to overcome temptation and to deal with those who despitefully used Him and persecuted Him. Instead, He set His face like a flint and relied only on His Father for the exercise of divine power and the authority of His proclamations. He

³¹⁰ Edward Heppenstall, “*The Man Who Is God*,” Chapter 4, *The Kenosis Doctrine*, Section “*Kenosis*,” from

<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/books/mangod/manch4.htm>

³¹¹ *Ibid*

asserted, "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." ³¹² "The Father that dwells in me, he does the works." ³¹³

We need to remember always that this surrender was voluntary for Christ. It was planned in the far reaches of eternity past, in the Godhead counsels where He accepted His role as Creator and Sustainer and Saviour and was anointed as God's only begotten Son. When we consider the utter dependence of Jesus on His heavenly Father during His incarnation, it is immediately obvious how appropriate is the Father/Son imagery of the Bible. Just as an infant son of an earthly father is dependent on His parents for life and a safe and loving environment for growth to take place that leads to maturity, so Jesus as the Son of God was dependent on His Father while subduing His divine capacities.

When Jesus "emptied Himself" ³¹⁴ and the "Word became flesh" ³¹⁵ it made no difference to His worth or the relative value of His life. It did not suddenly wrest from Him His accomplishments in His pre-incarnate eternal existence. He remained the object of worship for all the heavenly throng. Though He had laid aside His capacities as God, He was no less God. He was, properly, still Creator, still Lawgiver, still Love (as God is love,) still the Righteousness of God.

However, in His incarnation, He was found "in fashion as a man." He acquired language and knowledge in the way all human children do. Fanciful stories of Jesus' childhood abound where He playfully uses divine powers in childish

³¹² John 5:29

³¹³ John 14:10

³¹⁴ Phil 2:7

³¹⁵ John 1:14

ways but the Bible merely says, “The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.”³¹⁶

He was unaware of His pre-incarnate existence and activity even as a faint memory when He was born. This knowledge came as Mary taught Him about what the angel had told her and about the Biblical stories and prophecies. She encouraged Him to commune with God in prayer, to maintain intimate contact with the heavenly Father and to obey His prompting. Blessed by the grace of God, under His mother’s and father’s tutelage and with the indwelling Holy Spirit, by age twelve He was well aware of His heavenly origins and His heavenly Father’s business.³¹⁷

We can imagine that the “memory” of His pre-incarnate life and position came to Him slowly as His brain and intellect developed, somewhat like an amnesia victim regaining the memories and knowledge of his former identity and associations. Continued contact and communication with forgotten associates trigger the memory recall. So His intimate association with the Father and the Holy Spirit and their ministrations gradually recalled for Him their past intimate fellowship and kindled in Him recollection of all that was involved. His adult ministry certainly indicates that His knowledge of heavenly realities and associations was no mere hearsay.

There is a sentence in Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth (and the affirmation by angels and prophet and prophetess) that exposes something of the life setting in which Jesus was nurtured. “So when *they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord*, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.” How carefully God had chosen the home envi-

³¹⁶ Luke 2:40 (NASB)

³¹⁷ See Luke 2:41-50

ronment to support the exercise of His grace – a place where the Son of God could learn and develop and come to maturity! It was a home where the objective was to perform all things according to the law of the Lord. That is how one honours God!

A Prophet Like Moses

It is important to remember that Jesus was more than a mere human being when we speak of His human limitations. God spent special effort to ensure the Son of God could bear personal witness to His heavenly heritage.

Near the end of his life Moses prophesied that the LORD God would raise another prophet like himself. Deuteronomy states that God Himself confirmed the prophecy in these words, “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”³¹⁸ These words were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

From a short conversation with Him, the woman at the well could say, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.”³¹⁹ After the five thousand were fed, “those who had eaten ... when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’”³²⁰ At the triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the end of His ministry, the multitudes said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.”³²¹ On the road to Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion declared, “Jesus of Nazareth ... was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.”

³¹⁸ Deuteronomy 18:18

³¹⁹ John 4:19

³²⁰ John 6:13,14

³²¹ Matthew 21:11

The prophets of God in Israel were intermediaries between God and His people. They bore His message, revealed His will, and were sometimes His instruments to reveal the future. Moses was considered to be the greatest of the prophets. Samuel was still a child when God began to speak to Him. Daniel was only a young man when God revealed to him the future course of world history. Amos tells us that “the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.”³²²

There was a special relationship between God and His prophets through which He inspired them and instructed them and empowered them as men and women to accomplish God’s business. They were imperfect human vessels to whom God entrusted a small measure of His divine authority and power. Just so Jesus Christ, the faultless Son of God as He grew from babyhood was especially inspired and instructed and empowered to accomplish His Father’s business.

There can be no doubt that these supernatural influences informed and moulded His self identification as the Word who was eternally with God, who was God, and who had become flesh. It was from unbroken daily communion with His Father that He was conscious of His divine origins and that He could say, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also ... He who has seen Me has seen the Father ... I am in the Father, and the Father in Me. The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.”³²³

³²² Amos 3:7

³²³ John 14:7-11

If mere human beings could achieve the attainments of the prophets when inspired and empowered by God through His Spirit, how much more could the Son of God accomplish with His divine/human heritage and the indwelling Father!

Jesus' Life and Ministry

In the life and ministry of Jesus Christ there are many places where His actions or statements appear strange to us if we assume that Jesus retained His divine capacities in a divine nature that was not integrated with His human nature. Perhaps the most obvious is His admission that no one except His Father knew the day or hour of Jesus' own return in power and glory.³²⁴ This statement is a denial of His omniscience.

Heppenstall observes about many incidents in Jesus' life:

“There is no proof that Jesus had the fullness of divine knowledge during His life on earth. It would be ridiculous to maintain that every time He asked a question, He was only pretending ignorance. Jesus' requests for information were quite natural, genuine, and necessary. His straightforward questions were obviously to get answers that He could not get in any other way.”³²⁵

He quotes the example above and numerous others from the gospel story in support.

Similarly, in His humanity Jesus could occupy only a single place at a time. He had to walk between places in the same way as others in His era. The Bible gives no indication that Jesus relied on any internal supernatural consciousness or ability while He was found in fashion as a man. His divine insight into men's hearts was provided through unbroken communion with the Father moment by moment.

³²⁴ Matthew 24:36

³²⁵ Heppenstall, *op. cit.* Section, *Biblical Evidence.*

Because He had emptied Himself of the divine capacities, Jesus Christ used only powers that are available to the rest of humanity. This is also true in the area of overcoming temptation

In our lives today, we are accustomed to using every available advantage we can grasp to overcome problems and difficulties that face us. The God/man, Jesus Christ, could not do this. It would have been possible for Him at any time to recall the full range of His divine powers if He had been willing to abandon mankind to its fate. He had covenanted however to use no power that is not freely available to us in the battle against sin.

The New Testament teaches that the new birth of a Christian begins a life that needs to die daily to the natural human nature and live to God. So it was with Jesus in His human nature. But for His divinity it was in reverse. Jesus had to die daily to His own divine capacities and live wholly as a human being with the limitations that imposed on Him. How easy it is for us not to “die daily.”

The Suffering Servant

We shall never understand the God of the Bible, never understand the divinity of Jesus Christ unless we accept the plain meaning of the words that express Biblical revelation. Of course we will do this giving due respect to the genre of each passage. We recognize poetic imagery, apocalyptic, type and symbol. But we will have an open mind when the Bible uses the language of emotion and risk in relation to God’s engagement with His creation. We will be careful to see that there are many ways for God to express His sovereignty. If He chooses to exercise His sovereignty by providing the means of salvation then allowing His creatures to decide their own

eventual destiny by accepting or rejecting His provision, who are we to judge! It is not for us to question.

It is impossible to hold views of a God or Godhead who is incapable of any change, incapable of emotion or suffering or compassion and still remain faithful to the words the Bible uses to describe the Son of God. “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3); He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; (v5) He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.” (v10) These are just a few examples from one chapter of one book.

Shall we dismiss His agonizing in Gethsemane and say His divine nature was immune? Did the agonies of a Roman crucifixion simply flow over His divinity?

In all that He endured, His divine nature was not somehow incapable of suffering while His mere human nature was affected. Each emotion that Jesus felt as a human being, each insult thrust at Him, each slight, each rejection, each wound affected His divine nature also. When Jesus suffered, He suffered as God as well as man.

In the events that led up to His crucifixion, indignity after indignity was heaped upon the person and name of Jesus Christ. No one should ever be subjected to the physical torture He endured however unspeakable their own actions. Yet He was the divine Son of God and these actions demonstrated to the whole universe that, unless it is contained, sin eventually destroys everything that is worthwhile. Rebellion against God and His laws has its root in the desire to be rid of God Himself. This is the mindset of Antichrist – I will have my own way, by whatever means and using whatever force is necessary, whatever the cost to anyone else, including God Himself.

Jesus Christ was arraigned and condemned on false charges. He was personally innocent of all charges laid against Him. His life had been faultless, free from sin, pure, fully complying with the Law of God and in harmony with the will of God. When He stood before the judgment seat of Pilate, this prefect of Judea could find no fault in Him because there was no fault in Him.

All unseen to human eyes, Jesus Christ was facing another judgment seat. In accordance with the Father's will for Him, He had taken on Himself personal responsibility for the sins of the whole world. On each hand-written charge sheet³²⁶ that specified in detail how the sinner had broken God's law, the name of Jesus Christ was substituted for the name of the perpetrator. God's law must be upheld and he who offends that law in one point is guilty of all.³²⁷

From the time Jesus prayed, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done,"³²⁸ He willingly accepted the judgment from man and God for things He had not done personally. He assumed the guilt of each sin ever committed. He accepted the charges. He who knew no sin was made to be sin.³²⁹ He bore the penalty.

We recall Habakkuk's pronouncement, "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on wickedness."³³⁰ Imagine One who had lived from eternity with this mindset then being made sin for us! We cringe at the thought

³²⁶ The thought is taken from Col 2:14 – "God wiped out the (handwritten) charges that were against us for disobeying the Law of Moses. He took them away and nailed them to the cross." (CEV)

³²⁷ James 2:10

³²⁸ Luke 22:42

³²⁹ 2 Cor 5:21

³³⁰ Habakkuk 1:13

of enduring pain. We are devastated at the thought of losing an intimate friend. We are overwhelmed by another's blaming us for his own wrong behaviour. We feel abandoned when friends forsake us in our hour of need. What if we were God who cannot look on wickedness, but had the guilt of the world's sin thrust upon Him while simultaneously facing these other incapacitating issues?

It is no wonder that it was as Luke records,

“He knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”³³¹

No other human being has endured such mental torture! He had accepted the guilt of the world's sin and the Father was “of purer eyes to behold evil and could not look on wickedness.” Where did that leave Him? He well knew Isaiah's conclusion: “your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”³³²

He had emptied Himself of His prerogatives as God and relied solely on His Father. Now, if the Father was truly just, the Saviour's burden of sin must separate Him from His Father also. He scarcely could bear the thought. If ever there was the temptation to recall His divine capacities and feel safe again, this was it! But His love for lost mankind was greater. He would submit to the Father's will and trust in His mercy if that's what it took to save mankind.

³³¹ Luke 22:41-44

³³² Isaiah 59:2

There are times of deep trauma in our lives when it seems we are alone in our suffering. Our agonizing prayers seem to be unanswered. We sense that even God has left us to our distress so we might as well abandon hope. This is “the dark night of the soul,” The Son of God identifies with us in such times for He Himself experienced first hand that sense of desertion. “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”³³³ His own experience informs us that God is never disinterested but will send the angels, most often unseen to us, to support us in our trials and make us triumphant at last, along with His Son

God’s Time and Place

Most of the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus do not deal with the actual time of Messiah’s appearance and ministry. Daniel however, gives a prophetic starting point and a time scale that pinpoint both the year Messiah would commence His ministry and the time of His death. The prophecy is most often misapplied by 21st century Christians.

Leaving aside the detail, the prophecy speaks of a period of seventy weeks of years (seventy sevens of years) – 490 years from the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity.³³⁴ Messiah would begin ministry at the beginning of the final seven years of this period and be “cut off but not for Himself” some time after the start of the final seven years. In the midst of the final seven year period, the Messiah would cause sacrifice and oblation to cease.

When Jesus died on Calvary, His life was suddenly “cut off” and His death brought to an end the sacrificial system that pointed forward to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

³³³ Hebrews 2:18

³³⁴ Daniel 9:24-27

This was approximately three and a half years after His baptism, half way through Daniel's seventieth week of years.

The system of types and sacrifices and oblations also came to an end when Jesus "breathed His last" and "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."³³⁵ Formerly, only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place of the temple. Now all may "enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,"³³⁶

The Bible records, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law ..."³³⁷ When Jesus was born God's prophetic clock was very much on time. Soon after John Baptist was executed, "Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom^[a] of God,¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."³³⁸

During His life and ministry, Jesus was also constrained to God's timetable. We can see a change in His sense of destiny in remarks such as, "My time has not yet come,"³³⁹ with a qualification two verses later, "My time has not yet fully come." Then He says, "My time is at hand," on Thursday of Passion week. This is further evidence that Jesus closely followed His Father's agenda and not His own.

Tabernacle, Temple and Types

John records an incident from Jesus' life near the first Passover of His ministry:

³³⁵ Mark 15:37,38

³³⁶ Hebrews 10:19,20

³³⁷ Galatians 4:4

³³⁸ Mark 1:14,15

³³⁹ John 7:6

“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!” Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.”¹

So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”

Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them;¹ and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”³⁴⁰

These words Jesus used inform us that by this time He clearly understood that He was to die and be raised again within three days. The incident took place within the temple precincts and Jesus referred to Himself using temple imagery. The furnishings of the temple typified aspects of His being. He was the menorah, the Light of the World. He was the table of shewbread, the Bread of Life. Just as the temple had the tables of the law of God in the Ark of the covenant within its Most Holy Place and over it, the mercy seat with the shekinah glory of the very presence of Jehovah God, so Jesus had the law of God written on His heart and the glory of God was in Him and manifest through Him. He was the Lawgiver. He was also God’s mercy seat.

³⁴⁰ John 2:13-22

Before there was ever an imposing temple, soon after God delivered His people from Egypt, He commanded, “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell (lit. “tabernacle”) among them.”³⁴¹ This tabernacle was dedicated to the worship of God. It symbolized God as a sacred and inviolable asylum, a place of refuge and protection. Its services and rituals typified the way God deals with sin – He accepts the death of a substitute and allows the sinner to live, free of condemnation and guilt.

In the simple words, “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt (lit. “tabernacled”) among us,”³⁴² John introduces Jesus as the antitype of the wilderness tabernacle and the subsequent permanent temple that replaced it. Jesus Christ was also the lamb slain from the foundation of the world; He was the priest; He was the High Priest; every aspect of the tabernacle, its furnishings and its services presaged some aspect of Jesus Christ and His ministry.

As He approached Calvary it was as the Lamb of God, the world’s sin accounted to Him and on His head. It required only that the fatal blow be struck for the ransom price to be paid. “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”³⁴³ Thus He was the antitype of the particular sacrifice that the sinner brought as acknowledgment of personal sin, as well as the daily (sacrifice) that covered the sins of the whole camp until the personal sacrifice could be brought.

Fractured Fellowship

Mark records:

³⁴¹ Exodus 25:8

³⁴² John 1:14

³⁴³ 1 John 2:2

Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken (abandoned) Me?*"³⁴⁴ ... And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"³⁴⁴

One by one the crowds of His supporters and the eleven remaining disciples had abandoned Him. Only a few of His female friends lingered, looking on from afar. His enemies surrounded Him and taunted Him. Human support for Him had evaporated in His hour of deepest need.

Through all eternity, before there was ever a creation He had been secure in the fellowship of Godhead. The love of the Father and the communion of Holy Spirit were of one accord with Him and of one mind. Each esteemed the others better than Himself and looked out not only for His own interests but also for the interests of the others.³⁴⁵

Such close communion is palpable. One senses immediately if it is disrupted. Jesus well knew that Habakkuk had written, "O LORD my God, my Holy One? *You are* of purer eyes than to behold evil ..." Now He became conscious that even the Father had abandoned Him and it seemed that the separation would be permanent because sin and iniquity separate the sinner from God. He bore the sin of the whole world as if it were His own!

His physical organs were breaking down as a result of the abuse that He had suffered. His neural system was over-

³⁴⁴ Mark 15:33-39

³⁴⁵ See Philippians 21-4

loaded with pain but the sense of abandonment was greater. He struggled to maintain hope by recalling the occasions when the Father had pronounced His blessing. “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”³⁴⁶ He had been fortified by the presence of Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration³⁴⁷ and strengthened by the angel in Gethsemane.³⁴⁸ The scenes of His life were passing before Him.

He recalled His own prophecy to the Jewish leaders, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” He remembered Isaiah’s picture of the suffering servant and other Bible passages He had learned:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;
He has put *Him* to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.
He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.³⁴⁹

As His overwhelmed mind grimly held on to these treasured memories, His anguished voice cried out the conviction that He really could not bear, “My God, My God. Why have you forsaken me?”³⁵⁰ His physical distress again came to the fore and He uttered the only words mentioning His personal suffering, “I thirst.”³⁵¹ This was true physically but also spiritually because He couldn’t sense His Father’s presence and He thirsted for it. Then, realizing He had accomplished

³⁴⁶ Matthew 3:17; 17:5

³⁴⁷ See Matthew 17:1-13

³⁴⁸ Luke 22:43

³⁴⁹ Isaiah 53:10-11

³⁵⁰ Matthew 27:46

³⁵¹ John 19:28

the purpose of His mission even though it appeared He had been abandoned by God, He cried out in relief and triumph, "It is finished!"

Finally, despite the perception that God had abandoned Him, He showed His steadfast trust by praying, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."³⁵² With this last loud cry, He breathed His last breath. He had the power to lay down His own life and He laid it down Himself.³⁵³ He chose His own moment to die in accord with His Father's will, but He died with a broken heart!

We need to remember exactly who was crucified. It was the LORD of glory in the guise of a man! Under oath, before the High Priest, Jesus acknowledged that He was "the Christ, the Son of God!"³⁵⁴ He immediately added, "I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." He thus invoked the imagery of Daniel who saw in the night visions, "One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him."³⁵⁵

Several times in His apocalyptic sermon (Matthew 24) Jesus had used the same title and imagery to teach about the coming of the Son of Man. It would be like lightning that comes from the east and flashes to the west. (v27) The tribes of earth would mourn when they saw the coming of the Son of Man "on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (v30) The coming of the Son of man would be as unexpected as was the flood in the days of Noah when people were going

³⁵² Luke 23:46

³⁵³ See John 10:15-18

³⁵⁴ Matthew 26:63

³⁵⁵ Daniel 7:13

about their everyday business and the flood came and took them all away. (vv37-39)

To Pilate's questioning, Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king."³⁵⁶ He had also asserted, "My kingdom is not of this world."³⁵⁷ He was rather King of kings and Lord of lords.³⁵⁸

Peter accused the crowds during his Pentecostal sermon, "... you ... killed the Prince of life."³⁵⁹ The epistle to the Hebrews has it, "we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man."³⁶⁰ Paul testifies, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,"

John writes in Revelation, "Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, ... from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,"³⁶¹ He also saw, "One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength." This One asserted,

³⁵⁶ John 18:37

³⁵⁷ John 18:36

³⁵⁸ See 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16

³⁵⁹ Acts 3:14,15

³⁶⁰ Hebrews 2:9

³⁶¹ Revelation 1:5

“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”³⁶²

These inspired writers, some of whom were eyewitnesses, leave no doubt that Jesus Christ was crucified and died as the Lamb of God. This same Jesus was in fellowship with the Father from the beginning of all beginnings. He was the One who was in the form of God, who emptied Himself to become obedient unto death;³⁶³ He was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death for every man.³⁶⁴

There is not one shred of Biblical evidence to show that the second person of the Godhead was conscious in any form during the hours between His death on the cross of Calvary and His resurrection early on that Sunday morning. The fellowship of the Godhead was fractured to atone for our sins.

Some may be tempted to think that 1 Peter 3:18-20 explains what Jesus did and where He was during the hours between His death and resurrection.

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited^l in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

Consider carefully the relationship between the pronouns and adverbs in this passage and their relative antecedents, nouns or verbs. See clearly that this passage is not speaking of Christ’s activity between His death and resurrection. It was the Holy Spirit who preached to spirits (in this

³⁶² Revelation 1:13-18

³⁶³ Philippians 2:6-8

³⁶⁴ Hebrews 2:9

case the word refers to persons) who were formerly disobedient but who are now in the prison of death. When did the Spirit preach to them? Peter says it was when they were disobedient and when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. At that time, of all who were warned – it was the entire world population at the time – only eight availed themselves of God’s provision and were saved.

Here again is evidence of the presence and activity of Holy Spirit far back in Old Testament times, even before the flood. Of course it was the same Spirit that moved on the face of the waters at creation.³⁶⁵

The words of the wisest man, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, also bear on what Jesus could do while He was dead. “... there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.”³⁶⁶

Did Deity Die?

Despite the fact that the divine Son of God died on the cross of Calvary, deity did not die. The Godhead continued to function when Jesus died. With omnipotent power and faithfulness God continued to uphold all things by the word of His power. He caused the sun to rise and the rain to fall on the evil and the good. The Holy Spirit was still at work to bring conviction to the hearts of men. It was no doubt He who prompted the centurion to say, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!”

True, Godhead did allow nature to display displeasure at the treatment of its Creator with a great earthquake and lightning and thundering. For a time the sun hid itself and its

³⁶⁵ Genesis 1:2

³⁶⁶ Ecclesiastes 9:10

Maker. However God continued to provide all the essential maintenance of natural law and of life that that He performs continuously. The one God of the Shema remained as one God and not merely two thirds God.

We also need to revisit the concept of Godhead as unity rather than as a unit. While each member of Godhead is distinct from the others none may be considered as separate from the others. There is a shared will and a shared consciousness. Thus whatever affects the mind of One also affects the minds of the others through that shared consciousness. If we see Jesus Christ's divine nature as isolated from that of Father and Holy Spirit, we are probably considering Jesus as God in His own right, isolated from the union that is the true God. This way of thinking is really a form of Tritheism where the three persons of Godhead are only loosely associated and not intimately united as one God.

Because "we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death,"³⁶⁷ we are apt to see His divinity as self contained. We undervalue the relational significance of His claim, "I and my Father are one."³⁶⁸ It becomes easy to think of the unity of Godhead being completely broken during His incarnation.

Conversely, for the very reason that Jesus "emptied Himself," it is easy to see Godhead's role in His life as simply sympathetic and supportive. We are apt not to see the deep empathy that continued to involve the Father and Holy Spirit in everything the Son experienced including His pain and suffering. When Jesus died on Calvary, though deity did not die, all its members experienced all the pain of the prelude to His

³⁶⁷ Hebrews 2:9

³⁶⁸ John 10:30

death; they all felt the full emotional force and mental anguish caused by the separation.

When Jesus died, He died the death that sinners die when finally they choose to be eternally separated from God rather than acknowledge and receive the benefits of His atonement for sins. It was not merely the death that is the lot of every man because of Adam's sin; the death that is as a deep sleep; the death that "spread to all men because all sinned."³⁶⁹ It was not the death from which "...all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."³⁷⁰ It was the second death which all overcomers avoid.³⁷¹ It was the second death, the final result of separation from God, that was in view when God warned Adam and Eve, "In the day you eat of it (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) you shall surely die."³⁷²

Any vestige of life cannot exist separated and apart from God who sustains the life of all He has created. It is only because Jesus was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"³⁷³ that temporary life was granted to Adam and Eve and their seed as a time of amnesty. This was to be a time of probation for God to provide reconciliation and salvation and the opportunity for sinners to accept His provision and so to be saved.

The wages of sin is the second death. All who sin rebel against God and His law. This is the behaviour and mindset of traitors who deserve annihilation, to prevent the spread of

³⁶⁹ Romans 5:12

³⁷⁰ John 5:28,29

³⁷¹ Revelation 2:11

³⁷² Genesis 2:17

³⁷³ Revelation 13:8

disaffection that ultimately undermines the authority of God's rule of law. Jesus chose to bear the burden of our guilt, alone, rather than resume all His capacities as God to avoid death. He died the second death, the final penalty for sin that is unconfessed and unrepented. In doing so, He made the propitiatory offering, paid the penalty for all sin. He carried the sin of the whole world.

“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”³⁷⁴ If we do not resist, we cannot help but be drawn by such love.

What Was Finished on Calvary?

After Jesus cried, “My God, my God, Why have you abandoned Me?” on Calvary He uttered three short phrases before He breathed His last breath.

Jesus' cry, “It is finished,” signalled the successful completion of His mission to vindicate God and His law and simultaneously to provide salvation for sinners and release from their subjection to Satan's power. The mission for which He was ordained in eternity past was secured and its goals assured. A couple of paragraphs from an early 20th century magazine for youth explains the significance of these words exactly.

“ Entire justice was done in the atonement. In the place of the sinner, the spotless Son of God received the penalty, and the sinner goes free as long as he receives and holds Christ as his personal Saviour. Though guilty, he is looked upon as innocent. Christ fulfilled every require-

³⁷⁴ 1 John 4:9,10

ment demanded by justice. God's character as a God of holiness, a God of goodness, compassion, and love combined, was revealed in his Son. In the cross of Christ, God gave the world a mighty pledge of his justice and love. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

" When Christ bowed his head and died, he bore the pillars of Satan's kingdom with him to the earth. He vanquished Satan in the same nature over which in Eden Satan obtained the victory. The enemy was overcome by Christ in his human nature. The power of the Saviour's Godhead was hidden. He overcame in human nature, relying upon God for power. This is the privilege of all. In proportion to our faith will be our victory."³⁷⁵

We notice in these two paragraphs a very important principle. Our ability to follow Jesus' example grows out of accepting that Jesus was our substitute, in His life and death. We can never be victors in our own battle with sin until we personally grasp this gift of God in Jesus Christ. "If *we* confess *our* sins, he is faithful and just to forgive *us our* sins, and to cleanse *us* from all unrighteousness."³⁷⁶

We may seek God's favour by striving to keep all His commandments. We will find this is mere grasping at straws. We may believe that Jesus died to save people from their sins but believe our own sins put us beyond God's mercy. However, Jesus simply says, "... the one who comes to Me I will by

³⁷⁵ E. G. White. *Youth's Instructor*, April 25, 1901, pars. 10 & 11

³⁷⁶ 1 John 1:9

no means cast out.”³⁷⁷ Whatever our condition, however hopeless our case seems to be, God accepts us just as we are because of Jesus. Because of Jesus, sinful as our lives may have been, for His sake God sees us as perfectly sinless, ready for eternal life if we will simply believe.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that *whosoever* believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ John 6:37

³⁷⁸ John 3:16,17

He Is Risen!

As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." John 10¹⁵⁻¹⁸

Who Raised Jesus?

The Bible says nothing about the process of raising Christ from the dead. At the outset of His ministry Jesus prophesied of Himself, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."³⁷⁹ How He would achieve this remains a mystery.

In teaching He was the Good Shepherd (quoted above), Jesus claimed the same knowledge of the Father as the Father had of Him. However, He asserted that He, Himself lay down His life for the sheep in order that He, Himself, may take it again. He was very definite that no one else would take His life because He would lay it down Himself. He asserted further that He had the power to lay down His life and the power to take it again and in doing so He would obey His Father's explicit command.³⁸⁰

Most of the New Testament passages that speak of the resurrection speak of God raising Him. "This Jesus, God has raised up." (Acts 2:32) "... whom God raised from the dead," (Acts 3:15; 4:10) "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus." (Acts 5:30) "Him God raised up on the third day." (Acts 10:40) "But God raised Him from the dead." (Acts 13:30) "He has

³⁷⁹ John 2:19

³⁸⁰ See John 10:15-18

raised up Jesus.” (Acts 13: 33) “He raised Him from the dead.” (Acts 13:34) “He whom God raised up.” (Acts 13:37) “God has raised Him from the dead.” (Rom 10:9) “God ... raised up the Lord.” (1 Cor 6:14) “We have testified of God that He raised up Christ...” (1 Cor 15:15) “... through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead.” (Gal 1:1) “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, ... raised Him from the dead.” (Eph 1:17,20) “God, who raised Him from the dead.” (Col 2:12; 1 Pet 1:21)

Only two of these make any mention of the Father. Are we then to deduce that each of the others is referring to God as a unit, meaning the Father? Indeed, does the term “Father” in its dual appearances refer to God the Father as an independent unit? All these references come from the hand of three authors. Each of these, in other places in their writings, supports the idea that Jesus Christ is fully divine. Is it not possible that all these pronouncements refer to God as a unity, as the whole body of New Testament revelation shows Him to be? It seems that we could substitute the term “Godhead” for each occurrence of the term “Father” in these verses (at least in Ephesians 1:17,20 if not also Galatians 1:1) without misrepresenting the meaning. The same is true for the term “God.”

Careful consideration of a verse from Paul not mentioned above lends some support to this conclusion. “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”³⁸¹ “Him who raised Jesus from the dead” seems to be simply a circumlocution for “God.” Paul certainly uses the term “Spirit of God” in close proximity to this verse and in the same section of his discourse.

Substituting “God” for the One “who raised Jesus from the dead,” we then have, “But if the Spirit of God dwells in

³⁸¹ Rom 8:11

you, God will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." This makes perfect sense with the interpretation that "God" is a unity rather than a unit.

Some may argue that two of the texts that mention the One who resurrected Jesus refer to God as the Father so all must be speaking of God as a unit. However, this interpretation denies Jesus' own claim that He would lay down His life and He, Himself would take it up again.³⁸² To explain all that the Bible says on the matter we must accept that the passages all speak of God as a unity rather than as a unit.

All in all, unless we are blinded by our presuppositions, the New Testament witnesses that each of the persons of Godhead was involved in the process of resurrecting Jesus Christ from the dead. A veil is drawn over the details of the process involved. However, as we shall see, it is a repeatable process except in some of the finer detail.

Immediate Effects of the Resurrection

Early on Sunday morning, the military guard was wide awake and alert, all at their posts guarding the tomb where Jesus lay. Suddenly there was a great earthquake and these trained soldiers who would face the fiercest foe were frightened out of their wits when a mighty angel appeared in dazzling brightness and rolled away the entrance stone, breaking the Roman seal. They became as dead men. The Bible does not tell us exactly what else this mighty angel did. We can speculate that he had a message to deliver to the dead Saviour, "Arise! Come forth! Your Father calls!" Matthew tells us this angel spoke to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary telling them, "He is not here, He is risen, as He said ...from the dead!"³⁸³

It seems that neither the women nor the disciples who came to the tomb of Jesus early that Sunday morning came

³⁸² John 10:17

³⁸³ Matthew 28:6,7

expecting to find Jesus' own words accomplished. Still today, experiences causing deep grief seem to rob us of our full intellectual response to the gospel and we are left to run to the Saviour after some trauma and figuratively snuggle up in His arms like a little child seeking comfort from its mother. Even when Jesus Himself appeared to Mary Magdalene, she did not at first recognize Him. I imagine her, "Raboni," sounded not so much as a statement of relief and excitement at first but like a question, "Can it really be you?"

The evidence for Jesus resurrection accumulated – the tomb was empty. The death wraps were neatly folded; the angel messenger asserted, "He is risen. Why seek the living among the dead?" Jesus Himself appeared; "many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people."³⁸⁴ Jesus walked with two disciples on the way to Emmaus.³⁸⁵ He appeared to the assembled group and "He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."³⁸⁶

This brought about an amazing change in the disposition and focus of all Jesus' supporters and in the eleven remaining inner circle of disciples in particular. Their focus had been on securing the most favourable positions for themselves in God's kingdom when He overthrew the Roman invaders. Then the cross had shattered their hopes and left them depressed and enervated. They had fled from their fel-

³⁸⁴ Matthew 27:52,53

³⁸⁵ Luke 24:13-35

³⁸⁶ Luke 24:45-49

lowship with Jesus, not wanting to endure the shame and suspicion that being identified with Him may bring on them.

Now they boldly declared His resurrection fearing no one. Tirelessly they proclaimed the forgiveness of sins in His name and called all those who heard into the fellowship that Jesus had brought to them from His heavenly union. Their focus had changed from self promotion and self preservation to the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom of God, whatever the personal sacrifice involved.

Implications of the Resurrection

According to Paul, the resurrection of Jesus Christ completed the events that established the gospel of Jesus Christ as good news for all mankind: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."³⁸⁷ The good news is firmly rooted in these historic events which have implications reaching to eternity. However these basic facts cannot be changed by the way we feel about them. They are locked into an immovable verity because they happened in time now past. They remain true whether or not we ignore them.

Every moment of our lives we depend on these facts for life and breath and all things. These facts ensure the resurrection of all that are in the graves. Our attitude to these facts and their central figure will determine whether we will arise to unending life or to eternal damnation.

"For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrec-

³⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:3,4

tion of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.³⁸⁸

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”³⁸⁹

By His substitutionary death on Calvary, Jesus Christ reconciled mankind to God. Yet something more was required to ensure that those He reconciled could be saved for eternity. His death reckoned us all dead to disobedience and rebellion against God's kingdom, to the old man of sin. It is His resurrection that enlivens us to newness of life, obedience and citizenship of the kingdom of God.

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”³⁹⁰

“For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”³⁹¹

Paul has written a lengthy discussion of the consequences of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. The passage first describes what it would mean if there were no resurrection of the dead – Christ would not be risen. Further, if Christ hadn't risen, faith is futile, there is no deliverance from sins and there is no future hope after death. Our lives would be most miserable without the hope that Christ's resurrection brings us³⁹²

³⁸⁸ Daniel 12:2

³⁸⁹ John 5: 26-29

³⁹⁰ Romans 5:10 It is most likely that the “life” mentioned here is Christ's perfect, incarnate life. However, that would be meaningless to us without His resurrection and the restoration of His life that He gave up for mankind.

³⁹¹ Romans 5:17

³⁹² 1 Corinthians 15:13-19

Then there is this confident assertion:

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”³⁹³

It is not that Jesus Christ was the first to be raised from the dead. Jesus Himself raised the son of the widow of Nain,³⁹⁴ Jairus' daughter,³⁹⁵ and Lazarus,³⁹⁶ as well as many others,³⁹⁷ all before His own resurrection. Elijah and Elisha each raised a child from the dead by God's power.³⁹⁸ However, all these were raised to a life that was ended again in the course of time. They died again and saw corruption.

The appearance of Moses on the Mount of transfiguration suggests that he was also resurrected following his death at Mount Pisgah in Moab.³⁹⁹ His resurrection was of a different kind from those others just mentioned because he was obviously resurrected to a heavenly, eternal life never again to experience death. Jesus' resurrection was of this same quality but, because of Moses, it was not the first in point of time.

³⁹³ 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

³⁹⁴ Luke 7:11-17

³⁹⁵ Mark 5:22-24, 35-43; Luke 8:40-42; 49-56

³⁹⁶ John 11:1-44

³⁹⁷ Matt 1:4,5; Luke 7:22

³⁹⁸ 1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:32-35

³⁹⁹ Deuteronomy 34:5 Moses was plainly a special case. It was not that all who were in a right relationship with God when they died in Old Testament times were taken immediately to heaven. The “many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep [who] were raised and came out of their graves following Christ's resurrection” (Matthew 27:52,53) show that all of God's faithful people are not immediately “promoted to glory” as many believe. They sleep in their graves until God calls them to rise to eternal life. So Moses was an exception to the general rule.

Jesus was called “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” because His resurrection was an early sign of a great harvest to follow. All resurrection from the dead depends on His resurrection. Christ’s resurrection also demonstrated that God is able to restore the life of anyone who dies as a sinner. Life after death is not merely some wild hope but an established fact.

God’s purpose in the incarnation was to eliminate sin and to undo all its effects. He came to seek and to save all that was lost. He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. So Christ’s resurrection was a model of what could be achieved for all. His body was sown in corruption, it was raised in incorruption. It was sown in dishonour, it was raised in glory. It was sown in weakness, it was raised in power. It was sown a natural body, it was raised a spiritual body.⁴⁰⁰ He was the prototype for the figurative seed that must fall in the ground and die before it can bear a harvest.

The Bible paints a prophetic picture that all who are in the graves will come forth. Some – those who have been “faithful unto death” – will arise to eternal life and a crown of glory, transformed and “incorruptible.” When this occurs, God’s faithful remnant who are still living will also be changed. God will clothe them with the same transformation and incorruption that the righteous dead receive on resurrection,⁴⁰¹ Those who have died alienated from God will arise to shame, condemnation, damnation and everlasting contempt.⁴⁰²

How Christ's Resurrection Affects Mankind

So far we have considered the long term benefits that the resurrection promises. These certainties affect our present life only as a matter of faith and hope. They will be fully

⁴⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

⁴⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 15:51,52

⁴⁰² Daniel 12:2

effective when the Godhead's plan for mankind is consummated with the return of Jesus and when He finally destroys sin and unrepentant sinners. He will create new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells⁴⁰³ and His resurrection ensures this.

However, Christ's resurrection has much more immediate effects also. "He was delivered up [to be crucified] because of our offences but raised for our justification."⁴⁰⁴ "... just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."⁴⁰⁵

Just as sin marred the image of God in humanity but did not obliterate it, so the resurrection makes its full restoration possible, but not immediate. The gospel provides all mankind with a time of amnesty where the full penalty of law breaking is suspended temporarily. It is a time when each person can personally test what it means to live in fellowship with God and in harmony with His standards,

God's provision works something like this although the actual detail differs for every person. Holy Spirit impresses our minds that there is a better way of living than what we're used to. We have not obeyed God and we have fallen short of His requirements. However, He puts in our hearts a desire to find that better way for our future and forgiveness for our past. God has promised, "...you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."⁴⁰⁶

It is impossible for us to know or understand that God can turn our lives around and save us unless Holy Spirit convicts our hearts. It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. ⁴⁰⁷We cannot afford to put off the decision until a time we think may be more convenient for us to heed it's

⁴⁰³ 2 Peter 4:13

⁴⁰⁴ Romans 4:25

⁴⁰⁵ Romans 6:4

⁴⁰⁶ Jeremiah 29:12,13

⁴⁰⁷ Romans 2:4

pleading. Procrastination dulls our minds to the good news He brings. When we steadfastly close our minds to the impressions we are given about our need to be right with God there is no other avenue for us to receive salvation.

At Pentecost, Peter taught,

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. ... To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.”⁴⁰⁸

We see here that the resurrection is a blessing designed to turn us away from our previous sinful lives and to give us new life in Christ Jesus.

Repentance includes a deep, genuine feeling of sorrow for our sinfulness of mind and action. These are our personal contributions to the load Jesus carried to Calvary and that caused His death. Being fearful for the consequences that may fall on us for our wrongdoing is not true repentance. That comes as a gift from God and involves a recognition that God has been affected as well as others. It results in a wish that we could undo the wrong and make restitution if that were possible.

Being converted involves a transformation from being self centred and wanting to have our own way whatever the cost to anyone else. This turning away from self brings us to the place where God's will and God's ways become dominant motivators in our lives because we “are born again from above,”⁴⁰⁹ Conversion is always God's work for us and never our own achievement.

⁴⁰⁸ Acts 3:19-32, 26

⁴⁰⁹ See John 3:1-21

Peter's final point is that Jesus' resurrection paved the way for everyone to turn away from wickedness and injustice. Christ's death and resurrection have made eternal life freely available to all mankind. God has Himself provided all that He demands as a condition to live with Him forever as a gift in Jesus Christ.

We need to see what it means that Holy Spirit will "convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment."⁴¹⁰ While the Holy Spirit is in the world, He is constantly active in every mind and heart. Every good deed that is done is prompted by Holy Spirit. Every other deed that is done ignores or rebels against the still, small voice of the Spirit of God and sears the conscience. When the voice of the Holy Spirit is finally rejected outright, God has no other avenue to influence us. Steadfast rejection of the Holy Spirit's guidance is blasphemy against Godhead Himself and is the only sin that cannot be pardoned

When a person is born again, born from above, his or her citizenship changes. There is a very real sense that he or she becomes an alien and a foreigner in the territory presently ruled by the Prince of this world. He or she has a diplomatic mission and is an appointed ambassador of the King of kings wherever on earth that may be.⁴¹¹ So our place of residence does not change when we accept Jesus Christ as Saviour but we become naturalised citizens of heaven by faith.

Newness of Life

We should never underestimate the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents and turns to God. One dead in trespasses and sins has received new life in Christ Jesus! A cap-

⁴¹⁰ John 16:8

⁴¹¹ 2 Cor 5:18, 20 tells us, "God, ... has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ... Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

tive of Satan has been redeemed and released! An alien from God has been granted citizenship of heaven! A great debtor has been forgiven! A habitual lawbreaker has been justified and pardoned! Why would there not be celebration?

The new believer will never reach a higher place in God's regard than when he or she first kneels at the foot of the cross and surrenders self to the Saviour. At that moment, when we first trust Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we are "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."⁴¹² God regards us as if we had never sinned and we begin a new life as a child of God.

The Bible is very clear that all who are born again are judged to be righteous in God's sight and need fear no future judgment while they remain submitted to His will as they are at conversion. Does this mean that once you are saved in this way you can never be lost? It's interesting what the Bible teaches.

Accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour is the start of a journey that ends at death or just before Christ's second coming when the time of amnesty for sinners is brought to a close. We are told that God's Spirit will not always strive with men,⁴¹³ A time comes just before Christ's return when God decrees, "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous^[a] still; he who is holy, let him be holy still."⁴¹⁴ Amnesty is at an end. Those who remain righteous in God's sight by faith in Jesus Christ are saved for eternity, whether they have died or remain alive. Alternatively, unregenerate sinners will be destroyed.

⁴¹² Ephesians 1:13,14

⁴¹³ Genesis 6:3, Psalm 103:9 "Strive" means to try for or to exert oneself.

⁴¹⁴ Revelation 22:11

We have seen that a time comes when the possibility of being saved is at an end. Every person who has steadfastly ignored or rebuffed the Holy Spirit when He has pleaded with them to accept God's merciful provisions, will be excluded from God's kingdom and be forever lost. There is no future hope for those who ignore the opportunities that God has provided for all sinners to be saved.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.⁴¹⁵

When the sinner comes to Christ and trusts in Him for forgiveness and grace, he is assured that God will not withdraw this blessing. So long as he holds close communion with Christ and walks obedient to the Spirit's direction, even though mistakes are made, he will be counted as an over-comer. His place in the kingdom is secure.

Falling Away

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 1 Timothy 4:1,2

It may seem incredible to some that the Bible contains warnings against falling away from faith and losing the standing we once had in Jesus Christ. Just a few verses after Peter's assurance that the LORD is not willing that any should perish comes this solemn warning. "Therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ."⁴¹⁶ There needs to be a continual growth in the grace of Jesus as we walk with Him day by day. If we

⁴¹⁵ 2 Peter 3:9

⁴¹⁶ 2 Peter 3:17,18

neglect this walk and despise this fellowship we are in danger of being led away with the error of the wicked.

Other writers give the same warning. The whole book of Jude is devoted to teaching us not to fall away from the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. The LORD's brother considered his cautions to be so important that he abandoned a plan to write of our common salvation.⁴¹⁷ Instead he wrote of the dangers of falling away from the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. The book leaves us with the wonderful promise, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."⁴¹⁸ God's provision remains certain. If we are tempted to fall away from the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints, He remains able to deliver us from seductive influences to abandon His teachings.

We would remind those who believe that once a person is saved it is impossible to be lost, and that those people who are eventually lost were never really converted in the first place, that this explanation runs against the words of scripture. In Old Testament times we have the example of King Saul. Notice the record:

- The Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.⁴¹⁹
- And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen, that *there is no one like him among all the people?*"⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁷ Jude v3

⁴¹⁸ Jude vv 24,25 (KJV)

⁴¹⁹ 1 Samuel 10:10

⁴²⁰ 1 Samuel 10:24

- God had promised His people who demanded a king for themselves, If you fear the LORD and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the LORD your God.⁴²¹
- And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”⁴²²
- Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹ “I greatly regret that I have set up Saul *as* king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.”⁴²³
- But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.”⁴²⁴
- But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him.⁴²⁵
- Then Samuel said: “So why do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy? And the LORD has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this

⁴²¹ 1 Samuel 12:14

⁴²² 1 Samuel 13:13,14

⁴²³ 1 Samuel 15:10

⁴²⁴ 1 Samuel 1 Samuel 28:10-15:26

⁴²⁵ 1 Samuel 16:14

day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons *will be* with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”⁴²⁶

The LORD Himself chose King Saul to be Israel's first king and imbued Him with the presence of the Spirit of the LORD. Early in His reign Saul reigned humbly and obeyed all the LORD's commands. However, the time came that the LORD rejected him and withdrew His Spirit because Saul persistently disobeyed the LORD's commands.

In Hebrews., the writer comments, “

For *it is* impossible for those who, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, *it is* rejected and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned.⁴²⁷

The passage makes it clear that it speaks of some of those who have experienced genuine conversion -- they were once enlightened, they have tasted the heavenly gift, they have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. All these apply only to true believers.

The passage also affirms that the falling away involves a well considered decision to put Christ to shame openly. A loyal and devoted friend does not cultivate disloyalty and disobedience to their benefactor. These actions bear fruit that is represented as thorns and thistles rather than good herbs. The behaviour is symptomatic of those who no longer wish to maintain an intimate fellowship with the Saviour of the world.

⁴²⁶ 1 Samuel 28:16-19

⁴²⁷ Hebrews 6:4-8

When Adam first sinned, it was because he made a deliberate choice. He was confronted with the fact that Eve had been deceived by the serpent and had brought herself into opposing God's express command. Eve was his most cherished companion. He wanted to show his love for his beautiful helpmeet even if it meant choosing between her and obedience to God. He clearly understood the nature of the choice, but he chose his own way rather than following God's revealed will.

Falling away from salvation involves the same considered and deliberate choice to ignore or oppose God's expressed will. God has warned His people,

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”⁴²⁸

Instead of the prohibition against eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and a consequent penalty of death, we have a prohibition against loving the world (and what that involves), and a penalty of passing away when this world passes away. Sometimes, like the apostle Paul, a person whose heart is set on obedience to God's requirements acts against his heart's consent.⁴²⁹ They fall short of entering God's rest.⁴³⁰ However, Paul sees that Jesus Christ our LORD can deliver us from this condemnation.

When the Holy Spirit convicts a person of falling short, He always points to the solution. “... if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”⁴³¹ So, repentance and con-

⁴²⁸ 1 John 2:15-17

⁴²⁹ Romans 7:18-23

⁴³⁰ Hebrews 11:25

⁴³¹ 1 John 2:1,2

fession of our failures and shortfalls remains as an ever present reality for God's people. "There still exists, therefore, a full and complete rest for the people of God. And he who experiences God's real rest is resting from his own work as fully as God from his."⁴³²

Communion is a necessary part of establishing and maintaining any friendship and is doubly so in maintaining closeness with God. Abraham was called a friend of God and it is apparent from His life story that there were times when his own choices put the friendship under severe test. However, the general tenor of his life is expressed in Hebrews 11:8 – "By faith Abraham obeyed ..."

Moses also exemplified the life of one dedicated to God's fellowship. He chose, "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin."

The history of God's leading His people Israel demonstrates His longsuffering with those who ignore His advice and live contrary to His commandments. When His people strayed from their loyalty, He permitted much painful conflict. He sent many deliverers over the centuries who led the nation to victory as they returned to following His will. He proved His love by delivering them time and again. However, He finally brought on them all the curses of the covenant. They had at last gone too far when their leaders cried, "His blood be on us and on our children."⁴³³ Disobedience to the covenant provisions had brought disaster upon them.

As individual Christians who have been born from above and adopted into the family of God, we need to take these lessons to heart. God wants us to produce fruit in keeping with our repentance.⁴³⁴ Jesus Christ calls us into fellowship with Himself, the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁴³⁵ "...having

⁴³² Hebrews 4:9,10 (J.B. Phillips translation).

⁴³³ Matthew 27:25

⁴³⁴ Matthew 3:8

⁴³⁵ 2 Corinthians 13:14

been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”⁴³⁶ Everyone who hopes to see Jesus and be saved finally in His kingdom seeks to “purify himself, even as He is pure.”⁴³⁷

God's promises are sure and certain to those who maintain their faith in Him. He is able to keep us from falling from the faith and present us faultless before God's presence with exceeding joy. to God. The single condition is that we maintain our fellowship with Him, praying and studying His to know His will and doing His will as completely as He enables us.

Personal Note

In my experience, there have been some sensitive souls whom Satan has tried to discourage with the thought that they have committed the unpardonable sin. The passage from Hebrews 6 quoted above presses upon them as a Biblical reason that God has irrevocably abandoned them.

If you are ever tempted to think this way, let me encourage you. Whenever we sin as believers, Satan tries to convince us that our transgression is too great for God to forgive. He hopes this will keep us from seeking the God who came into the world to save sinners. He insinuates that we will be turned away. However, “If any man (or woman) sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation (sacrifice of atonement) for our sin, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”⁴³⁸ If you are being convicted by Holy Spirit, He will always point you to that remedy. It is only Satan who will convict you without pointing you to the Saviour of the world and His longsuffering compassion and forgiveness.

⁴³⁶ Hebrews 5:9

⁴³⁷ 1 John 3:3

⁴³⁸ 1 John 2:1,2

Those who have committed the unpardonable sin will never see their sin because they are at enmity with God. Satan wants to keep them self satisfied with their course of action. However, Satan is the deceiver of the brethren and he will go to any lengths to keep a sinner from resting in God's provision of salvation. So, the very fact that you are coming under conviction of sin is a sign that God has not abandoned you.

God's call to us through Jesus is, "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."⁴³⁹ "You will show me the path of life; In Your presence *is* fullness of joy; At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore."⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ Matthew 11:28-30

⁴⁴⁰ Psalm 16:10

Fellowship and Sonship

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our LORD.” 1 Corinthians 1:9

“...grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 3:8-10

Mankind was originally created to be in fellowship with God. While man’s sin fractured the communion between Creator and His disobedient creatures, God acted in Jesus Christ to provide reconciliation for the alienated inhabitants of earth. Jesus lived, died and was resurrected so, “That God’s way may be known [again] on earth, His salvation among all nations.”⁴⁴¹

By accepting God’s provisions, all those who have responded to His call are brought into fellowship with Him and with one another. These called out ones together constitute His Church. On each one the Holy Spirit bestows at least one spiritual gift to bless and build the community of His people.

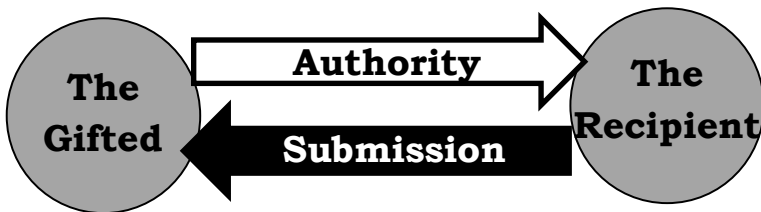
Let us consider for a moment some of the practical issues that this bestowal of gifts has for individual people who use these gifts and the ones receiving the benefits from the use of the gifts. Let’s call the one who receives a gift for ministering from the Holy Spirit, “The Gifted,” and the one who is blessed by the benefits, “The Recipient.”



⁴⁴¹ Psalm 67:2

The Gifted has a responsibility towards the Recipient that amounts to an authority to bless the recipient by the exercise of their gift. Similarly, the Recipient has an obligation to submit to the Gifted in the area of their giftedness in order to obtain the promised blessing. Of course, there may be a Gifted individual person with many Recipients of that gift.

This is certainly obvious where the gift may be teaching, or apostleship, or evangelism. These “gifted” need to exercise administrative control over others. However, their very humanity may sometimes make it difficult for them to submit to other “gifted” through whom God desires to bless them, someone who does not have one of the “greater gifts.”⁴⁴² Every Christian we meet has been gifted by the Holy Spirit to be a blessing to His church in some way. To refuse to submit to them in the area of their giftedness it to cut oneself off from the means God has appointed to grow in that area. To refuse to exercise a gift we are given because we don’t consider it one of the greater gifts is simply not submitting to the will of God.

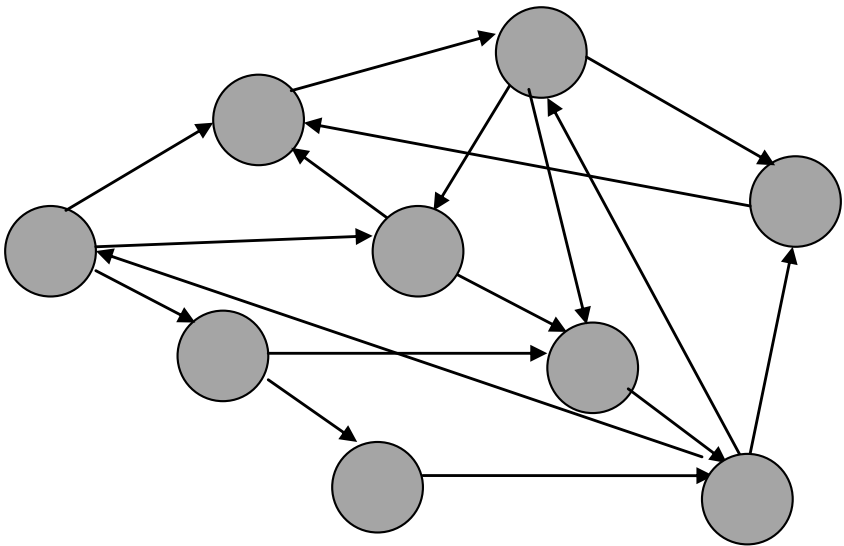


Could it be that when Paul says, “be filled with the Spirit, ... giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one an-

⁴⁴² 1 Corinthians 12:31 (NIV) Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

other in the fear of God,”⁴⁴³ that he includes submitting to the Gifted as well as esteeming others as better than oneself?⁴⁴⁴

Now, of course, in the area of another different gift, the positions of Gifted and Recipient may be reversed and so the authority and submission relationships will also be reversed in that area of giftedness. We can visualize that in a local congregation and in the Church at large, the network of Gifted and Recipients is also large and so are the relationships of authority and submission. Each person benefits from the gifts of others and blesses others with their own gifts. So, in a small group of believers we may represent the relationships of Gifted to Recipient something like this (for simplicity’s sake) and note that each is gifted in some way and each is also recipient of some other area of gift.



It stands to reason that each person in the fellowship of believers is “gifted” in some area of service and, simultaneously, “recipient” of others’ giftedness in other areas of the

⁴⁴³ Ephesians 5:18, 20, 21

⁴⁴⁴ Philippians 2:3

gifts of the Spirit. Thus we all serve and we all are to submit to others' service.

This is a very practical aspect of God's desire to dwell amongst His people. He provides salvation as a free gift so all may be reconciled to Him. To all who gratefully accept this grace He provides the means to cooperate with Him in restoring the image of God in themselves and also in their fellow man.

There are aspects of God's relationship with His people that are better represented by the imagery of fellowship (or communion) with one another than by the more pervasive Father/Son imagery. Our knowledge of God would be more restricted if we were to see Him only in terms of a family with God as Father and Son. We need models of the relationships between equals because we are equal as the children of God. We are not in a parent/child relationship with one another. The concept of fellowship adds an extra dimension to our understanding and it is modelled for us in the eternal fellowship of the Godhead.

This is completely in harmony with the New Testament teaching about gifts of the Holy Spirit. Notice particularly the emphasized points:

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills."⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says:

“ When He ascended on high,

He led captivity captive,

And gave gifts to men.” ...

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”⁴⁴⁶

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

⁴⁴⁶ Ephesians 4:7-16

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”⁴⁴⁷

When we look at spiritual gifts in this way, we can see the network of associations through which God’s church is organized into a single body. Little wonder that, within that body the relationships are referred to as a fellowship. It is a fellowship described in several different ways. It is “the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42); it is “the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Cor 1:9); it is “the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints”. (2 Cor 8:4); it is “fellowship in the gospel.” (Phil 1:5)

What is more, in some inexplicable way the unity of this fellowship reflects (poorly), “the unsearchable riches of Christ, and makes all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁴⁴⁸

We have already discovered that, when Jesus came, God purposed to extend the eternal fellowship of the Father and Son that had existed from the beginning of beginnings. He wanted the divine fellowship to extend to us, through the proclamation of the apostles and to all who respond to their message.⁴⁴⁹ It is God’s plan that this proclamation be made to every nation and kindred and tongue and people calling on all to join the fellowship. The goal is that we may find fullness of joy.

⁴⁴⁷ Romans 12: 1-13

⁴⁴⁸ Ephesians 3:8

⁴⁴⁹ 1 John 1:1-4

What is more, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”⁴⁵⁰

As Christians we have long accepted that God wants to draw us into the unity of the faith. We have paid lip service to the idea that we are one body, but we seldom see the situation where, say, even a complete local congregation behaves as one, united in all its purposes. Yet God is waiting with longing heart for us to act like He acts, a fellowship of three moving in complete harmony. He pleads to us through the Apostle Paul, “if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”⁴⁵¹

There are some ways that this concept of fellowship of God’s creatures with one another and with Him transcends even the intimate relationship between a father and a son. The relationship between husband and wife also is a relationship of fellowship and not a filial relationship. Both wife and husband are to leave behind the familial ties and be joined to one another as one flesh.

Now the concept of “one flesh” is only literally so during coitus and in their children. However spouses ideally remain “one flesh” perpetually in a figurative sense. How wise God was to represent His oneness of Godhead by such a union (as He designed it.) It gives us a limited idea of how more than one can also be one in a fellowship designed to be a taste of heaven on earth.

⁴⁵⁰ 1 John 1:6,7

⁴⁵¹ Philippians 2:1-4

Within the Church, though each member individually is to have a filial relationship with Godhead, there is also to be a fellowship relationship with one another and with God. So our filial relationship with God is not meant to displace our fellowship with Him. The two kinds of relationship are to exist together. The filial relationship with God means that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, while the fellowship relationship means that we dwell in unity and harmony with one another and with Him, the triune God.

Appointed Son or Natural Son?

(A rebuttal)

There are some who deny a triune Godhead and who insist that Jesus is the literal offspring of the Father because He is the only begotten Son of God. This means that all the Biblical references to Jesus as the Son of God and to the Father are to be understood in their literal sense. Further, they maintain that the richness of the Biblical imagery of the divine Father and Son has real relational significance to the human condition and to salvation only if the connection is a literal Father/Son kinship.

These people present excellent studies of the spiritual significance and lifestyle example for Christians arising out of the divine Father/Son imagery. However, they militantly proclaim that it is impossible for us to derive the same benefits if the relationship between Father and Son is not literal. They often denounce any theological positions that are not in harmony with this viewpoint.

The issue of how Jesus came to be the Son of God has been examined in an earlier section. Here we will rehearse an occasional point as we show that the richness of the Biblical teaching about the Father and Son is not dependent on the words being used in their literal or natural sense.

There are many Biblical examples where the words “father” or “son” are used without any intention of describing male persons of successive generations in the same family.

Each of these is an example of how the Bible uses the words in a figurative sense. So it is not as if we *must* understand the words in their strictly literal sense.

If we force the words into a strictly literal sense, we are left with some strange issues to explain. In a natural, literal sense a father needs a woman to be mother to his child. Who was the mother when Jesus was begotten in eternity? If there was none, then we are not using either word “Father” or “Son” in its strict, natural, literal sense. So even those who insist that the pre-incarnate Jesus was “brought forth” from the Father are using the term “Father” in a figurative way. The same applies to the term “Son” in reference to Jesus Christ.

In our society with its wide variety of partnership arrangements, there are many and diverse situations where father and son(s) have no genetic links. Normally there are genetic links between father and son through the mother, sometimes not. Adoption is possibly the most common of these. When you consider adoption, it is so much like “appointing” a child to a position of son (or daughter) where either one or both parents cannot be its literal father or mother.

The Bible uses the figure of adoption to describe how Christians become sons and daughters of God. “God ... predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, ... He made us accepted in the Beloved.”⁴⁵² “... when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”⁴⁵³

Now, if we are not literal children of God but adopted or appointed sons and daughters, we assert that we still pos-

⁴⁵² Ephesians 1:5,6

⁴⁵³ Galatians 4:3-7

sess all the spiritual advantages of natural born children and heirs. It is not the literalness of the words “father” or “son” or “child” that is important. What is important is the decree of sovereign God which appoints us as His children. In the same way, it is not the literalness of the words “Father” and “Son” that must be preserved at all cost when used of God but the sovereign decree of Godhead that appointed Jesus as Son of God.

All the richness and teaching capacity in the Biblical imagery of Father and Son is preserved whether the words are used literally or figuratively. God is faithfully drawing us to Himself but He must frame His self revelation in faulty human language. He must also use faulty human concepts expressed in imprecise human words to give us limited understanding of things that are simply too big for human intellect to grasp fully. There are no other words to describe Him more completely. And with the words, He gives the Holy Spirit to interpret them to our hearts and minds.

It is important also for us to consider that when God created Adam He also created Eve to be a help suitable for him. Thousands of years of sin have left women without the equality between the sexes that God planned. When Jesus Christ came, He provided that men and women again be equal as citizens of His kingdom and children of God. In Christ there is neither male nor female⁴⁵⁴ - the gender imbalance should no more be cause for discrimination.

It is only because of sin that women face the gender imbalance. However, Jesus Christ dealt with the problem of sin and in Him, the distortions due to sin have been dealt with. There is no hierarchy of worth for men and women. So the words that best describe the God-planned equality relationship between the sexes are “fellowship” or “communion.” These describe the very concept that characterizes Godhead in unity. It is the same concept that the Bible uses to express

⁴⁵⁴ Galatians 3:28

the expanding community of those who respond to the preaching of the gospel⁴⁵⁵. God wants to be in communion or fellowship with His people, male and female.

We do not negate the rich imagery of the relationship between Father and Son by speaking also of the relationship of fellowship between them. Fellowship expresses a quality of mutual love and interdependence that is not always present in the relationship between a father and his son. There is a special intimacy for instance in the relationship between a married couple that is a type of fellowship relationship and not that of father/son. Or consider the fellowship of David and Jonathon. It is altogether different from the father/son bond.

Thus the imagery of fellowship gives us some insight into the relationships within Godhead that adds to the Father/Son model that is so pervasive in the Bible. It enriches our understanding and particularly exemplifies God's way for us to relate with other contemporaries who share no familial ties with us save the fellowship of His suffering.

Source of Jesus Christ's Authority

(A rebuttal)

We have already mentioned that there are five main threads of Biblical evidence for Jesus' divinity - His honours, His attributes, His nature, His deeds, and His seat as God. A careful consideration of this evidence shows, this divinity is self-existent and not inherited from that of the Father. There are some who claim that the Father alone is Almighty God who elevated Jesus to a position of divinity above the rest of the heavenly hosts at some time in the unimaginably distant past. There seems to be some confusion among their ranks concerning whether He was previously the angel with highest

⁴⁵⁵ *απαγγελιον* leads to *κοινωνια* (proclamation [of the gospel] leads to fellowship.)- see for example 1 John 1:1-4

inherent power or whether He obtained His divinity by natural inheritance as He was “brought forth” out of the Father.

The claim is also made that those who believe in a triune Godhead understand divinity to be defined on the basis of “highest inherent power.” Further, that this concept grows out of the serpent’s lie to Eve, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁴⁵⁶

We heartily agree that this pronouncement of the serpent is the basis of all error promoted by Satan. In fact it contains three lies all of which underpin all godlessness, all sinful activity and all erroneous decisions.

Let’s take a moment to highlight these three lies.

- “You shall not surely die.” This lie denies that life can continue only while God sustains it. It is a claim that all living organisms have life in themselves quite independent of any supernatural source. It asserts that we do not need God and that we can live quite independently of Him.
- “You shall be as Gods.” This lie claims that each creature is sovereign in itself and has the right to make decisions and act in complete independence. It claims we do not need to submit to the will and authority of God.
- “You shall know good and evil.” This lie claims that we each have in ourselves the knowledge of what is good and what is evil, though we may be conditioned to suppress this knowledge. It is a claim that we do not need any external frame of reference to know right from wrong. We decide for ourselves. We do not need guidance from God’s law to define the way we should think and act.

This trinity of lies (three united as one) underpins the mindset we have mentioned in connection with the antichrist – I have the right to get my own way by whatever means, using whatever power or force that is available, whatever it may

⁴⁵⁶ Genesis 3: 4,5

cost anyone else. We have also called it the mindset of Babylon.

As for this Babylonish mindset, we can certainly see that it is associated with accomplishing goals by using the highest inherent power or highest available power. We agree up to this point. But we see these lies associated with anti-christ and never with the person or methods of Jesus Christ. We cannot claim that the power He exercised in His pre-incarnate existence and His incarnation and which He will exercise in His imminent return are simply to demonstrate His divinity. After all, He laid aside most of the prerogatives of divinity for a while to become the humblest of men and to tabernacle with us. We can certainly say, with complete Biblical backing, that He was able, during His time on earth, to achieve all the goals set in the counsels of the Godhead while laying aside His own power and depending wholly on His Father.

It is not the lies of the serpent in Eden that underpin the concept of trinity. It is not presuppositions that divinity, Godness, is determined by highest inherent power. Divinity is rather expressed in the principle of self effacing concern for others; in not thinking of self more highly than one ought; in promoting others ahead of oneself. In short divinity exemplifies selfless love willing to allow itself to be vulnerable in order that others might be saved. Jesus was not divine because He had the “highest inherent power” but because He was God, in Himself, in fellowship together with the Father from the beginning of all beginnings.

It is because Jesus is God in His own right that He is glorified as God by the Father and all the heavenly hosts. As Jesus returned to heaven from His resurrection, the Father returned to Him His ‘emptied’ prerogatives and called on all heaven and earth to honour Him just as they honour the Father.⁴⁵⁷ Those who do not glorify Him for this reason put

⁴⁵⁷ Philippians 2: John5:23; 1 Peter 1:17

themselves at odds with these heavenly hosts and with the Father Himself.