

UNLOCKING THE GODHEAD

A Defense of Seventh-day Adventist Belief

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UNLOCKING THE GODHEAD

A Defense of Seventh-day Adventist Belief

Introduction

Within a Seventh-day Adventist setting the second to fifth of the 28 statements of fundamental beliefs deal with "The Godhead," "God The Father," "God The Son" and "God The Holy Spirit."¹ Critics who do not believe that the Godhead consists of an intimate union of three co-equal and co-eternal Beings group these statements together and criticize the statements as the Trinity doctrine even though the word appears nowhere in the statements.² Here is the nearest the statements come to using the word: "There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons."³

Within the denomination, a growing chorus of voices is rising against the portion of the official Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Beliefs that deals with the Godhead. These voices raise several different types of argument against the doctrine of Trinity. At their heart, they appear to attack the Trinity doctrine as heretical because they fear it will lead those who believe it eventually to cast off their commitment to Christ as their Saviour. They contend that in the process the task of the Church to proclaim the three angels' messages will be compromised and Christ's coming will thus be delayed.

¹ http://adventist.org.au/about_adventists/beliefs#full as at 4 May,2008

² It is a fact that the second of these statements was until recently entitled "Trinity."

³ Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, Number 2

Scope of Investigation

It is beyond the scope of this book to deal with every specific argument raised. However we will examine most of the general classes of argument and deal with some specifically. In addition, we will suggest principles to adopt when evaluating the merits of arguments against what we believe.

Our purpose is to examine the claims honestly, to determine how much weight should be given to the claims in our pursuit of “the faith that was once for all given to the saints.”⁴ In doing this we may have some contention with the statements made by many honest believers. We do this in the spirit of learners, not know-it-alls, for we believe that we are called to work together prayerfully towards unity in the faith.

When contending for any part of the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints, we need to maintain humility of spirit. Even as individual Christians we have not always believed exactly as we do now. Our belief is not static. It changes from time to time as we mature and as we accumulate additional knowledge. Often, under the influence of the Spirit of Holiness, we realize that we can no longer accept some aspect of belief that once seemed set in concrete. If we insist that we should always believe as we or our pioneers did, we cut ourselves off from advancing knowledge and from restoring truth where the mistakes of the past have distorted it.

None of us holds truth in absolute purity. We are all frail human beings. However, when we have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, the way and the truth and the life, we have all truth in Him (in the reckoning of God). This is also true for others with a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, however much their perception of truth differs from our own. As Christians, surely we can discuss and even wrangle over others’ points of view without doubting their sincerity or condemning them! So we suggest a couple of principles we should keep in mind as we continue.

⁴ Jude v3

Principles Used in This Document

Here are the basic principles that provide the foundation for this work:

- We must keep an open mind, recognizing that we are all wrong in many things. The only way to fix that problem is for us personally to change our beliefs when our error is exposed. God does not compel anyone's actions or beliefs. Nevertheless, we are all held accountable for knowing and not acting on what we do know.
- We must find answers in the Bible, taking care to consider all the Biblical evidence before reaching our conclusions.
- We must recognize that experts often differ in many ways. This is particularly so with experts in Biblical languages, who always bring some bias to their task, no matter how objective they try to be.
- We need to be as aware as possible of the issues writers faced at the time of their writing and trust that they were honestly trying to support truth or rebut perceived deficiencies. Along with this, it is helpful to understand the underlying world view of each particular author or exponent of doctrine.
- We must neither damn nor approve on the basis of association with someone or some human organization. We so often do this as a shortcut to winning an argument rather than getting back to Biblical basics and counteracting error point by point.

Pagan Beliefs about Trinity

Many pagan beliefs incorporate ideas similar to the Biblical belief of a Godhead comprising three co-equal personal Beings who Paul refers to as God our Father, the Son of God and the Spirit of

Holiness.⁵ We prefer not to give publicity to the various pagan examples but simply to acknowledge their existence. We also acknowledge pagan counterfeits of other Christian beliefs such as the virgin birth. We question the logic that says we should abandon our Christian beliefs simply because there are pagan counterfeits.

Too often people aver that the overlap between such pagan beliefs and their Christian counterparts results from Christians copying the servants of Satan. We suggest two other probabilities that are more likely explanations.

The first is that Satan, the master of deception, introduced the counterfeits to the world to establish His claim that His ways are similar but superior to God's ways. Biblical evidence for this principle includes Satan's own self exaltation. "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that *he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*"⁶ Similarly, he counterfeits the activity of the Son of God in the imagery of the beast from the sea. "The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed"⁷ Again he counterfeits the activity of the Holy Spirit in the beast from the earth. This beast performs miraculous signs counterfeiting Pentecost and draws attention to the first beast as the Spirit does to Jesus Christ.⁸

Another explanation is that pagan customs could be remnants of the truth of God that have been corrupted over the centuries. Paul speaks of people who, "although they knew God...did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible

⁵ Rom 1:3,4

⁶ 2 Thess 2:3-4 (emphasis supplied).

⁷ Rev 13:3-4

⁸ The Spirit reminds us of all Jesus has said, John 14:26); He will testify of Jesus (John 15:26): He will not speak "on His own" (John 16:13).

God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”⁹ Many corrupted truths remain amongst ungodly people as witness to the fact that they have fallen from some former standard of revealed knowledge. To remain uncorrupted, truth needs constant contact with its source.

The resemblance in certain respects between Biblical teaching about the Godhead and pagan beliefs is not an excuse to discard all Bible teaching. Not one shred of evidence exists showing that the Biblical teaching of the Godhead derives from pagan teaching and custom in the slightest degree. The argument is damning by association and comes from human reasoning rather than from God’s revelation.

Some may argue that the association between paganism and the doctrine of the Christian Trinity is plausible. However, pagan beliefs resemble the truth only in minor details. People who are intrigued by this connection should be cautious about using this argument when it is so deceptive and when there are much better explanations of Biblical facts. We are not going to discuss all arguments related to this issue because we do not choose to publicize pagan practices unnecessarily.

Finally, we can see minor resemblance between certain aspects of pagan belief about three-in-one and the Biblical doctrine of Godhead. However, pagan belief falls far short of the Biblical teaching that the eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit each promotes other as better than Himself, works co-operatively for the salvation of the whole disobedient and rebellious world and allows Himself to be vulnerable to build a secure future for all who will accept the gift of salvation.

Christian Origins of the Trinity Doctrine

Anti-Trinitarians make much of the fact that the word Trinity does not appear anywhere in the Bible and that the theory or philosophy of the Trinity arose within the early Catholic Church. Op-

⁹ Rom 1:21-23

ponents of the dogma also make it seem that there was no deep Bible study involved in the process of establishing the position and that the whole doctrine is flawed because it comes only through sources influenced by pagan and philosophical belief and practice.

This is simply not true. Satan knows too well that the more closely a counterfeit resembles the true, the more difficult it is to detect. Much sound work went into interpreting the Biblical data and preserving its teachings. God preserved the revealed truths.

It is true that we can see today how knowledge of Greek philosophy swayed the formulation of dogma. Political pressure also caused the expression of concepts to be framed in language that would not offend the passing pagan culture.

Whatever corruption we see in the Trinity doctrine arising from deficiencies in its establishment, it still retains a sound Biblical basis. We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Rather we need to rediscover the unblemished worth by washing away the unbiblical distortions and detritus.

Adventist Pioneers and the Trinity

At the time the Adventist pioneers began to express our beliefs, the Catholic community and much of the Protestant community held the Trinity doctrine in a mystic type of mindset. God was seen as so separated from the world and people as ineffable, immutable and impassible.¹⁰ It was a mindset that needed someone heavenly who appeared real, human and approachable and who could identify with and understand human beings. Of course, Mary fit the bill exactly, and the various beliefs surrounding Mary worship have consequently become entrenched in Catholic dogma.

¹⁰ "Ineffable, immutable and impassible" are terms used to describe aspects of God's qualities. "Ineffable" – that God is too great to be described and that His name should not be uttered; "Immutable" – that He is not subject to variation and change; "Impassible" – He is incapable of feeling passion and emotion or of suffering injury and hence not subject to suffering.

Most pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who struggled against the tide of opposition from their original churches, argued vigorously against this form of Trinitarian belief. They recognized that the Bible pictures a personal God. They saw mankind very much as being made in His image. They saw Him as full of passion and compassion and very much involved in guiding and supporting His physical creation and its inhabitants. He was a God who was open to hearing and answering their prayers. He was a God soon to come in person and in great glory. It is no wonder they reacted strongly to the distorted views of God portrayed in Trinity teaching at that time. In many cases, this opposition stayed with them to their deaths. Today we still reject the ideas of immutability and impassability that the Catholic Church and some Protestant Churches held along with the Trinity.

We need to understand the reasons involved in the change from the militant stand against the Trinity doctrine taken by our early pioneers and the beliefs about the Godhead that now appear in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs.

In doing this, we recall two seemingly irreconcilable facts. The first is that we believe that our pioneers laid down a central platform of beliefs which they considered immovable. The second is that we have always maintained that truth is progressive and that "Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word."¹¹

There has been much recent research into the change from Arianism and semi-Arianism to Trinitarian Monotheism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Without having ready access to suitable libraries, it is usually difficult for lay members of the Church to obtain access to these materials or to the primary data authors have examined. However, there is a collection of materials including some of this historical investigation available on the Internet.

¹¹ *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002

Biblical Basis for Believing in Godhead

Early Adventist leaders asserted that the Bible and the Bible only was authoritative in matters of faith and practice. If they had biblical backing for a belief, they willingly endured hardship, scorn and ridicule to promote it with evangelistic zeal in society at large. All their energies and means were directed to proclaiming the good news about God and to hasten Jesus' return.¹²

Let us turn our attention to examining the Biblical evidence that supports the doctrine of Godhead in an apologetic framework that acknowledges many objections raised against it.

A brief historical summary of the Adventist pioneer's positions in opposition to the Trinity teaching appears in the concluding chapter along with a summary of the process of change.

¹² SDANET *At Issue*, Index Item, "The Trinity,"
<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/index.htm>

Is God Good News?

Introduction

In the world at large today, God is not good news. On the one hand many people think of destructive natural events such as tsunamis and storms, floods and earthquakes as acts of God. On the other hand the idea of God is seen as an unfortunate delusion and people who believe in God are considered to be deluded by ancient myths, misguided imaginations and untrustworthy literature. To many people the word "God" comes to their lips only as a curse or an oath or an exclamation of surprise.

The Bible claims to tell the story of God and His activity amongst people. Because it holds people up to an objective standard of behaviour, people who turn from all external standards scorn the idea that the Bible has any authority in its teaching. They want no interference in deciding their own destinies and behaviour. At best, they see the Bible as a collection of ancient myths.

As Christians, our attitude is entirely different. We believe that we can't exist apart from God, and that true joy and satisfaction in life come only when we enjoy a close relationship with Him. Moreover, "a knowledge of God is the basis of all true education and of all true service. ... Like our Saviour, we are in this world to do service for God. We are here to become like God in character, and by a life of service to reveal Him to the world. **In order to be co-workers with God, in order to become like Him and to reveal His character, we must know Him aright.** We must know Him as He reveals Himself." (MH 409)

In the very first verse of Romans Paul says he was "separated to the gospel (the good news) of God." He goes on to speak of a whole group of facts about God. In the first and introductory chapter He mentions many facets of God and His activity. These are the various aspects of God mentioned in Romans 1:

- v1 the gospel of God
- v3,4 the Son of God
- v7 God our Father

-
- v10 the will of God
 - v16 the power of God unto salvation
 - v16 the righteousness of God
 - v18 the wrath of God
 - v19 God has showed that which may be known of God
 - v20 Godhead
 - v23 the glory of the immortal God
 - v25 the truth of God
 - v25 the Creator
 - v32 the righteous judgment of God

The Good News of God

The greatest tragedy of human understanding is that people do not consider the idea of God to be good news. People of great influence parade as intelligent thought leaders and deny the existence of God. Richard Dawkin's book, *The God Delusion*, is a contemporary example of the scorn people show towards those who believe in God. Other people accept the possibility that there may be a God, but they are not certain. Still others hold firm or wavering beliefs in the existence of one or many supreme beings thought of as God or gods. Only a small minority of these would consider the idea of a supreme God to be good news. Even Christians may identify with Martin Luther's early feelings; "Love God? I hated Him!"

Of course, hating God is an idea that is incompatible with the thought of God as good news and comes from a sense of personal guilt and belief in the fearsome power of God to punish those who incur His displeasure. We must seek further in the Bible to discover why Paul can so confidently speak of the good news of God.

The Son of God

Paul assures us that the words of the prophets in the holy scriptures that point to the Son of God, "with power," are reason to think of the idea of God as good news. He adds that this declaration originated from the witness of the Spirit of holiness and the tangible historical fact of the Son's resurrection from the dead. Not only does

Romans ascribe power to the Son of God but it immediately adds the title, "Our Lord." The title, "Lord" indicates a position of authority and many people refuse to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ as their own Lord and master. But this does not diminish in any way the right of the Son of God to authority and power over all humanity and their environment.

Through Jesus Christ, the idea that God seeks to punish us harshly for our disobedience is replaced by the idea that we are all called by grace for obedience to the faith. Rather than the harsh, judgmental God that some are accustomed to see, Paul's message is that God is calling all people to Himself, having opened a way to renewed obedience to God through the substitutionary death and resurrection of the Son of God and the testimony of the Spirit of Holiness.

Here in the first few verses of Romans we notice that God the Father, the Son of God and the Spirit of Holiness (or the Holy Spirit) are grouped together in a significant way. We also should not discount the declaration of power associated in this passage with the Son of God. We need to pay attention also to the idea implicit here that the truth about God cannot be discovered by human intellect or wisdom. God must reveal the truth about Himself.

God Our Father

A friend of mine grew up in an abusive family where she, her mother and siblings had endured much suffering. Once she commented about her long estranged father, "He's not my father; he's my sire!" A schoolmate with a similar family situation wished he had a father like mine when he saw my father's love in our family. When we consider the good news about God and find Him called, "Our Father," we can be sure that means that God is all an ideal father should be. He is the ultimate provider and protector whose love is inexhaustible and self sacrificing, to make our own lives full and joyful and productive and loving. This is true in both Old and New Testaments where the title "Father" is used of God.

Although we owe our lives to Him because He is our Creator and Sustainer, He is not our sire. Nor does the fact that Jesus

Christ our Lord is called the Son of God mean that God, our Father, is also His sire in the same sense that a human son has both a father and a mother. In explaining Jesus' human origin, Matthew in his gospel twice observes that His conception involved the Holy Spirit. The strong implication is that a unique creative rather than procreative act was involved.

As human beings we are familiar with many situations where children call a man "father" even though he is not their biological father. Usually the word is a title of honour, and most fathers worthy of the name would willingly sacrifice themselves to protect their child whether biological or adopted. The reverse is also true.

In this way the father and child, each in his own way, consider the other better than himself. Although the natural order is that the child defers to the age and superior experience of the father, this isn't always the case. Watch a father and child involved with a computer. We quickly observe the child to be the mentor and the father to defer to the child's special knowledge. We conclude that father and child are equal as human beings despite the general deference of child to father in matters of administration and of the father to the child in matters pertaining to computers.

As we proceed, we will notice that the Bible also distinguishes between God the Father and the Son of God using the same general scheme. Some statements deal with the qualities of "being" of the Father or the Son (or both) while others deal with their respective administrative roles associated with their individual and joint activities. We must be careful not to confuse the two types of testimony.

The Righteousness of God

The righteousness of God as revealed in the writings of Paul is associated with God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, irrespective of their ethnicity.¹ It is associated with life and salvation from whatever alienates and separates us from God. Paul does not define righteousness in this passage but, as he continues,

¹ Rom 1:20

we see that the results of ungodliness are described as unrighteous acts that incur the wrath of God. We can therefore conclude that the righteousness of God is involved in maintaining the integrity of all creation as a place of love, joy and satisfaction. God is even willing to allow Himself to be vulnerable in order to restore the orderliness from the disorder resulting from defiance of His laws.

The righteousness of God is not limited to His own personal integrity and activity apart from creation. It is, rather, deeply involved in creating and sustaining life. God's righteousness works to heal the inhabitants of the world from all that disrupts productive and joyful relationships. His primary interest is in the relationships between living beings, but He is also concerned about the relationships between His creatures and the physical universe.

What May Be Known of God

How can we know the truth about God? Human language is inadequate, and our intellect is constricted. We lack the similes and metaphors, the models, types, or blueprints that can reveal all that can be known of God. Science depends on the senses for its knowledge, aided by tools that can be devised and constructed, but God cannot be fully perceived by our senses, aided or unaided.

A marvelous aspect of the good news about God is that in spite of our intellectual incompetence, He has chosen to reveal Himself to all peoples. While this is good news about God, too many suppress the truth of this universal revelation with their ungodliness and unrighteousness. We observe the unsavoury spectacle of human beings so absorbed with their own self importance that they deny the transcendent. Paul claims that the basic essential knowledge of God has been revealed to all people as an internal witness "manifest in them, for God has shown it to them."

If the essential knowledge of God is a revealed knowledge because it cannot be discerned by unaided human senses and inventiveness, it stands to reason that any understanding of God is suspect if it lies outside His own self revelation. We need to be extremely careful when searching for knowledge about God that we recognize the limitations of human language, similes and metaphors to

describe the transcendent God. At the same time we must learn to be so familiar with the internal witness of His Spirit's guidance that we interpret with integrity the thoughts holy men of old wrote under inspiration.

Let's look at an example of the inadequacy of metaphor to convey the full picture of God. Consider the terms we have already discussed, "God our Father" or "Son of God." We dare not apply all of the meaning of the words "father" and "son" as used in the human realm and expect them to apply without exception to divinity also. This would be making God in the image of man.

The Wrath of God

In connection with our human refusal to accept God's self revelation, Paul speaks of the wrath of God,² stating that ungodliness and unrighteousness arise when the special revelation of God's attributes is suppressed. Instead of relying on God's revelation, people exchange the true knowledge that God Himself has made manifest to them and substitute objects of their own invention. This leads to all manner of wickedness that undermines the purpose of God's self revelation.

The wrath of God is never capricious. Neither is it unheralded or unreasonable. God bears long with those who "exchange the truth of God for a lie" and who extol and honour the teaching and achievements of mankind above the creative, sustaining and redemptive activity of their Creator.

In Romans 1 Paul does not specifically mention the final death of the wicked. However, he does contrast the life of godlessness with the gospel that is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. The gospel reveals the righteousness of God by faith. Paul emphasizes that only those considered righteous "shall live by faith." Obviously, then, those who do not believe and trust in the power of God for salvation will not live beyond their allotted span.

² Rom 1:10ff

God is the source and sustainer of our present mortal life and of life in the age to come. If we choose separation from God, we are inevitably separated from the only source and sustainer of life in the universe. That brings on our annihilation.

Conclusion

We have discovered that Paul mentions several aspects of human interaction with divinity. He does not explain most of these in detail but leaves many questions for us to answer from the rest of God's word. However, he leaves us in no doubt that the truth about God must be revealed by God Himself and not be the product merely of human intellect, reason, or speculation.

Paul also groups together the concepts of God our Father, the Son of God and the Spirit of Holiness and introduces the term "Godhead," which in some translations appears as "divine nature." We need to examine further these concepts associated with divinity.

The subject is important because on it hinges life everlasting and eternal death. The good news of God is that He has made it possible for those who have fallen short of God's ideal to find salvation through faith and partake in the life of the world to come.

In considering the relationships between divine and human beings, we also recognized that we must distinguish between revelation that deals with the order of being on one hand, and activity or responsibility on the other hand.

Our study continues by considering all the aspects of divinity that Paul has raised. We need to do this in harmony with God's self revelation to holy men of old who wrote as they were inspired by the Spirit of Holiness.

Good News about the Son of God

Introduction

We have seen that Paul mentions several facets of divinity as He introduces good news about God in Romans. While he does not go into detail about most of these subjects, he lays a foundation of terminology that suggests the course of further examination. He also asserts that God has taken responsibility to reveal Himself to all peoples and implies that only God's self revelation will carry the truth about God.

Paul also identifies suppression of the truth about God as the source of godlessness and unrighteousness, which lead to behaviour that incurs the wrath of God and leads finally to eternal death,

Romans 1 also speaks of God's saving activity. The good news proclaims the special saving power of God working for those who accept the righteousness of God by faith. Paul implies that God our Father, the Son of God and the Spirit of Holiness are all involved in this redemptive activity. This leads us to examine in this article further details about what the Bible teaches about God our Father, the Son of God, and the Spirit of Holiness.

The Apostle John's Witness about the Being of Jesus

John's gospel and epistles and the Apocalypse come last in the chronology of Biblical writing. In the gospel of John and his first epistle he counters some of the developing heresies concerning what sort of a being Jesus really was.

Like other Bible writers, John makes statements about Jesus as the Son of God. He also deals with matters of His relationship with God our Father and the Spirit of holiness as mentioned in Romans 1 where they are associated with Jesus in human salvation. John was the disciple whom Jesus loved more than any other disciple and was honored to belong to the inner circle within the twelve apostles.

His intimate connection with Jesus gave him opportunity to know Jesus personally as much as any other human observer. John was also inspired by the Spirit of Holiness in what he recorded, giving a dimension of divine revelation to what he wrote.

John's opening statements in his gospel and first epistle both deal directly with the divine nature of "the Word." In the gospel we have, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." ¹ Soon John tells us plainly that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." ²

Jesus Christ was the Word who was with God and who was God, from beginning.

In his first epistle John begins in a similar way. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." ³

Both passages include the term "the Word." Both say the Word existed from "the beginning." Both say the Word was "with God," the gospel directly and the epistle by implication. Both speak about His physical life amongst people. Both speak of Him as the source of life, and in the epistle John calls Him the "Word of life" emphasizing that He is not dependent on anyone else as the source of His life.

Some points that are clear in the original Greek words are not quite so obvious in the English translation. For example, Greek has no definite article "the" with the word "beginning" in either the

¹ John 1:1-4

² John 1:14

³ 1 John 1:1-3

gospel or the epistle. This construction indicates that the word describes an archetype. For example, we can think of many types of table all having three or more legs. The word "table," unqualified, encompasses all of the specific types of table. So when John writes, "in the beginning," he is referring to the beginning of beginnings, the original beginning, the model of all other beginnings. He is asserting that in the beginning of all other beginnings, the Word who dwelt among us, Jesus, was already present along with "God our Father."

John also says explicitly that "the Word was with God and the Word was God" from this beginning of all beginnings. Some people who do not believe that Jesus was God say that the Greek does not have a definite article here so it should be translated, "The Word was a God." They fail to consider the archetypal nature of the statement. Just as the archetypal table has all the qualities that let us recognize all tables as tables, so John is saying that Jesus possessed all the qualities that make God to be God. John leaves no doubt that as far as His being is concerned Jesus is divine in the same way that God our Father is divine.

The Jews Scandalized by Jesus' Claims

John's gospel shows that Jesus' claims about being God scandalized the Jews because they considered the claims to be blasphemous. An important example occurs when the Jews and Jesus were discussing His origin and His relationship with the Father, reported in John 8.

Jesus tells the Jews, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." ⁴ (He refers here to the name that Jehovah God at the burning bush told Moses to use of Him to identify who gave him authority to lead them from captivity.⁵) The Jews recognized that He was claiming to be Jehovah God and took up stones

⁴ John 8:58

⁵ The third commandment prohibits taking the name of the Lord your God in vain and adds that God will not leave such a blasphemer unpunished. (Ex 20:7)

to throw at Him in presumed compliance with the Biblical punishment for blasphemy.⁶

Only a divine person who has "life original and unborrowed and underived" ⁷ in Himself should use the name, "I AM." It is not merely a statement of identity but a statement of existence that is not dependent upon anyone else. All created beings depend on God, not only for their origin but also for sustaining life while He wills it. By using the name "I AM" Jesus was claiming that He existed alongside the Father from eternity past and would continue that same existence into eternity future.

In the original Greek the name, I AM, is present in many of the best-loved sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John. The name teaches the eternal realities of Jesus as the I AM of Old Testament times, the present and on for eternity.

I AM the bread of life. John 6:35,48

I AM the light of the world. John 8:12; John 9:5

I AM the door (of the sheepfold. John 10:7

I AM the good Shepherd. John 10:11-14

I AM the resurrection and the life. John 11:25

I AM the way, the truth and the life John 14:6

I AM the true vine. John 15:1,5

In these passages, when Jesus says, "I AM the way, the truth and the life" for example, He is proclaiming His self existence. He is showing us that He is not only the way, the truth and the life now, but has always been and forever will be. In other places besides these John uses this same special divine designation for Jesus Christ. ⁸

⁶ Ex 3:6 Jehovah God revealed Himself as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob "

Ex 3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p530

⁸ John uses this emphatic declarative statement so many times of Jesus that we can be certain he is referring to the claim Jesus makes specifically at John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I AM," that scandalized the Jews In John 9:9, the man born blind uses the same emphatic grammatical form in a statement that means, "I am most certainly the same one who

“I and MY Father Are One”

Up to now we have been looking at statements that deal with what sort of being Jesus is and ignoring those statements that show His relationship with His Father. We needed to do this because we must understand very clearly that Jesus is not inferior to God our Father in any aspect of His being. God “has made of one blood all nations of men that dwell on the face of the earth.” with all men being equal. In a more powerful and eternal way, Jesus can say, “I and my Father are one.” He is saying that He and the Father, both co-eternal beings, are of one divine substance. All human beings are of one blood as created by God and of one human substance though many individual people.

In marriage two separate human beings become “one flesh” in what God planned as an indissoluble union. In a far more powerful and far-reaching way, the Father and Son are one divine entity.

Other New Testament Writers

Before we continue to explore the relationship between God our Father and the Son of God, we will show that other New Testament writers agree with John that Jesus is God. Hebrews reports “...The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”⁹ Hebrews also quotes the Father saying about Jesus, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever...”¹⁰

This assertion by the Father Himself should be taken exactly as it reads, but many compare it with Isaiah’s prophecy that the Child to be born would be called, among other names, “Mighty God.” If it were true that Jesus was “a God” to be worshipped, but not equal with the Father Almighty in one Godhead, then we would have two Gods and would no longer be monotheists.

you saw before I was changed, the one who sat and begged, the man who was born blind.” He thus emphasized the enduring nature of his being while acknowledging his change in state.

⁹ Heb 1:3

¹⁰ Heb 1:8

Paul does not see it this way. "For in Him all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."¹¹ The New King James and other versions use the word "Godhead" rather than "Deity" as mentioned by Paul in Romans 1. "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The meaning is the same. This is part of what the Bible refers to as "the mystery of Godliness,"¹² that God our Father and the Son of God are equal entities within a union of equal divine Beings called "the Godhead."

Paul speaks of the "...blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ."¹³ Peter agrees, using the same phrase, "God and Saviour" when he talks to his hearers about the source of righteousness.¹⁴ In these Bible passages we have the unequivocal witness of New Testament writers that Jesus Christ was divine and possessed the fullness of divinity in every sense.

The Humbling of Christ Jesus

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation...."¹⁵ Paul first says Christ Jesus had the very form of God. He continues with a statement that reminds us of Isaiah's report of Lucifer who wanted to be equal with God,¹⁶ thus robbing Him of His rightful supremacy. Paul says that Christ Jesus did not need to rob God of His supremacy because He was already "equal with God." Jesus voluntarily abandoned the exclusive rights and privileges of divinity and hum-

¹¹ Col 2:9

¹² 1 Tim 3:16

¹³ Titus 2:13

¹⁴ 2 Peter 1:1 "To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours."

This construction in Greek always refers to a single entity and not two persons. We use the same construction when we speak, for example, of someone as a wife and mother.

¹⁵ Phil 2:6ff

¹⁶ Isa 7:14 "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."

bled Himself to become a human being in the flesh so that it would be possible for him to die, for divinity is immortal. Further, He did not seek the greatest position as a human being but took the position of bond slave. "If that isn't love," the gospel song says, "The ocean is dry. There's no stars in the sky, And the sparrow can't fly."¹⁷

The Philippian passage concludes by saying, "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."¹⁸

The picture is clear. Jesus has had His exclusive rights and privileges restored. Psalm 24 speaks prophetically of the joy in heaven as Jesus Christ returns and the heavenly beings extol Him as "King of glory," "LORD (Jehovah) strong and mighty," "LORD mighty in battle," and "LORD of hosts."¹⁹

Divine Activities of Jesus Christ

Let's consider briefly some of the activities undertaken by Jesus as God. In addition to direct statements about His being God, as examined above, John asserts that "all"²⁰ that has come into existence came into being through Him. He emphasizes this by repeating, "without Him nothing ever came into being that has come into being." This is the way John chose to reveal Jesus Christ as the Creator of all.

Hebrews makes the same point. "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

¹⁷ Dottie Rambo, *If That Isn't Love*,

<http://www.preciouslordtakemyhand.com/christianhymns/ifthatisntlove.html>

¹⁸ Phil 2:9-11

¹⁹ Ps 24. "LORD of hosts is often translated, "LORD Almighty." (See NIV for example.)

²⁰ "things" is added to make sense in English

appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."²¹

Jesus was the active agent in creation. He is also the One who sustains all He has created by the "word of His power." He possesses "the brightness of the Father's glory and He is the exact image of His person." Besides being Creator of all, Jesus is the One who purges our sins, "by Himself."

Conclusion

In this section we have considered the witness of John, the disciple Jesus loved as His own son, as He counters growing misinformation about the person of Jesus and what sort of Being He really was. We have found that John does not mince words as he says "... the Word was with God and the Word was God." Through his gospel and epistle he reinforces this concept.

The writings of Paul and Peter support John in his understanding that Jesus is God, who left the splendour of heaven to die an ignominious death on the cross and thereby purge our sins. A sacrifice is only as valuable as the intrinsic worth of the victim. In His effort to purge the sins of the whole world, the infinite value of Jesus in His deity more than compensated for the sins of the whole world.

So far we have briefly considered only two aspects of His activity: His role as Creator of all and His role as the One who, by Himself, purged our sins.

We have examined only those texts that define the Being of Jesus Christ. Now we will probe further into His activities and His relationship with His Father, the focus in the next chapter, along with an examination of the role of Jesus in Old Testament times.

²¹ Heb 1:1-3 NKJV

Father and Son and Spirit of Holiness

Introduction

We have investigated some of the reasons to consider the truth about God to be “good news.” We have seen that Paul speaks about God the Father and the Son of God and the Spirit of Holiness in Romans 1 and introduces several aspects of what God has revealed about Himself.

John speaks about what sort of Being Jesus was because He lived when there was serious heresy about Jesus’ being. John emphasizes that Jesus was God and called Himself the “I AM,” the name given to Moses by the LORD, God of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, when He commissioned him to lead Israel out of Egyptian slavery.

Paul and Peter support John’s assertions about the deity of Jesus Christ, and Paul states that Jesus was equal with God before he voluntarily emptied Himself of His glory and divine rights to become a man and die a criminal’s death to purge the sins of mankind. Finally we have proof that Jesus Christ was sole Creator of absolutely everything and that He purged our sins “by Himself.”

Now let’s continue our study of some of the features of Jesus’ activity amongst humanity, starting with the Old Testament and calling on New Testament witnesses to explain some of the Old Testament stories. Then we will briefly examine the New Testament concerning the Spirit of Holiness.

Jehovah Our God

The Bible uses the term “god” in many places where it is not speaking of God who should be worshipped. In these places, it is obviously speaking about created beings, human or angelic, and not about the Creator God who is to be worshipped.

The Old Testament repeatedly insists that there is only one true God. The definitive statement appears in Deuteronomy 6:4.

"The LORD our God is one LORD." ¹ Most people know that when the word "LORD" appears in the Old Testament, capitalized, it refers to Jehovah ² It is the sacred name of God that was too sacred to be pronounced or even written in full. We can't be sure of the original Hebrew linguistic form because it doesn't exist anywhere. Other nations of the same period usually worshipped many gods, and resulting ideas were totally at odds with the idea of one LORD. Religions with many gods persisted for centuries amongst other nations and still exist today. The belief that two or more gods who exist simultaneously should all be worshipped is called polytheism.

Many Old Testament stories record that God appeared to men for one purpose or another. God talked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening.³ He sat and spoke with Abraham ⁴, He wrestled with Jacob⁵, spoke face to face with Moses—many references⁶, and appeared to many others as well.

When the Jews persecuted Jesus and "sought to slay Him" (after it was revealed that He healed the man with an infirmity for thirty-eight years) Jesus said plainly, "And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape."⁷ Jesus taught that the Old Testament passages referred to above were not speaking of the One He called "My Father."

In the same conversation with the Jews, Jesus defended His healing the crippled man on the Sabbath by saying, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."⁸ The Jews immediate-

¹ Or "The LORD is our God, the LORD is one;" or "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone."

² Sometimes referred to as "YHWH" or "JHVH" or "Yahweh" or "Jahveh."

³ Gen 3:8ff

⁴ Gen 17:1; Gen 18:2,3,13,27,33

⁵ Gen 31:3; Gen 32:30 where it is stated that the meeting was "face to face"

⁶ eg Ex 3 where the names "God," "LORD," "I AM THAT I AM" are all used; Ex 4 and many other places. In Ex 33:11 we are told "... the LORD spoke to Moses face to face." Deut 34:10 also speaks of "... Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face."

⁷ John 5:37 We will return to John 5 later.

⁸ John5:17

ly recognized His true meaning, and it bears directly on the type of being Jesus really was. The record continues in the next verse: "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

We need to satisfy ourselves that the Jews were not reacting in this malicious way simply to curb His influence. Their criticism certainly came from a deep knowledge of the traditional understanding of the books of Moses. Jesus was claiming equality with His Father, a statement that would contradict their understanding that for Israel there is only one LORD. Further, since He said plainly that no man had heard the Father's voice at any time or seen His form, face-to-face communion between the LORD (Jehovah) and the people did not involve God our Father in any physical way.

Preparation for Jesus' Departure

John describes the purpose of his first epistle in these words, "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.⁹ And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

"Paraclete" is the English form of the Greek word here translated as "Advocate." It has shades of meaning that include the ideas of being a supporter, comforter, intercessor, mediator, helper, spokesman or a combination of all these. The picture is of someone "we have" who can comfort and support us on the one hand and also bridge the wide gap between us as creatures and our Creator God. Jesus is uniquely qualified for this role because He combines deity with humanity in His very Being.

When Jesus was coming to the end of His earthly stay, He was concerned about His disciples' future. John begins a section of his gospel by reporting Jesus' comforting the disciples with the words, "Let not your hearts be troubled."¹⁰ For the next three chap-

⁹ 1John 2:1-2

¹⁰ John 14:1

ters Jesus explains momentous troubles that lie immediately ahead resulting in His death. He also prepares them for His departure and outlines the provisions in place to continue divine support following His return to heaven. Near the beginning of this discourse is one of the self revelations of Jesus as the self existent "I AM" when He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."¹¹

His self existence from eternity past to eternity future as the way to God and the truth about God and life of God is good news for humanity because His Being encompasses both divinity and humanity. This verse also emphasizes His unique role as intercessor and mediator.

Promise of the Paraclete

Having promised that He will do whatever is asked in His name after He returns to His Father, Jesus calls for those who love Him to keep His commandments.¹² He then promises that He will pray to the Father to give "another Helper,"¹³ another Paraclete.

There is a richness in this phrase that is not readily apparent to the casual reader in English. First, the word translated "another" means "another of the same kind." It is not a word that you would use to ask for "another piece of fruit" unless you meant the same variety of fruit. The word "Paraclete" encompasses the breadth of meaning we mentioned when we saw Jesus being called "Paraclete" in 1 John 2.

The seemingly simple phrase, "another Paraclete," paints a picture of the promised replacement for Jesus being another of the same kind as Himself. We would thus expect the promised Paraclete to be divine in every respect as Jesus was before His incarnation. There is no mention that the Paraclete would take a body when He comes.

¹¹ John 14:6

¹² John 14:15

¹³ John 14:16

Over the next three chapters Jesus tells the disciples specific things about the work of the Paraclete.

- He will abide with humanity forever. John 14:16 This implies He endures to everlasting as Jesus and the Father are eternal.
- He is called "The Spirit of Truth". v 17; 15:20 This suggests that He can be trusted in His witness of the truth about God.
- He will dwell with people and be in people. v 17 Paul reminds us of this promise in 1 Cor 3:16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
- He, the Helper is now called the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ v25
- He will teach "all things" and bring all Jesus' sayings to remembrance. v 26
- He proceeds from the Father and will testify of Jesus. John 15:26
- He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. John 16:9
- He will guide you into all truth. v12
- He will tell you things to come. v12
- He will glorify Jesus Christ. v13
- He will take of what is Jesus Christ's and declare it to you. vv 14, 15

As we look at these verses we notice that John repeatedly uses third person singular masculine personal pronouns when he mentions the Holy Spirit or Paraclete. This is significant because the word for "Spirit" is neuter gender in Greek and so the pronouns that refer to "Spirit" should always be neuter gender—"it" or "its."

Apart from the fact that he says that Jesus is another of the same kind as Jesus, John's use of masculine pronouns also emphasizes that he speaks of a real personal Being and not merely some divine influence that emanates from the Father.

¹⁴ The same as the Spirit of Holiness mentioned in Romans 1

Other New Testament passages strongly imply that the Holy Spirit is a personal Being rather than a set of impressions coming from the Father. Ephesians 4:30, for example, states, "and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Could a neutered influence feel grief? Of course not; only a personal being can experience grief.

Then there is the concept of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ Blasphemy amounts to treating the name of God disrespectfully. God's name is associated with His character so closely that blasphemy opposes a divine Person rather than merely His influence.

The Source of Selfless Esteem

Paul makes a significant statement about Jesus' incarnation and His position both prior to and following His earthly stay in Philippians 2. This chapter also makes a very telling comment about the nature of God's character and its implications for human responsibility.

"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. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."¹⁶ The admonition found in the words "Let this mind be in you" or "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus"¹⁷ implies that a practical example of the principle outlined in the preceding verses can be seen in Christ Jesus as an example to follow. It also shows that the Source of selfless esteem of the other as better than oneself comes from heaven itself, explicitly stated as being in Christ Jesus.

The witness of the Bible is that each of the divine Beings, God our Father, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Holiness exemplifies this principle. The Father remains in the back-

¹⁵ Matt 12:31; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10

¹⁶ Phil 2:3-5

¹⁷ Phil 2:5 NIV

ground in the Bible, choosing to promote and glorify His Son. The Holy Spirit's role and witness are also in the background promoting the knowledge and teachings of Jesus Christ. And, finally, Jesus embodies the same principle, promoting His Father in all discussions where their relative merits are discussed.

To my knowledge, not a single instance in Scripture describes any of the three persons of the Godhead indulging in the least degree of self promotion. Whereas the spirit of Satan is manifest in self promotion at whatever cost to others, the righteousness of the Godhead is manifest in promoting the absolute interests of others at whatever personal cost.

Conclusion

We have examined a snippet of the abundant evidence about the activity of Jehovah, the great I AM in the Old Testament and concluded from New Testament passages including the words of Jesus Himself, that Jesus asserted that He was the I AM and Jehovah of the Old Testament.

We examined the conversation Jesus initiated with His disciples preparing them for His departure. Jesus promised that, if He went away, the Father would give them the Holy Spirit, another Paraclete of the same kind as Jesus Himself. He would be Comforter and Convictor, Helper and Teacher, Memory Aid and Advocate. His identity with Jesus upholds His own personal claim to deity.

Finally, we considered the origin of selfless esteem of others and observed that each of the members of Godhead epitomizes the proper manifestation of esteeming the other better than themselves.

In the next part we will examine the Biblical record of the relationship between God our Father and the Son of God. What are the factors in play when Jesus repeatedly speaks of doing only the Father's will? Why does the Father ascribe all glory to the Son? What does it mean that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God? These questions will be answered from the Bible in the next part.

Relationships and Activity of the Godhead

Introduction

As we have discussed, the good news of God involves God our Father, the Son of God and the Spirit of Holiness. We have investigated Bible statements that speak of the sort of being each of these "Persons" possesses and discovered that the Bible teaches unequivocally that each is divine. Each has the fullness of the Godhead: the Son of God because Paul says so explicitly, even in His incarnate body, and the Holy Spirit because He is of the same type as Jesus.

We have investigated the claims of Jesus to be the I AM and Jehovah of Old Testament times and concluded that Father and Son justify the claim by sharing the essence of divinity and their existence through eternity. We also found that one principle of divinity that applies to Father and Son and Spirit of Holiness is that they each epitomize the principle of esteeming others as better than themselves. They call us to follow this example.

Further Biblical evidence reveals how these three Persons related to one another and the effect of their interrelationship with the activity of each. Before investigating how their union is organized, we need to understand the nature of each being. We turn our attention now to these organizational matters.

Being before Relationships

The relationship between God and His people is different from the relationship between individual people because God is Creator and divine, while His people are creatures and human. Obviously, the relationships between equal beings are totally different from the relationship between different orders of beings. The relationship between God and unfallen beings is also different from His relationship with creatures who have fallen into sin. Those who have never sinned commune with God face to face and gladly do His bidding and worship Him with joy.

The argument by some Christians for their belief in only one God, the Father, is usually based on statements that have nothing at all to do with what sort of a Being He is. They parade out text after text that, they say, show the Father to be the One who is making all the decisions and giving the orders which are then carried out by the Son of God and angels; that is, a lesser God and created beings.

If the witness of the Father that Jesus is God¹ is raised or the first verse of John's gospel is quoted,² an immediate reply is that the Son of God is a being of inferior position who needs a God Himself. Responses range from, He is "mighty God"³ but not "Almighty God,"⁴ in spite of the fact that Jeremiah speaks of "the Great, the mighty God, whose name is the LORD (Jehovah) of hosts."⁵ They do agree that the Father glorifies Jesus Christ with His own glory and usually works through the Son as His representative. The upshot is that clear Bible statements about the *being* of Jesus are interpreted based on statements about the relationship between the Father and the Son which have nothing to do with the sort of a being Jesus is.

We have shown that the clear statements about Jesus' being unequivocally demonstrate that the Son of God is equal with the Father in every respect. Also, we have shown from the Biblical record that the Spirit of Holiness, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, is also a Being of exactly the same divine quality as Jesus Christ.

This is the clear evidence from the Bible that that there are three divine Beings with the same nature. In the same way that all

¹ Heb 1:8 But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever,"

² John 1:1,2

³ Isa 9:6 "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.

⁴ e.g. Ex 6:3 "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD (Jehovah) I did not make myself known to them.

⁵ Jer 32:17-19 The passage also says that Lord (not all capitals) Jehovah "made the heavens and thhe earth."

peoples of the earth, who are formed “of one blood,”⁶ are all human beings (mankind) and equal under God, so God our Father and the Son of God and the Spirit of Holiness are all of one substance, and equal as individual divine Beings within a union that the Bible calls Godhead. This union is generally referred to simply as “God” (in a plural form).

We need to be sure we have correct information about the being of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit *before* we begin to interpret Biblical statements about their relationships, activities and relative authority.

Implications of Jesus’ Humanity

Except for Paul, all New Testament authors were familiar with Jesus in His humanity. Paul had his own private revelation. Jesus had voluntarily laid aside the glory and privileges and worship that were His rights from eternity past, the divine prerogatives that the Father restored to Him on His return to heaven.⁷

During His incarnation, that is while He was here on earth “in the flesh,” Jesus always remained as much divine as though He were not at all human. But He was still as much human as if He were not at all divine.

“Being found in fashion as a man,” Jesus did not exercise His own divine power on even one occasion. All His miracles, all His special insight into the human condition, all His perception of what people were thinking and what they particularly needed came from His heavenly Father as a result of His personal devotion and openness to the Father’s will. In other words, when Jesus spoke, His words were expressed from the point of view of a human being open to divine influence.

He did not speak from His divinity even when the Father led Him in self revelation, which we have already seen. He spoke only from the point of view of a human being, always deferring to His Father as His God. He used human language with all its limitations to

⁶ Acts 17:26

⁷ Phil 2:3-11

convey His Father's message. He did not promote Himself as being equal with God except as the Father directed.

The Only Begotten Son of God

The best known verse of the whole Bible speaks of Jesus as God's only begotten Son whom God sent into the world to bring eternal life.⁸ In the chapter where John declares emphatically that "...the Word was God,"⁹ he adds that "... the Word was made 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."¹⁰

In several other places in the New Testament the phrase "only begotten" is used, and in other places in both Old and New Testaments Jesus is said to be "born of God" or "begotten" of Him.¹¹ We understand that these statements do not imply that anything like the human process of procreation was involved. The question is, Do these statements imply that there was a time in the distant recesses of eternity when the Father "brought forth" His Son from Himself?

We answer, "No!"

Isaac is said to be the "only begotten" of Abraham and we know Abraham's first child was Ishmael whom he fathered through Hagar. The unique thing about Isaac is that he was chosen by God to be Abraham's son through whom God's covenant promises would be fulfilled. Paul writes to the Corinthians, ¹² "...in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." He calls Onesimus "...my son...whom I have begotten in my bonds."¹³ Peter also comments, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."¹⁴

⁸ John 3:16

⁹ John 1:1

¹⁰ John 1:14. The phrase "only begotten," translated from the Greek *monogenes*, appears also at John 1:18; 3:15; 3:18; Heb 11:17; 1 John 4:9

¹¹ Ps 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5; 1 John 5:1

¹² 1 Cor 4:15

¹³ Philemon 1

¹⁴ 1 Peter 1:3

These passages show that being begotten means being recognized as having a unique relationship with the aims and objectives of God, particularly as they apply to the gospel of salvation. This is consistent with the picture the Bible paints of Jesus Christ when it says that He is the only begotten Son of God.

Psalms 2 speaks prophetically of the Son who would be given the nations for His inheritance and the ends of the earth for His possession.¹⁵ When we are born again, born from above, as sons and daughters of God, “begotten...to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”¹⁶ we are adopted into the same covenant, that [we] “should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.”¹⁷

The words “begotten” and “only begotten” clearly refer to the divine agreement made before sin entered the universe that One should be anointed and take responsibility to be born as a human son, live an exemplary life, die an atoning death and be resurrected to restore everlasting life to those condemned to eternal death for defying God’s laws. “Son of God” thus makes perfect sense, not as superior Father and inferior Son but as equal Beings involved in a mutual pact for the creation and preservation of this world and for salvation should people become a lost creation.

Christ, the Wisdom of God

The idea that One of the eternal Godhead should be appointed to front for God in this world is clearly seen in Proverbs chapter 8. Some may argue, for various reasons, that the Son of God is not in view in this chapter. However, Paul is not hesitant to refer to Jesus Christ as “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”¹⁸ He adds in the next chapter¹⁹ “But we speak the wisdom of God in

¹⁵ Ps 2:7,8

¹⁶ 1 Peter 1:3

¹⁷ Acts 13:47

¹⁸ 1 Cor 1:23-24 - but we preach Christ crucified, ... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God

¹⁹ 1 Cor 2:7

a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:" So Paul ties His meaning about Christ as the wisdom of God with the theme of Proverbs 8.

The previous chapter has outlined the allurements and also the folly of yielding to the pursuit of pleasure. It is cast in a setting where folly is personified as a seductive woman undermining the resolve of a simple young man, devoid of understanding,²⁰ to live uprightly.

Chapter 8 personifies wisdom, extols its qualities and describes how it influences those who seek her towards a truly fulfilling life. The chapter can be described as a short discourse on the qualities of personified wisdom and guide to many aspects of her activity. Arguments from the gender of the Hebrew word for "wisdom" notwithstanding, there is no doubt that the person of Jesus Christ is in view as wisdom is personified.

The first 21 verses speak of the characteristics of wisdom and of its activity. Then there is this declaration, "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was."²¹ Some people prefer the New International version rendering, "The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began." They prefer this translation because of the words, "brought forth" which in their opinion shows that Jesus Christ emerged as the first of the works of God.

This interpretation requires unwarranted changes in the sense of the passage from speaking of personified wisdom's activity to declaring its origin. There is no need for this.

²⁰ Prov 7:7

²¹ Prov 8:22-23

When Barack Obama was inaugurated as President of the United States of America, we watched with interest as the man, born August 4, 1961 was “brought forth” to be sworn in-to 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.

This is the sense that Proverbs uses when it says that the Lord brought me (Wisdom) forth as the first of His works. It is speaking of a very special event – the formal appointment and admission of the second person of Godhead to His covenanted position as Creator and Sustainer and Redeemer of this earth, the Wisdom of God Who would eventually die as God’s Son. So the Wisdom of God was contrasted with the foolishness of wicked men.²²

In the parallel statement in verse 23 the concept is reinforced. The Amplified version translates, “I [Wisdom] was inaugurated and ordained from everlasting, from the beginning, before ever the earth existed”. The words “from the beginning,” “from everlasting.”²³ are familiar to us from John 1:1 and 1 John 1:1 (amongst many others.) “Mighty God, Everlasting Father,”²⁴ God’s wisdom personified was inaugurated as the designated member of Godhead to create and uphold all things on earth by the word of His power²⁵ and yet to be “made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death.”²⁶

To reiterate, since before the foundation of the world, God’s Wisdom, Jesus Christ, has been the representative of Godhead in creating the world and its creatures, in “upholding

²² See 1 Cor 1:21; 3:19

²³ For example – John 1:1; 1 John 1:1; Heb 1

²⁴ Isa 9:6

²⁵ Heb 1:3

²⁶ Heb. 2:9

all things by the word of His power”²⁷ in “purging our sins.”²⁸ Now He sits again “at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”²⁹ So when some wrongly interpret “brought forth” as a statement of the origin of Christ’s person, or being, it is an untenable position.³⁰ The passage is not speaking about where wisdom originates but of its external activity, the way it manifests itself, and of Wisdom’s place in carrying forward the plans of divinity for this world.

Relationship Between God Our Father and the Son of God

It stands to reason that if the Son of God planned to adopt human form in the event of a fall, He should be the One to represent the Godhead in its relationship with this world. As we have discussed, Jesus was the active agent in creation. Nothing has been made that was not made by Him.³¹ It is He also who upholds all things by the power of His word.³²

He whom we call the Father has so personified the principle of selfless esteem that, for the whole existence of the world, He has taken, as it were, a back seat. He has glorified the Son, allowed the Son to be seen as God and Jehovah and I AM, and promoted the Son’s glory and kingdom.

²⁷ Heb. 1:3

²⁸ Idem.

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Leslie M Grant, in arguing that Wisdom refers to Jesus Christ in Proverbs 8, observes. “Also, if we dare to apply this scripture strictly to the principle of wisdom, and not the Lord Jesus, then are we saying that God acquired wisdom at some point of time? Surely every believer would consider the very thought of this to be thorough nonsense. Just as God’s wisdom is eternal, being one of His eternal attributes, so in fact is His beloved Son eternal, the One who is Wisdom personified.” (*The Son of God in Proverbs 8*, http://www.biblecentre.org/truthtestimony/2000/lmg_son_of_god_proverbs8.htm 22/1/2009.)

³¹ John 1:3; Heb 1:2; Col :16

³² Heb 1:3

The God we see in the Old Testament, who created the world, who appeared to people, who communed with them as He did with Adam and Eve, with Abraham and Moses, who was extolled by the fathers and the prophets—that God was the only begotten Son. The Father kept in the background, as an unseen Equal, also Jehovah, supporting the Son.

Just as in the beginning when the Holy Spirit was present at the dawn of creation, the Holy Spirit also Jehovah, hovered over the dominion that Adam surrendered to Satan, invisible and mostly unheard moving in people's hearts and minds, drawing them back to the Godhead.

The I AM and Jehovah of the Old Testament

Paul writes in Ephesians that the grace of God was given to him to “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*, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”³³

This text is used to oppose belief in a Godhead of three equal Beings. People with this view say the passage proves that the Father is God who merely appoints His Son to carry the hands-on work of Creation. Other scriptures also appear to say that the Father is God and the Son His subordinate, but we can take this passage as representative of all such passages because the principle is the same.

Let's start by questioning the conclusion that the word “God” here refers unequivocally to God our Father. There is nothing to prove this is the case. One must accept by pre-judging that this is so. We have seen that Jesus is also called “God” by the Father and

³³ Eph 3:8-13

that He claims equality with the Father. Why shouldn't the word "God" refer equally to the Godhead, in council as it were?

The passage speaks of the unsearchable, unfathomable, riches of Christ. It also speaks in terms of the administration of the mystery of how Jew and Gentile should be united in the Church and of how the culmination of this plan would unveil the manifold wisdom of God to the universe. Thus it encompasses the whole great controversy theme. Further, the chapter continues to speak of the Father, His Spirit and Christ who, together occupying the heart, fill us up in all the fullness of God. So it is reasonable that Godhead is in view here when Paul uses the word "God."

The text plainly says that God (whoever we believe that to be) created all things "through Christ Jesus." All accept that Jesus was the active agent in creation. The Bible plainly says so. However, let us investigate a passage from the Old Testament that bears on this point. "Thus says the LORD, The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: 'Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hands, you command Me. I have made the earth, and created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways; He shall build My city and let My exiles go free, Not for price nor reward,' Says the LORD of hosts."³⁴ The LORD (Jehovah), the Holy One and Maker of Israel, is speaking, the LORD of hosts. Notice He claims that He made the earth and created man upon it as the work of His hands. His own hands stretched out the heavens. The same hands were later suspended between earth and heaven nailed to a cross.

When we compare this passage with Paul's words in Ephesians 3, we see that the claim that God our Father gives the orders with Jesus Christ as a lesser God carrying out His orders has no substance. Such a claim comes from the intellectual contrivances of men. God's own self revelation is that all that was made was created by the Word, Jesus. Isaiah says the work was done by the hands of the LORD (Jehovah) of Hosts. There is no conflict when we accept

³⁴ Isa 45:11-13

that Jesus Christ was the Jehovah and visible God of Old Testament times.

Indeed, Paul speaks about the need to “understand the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets....To make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God [Godhead] 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, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.”³⁵

Paul uses the same word “fellowship” that John uses in his first epistle. John says that the whole purpose of God is to extend the fellowship the Father and Son had in the beginning. He was working to accomplish this by giving the apostles a personal revelation of the Word of life so that they could proclaim what they had heard and seen and touched. Their proclamation would thus extend the fellowship that existed from the beginning between the Father and Son and so bring fullness of joy.

Conclusion

We have seen that statements about God are of two types: those that speak of His Being and those that deal with His activities and relationships. It is important to recognize the difference and to work from an understanding of being when we interpret the other statements. During His incarnation we found that Jesus spoke from His position as a human being because He had laid aside His prerogatives as God. So when He spoke of His Father, He spoke as a human being and not as God’s equal in being though He was still divine.

In the councils where plans were made for creating the world and sustaining it by divine power, the “only begotten Son” was the

³⁵ Eph:3:4, 5, 9-12

nominated member of Godhead. This title reflects His special position in upholding the covenant between God and the world should mankind sin. The Son of God was the visible representative of Godhead in the world. The Father promoted the glory of the Son and supported Him in His responsibility and the Spirit also hovered over all influencing mankind silently for God.

Finally we have established from one representative passage used by some to show the subservience of Son to Father that there is no evidence to support the contention that Jesus was inferior to the Father.

In the next part we will begin by investigating the throne of God and the relationship between the Son of God and the kingdom of God when the plan of redemption is complete and Jesus returns to earth.

What about the Trinity?

Introduction

We have considered Biblical evidence for the identity of God our Father, the Son of God and the Spirit of Holiness. In our last section we stressed that the only safe way to interpret the Bible's teaching about God is to determine whether individual passages spoke of being, doing, or relating to other beings.

We need to understand fundamental issues of the being of Father, Son and Holy Spirit before we attempt to interpret statements about their relationships with one another or their actions. Issues of essence need to influence our interpretation of statements about their deeds and their relationships. If we do not have the issues clear, we are unqualified to judge the actions and relationships.

We have considered implications of Jesus Christ's humanity from His statements about His position relative to His Father. We went on to consider the meaning of the term "Only Begotten." Finally, we considered one representative statement that many people believe indicates that the Father makes decisions that are then executed by the Son of God. Our conclusion was that this judgment at first seems reasonable but on further examination, it cannot be sustained.

The Son of God and the Kingdom of God

"The term 'kingdom of God' is not an Old Testament one, but the concept is."¹ In concluding his article Graeme Goldsworthy summarizes, "All the biblical promises find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Every element of the Old Testament's unfolding revelation of

¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Kingdom of God and the Old Testament*, <http://www.beginningwithmoses.org/articles/golds1.htm>

The article is a very useful summary of the Kingdom as God's people, in God's place, under God's rule.

the kingdom leads to the Person of Jesus Christ come in the flesh. The kingdom of God has its objective reality in Him. He is God's true people. His presence marks the presence of God in the place we designate His kingdom. His word comes as God's ruling word with all authority." ² The concept of the Kingdom of God as God's people, in God's place, subject to God's rule, embodies the goals set for the Son of God in the council of peace before the creation of the world.

The story of the Bible is the story of how God created perfection, how God's people and God's place were marred by sin, and how the Son of God sacrificed Himself to restore God's people, God's place and God's rule, As this great work climaxes, Paul records, "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. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet."³

When this happens, the great controversy is over. Jesus Christ is triumphant in achieving the goals established in the council of peace before the world began.

The prophet Daniel declares that in the last days, "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"⁴. "Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him."⁵

Having fulfilled every objective of the everlasting covenant, Jesus hands the lost dominion back to the people of the saints of

² Ibid

³ 1 Cor 15:20-28

⁴ Dan 2nd 44

⁵ Dan 7:27

the Most High. The Father no longer needs to hide His own glory in deference to the Son of God. So He accepts the kingdom once again and together the Godhead receives the praise and displays the glory once bestowed on the Son. There is no sense of a hierarchy of divine beings here or a scene of the divine Father with the semi divine Son. Godhead, united, is all and in all.

The Throne of God and of the Lamb

The book of Hebrews begins with the words, "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; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."⁶

Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus sat "at the right hand of the throne of God."⁷ In Revelation, John calls this location "the throne of God and of the Lamb."⁸ This also preserves the idea of togetherness because "throne" is singular, not plural. I have searched the Bible and can find nowhere where more than one throne in heaven is mentioned in association with God the Father and the Son of God.

Much has been made of the fact that there is no mention of a throne for the Holy Spirit and this is seen as "proof" that the Holy Spirit is not a personal Being but an influence emanating from God our Father and the Son of God. This interesting but unfounded assertion originates in the imaginations of men and not in the revelation of God.

When John reported Jesus' promise that the Father would send another Comforter, just like Himself, he also reported that the Spirit would not speak on His own behalf, or from His own authori-

⁶ Heb 1:1-3

⁷ Heb 12:2

⁸ Rev 22:1,3

ty. There is nothing in the Bible that speaks directly about the being of the Spirit except Jesus' testimony in John's gospel. However, we should remember that John was dealing directly with heretical attacks on aspects of Jesus' humanity and divinity. He particularly dealt with the assertion that Jesus was not really human but merely appeared so to people's senses. We need to accept fully the joint implications of John's statement that the Spirit would not speak from His own authority and Paul's statement that each person should esteem the other as better than himself. The combination of these two thoughts leads us to expect that the Spirit of Holiness would not speak to draw attention to Himself and away from the other two members of Godhead. There is no reason to suggest that the lack of reference to the Spirit's presence on the throne of God is proof that He is not a personal Being.

Consolidation

We have allowed Paul to introduce the subject of the good news about God and the relationship between God our Father, the Son of God, and the Spirit of Holiness." In the first chapter of Romans he speaks of several aspects of God's self revelation and uses the term translated as "Godhead." He emphasizes that suppressing the truth God reveals about Himself leads to all manner of ungodliness and unrighteousness that finally incur the wrath of God.

We concluded that there are two facets of God's self revelation: The first concerns His being and the second His relationships and actions. We concluded that we must understand His being before we can rightly interpret statements about His activities and relationships.

As we began to search the Bible for statements about the being of Jesus we considered first the latest Bible writings, the Gospel, epistles and apocalypse of the disciple whom Jesus loved. John faced heretical opposition to apostolic teaching about Jesus' humanity and divinity. In both gospel and epistle John introduces the Word. From the beginning of beginnings, the Word existed. The gospel asserts that the Word was with God and was God from this eternity past and that He became flesh and dwelt among us. The

epistle refers to the Word of life whose existence was beyond human senses; He broke into humanity in bodily form where He was heard, touched and seen (with both eyes and understanding.)

Quoting Old Testament passages and referring to Old Testament concepts, John asserted that Jesus was the Jehovah, the I AM, of Old Testament times. In fact, many of Jesus' best-loved sayings are reminiscent of His declaration of eternal self existence embedded in the grammatical form used in the original Greek language when Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM." Jesus also said, "I am the bread of life," "I am the way, the truth and the life;" and "I am the good Shepherd." Similar sayings reflect the reality of the concept and the truth for past, present, and future, that is for eternity. The Jews were scandalized not only by this but also by Jesus' claim that "I and my Father are One."

Paul witnessed to the divine being of Jesus, saying that all the fullness of the Godhead existed in Him bodily. Hebrews reports God praising His Son's deity by saying, "Your throne O God is forever and ever." Paul and Peter each use the phrase "God and Saviour" referring to Jesus Christ. The form of grammar used for this phrase makes it clear that only one person is meant. Jesus Christ is both God and Saviour.

We considered the significant passage in Philippians 2 about Jesus humbling Himself and His subsequent restoration to His former position. This in itself explains how Jesus always deferred to His Father when speaking as a human being. But the same chapter also presents the principle of esteeming others better than oneself, a principle that is epitomized in the Godhead as each furthers the other's being and position and activity.

The Father extols the glory and kingdom of the Son of God. The Son proclaims the Father's glory and position and when introducing the Holy Spirit speaks of His divine cooperation in maintaining the goals of the covenant of grace. The Holy Spirit does not promote Himself but is tireless in advancing the persons and interests of both God our Father and the Son of God.

The Spirit of Holiness does not reveal His Being. Jesus alone speaks of His Being in conversations with His disciples reported by John when Jesus prepared them for His departure. In his first epis-

tle John refers to Jesus as the "Advocate" with the Father. The word is translated from Greek, but the transliteration of the word in English is "Paraclete." Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will be "another Paraclete" using the word which means "another of the same kind."

In John 16 the apostle refers to the Holy Spirit with masculine pronouns while Greek grammar requires neuter gender pronouns for the word, "spirit." John thus emphasizes the personal being of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible uses the term "Only Begotten Son" in the sense of His unique position as Creator and Sustainer, not only of the physical world and its creatures but also in terms of the covenant established within the Godhead before the world was created. This covenant designated Jesus as the representative of Godhead to carry out creation with His own hands, hands that were later nailed to the cross.

Jesus also covenanted to become the Son of a human mother should sin arise, to pay the penalty for sin, and to restore the integrity and perfection of the whole world. Jesus thus became the great Jehovah and I AM of Old Testament times and the Saviour of the world as declared in the New Testament. In an infinitely lesser capacity we who have been "begotten again to a living hope," are called to further the aims of the everlasting covenant. This includes the admonition to esteem others better than ourselves.

So many statements deal with the relationship between God our Father and the Son of God that we couldn't examine them all in this short book. We examined one representative statement in Ephesians, interpreted by many as an assertion that the being of Jesus is lesser than that of God our Father. This, they say, is because God, who in their opinion is the YHWH of the Old Testament, gave the orders and the Son carried them out, a statement about the being of One relative to the Other. It is not a statement about being but a statement about activity and relationships. As we have shown, it is therefore absolutely essential to understand clearly the biblical teaching about the Father and the Son being of the same divine substance, before we read into the words something that is simply not there.

As we examined related Biblical passages, we discovered that it was YHWH of Hosts who carried out the work of creation with His own hands. This supports Jesus' claim to be the I AM and Jehovah of the Old Testament.

The concept that the kingdom of God refers to the people of God living in the territory or place of God under the rule of God, fits the goals of the executive decision during the council of Godhead when the world was planned. Man lost the dominion given to him under God at the creation of the world. Jehovah was true to the principles of the everlasting covenant and was eventually born of a human woman and provided all that was necessary for the restoration of the kingdom of God.

It cost Him His life and a temporary separation from union with His Father. But it assured final victory. So when Jesus returns, when sin and sinners are destroyed and the Saviour delivers the kingdom and the dominion to the people of the saints of the Most High, the triumphant Jesus Christ delivers the kingdom as promised to the Father and the whole universe glorifies the united Godhead.

Authority

There is much Biblical evidence about this subject that we have left unexamined so far. Other sections will examine other specific aspects of the doctrine of Godhead that have been called into question by critics. However, the principles established here should prove valuable in fitting any other material into the framework of truth. Most important is that any beliefs about God that do not come from the authority of His own self revelation are unreliable. Similarly, to suppress any of the truth God reveals about Himself is to start a slide away from Godly authority to godlessness and unrighteousness.

What our fathers believed is valuable only as far as it comes from God and draws us back to God's own revelation. We must understand that sometimes our spiritual fathers were fighting different battles than those we face. Their emphasis and exclusions reflected their perception of the heresies they faced.

The early position of SDA pioneers against the doctrine of Trinity seems to be of this nature. We need to recognize that it is not a valid argument against current SDA teaching of a given doctrine to say that the pioneers taught differently or that their objections about a particular position remain current today. We need to go back to the Bible and make it our guide. Knowledge of truth is progressive, and we cannot afford to accept or reject evidence based on the understanding of our pioneers or anyone else.

In our discussions with others who hold positions different from our own, we need a Copernican vision, recognizing that the universe does not revolve around the earth nor are we the epitome and centre of truth. Our positions are not so right that it is always others who are wrong. We need to bring an open mind and allow ourselves to be proved wrong sometimes as we hold our beliefs to the lamp of God's revelation.

We must follow the words of Paul when he calls us to pursue the attitude of Jesus Christ in our own relationships. To do that is to esteem others better than ourselves and not to be so concerned with our own interests that we scorn the interests of others. We do this only when we remember the encouragement we receive from being united with Christ, from the love of the Father and from fellowship with the Spirit, and the tenderness and compassion we experience from those sources. Only then can we have the same love and be one in spirit and purpose.

May we all come to knowledge of the truth, "For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." ⁹

⁹ 1 Tim2:3-5 Here is one place where the term "God" easily embraces the idea of "Godhead."

“My Father Is Greater Than I”

Introduction

When we pick up the Bible and read a chapter, we tend to recall some verses better than others. Often we read the Bible so we can cover as much as possible in one sitting. This way of reading is useful to give us a general overview of its message. However, we need more often to read the Bible slowly and thoughtfully, pondering each thought and word carefully; asking and trusting God to give us understanding; letting Him show us the deep significance of each thought and word; seeing each idea as a stitch in the whole tapestry of God’s revelation.

When we do this with John 14, the chapter becomes much more than the best known promise of Jesus’ return that we can glibly rattle off as support for the “Adventist” portion of our identity.

The chapter reveals significant aspects of Jesus’ being and His relationship with the Father. The Holy Spirit also fits into this relationship, shown by statements that disclose the nature of the Spirit’s existence.

Preparation for Departure

Jesus begins His discourse about His departure and its consequences with the well-loved promise that gives us hope of a future eternal life as God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule. When Jesus tells the disciples that He is going away to prepare a place for them, He adds that they know where He is going and they also know the way. Thomas responds, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answers him, “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. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”¹

¹ John 14:5-7. Comment: “Without the Way, there is no going, Without the Truth, there is no knowing, Without the Life, there is no living.” Thomas à

Here is a most significant “I AM” saying of Jesus Christ recorded by John. In this and most of His other similar “I AM” statements where there is no predicate of the verb,² Jesus claimed the name of Jehovah. At the burning bush Jehovah told Moses to use this name³ to the Israelites to identify the One who had given Him authority to lead them out of slavery. He was the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.⁴ The name is a statement of self existence, the fact that Jesus was not dependent on any other Being for His life or His existence.

John established that Jesus, the Word that “was God,” had created absolutely everything that had ever come into being.⁵ This was far more than was encompassed by His humanity during His incarnation. These statements claimed self existence, extending from eternity past to eternity future. Jesus is co-eternal with the Father Himself.

When Jesus claimed, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” He was making exclusive claims that could only come from deity. Only God is the universal way; only God is the source and sustainer of truth; the life of every created being originates in the Creator and continues only so long as He sustains it.

Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Book I, ch. 3

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_%C3%A0_Kempis

² For example: John 6:51; 8:12, 58; 10:9, 36; 11:25; 15:1. The list is not complete. Notice also John 8:24 where English translations usually add the predicate “He” which is not present in the Greek.

³ Ex 3:14 When Jesus used this name as proof that He had divine authority, the listening Jews took up stones to throw at Him because they recognized it as a claim to equality with God. See John 8:13-59.

⁴ E.g. Isa 54:5. The term is used several times in Isa 40 – 55 where there are many other passages that parallel the qualities and activities of YHWH with John’s use of the name “I AM.”

⁵ John 1:3,4 Paul corroborates this claim in Col 1:15-19 where the Son who is the identical “image of the invisible God,” is said to be pre-eminent over all creatures “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.” (The Greek word *prototokos* has the meaning, “pre-eminent” and has nothing to do with His origin.)

Jesus spoke these words during His incarnation, when He was “in the flesh.” He had not cast off His divinity when He “humbled Himself” and was “made in the likeness of men.”⁶ To emphasize divine authority for saying this, Jesus claimed He did not speak on His own (authority) but His Father who dwelt in Him was responsible.⁷ Three times He asserted His identity with the Father in these words, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”⁸ The third time He points to the consummation when He will return and they will know His identity with the Father’s deity on the one hand and His identity with humanity on the other.⁹

These statements show why Jesus is uniquely qualified to be our Mediator and our Intercessor. “As we approach God through the virtue of the Redeemer’s merits, Christ places us close by His side, encircling us with His human arm, while with His divine arm He grasps the throne of the Infinite.”¹⁰ “...In the perfection of humanity he grasps the world, and in the fullness of his divinity he lays hold upon the throne of God.”¹¹

Paul says of Jesus Christ who is both “our God and Saviour,”¹² that “...*there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.*”¹³ “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, ...‘There is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved..’”¹⁴

Returning to John 14, we notice a few of the ways in which Jesus identified His equality with the Father in this discourse. “Believe in God, believe also in Me.”¹⁵ “If you had known Me, you would

⁶ Phil 2:7 – NASB has “... emptied Himself” or, “ laid aside His privileges.”

⁷ John 14:10

⁸ John 14:10,11, 20

⁹ John 14:“I am in the Father” asserts His identity with divinity while “You in Me and I in you asserts His identity with humanity.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, {*God’s Amazing Grace*, 85.4}

¹¹ Ellen G. White, {ST, June 27, 1895 par. 7}”

¹² 1 Tim 2:3

¹³ 1 Tim 2:5 Italics indicate words supplied by the translators.

¹⁴ Acts 4:8-12

¹⁵ John 14: 1

have known My Father also.”¹⁶ “He that has seen me has seen the Father.”¹⁷ “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.”¹⁸ “We will come and make Our home with him.”¹⁹

With these statements of identity firmly implanted in our minds, we come to this statement, “You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you. If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.”²⁰

Let us analyze this declaration in light of the scheme that suggests we should first consider whether the passage is a statement about being and only then consider whether it is a statement about activity or relationships.

In this case we suggest it is primarily a statement about being. One reason is that it is the sense that Jesus always used when speaking from a human point of view during His earthly ministry.

In His incarnation, while Jesus retained His divine nature, He held it simultaneously with His human nature. However He had laid aside the power and prerogatives of His divine nature so His being displayed no appearance of the glory of divinity nor did He exercise His own divine power. Rather, the divine power exercised in His ministry came from the Father. This is the same divine power that God is willing to supply to any human being ready and willing to be His instrument.

“Being found in fashion as a man” Jesus’ relationship with His Father was always as if He had no divinity in His being, He related to the Father as mere human being to supreme God.

He spoke representing all human beings, for He had laid aside His prerogatives as God. Everything He did came from the same quality of relationship with divinity that each individual human being could enjoy under God’s provision of reconciliation, for

¹⁶ John 14:7

¹⁷ v 9

¹⁸ vv 10,11

¹⁹ v 23. We remember that the chapter opened with the promise of an eternal home “in My Father’s house.

²⁰ v 28

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.²¹

The human Christ appeared to be a lesser order of being than the Father, a created human being rather than One who had self existence. He had not abandoned His divinity—He was still as much divine as if He were not at all human—but the divine power He exercised on earth belonged to His Father. In His humanity then He could only say of His Father’s being, “My Father is greater than I.” And yet He could still declare, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,”²² because He was so in harmony with His Father’s purposes and He still retained His suppressed divinity.

Introducing the Holy Spirit

Jesus was leaving earth and returning to His Father’s territory. As the Father’s representative on earth, Jesus provides the exclusive way to His Father. He fulfils mankind’s requests made in His name so the Father can be glorified. He helps mankind, encouraging people to keep His own words, which originate with the Father.

²³

He entreats the Father to send the Holy Spirit in His place so the disciples will not be left as orphans.²⁴ These things have nothing to do with His inherent being but rather with the way individual members of Godhead choose to relate to each other and to act.

He had given His disciples reason to rejoice because He had promised them another Paraclete, an Advocate or Comforter or Helper of exactly the same divine nature as Himself. In reporting this promise, John uses masculine pronouns. We would expect masculine pronouns to stand in place of the noun, Paraclete.²⁵

²¹ 2 Cor 5:19

²² John 14:9

²³ Christ also taught His disciples to call His Father their Father, as in the Lord’s prayer, for instance. In the Old Testament, the term Father is not restricted to the idea of immediate progenitor. So people could speak of “Father Abraham” as well as referring to “the fathers,” meaning Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or other significant ancestors. Thus there is no conflict between the idea of God as the Father of Jesus, and our Father.

²⁴ John 14:18

²⁵ “He” in vv 15, 17, 26, 15:26; 18:8

“Him:” John 16:7;

However John also uses masculine pronouns to stand in place of the neuter noun translated "Spirit." ²⁶ This breaks the grammatical rule of the Greek language that requires neuter pronouns standing in for neuter nouns. We thus have another witness to the Holy Spirit's being. – a real personal Being rather than merely an impersonal emanation from Father or Son that could be referred to as "it."

Why would Jesus' departure leave the disciples as "orphans?" He had been satisfied with His Father's support. Wouldn't the Father continue His support for them? Could it be that Jesus was playing a very active fatherly role in His presence with them, fulfilling that portion of Isaiah's prophecy that forecast He would be, "Everlasting Father?" ²⁷ A part of a father's role is helping his children to develop towards maturity, teaching them and helping them. That is precisely the role of a Paraclete also (or Advocate or Comforter,). – to be an immanent Helper when Jesus left them, He would carry on the responsibilities of Jesus in teaching them and bring to remembrance whatever Jesus had said to them, and His other ministry roles.

The responsibilities to be borne by the promised Holy Spirit also inform us of the activities Jesus had performed. Jesus too had been immanent teacher and helper, as the Spirit of Holiness was to be. But He was to be much more than Teacher and Helper, as Jesus had also been, . The work of the Holy Spirit was also to bear witness to Jesus, ²⁸ to convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, to guide the disciples into all truth and tell them things to come, to glorify Jesus and take the things of Jesus and declare them to the disciples.²⁹ All of these things, Jesus had done in His life on earth. Jesus had been Teacher and Helper, He had borne witness to the deity in Heaven and completed each of the other duties now to be carried by the Holy Spirit. He had not glorified Himself but His Father. The Spirit also was not to speak on His own be-

²⁶ "He:" 16:13, 14, 15. These pronouns refer to the substantive, Holy Spirit." which is neuter gender in the Greek and thus should take a neuter pronoun.

²⁷ Isa 9:6

²⁸ John 15:26

²⁹ Joh 16:8-10; 13, 14

half (from His own authority,) ³⁰ but to carry the message of heavenly deity, just as Jesus had done. ³¹

This list of identical responsibilities also points to the fact that the Holy Spirit was to be another One of exactly the same kind as the departing anointed One. While Jesus had been visible and the Spirit of Holiness would be invisible because He did not adopt humanity, in every divine feature He was Jesus Christ's equal.

As we contemplate the picture of God Our Father and the Son of God and the Spirit of Holiness painted in these three chapters we need to consider the places where each made His home. The Father's territory embraced the universe but Jesus referred to Him as "Our Father in heaven." ³² Jesus home was the earth where He had humbled Himself to take the form of a bondservant and become obedient to the point of death. ³³ He was soon to return to heaven to the joyful welcome of heaven's host ³⁴ and where His prerogatives as God and equality with the Father would be restored. ³⁵ When He returned to heaven the promised Holy Spirit would come at Pentecost with all the intrinsic divinity of Father and Son, another self-existent Being of exactly the same kind as Jesus Christ. He would abide with them forever.

No longer need the Son of God say, "My Father is Greater than I," except for one thing. Each individual Person of Godhead, equal but distinct, indissolubly bonded together in perfect unity, exemplifies the principle of selfless esteem epitomized in these words, "...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. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than

³⁰ v 13

³¹ Even in the current discourse Jesus had reminded them, "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.," John 14:10

³² Matt 6:9

³³ Phil 2:6-8

³⁴ Psalm 24

³⁵ Phil 2:9-11 and compare Ps 24:3-10

himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”³⁶ Each member of the Godhead always seeks and promotes the being of the others as better than themselves. May we all have this attitude which is in Christ Jesus and in His divine associates.

³⁶ Phil 2:1-4

This Is Life Eternal

Where Life Originates

John opened the gospel by declaring the eternal coexistence of the Word, with God. The Word was right there along with the Father in the very beginning of all beginnings, and everything that God was, the Word was also. In the fourth verse, John declares, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."¹

Throughout this gospel, the apostle returns to the theme of life again and again. In the best known verse in the Bible, he asserts, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever 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." Father and Son cooperate in making it possible for all human kind to be in fellowship with them. In the closing verse of his gospel, John says that we "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."²

John opens his gospel speaking of a fellowship of life eternal; he continues it showing the means by which the objective may be accomplished and the theme of eternal life in fellowship with Himself and the Father. He ends on the same note.

In his first epistle, John makes the very same point, "What was from the beginning."³ He refers to Jesus as "the Word of Life," emphasizing the life factor. "...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."⁴ John again refers to the beginning of all beginnings to bolster his point that the eternal life in Jesus was there, co-eternal with the Father.

¹ John 1:4,5

² John 20:31

³ Literal Greek, 1 John 1:1, first clause

⁴ 1 John 1:1,2

In the introductory section of 1 John, the apostle also speaks of an expanding fellowship, describing how the Word of life took a human form so that He could be heard, seen, looked upon and touched. He drew the apostles into the fellowship He had with the Father. They in turn proclaimed the Word of life to extend the fellowship of the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. This is a fellowship of eternal life.

These passages are the most direct of all scriptures in informing us of the essential being of the Word who was made flesh and dwelt among us. Without question, they state that the Word of Life was co-eternal with the Father.

In the beginning of all beginnings, there was fellowship between the Word and the Father, for the Word was "with God." There is no room for the Son of God to be a created Being who was allotted certain powers and prerogatives of divinity by the Father. Neither is there room for Him to emerge in amoeba-like fashion from a single homogeneous substance where both Father nature and Son nature co-existed. He was not "begotten" in this sense at some time after "God" had existed alone. Rather, God our Father and the Son of God were of the same essence or of the "one substance" in the same sense that God has made of "one blood" all the nations of the world.

No wonder Jesus can confidently declare, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."⁵ Later in the same conversation with Nicodemus He adds, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."⁶

If we were present during the incipient rebellion against God that raised itself in Lucifer's mind as he compared Himself with the Son of God⁷ and ponder their relative status, we would doubtless have found it difficult to distinguish between them on the basis of appearance. Lucifer's appearance rivaled that of the Son of God, for He was formed in His image. The great difference had to do with the

⁵ John 3:16

⁶ John 3:36

⁷ One version of the story may be found in Ellen G White, *Patriarch and Prophets*, "Why Was Sin Permitted," pp 35ff.

source of their life. Lucifer was a created being, a creature who depended on his Creator for his very existence.

The Son of God had no such dependence. When He was in the tomb, having perished, abandoned by His disciples and forsaken by God, He was without hope in the same way that others who die the second death are without hope, *except* that He had life, divine life, in Himself. It was not a life He owed to His Father's bestowal. It was His by right of His eternal co-existence with the Father, genuine, natural, intrinsic life that is an essential characteristic of true and absolute divinity. It was life, "original, unborrowed, and underived."⁸

The fact that Jesus Christ has genuine, natural, intrinsic life in Himself has great significance for us who are believers and to the plan of salvation. Ellen White continues the passage quoted above with these words: " 'He that hath the Son hath life.' 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life...By His word and His works He declared Himself the Author of the resurrection. He who Himself was soon to die upon the cross stood with the keys of death, a conqueror of the grave, and asserted His right and power to give eternal life."⁹

Paul asserts, "... if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."¹⁰

No angel, however exalted, could have paid the price for man's sin. The resurrection was vital to the plan of salvation. Jesus' resurrection offered life for the whole of humanity. However, there could have been no anticipatory resurrection for anyone who was dependent on Another for his life. Forsaken by God, because of the burden of sin to be carried, there could be no future separated from the Source of life. When the Father sent His archangel to call His Son after resting the Sabbath day, it was by Jesus' own divinity that He was raised. Only a human sacrifice with intrinsic divinity and

⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 19.1

⁹ *Idem*.

¹⁰ 1 Cor 15: 17,18 We note the fact that verse 15 says, "... we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, ..." but to say this "God" refers to the Father is to pre-judge the issue. We will examine this concept later.

underived eternal life could ever experience resurrection from the second death. The risen Christ provided an eternal bridge spanning the sin-caused gulf of separation between man and God, a ladder between earth and heaven, or an intercessor between man and God.

“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. Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”¹¹

What about the Holy Spirit?

From pre-creation when the earth was without form and void, the Spirit of God has been associated with God in creating, upholding and redeeming this earth and its people. Always in the background in the Old Testament as He promoted the interests of God-head, the Spirit is called the Spirit of God or the Spirit of the LORD (who is YHWH.)

In the New Testament Peter assures us, “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.”¹² Peter knew exactly who the Holy Spirit was because he was present when Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit, another Paraclete exactly like Himself, a personal Advocate, Counselor, Comforter and Intercessor who can be grieved.¹³ This Being is also to help with our infirmities when we do not know how to pray as we ought.¹⁴

Peter received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Under His direction and power Peter preached and healed. It is significant therefore that Peter speaks of one aspect of the Spirit’s work in Old Testament times, inspiring people to write down God’s messages. Several times in the Old Testament we are told of the way the Holy Spirit inspired His prophets. When Samuel anointed Saul, Samuel

¹¹ Rom 5:17,18

¹² 2 Peter 1:20,21

¹³ Eph 4:30

¹⁴ Rom 8:26

prophesied of his journey home to his father, "Then the Spirit of the LORD (YHWH.) will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man."¹⁵

Exactly as Samuel said, "So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day. When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them."¹⁶

Many times in the Old Testament the phrase "the Spirit of the LORD (JHWH)" is used ¹⁷ So Isaiah can ask, "Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD (YHWH.), or as His counselor has taught Him?"¹⁸ He is said to be the "Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."¹⁹

In Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones, the One whom the LORD (YHWH) calls "My Spirit" is the vivifying Spirit that brings dead bones to life.²⁰ Micah speaks of being "full of power by the Spirit of the LORD (YHWH)" ²¹ while Zechariah proclaims, "the word of the LORD (YHWH) to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD (YHWH) of hosts."²²

The Spirit of the LORD (YHWH) remained mostly in the background in the Old Testament, but still played an active role in changing people's lives, inspiring the prophets, playing a part in setting people apart for special holy duties and being a restorer of life. With His expanded role after Pentecost following the revelation of the Godhead in Jesus Christ, the Spirit was revealed as a personal Being of exactly the same divine quality as Jesus Christ. He would

¹⁵ 1 Sam 10:6

¹⁶ 1 Sam 10::9,10 Similar instances of the Spirit of God coming upon other prophets include 2 Chron 15:1; 2 Chron 24:20

¹⁷ E.g. Judges 3:10; 11:29; 14:6,19; 1 Sam 16:13,14; Isa 11:2; 40:13; Eze 11:5; 37:1

¹⁸ Isa 40:13

¹⁹ Isa 11:2

²⁰ Eze 37:14

²¹ Micah 3:8

²² Zech 4:6

continue to remain largely invisible and not speak on His own authority but recall the messages of Christ to His followers.

Jesus' earlier words have particular significance in clarifying the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life." He glorified both the Son of God and God our Father thus epitomizing the principle of selfless promotion of the other. In Revelation He is called the seven spirits of God, because of His association with each of the seven churches.²³ Finally, the Holy Spirit is the instrument through whom God's eternal life is imparted. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life."²⁴

Revealing Eternal Life

In His incarnation, Jesus Christ was both so human it was as if He were not at all divine and at the same time so divine it was as if He were not at all human. Let's keep this paradox clearly in mind as we proceed.

When Jesus was speaking in His humanity, He voluntarily laid aside all the prerogatives and appearance of His divinity and acted as a man should act, a man who is perfectly in harmony with God our Father. His language was also suitable for this relationship. He was confident of His standing and approval but deferred to the Father as creature to Creator, always acknowledging His dependence on the Father's will and activity. In this manner of speaking we have pronouncements such as "My Father is greater than I," and "I can of my own self do nothing."

There are also passages which seem to suggest some degree of subservience of the Son to the Father. This idea of eternal subservience works best when accompanied by the additional supposition that Jesus derived His life and being from the Father at some unimaginably distant time close to an eternity ago. Here are some examples often quoted in this regard: "God so loved the world that

²³ Rev 1:4; 3:1. 4:5; 5:6

²⁴ John 6:63

He *gave* His only begotten Son...,"²⁵ "This is life eternal that they might know *you, the only true God*, and Jesus Christ *whom you have sent*," "Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: Father, the hour has come. *Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was,*"²⁶ and "I have come down from heaven, *not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*"²⁷

The emphasized clauses are sometimes used to indicate that the Father developed the plans, issued the orders and supported the Son in their execution. The Father was thus the Almighty God working with a lesser Mighty God. Since Jesus was begotten of the Father (taken to mean that the Father "begat" Him,) so He depended on the Father as the source of His life, His authority, His power and His glory.

These statements do suggest the subservience of the Son, in His human nature, to the divine nature of the Father. This is the relationship of Creature to Creator. Jesus Christ had indeed humbled Himself, had taken the likeness of humanity and become a bond slave, all to enable Himself to be bruised for our iniquities and to die for our sins. No wonder that Jesus Christ, who partook of human nature, should speak and act in subservience to the Father during His incarnation.

However, Jesus was more than merely human. The remarkable fact is that the Biblical statements mentioned above remain true when we consider them from the point of view of Jesus' divinity. The statements no longer express subservience of the one to the other

²⁵ John 3:16

²⁶ John 17:1 – 5

²⁷ John 6:38

but rather describes an equal and intimate sharing where each does nothing without the other's knowledge and involvement.

It is appropriate for the Son of God to defer to God the Father within the mystery of Godliness called the Godhead—only one God though an intimate union of three divine persons. What was properly a statement of subservience at the human and divine interface becomes deference and reinforcement between equals involving two of “three persons in one Godhead.”\

The one-ness of the three is displayed and the principle of selfless esteem for the others is exemplified. Each promotes the others as better than Himself. ²⁸

We also draw attention to the fact that Jesus declared His equality with the Father in their pre incarnation existence. In His incarnate, human form, Jesus asks the Father, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the *glory which I had with You before the world was.*” ²⁹ As He nears the end of His earthly ministry He humbly requests that the Father restore Him to the glory He had in His fellowship of life with the Father.

God granted this prayer. “... 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.” ³⁰

In the beginning of his gospel and first epistle, John shows the co-existence of Father and Son from eternity in a fellowship of life. Jesus' statements of subservience to His Father were framed to reveal the fact that He had humbled Himself and become human. He had laid aside the glory and prerogatives of His essential and eternal “Godness” for the limited duration of His earthly sojourn. In fact, Psalm 24 speaks prophetically of His welcome back to His pre-incarnate glory. The host of heaven sings of Him and to Him, calling

²⁸ See Phil 2:2 - 4

²⁹ John 17:5

³⁰ Phil 2:9-11

Him King of glory, LORD (YHWH) of hosts and LORD (YHWH) mighty in battle.

“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 strong and mighty,
The LORD mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O you gates!
Lift up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
He *is* the King of glory. Selah³¹

Jesus, who had become the Son of Man, is welcomed back into heaven in scenes of adulation. His former glory, His appearance and prerogatives as God are restored to Him. He is now uniquely qualified to be Mediator between God and man because He retains His humanity, now glorified but bearing the marks of His humiliation. The final fulfillment of Godhead’s plan for a perfect, eternal creation is assured. “...There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”³²

Paul reminds Timothy of what has been accomplished for mankind by the “purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before time began but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”³³ The

³¹ Ps 24:7-10 The Psalm was first written to welcome the ark of the covenant back from its intermediary resting place in the house of Abinadab into Jerusalem. It presages the Messianic return to Heaven following the incarnation. Finally, it predicts the welcome the Lord with His gathered people will receive on their arrival in Heaven following the second advent of Christ.

³² Rev 21:4

³³ 2 Tim 1:9,10

good news about God is that mankind has been drawn into the fellowship of eternal life that existed in Godhead before time began

John, who began both his gospel and his first epistle with statements about the Word's existence from the beginning of beginnings in a fellowship of eternal life ends his gospel with a call to believe on Jesus Christ as the source and sustainer of eternal life. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."³⁴

In 1 John, he is even more insistent that we are called to eternal life in the Son of God. "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."³⁵

³⁴ John 20: 31

³⁵ 1 John 5:11-13, 20

Who is Jehovah?

The Issue of Authority

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."¹

We discovered in an earlier chapter that all humanity has received a revelation of the essential knowledge of God because "God made it evident to them."² Those who suppress this truth in unrighteousness and ungodliness finally evoke the wrath of God. Their steadfast choice is to deny God any authority or place in their lives. When they finally refuse the slightest response to the ministry of the Spirit of Holiness, God grants their wish to be separated from Him. To be separated from God is to be separated from the only source of life in the universe, and that means annihilation.

Malachi paints the picture for us. "The day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch....They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I do this, says the LORD of Hosts."³ Peter calls that day, "the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."⁴

In Romans Paul shows us that suppressing the truth of God's self revelation is a serious matter. Ignoring the authority of God is disastrous, whether the revelation comes to us through nature, impressions by the Spirit of Holiness directly to the mind, through human words or activity pointing to God, or through the Bible itself.

In contrast, "...to you who fear My Name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings."⁵ God's reputation

¹ Deut 29: 29

² Rom 1:19

³ Mal 4:1, 3

⁴ 2 Peter 3:7

⁵ Mal 4:2

and character are bound up in His name as is a statement of His very being. The third command of the decalogue insists, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain."⁶ In view of the fact that part of God's self revelation concerns His name, it is important that we are clear about this aspect of His identity. Decisions we make either to accept, or reject and suppress God's self revelation are matters of life and death.

The LORD Jehovah

The name LORD (all capitals) appears in many places in the Old Testament. It refers to Jehovah (or YHWH or JHVH,) the name of the God of Israel. "So let it be established, that Your name may be magnified forever, saying, 'The LORD (YHWH) of hosts, the God of Israel, is Israel's God.'" ⁷ Its meaning has to do with eternal, original existence, "I AM that I AM," or, "I exist only because I exist."

This name proclaims its owner to have no prior cause; rather He is prime cause of all that exists. It was introduced to Moses at the burning bush when the LORD called him to lead Israel out of Egypt. "And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM' ... The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations." ⁸

This is also the name of God used in the key text used by all who oppose the Trinity. ⁹ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one [echad] LORD." ¹⁰

Without injury, the text can be translated: "Hear, O Israel, the Source of existence, our God, is the [only] Self existent One [Echad]."

Echad, or "one," often refers to unity in plurality, as a cluster of grapes or husband and wife (Gen 2:24). The emphasis is not on

⁶ Ex 20:7

⁷ 1 Chronicles 17:24

⁸ Ex 3:14,15

⁹ The author is indebted to A. Leroy Moore's unpublished article, "Trinity Theology" for some of the expressions and concepts in these immediate pages.

¹⁰ Deut. 6:4

God as 'one' being but upon unity in the self-existent nature of JHWH, the sole Source of all existence, for Whom Christ is the eternal Spokesperson—Himself JHWH, the Word." ¹¹ This is not to say that Jesus Christ is alone JHWH.

"Unity in the self-existent nature of God" is expressed in John's gospel as "The Word was with God, and the Word was God"¹² and in his first epistle as, "Fellowship ... with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."¹³ Jesus Himself also claimed the title "I AM," ¹⁴ thus identifying Himself as YHWH. The Jews understood exactly the nature of His claim, which they thought to be blasphemy, so "they took up stones to throw at Him." ¹⁵

Moses' last words to Israel establish that the words, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD," refer to the Son of God in unity.

"For I proclaim the name of the LORD:

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." ¹⁶

"Do you thus deal with the LORD,

O foolish and unwise people?

Is He not your Father, *who* bought you?

Has He not made you and established you?" ¹⁷

"He found him in a desert land

And in the wasteland, a howling wilderness;

He encircled him, He instructed him,

He kept him as the apple of His eye.

As an eagle stirs up its nest,

¹¹ A. Leroy Moore, *Ibid.*

¹² John 1:1

¹³ 1 John 1:3

¹⁴ John 8:58

¹⁵ John 8:59

¹⁶ Deut 32:3,4

¹⁷ Deut 32:6

Hovers over its young,
Spreading out its wings, taking them up,
Carrying them on its wings,
So the LORD alone led him,"¹⁸
 "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...
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?
For their rock *is* not like our Rock,
Even our enemies themselves *being* judges." ¹⁹

These passages equate the Rock with YHWH. YHWH *is* the Rock. In the New Testament passages, this Rock is said to be none other than Jesus Christ. "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock ²⁰ I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."²¹ This is the "stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." ²² "[Our fathers] all ate the same spiritual food, all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."²³ So it is crystal clear that the LORD who is the Rock in the Old Testament is the same as, or at the very least includes the One called Jesus in the New Testament.

¹⁸ Deut 32:10-13

¹⁹ Deut 32:15,30,31

²⁰ Seventh-day Adventists have long interpreted this "rock" as referring to Jesus Christ Himself, in contrast to Peter, a small stone.

²¹ Matt 16:18

²² Acts 4:11,12

²³ 1 Cor 10:3,4 [

When Moses speaks of the LORD as Father, he also anticipates Isaiah's saying of the child to be born, "and the government shall be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called...Everlasting Father..."²⁴

In John's gospel, as Jesus speaks of His forthcoming death, we read, "But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, 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?’

Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

“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.”²⁵

John quotes from Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10 in this passage before he clearly states, "These things Isaiah said when (or 'because') he *saw His glory* and spoke of Him."²⁶ The verse in Isaiah 6 (one of the chapters Jesus quoted) that most prominently speaks of "glory" is the third verse:

"Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD (YHWH) of hosts;

The whole earth *is* full of His glory!"

It could hardly be clearer that John, the beloved disciple, the one closest to Him, regarded references to the LORD Jehovah of the Old Testament as including Jesus Christ, Yahsua Meshiach, the Saviour and Anointed One. John obviously understood Isaiah's testimony about Jesus, not only here in the sixth chapter, but in many other places as well.

Isaiah says plainly,

²⁴ Isa 9:6

²⁵ John 12:37-40

²⁶ John 12:41

“Thus says the LORD (YHWH),
The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:
“Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons;
And concerning the work of My hands, you command Me.
I have made the earth,
And created man on it.
I—My hands—stretched out the heavens,”²⁷

Isaiah is obviously speaking of Jesus Christ as YHWH. The New Testament plainly says that God made the worlds through His Son.²⁸ Paul asserts “...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.*”²⁹

Isaiah speaks of the fall of Babylon in a long prophecy starting in chapter 40 and running to chapter 49. In these chapters, YHWH is proclaimed as Rock and Saviour, Creator and Redeemer who appoints Cyrus as His anointed prince whom He raises up to overthrow literal, historic Babylon. Cyrus is introduced at the end of Chapter 44, called by name before he was born to demonstrate YHWH’s superiority over all other gods. His successful campaign against Babylon is prophesied and assured with YHWH underpinning his crusade to ensure redemption from Israel’s captivity. Even the method he would use to overthrow Babylon is described in advance.

With great passion YHWH repeatedly asserts His right to obedience and worship as Israel’s only Creator and God and King and Redeemer throughout this passage of Isaiah. He constantly asserts His creative saving activity against the sterile incapacity of gods made by human craftsmen. Three times He asserts His eternity, from first to last.

“Thus says the LORD (YHWH), the King of Israel,
And his Redeemer, the LORD (YHWH) of hosts:

²⁷ Isa 45 11,12

²⁸ Heb 1:1,2

²⁹ Eph 3:9

'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last;
Besides Me *there is* no God.'" ³⁰

In a passage reminding Israel of her chosen status and God's enduring nurture, the LORD (YHWH) speaks also of her final deliverance from Babylon by the destruction of those who put their trust in other gods. He urges His eternal existence and constancy as the reason they may safely and confidently trust Him.

"I, the LORD, am the first;
And with the last I *am* He." ³¹

After reproofing Israel for misrepresenting Him, for mentioning His name but not in truth and uprightness, the LORD again declares,

"Listen to Me, O Jacob,
And Israel, My called:
I *am* He, I *am* the First,
I *am* also the Last." ³²

The threefold pattern in Isaiah of Jehovah's declaring Himself the first and last is also prominent in John's Book of Revelation, where Jesus Christ three times declares Himself to be the first and last.³³

As we read the book of Isaiah, it becomes obvious that the name YHWH embraces and applies to more than one personal divine Being.

Because Isaiah points to Jesus Christ in His use of the name, it does not mean that he refers to Jesus exclusively, using the name YHWH. Sometimes He refers unmistakably to the Father by the

³⁰ Isa 44:6

³¹ Isa 41:5

³² Isa 48:12

³³ Rev 1:17; 2:8; 22:13

name. It is the Father Who calls, "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!"³⁴

This message from Isaiah is particularly interesting because it links YHWH, the Father, with His Servant, Jesus the elect one (whom we have shown is also referred to as YHWH) and with the Spirit. This Spirit was declared by John to be one of exactly the same type of Being as Jesus Himself. If we take this witness of the Bible, we see that here in Isaiah we have the Father (the 1st Person YHWH) anointing the suffering Servant (the 2nd Person YHWH) with the Spirit (the 3rd Person YHWH,) for His incarnate ministry.

In the first part of Isaiah 44 the LORD (YHWH) heaps scorn on idols and their creators, He repeatedly claims to be Creator of all and Israel's Redeemer. He is speaking directly about the LORD's redemption of Israel from literal Babylon by Cyrus, whom He designated for the task.³⁵ He then predicts the fall of mystical or spiritual Babylon, and elevates YHWH as her designated conqueror, the anti-type of Cyrus.

John picks up this theme, the fall of mystical Babylon, in the Book of Revelation. There it is Jesus Christ, the Lamb as it had been slain, who overcomes Babylon and its supports.³⁶ Here the Lamb is also called Lord of Lords and King of kings. The type, Cyrus, is called "the righteous man from the East."³⁷

In Revelation, John announces a blessing from the Godhead immediately before Jesus declares,

"Grace to you and peace
from Him who is and who was and who is to come,
and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,
and from Jesus Christ,...the ruler over the kings of the
earth."³⁸

³⁴ Isa 42:1 (See vv 5,6 also

³⁵ Isa 42:24 - 45:3

³⁶ Rev 17:14 See also Rev 14 and Rev 18 for further imagery concerning the fall of mystic Babylon.

³⁷ Isa 41:2

³⁸ Rev 1:4,5 The Spirit of holiness is tioned as seven fold because it suits the theme that follows, of the seven churches. After the message to each church we are advised, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Later in the chapter, two of these three introduce themselves with almost identical expressions that parallel YHWH's "First and Last" expressions in Isaiah. After John introduces the Father as "Him who is and who was and who is to come," the self declaration comes, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."³⁹

These three expressions are equivalent to the meaning of "YHWH," the source of all existence, the Self existent One. Jesus also identifies Himself with three almost identical expressions, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last."⁴⁰

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
 My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights!
 I have put My Spirit upon Him;
 He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
 He will not cry out, nor raise *His voice*,
 Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
 A bruised reed He will not break,
 And smoking flax He will not quench;
 He will bring forth justice for truth. ⁴¹

Isaiah's chapter that starts with these verses contains many Messianic passages that are mentioned in the gospels. Significantly, at times YHWH is clearly Christ and at others YHWH addresses Christ as "My Servant." This is not surprising because the name YHWH applies to all three, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, (referred to in Isaiah 42 as, "My Spirit)."⁴¹ All three are self existent, and individually, the name YHWH applies to each One.

The name YHWH can also be applied to the three together, united in Godhead. This brings us back to the primary text which non-theists pose as the strongest evidence against a triune God.

³⁹ Rev 1:9

⁴⁰ Rev 22:13 Some scholars question the expression attributed to Jesus in Rev 1:11 but attest the authenticity of Rev 22:13.

⁴¹ Isa 42:1 ff

"Hear, O Israel, the LORD (YHWH) our God is echad YHWH."
(Deut 5:4)

The self-existent Godhead is one (echad) LORD (YHWH), for which Christ is Speaker and Revealer in both Old Testament and New Testament and forever. ⁴²

To Whom Does "GOD" Refer?

In the same way that "God" refers to one Godhead in Deuteronomy, in many other places the term also properly refers to Godhead. It is only when we bring our prejudice to these texts that we insist that they refer only to God the Father. Paul writes one passage that commands our attention in this regard. "... that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."⁴³

Paul speaks of the "mystery of God" and immediately speaks of both the Father and of Christ. Obviously, he sees "God" as encompassing more than merely the Father, but Christ as well. It is also significant that this is the very chapter in which Paul states with great conviction that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ. Notice also the long duration implied in the word, "Dwells." It is not a fleeting presence.

With this declaration concerning "the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ," we can call into question our presuppositions about whom is meant by the word "God" in verse 11 of the same chapter. Can it be referring only to the Father, or to Christ as well? Can it include the Holy Spirit, who is not specifically mentioned in the earlier verse, but who is included in the Godhead as has been shown?

⁴² A. Leroy Moore, *Ibid.* Minor changes have been made to Moore's wording but it is his thought that is conveyed.

⁴³ Col 2:2,3

This verse is not the only verse called into question. Every verse of the Bible that does not specifically state directly or by context that "God" refers only to the Father can be questioned concerning whom it is addressing. We can not afford to make assumptions based merely on our pre-conceived ideas.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."⁴⁴ "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."⁴⁵ "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent."⁴⁶

Can we say with conviction based on scriptural evidence that these and a whole stack of other passages refer only to God, the Father? Of course not! We have already examined passages that show it was Jesus Christ involved in the hands-on work of creation. We certainly cannot say that the first verse in the Bible refers merely to God our Father. Similarly with Hebrews 1, which goes on to mention God's Son but could easily be referring to the Godhead without doing any injustice to its meaning.

In our study of the Bible, we are often found wanting of a careful rigour in applying all that we already know as we study. We also tend to bring our own opinions and prejudice to our study and thus distort the lessons God would have us learn. Our practice should be to allow all the resources of heaven given by Father, Son and Holy Spirit to be our guides to keep us from falling from the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.⁴⁷

Conclusion

God our Father is a consuming fire to all who are tainted with iniquity and He is thus invisible.⁴⁸ This is to ensure their safe-

⁴⁴ Gen 1:1

⁴⁵ Heb 1:1,2

⁴⁶ Acts 17:20

⁴⁷ See Jude vv 3, 24

⁴⁸ Col 1:15 "He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God...."

ty. John reports Jesus saying, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."⁴⁹ Jesus makes it more explicit when He says, "And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form."⁵⁰

He further declares, "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father."⁵¹ We can be certain that anywhere in the Old Testament that YHWH reveals Himself, it is not referring to the Father nor the Spirit of Holiness but to the Son of God Himself.

The Son of God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush declaring Himself to be I AM THAT I AM, and YHWH. Jacob saw the Son of God face to face and so named the place Peniel. The Son of God questioned Abraham about Sarah's laughing and bargained with him about saving Sodom and Gomorrah. The list goes on. We need have no doubt at all that the Son of God may also be rightly called Jehovah (YHWH.)

⁴⁹ John 1:18.

⁵⁰ John 5:17

⁵¹ John 6:45

The Godhead in Ellen White's Writings

Introduction

Some current views of the Trinity in other Christian churches continue to be influenced by Greek philosophy. The Greeks were absorbed by theoretical ideas of "the ideal" and what it means to be perfect. We follow this process when we consider something that is ideal or perfect to be so as an absolute. If it changes at all, it can thus no longer be perfect. In Greek philosophy, a god who is perfect cannot change in any way at all and still be perfect.

Similarly, in the Greek view, if a perfect god is moved to compassion for someone else, he is changed and therefore becomes less than perfect. The perfect God must therefore be immutable (not subject to change) and impassable (not moved with compassion.)

When the Trinity doctrine was first proposed at the Council of Nicea, these ideas of immutability and impassability moulded scriptural understanding. Interpretation of scripture was thus made to depend on principles of Greek philosophy, which was anathema to our pioneers. They absolutely insisted that the Bible and the Bible only, in its clearest sense, should be the rule of faith and practice.

Since the Trinity doctrine at that time was tainted by mystical ideas and Greek philosophy, our spiritual ancestors opposed it vigorously. They saw the doctrine to be strongly opposed to the Bible's claims of a personal God who was touched with the feelings of our infirmities and moved with compassion by our sinful condition.

They believed the Bible presented a God whose ear was open to prayers that could move Him to answer them according to His time and His will. Seventh-day Adventist belief does not encompass the ideas of God's immutability and impassability that are still part of the Trinity doctrine as it exists in the teaching of Catholic and many Protestant churches

Seventh-day Adventist opponents of the doctrine of the Trinity rely heavily on the fact that most of the early pioneer Sabbatarian Adventists were militantly anti-trinitarian, while others were less

militant but still opposed to the doctrine. There is no disputing that fact, but sometimes the anti-trinitarians overstate their case.

Uriah Smith, author of *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation* and long-time editor of *The Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, and James White, husband of Ellen, were two of a long line who were Arian or semi-Arian in their beliefs and therefore did not accept a trinitarian view of God.

Surrounded by vocal opponents of Trinity belief, Ellen G. White could be expected to give strong support to the belief that Jesus had been either created or "begotten" by God at some time in the distant past. Some waited for a definitive vision on this doctrine. After all, on many occasions Ellen White received a confirming vision or message from God after new doctrinal positions were established through diligent and prolonged Bible study.

Up to that point the core Sabbatarian Adventist beliefs had been established by diligent and prayerful Bible study, not by a vision from God to Ellen White.¹ Nevertheless, Ellen White stated plainly that "we have many lessons to learn and many, many to unlearn" about our understanding of truth.²

It is a clear fact of history that the understanding of truth available to the pioneers, and their fervour in proclaiming it, did not result in the return of Jesus Christ our Lord at that time. If we return to the same understanding now, it will not affect the time of His return. God is consistent. If the belief did not ripen the grain in

¹ In fact, even the Sabbath doctrine was established in this way. Ellen G. White often had a confirming vision *after* these core beliefs were established and she wrote prolifically to disseminate these core beliefs. (The term "Sabbatarian Adventist," is used because these core beliefs were established before the Seventh-day Adventist Church was established and named.)

² Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White* p203. The full paragraph follows: "It is necessary that our unity today be of a character that will bear the test of trial. . . . We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and Heaven alone are infallible. **Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.**" (Emphasis supplied.)

the days of the pioneers, it will not do so now. ³ So this is not the factor that causes the Lord to delay His coming.

Apostasy and Advancing Truth

Following the emphasis on righteousness by faith in the General Conference session of 1888, unease began to develop about how anti-trinitarian beliefs meshed with the new emphasis. How could Jesus provide life and righteousness if He depended on another (namely Almighty God, His Father) for His own life and right standing? The Father alone was seen as the Being possessing intrinsic immortality.

Simultaneously, and none seem to know exactly when and how it started, Waggoner and Jones and Dr John Harvey Kellogg began to promote a world view that was somewhat mystical in explaining the way God relates to His people. This set of ideas gradually developed, trending towards pantheism.

Pantheism is the view that says that God consists in the totality of all that exists so that anything that exists is a part of God. Jones and Waggoner and Kellogg did not reach that position, but they saw God as immanent within everything. According to this perspective, we become righteous when we become aware of His immanence and cooperate with Him. Jesus becomes reincarnated, as it were, within each of His people.

This is a mystical view of God that stands over against the view of a personal God that the Adventist pioneers had struggled so hard to maintain. In some ways it harmonized more with the mystical view of the Trinity that permeated the Catholic Church at the time than with emerging Adventist beliefs concerning the nature of God. The mystical element of Trinitarian dogma was a major reason for the pioneers' opposition to the doctrine.

An interesting fact about the theist personal view of God and the pantheist mystical view of God is that proponents of each can use exactly the same language to explain the basis of salvation and

³ See Mark 4:29 But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.

personal devotion and actually mean something entirely different simply because of their different world views.

For example, the words, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," mean something entirely different to a pantheist, who views God as immanent within each believer, than to someone whose world view sees Jesus Christ as a personal being, One who dwells in the body temple of the believer by the Holy Spirit but is not part of the believer's being.

Throughout the middle and later 1890s there was increasing Bible study concerned with Jesus' person and ministry. Ellen G. White and her staff worked on the life of Christ project that resulted in the printing of *The Desire of Ages* in 1898. At the same time Professor W.W. Prescott came to Australia while he was writing a year's Sabbath School lesson studies on the Gospel of John.

Prescott ran an evangelistic campaign in Melbourne when he arrived in Australia. It was a new style of Christ-centred outreach, and his evangelistic team members were heavily involved in Bible study to learn and develop Prescott's methods. At the end of the series, Prescott went to Cooranbong in Australia where Ellen White and her literary assistants were working. There they collaborated in proofreading and editing the manuscript for *The Desire of Ages*.

This period of deep Bible study at a time when the new understanding of Christ as our righteousness had raised questions about what the Bible really taught about Christ's divine nature brought new understanding. The fruit borne by these projects startled the Church at the time. In *The Desire of Ages*, published in 1898, Ellen G. White wrote a passage that turned the Church's belief about the origin of Jesus Christ on its head. Commenting on this, M.L. Andreasen wouldn't believe that Ellen White had written these words until he saw them written in the manuscript in her own handwriting.

Here is the statement: "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived." "He that hath the Son hath life." 1 John 5:12."⁴ Here were the confirming words from the Lord's messenger that had been absent for all the years of the early pioneers. With these words there

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p530.3

was no lingering doubt. The life of the Son of God was neither created by the Father nor begotten from Him at some unimaginably distant past time. It was in Him intrinsically, along with the Father, from the beginning of all beginnings. Christ's life was "original." That is, Jesus and the Father co-existed eternally. Christ's life was "unborrowed." That is, He does not owe His life to God the Father. It is "underived." That is, the Son of God was neither created, nor did He emerge, from a joint pre-existence with the Father where both shared the same substance. The Father remains invisible and directly unapproachable in this world, accessible only through the Son of God whose divine authority and glory He promotes.

The term "only begotten" does not refer to His origin but to His uniqueness as the Personal member of Godhead appointed as hands-on Creator, Upholder and Redeemer of this world. He epitomized grace in God's relationship with man and his environment.

Other writings that followed *The Desire of Ages* included the same theme.

At the very time *The Desire of Ages* was published, Dr John Harvey Kellogg began suggesting that God needed to be seen in a whole new, and more scientific way. He moved away from viewing God as a personal God to a mystical view of God, where He was "in" each person and in each part of creation. Kellogg's view of God often referred to as pantheism is more correctly called panentheism. ⁵

The "Pantheism" Crisis

In the opening years of the twentieth century, conflict arose in the Seventh-day Adventist Church between many senior General Conference officers, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and others who shared Dr. Kellogg's beliefs. Kellogg published a book titled *The Living Temple* which dealt mainly with principles of healthy living but which also featured His views of God. The basis of disagreement about these views is explained by W. A Spicer, who was secretary of the

⁵ At a simple level, according to Pantheism God is all things, whereas according to Panentheism God is *in* all things

General Conference from 1903 and later became its president (1922-1930.)⁶ He describes his meeting with Dr. Kellogg:

Sitting down with no thought that there could be any differences of a really controversial nature, and with the heartiest of friendly feelings, personally I was at once in the midst of a discussion of the most controversial questions. Instead of things in the book being inadvertently overdrawn because of employment of scientific terms, unfamiliar to most of us, I learned that the teaching was conservatively stated in the book; that the teaching was really of intent to signify that God was in the things of nature.

"Where is God?" I was asked. I would naturally say, He is in heaven; there the Bible pictures the throne of God, all the heavenly beings at His command as messengers between heaven and earth. But I was told that God was in the grass and plants and in the trees (with motions to the grass and trees about us, as we sat on the open veranda).

Where is heaven? I was asked. I had my idea of the center of the universe, with heaven and the throne of God in the midst, but disclaimed any attempt to fix the center of the universe astronomically. But I was urged to understand that heaven is where God is, and God is everywhere in the grass, in the trees, in all creation. There was no place in this scheme of things for angels going between heaven and earth, for heaven was here and everywhere. The cleansing of the sanctuary that we taught about was not something in a far-away heaven. The sin is here (the hand pointing to the heart), and

⁶ W. A. Spicer. *How the Spirit of Prophecy Met a Crisis: Memories and Notes of the "Living Temple" Controversy*. The book is available on-line at <http://sdanet.org/atissue/white/spicer/>

here is the sanctuary to be cleansed. To think of God as having a form in the image of which man was made, was said to be idolatry.

By any understanding I had of language, I was listening to the ideas of the pantheistic philosophy that I had met with in India. In fact, I was told that pure pantheism, as the early teachers conceived it, was indeed right—God was in the things of nature. A personality was in every blade of grass and in every plant.

Trying to get the import of it all, I [sic] seemed to me these ideas set all earth and heaven and God swirling away into mist. There was in it no objective unity to lay hold of. With scripture terms and Christian ideas interwoven, it seemed the old doctrine of the Hindus—all nature a very part of Brahma—and the Brahma the whole."⁷

The problem being discussed had nothing to do with the doctrine of the Trinity but was entwined around pantheistic philosophy. Ellen White confirms this conclusion in these statements:

"Spurious scientific theories are coming in as a thief in the night, stealing away the landmarks and undermining the pillars of our faith. God has shown me that the medical students are not to be educated in such theories, because God will not endorse these theories. The most specious temptations of the enemy are coming in, and they are coming in on the highest, most elevated plane. These spiritualize the doctrines of present truth until there is no distinction between the substance and the shadow." ⁸ (Emphasis supplied)

"Men have given to our leading physician allegiance that is due to God alone: and he has been permitted to show what self-exaltation will lead men to do. Scientific, spiritualistic sentiments, representing the Creator as an essence pervading all nature, have

⁷ *Ibid*, p 18,19, Chapter title: *Teachings Strange to Us Appear*.

http://sdanet.org/atissue/white/spicer/Spicer_05.htm

⁸ Ellen G; White, *Review & Herald*, April 14, 1903 par. 27}

been given to our people, and have been received even by some who have had a long experience as teachers in the word of God. The results of this insidious devising will break out again and again. There are many for whom special efforts will have to be put forth to free them from this specious deception.”⁹ (Emphasis supplied)

Ellen White plainly agrees with Spicer that the issue is not the Trinity but rather the depersonalizing of the issues of present truth and teaching scientific and spiritualistic theories of pantheism. When the Lord revealed it was time to meet the crisis, she wrote again in terms that cannot be misunderstood. Quoting her at length with emphasis supplied:

It is something that can not be treated as a small matter that men who have had so much light, and such clear evidence as to the genuineness of the truth we hold, should become unsettled, and led to accept spiritualistic theories regarding the personality of God. *Those doctrines, followed to their logical conclusion, sweep away the whole Christian economy.* They estimate as nothing the light that Christ came from heaven to give John to give to his people. They teach that the scenes just before us are not of sufficient importance to be given special attention. They make of no effect the truth of heavenly origin, and rob the people of God of their past experiences, giving them instead a false science.

During the past night, I have been shown more distinctly than ever before that these sentiments have been looked upon by some as the grand truths that are to be brought in and made prominent at the present time. I was shown a platform, braced by solid timbers—the truths of the word of God. Some one high in responsibility in the medical work was directing this man and that man to loosen the timbers supporting this platform. Then I heard a voice saying, “Where are the watchmen that ought to be standing on the walls of Zion? Are they asleep? How can they be silent? This foundation was

⁹ Ellen. G. White, *Special Testimonies Series B, Nos. 1-19*, p36

built by the Master Worker, and will stand the storm and tempest. Will they permit this man to present doctrines that deny the past experience of the people of God? The time has come to take decided action."

"I was instructed to call upon our physicians and ministers to take a firm stand for the truth. *We are not to allow atheistic, spiritualistic sentiments to be brought before our youth.* God has led us in the path, giving us truth, eternal truth. By this truth we are to stand. Some of the leaders in the medical work have been deceived, and if they continue to hold *fanciful, spiritualistic ideas*, they make many believe that the platform upon which we have been standing for the past fifty years has been torn away. These men need now to see with anointed eyes, with clear spiritual vision, that in spite of all men can do, "the foundation of God standeth sure," and the Lord knoweth them that are his.

The message to the Laodicean church comes to us at this time with special meaning. Read it, and ask God to show you its import. Thank God that he is sending us messages of mercy. Those accepting the theories regarding God that are introduced in the "Living Temple" are in great danger of being led finally to look upon the whole Bible as a fiction; for these theories make of no effect the plain word of God.

The tempter is working to gather together at Battle Creek as large a number as possible, hoping that they will receive false ideas of God and his work, and thus make of no effect the impression that God would have made on the minds of those engaged in the medical missionary work and in the gospel ministry. God abhors the great swelling words of vanity that have been spoken by those connected with the Sanitarium. The judgments of God have been visited upon Battle Creek, and these judgments call for humiliation rather than for proud boasting and self-exaltation.

The heavenly messenger turned to those professing to be medical missionaries, and said, "How could you allow yourselves to be led blindfolded? How could you so misrepresent the name you bear? You have your Bibles. Why have you not reasoned from cause to effect? You have accepted theories that have led you away from the truths that are to stamp their impress upon the characters of all Seventh-day Adventists.

Your leader has been moving the foundation timbers one by one, and his reasoning would soon leave us with no certain foundation for our faith. He has not heeded the testimonies that God through His Spirit has given. *The books of the Bible containing most important instruction are disregarded because they say so much about a **personal** God.* He has not known whither his feet were tending. But in his recent writings, his tendencies toward pantheism have been revealed.¹⁰

Nothing in this or any other place in Ellen G. White's writings suggests that she ever remonstrated with Kellogg over the doctrine of the Trinity. The issue was the over-spiritualizing of the deity, introducing atheistic and mystic ideas that destroyed the personal nature of God. In fact, for some time before and after this crisis, Ellen White wrote extensively about the personal nature of God, our Father, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit.

Ellen G. White on the Godhead

Included below are representative comments from Ellen G. White's writings about various concepts of Godhead, previously explored from a "Bible and Bible only" perspective. The purpose is to show how thoroughly Ellen White supported the concept of Godhead consisting of three persons who together comprise one true

¹⁰ Ellen. G. White, *Special Testimonies Series B, Nos. 1-19*, pp. 37-39. The whole chapter, *Decided Action to be Taken*, may be read on-line at [http://egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm\\$vid=default](http://egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates$fn=default.htm$vid=default) This is a transcript of the letter to the General Conference that led to action against Kellogg and his intractable followers.

God. Although it is lengthy, the list of comments is representative rather than exhaustive. Emphasis is supplied.

The Holy Spirit

"In describing to His disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart. He rejoiced because of the abundant help He had provided for His church. The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail.

The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of *the Third Person of the Godhead*, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.

"When He [the Spirit of truth] is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." The preaching of the word will be of no avail without the continual presence and aid of the Holy Spirit. This is the only effectual teacher of divine truth.

Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit will it quicken the conscience or transform the life. One might be able to present the letter of the word of God, he might be familiar with all its commands and promises; but unless the Holy Spirit sets home the truth, no souls will fall on the Rock and be broken.

No amount of education, no advantages, however great, can make one a channel of light without the co-operation of the Spirit of God. The sowing of the gospel seed will not be a success unless the seed is quickened into life by the dew of heaven. Before one book of the New Testament was written, before one gospel sermon had been preached after Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit came upon the praying apostles. Then the testimony of their enemies was, "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." Acts 5:28, *The Desire of Ages*, p 671

"During the Jewish economy, the influence of God's Spirit had been seen in a marked manner, but not in full. For ages prayers had been offered for the fulfillment of God's promise to impart his Spirit, and not one of these earnest supplications had been forgotten.

Christ determined that when he ascended from this earth, he would bestow a gift on those who had believed on him, and those who should believe on him. What gift could he bestow rich enough to signalize and grace his ascension to the mediatorial throne? It must be worthy of his greatness and his royalty.

He determined to give his representative, *the third person of the Godhead*. This gift could not be excelled. He would give all gifts in one, and therefore the divine Spirit, that converting, enlightening and sanctifying power, would be his donation."

—*Southern Watchman*, 28 Nov 1905

The Regenerating Power of the Spirit

"The Spirit was given as a regenerating agency, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of man to this satanic captivity was amazing. *Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified ener-*

gy, but in the fulness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer.

It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given his Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress his own character upon the church."

—*Review and Herald*, 19 May, 1904

Resisting evil

"Evil had been accumulating for centuries, and could only be restrained and resisted by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. Another spirit must be met; for the essence of evil was working in all ways, and the submission of man to this satanic captivity was amazing. The prince of the power of evil can only be held in check by the power of God in the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit."

—*Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*. -- No. 10, 1897, p25

Emptiness of spiritualistic interpretations

"All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to. God can not be compared with the things His hands have made. These are mere earthly things, suffering under the curse of God because of the sins of man. The Father can not be described by the things of earth. *The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight*

The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be "the express

image of His person." "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is shown the personality of the Father." – *Evangelism* p614

The Comforter

"The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, *is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead*, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. *There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—* those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will cooperate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ. . . ." *Testimonies for the Church Containing Messages of Warning and Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists, 1906* p62-63

In summary

- There are three living persons in the heavenly trio – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
- The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and is invisible to earthly sight
- The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested
- The Comforter is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead

The Son of God

Amazed at [Philip's] dullness of comprehension, Christ asked with pained surprise, "Have I been so long time

with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" Is it possible that you do not see the Father in the works He does through Me? Do you not believe that I came to testify of the Father? "How sayest thou then, Show us the Father?" "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." *Christ had not ceased to be God when He became man. Though He had humbled Himself to humanity, the Godhead was still His own.* Christ alone could represent the Father to humanity, and this representation the disciples had been privileged to behold for over three years "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake." Their faith might safely rest on the evidence given in Christ's works, works that no man, of himself, ever had done, or ever could do. Christ's work testified to His divinity. Through Him the Father had been revealed.

If the disciples believed this vital connection between the Father and the Son, their faith would not forsake them when they saw Christ's suffering and death to save a perishing world. Christ was seeking to lead them from their low condition of faith to the experience they might receive if they truly realized what He was—God in human flesh. He desired them to see that their faith must lead up to God, and be anchored there.

How earnestly and perseveringly our compassionate Saviour sought to prepare His disciples for the storm of temptation that was soon to beat upon them. He would have them hid with Him in God.

—*The Desire of Ages*, pp663,664

The Reward

Great is the reward in heaven of those who are witnesses for Christ through persecution and reproach. While the people are looking for earthly good, Jesus points them to a heavenly reward. But He does not place it all in the future life; it begins here. *The Lord appeared of old time to Abraham and said, "I am thy shield, and thy*

exceeding great reward." Genesis 15:1. This is the reward of all who follow Christ. Jehovah Immanuel—He "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," in whom dwells "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:3,9)—to be brought into sympathy with Him, to know Him, to possess Him, as the heart opens more and more to receive His attributes; to know His love and power, to possess the unsearchable riches of Christ, to comprehend more and more "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18, 19)--"this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord." Isaiah 54:17.

—Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p.034

The Fullness of the Godhead

Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." He speaks of Himself as well as the Father when He speaks of omnipotent power, and claims for Himself perfect righteousness. In Christ dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily. This is why, although tempted in all points like as we are, He stood before the world untainted by the corruptions that surrounded Him. We also are to become partakers of that fullness, and only in this way shall we be enabled to overcome as Christ overcame.

—Bible Echo, 1 Nov. 1892, p8

Had the rabbis, Pharisees, priests, and rulers received Christ, and believed his words, what a different history would have been theirs! Christ is "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." *He who had wrought in so wonderful a manner in bringing his people*

out of Egyptian bondage, and who had gone before them in the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, was in the midst of them, the one of whom it is written that in him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and yet they received him not. He was the express image of his Father, the brightness of his glory, yet "*his own*" had so far separated themselves from purity and righteousness that they *could not discern God in Christ.* "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Had they rightly interpreted the Scriptures, and taken the yoke of Christ, they would not have found his yoke rigorous and his burden wearisome; but they would have known that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. *Sabbath-School Worker*, 1 Apr, 1895, p3

Teach the great, practical truths that must be stamped upon the soul. Teach the saving power of Jesus, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." All should be made to comprehend the power of the truth to those who receive it. "*In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*" . The Majesty of heaven was made to suffer at the hands of wicked men,-- religious zealots, who claimed to be the most enlightened people on the face of the earth. Men claiming to be the children of Abraham worked out the wrath of Satan upon the innocent Son of the infinite God. While Christ was bearing the heavy guilt incurred by man's transgression of the law of God, while in the act of bearing our sins, of carrying our sorrows, he was mocked and reviled by the very men appointed to teach the law, and lead the people to love and obey God. *Review & Herald*, 4 Apr, 1899, p2

Those who think they can obtain a knowledge of God aside from his Representative, whom the Word declares is "the express image of his person," will need to become fools in their own estimation before they can be wise. It is impossible to

gain a perfect knowledge of God from nature alone; for nature itself is imperfect. In its imperfection it can not represent God, it can not reveal the character of God in its moral perfection. *But Christ came as a personal Saviour to the world. He represented a personal God. As a personal Saviour, He ascended on high; and He will come again as He ascended to heaven,--a personal Saviour. He is the express image of the Father's person. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."*

Review & Herald, 17 Mar, 1904, p15. ¹¹

There is but one way of escape for the sinner. There is but one agency whereby he may be cleansed from sin. He must accept the propitiation that has been made by the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. The shed blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." A complete offering has been made; for *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,"-- not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, but a Son begotten in the express image of the Father's person, and in all the brightness of his majesty and glory, one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection. In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.* *Signs of the Times*, 30 May, 1895, p4

John said, "We have seen, and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." The Son of God took upon him human nature,--"the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." "God was manifest in the flesh." The union of divinity with humanity brings to the fallen race a value which we scarcely comprehend. The human and the divine

¹¹ This was written in the midst of the Kellogg "pantheistic" mystic interpretation of trinity. Notice how clearly Ellen White spells out the personal nature of God.

were united in Christ, in order that he might represent those who should believe in him. He took our nature, and passed through our experiences, and as our representative he assumed our responsibilities. The sins of men were charged to Christ, and, innocent though he was, he engaged to suffer for the guilty, that through faith in him the world might be saved. "We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Christ reconciled the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. O, what compassion and love are here revealed! How is humanity exalted through the merits of Christ! His sacrifice was ample and complete. The Holy One died instead of the unholy. He clothed himself in our filthy garments, that we might wear the spotless robe of his righteousness, which was woven in the loom of heaven. He paid the whole debt for all who would believe in him as their personal Saviour. His blood Cleanseth from all sin and purifieth from all unrighteousness. In him, through him alone, we have forgiveness of sins. Through faith in his blood we have justification in the sight of God.

When the mighty angel descended from heaven, parting the darkness from his track, the Roman guard fell as dead men before the resplendent glory, and *Christ in his Godhead shone forth as he burst from the tomb, and rose triumphant over death and the grave.* The disciples understood, when they saw him arisen from the dead, what he meant when he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Signs of the Times, 30 May, 1895 p8

Shall our faith ever falter again? What stronger evidence could God have given us that Jesus is the Son of God? What greater evidence could be given of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ than that which has been given by those who were eyewitnesses of his Majesty? Will those who claim to believe in Christ as a personal Saviour, dishonor God by doubting that he to whose guardianship they have committed their souls will keep that which has been committed to his trust against that day? Jesus is a risen Saviour. *He*

came forth from the grave to vindicate his previous claims, to confirm the faith of his followers, to establish the truth of his Godhead before men, to make doubly sure the assurance that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life

The great object that brought Christ to the earth was to reveal the Father. When Moses had desired a closer acquaintance with God, and had prayed, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," the Lord had answered, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

"And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." The glory of the Lord is his character that was revealed to Moses; but how different is the representation of himself from that made by Satan, the father of lies!

Signs of the Times, 27 Jun., 1895 pp1-3

But who that is not infinite can understand the infinite? Christ declares, "No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son shall reveal him." It is recorded of Epicurus that when his hearers said to him, "You have uttered many excellent things of God; but we cannot as yet understand what he is," he truly and nobly replied, "Were I able fully to set forth God, I should either be a god myself, or God himself would cease to be what he is." The greatness of God cannot be measured or comprehended. And that doctrine that denies the absolute Godhead of Jesus Christ, denies also the Godhead of the Father; for no man knoweth the Son but the Father.

Signs of the Times, 27 June, p4

The mightiest created intelligence cannot grasp divinity. The principalities and powers of heaven are overwhelmed with the vastness of the theme of Christ's character and the mystery of the union of divinity and humanity. The most eloquent notes of cherubim and seraphim fail to describe him; but the angels of God delight to be in his presence. They rejoice in beholding his face, and hasten to obey his command, to fulfill their commission of love to those for whom Christ died.

Signs of the Times, 29 Aug., 1895 p7

Jesus Christ was the foundation of the whole Jewish economy. The world's Redeemer was symbolized in types and shadows through their religious services. *The glory of God was revealed in Christ within the veil until Christ should appear in the world, and display to the world all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. In Christ we behold the image of the invisible God; in his attributes we see the attributes of the character of the Infinite. Jesus said: "I and my Father are one." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."*

In answer to the request of Philip, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," Jesus said: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." *The Lord Jesus is the embodiment of the glory of the Godhead. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. God has revealed himself to men; he stopped to take upon him our nature, and in his Son we see the glory of the divine attributes. Those who see not in Christ the divine character are in the shadow of Satan's misrepresentation of divinity. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." "Who being the brightness of his*

glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature." *Signs of the Times*, 12 Dec., 1895 p5

In Christ Jesus is a revelation of the glory of the Godhead. All that the human agent can know of God to the saving of the soul, is the measure of the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, to which he can attain; for Christ is he who represents the Father. The most wonderful truth to be grasped by men is the truth, "Immanuel, God with us." Christ is the wisdom of God. He is the great "I Am" to the world. As we contemplate the glory of the divine character as revealed in Christ, we are led to exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" This wisdom is displayed in the love that reaches out for the recovery of lost and ruined man.

Signs of the Times, 30 July, 1896 p3

In contemplating the incarnation of Christ in humanity, we stand baffled before an unfathomable mystery, that the human mind can not comprehend. The more we reflect upon it, the more amazing does it appear. How wide is the contrast between the divinity of Christ and the helpless infant in Bethlehem's manger! How can we span the distance between the mighty God and a helpless child? And yet the Creator of worlds, he in whom was the fulness of the Godhead bodily, was manifest in the helpless babe in the manger. Far higher than any of the angels, equal with the Father in dignity and glory, and yet wearing the garb of humanity! Divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one. It is in this union that we find the hope of our fallen race. Looking upon Christ in humanity, we look upon God, and see in him the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person.

But although Christ's divine glory was for a time veiled and eclipsed by His assuming humanity, yet *He did not cease to be God when He became man*. The human did not take the place of the divine, nor the divine of the human. This is the mystery of godliness. The two expressions human and divine were, in Christ, closely and inseparably one, and yet they had a distinct individuality. *Though Christ humbled Himself to become man, the Godhead was still His own. His Deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty*. Surrounded with sorrow, suffering, and moral pollution, despised and rejected by the people to whom had been intrusted the oracles of heaven, Jesus could yet speak of Himself as the Son of man in heaven. He was ready to take once more His divine glory when His work on earth was done.

Signs of the Times, 10 May 1899, p11

... The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. God has revealed Himself to men; He stooped to take upon Him our nature, and in His Son we see the glory of the divine attributes. *Those who see not in Christ the divine character are in the shadow of Satan's misrepresentation of divinity*. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." "Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." "In whom we have redemption thru His blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature."

In Christ Jesus is a revelation of the glory of the Godhead. All that the human agent can know of God to the saving of the soul, is the measure of the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, to which he can attain; for Christ is He who represents the Father. The most wonderful truth to be grasped by men is the truth, "Immanuel, God with us." Christ is the wisdom of

God. He is the great "I Am" to the world. As we contemplate the glory of the divine character as revealed in Christ, we are led to exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" This wisdom is displayed in the love that reaches out for the recovery of lost and ruined man.

Signs of the Times, 7 Mar 1907, p4,5

A Heavenly Reward.

While the people are looking for earthly good, Jesus points them to a heavenly reward. But He does not place it all in the future life; it begins here. The Lord appeared of old to Abraham, and said, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." This is the reward of all who follow *Christ*. *Jehovah Emmanuel--He "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," in whom dwells "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"*--to be brought into sympathy with Him, to know Him, to possess Him, as the heart opens more and more to receive His attributes; to know His love and power, to possess the unsearchable riches of Christ, to comprehend more and more "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God,"--"this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord." *Signs of the Times*, 2 Oct 1909, p10

For centuries the Jews had vainly endeavored to show wherein the promise of God, given by Haggai, had been fulfilled; yet pride and unbelief blinded their minds to the true meaning of the prophet's words. *The second temple was not honored with the cloud of Jehovah's glory, but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily,--who was God himself manifest in the flesh.* The "Desire of all nations" had indeed come to his temple when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the sacred courts. In the presence of Christ, and in this only, did the second temple exceed the first in glory. But Israel had put from her the proffered gift of

Heaven. With the humble Teacher who had that day passed out from its golden gate, the glory had forever departed from the temple. Already were fulfilled the Saviour's words, "Your house is left unto you desolate." [MATT. 23:38.]

Spirit of Prophecy, Vol 4, p24

In summary:

- Christ had not ceased to be God when He became man. Though He had humbled Himself to humanity, the Godhead was still His own
- Christ is Jehovah Immanuel
- When Christ spoke of omnipotent power He spoke of Himself as well as the Father
- The One who brought His people out of Egypt and who went before them in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire was in the midst of them (the people who witnessed Jesus' teaching and miracles) and : "His own ...could not discern God in Christ."
- "Men need to understand that the Deity suffered under the agonies of Calvary."
- Christ is a *personal* Saviour. He represents a *personal* God. He is the express image of the Father's *person*.
- Christ not created or adopted but "begotten." He is "one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection."
- It was in His own Godhead that Christ burst from the tomb, and rose triumphant over death and the grave.
- Only the infinite can know the infinite – that's why Jesus needed to be both man *and* God to reveal God.
- "...that doctrine that denies the absolute Godhead of Jesus Christ, denies also the Godhead of the Father"
- The mightiest created intelligence cannot grasp divinity. ... and the mystery of the union of divinity and humanity
- "The glory of God was revealed in Christ within the veil" – speaks about the Shekinah glory.

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- Those who see not in Christ the divine character are in the shadow of Satan's misrepresentation of divinity.
 - "Immanuel, God with us." Christ is the wisdom of God. He is the great "I Am" to the world."
 - "equal with the Father in dignity and glory, and yet wearing the garb of humanity! Divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one.
 - "... the Godhead was still His own. His Deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty.
 - Those who see not in Christ the divine character are in the shadow of Satan's misrepresentation of divinity.
 - "All that the human agent can know of God to the saving of the soul, is the measure of the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus
 - "...Christ. Jehovah Emmanuel--He "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," in whom dwells "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"
 - "The second temple was not honored with the cloud of Jehovah's glory, but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily,--who was God himself manifest in the flesh."

The Godhead

A Warning Against False Teaching A warning against false teaching is found in Paul's letter to the Colossians. The apostle declares that the hearts of the believers are to be "knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of *the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ*; ¹² in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say," he con-

¹² Notice Ellen White's use of the King James Version. Some modern versions are not as clear in distinguishing between "God" and "the Father" and "Christ." The point to note is the distinction between "God" and the Father. This calls into question all other places where Paul uses the term "God" without specifying which he really means, the Father or Christ or "Godhead." It is impossible to say with any certainty that he always means the Father when he says. "God."

tinues, "lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. . . . As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: 296 rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power." Colossians 2:2-10. *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol, 8, p295.003

It is the glory of the gospel that it is founded upon the principle of restoring in the fallen race the divine image, by a constant manifestation of benevolence. This work began in the heavenly courts. There God decided to give human beings an unmistakable evidence of the love with which He regarded them. He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." *The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order to fully carry out this plan, it was decided that Christ, the only begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin. What line can measure the depth of this love?*

God would make it impossible for man to say that He could have done more. With Christ He gave all the resources of heaven, that nothing might be wanting in the plan for man's uplifting.

Here is love--the contemplation of which should fill the soul with inexpressible gratitude!

While we were yet sinners, the Son of God died for us. Laying aside His royal robe and kingly crown, and clothing His divinity with humanity, He stooped to our estate to rescue us from the thralldom of sin. For our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. He came to this earth to take His position at the head of humanity. In our

behalf He bore the stroke of divine justice. Because He was just, He became the justifier of all who believe in Him. He assumed human nature that for the transgressor He might suffer the penalty of transgression. He took the place of the sinner, and died that we might live, making His soul an offering for sin. *Australasian Union Conference Record*, 1 April, 1901, pars 10-13

Those who have by baptism given to God a pledge of their faith in Christ, and their death to the old life of sin, have entered into covenant relation with God. *The three powers of the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are pledged to be their strength and their efficiency in their new life in Christ Jesus.*

In this age, as then, there are lost sheep to be sought and saved. There are many who need personal labour. No prophet, like John the Baptist, has cried out the message of warning to them. No one has pointed them to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." But this is not because the Lord has no interest in these souls who are ready to perish, represented as lost sheep. The Lord is not chargeable with neglect. Look to Calvary and answer decidedly, No, no. The Lord has made every provision to save men in giving His Son. Jesus thought it not robbery to be equal with God, for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily. When He claimed the highest prerogatives, He did not make an empty boast. Yet when He was among men, He did not call together a concourse of people, and sound a trumpet before Him, and command attention. The great Teacher came in simplicity, though He was the light of the world. He taught the people in plain, simple words, which all could understand. He said, "*As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father. . . . My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's*

hand. I and My Father are one." ¹³ *"All things that the Father hath are Mine." With the familiarity and ease of eternal habitude, Jesus lays His hand on the throne of God. Australasian Union Conference Record, 7 Oct., 1907, par. 9*

In giving Jesus to the world, God gave all heaven in one gift. Then why is it, when God has left nothing undone that could be done, that there are not more brought from darkness to light?--It is because the human will does not cooperate with the divine intelligences. If the Lord's will and way were carried out, humanity would be reached through humanity, and every lost prodigal would be brought home, and saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who tasted death for every man. Sin would no longer exist. But it is humanity that bars the way. It is for lack of the co-partnership of man, because of rebellion, that the way is blocked up. The revelation of God's truth comes to us through human agents. Christ came to the world as the Son of man. This was the only way in which He could reach humanity. "Ye are labourers together with God." Man must cooperate with Jesus Christ. Those who are building up a Christlike character will not, cannot, withhold their interest from the work of aiding Christ in seeking and saving that which is lost.

The Bible Echo, 30 Apr., 1894 p4

The Jews knew not God, nor Jesus Christ, whom He had sent. They had lost the truths presented to them by both patriarchs and prophets, and did not recognize Christ, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. *Was it not strange that the only people who claimed to be the chosen people of God were in such darkness by departing from God that they did not recognize the Prince of life, who was the foundation of their system of worship, the very one who was symbolized by their sacrificial offerings?* Well may we see the

¹³ When people read, "My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all," so often they stop there. The thought is not complete until Christ's statement, "I and My Father are one," takes its place along side.

force of the words of Christ, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me." It is not safe to commit this work of searching the Scriptures to any other man to do for us, however learned he may be. If he has not a living connection with God, he will mislead the mind, and cause the destruction of many souls. "Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?" *The Bible Echo*, 3 Dec., 1894, p6

The Father can not be described by the things of earth. *The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*, and is invisible to mortal sight. *The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested*. The word of God declares Him to be "the express image of His person." "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is shown the personality of the Father

The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, *is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead*, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. *There are three living persons of the heavenly trio*. In the name of these three powers,--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will cooperate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ. *Bible Training School*, 1 Mar., 1906, pars. 1-2

The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order fully to carry out this plan, it was decided that Christ, the only begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin. What line can measure the depth of this love? God would make it impossible for man to say that He could have done more. When He gave Christ, He gave all the resources of heaven, that nothing might be wanting in the plan for man's uplifting. Here is love -- the con-

temptation of which should fill the soul with inexpressible gratitude! *The Needs of the Cause in Australia*, 4 July 1903, par. 28

The three powers of the Godhead have pledged their might to carry out the purpose that God had in mind when he gave to the world the unspeakable gift of his Son. Every act of self-denial, every earnest surrender to God, is an element in God's design for the increase of the piety and zeal and earnest faith of his people. The Holy Spirit unites with the powers of grace that God has provided to turn souls to Christ. We are to labor as Christ labored for the salvation of dying souls. And as we work, our hearts are to be encouraged by the thought that every soul converted through our efforts will become another instrumentality in the work of recovering the lost. Guided by the same Spirit that led some one to work for him, he will take up the work and labor in the spirit of the Master. *The Review & Herald*, 18 July, 1907, p. 3

The minds of the Jewish teachers were filled with maxims and suppositions. They interpreted the word to mean that which God never designed it to mean, enforcing their oddities on the common people.

A warning against such teaching is found in Paul's letter to the Colossians. *The apostle declares that the hearts of the believers were to be "knit together in love; and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father, and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* "And this I say," he continues, "lest any man should beguile you with enticing words... As ye have therefore received Jesus Christ the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead

bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power." Pacific Union Recorder, 31 Dec., 1903 par. 18

In Ex. 31:17 and Eze. 20:12,20, *the Sabbath of the Lord is called a sign. It is a memorial of the Creator's work, and so a sign of His power and Godhead.* Rom. 1:20. This is also an institution as was circumcision; but there was this distinction: Circumcision was a sign in the flesh, while the Sabbath was a sign in the mind. "Hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that ye may know that I AM the Lord your God" Eze. 20:20. *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol 4 p. 504

In Summary

- Paul speaks of "God and of the Father, and of Christ."
- The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race and the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit gave themselves to working out the plan of redemption.
- The three powers of the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- The Father is the fullness of the Godhead bodily; The Son is the fullness of the Godhead manifested; The Comforter is the Spirit in all the fullness of the Godhead
- The three powers of the Godhead pledged to carry out the purpose that God had in mind
- Hearts of believers to be knit together ... to acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ.
- The Sabbath a sign – a memorial of the Creator's work, and so a sign of His power and Godhead

Conclusion

During the years that anti Trinitarian ideas dominated the attention of early Sabbatarian Adventists and after the Seventh-day Adventist Church was established, Ellen White did not write in confirmation of these sentiments. When the message of righteousness by faith in 1888 led to increased Bible study about the life of Christ, some Trinitarian ideas began to be couched in terms of a personal Godhead. Ellen White was active in affirming the new understanding. Her statement in *The Desire of Ages*—"In Christ was life, original, unborrowed, underived,"—immediately confirmed the understanding that Christ . He was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. This understanding had been established by deep Bible study.

When Kellogg and others developed a mystic, spiritualized theory of God, Ellen White characterized it as "Scientific, spiritualistic sentiments, representing the Creator as an essence pervading all nature."

Ellen White's late nineteenth and twentieth century writings carry a strong message of the three powers of the Godhead consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We can see why early Adventist pioneers decried the Trinity doctrine in its mystic form that came tainted with Greek philosophy in a way that depersonalized God. When deep Bible study led to a doctrine of a personal Godhead consisting of three personal Beings, Ellen White was quick to write in support.

Kellogg posed a threat to the Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal platform with a mystic, spiritualized view of a God present in everyone and everything, moving away from the pioneer insistence on a personal deity. Ellen White wrote decisively against his theories and re-emphasized the personal nature of the Godhead.

From these facts, we understand that God is a personal being consisting of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are united in providing redemption for mankind and that Jesus was fully God, the great I AM and Jehovah of Old Testament times who became Jehovah Immanuel, God with us.

Some opponents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's current understanding of Godhead go to great lengths to undermine the plain meaning of many of the statements quoted above. Tim Poirier of Ellen G. White Es-

tate, Inc, writes, "These persons claim to accept Ellen White's prophetic writings, but they question the authenticity of her statements that affirm the church's belief in three distinct, co0eternal, fully divine persons in the Godhead – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."¹⁴

Poirier explains the life setting in which many of these statements were written. Using the original documents, sometimes the handwritten manuscripts where available, he shows the objections to be speculative rationalisations. He concludes his paper with this paragraph: "Our interest in this presentation, however, has not been the mystery of the Godhead but the trustworthiness of certain descriptive statements found in Ellen White's books. We have found that the original manuscripts, her approved transcriptions, and/or first editions of her published works support the Trinitarian expressions found today in her writings."¹⁵

We may have complete confidence in the Biblical affirmation that there are three divine persons in the Godhead. This is the primary reliable witness and the basis of our faith. However, the testimony of Ellen G. White who worked with all of the Church's pioneers attests that advancing light required that there be a change from the old anti Trinitarian views. As deep study of the Bible revealed the inadequacies of earlier views of Godhead, so Ellen White was not hesitant in affirming the change.

¹⁴ Tim Poirier, *Ellen White's Trinitarian Statements: What did she actually write?* This is from *Ellen White And Current Issues Symposium 2006*. It may be found at:

<http://www.ellenwhite.org/issues/The-Trinity.pdf> p18

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p39

In Conclusion

Pioneer Objections to “Trinity” Doctrine

The following historical summary comes largely from papers on the SDANet “At Issue” site.¹ The authors consulted are Jerry A Moon, Gilbert Valentine, Edwin Roy Gane, and Woodrow Whidden. We would suggest strongly that anyone interested in the topic should read the material available at this site. It is no longer sufficient to accept generalized statements made blindly by people with vested interests that contradict documented history,.

Grounds for Early Adventist Pioneers’ Opposition to Trinity

Why did our pioneers write and teach so militantly against Trinitarianism? What were the reasons for the changes in our beliefs from Arianism or semi-Arianism then to Trinitarianism now? How much of the change was for sound Biblical reasons? Is there any suggestion that the change was motivated by a desire to be better accepted in the Christian community?

The early Adventist pioneers strongly believed that the Bible and only the Bible was authoritative in matters of faith and practice. So they militantly opposed any belief that could not be supported from the Bible. They were particularly opposed to any belief that was thought to misinterpret Biblical statements on the basis of philosophical or ecclesiastic authority.

Jerry A. Moon says, they “had no question about the biblical testimony regarding the eternity of God the Father, the deity of Jesus Christ “as Creator, Redeemer and Mediator,” and the “importance of the Holy Spirit.” However, they weren’t initially convinced that the relation between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is best described by the word “trinity.”²

¹ SDANET *At Issue*, Index Item, “The Trinity,”
<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/index.htm>

² Early Adventists’ Struggle with the Truth about the Trinity,,

After listing six reasons ³ for the pioneers' rejection of the Trinity dogma on Biblical grounds, Moon observes, "None of these is a valid objection to the basic trinitarian concept of one God in three Persons." ⁴ He expands the view in another paper: "Most of these objections to the Trinity are either based on misunderstandings of the trinity doctrine, extreme distortions of it, or speculative extra-biblical additions to it. None of them is a valid objection to the true biblical view of one God in three Persons. Yet all of the objections were based on biblical texts. This shows that while misunderstanding or prejudice may have played a part, the pioneers were united in basing their arguments on Scripture. As long as they appealed to Scripture itself rather than to a creed as their rule of doctrine, they were bound to discover the truth sooner or later." ⁵

From some early pioneers who believed that Jesus Christ was a created being to later and more numerous leaders who understood Him to be begotten of the Father in the extreme reaches of the distant past, there was a steady advance in understanding the Biblical witness concerning the life that was in Jesus Christ. Accompanying this was an unequivocal (at first) understanding of the Holy Spirit as an influence issuing from Father and Son rather than a personal Being. Over the years as understanding of the Spirit's role and work improved, more and more began to express uncertainty about whether the Spirit was an influence emanating from Father

<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/Trinity%20Review%20art.htm>

³ Jerry A. Moon, *The Adventist Trinity Debate*, "Part 1: Historical Overview"

The six reasons, briefly stated, were:

1. They did not see Biblical evidence for three persons in one Godhead.
2. A misconception that the Father and the Son were identical.
3. The misconception that the Trinity teaches the existence of three Gods.
4. The misconception that belief in the Trinity would diminish the value of the atonement.
5. The fact that Christ is called "Son of God" and "the beginning of the creation of God" showed He was of more recent origin than God the Father.
6. Certain Biblical expressions concerning the Holy Spirit showed it couldn't properly be considered a person.

<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/moon/moon-trinity1.htm>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Jerry A. Moon, *Heresy or Hopeful Sign?*

and Son or was indeed also a personal Being along with Father and Son..

Moon sees the 1888 General Conference Session with its new emphasis on Righteousness by Faith in Christ as a major reason questions arose about the adequacy of the old views. As the cross of Christ was lifted up, so it was recognized that a created being or a lesser deity who depended on another for existence could not provide redemption for a lost creation. How could Jesus, forsaken by God because of the guilt of man's sin upon Him ever be resurrected unless He had life in Himself? The pioneers had claimed that divinity could not die and a human death could not atone for the sins of mankind. Ellen White has since written, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25). He who had said, 'I lay down my life, that I might take it again' (John 10:17), came forth from the grave to life that was in Himself. Humanity died; divinity did not die. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will" ⁶ This directly contradicts the views of the some of the pioneers, not denying scripture, but re-interpreting it in the light of the results of deep Bible study by her contemporaries.

Ellen G White

As we investigate the history of Anti-Trinitarian belief in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is inevitable that we consider the position Ellen White adopted in relation to the subject. Whether one accepts her teaching authority or not, her writing and preaching were certainly influential within the Church. As we examine her contribution to doctrinal formation some are surprised that Ellen White was not an innovator as far as doctrinal development was concerned. Laying down the platform of our beliefs did not result

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages Vol 1.*, 301.1. Similar statements appear in several other places. For example: "I am the resurrection, and the life." He who had said, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again," came forth from the grave to life that was in Himself. Humanity died: divinity did not die. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will. {Quoted in 5BC 1113.6}

from direct visions of God given to her. Rather the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church came from deep and prayerful study of the Word of God in the Bible. When the Biblical foundation of a doctrine was established from the Bible, there were occasions when Ellen received a confirmatory vision. ⁷ So the Bible and the Bible only was, and still should be, the basis of our beliefs.

It is very significant that, while surrounded by leaders who wrote and preached and taught strongly against the Trinity doctrine, Ellen White never received a confirmatory vision nor is there any unambiguous anti-Trinitarian sentiment in her writing. ⁸ Some who do not have a clear understanding of the phrase, "only begotten," see a hint of Arianism in her description of the rise of Lucifer's jealousy about Christ, the Word. ⁹ Some say that there is a hierarchy described here with the Father formulating the plans and the Word executing them. This, they say, indicates that God is superior in Being over the subordinate Son of God.

Careful reading of the surrounding opening chapter of *Patriarchs and Prophets* soon dispels this belief. "Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father--one in nature, in character, in purpose--the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God." ¹⁰ "Angels are God's ministers, radiant with the light ever flowing from His presence and speeding on rapid wing to execute His will. But the Son, the anointed of God, the "express image of His person," 'the brightness of His glory,' 'upholding all things by the word of His power,' holds supremacy over them all. Hebrews 1:3. 'A glorious high throne from the beginning,' was the place of His sanctuary (Jeremiah 17:12); 'a scepter of righteousness,' the scepter of His kingdom. Hebrews 1:8. 'Honor and majesty are before Him: strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.' Psalm 96:6. Mercy and truth go before His face. Psalm

⁷ Examples include: 1. The Sabbath – introduced by Joseph Bates; 2. The time for observing the Sabbath – biblical study pointed to our current sunset to sunset practice when their practice had been to commence and finish at 6 pm;

⁸ Jerry Moon, *Heresy or Hopeful Sign?* "Early Adventists' Struggle with the Truth about the Trinity"

<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/Trinity%20Review%20art.htm>

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Chapter 1, "Why was Sin Permitted?"

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 34.1

89:14." ¹¹ "The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both." ¹²

In his Master's Thesis, ¹³ Gane has a chapter titled, "Ellen White a Trinitarian Monotheist," where he summarizes like this. "Ellen G. White was clearly a monotheist who understood the one God as comprising three distinct personalities. But the student of the Deity is bound to admit that both the oneness of God and the distinction of the personalities are mysteries which human terminology cannot define." ¹⁴ Whether Gane is correct or not about Ellen White's consistently maintaining Trinitarian views while surrounded by Unitarians including her husband for most of his life, she left no doubt about her belief when she wrote *The Desire of Ages*, first published in 1898.

For some time previously there had been increasing calls for clarifying study on several issues. When Professor W. W. Prescott came to Australia he engaged in a new style of evangelism based on the premise, "That ye might know Him, whom to know is life eternal," (ARV). Valentine relates the history of the deep study involved in preparation for a year's Sabbath School's lessons on the Gospel of John and in mission workers' meetings studying the person and work of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁵ During this time, Prescott often conversed with Ellen White, helping her in preparing the manuscript for *The Desire of Ages*. It's opening words quote Matthew 1:23, "His name shall be called Immanuel, . . . God with us." ¹⁶ The opening paragraph continues: "'The light of the knowledge of the glory of God' is

¹¹ *Ibid*, 34.2}

¹² *Ibid*, 36.2

¹³ Erwin Roy Gane, *The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer*,

<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/gane-thesis/index.htm>

¹⁴ *Ibid*, Chapter XIII "Ellen G. White a Trinitarian Monotheist,"

<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/gane-thesis/e-gane13.htm>

¹⁵ Gilbert Valentine, *How clear views of Jesus developed in the Adventist Church*

<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/valentine.htm>

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 19.1

seen 'in the face of Jesus Christ.' From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was 'the image of God,' the image of His greatness and majesty, 'the outshining of His glory.' It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God's love,--to be 'God with us.' Therefore it was prophesied of Him, 'His name shall be called Immanuel.'"¹⁷

The statement of the book that was the watershed in the change from Arianism to the Biblical concept of Godhead was however one dealing with the inherent life of the Son of God. "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. 'He that hath the Son hath life.' 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life. ... By His word and His works He declared Himself the Author of the resurrection. He who Himself was soon to die upon the cross stood with the keys of death, a conqueror of the grave, and asserted His right and power to give eternal life."¹⁸ This certainly challenged the then majority view of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

Trinitarian Views Become Firmly Established

With such confirmation of the conclusions reached by deep Bible study both personal and in groups, advancing light spread gradually through the Seventh-day Adventist Church, not without opposition. "Even as late as the 1940s Prescott was still being viciously attacked for his Trinitarian views."¹⁹

F. M. Wilcox wrote "the first explicitly trinitarian belief statement among Seventh-day Adventists ... in the Review and Herald in 1913."²⁰ Finally, in 1946 the General Conference officially endorsed

¹⁷ *Idem*.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 530.3 Chapter available on line at

[http://egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm\\$vid=default](http://egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates$fn=default.htm$vid=default)

¹⁹ Gilbert Valentine, *How clear views of Jesus developed in the Adventist Church* He refers to Judson Washburn, *The Trinity*, 1939

²⁰ Jerry A. Moon, *The Adventist Trinity Debate*. Part 2: "The Role of Ellen G. White"

belief in the Trinity.²¹ As we have observed earlier, recent changes have been made to the heading of the second Fundamental Belief statement, substituting the Biblical term “Godhead” for the old term “Trinity.”

The documents quoted from “At Issue” on SDANET are “must read” status for anyone who wants to know the truth about the change from the early Anti-Trinitarian statements in Seventh-day Adventist publications. They strongly demonstrate that the early statements related particularly to counteracting the then current spiritualizing of Biblical passages relating to the members of the Godhead. When Adventist authors like Kellogg, Jones and Waggoner began spiritualizing beliefs about God in the 1890’s and early twentieth century, Ellen White quickly and strongly rebuked them pointing out their heresy.

We conclude therefore that the early Anti-Trinitarian stance of our pioneers was directed particularly against spiritualizing ideas of God when their own emphasis was strongly in taking the literal word of the Bible and the Bible only. When removed from the spiritualizing mystifying influence of the Catholic Church and other like-minded theologians, the divine personhood and eternal existence and intrinsic life of the Son of God was readily accepted for its Biblical basis.

The fact is that present Seventh-day Adventist belief in the Godhead carries none of the spiritualizing and mystical baggage of the Catholic Trinity dogma. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are seen as real, living Beings deeply loving, deeply compassionate, deeply affected by mankind’s rebellion and suffering and deeply involved in direct activity to bestow salvation on all who will accept their provision. Their mutual activity in mankind’s redemption is the best possible solution for the mess we’re in. Neither does current Adventist Trinitarian belief deny the underlying Biblical foundation established by early Church fathers prior to the establishment of the Papacy.

It is perhaps instructive that, in the fickleness of human nature, those who wish to return to the militant Anti-Trinitarian

²¹ *Ibid.*

stance of our pioneers should also support a depersonalizing of the Holy Spirit. Consistency in applying Biblical principles is lost in the desire to reinforce a view that is no longer tenable in the light of current Biblical and historical knowledge.

Conclusion

Opponents of the doctrine of Godhead as expressed in the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental beliefs denounce what they see as the Pagan and Papal roots of the Trinity dogma. We acknowledge the historical reality of some similarities. We would expect these in any false system since a counterfeit that does not resemble the original will not fool anyone for long. We proposed that the great deceiver is always at work to upstage God with his own corrupt model. We added that much that is now unreliable in pagan and Papal beliefs started out as true but was corrupted to the extent that the original truth becomes unrecognizable when people suppress truth revealed by God and leave God out of the picture. Indeed, we emphasize that to suppress any of the truth God reveals about Himself is to start a slide to godlessness and unrighteousness.

Early Adventist pioneers reacted particularly against spiritualizing distortions of the Trinity doctrine because of their insistence on taking the Bible as it reads. There was a gradual development from early years when some believed Jesus to be a created Being to the early 1890's when Jesus was understood to be begotten by the Father in the most distant reaches of the past, and granted divine status by the Father. (This view is untenable because it leaves us with two divine persons, two Gods, in direct contradiction of the foundational text on monotheism, Deuteronomy 9:6.)

The General Conference sessions of 1888 with their emphasis on the substitutionary righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith led to questioning the adequacy of a view of Jesus which saw His life to be derived from that of the Father. Prescott and his evangelistic associates studied the Gospel of John and the work and person of the Holy Spirit deeply during the Melbourne crusade of 1895. Combined with Prescott's editorial assistance for Ellen G. White's writing *The Desire of Ages*, this resulted in a watershed.

Old inadequate views of the person of Jesus Christ and the source of eternal life gave way to the current view, with pockets of resistance remaining for many years. Ellen White wrote that there was “life, original, unborrowed and underived” in Jesus Christ. It was this life that provides eternal life for the believer. **Many of the pioneers had argued that Jesus could not be very God because divinity could not die and a human sacrifice was insufficient to cover the cost of sin.** Sister White laid this assertion of early Adventist pioneers to rest forever, when she wrote that Jesus “came forth from the grave to life that was in Himself. Humanity died; **divinity did not die.** In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will.” Thus it required both humanity to die and divinity to come forth from the grave.

Then, if Jesus really is a divine being who will receive worship throughout eternity, One who possessed eternal life, original, unborrowed and underived, that He could grant to His creatures as He sees fit, it stands to reason that we have two Gods. That is unless the two merge into one Godhead, united but distinct. And with Jesus’ declaration that the Paraclete was another of the same kind as Himself, we have three personal divine beings united from eternity past to eternity future as the supreme Godhead of the universe.

Here is love indeed. Love requires that at least two beings capable of love exist together, unless it is self love. Blessed harmony for eternity requires that each esteem others as better than Himself, looking out not only for His own interests but for the interests of others. The Bible shows that God, as a Godhead of three divine persons, epitomizes and promotes these ideals and works tirelessly to perpetuate this harmony through all creation.

The doctrine of the Godhead has been established in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is a Godhead of three co-equal divine Beings intimately united by bonds that epitomize selfless promotion of others. It is untrue to say that the process of change came from a desire for credibility amongst the ranks of present day denominational Christianity. It has been established by deep Bible study and unswerving devotion to the principle of the Bible and the Bible only as the rule for faith and practice. It has been confirmed

by the writings of Ellen G. White, the Lord's messenger. With such origins, it is worthy of all acceptance as a sound basis for belief in the God of the Bible.

