



**UNDERSTANDING
THE TRINITY**

**An Encouragement to Abide in the Doctrine
in both Faith and Practice**

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both Faith and Practice

B.P. Harris

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INTRODUCTION

A common statement heard among many Christians today is that the Trinity is a mystery, which cannot possibly be understood with our finite minds. We will confess that it is one of the most important doctrines of the Bible, but because we think finite minds cannot possibly understand the doctrine, we put it in the back corners of our minds where it slowly gathers dust. This is doing irreparable harm to the faith of many Christians and is not the result of any biblical teaching, but the result of the subtle distraction of the enemy.

Belief that the Trinity is a mystery causes one to not even take time to try to understand the doctrine. Why take time studying something which no one can ever understand? However, nowhere does Scripture tell us that the Trinity is a mystery, not in the biblical sense of mystery, nor in the modern definition of the word. In fact, the word mystery in the Bible, which is the translation of the Greek word “*musterion*,” does not mean something which is beyond understanding, but simply means a secret, which having been hidden, is now revealed to the one illuminated, i.e. Christians.

So even if the Bible did call the Trinity a mystery it would only be saying it was unknown to the one not illuminated, i.e. the one who is not a Christian. A Christian would still be expected to understand it. That leaves us with the modern definition of the word mystery.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary the word “mystery” means “something that ...baffles or eludes the understanding,”¹ and it is this definition of the word, which fills the minds of many Christians when contemplating the Trinity. As an example, in responding to a question about the Trinity the other

¹ American Heritage Dictionary, Second Edition, (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA), 1976, pg. 826

day, a well-known Evangelical preacher stated that the Trinity is a mystery which cannot possibly be understood this side of heaven. (This is not to imply there is not a side of God, which is beyond our knowledge. God is omniscient and we are finite. There is a side to God, which will always be above us. But as to how our God is Triune – how one can be three, and three can be one – Scripture never tells us it is a mystery).

Trinitarian theology is given scant attention in Bible Colleges and Seminaries, and little mention in Sunday Schools and/or Evangelical Churches. (May it never be in our assemblies). It seems that we have developed a sort of Trinitarian amnesia. For one to declare that the Trinity is a mystery which cannot possibly be understood is to contradict Scripture which states –

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” Rom. 1:20.

Consequently, to declare that the Trinity cannot be known is to make God specious, because it makes God reveal something that cannot possibly be understood. On the contrary, what God reveals can always be understood and must be understood. The Trinity is the basis of all our understanding of God. If we would know God (Jn. 17:3), then we must understand the Trinity. Apart from the Trinity, one cannot fully understand the ways of God. Apart from the Trinity, one cannot fully understand salvation or sanctification. The Trinity is the basis of all of our spiritual understanding of God. Indeed, it is a lack of this understanding that has caused many Christians to be drawn into apostasy and heresy. If Christians really understood the Trinity down to the very depths of their beings, it would become a bastion of truth that would repel all attacks of apostasy and error.

Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity should not be a “mystery” in the corner recesses of our mind where it slowly gathers dust, but instead, a revealed Truth sparkling like a

multifaceted diamond at the forefront of our minds with all its glory and majesty.

That being said, though, it should not surprise us that in these last days the doctrine of the Trinity is ignored and misunderstood. We are engaged in a spiritual warfare. Satan does not want us to understand God because he desires to imitate and be like God (Isa. 14:14). Yet, as we know, he cannot be like God, *and so he must “mystify” the Godhead in order to substitute his own concept of godhead*, and so deceive.

Within the Godhead, or Divine Being, subsists Three Persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is of none and is thus known as unbegotten, the Son is of the Father and is thus begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son and is thus spirated. This is who God is. There is an eternal movement within the Three Persons. This movement is what unifies them and makes them One. Satan cannot imitate this. He does not have the ability to beget an only-begotten son as the Father has eternally begotten His Son. And so, if he is to make himself out to be God, he must change our perception of the nature of God. This is why there have always been heretical views on the nature of God. God exists as a triunity of Persons. They are distinct, but not separate. There is only one Divine Being, not three beings. Satan as an angelic being does not exist in that way.

And so one of his first attempts in distorting the nature of God was to nullify the thought of one Divine Being and instead introduced the idea of a plurality of beings – polytheism. Why would he do this? Because if he can make one believe that the Godhead is none other than three Divine Beings – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he then can imitate God.

History is replete with ancient Pseudo-Trinitarian models, which are better known as Triads. The Egyptians had a triad of Osiris, Isis, and Horus. There was the Babylonian triad of Enlil, Ninlil, and Ninib. The Greeks had a triad of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, and a lesser-known triad of Zeus, Here, and Athene. These were the result of the vestiges of Trinitarian knowledge that all men

once possessed when God first communicated with men in those early days after the Fall. But as Romans 1:20-23 tells us, men suppressed the true knowledge of God and became futile in their imaginations and thus created these Pseudo-Trinitarian triads, not based upon the truth of God's nature, but based upon their vain imaginations fueled by the distortions of the enemy. And so mankind plunged into a polytheistic milieu of heresy and error. But Satan is not content with one tactic.

After our merciful God continued to reveal Himself to mankind through His people Israel, the fallacy of polytheism was exposed and so Satan changed his tactics. If he could not continue the deception of God existing as a plurality of beings, he would reverse himself and make man believe that, indeed, there are not many gods, but only one true God, and this God exists as an individual Person, not a triunity of subsistential Persons. Thus, we see the rise of a type of monotheism *devoid of Trinitarian truth*.

Judaism developed into a religion, which denied the triune nature of God, (although many Jews even up to the time of Christ understood, with a limited and imperfect knowledge, that God existed in a multiple, if not triune way). This development continued, of course, with the heresy of Sabellianism and ultimately with the religion of Islam, which denied the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ and instead affirmed *one Divine Being existing as one individual Person*. And so we see the deception continue.

All these variations on the true nature of God were leading to one final and great deception. Satan wanted mankind's perception of God to be so altered, that one day he could foist upon the world his own trinity – the trinity of Satan, the Anti-Christ, and the False Prophet. With this trinity Satan could present himself as the one true God, the one Divine Being, yet, at the same time, he could also present himself as a trinity. Satan's trinity, of course, could not be one of substance and subsistence, *but only of purpose and character*. To accomplish this he has ever had to alter Trinitarian truth, and this alteration continues today before our very eyes.

The Church has always affirmed that there is one Divine Being subsisting in Three Persons – the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Within this affirmation, the Church also affirmed the eternal activity of the Three Persons – the eternal begottenness of the Son and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit.

The council of Nicaea said it this way:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things, visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all time, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became Man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended unto the heavens and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and cometh again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end:

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver, that proceeded from the Father, who with Father and Son is worshipped together.²

In modern times, one has the example of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which affirmed the same truth and declared it this way:

In the unity of the Godhead there be Three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.³

² See *Documents of the Christian Church*, Henry Bettenson, ed. (Oxford University Press, London 1975)

³ See *The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. III*, Philip Schaff, ed. (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1983)

Or take that great Baptist Confession – the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, which stated:

In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, (I John v.7; Matt. xxviii, 19; II Cor. XI 11. 14) the Father, the Word (or Son), and the Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each have the whole divine essence, yet the (Exod. iii. 14; John xiv. 11; I Cor. vii. 6) essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is (John I. 14,18) eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit (John xv. 26; Gal. Iv. 6) proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore, but one God.⁴

This is the Historic Christian Faith that has always been confessed and to which we whole heartily agree. Yet many Christians today do not understand this truth. They do not understand that there is only one Divine Being. They believe “Person” means “individual” or “being” and thus in reality hold to a tritheistic viewpoint. They believe there are three Beings in the Godhead, or others, in reaction to such a viewpoint, hold to a modalistic viewpoint of God – while believing that there is but one Divine Being, they believe God reveals himself, not in three subsistences or modes of existence, but in three stages manifestation – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Still others, rejecting both extremes, affirm that there are Three Persons and one Divine Being, but they deny the intra-Trinitarian activities between the Three Persons, and so do not believe in the eternal begottenness of the Son or the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit.

This viewpoint is one of the most subtle variations of the truth, for with denial of procession, one is left with Three Persons who cannot possibly be consubstantial. They become Three Persons who are not just distinct, but are actually separate. If the Persons are “separate,” they can only be of “*similar substance*”

⁴ See, *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, (Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc. Grand Rapids, MI)

rather than of the “*same substance.*”

This semi-Arian viewpoint was condemned at Nicaea and was considered heretical, yet this is exactly the viewpoint that needs to be prevalent in the last days if Satan is going to imitate the Trinity – Three separate Persons who are seen as one in “purpose” but not in “substance.” – Three Persons who are co-eternal, without the intra-Trinitarian activity of begottenness and procession.

This tactic of Satan can only be accomplished by “mystifying” and distorting Trinitarian truth. He cannot have Christians spending much time seeking to understand the true nature of God. He needs to hinder the Christians pursuit of the truth, and he has accomplished this by adding the word “mystery” to Trinitarian Theology. *This is his masterful stroke.*

If Christians believe the Trinity is a mystery that cannot be understood, then why even bother? However, as we said before, Scripture nowhere declares the Trinity is a mystery in either of its definitions. Satan desires us to think the Trinity is a mystery, because in that way he can keep our minds befuddled of the Truth and, as we will see later in the book, keep us devoid of spiritual truth, and robbed of the grace and peace that should be ours through the knowledge of our God (II Pet. 1:2).

So, if it is wrong to label the Trinity a “mystery,” how do we go about understanding the Truth? The first step is to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for it is the Holy Spirit who leads us into all Truth (Jn. 16:13). Secondly, we need to be spiritual Christians. A soulical Christian cannot understand the deep things of God (I Cor. 2: 10-15; 3:1-3; Heb. 5: 12-14). A soulical Christian trusts in the wisdom of this world, rather than in Christ for his sanctification; he trusts solely in his own intellect and logic to apprehend the things of God, rather than the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and trusts in a form of godliness, rather than He who is Godliness. Such an attitude will never bring true Trinitarian understanding. It may bring a lifeless orthodoxy, but never a living reality.

And that brings us to the third and final step. One needs to realize that the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which we need, is

not based on any new revelation, but on the revelation that God has already provided. The Church has commonly divided this revelation into General and Specific. General revelation is understood as Creation and all that is within that term, and Specific Revelation is understood as the Word of God – the completed Canon of Scripture contained in sixty-six books, which the Church has always held sacred and inspired.

However, in this step, we must realize that General Revelation must always be understood in relation to Theology. Theology is defined as a discourse on God, the study of God and His attributes or simply the doctrine of God. The theology of the church would be the study of God in relation to the church. The theology of salvation would be the study of God in relation to salvation, etc. While these designations are not the common parlance used in modern Evangelical Christianity they are, we believe, more helpful nomenclatures because every doctrine of Systematic Theology must be understood firstly within the framework of God Himself.

General Revelation then, must be understood to be the study of God gained by studying His relationship with nature or creation. Psalms 111:2 bespeaks this when it tells us that:

“Great are the works of the LORD; they are studied by all who delight in them.”

David tells us in Ps. 19:1:

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork.”

And Paul tells us in Rom. 1:20:

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

Much can be gleaned from God’s creation if man would

simply raise up his head and look. If he would but apply his heart and “study” all that is around him, he could discover the greatness of his Creator. This is what General Revelation is – the study of God gleaned through the study of God’s Creation.

In pursuing this study of General Revelation, however, one soon finds one’s self floundering without guideposts or directions when one seeks to advance beyond the mere knowledge that this universe affords him of God. General Revelation will lead someone to the existence of God, but to go beyond the mere existence of God unto a personal knowledge of God takes more than is afforded in General Revelation. It takes a Specific Revelation from God to give mankind parameters in which to continue his study of God’s works. These parameters are found in the Bible, and one such parameter is the aforementioned verse – Romans 1:20.

“For since the beginning of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

This verse introduces to us a principle, which we have called the Doctrine of Analogy.

Since God is a revelatory God, all things have been created to reveal something of Himself to mankind – something of His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and His divine nature. All of creation, according to Rom. 1:20, is created to be analogous to something in God. All things were created to correspond to something within the Godhead. This correspondence, of course, *must be understood to be limited, for the finite cannot fully mirror the infinite.* But this does not preclude the fact that God tells us that something of Himself is always reflected in His creation.

When we begin to grasp the significance of this Doctrine of Analogy we begin to understand that the doctrine is the biblical basis for the use of types, figures, patterns and parables. Types, figures, and patterns were given to us by God in order to help us

develop a correct understanding of who He is.

Therefore, the Doctrine of Analogy allows us to continue our study of God through creation because it tells us that God made all things to reveal something of Himself. It tells us that all things that God created, He created to correspond to some truth of Himself.

For the most part, Christians have taken Rom. 1:20 to mean that one can see God's greatness in Creation, or that one can see His omnipotent power, (as the famous hymn goes "Thy power throughout the universe displayed"). While this is true, for this verse does tell us that one can see His invisible attributes and eternal power, it does not address the third aspect Paul says can be seen in Creation – His divine nature. This hardly is ever spoken of in Christian circles, let alone Christian hymns, yet, this is the very essence of what we have been talking about – the Trinity.

Paul tells us in Rom. 1:20 that we can "clearly see" His *divine nature* throughout Creation, and that, not only can it be seen it *can be understood*. In other words, God's purpose for creation was not just to show us His greatness, but was also to show us His very nature in such a way that allowed one to *understand* it.

Consequently, if one admits the *nature of God is triune*, then one would have to admit that *creation must be triune!* Do we really see what Paul is telling us? We can clearly, not partly, or hazily, but clearly see God's divine nature through what has been made. In other words, since the rest of Specific Revelation (meaning the Bible in 66 books) tells us that the Godhead exists as a Trinity of Persons with one substance, we should expect to see, throughout creation, an analogy to the Triune nature of the Godhead. This is a tremendous declaration by the Apostle Paul. The Trinity can be understood! It need not be a mystery to us, for God has bent over backwards to reveal Himself to His creatures, and He has done this by creating all things to correspond to His own Triune nature. *The Trinity is not a mystery!*

God has given man a perfect model to understand how "one" can be "three" – Creation. When one observes or studies the

universe one can see that it consists of three and only three properties – space, matter, and time. These three properties are co-existent and possess the one and same, undivided substance – energy. Space cannot exist apart from matter or time. Nor can matter and time exist apart from space. (Nor can the Father exist without the Son, nor the Spirit without the Father and Son). Space, Matter, and Time are three yet one in substance. The Universe is triune!

This is the Doctrine of Analogy. One can easily see how “three” can be “one,” and “one” can be “three” – just look around at God’s Creation! God created it, thus, to aid us in our understanding of His own Triune nature.

In addition, we see that time is threefold – a triplicity of future, present, and past. Isn’t it interesting that God created time to be threefold, not twofold, or fourfold. Why? – Because God created it to correspond, *in a limited manner*, to His divine nature.

Nathan R. Wood bespeaks this truth in his book “The Secret of the Universe.” First, he speaks on the nature of time. Does it flow from the past to the future or from the future to the past? Most of us think of time as flowing from the past to the future, but as he amply demonstrates, God created time to flow from the future to the past.

He clearly demonstrates this by having one consider the present moment, or in a broader sense, by considering the present day in which one would be reading this book. If you would have taken a calendar many months ago and looked into the future, you would have seen that this day, in which you are reading this book, used to be in the far future – perhaps, two years in the future if you had a two year calendar. Then this day was a few months in the future. Then it was next month in the future. Then as it proceeded to you, it was next week in the future. Then it became tomorrow, in the near future. Then it became today and soon, after twenty-four hours, you will find it will become yesterday. Then it will recede and become last week, and then it will become last month. Then, as it continues to recede in the past, it will become last year, and soon,

this day would be long time past – two years past.

So, one can see that our present moment came from the future. The day in which you read this, was once far in the future, then it became nearer, then it became tomorrow, then it became today – your present – and soon it will become your past, then your near past, then your far distant past. Time flows to us from the future to the present to the past. Never does time flow from yesterday to the present to the future. Tomorrow becomes today, but yesterday will never become today, let alone tomorrow.

Perhaps an easy way to visually see this is to look at an hour glass. Turn the hour glass over, and the sand in the top is the *future*. The narrow neck of the hour glass where the sand falls through is the *present* and the bottom of the hour glass, where the grains of sand collect, is the *past*. Time flows from the future to the present to the past!

With this being understood, perhaps it would now be helpful to quote a portion of his book to show how he demonstrates this principle of analogy in regard to time.

“The Future is the source. The Future is unseen, unknown except as it continually embodies itself and makes itself visible in the Present. The Present is what we see, and hear, and know. It is ceaselessly embodying the Future, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment. It is perpetually revealing the Future, hitherto invisible....”

“The Future acts, and reveals itself, through the Present. It is through the Present that Time...enters into union with human life. Time and humanity meet and unite in the Present....”

“The Past in turn comes from the Present. We cannot say that it embodies the Present... The Past does not embody the Present. Rather it proceeds silently, endlessly, invisibly from it.”

“But the Present is not the source of the Past which proceeds from it. The Future is the source of both the Present and the Past. The Past issues in endless, invisible procession from the Present, but, back of that, from the Future out of which the Present comes.”

“The Past issues, it proceeds, from the Future, through the Present.” “The Past acts invisibly. It continually influences us with regard to the Present. It casts light upon the Present. That is its great function. It

helps us to live in the Present which we know, and with reference to the Future which we expect to see.”⁵

Now Nathan Wood tells us why God created time in this way. He did so in order to reveal something of His own triune nature – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the Doctrine of Analogy. The essence of time is “one.” There are not three substances of “time,” but only one created substance of time, but it is understood by three distinct modes of existence – future, present, and past. The future is distinct from the present and the present from the past. The future is not the present, but is made known in the present, and the past is not the present, but gives understanding to the present. That is the reason God knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). The end, which will one day be known in our present and then will be understood in our past, already exists in the reservoir of time. All are days are numbered and ordered by God, who knows the end from the beginning.

“Seeing his days *are* determined, the number of his months *are* with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.” Job 14:5

“Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them.” Ps. 139:16 NASB

Thus Nathan Wood continues:

“All of this is indeed remarkable. But here is something yet more remarkable, which we can discover for ourselves by a simple experiment.

⁵ Wood, Nathan R., *The Secret of the Universe*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI), 1963, pg. 44-45 – underlining ours. (This book was recommended by such men as G. Campbell Morgan and A. S. Loizeaux. It is an excellent book to aid the Christian’s understanding of the Trinity shown forth in the universe. However, it should also be noted, all of us may not all agree with all of our brother’s conclusions. Nevertheless, much insight can be gleaned from his writing).

It is possible to take the preceding paragraph (quoted above)...and ...read it...without change, substituting the word God for the word time, the word Father for Future, the word Son for Present, and the word Spirit for Past, and have a detailed and exact description of the relations between Father, Son and Spirit as the Scripture present them.”

“Let us try it. The Father is the source. The Father is unseen, unknown except as He continually embodies Himself and makes Himself visible in the Son. The Son is what we see, and hear, and know. He is ceaselessly embodying the Father, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment. He is perpetually revealing the Father, hitherto invisible....”

“The Father acts, and reveals Himself, through the Son. It is through the Son that God...enters into union with human life. God and humanity meet and unite in the Son....”

“The Spirit in turn comes from the Son. We cannot say that He embodies the Son... The Spirit does not embody the Son. Rather He proceeds silently, endlessly, invisibly from Him.”

“But the Son is not the source of the Spirit which proceeds from Him. The Father is the source of both the Son and the Spirit. The Spirit issues in endless, invisible procession from the Son, but, back of that, from the Father out of which the Son comes.”

“The Spirit acts invisibly. He continually influences us with regard to the Son. He casts light upon the Son. That is His great function. He helps us to live in the Son whom we know, and with reference to the Father whom we expect to see.”⁶

Isn't that amazing! This is the Doctrine of Analogy! These are the glasses given to us by God, through which we must look, if we would properly understand God's creation. All things correspond to Him in a limited fashion, because He created them to be that way. Time was created in such a way that it would mirror God's own Triune nature.

However, it should always be remembered that the analogy should not be taken too far, for it can never mirror God's Triune nature precisely, *for only the eternal can mirror the eternal*, and nothing of the universe is eternal. However, it does give us a limited understanding of the Trinity, since God, according to

⁶ Ibid., pg. 46-47

Scripture, created all things to correspond, in some way, to His own triune existence.

We must remember that only by Scripture can we properly understand those truths afforded to us in General Revelation. Without the proper understanding of Scripture, analogies can be misunderstood and in some cases taken too far. The same, of course, is true even with the various parables given to us in Scripture. Without the proper hermeneutic, parables can be stretched too far and be made to teach things that God never intended them to teach.

Nevertheless, once we properly understand the Doctrine of Analogy in creation, it will then leads us to maintain a certain frame of mind in our observation of the world around us, and this frame of mind is what we have given the name – The Trinitarian Mode of Thought.

The Trinitarian Mode of Thought is simply stated, “a Trinitarian way of thinking.” It is a disciplined way of thinking where all things begin with God. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth!” It recognizes that God created all things to reveal something of His character and nature.

For example, the Holy Spirit did not call Jesus the Lamb of God because, when He was inspiring Scripture, He looked through all His creation to find an animal that best reflected the sacrificial character of His Son, and that ended up being a lamb. No, God created lambs in the first place to be what they are because He knew that in the fullness of time He would send His Son to be a sacrifice of sin, and the lamb was originally created, with its own peculiar character, to be a type of Him who was to come. In the same way, God created a lion to be the way it is because it bespoke something of Christ’s glory, strength and courage. God created all things the way they were because it somehow would reveal something of Christ (i.e. Rock, Branch, Light, etc.).

Also, God created the very fabric and nature of the universe to reveal something of His triune nature. All of creation reveals something to us of God, His nature, and Persons (i.e. the wind was

created as it was to bespeak the Holy Spirit). A Trinitarian mode of thinking allows one to avail him or herself of this correspondence of creation in order to grow in our understanding of God.

It allows the Trinity, not to be a mystery, but a wonderful doctrine of Scripture. By understanding God, and how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to one another in perfect love and unity, allows us to understand how we should relate to each other in love and unity. Growing in our knowledge of our Triune God will strengthen our marriages, families and assemblies.

However, it must be never forgotten that the Specific Revelation is necessary for a true Trinitarian way of thinking. It is study of Scripture that gives us a sure foundation for General Revelation to rest upon. And it is only through God's Holy Writ that such a foundation can be found. It must be remembered that the Universe and Man are created by God to reveal to us how one can be three, and how three can be one, but we must remember they are limited in their analogy, and Scripture is ever needed to properly understand the true nature of God.

One last thing must be said in conclusion. General Revelation can never bring one to a full knowledge of God since Scripture is an essential element of Revelation. And since Scripture cannot be truly understood apart from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and since the Holy Spirit does not enlighten one who is unregenerate, it goes without saying that regeneration or new birth is a necessary ingredient. As full knowledge of God is only secured through the revelation of God's own dear Son (Col. 2:8,9; Heb. 1:1-3), it goes without saying that a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is a prerequisite for the reception of such a full knowledge.

General Revelation, without regeneration, can only lead one to the knowledge of the Creator and certain truths about Him, but never to a full knowledge of who He is, and so we have labeled such a reality as simply – a creational reality – a reality which is available to all men regardless of their personal status (Rom. 1:18-20).

Hopefully, such a reality will lead men to want to see more about God and to see Him who is the perfect expression of God – the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only when men believe in Christ and the work of His atonement, that men can be regenerated to a new and living hope. And it is only with such a new life and hope that one can continue to grow in the knowledge of God.

Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit the believer will be lead into all truth as it is found in God the Son. He will bring the student of General Revelation into a totally new and different reality – a reality that will one day bring all God’s children into a glorified state of existence. He will bring him into an existence where God will be known in all His fullness and in all His glory. May that day so come.

Therefore, we see that the Trinity is *not* a mystery. Our enemy wants us to believe so, and, thus, neglect the doctrine. God has created three models or Triunities to aid us in our understanding of His Triune nature – Universe, Man, and Scripture. The Universe is triune, Man is triune, and even Scripture is a triunity of language, writing, and message. By taking time to observe, or study, the things God created – His great revelatory objects – the Christian can understand the Trinity (Rom. 1:20). And since General Revelation is dependent on Specific Revelation, we would like to begin our study of the Trinity as revealed, defined, and practiced in Scripture. We pray this will aid the reader in his pursuit of Trinitarian truth, and thus increase his or her knowledge of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁷

⁷ If one would wish to further his understanding of how Creation teaches or shows forth the Trinity, we would recommend the aforementioned book by Nathan Wood, “The Secret of the Universe.”

BOOK ONE

THE DOCTRINE REVEALED

THE PERSONS OF THE GODHEAD

THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is a common misconception to think that the doctrine of the blessed Trinity was hidden in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament. If that was true, the question must be asked, “Why did the Jews during the Old Testament develop a theology of threefoldness, (as we shall see later), from their own Scriptures?” No, from the very first verse, of the very first chapter, of the very first book, God is revealed in His plurality and oneness.

ELOHIM

Genesis 1:1 states “In the beginning God.” The very first name of the God, given us in Scripture, is the Hebrew word Elohim. Elohim is in the plural form as opposed to the singular. In other words, the very first name given by God to reveal Himself is in the plural case. This has led some to conclude that the plural use of the word gives proof to the Trinity, while others maintained that the word is in the plural to reflect, what is known as, a “plural of majesty,” and not the plural nature of the Godhead. Which view is correct? More than likely both views have an element of truth to them. To fully comprehend this, however, we must have a proper understanding of the word “Elohim.”

Some Christians have mistakenly taken the term “Elohim” or “God” to refer only to “divinity” rather than also referring to a title or name. For example, people are apt to say, “Jesus is God”

meaning Jesus is His name and God carries the sense of divinity. In other words, they take the word “God” to mean “Divine,” much in the same way one might use “human” when referring to different people. For example, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are names of three human beings – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob being their names and “human,” being their species, or nature. However, this is not how Elohim, which is translated God, should commonly be understood. Obviously, one cannot deny “God” carries the sense of divinity or nature, but in most cases, it refers to a title that is *based upon His nature or divinity*.

Keil and Delitzsch address this point in their Commentary of the Old Testament stating this: “*Elohim* ... the plural ... is not used for the abstract, in the sense of divinity, but ... is used without the article, as a proper name for the true God.”⁸

In other words, “God” does not just refer to nature, but also refers to a name or title of One who is to be held in awe and reverence. Therefore, we must see that God, in the biblical sense, is a proper name or title and not just a reference to divinity, (although God of course is divine). There are other words used in Scripture to refer to divinity, (e.g. *theotes*, Col. 2:9), but these we will address later. So if Elohim is a title, or proper name, what is the significance of it being in the plural?

First, it should be noted that those who understand God to refer *only* to a divine being, rather than to a title or name, have a problem when they categorically state that Elohim is in the plural because it refers to the Trinity. If Elohim refers only to a divine being, and Elohim is plural because it refers to the Trinity, then one would be saying that the Godhead consist of three divine beings, which of course, contradicts Scripture. There is only one essence, one Divine Being in the Godhead, and the plural form, “Elohim” cannot refer to a plural number of Divine Beings, but must refer to a plurality of, what we may call, intensification within a single

⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 1*, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts), 1989, pg. 73

Person.

Keil and Delitzsch state in their Commentary, that Elohim is “...an external (numerical)” plural, and in Israel, “...an internally multiplying (intensive) plural.”⁹ Many times, throughout Scripture, the term “Elohim” refers, not to the Trinity, but to a single Person within the Trinity or Divine Being. This is the aspect which shows forth the concept of the “Plural of Majesty.” And that single Person in the New Testament is identified with the Father.

For example, a common opening statement in Paul's epistles is “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; II Thess. 1:2), where God refers to the Father alone. Perhaps the most succinct text is John 20:17 where Jesus Himself states, “I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.” – God being a proper name and title primarily referring to the Father.

Whenever you read the word “God” in the Bible, you can be assured it is, in almost all cases, referring to the first Person of the Godhead – God the Father. So if God refers almost exclusively to the Father and when we read, “In the beginning God” (*Elohim* – the Father), why does the first reference to the single Person of the Father occur in the plural form? Obviously, it does not refer to a plural number of Fathers because, in most cases, the plural noun is always followed by a singular verb, showing that in the writers mind a single Person was being referred to, but still, why refer to that single Person with a plural noun?

This is what has led many to believe that Elohim must be seen only as a “plural of majesty” because the use of a singular verb limits the noun from being seen as a plural entity. However, I believe the confusion can be cleared up if we remember that Franz Delitzsch states that Elohim does not refer to an “external numeration” but an “internal intensification.” In other words, Elohim *does speak of a plurality of Persons in the Godhead*, but

⁹ Ibid., pg. 73

only in their relation to the Father.

There is only one God the Father, but within Him, through coinherence, there are two other Persons, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and from Him there coinheres one communicated essence without separation in the Son and Holy Spirit. Elohim refers primarily to the Father, but is in the plural form because in Him and from Him, as the source, the Son proceeds through an eternal begetting and the Holy Spirit proceeds through eternal spiration.

Elohim refers to the internal intensification of the second and third Person in the Father who is the source of all the fullness of the Godhead, which also resides within the Son and Holy Spirit. Elohim does refer to a “plural of majesty” but only through the revelation that the unity of the Godhead resides in the Father as the *source*.

Even Dr. J. H. Hertz, C.H., the Late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, admits the concept of source in the title Elohim when he states in his work, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, that the name Elohim, “...is the general designation of the Divine Being... as the fountain and *source* of all things.”¹⁰

So what we see is that Scripture begins with the revelation of the Persons of the Godhead as they coinhere in an intensive manner in the Father. This explains why Elohim, being plural in form, is linked so many times with a singular verb (Gen. 1:1, 25; 3:22; etc.). If Elohim primarily refers to the Father alone, it must be controlled by a singular verb, but at the same time it is in the plural case to reflect the intensive plurality within His nature, in which the Son (Messiah) and the Holy Spirit coinhere.

However, this title Elohim, which primarily refers to the Father, because He is the awe inspiring one, the King of the Universe, the omnipotent one who is the Source of all – the “one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6), is also used, in some cases, not with a singular verb, but

¹⁰ Hertz, Dr. J.H., ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (Soncino Press, London, 1978), pg. 2

with a plural verb (e.g. Gen. 20: 13; 35:7; II Sam 7:23).

Now, obviously, we must conclude that in these cases the Trinity, and not the Father alone, is being referred to in these verses, because, if they only referred to a “plural of majesty,” the singular verb would have been used.

Now, this poses no problem, if we remember that from Scripture, “God” refers, not only to nature, but also is used as a title or proper name. These verses simply tell us that in the Divine Being all Three Persons can be called God, not now in the sense of Father, because with a plural verb an internal intensification cannot be meant, but now in the sense of an external recognition of the complete equality of all Three Persons.

All titles and honour, that can be ascribed to the Father, are also due to the Son and the Holy Spirit because all Three Persons can properly carry the name of Elohim. They are all mighty or awe inspiring because they all equally coinhere within each other and all possess the same undivided substance. Therefore the Son can be called God, as in John 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb 1:8, and the Holy Spirit can be called God, as in Acts 5:3,(cf. with verse 4), and I Sam. 10:6, (cf. with verse 7) – not three Gods in the sense of nature, (which one would be forced to conclude if one interpreted Elohim as species, like human i.e. three humans), but Three Persons who equally are ascribed the title, or name, “Elohim,” the awe inspiring all mighty One.

In conclusion, then, we can see that the Trinity is indeed in the Old Testament from the very first verse of Genesis. God chose to reveal Himself to us from the very first as Elohim. This revelation continues with the second name God gives us – the name “YHWH” or what is commonly called “Jehovah.”

JEHOVAH

Unlike Elohim, which is in the plural form, the next name, which God reveals Himself to us, is YHWH, which is in the

singular form. While Elohim primarily brought into focus the fullness of Father as the source of all things within the Godhead, Jehovah bespeaks the manifestation of that source of fullness. Delitzsch says:

“Jehovah... is not so much Being at rest, as Being in movement or self-manifesting, as He who exists and lives in an absolute manner, i.e. who is perpetually positing and manifesting Himself, whose Being coming into appearance is the supporting foundation, and essential content of the universe and its history, and especially of the history of redemption.”¹¹

In other words, Elohim primarily bespeaks of the Father and Jehovah primarily bespeaks of the Son. However, as there is only one God, so there is also only one Lord. Even though the title Elohim can be applied to each of the Three Persons, it still refers to one Divine Being seen in reference to the primacy of the Father as the Source. And while Jehovah is a name that can be applied to all Three Persons, it still refers to one Divine Being seen in reference to the primacy of the Son as the manifestation or image.

This is why when we come to the New Testament God is used primary in reference to the Father and Lord (Jehovah) is used primary of the Son.

That this was in the minds of the New Testament writers there can be no doubt. Unfortunately, today, in some Evangelical circles, when one says “Jesus is Lord,” what most have in their minds is not what a first century Christian would have in his mind when he confessed Jesus as Lord. In some Evangelical's minds, to say “Jesus is Lord” is to say Jesus is our Master, our Ruler, or Head, which, while this is true, does not carry the full significance of the confession. To say “Jesus is Lord” to the first century Christian was to say “Jesus is Jehovah,” the Jehovah of the Old Testament. And it was only for that reason that He was to be our Master and Ruler.

¹¹ Delitzsch, Franz, *A New Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 1.*, (Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, Minneapolis, MN, 1978), pg. 113

“A son honoureth his Father and a servant his master: if I be a father, where is mine honour: and if I be a master, where is my fear: saith the LORD of hosts unto you.” Mal. 1:6.

Edward Henry Bickersteth writes concerning this truth the following in his classic work “The Trinity” –

“And here may be the most convenient place to introduce a few remarks on the witness we derive from the word “Lord.” No doubt it is often used by classical, and sometimes by sacred writers, as a human appellation. But then the facts remain, that it is the word, equivalent to Adonai, which the Jews, through their reluctance to pronounce the awful name Jehovah, continually employed as its synonym; that it is the word by which Jehovah is uniformly translated by the Septuagint, even in Exodus vi. 3; and further, that standing by itself in the New Testament, it designated in multiplied passages the Infinite Father. We must look, therefore, broadly to its general use by Christ and his apostles. And what is the result? The word *Kurios* (Jehovah in Old Test.) occurs 737 times in the New Testament – of these, in 18 instances it is confessedly applied to man or men. In 54 instances it appears in the discourses and parables of Christ, where the master, described as Lord, represents or typifies the Father or himself: and in 665 cases, the vast remainder, it is applied indiscriminately to the Eternal Father or to the Son.”¹²

He continues –

“Now we find certain prophetic declarations in the Old Testament regarding Jehovah fulfilled, as ruled by the New Testament, in Christ Jesus. This is, perhaps, the most conclusive evidence that could be adduced – an inspired interpretation of an inspired text –

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isaiah 40:3
(Old Testament)

This is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, The

¹² Bickersteth, Edward Henry, *The Trinity*, (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1957), pgs. 74-75

voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Mt. 3:3 (**New Testament**)”

Now John the Baptist's voice, without controversy, was heard in the wilderness, preparing the way for Christ. Therefore, Christ is Jehovah, our God.

Sanctify Jehovah of host himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel. Isaiah 8: 13, 14 (**Old Testament**)

Unto you therefore which believe he (Christ) is precious; but . . . a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient. I Pet. 2: 7, 8 (**New Testament**).

The stone of stumbling, as Isaiah affirms, is: ‘Jehovah of hosts himself,’ but as Peter interprets it, (for he is referring to what is contained in Scripture, vs. 6) this stone is Christ. Therefore, Christ is Jehovah.”¹³

There are many such verses, but let it suffice to conclude with two more comparisons.

“I (Jehovah) have sworn by myself... that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” Isaiah 45:23 (**Old Testament**)

“We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” Rom 14:10, 11 (**New Testament**)

“Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2: 9-11 NKJV (**New Testament**)

¹³ Ibid., 72-73

Here we see that the bowing of the knee to Jehovah is fulfilled by bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus, thus showing, that in Paul's mind, Jesus was Jehovah.

And finally, when Paul, (in speaking of Christ the Lord), tells us in Romans chapter 10, verse 13, that "whoever will call on the name of the Lord shall be saved," he is quoting from Joel 2:32, which identifies the LORD as none other than Jehovah. This, once again, shows that Paul confessed Jesus as the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

Therefore, we see Jesus is truly Jehovah – LORD. When a Christian confesses Jesus to be Lord, he must understand the full significance of such a confession. To the Christian, Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary, is LORD, the Jehovah of the Old Testament. He most assuredly is truly Man and truly God.

However, it must be remembered that Jehovah, like Elohim, cannot be divorced from the other two Persons. Any title or name, save that of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, can be applied to any of the Three Persons because they are co-eternal, co-equal, and co-essential. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; the Son is Jehovah, the Father is Jehovah, the Holy Spirit is Jehovah; The Father is King, the Son is King, the Holy Spirit is King. To have it any other way would destroy the equality of the Persons. The only terms that cannot be applied interchangeably are the processional terms that speaks to us of the order within the Godhead: the paternity of the first Person, the filiation of the second Person, and the spirationality of the third Person.

So while any title can be applied equally to any Person, it must be remembered certain titles apply "primarily" to certain Persons: Elohim to the Father, and Jehovah to the Son.

Therefore, as we see the Trinity in the word Elohim, with the emphasis on the Father as the source of the subsistence of the other two Persons, so we see the Trinity in the word Jehovah, with its emphasis on the Son as the manifestation of that Godhead.

However, we also see the Trinity in the word or name of

Jehovah itself, because of the very structure of the word.

Keil & Delitzsch state in their commentary:

“The name Jehovah, on the other hand, was originally a proper name, and according to the explanation given by God Himself to Moses (Ex. 3:14,15), was formed from the imperfect of the verb.... The Vulgate gives it correctly: *ego sum qui sum*, 'I am who I am.' The repetition of the verb in the same form, and connected only by the relative, signifies that the being or act of the subject expressed in the verb is determined only by the subject itself” The verb... signifies “to be, to happen, to become.”¹⁴

And Rabbi Hertz in his “Pentateuch and Haftorahs” states that the LORD (Jehovah)

“... is the translation of the Divine Name written in the four Hebrew letters YHWH and always pronounced 'Adonay'. This Divine Name of four letters – the Tetragrammaton – comes from the same Heb. root (*hayah*) as *Ehyeh*, viz. ‘to be’. It gives expression to the fact that” He was, He is, and He ever will be.” Here, too, the words must not be understood in the philosophical sense of mere 'being,' but as active manifestation of the Divine existence.”¹⁵

This meaning of the word, of course, is also what was in the mind of John when he wrote in the Book of Revelation 1:4, “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come.” This verse refers to the Father, and in verse 8, when he writes, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, says the Lord, who is, and who was and who is to come, the Almighty,” it refers to the Son.

In other words, in the name of Jehovah, we see the three “tenses of existence” but only one “tense of expression.” As time is revealed in three tenses, with only one tense of expression – the

¹⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 1*, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts), 1989, pgs73-75

¹⁵Hertz, Dr. J.H., ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (Soncino Press, London, 1978), pg. 6-7; 215-16.

present, so too Jehovah is made known by three tenses of existence, with only one tense or Person of expression – the Son. As the past is called time, and the future is called time, so too the Holy Spirit can be called Jehovah and the Father can be called Jehovah, but as time is primarily known by the “present,” so too Jehovah is primarily known by the Son.

So we see the continuing unveiling of God to finite reality. He is the LORD God, Jehovah Elohim, the One who is the Source of all things, even of creation itself, and thus is the One to be held in awe and reverence, but also is the One who is ever moving, yet always manifesting Himself. He is Jehovah.

The third reference that God uses to reveal Himself is the Spirit – *Ruach*. And it is this name we will now turn to in our next section.

RUACH

From the very first chapter of the Bible God reveals Himself to us as Spirit when He states, “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2). This name *Ruach*, linked with Elohim, is used repeatedly throughout the Old Testament. The word *Ruach* is also linked with Jehovah, and in Isa. 63:10-11; and Ps. 51:13 it is linked with Holiness – the Holy Spirit.

According to Jewish usage, some understood *Ruach* to be the “Divine spirit; spirit emanating from God.”¹⁶ Others, like in the Zohar, understood that, “The spirit of God is a holy spirit that proceeded from *Elohim Hayyim* (living God).”¹⁷ And others, like Rabbi Hertz, believed that the Spirit of God was “...the mysterious,

¹⁶ Werblowsky, Dr. R.J., Wigoder, Dr. Geoffrey, editors, *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., New York, Chicago, San Francisco, 1965), pg. 190

¹⁷ Sperling, Harry; Simon, Maurice, translators, *The Zohar, Vol. 1* (The Soncino Press, London; New York, 1984), pg. 66

unseen, and irresistible presence of the Divine Being.”¹⁸ But none understood this Spirit or Presence to be a distinct Person possessing the personal attributes of God, but to this fact there could be no doubt.

Throughout the Bible, the Spirit of God is seen as distinct from God yet still possessing His attributes. He is eternal according to Heb 9:14. He is omnipresent according to Psalms 139:7-8. He is omniscient according to 1 Cor. 2:10-11. He is good according to Psalms 143: 10 –KJV (Cf. Mk. 10:18). He is the Creator according to Job 33:4. And of course, He is holy according to Psalms 51:13.

Therefore, we see that the *Ruach* of God possesses all the same attributes as God. But this is not all. The Spirit of God, who is also seen as the Spirit of the Lord, is also said to be God Himself. In I Sam 10:6 Scripture states: “Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you...,” and then in verse 7 it states, not that the Spirit of the Lord is with you, but “God is with you” (Cf. also Acts 5:3&4). And so we see that since the Spirit possesses all the same attributes of God, He is also called God.

Yet not only does the Holy Spirit possess the same attributes as God, He is also seen as distinct from God and the LORD. Perhaps one of the clearest passages is Isaiah 48:16, which states:

“Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, from the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel....”

Here we see that the Spirit is distinct from God (Father) and from the LORD the Redeemer (Son).

Now while some may argue as to whether it is the LORD who is speaking here, or the prophet Isaiah (although I think in the context it must be admitted that the LORD is speaking), it does not

¹⁸Hertz, Dr. J.H., ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (Soncino Press, London, 1978), pg. 2

change the fact that the Spirit is seen as distinct from the Lord God. And so the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jehovah, the Holy Spirit, or simply Spirit, are all names showing not only identification, but also distinction. The Holy Spirit, while being God, still proceeds from God and is distinct from God the Father.

So, in concluding our look into the Old Testament, we see that God revealed Himself with different names and distinctions, showing that He exists in a multi-personal way. These multi-personal ways are hinted at in many places in the Old Testament and are even interpreted in later Jewish Theology (not just Christian Theology as some think) as a mysterious type of plurality within the Godhead that, in some cases, was even seen in a threefold manner.

For example, in commenting about the Shema, the Zohar (which some believe dates to the second century) states the following:

“Hear, O Israel, YHVH *Eloheinu* YHVH is one. These three are one. How can the three Names be one? Only through the perception of Faith: in the vision of the Holy Spirit, in the beholding of the hidden eyes alone. The mystery of the audible voice is similar to this, for though it is one yet it consists of three elements – fire, air, and water, which have, however, become one in the mystery of the voice. Even so it is with the mystery of the threefold divine manifestations designated by YHVH *Eloheinu* YHVH – three modes which yet form one unity.”¹⁹

Now perhaps many Christians, and even Jews today, do not realize that it was not uncommon to view the Godhead in this way during the first and second century of this era. The Jews of the Old Testament up to the time of Christ did not have a problem in

¹⁹ Sperling, Harry; Simon, Maurice, translators, *The Zohar, Vol. 3* (The Soncino Press, London; New York, 1984), pg. 134

viewing the Godhead in some form of plurality, obviously because, as we have seen, the Scriptures so intimate.

Philo, who was born 20 years before Christ, repeatedly referred to God in a plural manner. While he never developed any Trinitarian viewpoint, he did speak of the logos of God as –

“...God’s partner in creation. [And] to this effect, he calls the logos, ‘The Beginning,’ ‘The Ruler of the Angels,’ and significantly, ‘the Name of God.’ [And] ‘...because the logos is an emanation of God, [he] can also talk about him as God’s offspring, or the first-born son of god.”²⁰

Alan F. Segal, in discussing these various exegeses of Philo, also states this.

“Here Philo makes no disclaimer about the metaphoric quality of the terms he is using. He unabashedly calls the logos a “second God.” This in calling attention to various similar scriptural passages, the rabbis were not just stylizing theoretical arguments. Real traditions of a “second God” were present in Judaism as early as the time of Philo.”²¹

Philo came to his conclusions not just because of some philosophical approach, (although Greek philosophy was assuredly a major pillar of his thinking), but because of the text of Scripture itself. The Old Testament was filled with hints at some type of plural manifestation of the Being of God. Philo came to his conclusions based upon the underlying biblical text.

The primary biblical texts that influenced such thinking were identified by Alan F. Segal as follows:

“... (1) Dan. 7:9f, and the speculations about the identity of the “son of man,” (2) the Ex. 24 theophany, possibly together with other passages in the Bible where God is pictured in the form of a man (3) the related

²⁰ Segal, Alan F., *Two Powers in Heaven, Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, (E.J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1977), pg 173

²¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 164

descriptions of the angel of YHWH who carries the divine name (e.g. Gen. 16:7f., 21:17f., 22:11, 31:11f., Ex. 3:2f., Ju. 2:1f., as well as Ex. 23:21f.), [and] (4)scriptural verses which describe God as plural (Gen. 1:26).”²²

Philo gave “... a good inkling of the kinds of traditions which must have been current in the Hellenistic Jewish communities of the first century.”²³ Many Jews, up to the time of Christ, believed that the Scriptures of the Old Testament revealed that the one true God existed in some type of plurality. But many of their views were erroneous and imperfect. Some saw God in a binitarian way. It wasn’t until the time of the New Testament that the full truth was solidified and revealed in an accurate manner. The Trinitarian nature of God was fully disclosed in the New Testament.

Perhaps it would be best to conclude with a quote from Francis J. Hall in his masterful theology on the Trinity regarding this issue:

“The elements of Trinitarian teaching, which our Christian standpoint enables us to detect in the earlier stages of revelation, could not be understood in ante-Christian ages; but it would be rash to conclude that Jewish students of Old Testament prophecy were unable to advance in their ideas of God beyond a bold Unitarianism. We must not make our ignorance a basis of inference; and we are very ignorant of the ideas of God which were cherished in the latter days by spiritually minded Jews, who meditated upon prophecy and, like the aged Simeon, were “looking for the consolation of Israel.” (Luke 2:25). However vague their anticipations may have been, their imaginations must have been controlled to a degree by those elements of messianic prophecy which, as we have seen, imply some kind of social and plural mystery in Jehovah, without justifying belief in more than one God. The Father, the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit must have been distinguished by many readers of the Old Testament, for they are there distinguished; and the divine rank assigned to the Messiah could hardly escape notice, although it must have raised

²² Ibid., pg. 183-84

²³ Ibid., pg. 180

questions which could not be answered.

Whatever may have been the case with ordinary devout Jews, we have evidence that, in higher circles, Jewish theology in the period between the Old Testament and Christ made some progress towards a Trinitarian view of God.... In Alexandria, Philo the Jew, whose lifetime partly coincided with the earthly life of our Lord, developed an elaborate speculation concerning the Logos.... His thought is bold, and superficially considered, seems at times to anticipate Christian theology; but his footing is insecure, and his language is often self-contradictory and fanciful. He identifies the Logos with the Angel of Old Testament manifestations, and describes Him as divine. At times he seems to regard Him as a person, but not consistently, and calls Him a "second God," who embraces both God and man. On the whole, Philo gives us an objective illustration of the contention that the Old Testament suggested lines of speculation which involved elements of Trinitarian thought, without enabling its readers, apart from knowledge of the Gospel, to attain to secure conclusions or to determinate Trinitarian conceptions...."

"The Spirit was also treated of by Jewish writers of this age, both Palestinian and Alexandrian, and was dimly perceived to be distinct from the Father and from the Logos. The view gained expression that he was to come with the Christ. But the ancient Jew could not combine these half apprehended elements of Trinitarian teaching; and his speculations, useful as they have become to confirm our impression that Trinitarian implications can be discovered in the Old Testament, they needed to be supplemented by further revelation [the New Testament] before they could be developed into a true theology."²⁴

²⁴ Hall, Francis J., *Dogmatic Theology, The Trinity*, (Longmans, Green and Co. New York, 1918), pg. 44-47

THE PERSONS OF THE GODHEAD

THE NEW TESTAMENT

One of the first references to the Trinity in the New Testament is Mt. 3:16-17 which reads: “When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lightning upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

Here we have in the New Testament, a setting similar to the first reference of God in the Old Testament. One has the heavens and the earth. One has God speaking and the Spirit of God hovering over the (baptismal) waters. The only difference is we now have someone named the beloved Son being anointed by the Spirit of God.

In Genesis, we had the Spirit of God taking part in the old creation. In Matthew, we have the Spirit of God taking part in the beginning of the new creation. In the Old Testament, we have God speaking words of creation. In the New Testament, we have God speaking words of confirmation. In this setting, we see the voice in heaven (God the Father), the Spirit of God descending, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son.

The New Testament begins with the Persons of the Trinity, and takes their revelation further. Let's begin by looking at the first Person – God the Father.

FATHER

Two chapters later in Matthew, Jesus begins to identify the voice of this One in heaven, as being the Father.

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Mt. 5:16.

“In order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” Mt. 5:45.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” Mt. 6:1.

“Our Father who art in heaven.” Mt. 6: 9a

What we see now is the repeated assertion that God, (*Theos* in Greek, used to translate *Elohim* in the Greek Old Testament), is known as the Father. This is also confirmed in Matt. 5:9 where Jesus calls peacemakers the “sons of God” whereas in verse 45, He calls disciples “sons of your Father” who is in heaven.

In almost all cases, as we stated before, when one reads “God” in the New Testament, it is not referring to God, simply as “divinity,” nor is it usually referring to God meaning “Trinity,” but is usually referring to God, meaning “Father” – the Father who is the source of the eternal Personhood of the Son and Spirit.

This assertion is continually revealed throughout the New Testament writings. Paul repeatedly identifies God, not as Trinity, but as the Father.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom. 1:7

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 1:3

“Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Cor. 1:2

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” II Cor. 1:3

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Gal. 1: 3

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Phil. 1:2

“We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.” Col. 1: 3

“Constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.” 1 Thess. 1:3

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Thess. 1:2

“Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” I Tim. 1:2

“Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” II Tim. 1:2

“Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.” Tit. 1:4

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philemon. 3

Much confusion has resulted in modern Evangelical circles regarding the Trinity because many have failed to see this truth. To many Evangelicals, God always means some all-inclusive term of the Godhead and not a title that is primarily reserved for the Father.

Terminology is very important for the proper understanding of the Trinity. God is not redundant in His revelation

of Himself, and if we are precise in our terminology, we will be greatly aided in our understanding of the Trinity.

So in conclusion, we see the New Testament opens with a deeper revelation of the first Person of the Godhead. The New Testament solidifies our understanding of Elohim (*Theos*) as the Father. He is our Father, but more importantly, He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – His Eternal Son.

SON

This takes us into the further revelation concerning the Second Person of the Trinity – the Son. One of the first verses identifying the Son with Jehovah is Mt. 3:3 which reads as follows: “For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the LORD, make His paths straight.’”

In this verse, Matthew identifies the ministry of John the Baptist with the voice of the one spoken of by Isaiah. The passage in Matthew is a quote from Isaiah 40:3 which reads: “A voice is calling, clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.”

In this verse, Isaiah says that the voice is making a way for the LORD, which in Hebrew is the name YHWH or Jehovah. Consequently, when Matthew concludes that section of Scripture with the coming of Jesus in verse 13, Matthew is very clearly identifying not only the voice with John the Baptist, but also the LORD (Jehovah) with Jesus of Nazareth.

In the apostle Matthew’s mind, Jesus was the Jehovah mentioned in Isaiah 40:3. Jesus was the Jehovah of the Old Testament. *And this Jehovah was the Son of God.* And so the further revelation of the second Person of the Godhead is unfolded. *He is the Son of God, the Son of the Father.*

This New Testament identification of the Son with the Jehovah of the Old Testament is not limited to Matthew. Paul, in Rom. 10:6-13, states:

“But the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, 'Do not say in your heart, “‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is to bring Christ down), or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).” But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ – that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him, for “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.””

As we said before, this last verse is a quotation taken from Joel 2:32,

“And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered.”

In Paul’s mind, Jesus Christ was the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

Or again, in Rom. 14: 11, the apostle Paul, in referring to the Judgment seat of Christ, says this,

“For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’”

This is a quotation from Isaiah 45:21-23, which again speaks of Jehovah:

“...Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. Turn to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.”

Therefore, we see that in Paul's mind Jesus was Jehovah.

There are many other such verses throughout the New Testament, but let it suffice to quote just three more, one from the Apostle John and one from the Apostle Peter and the last one from Paul again.

John applies many verses to our Lord as being a fulfillment of the Old Testament. One of these verses is John 19:37:

“And again another Scripture says, 'They shall look on Him whom they pierced.’”

This is referring to the crucifixion of Christ and is a fulfillment of Zechariah 12:1, 10 which states:

“Thus declares the LORD (Jehovah) who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him: ... “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.”

So we also see in John's mind, Jesus was the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

And now, let's look and see what Peter thought concerning the identity of Jesus. I Pet. 2:7-8 states:

“This precious value, then, is for you who believe, but for those who disbelieve, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,' and 'A Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence.’”

This verse, which Peter uses to refer to Christ, was a quotation from Ps. 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14. Ps. 118:22 speaks of the stone which became the cornerstone, and Isaiah 8:14 identifies this stone and the Rock of offence as Jehovah.

“Sanctify the LORD of host himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” Isa. 8:13-14 KJV

So we see in Peter's mind, he also confessed that Jesus was Jehovah, since he linked up all these verses together.

And now let's conclude with what may be the most succinct verse of them all – Phil. 2:10-11:

“. . .that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Paul is quoting again, of course from Isaiah 45:21-25:

“Declare and set forth your case; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it no I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*.”

Much, so-called “mystery” has been added to the Trinity because Christians have not been careful in their terminology. When Paul says Jesus is Lord, he is not just saying Jesus is our Master (Lord of the whole earth), but Paul was also saying Jesus is Jehovah. He is our Master not because He is our Lord (Lord being used in an all-powerful sense), but He is our Master because He is Jehovah – the LORD God of the universe, and thus requires our total submission and respect (Mal. 1:6). This is what was in the mind of first century Christians when they confessed the Lord Jesus and this is what was in the mind of the Apostles.

When Paul and others would say “Grace to you and peace

from God our Father and the LORD Jesus Christ,” they were saying that *Elohim* (God) of the Old Testament is primarily known in the New Testament as the *Father*, and that *Jehovah* (LORD) of the Old Testament is primarily known as *Jesus, the Only-Begotten Son of God*, in the New Testament.

There remains one final aspect of the New Testament revelation and that, we will see, is in regard to the Spirit.

HOLY SPIRIT

In Mt. 12:18, Matthew tells us that Isaiah foretold that the Spirit would rest and empower the coming Saviour. Matthew then shows this power at work in the next few verses as Jesus heals and restores a blind, dumb, and demon-possessed man. Jesus did this miracle in the power of the Spirit that Matthew had just referred to. This Spirit is then identified by Jesus as the Holy Spirit (verses 31 and 32).

“Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men; but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, is shall not be forgiven them, either in the age, or in the age to come.”

Whereas in the Old Testament, the Spirit is rarely referred to as the Holy Spirit, in the New Testament He is continually referred to as such (e.g., Mt. 1:18; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 1:15; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:2,5,8,16; Rom 5:5; Tit. 3:15). The New Testament firmly identifies His name as the Holy Spirit. And with this, we begin to see the completion of the names of our Triune God.

The names and designations given in the Old Testament by God are now firmly identified in the New Testament with the names Father as God, Jesus as LORD, and the Spirit as Holy Spirit.

However, this is not the final designation of the Trinity that is revealed to us, but is a slight variation. Matthew 28:19 tells us the eleven were to go into all the world and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew, in this verse, or should I say the Holy Spirit in this verse, now gives us the fully revealed name of the Trinity – *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. (It should be noted that it says “in the name” – singular, not “in the names” – plural).

This new name had never been revealed before, although it had been hinted at before in the Old Testament through the plural use of *Elohim*, the threefold usage of *Jehovah*, and the usage of *Ruach* with *Elohim*, and *Ruach* with *Jehovah*. However, in the New Testament the name of God is now firmly understood as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In this portion of Scripture, we now see that, while Jesus is *Jehovah*, in the final name of the Godhead given to us, He is spoken to us as the SON. This is of prime importance because the Son speaks of relationship and derivation. What we now see in the name given to us in Matthew 28:19 is the beginning of the fullest revelation God has given to man concerning His eternal existence. And that existence is understood through what is called in theology, the doctrine of procession. So it is to that doctrine we shall now turn our attention.

We have seen how God revealed Himself to us as Three Persons, and we shall now see how He has revealed to us the relationship among those Three Persons, for that will lead to our final understanding of the Trinity – the unity of those Three Persons. May the Lord allow us to continue.

ACTIVITY OF THE GOD

BEGOTTENESS

A SHORT INTRODUCTION

Why, dear reader, is there a presumption of truth when it comes to other essential doctrines of the Faith that have been with us from the beginning (I Jn. 2:24), but not for this essential doctrine of the Faith? Why will many begin with the presumption of truth when dealing with such doctrines as the Virgin birth, the deity of Christ, or the inspiration of Scriptures, but not this important doctrine of the Faith?

For instance, a Christian who believes in Verbal Plenary Inspiration begins with a presupposition that every word of the Bible is inspired in the original autographs and thus free from error or mistakes. There are no contradictions in Scripture. Therefore, when a critic comes up with a supposed contradiction, like Stephen's assertion in Acts 7:16 that Abraham purchased a tomb from the sons of Hamor in Shechem, a Christian begins with the presupposition that there are no contradictions in Scripture because it is free from error, and so they easily see the truth that Abraham purchased just the tomb and Jacob later purchased the land around the tomb (Jos. 24:32). However, because the critic does not begin with the presupposition of faith, such a one cannot see this simple explanation, which seems so clear to us.

Or, to give another example, because one believes in the deity of Christ, when a critic says that Christ was just a man because He was wearied like any other human being (Jn. 4:6), the Christian understands that Christ was speaking from the viewpoint of His humanity. In His humanity He may have been wearied, but in His deity He was ever omnipotent. In His humanity, He was localized

on earth, yet His deity he was omnipresent (Jn. 3:31KJV).²⁵

If we will hold to certain presuppositions regarding the inspiration of Scripture, and the deity of Christ, etc., why do we reject the presupposition regarding the eternal generation of the Son from the Father? Holding to a presumption of truth in regard to this doctrine is no different than holding to a presumption of truth in regard to the doctrine of the Virgin birth. Such presuppositions are not wrong, because such presuppositions are based upon faith, not reason. True faith does not require logic.

Just because someone tells us that the Trinity is false because it does not make sense how one can be three, and three can be one, do we reject the doctrine because we cannot understand it? Do we not give it a presumption of truth? Or when someone says a Virgin birth does not make sense, do we reject the doctrine because we cannot understand it?

And so, dear reader, why, when a critic says it doesn't make sense how the Son could be begotten of the Father and not be created, or have a beginning of time, why do we not give it the same presumption of truth that we will give to the Virgin birth? Why do some, instead, agree with them and say, "Well, you're right we can't understand it. It doesn't make sense, so it must be wrong."

Why will they not begin with a presumption of truth and say, "He was begotten, but not created, for Scripture says, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word "was" God,' and if He was in the beginning He was not created, and if He "was" God (essentially, substantially), He must be co-equal, and co-eternal with God and not have a beginning of time, for if the substance of God is eternal and the Son and the Father have the same substance, they must both be eternal"?

Both doctrines have been a part of the Faith from the days

²⁵ Of course, we must be careful, not to fall into the error of Nestorius who believed that Christ had two separate and divided natures, the human and the divine. As you know, Scripture teaches that Christ had two natures, the human and divine, without separation, with division, without change and without confusion, unionized in one Person.

of the apostles. The Church, meeting at Nicaea, affirmed it when it declared He was “begotten of His Father before all time,” and that He “came down from the heavens, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.” Both doctrines will defy logic. Why do we hold to the one and reject the other? Granted, both do not make sense from the perspective of human understanding, but we should not be operating by human understanding, but by faith!

Dear brethren, the Historic Christian Faith says that Christ was the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten before all time, of the same substance of the Father, and therefore co-equal and co-eternal with Him. The Son is very God of very God. He is begotten of the Father, but not less than the Father for they are of the same substance. This is a neglected doctrine today, yet this is the true Faith! *One does not have to understand it in order to believe it*, one simply has to affirm it and cling to it with all one’s heart for it is an integral part of the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints by God Himself.

Therefore, with this ground work laid, let us now look at this doctrine in all its beauty.

In the New Testament, we are told that Jesus is the Son of God. This is not a “phrase of character” as some maintain, as if the term Son of God is used the same way as one might say “son of the prophets” meaning someone who had the character of the prophets. No, this term in the minds of the New Testament writers carried the idea of derivation, origin, or begottenness.

In other words, the Son had His eternal begetting from the Father. He is “God of very God” for he proceeds from God. This doctrine of procession is perhaps one of the most misunderstood doctrines of the Trinity in the minds of modern day Christians, and is ridiculed, de-emphasized, and in some cases, out and out denied! Yet without the doctrine of procession one cannot fully understand the Trinity. If you don't have procession, you don't have the Trinity,

you have Tritheism.

The doctrine of procession was confessed by all New Testament writers, was testified to by all the early church fathers, and was confirmed as the Historic Christian Faith by the Council of Nicaea, yet is almost totally ignored and denied by many modern day Evangelicals. One cannot hold to the *Historic Christian Faith* if one denies the doctrine of procession; one cannot hold to the Faith of the Apostles if one denies the doctrine of procession. Indeed, one cannot adhere to the Faith if one denies the doctrine of procession.

We must fully understand what procession is and how it has been revealed in Scripture if we want to understand our Triune God. And to do that we must once again go back to the beginning of all time and creation – back to the first chapter in Genesis.

We will look first at the general concept of procession, before we look at the specific doctrine of procession. If we do so, I think we will see God has left the imprint of His processional nature everywhere for us to see.

According to Rom. 1:20, the universe is not some random creation of God that has no significance for man, but is, as Rom. 1:20 states, a direct revelation of the One who made it. The universe is an expression of the nature of the Creator. God created all things to give glory to Himself. So it should not surprise us if He has implanted within the universe truths concerning Himself. One such truth is the doctrine of procession. Our universe is Triune because our God is Triune, *but our universe is also processional because our God is processional*. The doctrine of procession is hinted at from the very beginning of the Bible. The general concept begins in the very first chapter of the Book of Genesis, as is seen in this letter from a friend.

“In the first chapter of Genesis we see that as the dry ground proceeded out of waters, so also did the “earth bring forth, vegetation, herb's yielding seed after its kind, and fruit bearing trees yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after its kind: and God saw that it was good” (1:11,12). Here we have a primeval picture of the

doctrine of procession vividly illustrated. The earth is said to 'beget' the vegetation and the tree, and in turn, these are said to 'beget' herbs and fruit 'after its kind.'“

“There is a fundamental principle with respect to all biological life, and that is that like begets like. Horses beget horses, and oxen beget oxen, each after its own kind – that is to say, according to its own essence. This fecundity of created living things being able to reproduce themselves in their offspring is a beautiful image of how the Father is able to eternally produce His Son in generation. Moreover, like the vegetation and trees, the Son is of the same kind (essence) with the Father. The Father's substance within Himself is eternally begetting the Son. And this same paternal substance is spirating the Spirit through the Son. In the Scripture, the whole concept of seed presupposes that the seed itself is 'begotten; from the source of its own kind, and thereby possesses the full essence of the producing kind – life from life, kind from kind.”

“Now what can be said of the mineral and vegetable kingdoms regarding the processional order inherent within them can also be said of the animal kingdom. Here we see the earth, 'begetting' as it were, living creatures after their kind – birds of the blue skies multiplying after their kind, the beast of the misty field multiplying after their kind, and the fish in the sea multiplying after their kind. We see each species reflecting the divine processional life of the Trinity in their own ordered lives.”

“Then, at the first rising rays of sunlight of the sixth day, God uttered these majestic words, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” This was the earnest expectation of the creation, waiting for the manifestation of Adam, the son of God, (cp. Rom. 8:19). For it is man who bears the likeness of God more than any other creature, even the angels of heaven are not as like God as man, for what angel can 'beget' another angel of its own kind? Only Man, who is a type of Him that was to come, that is Christ (Rom. 5:14 cp. Col. 3:10) and is called the son of God (Lk. 3:38) can express the character of God to the fullest extent in which God

originally intended. It is in man that we see the full richness and likeness of God, for it is man that God freely chose to become in the Person of His Son. Adam was patterned after the eternally begotten Son of God, who is the express image of the Father, and who would assume our humanity for our sins.”

“See now the truth of procession in all its beauty! God creates man according to his likeness. God takes out of Adam, Eve. Thus, woman proceeds from the bodily essence of man to possess the full character of Adams humanity. For when God created the man, the woman was of necessity already present in the being of Adam. Thus we read, “This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; male and female created he them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam (Gen. 5:1-2). Clearly, in the mind of God, Eve was ever present in the creation of Adam. As the fruit tree whose life seed is in itself, so likewise with the creation of man whose extended life (Eve) was contained within himself.”

“But the story of man's expression of divine procession doesn't end here, for in the union of man and woman comes forth offspring in the image and likeness of man (Gen. 5:3). Seth was the appointed seed after the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. The intra-Trinitarian relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are now readily shown forth. As the Father is the unoriginate source of the Son, so Adam is the source of Eve, for she proceeded out of Adam. As the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and through the Son, so Seth (the promised seed) proceeds from his father Adam and through his mother Eve. In this dimension of inter-human relationships, Adam, Eve, and Seth all possess the same and one humanity reciprocally and mutually together.”

“And in another sense, this relation between a human father and his son affords to some limited degree an analogy of the relation between the Father and Son, and from this analogy, the title “Son” is derived. However, the analogy of this and the other analogies mentioned above cannot be pressed to far without running into some obvious differences. The begetting of all things

and of a human son involves a division of substance, and an external separation between that which begets and that which is begotten, and an external separation between father and son; but the divine substance or essence is indivisible, so that the whole essence of the Father is communicated to the Son in begetting without separation. The substance of the Son is the same substance of the Father. There is no division. The Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son. Again, human sonship, though strictly dependent upon the father and father upon the son, still involves temporal origin of the son, whereas the begetting of the Son of God is eternal. There is no temporal origin of the Son; both Father and Son are eternal. But though there are differences between the created processional realities mentioned above and between divine and human sonship, it must always be kept in mind that the latter (i.e. human, or created things) is predicated upon the former (i.e. divine, or uncreated), and therefore, as a revelatory analogy created by God, still serves us well in understanding the true relational order of the doctrine of procession.”²⁶

The “concept” of procession, however, is not limited to the first book of the Bible, but is ever present in Scripture. Indeed, the whole structure of the Bible is processional in that the New Testament proceeds out of the Old Testament, and in the fact that the Old Testament is the source of the New Testament. God has not hidden this “concept” of procession in some obscure text, but is everywhere present in Scripture if we would only open our eyes to see. And this is all because God wants us to know Him and to understand Him (Jn. 17:3).

So with this in mind let’s proceed from the general “concept” of procession in Scripture to the processional “language” of Scripture.

²⁶ Adapted from a letter by Cliff Moody. Used with permission.

THE PROCESSIONAL LANGUAGE OF SCRIPTURE

When we believe that all Scripture is God breathed (II Tim. 3:16), and that men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21), one immediately becomes aware that the description given to man of this divine act is a description of procession – for speaking is a procession of words borne along by the air, or breath, if you will, from one person to another for the purpose of the communication.

In this description we understand that the Holy Spirit, who proceeded forth from God, moved men to speak and to write the revelation of God. This is the processional language of Scripture and it fills the Word from Genesis to Revelation.

The language of Scripture is given to us by God through the Holy Spirit. Each word was perfectly chosen by God to reveal to mankind something of His nature, character and purpose. When a Christian understands this important spiritual principle, one then begins to increase one's knowledge of God. We learn, through the language of Scripture, that our God is a processional God in His very Being.

When one considers this, he or she must ask, "Why is the doctrine of the procession of the Son and the Spirit from the Father so important?" The answer is simple, because that is who God is! He has revealed Himself to mankind as a Trinity of Three Persons related to each through processional activity. As Anthony Norris Groves once said in relation to another doctrine, but which is just as applicable to this doctrine.

"I know that ten thousand arguments, plausible and powerful in various degrees, may be brought against this view of the subject; but my simple answer is, the Lord hath spoken, what can I say? - The Lord hath acted, what can I do? Shall men be

wiser than his Maker?”²⁷

We only know God by what He has revealed of Himself to us. Apart from that revelation, we could never know Him. Consequently, we should be impressed with the importance of every facet of revelation concerning the Trinity that God has granted us, for it is God who desires that we know not only His eternal power and invisible attributes, but also His divine nature (Rom. 1:20). And revelation declares that the divine nature of God is Triune through the eternal processions of the Persons.

God’s exhortation to us is to know Him and understand His revelation!

“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD.” Jer 9:23-24 KJV

The apostle John writes,

“And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so 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.” I Jn. 5:20 NASB

Paul’s desire for the Church was that we would grow into maturity by truly knowing the Person of the Son.

“Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” Eph. 4:13

And, finally, Peter’s prayer was that Christians would grow

²⁷ Groves, Anthony Norris, *On the Nature of Christian Influence*, (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, CA 2008), pg. 33

in grace and peace through the proper knowledge of God.

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” II Pet. 1:2

This is why the doctrine of procession is so important, because without this proper knowledge, we are “deficient” in our knowledge of God, and if we are “deficient” in our knowledge of God we cannot grow unto full maturity and spirituality.

Therefore, knowing this, how instructive it is to see what words the Holy Spirit uses to reveal this important doctrine in the sacred Word beginning with the very first book of the Bible.

Genesis 1:1 introduces God the Father to mankind. We learn that the creation of the heavens and earth occurred at the beginning moment of time. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” We are told that God is the one who created all things. However, we immediately find in the next verse the introduction of the third Person of the Godhead, the Spirit of God. We are told that the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. And what are the words used by the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself for the first time to the world? – the Spirit “of” God, the Spirit who proceeds from God.

This first use of the processional language of Scripture by the Holy Spirit reveals to the reader that within the ontological Being of God there is a procession of Persons. The Spirit proceeds from the Creator of all things. How instructive. The Holy Spirit reveals His ontological relationship with the Father. He is “of” God, for He proceeds from God.

However, when we compare Scripture with Scripture we realize that the Spirit of God also was instrumental in the creation of the universe and that God the Father did not work alone. Ps. 33:6 tells us, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.” The little word “breath” is the same Hebrew word for Spirit. The breath of His mouth is none other than the Holy Spirit of God. Ps. 104:30 says,

“You send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.”

And so we see the Holy Spirit who proceeded from God also took part in the creation of all things. But Ps. 33:6 also introduces another element into the creation account. It tells us, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.” And Heb. 11:3 tells us “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God.” And in Jn. 1:1-3, the Holy Spirit tells us, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” And Ps. 33:9 declares, “For He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast.” Therefore, we see there was yet another Person who took part in creation, none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God.

This is revealed for us in Gen. 1:3, which says “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” God spoke His Word and it was done; He commanded and it came to be. God spoke forth creation. In other words, speaking was necessary for the universe to come into being.

The Father had to speak forth the Word, sending forth the Spirit of His mouth to create! This reveals to us that our Godhead acts in the unity of Three Persons – the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. But it shows more; it shows that the Godhead exists in a procession of Persons. The Holy Spirit uses the imagery of Voice, Word, and Breath to show forth the intra-personal processions of the Blessed Trinity and the very means of creation.

A word cannot *proceed* unless there is a voice to *generate* it and in that act of speaking a breath *proceeds* from the voice out from the mouth bearing along the word. The Voice represents our heavenly Father, and the Word represents our precious Lord Jesus, and the Breath represents the Holy Spirit – these are the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity in their processional order.

Therefore, we see that God has revealed Himself to us from the very first verses of the Bible to be a processional God, who acts

in an order of Persons. But this is not all. The Holy Spirit has filled the Word of God with processional language to aid us in our understanding of who God is and how He exists.

A few verses later we are told that man was created in the image and likeness of God. We learn from Scripture that man is created with a spirit, a body, and a soul. This also is processional language, for God breathes into that lump of clay the breath of life, and in that movement of breath, representing the human spirit, we see the lifeless lump of clay become living flesh, and from the human spirit through the living flesh man now becomes a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

Our physical life is ever being *generated* and, indeed sustained by the human spirit of life. If one takes away the human spirit, the body will once more become a lump of clay (James 2:26). And not only that, through the productional properties of the spirit, we see man's soul becomes a living soul through this processional activity. The life of the soul *proceeds* from the human spirit through the living body, and the living body receives its life from the spirit. This is the processional order of man, and what is important is that the Holy Spirit tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God. In other words, we exist as a trinity of processional movement, because we are made according to the likeness of our God who has ever existed in a Trinity of processional order.

This again is the processional language of Scripture. The Holy Spirit chooses every single word of Scripture carefully to put together a picture that will teach us certain truths. He uses processional language because He wants us to understand the Blessed Trinity.

However, we must ever be cognizant of the fact that man is not like God. He is infinite, we are finite. He had no beginning, we have a beginning. He is holy, we are sinners. He has always and will ever exist in perfect unity, we are ravaged by sin and death and our unity of being is disjointed and through death divided and separated. Yes, we are created in the likeness of God, but because of our finite existence and the presence of sin, we must remember that

our likeness is but an imperfect picture of a perfect God, but the picture is still present!

For instance, consider this “likeness.” Our human spirit is invisible, our body is visible, and our soul is unseen – three properties in *one human “being.”* This is a picture or analogy of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is invisible, the Son is visible, and the Holy Spirit is unseen – three Persons in *one Divine “Being.”* We are told in Col. 1:15 that Christ is the image of the invisible God, and in John 3:8 that the Holy Spirit is like the wind which blows, but is unseen. This shows how man, being created in the image and likeness of God, helps explain the Trinity, but because of our finite existence and the presence of sin we must realize the analogy cannot be taken too far. For while it is true that our physical life is generated from the spirit, we must realize that because of sin, the generation of life from our spirit to our body can end, and our spirit and body can be divided in death. This can never be true of the Father and the Son. His, is an eternal generation that can never cease, for it never had a beginning but is an eternal act of the Father which is ever continuing yet is ever completed. He is infinite and eternal; we are finite and bound by time. He is holy and perfect; we are sinful and imperfect. But even in this imperfect analogy we see a procession of movement between the three properties of man, mirroring the eternal movement of procession between the three Persons of the Trinity – the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit wants us to understand this analogy, because this analogy will teach us the biblical truths of the procession, but we must remember the analogy must be controlled by the context and parameters of Scripture and must never be stretched too far.

And so we continue to see the Holy Spirit use language to teach us the intra-personal processions of the Trinity. He continues this processional language all through Scripture.

Exodus 24:17 declares that to the children of Israel the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire, reminding us of Heb.

12:29. God is described as a consuming fire where flames leap back and forth and through each other giving an appearance of constant movement. Our God is not a static God, but is an ever living and moving God in whose Being eternally moves the Son and the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and moving back towards the Father in their imaging and affirming activity respectively. This gives the picture of the ontological circle of life that proceeds from Father to the Son and to the Holy Spirit that returns through the respective activity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. How beautiful it is to realize that this activity of the ontological Trinity is also shown forth in the activity of the economic Trinity.

The Father so loves the world that He gives His only begotten Son (Jn. 3:16), who leaves the Father's bosom, humbling Himself, becoming a servant who is obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:6-8), who through that act of obedience offers Himself up through the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14), which Spirit then raises Him from the dead (Rom. 8:11), to return to the right hand of God the Father from whence He came (Heb. 12:2).

This is the processional language of Scripture. All we need to do is open our hearts to see it.

In Numbers 20:8 we are told that water comes forth from the Rock, and in I Cor. 10:4 we are told that the rock represents the Lord Jesus Christ. In this we see the beautiful picture of the procession of the Holy Spirit through Christ (Titus 3:6).

In Ps. 63:1-2, David speaks of his desire to see God in his sanctuary, to see His power and His glory. Moses had this same desire to see the glory of God in Ex. 33:18. When we consider this, one realizes that this gives us a glimpse of our Triune God, for who is the power of God? The Son is known as the power of God (I Cor. 1:24). And who is the glory of God? His Spirit is seen as the glory of God (I Pet. 4:14). And where does this power and glory proceed from? From none other than God the Father who is called the "Power of God" in Scripture (Lu. 22:69), and is known as the "Father of Glory" in Eph. 1:17.

Here we see a picture of the Trinity painted with the

language of procession – God the Father, to whom properly belongs both power and glory, communicates that same power and glory to both the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the Son, who proceeds from the Father, (Jn. 8:42), manifests the Father's great power and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father through the Son, manifests His great glory, and thus are also known as the “power of God” and the “Spirit of glory.”

This language continues throughout Scripture. In Prov. 8:22-24 the Holy Spirit tells us that the wisdom of God, which the New Testament identifies with the Son (I Cor. 1:24), was “brought forth” from all eternity. This is processional language. This cannot refer to the Son's incarnation for this being “brought forth” was in eternity. We will speak more of this later.

Or consider Isaiah 9:6, the second Person is called the “Son” who would be “given” – language full of processional imagery. In Micah 5:2 the Holy Spirit chooses a word of procession when He declares that His “goings forth” were from everlasting.

Isaiah 55:11 speaks about the word that “goeth forth” out of the mouth of the Lord. What could be more processional? The eternal Word proceeds from God the Father communicating and manifesting the invisible God to a world that desperately needs the revelation of His Person. This imagery bespeaks the Word as coming out from the Lord. Remember, the economic Trinity is rooted in the ontological Trinity. The reason the Word is seen as proceeding forth from God is because the Son has eternally proceeded forth from God the Father before all time. The Word is the Son and the Son is the Word – the second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit solidifies our understanding of procession by fully identifying the first Person of the Trinity as the “Father” and the second Person of the Trinity by the “Son.” As we will see later, the Holy Spirit, not only chooses the revelatory word “Son,” but also identifies the second Person as the “Only Begotten” – language full of processional imagery. Why would the Holy Spirit do this? Why would He choose words which

bring up the imagery of generation, spiration and procession to the mind of the reader? — Because He wants us to understand who God is and wants us to grow in that knowledge. He is not choosing words to fool us. He wants us to understand the nature of the Godhead by the careful words He chooses.

But today some believe the words given to us in Scripture should not be understood in their normal sense. They act as if the Holy Spirit did not know what He was doing in using words that so clearly bespeak procession. They tell us, “Do not think of those words in that way.” However, that is a perverse hermeneutic, for in all other places of Scripture they cry out, “Maintain a literal hermeneutic so as not to be misled.” But when it comes to the most important words given to us in Scripture concerning the nature of God, they ignore their own rule and interpret these special words apart from all normal meaning.

The Holy Spirit calls our Lord the “Son.” Some say “Son” does not mean “Son.” It carries no sense of derivation; it only means “of like nature.” Others deny the name “Son” and say He was not “Son” in eternity, but simply the “Word.” Others deny the plain sense of the word “Only Begotten,” and try to alter its original meaning, saying it means “one and only,” or “one of a kind,” all in order to deny the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father.

Those who teach such errors are only harming their own spirituality and growth. They claim to adhere to the Historic Faith, but by their teaching they manifest they either do not understand the Historic Christian Faith, or knowing it, they are altering its meaning, as they also do with these revelatory words, in order to support their own preconceptions. Yes, they are saved and they have the knowledge of God for salvation, but they do not have the proper knowledge of God to aid their sanctification. They have stultified their spiritual growth by ignoring the revelatory words of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit desires to teach us the truth of God and He has chosen the perfect words to communicate that truth. We should be careful to understand the words the Holy Spirit has given to us in

His great wisdom. The ignoring of them will do great harm to the spiritual life of the believer.

This processional language of Scripture continues on throughout the books of the Sacred Writ. There are the processional verses of the Gospel of John. There is the processional language of the epistle to the Colossians. The writer of Hebrews uses processional imagery in his exhortation declaring that Christ is the radiance of his glory and the express image of His Person.

The processional language that started in Genesis and continued on through both the Old and New Testament, concludes in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation which declares that out of the throne of God and of the Lamb *proceeds* a river of life clear as crystal (Rev. 22:1). What could be more succinct? The Holy Spirit will for all of eternity be seen as a clear, pure river of life flowing forth from the Father through the Son.

This is our blessed God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – seen in their processional order of first the Father who is invisible and the Son who is the image of the invisible God, and the Holy Spirit who has been poured forth into our hearts as He proceeds from the heart of the Father through the deep love of our precious Saviour – the Lord Jesus Christ – He who was begotten before the beginning, before time began, even from everlasting, the Son of the Father from all eternity. Amen.

So with this in mind, let's now turn our attention to the verses of Scripture, which reveal to us the "specific" doctrine of procession, or in a strict sense, the eternal begetting of the Son of God, and the eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit from the Father through the Son.

PROVERBS 8:22-26

“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. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.” Prov. 8: 22-26

The Holy Spirit discloses an important and significant truth to us in I Cor. 1:24. He tells us, through the Apostle Paul, that Christ is the Wisdom of God.

“But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ** the power of God, and the **wisdom** of God.”

This explains why Paul tells us to hold fast to Christ for in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). He is not only the Word of God; He also is the Wisdom of God.

The significance of this term is that it also bespeaks the procession of the Son from the Father. As the Eternal Word proceeds from God the Father (Jn. 1:1), so Eternal Wisdom is shown to proceed forth from God the Father. We know this from Prov. 8:22-26. This is why this portion of Scripture is so important. It is another part of Scripture that bespeaks the eternal generation of the Son from the Father.

As one studies the eighth chapter of Proverbs, one sees a remarkable parallel with the first chapter of the Gospel of John. It is almost as if John had this portion of Scripture before him as he penned his Gospel. But, of course, we know that the Gospel was not a creation of John, but was a creation of the Holy Spirit. John wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it was the Holy Spirit

that inspired John to write the words he wrote, and when one compares those words with the inspired words of Proverbs chapter eight, we see a beautiful symmetry.

Prov. 8:22 tells us that Wisdom was possessed by God in the beginning, meaning He was already in existence in the beginning. This parallels John 1:1 which tells us the Word was in the beginning. As he states, “In the beginning was the Word.”

Wisdom and the Word are names of the Eternal Son of God. Both terms tell us that all the Father is, in His own Person, is made known to the world by the Son of God (Jn. 14:9), who is known as the Wisdom of God and the Word of God. Wisdom is not an attribute subsisting within the Blessed Trinity, but is a Person, and from the revelation in the New Testament we see that that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The next verse, Prov. 8:23, tell us that Wisdom was “set up” from everlasting. It is interesting to note that the word “set up” is translated as “poured forth” in other places of Scripture. In Gen. 35:14 it tells us that Jacob “poured out” oil upon a rock where God had spoken to him. Oil bespeaks anointing, and our Lord, of course, is called the Christ – the Anointed One.

In Num. 35:14 the word is used for the “pouring forth” of the drink offering of wine unto God, reminding us that in the fullness of time the Son would be “poured forth” as a drink offering to God for our sins. The wine represented the blood of the New Covenant, the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that was poured out for the sins of the world.

And finally, we see that the word is used in Isa. 44:10 of one who forms a god by “pouring out” a graven image. How sad it is to see men exchanging the glory of God for an image made unto the likeness of corruptible men, or four footed creatures, or lifeless beings (Rom. 1:23), when from everlasting, Wisdom, our Lord Jesus Christ, was the image given to us by God for all mankind to worship and behold. Men rejected Him, who was eternally “poured out,” so to speak, as the eternal “image” of God the Father for *images* made by their own artful hands and by their own vain

imaginations. Wisdom is the true image of God; indeed, Wisdom is the only “image” of the invisible God – Wisdom, none other than our precious Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15).

And so we see Wisdom is the Lord Jesus Christ who was with the Father from everlasting – He who was the Promised one, the Anointed one, the Christ, the one who one day would come to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world – He who was slain from the foundation of the earth, who was ever the image of the invisible God, who was ever in the form of God, yet who was one who was willing to empty himself, who was willing to take on the form of a servant, and become obedient to death, even the death of the cross – Truly this is Wisdom, the wisdom of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next we see, in verses 24 and 25, Wisdom declaring that she was “brought forth” before creation. Here we have a clear declaration of “procession.” This parallels John 1:14 and 18 where John tells us that the Word, who was in the beginning, was the one who was the only begotten Son of God.

We are told in these verses that Wisdom, who was also in the beginning, is one who was “brought forth.” As the Son proceeds forth through begetting, so we see Wisdom proceeding forth through a “setting up” as verse 23 says, or an eternal “pouring forth,” if you will. This is also described in verse 24 and 25 as a “bringing forth.”

The word translated “brought forth” parallels with the word “only begotten” or “only born” in John. It also is associated with begetting in Deut. 32:18. In fact, Darby translates it as “brought forth in that verse.”

“Of the Rock that **begot** thee wast thou unmindful, and thou hast forgotten God who **brought thee** forth.” Deut. 32:18

And it is associated with being born in Isa. 51:2.

“Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you [**brought you forth**]: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.”

This tells us that Wisdom, which is the Lord Jesus Christ, was “brought forth” before the creation of the heavens and the earth, or, in other words, before time began. Wisdom was “begotten,” if you will, before all time. The word translated “brought forth” also carries the connotation of “begetting” or being “born.”²⁸

Thus, even though Scripture does not “usually” combine the idea of begetting with Wisdom, (as it combines it with the Son), it does intimate that “bringing forth” is the same activity as “being begotten” or “being born.” It tells us that Wisdom and the Son are one and the same Person, and thus, would be just as proper to say the “bringing forth” of Wisdom was no different than the “begetting” of the Son.²⁹

As we will discuss later, there are not multiple activities within the ontological Trinity, for that would presuppose the eternal existence of time. Time is not eternal, but is temporal. It is a created property of this universe. Time presupposes moments. In eternity there are no moments but only an ever present “now.” Consequently, there are not multiple activities within the Godhead, but only one eternal movement, and that one eternal movement is described in Scripture by various nomenclatures.

It is described as “begetting” in the Gospel of John (Jn. 1:14, 18), and is also described as a “proceeding forth” (Jn. 8:42; 16:28-30; 17:8). It is described, here, in Proverbs, as a “bringing

²⁸ Athanasius also calls Christ the “Only-begotten Wisdom.” (*Four Discourses Against the Arians*, Discourse II, Chap. XX, 54).

²⁹ In the Old Testament, begetting and birth, or “being born” are closely connected. Gen. 5:3 tells us that Adam “begat” a son named Seth, yet the same word for begat, *yalad*, is used in Gen. 4:25 which tells us that Eve bare (begat) a son by the name of Seth. So we see that to “bare” a son or to “bring forth” a son is closely related to the concept of a father’s begetting. The same is true in the New Testament. Matt. 1:16 says that Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born (begat) Jesus. The same word is also used in Matt. 2:1 when it says Christ was born (begat) in Bethlehem.

forth,” and a “setting up.” In Micah 5:2 it is described as “going forth” and in Isa. 55:11 it is seen as a “going forth” of the Word. All these varied terminologies of activity from God are actually different names for the one same eternal activity of God the Father in eternity.

In other words, the Word which “goeth forth” bespeaks the same activity of the Son who is “begotten,” and the Son who is “begotten” bespeaks the same activity of Wisdom which was “brought forth,” which, in turn, is the same activity of “proceeding forth” in John, which Scripture in another place calls a “going forth” from all eternity (Micah 5:2). All these different nomenclatures bespeak the one and same eternal activity of God the Father, because the Word, Wisdom and the Son refer to one and the same Person.

Therefore, when comparing Scripture with Scripture we come to understand that the Greek word “monogenes” could not be understood as “one and only” in the Gospel of John, but must be understood within the greater context of Scripture as “only begotten” or “only born.”

The parallel with the Gospel of John continues. When verse 30 declares, (according to the King James Version), “Then I was by him, as one brought up *with him*: and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him,” we are reminded of one of two things from the Gospel of John.

If the phrase, “*brought up with him*,” is translated “master workman,” as it is done in the New American Standard Bible, so that it reads – “Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him” – then it reminds us of John 1:3 which states that “all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” He was the master workman through which the heavens and the earth were made.

Or if the phrase “*brought up with him*” is translated “nursling,” as is done by Darby, so that it reads – “Then I was by him, his nursling, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always

before him,” – then we are reminded of John 1:18 which speaks of the “only begotten” Son who is in the bosom of the Father. The Son of God was dear to the heart of the Father. He was as a “nursling” who daily is the delight of a father with all the love and warmth that such a relationship entails.

Today, there are different opinions as to how the Hebrew word translated “brought up” in the KJV should be translated. Some believe it should be understood as a “master workman,” as the NASB and the NKJV translate it. Others believed it should be translated as Darby did, as a “nursling,” giving forth the idea of endearment, much in the same way it is understood in Num. 11:12, which says,

“Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?”

Nevertheless, whether it is translated as the latter or the former one can see a parallel with the first chapter of the Gospel of John. The Son, who is Wisdom, is not only seen as a “master workman,” He is also seen as one, who is lying tenderly in the bosom of the Father, being His daily delight.

The last two parallels we would like to mention is contained in verses 33 through 36 where Wisdom cries out –

“Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and obtaineth favour of Jehovah; but he that sinneth against me doeth violence to his own soul: all they that hate me love death.” (Darby)

How wonderful it is to realize that, as Wisdom is likened to “life,” so too the Word is likened to “life.” John declares in his Gospel,

“In Him was life, and the life was the life of men.” (Jn. 1:4)

Life is found in *Wisdom*; life is found in the *Word*; and, as John declares in I John 5:12, “He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life,” life is found in the *Son*. Scripture declares to us that Wisdom, the Word and the Son are all one and the same Person within the Blessed Trinity. They all *give* life, because they all *are* life.

Finally, as we are told in the Gospel of John that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life,” so too we are told in Proverbs that whoso finds Wisdom finds life and in finding that life “obtaineth favour of Jehovah.”

And, yet, as John warns us in his Gospel (Jn. 3:36), “...he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him – so too, Wisdom warns us saying, “he that sinneth against me doeth violence to his own soul: all they that hate me love death.”

How true is the declaration of Scripture, “The wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Therefore, we see how Proverbs 8:22-36 speaks to us of the eternal procession of the Son of the Father under the name of Wisdom. The doctrine of procession is found throughout Scripture, as we said before, whether it is known as a begetting, or proceeding, or a bringing forth, or a going forth. It all bespeaks the one and the same procession from God.

MICAH 5:2

Another major verse which teaches about the eternal procession or begetting of the Son is the Old Testament prophecy of Micah 5:2 KJV, which declares:

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that* is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting.”

In this great prophecy, we learn that the Messiah of Israel will be born in Bethlehem. This has, of course, occurred about two thousand years ago when Jesus was born of Mary in the city of David. This birth was spoken of as a “coming forth” from the city of Bethlehem. In the second part of the verse, however, “goings forth” are spoken of as occurring. The first part of the verse speaks of our Lord’s incarnation. The second part of the verse, however, speaks of a “goings forth” that occurred before the incarnation. What are the “goings forth” of our Lord?

Before answering that question, however, we need to realize that this verse, since the earliest times of the Church, has been used to prove the eternal pre-incarnational existence of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is most unfortunate that some modern translations of the Bible including the NIV, NLT, CEV and the RSV now mistranslate the word “everlasting” as “ancient days” or “distant past” and thus do much harm to our basic understanding of the eternal nature of our Lord in relation to this verse.

This same basic word is found dozens of times in the Bible, and, for example, the NIV translates it repeatedly as “everlasting” or “forever.” In fact, the very same word is used three other times in Micah (2:9; 4:5; 4:7), and in every case the NIV translated the word “forever.”

Why then, when we come to this one verse, do they

translate the word “ancient days,” especially knowing that this verse for centuries has been understood to refer to the eternal begetting of the Eternal Son of God? Obviously, they have their objective reasons, but those reasons do not hold up under the scrutiny of God's Word. Even those great Hebrew scholars Kiel and Delitzsch, who do not believe this verse refers to the eternal begetting of the Lord still maintain, however, that this Hebrew word should be understood to mean “eternal.” (It is most unfortunate that in this verse that truth has been obscured from the minds of many Evangelical Christians who read the NIV and may not read the footnotes.) Getting back to the question at hand, however, “What does the 'goings forth' of our Lord mean?”

We need to realize that those “goings forth” must be seen from two distinct vantage points – from “olden times,” and from “everlasting.” Some biblical scholars did not believe this verse spoke of the procession of our Lord, because it did not say, “going forth” (singular) but “goings forth” (plural). But they did not take into account that the “goings forth” must be seen from two different vantage points – from olden times and from everlasting. Our Lord “went forth” many times in days of old, before His incarnation. In Genesis chapter 16, He “went forth” as the Angel of the Lord. In Genesis chapter 18, He went forth as one of three men to meet with Abraham. In Joshua 5:13-15, He “went forth” as the Captain of the Lord of Host. In Judges Chapter 13, He “went forth” as the Angel of the Lord, appearing to Manoah. In Daniel chapter 3, He “went forth” as one like unto the Son of God, standing with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

There were many other appearances of our pre-incarnate Lord Jesus, and these all, with the one more “going forth” that happened in eternity, make up all the “goings forth” of our Lord Jesus Christ spoken about in this verse. There were many “goings forth” of our Lord Jesus, and all of them, save one which occurred in eternity, make up the multiple “goings forth” of our Lord. The reason there could only be one “going forth” in eternity is that, in eternity, there is no past or future time, but only an ever present

“now.”

If there was more than one “going forth” in eternity, one would have a “succession” or “duration” and that by definition would preclude it from being in eternity, since in eternity there is not any “duration,” but only a continuous ever present “now” which is ever completed, yet ever proceeding.

Consequently, if our Lord's “goings forth” have been from old, even from eternity, the multiple “goings forth” had to have occurred from of old (in time), and the one other had to have been an eternal “going forth” that was ever completed, yet ever proceeding.

This latter “going forth” was the eternal procession of the Son from the Father. That was the “eternal going forth”—the eternal begetting of an Everlasting Son from an Everlasting Father whereby the Son received the entire essence of God without division or separation, so that both the Father and the Son have the same substance and consequently are both consubstantial and one. It was an “eternal going forth” so that the Father did not precede the Son, but that the Father is just as dependent on the Son as the Son is on the Father, thus they are both co-eternal and co-equal.

And what is interesting is our Lord may have had this prophecy in mind when He taught His disciples the truth of His procession from the Father in John's Gospel (Jn. 8:42; 16:28-30; and 17:8). He also speaks from two perspectives. He speaks of the perspective of that which is eternal and from that which is in time.

So we see that in Micah, not only did the Holy Spirit speak of the incarnation of our Lord, but He also spoke of the eternal nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the eternal generation or procession of the Son from the Father. His goings forth has been from eternity. It is an eternal begetting, not a begetting in time.

I think much confusion today among Evangelicals who deny the doctrine of eternal generation is because they do not understand the nature of eternity. They consider eternity as nothing more than time going on forever into the past. Consequently, their denial of eternal generation is nothing more than a desire to protect

the divinity of our Lord. For if eternity is nothing more than time forever going backwards, then to say the Son was begotten by the Father does make the Son not co-equal with the Father, for the Father would, by definition, precede the Son in eternity past. But that is not what the Bible teaches about time! Time had a beginning. Time did not always exist. There is no eternity past. Eternity is the absence of time. Eternity is the absence of succession. Indeed, Eternity preceded time! Time began in Gen. 1:1. Augustine said it best when he said that there was “no time before the world,” but that “the world was made, not in time, but simultaneously with time.” (City of God, XI, 5, 6).

I'm not sure where this concept that time always existed came from, but it has done much harm to Trinitarian thinking. If we would just accept the biblical declaration that time had a beginning, (Gen.1: 1; Jn. 1:1; II Tim. 1:9 & Tit. 1:2 NKJV) much confusion regarding eternal generation would vanish. Even modern day scientists recognize that time did not always exist but is part of our universe. In other words, they recognize that apart from the universe time does not exist because time is a physical property of the universe.

Albert Einstein, in his Theory of Relativity said that

“... space – time is not ... something to which one can ascribe a separate existence, independently of the actual objects of physical reality.”³⁰

In other words, without matter (i.e. creation), space and time do not exist. Einstein confirmed what Moses said in Gen. 1:1, and what Augustine said almost 2000 years later. Time did not always exist.

Paul Davies, Professor of Mathematical Physics at the University of Adelaide, Australia says in the book, “The Matter Myth,” which he co-authored with John Gribbin, a trained

³⁰ Einstein, Albert, *Relativity, The Special and the General Theory*, (Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1961), pg. vi, Note to the fifteenth edition

astrophysicist from Cambridge University:

“Space itself, and time, were created, like matter, in the big bang; there was no “outside” into which the explosion occurred.”³¹

Here are two physicists, who as far as I know, are not believers, and yet they agree with the Bible that time began with creation. (Although, of course, they do not consider it to be the creation of God as recorded in Scripture, but just the big bang.) This is common knowledge among scientists today, and has always been so understood in the Church. Why, many modern day Evangelical leaders are ignorant of this I do not know the answer to, but I do know that this ignorance has done much harm to the understanding of Trinitarian Theology, because such ignorance has led to the denial of the biblical doctrine of the “eternal generation of the Son of God.

In their thinking, if time has always existed, then if the Father had a Son, that Son could not be equal to the Father because He was generated at some point in eternity past. This fallacious concept is the result of perceiving God from man's point of view, rather than from God's point of view.

As humans, we exist in time. When we have a son, he has a beginning in time. Consequently, many transfer that thinking to God and conclude if God has a Son, he must have had a beginning in time. But you see, as we have said, God does not exist in time and never has. There are not successive moments with God. God does not exist in time, but is above time, beyond time, and separate from time, for time is a property of this creation. So if God does not exist in time, and if God begets a Son, it must be by definition an eternal begetting, for there are never successive moments in God's ontological existence. There never was a moment when the Son was not begotten. The Son is ever being begotten by the Father. It is a begetting, which is ever continuing, yet ever completed. He is the

³¹ Davies, Paul, & Gribbin, John, *The Matter Myth*, (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1992), pg. 120

Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Time does not apply to the intra-operations of the Godhead. They are eternal in the purest sense of the word.

So in conclusion, when Micah says that the Messiah's goings forth were from eternity, he was declaring that the Son, who was the Messiah, was “ever proceeding” from the Father. If such an operation occurred in eternity, then by definition, it had to be an eternal operation, which never had a beginning, for “beginning,” is a concept of time.

Thus, we see the Old Testament continues to lay the foundation for the eternal begetting or procession of the Son. The next step in the unfolding of this revelation is seen in Psalm 2:7. Let us now look at this portion of Scripture.

PSALM 2:7

Although this Psalm precedes Proverbs and Micah in our Canon of Scripture, an occurrence, referred to in this Psalm, occurs after that of Proverbs and Micah. As we have seen, Proverbs 8: 23-36 bespeaks the begetting of our Lord from all eternity, and Micah also bespeaks that eternal begetting but also bespeaks the incarnation, the begetting of our Lord in Bethlehem. Psalms 2:7 now brings us up to another begetting of our Lord – the begetting of our Lord in His resurrection. But what is overlooked by many is that this final begetting sums up his other two begettings.

I have purposely left this passage of Scripture for last in order to show that the doctrine of eternal generation does not rise or fall with this Psalm. This Psalm is usually put forth as proof that the doctrine of the eternal generation is a misnomer of Scripture. This is done because some of our ancient brothers, sometimes called the “church fathers,” saw this verse as a primary verse which taught the Son’s eternal generation. As such, some have used this Psalm to nullify the whole doctrine of eternal generation because they believed the doctrine rose or fell based upon the interpretation of this one verse.

This author does not understand why there is such disregard, if not disdain, for this doctrine, especially since it has always been a part of the Historic Faith. Many times our ancient brothers are viewed with condescension, as if they were so ignorant to suppose this verse could bespeak our Lord’s eternal generation.

But what many of our modern brothers do not understand is that they were following a hermeneutic that most 21st Christians are not familiar with. If they were, perhaps, they would not be so quick to judge the Christians of those first few centuries.

The hermeneutic they were following was a hermeneutic that was familiar to the Jews living in our Lord’s day. It was called

the Peshet interpretation, which some believed should be classified as a midrashic hermeneutic, (in fact, some call it Midrash-Peshet), and others believe should be classified as a parallel, distinct, and separate hermeneutic. However, we will use it in its broadest sense, calling it a midrashic hermeneutic, because the Peshet interpretation, (which is technically redundant, for Peshet means “interpretation”), arose out of the milieu of midrashic hermeneutics of ancient Judaism.³² But, first, what is a midrashic hermeneutic? Let me quote from *Bibliotheca Sacra*.

“The following extract from the article ' Midrash ' in the ' Jewish Encyclopaedia ' throws some light on the meaning of this expression: A term occurring as early as 2 Chron. xiii 22, xxiv 27, though perhaps not in the sense in which it came to be used later, and denoting “exposition,” “exegesis,” especially that of the Scriptures. In contradistinction to literal interpretation ... the term “midrash” designates an exegesis which, going more deeply than the mere literal sense, attempts to penetrate into the spirit of the Scriptures, to examine the text from all sides, and thereby to derive interpretations which are not immediately obvious.”³³

This was the type of hermeneutic used by the apostles of Christ, especially Paul the apostle. For example, Paul declares that the “ascending on high,” in Ps. 68:18, is a reference to Christ “ascending on high” in Eph. 4:8. Now, literally, the Psalm is bespeaking David and the occurrences at that time, yet Paul declares that verse bespeaks the ascension of Christ. How can that be? Was Paul ignoring the literal meaning to make it say something

³² Therefore, some may feel our application of the term *Peshet* might be too broad in its usage and prefer more specific terms contained in Midrashic hermeneutics, thereby restricting the term *Peshet* to eschatological contexts. We understand this, but for the sake of continuity we are using the term *Peshet* in a very broad sense in order to show the Christocentric mindset of the early Christians. Therefore, we are using *Peshet* as a general term for all Midrashic interpretation.

³³Wright, G. Frederick, Ed., Dallas Theological Seminary, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 73 (Charles Higham & Son, London, 1916), Pg. 124

it did not say?

No, remember the Midrashic hermeneutic, “designates an exegesis which, going more deeply than the mere literal sense, attempts to penetrate into the spirit of the Scriptures, to examine the text from all sides, and thereby to derive interpretations which are not immediately obvious.” Paul was utilizing this hermeneutic to declare a truth of the text that was not apparent from a literal viewpoint. No one before him would have understood that Psalm to speak of Christ’s ascension. It took the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to interpret that verse.

Another example is when Peter uses the Peshet interpretation. Many times a Peshet interpretation was preceded with the phrase “this is that.” As we already mentioned, generally speaking, “peshet,” which means “interpretation,” is the unveiling of the meaning of a text, which, hitherto, has remained hidden or unfulfilled. Thus, Peter was using this hermeneutic when he said in Acts 2:16, *this* – the occurrence of Pentecost, is *that* – the prophecy in Joel 2:28-29.

Perhaps, the foremost example of this hermeneutic in the New Testament was Matthew’s declaration in Matt. 2:15 that the removal of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus from Egypt, back to Nazareth, was a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1, which states, “Out of Egypt I called my Son.” From a literal interpretation of Hosea 11, one sees that the prophet is speaking of the removal of the nation of Israel out of Egypt by Moses, and yet Matthew says that it refers to Christ. Is Matthew treating the passage dishonestly? No, he is using a Peshet interpretation, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, based upon common Midrashic understanding.

This was a common hermeneutic of the first century. Its purpose was to pull out truths hidden in Scripture for the benefit of God’s people. They were not ignoring the literal meaning of the text, but were interpreting various Scriptures from a *Christocentric point of view*.

This hermeneutic continued to be used by Christians even after the days of the apostles, and this is what some of our ancient

brothers were utilizing when they would interpret various Old Testament passages, including Psalms 2:7, as verses referring to Christ Jesus.

It is most unfortunate, that some modern Christians, who have departed from the faith in regard to this doctrine, have simply dismissed those “church fathers” who interpreted verses in this way. Our ancient brothers were not ignorant, they knew what the literal meaning of the passage was teaching, but they were following the example of the apostles by using a hermeneutic they thought would bring edification to the saints and glory to God.

Perhaps, if we lived within a generation or two of the apostles it would be natural for us to continue to use a hermeneutic that we knew the apostles utilized and followed. We would feel we were imitating the apostles and bringing edification to the church by revealing more truths about Christ in the Old Testament.

It is unfair for some modern Christians to ridicule those brothers, intimating that they did not understand Scripture, and that they were using *eisegesis* rather than a literal *exegesis*. They really were doing neither; they simply had a Midrashic mindset, following a Midrashic hermeneutic common to that day.

And so we see our brothers of long ago were not being ignorant in their interpretations, but were following a well-respected hermeneutic used by the apostles.

However, let me agree in one area with those who dispute some of the interpretations our ancient brothers came up with using this hermeneutic, not in regard to this Psalm, but perhaps in regard to some other passages of Scripture. There is a difference between the apostles using that hermeneutic and other Christians using that hermeneutic. Today, we should focus on a literal hermeneutic.

With the Peshar hermeneutic one can come up with any interpretation one wants. The apostles were able to properly use it because they were infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13). However, no one else could ever claim such infallibility. They were revealing new revelation for the Church under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, were kept free from error. All their

interpretations were correct. However, the revelation is now complete. There is no new revelation today. It is recorded for us in *their writings* which constitute the New Testament.

Consequently, the “church fathers” did not have the infallibility to use that hermeneutic as the apostles did, and, as such, should not have spoken so “authoritatively” in some of their applications. We can never be dogmatic in those types of interpretations as the apostles were dogmatic. The apostles could be dogmatic that a certain verse in the Old Testament spoke of Christ in a certain way because they were writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We are not.

Nevertheless, it still may be alright for us to use that hermeneutic in order to bring out things about Christ in the Old Testament for the edification of the Church, if we do it in a very limited sense. In other words, there may still be things in the Old Testament that bespeak our Saviour that the apostles did not reveal or even write about, (e.g. Joseph as a picture of Christ, or how the Tabernacle in the Old Testament can be a type of Christ). There are still many truths of Christ contained in the Old Testament and using such a hermeneutic to bring them out can be very edifying, but because we do not have the authority of the Holy Spirit to declare that such an interpretation is absolutely true, we must be content with declaring we “think” this bespeaks our Saviour. For instance, we have all read commentary on the beauty of Christ in the Tabernacle, and it is most edifying, but we can never say for sure that such an interpretation is correct beyond all error. Some teachers will look at an article of the Tabernacle and apply it to Christ in a totally different way than we may apply it. Therefore, we can only be dogmatic if the article of the tabernacle that we are discussing was discussed by the apostles and given an authoritative interpretation.

Therefore, we should be content to follow the principle of a literal hermeneutic, as admonished in Scripture (Jn. 21:23), and use the Peshier interpretation in a limited way.

Consequently, when we come to Psalms 2:7, we must

interpret the passage literally within the context of the Psalm itself and within the greater context of all of Scripture, specifically the New Testament. Literally, the Psalm, in and of itself, does not bespeak the time of our Lord's resurrection; it primarily refers to the time in the future when the Lord returns to the earth to set up His millennial rule in Jerusalem. It refers to the time when He shall physically set His foot on Mt. Zion.

However, when we come to the *greater context* of the New Testament we realize that the apostles applied Ps. 2:7 in Peshet form to other events.

Paul applies it to the resurrection. Psalms 2:7 states that the phrase "Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten you" is a decree. The beginning of the verse says, "I will declare the decree." It is a decree that God has "declared." Paul tells us in Roman 1:4 that Jesus Christ, "...was 'declared' the Son of God with power by the resurrection of the dead according to the Spirit of holiness..." The declaration of Psalms 2:7 is the declaration of Rom. 1:4. Jesus Christ is the Son of God! When Christ took His seat at the right hand of God on high He became a king of the whole earth; He was inaugurated; He was the Christ, the anointed one of Psalms 2: 2. He was declared to be the unique Son of God who would rule the world (Ps. 89:27). It does not mean He was not a Son before his resurrection, but, as we will see later, it referred to a Sonship that bespoke rule and authority.

Therefore, when Paul states in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch:

"God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." Acts 13:33,

he is using a Peshet type hermeneutic by applying this verse to the resurrection.

This is an authoritative Peshet interpretation of Psalm 2:7 by Paul. But we must remember that other New Testament writers also made other authoritative, Peshet type, interpretations of this

Psalm.

Paul applies Psalm 2 to the resurrection, but Peter and John and the other apostles applied it to our Lord before the resurrection. In Acts 4:25-26 they equate Psalm 2:1-2 with the incarnate Lord before His resurrection, indeed, before His death. However, as we said before, when we interpret the Psalm from a literal standpoint, we realize the next two verses speak of the days right before His second coming. It states in verse 3, 4 and 5 that the LORD in the heaven shall laugh at those who stand against Him and His Christ, and the Lord (meaning Christ) shall have them in derision and shall speak to them with wrath. That is the wrath mankind will experience at His second coming.

Peter and John apply verses 1 and 2 to the incarnation; verse 3, 4 and 5 apply to the second coming in the distant future, and then Paul applies verse 7 back in time to the time of the resurrection. And so we see from a literal standpoint this Psalm applies to many different points in time. In fact, even though Paul applies verse 7 to the resurrection, we know it isn't literally, or completely, fulfilled until the Lord actually returns and takes his seat upon Mount Zion (vs. 6).

We are told in verse 6 that the decree of the Lord is actually declared when Christ is installed upon Mount Zion, which is in Jerusalem. This installation on Mt. Zion did not occur at his resurrection, so in a technical sense, verse 7 has not yet been fully fulfilled. It will be completely fulfilled when the Lord returns and sets his feet once more on Mount of Olives (cf. Zech. 14:1-4 with Acts 1:11). He then shall be installed upon Mount Zion (Zech. 14:9, 16; Rev. 14:1), as Psalm 2:6 states, and then the decree of verse 7 will be literally fulfilled.

Now some will say, "Well if that is the way the verses in the Psalm are applied, how could the apostles depart from such a literal hermeneutic?" But we forget, they were using a Peshier type hermeneutic, which the Lord himself utilized (Luke 4:16-21;

24:44, 45).³⁴

They were speaking by the inspiration of Scripture, and so applied the verses accordingly. We might assume they are taking things out of order, but the Holy Spirit guided their interpretation. Remember, the same thing can be said about Matthews's application of Hosea 11:1. It seems completely taken out of context, but we know it is true because he spoke and wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, the Holy Spirit utilizes this Psalm in more than one way which may not be apparent in the Psalm in and of itself.

However, as we said before, such a hermeneutic cannot be utilized by us today in the same way. We must follow a literal hermeneutic. But the importance of this exercise is to see that sometimes Scripture might take a verse and apply it in more than one way.

For example, this principle is also used with the application of Mal. 3:1 and Mal. 4:5 by our Lord to John the Baptist. He was using a Peshet hermeneutic. He uses the "this is that" principle when he states, "**This** is the one about whom it is written," in Matt. 11:10, 14. He applies Mal. 3:1 and Mal. 4:5 to John the Baptist, and yet, he states a few chapters later, that Mal. 4:5 also has a future application, as well, when it shall literally or completely be fulfilled by Elijah himself (Matt. 17:10-13).

Therefore, it should not surprise us when a particular verse from the Old Testament might have more than one application. This is why I believe Psalm 2:7 not only has application to the second coming, but also has application to the resurrection and has application to the eternal begetting of the Son. Its final application may be to the second coming, its declarative application to the

³⁴ The Lord actually used many hermeneutics of his day. For instance, he used another one called "light to heavy" in John 7:23 and in Matt. 7:11. Many of these hermeneutics were developed by Rabbi Hillel, who lived some sixty years before Christ was born, and, may indeed have been one of the many personages of the Old Testament who were truly saved in the inter-testamental period.

resurrection, but its theological application is to the eternal generation of the Son, and this is revealed to us in Heb. 1:5.

When we come to the first chapter of Hebrews, we find a different application of Ps. 2:7 than either the literal application at the second coming, or the declarative application at the Lord's resurrection. We see a theological application to the Lord's eternal generation. This is clearly seen when one recognizes the structure and pattern of the first few verses, and when one understands the Jewish thinking of that day. Let's first look at the structure.

In verse 1, the Holy Spirit takes us to the time of our Lord's incarnation, then, in verse 2, the Holy Spirit takes us way back to the time of creation. He states that the Son was the one through whom God created all things. Then He moves us back before time, into eternity, in verse 3 when He states that the Son is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person. When referring to the word "being" in the phrase, "Who being the brightness of his glory," A. T. Robertson says the word "being" means "absolute and timeless existence."³⁵

Then the next phrase in verse 3 moves us back into time, pass the time of creation, taking us all the way forward to the time of the incarnation when the Son died on the cross making a purification of our sins. And then, finally, the verse takes us forward to the time after His resurrection when He ascends to the right hand of God on high.

So we see that the writer of Hebrews emphasizes three aspects of our Lord's existence: His eternal existence, His incarnational existence, and finally, His post-resurrection existence. However, we should be careful to state the writer is not stating that there is a change in the nature of the eternal Son. He remains the same from eternity unto everlasting.

In commenting on this verse, Dean Alford states the following regarding the pronoun "who" at the beginning of verse

³⁵ Robertson, A. T., *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI 1960). Pg. 335

three:

“**Who** (this represents, it will be evident, rather the pre-existent than the incarnate Word. But it is perhaps a mistake to let this distinction be too prominent, and would lead to the idea of a change having taken place in the eternal relation of the Son to the Father, when He subjected himself to the conditions of space and time. Even then He could say of Himself, ‘The Son of Man which is in heaven’) **being** (see Phil. 2:6, which is also said of His pre-existent and essential being)³⁶

In other words, the writer is speaking of three distinct aspects of our Lord’s existence: His pre-incarnational (eternal) existence, His incarnational existence, and His post-resurrection existence, but these two additional aspects of His existence do not imply a change in His Divine and eternal nature. The Son took upon Himself human nature, which was unionized in one Person with the Divine nature, without change, without confusion, without division, without separation.

And so we see the writer emphasizes three aspects of our Lord’s existence, (without ever implying a change to His essential nature). This is the basic structure of the first few verses and verse 3 in particular.

Then in verse 4, the writer makes a comparison of the Lord with angels, demonstrating the Lord’s superiority to angels in relation to each of these three aspects of our Lord’s existence. Why would he introduce this concept into the text? Why would he bring up angels when writing to the Hebrews? And this brings us to the Jewish thinking of the day.

What many Christians do not understand, indeed, even many Jews, is that the Jewish concepts of the Godhead, in the first century, were many and varied regarding the being of God, (as we mentioned in the conclusion of the preceding chapter on the Persons of the Godhead in the Old Testament). The monotheism of the

³⁶ Alford, Henry, *The New Testament for English Readers*, (Moody Press, Chicago), Pg. 1440

first century was not the monotheism of today. This is very important to grasp so that we can properly understand the purpose of the writer of Hebrews in bringing up the comparison with angels.

Many Jews of the first century, and the centuries preceding it, believed that angels participated in the being of God. For example, Alan F. Segal states the following concerning this thinking:

“According to Jewish ideas, Metatron was an angel that was called “YHWH hakaton, or YHWH, Jr., and sits on a throne equal to God’s in 3 Enoch 10:1...the principle angel is not only head of the heavenly hosts but sometimes participates in God’s own being or divinity.”³⁷

In another book, he states that others viewed an angel, by the name of Yahoel, as being so great in God’s eyes, that he was named his vice-regent. He states in that book:

“From the text it is quite clear that Yahoel is God’s vice-regent, second only to God himself, and is the supreme figure in Jewish angelology.”³⁸

This Yahoel was the highest of the angels and was the dearest and closest to God’ heart. This was the milieu of Jewish thinking in which the writer of Hebrews was writing.

In another place Alan Segal states that many Jews believed that all the appearances of God in the Old Testament were appearances of angelic beings created by God. He states in his book *Two Powers in Heaven*:

“Characteristically, the inter-testamental writers interpret any human form in a theophany as the appearance of an angel. For instance, theophanies in

³⁷ Segal, Alan F., *Paul the Convert, The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*, (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990), pg. 42-43

³⁸ Segal, Alan F., *Two Powers in Heaven, Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, (E.J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1977), pg. 196

Judges, Exodus, and Genesis underlie the description of the angel Raphael's appearance and ascension in Tobit.³⁹

In addition, some Jewish doctrines taught that humans could actually become angels. He states it was commonly thought that many righteous patriarchs would become angelic beings.

“In the inter-testamental age, immortality (or resurrection) could be promised to the righteous in the form of ascent to angelhood. To the righteous is promised “You shall shine as the lights of heaven...and the portal of heaven shall be opened to you...You shall have great joy as angels of heaven... You shall become companions of the host of heaven: (I Enoch 104:2, 4, 6; cf. 39:6-7; Dan. 12:3; Mt. 13:43, 22:30), Therefore, almost any righteous person in the past could be called an angel.”⁴⁰

Many believed, Moses, himself, was elevated to a high station beside God. It is not clear if they considered him an angelic being, although it would be in keeping with the thinking of the time to consider him so. In any case, he is considered to be changed from a human being into a divine, if not an angelic being.

“...In the Testament of Abraham 11 (Recension A), some patriarchs are exalted as angels...Philo often speaks of Moses as being made into a divinity...he says that God placed the entire universe into Moses' hands and that the elements obeyed him as their master; then God rewarded Moses by appointing him a 'partner'...Philo refers to Deut 5:31 as proof that certain people are distinguished by God to be stationed 'beside himself'.”⁴¹

Philo even taught that the logos was an angel. Alan F. Segal states:

³⁹ Ibid., pg. 190

⁴⁰ Ibid., pg. 186, n. 7

⁴¹ Segal, Alan F., *Paul the Convert, The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*, (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990), pg. 44

“Philo identifies the heavenly man with the *logos*, which is identified with God’s archangel and principal helper in creation.”⁴²

And Irenaeus said:

“ According to certain of the Gnostics, this world was made by angels, and not by the Word of God.”⁴³

Alfred Edersheim, mentions in his classic work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, that one would think that Rabbinic works, dated after the Christian era, would present the Messiah in a less dignified manner, but the opposite is actually the truth, showing that much of the writing of that time was rooted in long held beliefs. In some of this writing he states that “the *premundane*, if not the *eternal existence of the Messiah* appears as matter of common belief.”⁴⁴

However, he goes on and shows that some believed the *premundane* Messiah was a created being. He states:

“...the Midrash on Prov. 8:9 (ed. Lemb. P. 7a) expressly mentions the Messiah among the seven things created before the world. The passage is the more important, as it throws light on quite a series of others, in which the Name of the Messiah is said to have been created before the world...Even if this were an ideal conception, it would prove the Messiah to be elevated above the ordinary conditions of humanity.”⁴⁵

In other writings preceding the appearance of our Lord, Edersheim states that some believed the Messiah was an angelic being greater than other angels, i.e. “the Angel of the Great Council

⁴² Ibid., pg. 189

⁴³ Roberts, Alexander; Donaldson, James, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1985), pg. 426

⁴⁴ Edersheim, Alfred, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. I* (E. R. Herrick & Company, New York, c.1897) Pg. 175

⁴⁵ Ibid., Pg. 175

(Isa. 9:6), probably the Angel of the Face...”⁴⁶

The Hebrews put much stock in angels. Angels always played an important role in their many deliverances. The Angel of the Lord delivered them from Egypt, and angels played a major role in delivering them from their enemies during their sojourning in the land.

Isaiah 63:9 states,

“In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the **angel of his presence** saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.”

This was the “Angel of the Face” that Edersheim mentions some Jews believed was the Messiah.

More than likely, all these varied views concerning angels and the varied views concerning the Messiah, were part and parcel of the all the Jewish myths, genealogies and fables that Paul warns believers to be wary of –

“This testimony is true. For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to **Jewish myths** and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. Titus 1:13-14

“As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to **myths and endless genealogies**, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. I Tim. 1:3-4

These myths and fables were so numerous and influential that Larry W. Hurtado summarizes in his book, *One God One Lord*, that “ancient Judaism embraced the idea that God had a particular angel more exalted than all others, whose authority and status made him second only to God and who bore some measure of divine

⁴⁶ Ibid., Pg. 172

glory.”⁴⁷

With this understanding of the first century thinking, concerning the status of angels, especially the “one particular angel” that was considered more exalted than any other, one can understand why the writer of Hebrews wished to make clear that the Son was not a created being but was One begotten of the Father before all time. He wished to show He was not an angel and never was an angel and, indeed, did not *become* an angel. Nor did he want the Jewish believers to think He was an exalted one because he was transformed into an angelic being. He wanted them to understand the Son was from eternity, and thus preceded and, indeed, was the One who created all angels, and thus was the One who held the highest honour next to God the Father.

Apparently, the Jewish believers addressed in this book, were in danger of falling back, not only into Judaism, *but were also in danger of returning to some of the false Jewish fables regarding the importance of angels, and to those false views regarding the nature of the Messiah that were so prevalent in the first century* (cf. Col. 2:18; I Tim 4:7; II Tim 4:3-44; Titus 1:14).

And so, because of all these varied teachings by the Jews regarding the nature of angelic orders, (the belief by some that the Messiah was an angelic being, and the belief that the righteous became, or were exalted into angels), the writer of Hebrews wished to affirm the true nature of the Son of God the Messiah.

The writer accomplishes this by stating in Heb. 1:4 that the Son was superior to the angels. He then continues and shows how He was superior to the angels *in each of the three aspects* of our Lord’s existence he mentioned in verse 3.

Therefore, now that we see the structure of the first few verses and the background of the Jewish thinking, let us now see how the writer demonstrates that the Son is not a part of the angelic hosts.

⁴⁷ Hurtado, Larry W., *One God One Lord, Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1988), pg. 81-82

Verse 4 is a transition verse which lays the basis for understanding the true nature of the Son. It is important to properly understand this verse. Most versions translate the first part of this verse as “being made,” or “having become.” These words are a translation of the Greek word “ginomai.” However, the word is usually translated simply as “be.”

In the King James Version it is translated 255 times as “be,” 69 times as “be made,” and it is translated 82 times as “come to pass.” Now it must be admitted that “being made” is a perfectly possible translation, and so is “having become.” However, when considering the aforementioned background of Jewish thinking, and how Jewish fables taught that righteous men would *become* angelic beings, I think we can see that that is not what the writer is declaring. I believe the better translation of the word would be either “being,” or “having been.”

Here are some other examples where this same word is translated in Scripture as “being,” or “having been.” In every place the participle is the same tense and the same voice.

“And he came to Capernaum: and **being** in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?” Mk. 9:33 KJV

“And **being** in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” Lu. 22:44 KJV

“But **being** in Rome sought me out very diligently, and found me” II Tim. 1:7 Darby

“And Jesus **having been** in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,” Matt. 26:6 Young’s Literal Translation

“There, **having been**, therefore, not a little dissension and disputation to Paul and Barnabas with them, they arranged for Paul and Barnabas, and certain others of them, to go up unto the apostles and elders to Jerusalem about this question,” Acts 15:2 Young’s Literal Translation

“And in like manner also, a Levite, **having been** about the place, having

come and seen, passed over on the opposite side.” Lu. 10:32 Young’s Literal Translation

The one Bible translation, that comes closest to this understanding of the word as “being” in Heb. 1:4, is the English Bishop’s Bible of 1568. It translates the phrase as, “Beyng (being) so much more excellent then the Angels.” This Bible version preceded the King James translation of 1611 which translates the word as “*being made*,” or, the New American Standard Bible translation of “*having become*.”

When one takes into account the many Jewish fables the writer of the epistle to Hebrews was trying to discount, one can now see how translating the word as “*being made*,” or “*having become*” defeats the whole purpose of the writer in showing that the Son “was” superior to angels.” The writer is trying to make clear that the Son was not “made” superior to angels, nor “became” superior to angels. He was trying to completely discredit the Jewish thinking that the Messiah was ever an angelic being, far superior to other angels, or that he became a high angelic being because of his own righteousness.

Remember, the context and structure of the passage is that there are three distinct aspects of the Lord’s existence beginning with His eternal existence. When one translates the phrase as “*being* so much more excellent than the angels,” or “*having been* so much more excellent than the angels,” one then demonstrates that the Son was already superior to the angels in His own eternal existence, not that His superiority was something earned or something He attained by “*becoming*.” “Being” more excellent encompasses all three aspects of our Lord’s existence. He is more excellent in His eternal existence to angels; He is more excellent in His incarnational existence; and He is more excellent in His post-resurrection existence.

To translate the phrase as “*being made*,” or “*having become*,” ignores the first aspect of our Lord’s existence – His eternal existence. As the creed states, He was “begotten not made.”

Our Lord ever was. There was no beginning to His existence. He did not become the Son, but ever was the Son.

Therefore, when one translates “ginomai” in this context as “being made,” or “having become,” one ignores the eternal existence of the Son that the writer is emphasizing, and actually is lending support to the false Jewish thinking of the day that righteous men could become angelic beings by the depth of their piety.⁴⁸

However, when the word is translated as “having been” or simply as “being,” the correct connotation is given to the word within the greater context of the passage. He is already more excellent than the angels because the angels are not eternal, and, as such, God never declared to them “Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee.” This refers to the first aspect of the Son’s existence – His eternal begottenness.

He is more excellent than the angels because God never said to any angel, “I will be a Father to Him and He will be a Son to me.” This refers to the second aspect of our Lord’s existence to which the writer referred to in verse 3 – His incarnation.

And finally, He is more excellent than the angels because the angels are commanded to worship Him when He is brought back into the world. This refers to the third aspect of the Son’s

⁴⁸ The question must naturally be asked, “Why then did the King James translators translate the word in this way, especially since the earlier English Bishop’s Bible translated it as “being?” The answer is, “I do not know.” And it seems most subsequent English translators followed their lead. Perhaps they were not familiar with the Jewish fables that were rampant at that day, and so they misunderstood the context in which Ps. 2:7 is being quoted. It is interesting to note, however, that some other translations in the world also understood the word as “being” or “having been,” and not as “being made,” or “having become.” The Russian Synodal Version, which translation work began in the early 1800’s translates the word as “being,” as does the Hungarian Bible, the Hungarian Kairoli. The Norwegian Bible, Det Norsk Bibelselkap, also translates it as “has been.”

existence – His post-resurrection exaltation.

Therefore, let's reread these two verses, with all this in mind and you will easily see the writer's progression of thought. I will use the Bishop's Bible translation with the spelling and grammar updated to Modern English.⁴⁹

“Who being the brightness of the glory, and the very image of his substance, upholding all things with the word of his power, having by himself purged our sins, has sat [down] on the right hand of the majesty on high: **being** so much more excellent then the Angels...”

Or translate it in the same way, substituting “having been” for “being.”

“Who being the brightness of the glory, and the very image of his substance, upholding all things with the word of his power, having by himself purged our sins, has sat [down] on the right hand of the majesty on high: **having been** so much more excellent then the Angels...”

And so, when we see the point that the writer of Hebrews is trying to make, we see him apply Ps. 2:7 in a different way than Paul applied it in Acts 13:33. In this portion of the Scripture the writer applies it to our Lord's eternal existence. The writer is saying He is more excellent than the angels because from eternity He has been the Son of God. The eternal decree is “Thou art my Son, today I have begotten you.” This, of course, cannot be said of angels. The writer of Hebrews wants his readers to understand that the Son, who was temporarily made a “little lower than the angels” (Heb. 2:9), was never a part of the angelic host but was someone who was greater or more excellent than the angels because He was always

⁴⁹ This is the passage with the spelling as used in the Bishop's Bible of 1568 – “Who beyng the bryghtnesse of the glorie, and the very image of his substaunce, vpholdyng all thynges with the worde of his power, hauing by him selfe poured our sinnes, hath syt on the ryght hande of the maiestie on hye: Beyng so much more excellent then the Angels...”

the eternal Son of God.

Ps. 2:7, in this verse, applies to our Lord's eternal generation and not to His resurrection. Remember, it is not an uncommon Biblical practice to apply one verse in many ways. A verse can apply to two different occasions, as we demonstrated with the Lord's example of John the Baptist and Elijah.

Now, some may object because they do not see eternity expressed in the Psalm. However, that is not necessarily correct. Eternity is expressed by the word "today." The word "today" was sometimes used by the Jews as an expression of eternity. Philo, who lived in the time of our Lord, reveals this fact in his writings. He declares:

"And Moses, it seems, testifies to the immortality of those persons, when he adds, 'You are all alive to this day;' and this day is interminable eternity, from which there is no departure; for the period of months, and years, and, in short, all the divisions of time, are only the inventions of men doing honour to number. **But the unerring proper name of eternity is "today."**

Consequently, the Jews of that time would have understood the application of Ps. 2:7, by the writer of Hebrews, to the eternal existence of the Son. It would not have been difficult for them to understand the writer's progression of thought.

This equating of "today" with eternity was a long held concept by the Jews, not just a concept of Philo. Isaiah uses this concept in Isa. 43:13. The passage reads as follows in the King James Version.

"Yea, before the **day** *was* I *am* he; and *there is* none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?"

Young's Literal Translation gives it as,

"Even from the **day** I *am* He, And there is no deliverer from My hand, I work, and who doth turn it back?"

And the New American Standard Bible actually translates the word “day” as “eternity.”

“Even from **eternity** I am He; And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?”

And so we see the writer of Hebrews affirms the eternal generation of the Son by his application of Ps. 2:7 to our Lord’s eternal existence. While Paul applies it to the resurrection, the writer of Hebrews applies it to the eternal day. Both applications are appropriate, because both applications are from the Holy Spirit.

One should not let Acts 13:33 be the only verse that governs all interpretations of Ps. 2:7. In other words, since Paul applies Ps. 2:7 to the resurrection in Acts 13:33, one should not then interpret every reference to Ps. 2:7 in the New Testament as a reference to the resurrection. If that is done, then the Psalm could not even be a prophecy of the future reign of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem during the millennium.

Let me explain. We see in the Psalm that the declaration of verse 7 does not occur until after the Lord has been installed as king on Mt. Zion (vs. 6). This never occurred at the Lord’s resurrection. Therefore, if Acts 13:33 is to govern all interpretations of Ps. 2:7, then one must believe that the Lord taking His seat in Mt. Zion (vs. 6) must refer to the Lord’s exaltation to the right hand of God after His ascension in Acts 1:11. In fact, technically, Ps. 2:7 would then apply to the Lord’s ascension and not His resurrection.

If that is true, then the Mt. Zion, referred to in Ps. 2:6, would have to be the Mt. Zion mentioned in heaven (Heb. 12:22), and the Psalm would not predict a millennial rule at all, but would be referring to the present rule of Christ in the heavens. As this would contradict Rev. 20:4-7, one must then realize that there must also be a future aspect to the fulfillment of Ps. 2:7, and that the Acts 13:33 reference was a Peshier type interpretation that should not be understood as a governing interpretation for all quotations of that

verse.

One needs to realize that sometimes a specific verse is given a prophetic fulfillment in more than one way outside the literal context of the passage. Of course, *this can only be done by the Holy Spirit* through the New Testament writers, as was done by Matthew in Hos. 11:1 and Matt. 2:15, and by our Lord Himself in regard to John the Baptist and Elijah. In this way, Ps. 2:7 is given prophetic fulfillment in the resurrection, and in the millennial reign of Christ, while ever being rooted in the eternal generation of the Son.

In fact, as we will presently see, the Holy Spirit even applies it in one more way, but first let me state one thing about the progression of these verses.

The use of progression in the unchanging existence of our Lord is also used by Paul in Philippians 2:6-11. He writes:

“Who, **being in the form of God**, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became **obedient unto death**, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also **hath highly exalted him**, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Do you see the progression of the relation of our Lord’s unchanging existence to the existence of Him in time? 1) Being in the form of God bespeaks His eternal existence. This parallels the passage in Hebrews which says He was the “brightness of His glory and the express image of His Person.” 2) Then Paul says that He empties Himself taking upon Himself the form of a servant becoming obedient to the death of the cross. This bespeaks our Lord’s incarnation and parallels the passage in Hebrews that says “He made purification for our sins.” 3) Paul says in Philippians 2:9 that Christ was highly exalted and given a name above every name.

This bespeaks the post-resurrection existence of our Lord and parallels the declaration of the writer of Hebrews that He “seated Himself at the right hand of Majesty on high.”

Perhaps, this might be an indication that Paul was really the one who penned the epistle of the Hebrews. However, the reason for quoting this passage, besides showing the parallel progression of thought, is that the exaltation of the post-resurrected Christ and the giving of a name to Him above all names brings us to the last phrase of verse 4, which we purposely left out when we gave the Bishop’s Bible’s translation of verse 3 and 4.

The last phrase of verse 4 declares that “He hath inherited a more excellent name than they.” The phrase is introduced by the little word “*hosos*,” which is variously translated by the words “as,” “as long as,” “as many as,” and “*even as*,” etc. It is a relative pronoun which is used as a comparative. In other words, the name that He has inherited is also much more excellent than any name of the angels.

The thought is not that *He is superior because He has inherited* a more excellent name, but that He has *inherited a more excellent name because He is superior*. In other words, inheriting a more excellent name is further proof that He was superior. In this case, the second phrase gives further proof or definition to the claim of the first phrase. This same construction is shown in Heb. 3:3. The first phrase in Heb. 3:3 states that Jesus has more glory than Moses, and the second gives further proof or definition to this claim by stating that the builder of the house has more glory than the house.

This grammatical construction is also used in Heb. 8:6. The thought is not that He has obtained an excellent ministry “because” He is a mediator of a better covenant. The thought is that Christ, as a high priest, has obtained a better ministry than the ministry of an earthly high priest, “even as” He has is a mediator of a covenant that is better than the old covenant. They are two separate, but comparative thoughts.

Other examples of this are Acts. 2:39 and Acts 5:37 where

hosos is translated in the King James Version as “*even* as many as.” In these verses we see the King James translators supplied the little word “*even*” to give the sense of further definition. This is an important distinction that must be kept in mind in order to follow the progression of thought of the writer of Hebrews.

Because of this distinction, a better translation of verse 4 would be as follows: “being so much more excellent than the angels, *even* as he has obtained a more excellent name than they,” or, “having been so much more excellent than angels, *even* as he as obtained a more excellent name than they.”

The translation that comes closest to this rendering of the two phrases is the Revised Standard Version, although they translate the first phrase as “having become,” rather than simply “being.” However, they demonstrate the idea of comparison and fuller definition of the second phrase to the first phrase. They do not make the second phrase the basis for the claim of the first phrase, as the majority of the translations do, but present both phrases as two separate, but comparative phrases. They translate it as follows.

“having become as much superior to angels, as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.”

Consequently, when we come back to our passage we see the writer was declaring that the Son was more excellent than any angel because He was the eternal Son of God; He was not a created being like angels. Secondly, He was more excellent than any angel because He had a unique relationship with the Father in His incarnation, and, thirdly, He was more excellent than any angel because He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High in His post-resurrection state.

Then the writer adds He *even* was superior to angels because He also obtained a more excellent name than they ever did, and now he proceeds to give Scriptural references for his claims, starting with verse 5. However, this claim begins in verse 4 with a linguistic structure called a *Chiasmus*.

A *Chiasmus* is used many times in the New Testament, especially by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews. John Albert Bengel, the famous Greek scholar, gives a good description of the *Chiasmus* in his *Gnomon of the New Testament*. It would be worthwhile to quote it here. I will give the Greek portions in English in order to facilitate the understanding.

“Chiasmus...is a figurative mode of speaking, when two pairs of words or propositions are so arranged, as that the attentive reader may understand that a relation subsists between both words or propositions of the former pair, and both words or propositions of the latter pair.

Chiasmus is observed as being either direct or inverted...In a word: Let there be two pairs: A and B, C and D. If the relation is of the A to the C, and of the B to the D, there is a direct Chiasmus. If the relation is of the A to the D, and of the B to the C, it is an inverted Chiasmus.”⁵⁰

I know this sounds confusing, but it is an important linguistic tool to understand, if one wants to follow the teaching of the writer to Hebrews. Bengel continues with an example of a simple *Chiasmus* to help a reader understand its construction.

“...I will now make plain by as simple an example as possible: In the Epistle to Philemon, ver. 5 we have an *inverted Chiasmus*...Hearing of your – **A**) love – **B**) and faith which you have – **C**) toward the Lord Jesus – **D**) and toward all the saints. [In this example,] **A**) is connected with **D**), love – to all the saints: **B**) is connected with **C**) the *faith* which thou hast in the Lord Jesus.

Let us imagine the *direct* Chiasmus: Hearing of your – **A**) love – **B**) and faith which you have – **C**) toward all the saints – **D**) and toward the Lord Jesus. **A**) is connected with **C**), and **B**) with **D**).”⁵¹

In his second example you see that he switches the phrase “toward the Lord Jesus,” and the phrase, “toward the saints,” so the

⁵⁰ Bengel, John Albert, *Gnomon of the New Testament Vol. IV*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1873), pg. 397

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 397

phrase, “toward the saints” is now in position C), and the phrase “toward the Lord Jesus” is in position D). If Paul had actually written the verse in this order, he then would have been using a *direct Chiasmus*.

Moreover, if Paul was not using a *Chiasmus* at all, he would have written the verse as follows: “Hearing of –A) your love – B) you have toward the saints – C) and of your faith – D) you have toward the Lord Jesus.” In this case A) would have directly connected with B), and C) with D).

Therefore, when we read verse 4 and 5 we recognize that the writer is using a Chiasmus. **A)** is the phrase “being so much more excellent than angels, and **B)** is the phrase “*even* as he as obtained a more excellent name than they.” **C)** is verses 5-7 which states, “For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee?’ And again, ‘I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to me?’ And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him.’ And of the angels He says, ‘Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.’” And finally, **D)** is the phrase in verse 13, “But to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet?’”

This is an example of a direct Chiasmus. **A)** is connected with **C)**, and **B)** is connected with **D)**.⁵² I know this still may sound confusing, but this is a part of the linguistic techniques the writers of the New Testament often used, and much blessing may be obtained by observing them.

Therefore, we can now reach some conclusions regarding this portion of Scripture. The writer of Hebrews was declaring that the Son, the Messiah, was not an angelic being created by God, as some Jewish fables taught, but was the eternal Son of God who was

⁵² It should be noted that Bengel prefers to see this portion of Scripture as an indirect Chiasmus, but, as will be demonstrated, I believe a direct Chiasmus better fits the writer to the Hebrews argument regarding the nature of the Messiah.

the exact image of God the Father, and was ever the brightness of His glory. Therefore, because He was the eternal Son, He was so much more excellent than angels.

As proof of this, the writer quotes Ps. 2:7, “Thou art my Son, today I have begotten you.” Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer is making a Peshet type interpretation of Ps. 2:7, declaring the Messiah, or the Son, was the eternal Son because Scripture says He was God’s Son who was begotten by God in eternity. “Today,” the day of His begetting, was the day of eternity. His was an eternal generation. He was the begotten Son of God before all time – this proved that the Messiah was eternal and was not an angelic being, but was one who was superior to angels.

Now we can see why “ginomai” in Heb. 1:4 should *not* be translated as “being made” or “having become.” If it is translated in that way, then Heb. 1:3 cannot refer to the Son’s eternal existence, for he was not “made” or created at some point in time, nor did He at some point in time “become” the exact image of the Father. He always was the exact image of the Father. You see, the only way the Son could be the exact image of the Father is for Himself to be as eternal as the Father. The finite can never image the infinite, nor can the temporal image the eternal. Therefore, if the Son is the exact image of the Father, He, by definition, must also be eternal.

Moreover, since the Greek word “ginomai” is an aorist participle, it must refer back to the statements of verse 3, and since verse 3 begins with the Son’s eternal existence, the Scriptural proof the writer gives, (Ps. 2:7), must be referring to the Son’s eternal begetting and not to his resurrection. If it referred to the Lord’s resurrection, the writer would not be disproving the false Jewish fables regarding the nature of the Son, or the Messiah.

The purpose of the writer of Hebrews was to disprove all these Jewish fables that were threatening the life of the Church, and were denigrating the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was affirming the eternal existence of the Messiah by demonstrating that the Messiah was the eternal Son of God who was begotten by God in eternity. He was not a created angel, whether Metatron,

Yahoel or any other being in Jewish traditions. Nor was He a righteous man who was transformed and exalted into an angelic status. Rather, He was the eternal Son of God, begotten by God before all time.

The Holy Spirit applies Psalm 2:7 to our Lord's resurrection in Acts 13:33, but in Hebrews 1:5, he applies it to our Lord's eternal generation, and, as we will find presently, in Heb. 5:5 he applies it to our Lord's incarnation.

Let us continue. The next statement the writer makes in verse 3 is that the Son made a "purification of sins." He gave his life as a sacrifice for sin, thereby, making a reference to His incarnational existence and not His eternal existence. In this too, He was more excellent than the angels, and the Scriptural proof he gives in verse 5 is taken from II Sam. 7:14 which states, "I will be a Father to him and He shall be a Son to Me."

This verse literally applied to Solomon, who was to build the temple of God. We know this because the next part of this verse states, "when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men." This could never apply to the Son for He never committed iniquity, nor was there any deceit in His mouth (II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 2:22). But the first part of the verse is applied in Peshet form, by the Holy Spirit, to the Lord Jesus, because the Lord Jesus was the Son of God, the anointed king of Israel (Jn. 1:49).

In that culture, a son was to receive the same honour as the father (cf. Mk. 12:6). Therefore, when the Lord tells David that his seed will have a special relationship with God as a "son," David understood that great honour will be bestowed upon him that others did not possess, (for every Israelite was considered a son of God), but David understood this would be a special type of sonship with great honour. Ethan the Ezrahite bespeaks this great honour of anointed kings when he states in Psalm 89:27, "Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth."

However, Jesus, unlike Solomon, was not bestowed with this honour of Sonship because He was "anointed" king, but rather

He was the anointed “King,” because He already possessed this honour of Sonship. Christ did not earn the honour of Sonship through appointment; He already possessed the honour of Sonship by nature. He possessed the honour of Sonship *before* he was exalted to the throne, not *after* he ascended the throne like Solomon. John 5:23 states:

“in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”
John 5:23

We see from this verse that Christ was already the Son before He was sent into the world by the Father. He was not made a Son because He was installed as a king as David’s other descendents were, in fact, He was never installed on Mt. Zion as king of Israel during His incarnation. That will happen when He returns a second time. As we said before, He was already the king of Israel because He already was the Son. His appointment as King in the future will simply be an affirmation of this eternal reality.

Another reason why we know that this prophecy had a dual fulfillment is because II Sam. 7:12 says that God will raise up the seed of David to build His temple *after David had died*. Well, David was not dead when Solomon was raised up to be king (I Kings 1:17-48), therefore, the prophecy also had a future application. Solomon built a physical temple in Jerusalem, but the Messiah who was to come, would build the true spiritual temple of God.

Although there is much more we could say about this, it will lead us away from the main focus of this chapter, but let it suffice that this bespeaks the great honour and glory that was the Son’s, because He was the Son of God, (Jn. 11:27), before He came into the world, and thus was the Son of God, the king of Israel (Jn. 1:49) before He was exalted to the throne in Ps. 110:1. That could never have been true of any angelic being, therefore, even in His incarnation, in which He was made a little lower than angels,

(Heb. 2:7), the Son was still more excellent than the angels.

The last aspect of the Son's existence that the writer of Hebrews refers to is the post-resurrection state of Christ. He says in verse 3, that after the Son had made a purification of sins, He "sat down on the right hand of the majesty on High." The Scriptural proof he gives in verse 6 and 7 for this reads as follows, "And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him.'" And of the angels He says, 'Who makes His angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.'" The quote in verse 7 is taken from Ps. 104:4, but the first quote in verse 6 is not found in most Bibles today. That is because the underlying Hebrew text of this verse, which is used in most Bible translations, does not contain this phrase. However, that ancient Greek translation, the Septuagint, from which the writer of Hebrews quotes, contains this phrase in Deut. 32:43. It reads:

"Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, **and let all the angels of God worship him**; rejoice ye Gentiles, with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and he will render vengeance, and recompense justice to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him; and the Lord shall purge the land of his people.

When compared with most Bibles today, you will see that this phrase is missing. However, since this verse is present in the New Testament, we have affirmation that his phrase was a part of the original Hebrew text of Deuteronomy, and therefore should be included in our Bibles. As added confirmation, the Hebrew text of this verse in Deuteronomy, which was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, also contained this phrase. Therefore, let us now look at this portion of Scripture.

When we come to this text we see that it refers to the time of our Lord's second coming when He comes to judge the world of its sin (Rev. 19:11-15, cf. II Thess. 1:7). Because of this, we also see the writer of Hebrews declaring the superiority of the Son to the angels in His post-resurrection existence, for the angels are commanded to worship Him, not only when He sat down at the

right hand of God after His resurrection two thousand years ago (I Pet. 3:22), but also when He comes again into the world again at His second coming (Deut. 32:43 LXX).

This is further affirmed because His angels are made a flame of fire. At the time of the Lord's second coming, the angels are told to execute the wrath of God and the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16-17; 8:8; 14:18; 16:1). He is superior to the angels because the angels are made His flames of fire.

And so we see that the writer of Hebrews confirms his declaration to the Jewish believers that God spoke in these last days by the eternal Son of God, who was begotten by the Father before all time, was made of the seed of David in time, and was exalted to the right hand of God for all time.

He connected the first part of the direct Chiasmus **A**) of verse 4, with the corresponding part of the Chiasmus, **C**) of verses 5-7. He now proceeds to complete the Chiasmus **B**), with the last part of the Chiasmus, **D**) of verse 13. Let's now look at those verses.

The last phrase of verse 4, which is the **B**) of the Chiasmus, declares, “*even* as He as obtained a more excellent name than they.” This is completed by verse 13, **D**), which states, “But to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet?’”

This last part of the *Chiasmus* is introduced with Heb. 1:8-12 which states:

“But of the **Son** He says, ‘Thy throne, O **God**, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. Thou has loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Thy God, hath **anointed** thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions.’ And, ‘Thou, **LORD**, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands; they will perish, but Thou remainest; and they all will become old as a garment, and as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up; as a garment they will also be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end.’”

This quote is taken from the LXX translation of Ps. 45:6-7

and Ps. 102:25-27, which are Messianic Psalms bespeaking the glories of the Lord's Christ. In Psalm 45, the one addressed is said to be the King, (vs. 1), who is told to gird on his sword in splendor and majesty and go forth to make war against his enemies (vs. 3-5). Then in verse 6 the portion of the Psalm is introduced that is quoted here in Hebrews.

When we put the quote in Hebrews 1: 8-9 together with the first part of Psalm 45, we see that the Son, who the writer of Hebrews has just demonstrated to be the eternal Son, is not only the eternal Son, but is also King, and is God, whose throne is forever and ever. Then in Heb. 1:9 we see that He is also the Lord's Christ, because He has been "anointed" by God. Then, finally, the writer of Hebrews identifies Him in Heb. 1:10 as being none other than the LORD, because the LORD in verse 10 is the same as the Son in verse 8. By quoting Ps. 102:25 in conjunction with Ps. 45 the writer of Hebrews is identifying the eternal Son as being God, who is the anointed (Christ) King, who is none other than Jehovah, the LORD, who laid the foundation of the earth.

With this as a basis, he then introduces the last part of the *Chiasmus D*).

"But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet?'"

This is a quote from Ps. 110:1:1.

The writer of Hebrews is declaring that there is not one angel who has ever inherited a more excellent name than what the Son inherited for God has never told any angel to sit at His right hand until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.

Now, some may wonder, "What does that have to do with inheriting a name?" The answer would be plain to any Hebrew, because the one who is asked to sit at the right hand of God is given Lordship over all the earth. He is given the name of "Lord." The writer of Hebrews is not saying he is given the name – Son. He has already demonstrated that the name "Son" is his from all eternity.

He is here given the name “Lord,” as the *Chiasmus* demonstrates.

Peter speaks of this in Acts 2:32-36, when he says that Jesus has been made both Lord and Christ. Peter says, beginning in verse 32, the following, which parallels our passage in Hebrews:

“This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR THY FEET."’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Peter clearly says that Jesus has been made Lord. Now, some may wonder, “How could he be made Lord, was He not Lord before He died?” Yes, indeed, He was. He was ever the LORD, as we already saw in the chapter on the Persons of the Godhead, and as also we saw in the New Testament (e.g. Matt. 3:3; Lu. 2:11). But Peter and the writer of Hebrews are talking of something else. They are using “Lord,” in the sense of Master. Jesus was the LORD, meaning Jehovah, and He was Lord, meaning Master of His disciples and those in Israel, but He was “made” Lord, meaning *Master of the whole earth*. This is the mystery of the incarnation.

In his divinity, Jesus was ever the Master of the whole earth, but in his humanity he needed to learn obedience through the things which he suffered (Heb. 5:8); He needed to be made a little lower than the angels, suffering the death of the cross, so that He might be crowned with glory and honour and be exalted to the right hand of God and be made “Lord” the Master of the whole earth (see Heb. 2:9).

Remember, Satan tried to tempt Jesus to circumvent this process by bowing down to him in order to receive the kingdoms of the world in Luke 4:5-7.

“And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a

moment of time. And the devil said to Him, ‘I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.’”

And he tried again through Peter in Matt. 16:20-23, when he tried to dissuade Christ from taking the way of the cross. As the writer of Hebrews says, the Son learned obedience through the things which He suffered. And the greatest thing He suffered was the death upon the cross. But the way of the cross led to great glory and honour and ownership of all the kingdoms of the world. And because of this, Paul says in Philippians, “He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name.” The name He received at His exaltation was the name “Lord.” Let us now look more closely at this.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that the Son was told to sit at the right hand of the majesty on High. As we said before, this is quoted from Ps. 110:1, which says,

“The LORD (Jehovah) says to my Lord (Adon), Sit at my right hand, until I make thine enemies a footstool for thy feet.”

The first use of LORD is Jehovah, referring to the Father, and He says to David’s Lord (Adon-Christ), “sit thou at my right hand.” And in Ps. 110:5 Christ is called *Adon* in its emphatic form – *Adonai*. We do not see this in English, but the Hebrew uses two different words for Lord. It is this second form of Lord, (Adon - Master) that Peter says Christ was made.

F.F. Bruce speaks of this second name for Lord.

“The name whose consonantal skeleton is YHWH came to be regarded as so sacred among the Jews that it might not be pronounced. In MT it is usually supplied with the vowel points of Adonai, Lord, that the reader may know to pronounce that title in place of the Ineffable name. Similarly, in LXX it is regularly represented by kurios (Lord) without the

definite article. In Ps. 110:1 (LXX), quoted in v. 34 ...the first kurios represents YHWH; the second occurrence of the word, this time meaning “lord.” But when Peter says that God has made Jesus “Lord,” he gives that title a fullness of meaning far beyond that of a mere courtesy title.” (Which F.F. Bruce thinks is the ineffable name of Jehovah)⁵³

This is what the writer of Hebrews is referring to. This is the name that He has inherited that none of the angels has ever inherited – the name Lord, (*Adon*), which gave the Saviour title to the world, to be its Ruler and its Master. None of the angels had ever been given this name. Jesus earned this name by being obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, and by overcoming in all things so as to inherit that name which is most excellent (cf. Rev. 3:21; 2:26-27). That is why Ps. 110:1 is connected by *Chiasmus* to Heb. 1:4b.

But that is not all. Unlike F.F. Bruce, I do not believe Acts 2:36 also refers to the name Jehovah. I believe it only refers to the name *Adon* or its emphatic form, *Adonai*, which the Lord received in his exaltation. But like F.F. Bruce, I also believe that title has a fullness of meaning “far beyond that of a mere courtesy title.”

In the Old Testament, the Lord (*Adon*) is also identified as none other than the LORD (*Jehovah*).

“And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD (*Jehovah*), saith the Lord (*Adonai*) GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.” Eze. 36:23 KJV

And in Isaiah we are told:

“Therefore saith the Lord (*Adon*), the LORD (*Jehovah*) of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies.” Isa. 1:24 KJV

⁵³ Bruce, F. F., *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI 1956) Pg. 73-74 (note 65)

Here we clearly see that Jesus, who was made the Lord (*Adon*), as to his humanity, is none other than the LORD (*Jehovah*), as to His deity. Therefore, Jesus is truly Lord – *Adonai* and *Jehovah*. There is only One to whom God would make the world subservient, and that was the Lord, the anointed (Christ) of God, and He was none other than the Lord Jehovah.

Therefore, the only one who could sit at the right hand is the Son who was given, who was then born a child of a virgin (cf. Isa. 9:6; Isa. 7: 14), who died on the cross (Ps. 22:16), who was resurrected from the dead (Ps.16:10), and who was then exalted to the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1). The one who would fulfill all those aspects would be the one to inherit a name above every name, for that name is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, the name that is inherited is not the name of “Son,” for that name was the Lord’s name for all of eternity. Without understanding the nature of the *Chiasmus*, one might think that is what the writer was saying. But, no, the writer was referring to a name that was inherited by one who already had the name of “Son.” Isaiah says that “a Son shall be given, a child shall be born” of the Virgin. He was already the Son before He was born of the Virgin. That was not the name He inherited. The name He inherited which no angel had ever inherited, and indeed, was not able to inherit, was the name, “Lord (*Adon*) of the whole earth.”

“The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord (*Adon*) of the whole earth.” Ps. 97:5 KJV

He inherited the name Jesus at his birth. And He inherited the name Christ, because He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. But the name, Lord (*Adon*, or *Adonai*) of all the earth, He inherited at His exaltation to the right hand of God. This is the name more excellent than any name of any angel.

Moreover, because He has now been given this name, being made Lord of all the earth, Paul now says that at the name of Jesus, the name which people once mocked, at that name now,

“every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (*Jehovah*)” (Phil. 2: 10-11).

The Holy Spirit, through the writer of Hebrews, was exhorting the Jewish believers to remain faithful, and not give heed to Jewish fables, but to ever affirm all that the Lord Jesus Christ was. He was the Messiah, not an angelic or created being, but the eternal Son of God, begotten of God before all time. He was born of a Virgin. He was the one who died on the cross, purging our sins, and was the one who was exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on High, where he received that most excellent name never held by any angel.

And so, in concluding this precious passage of Scripture, we have seen that Ps. 2:7, in the context of the passage, is not referring to the resurrection of the Lord, but is referring to His eternal generation. The writer was using a Peshier type hermeneutic, just like Paul used in Acts 13:33, but here the Holy Spirit applies it to our Lord’s eternal begetting, not His resurrection. However, there is one more Peshier type interpretation of this Psalm by the Holy Spirit in Scripture. The only other place where Ps. 2:7 is quoted in the entire New Testament is found in Heb. 5:5 and it is to that passage we would now like to turn.

The writer of Hebrews, in chapter five, talks about the priestly work of our Saviour. He says:

“For every high priest taken from amongst men is established for men in things relating to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; being able to exercise forbearance towards the ignorant and erring, since he himself also is clothed with infirmity; and, on account of this infirmity, he ought, even as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no one takes the honour to himself but as called by God, even as Aaron also. Thus the Christ also has not glorified himself to be made a high priest; but he who had said to him, Thou art my Son, I have to-day begotten thee. Even as also in another place he says, Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedec. Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up both supplications and entreaties to him who was able to

save him out of death, with strong crying and tears; (and having been heard because of his piety;) though he were Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered; and having been perfected, became to all them that obey him, author of eternal salvation; addressed by God as high priest according to the order of Melchisedec.” Heb. 5:1-10 (Darby)

Here we find three things, 1) the High Priest is taken from men, 2) no one takes this honour upon himself, and 3) Christ is designated the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

We are not told when this honour of High Priesthood was bestowed upon Christ, but we know it could not have been before His incarnation, for the High Priest is taken from amongst men. This is also confirmed for us in Heb. 2:17-18 which reads:

“For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be **made like His brethren** in all things, that He might become **a merciful and faithful high priest** in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

Moreover, we know from Heb. 7:26-27 that he had to be a High Priest before His resurrection, for the writer says a high priest must first offer up sacrifices for the sins of the people, but the Son (vs. 28), as a High Priest, offered up a sacrifice for the sins of the people by offering up Himself upon the cross (cf. Heb. 10:11-14).

Therefore, we see that the declaration of Christ, as a High Priest, had to occur after our Lord’s birth in Bethlehem, but before His resurrection from the dead. This is significant because the writer equates the “declaration” of our Lord’s priesthood with His “declaration” of His Sonship. Therefore, *this declaration of Sonship had to occur before the resurrection.*

Consequently, we have another application of Ps. 2:7 which cannot be applied, like Paul applied it, to the resurrection, and, more than likely, cannot even apply to our Lord’s eternal generation. It seems the writer is applying it to our Lord’s

incarnation.

We know that we cannot apply it to the Lord's resurrection, because the type of Sonship, associated with the resurrection, did not involve suffering, but involved exaltation and rule. However the type of Sonship in these verses involves suffering, for He says in verse 8, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered."

In other words, the declaration, "Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten you" cannot, in this verse, refer to the Sonship of His resurrection, because verse 8 speaks of the Sonship of His suffering. He was already declared a Son before He suffered, therefore, the day of this declaration of Sonship had to have occurred before His suffering, which would leave us with either the "day of eternity" (as in Heb. 1:5), or the "day of His incarnation."

If I had to choose, I would say it applies to the Lord's incarnation, and not to His eternal generation, because the immediate context of the passage is the Lord's incarnation and His ministry as High Priest. Therefore, most likely, it refers to our Lord's begetting in the Virgin Mary.

Matthew 1:20-21 states:

"But while he pondered on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, fear not to take to thee Mary, thy wife, for that which is **begotten** in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a **son**, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." (Darby)

But someone will say, "It says He was begotten by the Holy Spirit. If that is the case, how could it apply to Ps. 2:7 which tells us it was the Father who begat Him?" To find the answer to this we must turn to Luke 1:35 which states,

"And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the **Son of God.**" (ASV)

In this verse we are given the added information that not only shall the Holy Spirit come upon Mary, but the power of the Most High shall overshadow her. The “Most High” is another name of God the Father. In fact, just three verses earlier, Luke states, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the “Most High;” and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David” (also cf. Mk. 5:7; Acts. 7:48; 16:17). Therefore, we are told that God the Father is also involved in the begetting of the Son in Mary. (Perhaps this begetting, as it involves the Lord’s human nature, was done by God the Father through the Holy Spirit as we are told that we are *begotten by God the Father* in John 1:13, and yet are also spoken as being *born of the Spirit* in John 3:6-8. Except, of course, with us it refers to a spiritual birth, whereas with Christ, in his humanity, it referred to a physical birth).

Therefore, we see that the time of our Lord’s incarnation was also called a begetting of God, and it is to this begetting in time that I believe the writer in Hebrews is applying Ps. 2:7 in this passage.

And so, in conclusion, we find that Ps. 2:7 is a verse from the Old Testament that was applied by the writers of the New Testament, in Peshet form, to three different occasions. The writer of Hebrews applies it to the Son’s eternal generation in Heb. 1:5. He applies it to our Lord’s begetting in the Virgin Mary in Heb. 5:5, and Paul applies it to our Lord’s resurrection in Acts 13:33 – three different Peshet or, perhaps, Midrashic interpretations, but Peshet or Midrashic interpretations inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit takes the one verse of Ps. 2:7 and gives it three different applications, leading up to that one final application when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again to this earth, and is declared, one last time, to be the God the Son – He who was eternally begotten by God the Father and declared Son in eternity, in His incarnation, in His resurrection, and finally, in that final exaltation when He will take His rightful place upon Mt. Zion to rule in peace and righteousness forever and ever.

“Thus says the LORD, ‘I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.’” Zech. 8:3

MONOGENES –THE REVELATORY WORD OF OUR SAVIOUR

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; **hear ye him.** Matt. 17:5

For God so loved the world, that he gave his **only begotten Son**, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills **to reveal Him.** Matt. 11:27

We are told in these precious portions of Scripture that the Lord Jesus was God's "beloved" and "only begotten" Son. As such, the Father gives the disciples a command to "hear ye him." This is the heartfelt desire of the Heavenly Father to his children. The Father has many sons (Jn. 1:12), but only one "Only Begotten" Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, the Son is the only one who can reveal the true nature, character and purpose of the Father. None other can show forth the Father, for He alone is in the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). He alone exists in the form of God (Phil. 2:6). He alone is the radiance of his glory (Heb. 1:3). And He alone is the exact representation of His Person (Heb. 1:3).

God the Father desires that we listen to the Son, for only by listening to the Son can the believer come to a full knowledge of who God is according to His nature. When a believer ignores something that the Lord Jesus says, he is restricting his own growth in the knowledge of God. And when a believer nullifies or alters the words of Jesus, he not only restricts his growth in the knowledge of God, he is also stultifying his own growth into Christian maturity. Why is this so? Because Peter tells us that the grace we need for

spiritual growth is intimately tied to our knowledge of God Himself (II Pet. 1:2). It is as we grow in our knowledge of our God that His grace is multiplied to us, and it is only by such a multiplication of grace that a Christian can grow into full maturity (II Pet. 3:18; Acts 20:32; cf. Lu. 2:40). Consequently, it is very important to listen carefully to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially when He tells us that He is the “Only Begotten” Son of God (Jn. 3:16). These are revelatory words. Only He can give us those words of eternal life that leads to a full knowledge of God (Jn. 6:68; 17:3). Moreover, how important it is to accept them in their plain and normal sense. Only when one understands the words He gives to us, is one able to grow in life, for light and life are always closely linked together (Prov. 16:15; Jn. 1:4; 8:12). This is an important principle. Our spiritual well-being is at stake. One will never lose his salvation from such willful ignorance of the words of our Lord, but one will certainly hinder his spiritual growth by such willful ignorance. When we understand this spiritual principle, we can understand why it is so important to contend for the Faith in these last days when some are departing from the Faith.

Scripture warns us that in the last days some Christians will depart from the Faith, and one of the biggest departures from the Historic Christian Faith is being caused by a small group of modern Christian teachers who are altering this important revelatory word of Jesus regarding his relationship to God the Father. They are telling Christians, (in books and in new translations of Scripture), that “monogenes” was misunderstood by the Greek speaking population of the early Church. They are saying that Christian ministers of the first three centuries of the Church did not understand their own mother tongue, and as such, misled generation after generation of Christians for almost 1900 years regarding this important aspect of the Faith.

What they are really claiming is that because they are now on the scene, the “true” Faith is being clarified because they have deciphered the true meaning of “monogenes.” Men, who for the most part, have English for their mother tongue are now telling us

that men, whose mother tongue was Greek, did not understand their own language. Christian teachers of long ago, who grew up speaking the Greek language, who learned Greek from the time they were little children, are accused of misunderstanding their own native language. They are saying that for almost two thousand years the true Faith was withheld from the Church and that the Holy Spirit had to wait for the modern teachers to be born in order to reveal to Christians the “true” Faith.

They are in reality saying that for almost two thousand years the Church was teaching error regarding the revelatory word “monogenes,” and for two thousand years the Church did not correctly understand the true Faith! Their assertions really mean there have been no godly ministers for the last 1900 years to correctly teach the Church the truth about the Faith, but now that the new teachers are here, they are able to do so.

This betrays nothing but pride and a separation from those who have gone before. It betrays their belief that the Faith has been obscured for two thousand years and they alone are now teaching the true Faith. And it betrays their belief that our ancient brothers misunderstood the Greek word *monogenes*, thereby producing a false belief that our Lord was begotten of the Father before all time.

Dear brethren, do not be carried away by this new thinking. Hold fast to the Faith that the Holy Spirit has affirmed through untold godly men throughout all of Church History. There is overwhelming historical and linguistic evidence that “monogenes” was used by the apostle John, indeed, by our Lord Himself, to mean “only begotten” or “only born.” They claim otherwise, but the evidence contradicts their assertion.

Nevertheless, the new teachers continue to alter the historic definition of “monogenes,” knowing that if they successfully obscure the true meaning of this word they will be successful in obscuring the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. (Or, perhaps, they are doing it unknowingly, nevertheless, such a view is a departure from the Faith).

I am afraid the real reason behind this attempt by modern

teachers to alter the true meaning of this word is because they have already altered the definition of the Historic Christian Faith in their own minds from an orthodox viewpoint to a heterodox viewpoint.

Many of the modern teachers (Neo-Trinitarians) do not believe, (as the Nicene Creed affirms), that our Lord was begotten of the Father before all time. Perhaps, they think if they can convince Christians of this new definition and the error of the old definition, they can complete their transformation of the Historic Christian Faith into a faith of their own making.

As such, many think it is enough to say in their Statements of Faith regarding the Trinity, “We believe in one God eternally existing in Three Persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” This is a sufficient affirmation of orthodoxy in their estimation. (It is admitted some maintain such a Statement of Faith, unwittingly, but other do so purposely).

Dear brethren, such a statement is a **dilution** of the Historic Christian Faith. It is robbing Christians of important truths as to the eternal relationships of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. It is ignoring the words of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who told us He was the “Only Begotten” of the Father.

Compare this new, generic, one sentence Statement of Faith, to the Statements of Faith regarding the Trinity that were utilized by most Christians for almost two thousand years and you will see for yourself what is being altered or left out. You will see what doctrine is being nullified by the Neo-Trinitarians who are trying to alter the meaning of “monogenes.”

The Common Statement of Faith used Today –

“We believe in one God eternally existing in Three Persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,”

The Statements of Faith of Yesterday –

The Nicene Creed

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things, visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all time, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became Man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended unto the heavens and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and cometh again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end: and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver, that proceeded from the Father, who with Father and Son is worshipped together.”⁵⁴

The Helvetica Confession

“We believe and teach that the one God, without separation or confusion, is distinguished in the Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; so that the Father from eternity hath begotten the Son; the Son is begotten by an ineffable generation, the Holy Spirit proceeding from both.”⁵⁵

The Gallic Confession

⁵⁴ See *Documents of the Christian Church*, Henry Bettenson, ed. (Oxford University Press, London 1975)

⁵⁵ Treffry, Richard, *An Inquiry into the Doctrine of The Eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ*, (Wesleyan Conference Office, London, 1865), pg. 469

“The Holy Scripture teaches us that in this singular and simple Divine essence there subsist three Persons, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit; the Father being, in order, the first cause and origin of all things, the Son begotten from eternity of the Father, the Holy Spirit from eternity proceeding from the Father and the Son; which three Persons are not confused, but distinct; not separated, but co-essential, co-eternal, and co-equal.”⁵⁶

The Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men. As Christ died for us, and was buried, so also is it to be believed, that he went down into Hell. Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day.

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., pg. 469

⁵⁷ Schaff, Philip, *The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. III*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993), pg. 488

The Confession of the Church of Scotland

“In the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons. Of one substance, power, and eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”⁵⁸

The Westminster Confession of Faith

“In the unity of the Godhead there be Three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”⁵⁹

The Baptist Confession – Philadelphia Confession of Faith

“In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, (I John v.7; Matt. xxviii, 19; II Cor. XI.11. 14) the Father, the Word (or Son), and the Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each have the whole divine essence, yet the (Exod. iii. 14; John xiv. 11; I Cor. vii. 6) essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is (John I. 14,18) eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit (John xv. 26; Gal. Iv. 6) proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore, but one God.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Treffry, Richard, *An Inquiry into the Doctrine of The Eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ*, (Wesleyan Conference Office, London, 1865), pg. 470

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 607-608

⁶⁰ See, *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, (Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc. Grand Rapids, MI)

Dear reader, you can see for yourself what is being left out in most Statements of Faith today. What you see above is the Historic Christian Faith. It has always been affirmed as such. It has included the important doctrine of the Only Begotten because our Lord and the apostles revealed this truth to be part of the Faith. Now it is gone! It has disappeared from most Statements! The Faith has been transformed before your very eyes because Christians have been convinced that the doctrine of eternal generation is not biblical or, at least, not very important. However, two thousand years of Christian witness contradict such an assertion. Godly ministers generation after generation, century after century, and, indeed, millennium after millennium have declared otherwise. It is a biblical doctrine and is very important and has always been an integral part of the Christian Faith.

Now, I know many of the modern teachers are true Christians. They love the Lord. I am sure they are very affable. Indeed, they more than likely wax eloquent on other doctrines and have been a great help to many Christians. I'm sure they are beloved by their students and by those in their churches. As such, I am sure they will be defended by such, because love produces loyalty and commitment. However, we must remember our loyalty and commitment must be first to the Lord and to His revelation. Why? Because love does, indeed, produce loyalty and commitment, and if the Lord Jesus is to be our first love, our loyalty and commitment must be first to Him.

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” Rev. 2:4

In other words, we must be first faithful to Him and to the Faith that was delivered to the Church. We must put our respect for the Lord and His Faith before any respect we might have for our Christian leaders and teachers.

It is never pleasant to confront error. In fact, it is very difficult. No one loves contention, but we must realize the Church is under an obligation from the Scripture to remain faithful to the Lord

as our first love and to “earnestly contend for the Faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

Remember the warning of the Holy Spirit. In the last day’s men would depart from the Faith. This is the time when such contending is necessary. However, may we pray to the Lord that it ever be done with humility, forbearance, and most importantly with love, so that those who are in error may realize their mistake and realize that human pride is fleeting and guarded reputations are futile. May they repent of their departure.

Beloved, the Faith was already been handed down to the Church. She has affirmed it for going on two thousand years. It has never been lost. It does not need to be rediscovered.

I do not make this judgment alone. I make it as one of many who have always held to and confessed this precious doctrine of the Church down through the ages. I affirm it as one of untold millions of Christians who have always confessed this Faith. I take my stand with them.

I declare no new doctrine. I have not rediscovered some new truth. I speak with those who have gone on before me. My authority is the Word of God. My witness is the witness of tens of thousands of Christians in every generation of the history of the Church. Our confirmation is the witness of the apostles, and their confirmation is He who was from the beginning, the One who they heard, the One who they beheld, and the One who they handled with their very hands – the Word of life – the precious Lord Jesus Christ (I Jn. 1:1) – the One who revealed to them that He was the “Only Begotten” Son of God.

As for me, I will follow the teaching of the apostles and the witness of Christians for the past twenty centuries, not the teaching of modern teachers who have departed from the Faith.

May we remember the Word of God when He says, “This is my beloved Son, **hear ye him!**” And in our remembering, may we also obey His admonition, especially when He reveals to us that He is the Only Begotten “Son” of God, bespeaking His special, unique and eternal begetting from God the Father. He is the Son, begotten

of the Father before all time!

Let us now look specifically at the word *monogenes*.

MONOGENES –ITS ETYMOLOGY AND USAGE

Our Lord Jesus was begotten by God the Father before all time. It was an eternal begetting. There never was a time when the Son was not, and because it was a unique begetting, Christ is spoken as being the *Only-Begotten Son*.

Through His begetting, the Son received the whole divine essence, without diminution, without division, or separation. The substance of Father is the same as the substance of the Son. The Son did not receive a different or similar substance. The substance of the Father and the Son is the same. The Father and the Son are one. This is what makes the begetting of the Son unique, and this is why He is called the Only-Begotten Son of God. The Greek word, which we translate “only-begotten” is the word “monogenes.”

Monogenes is made up of two Greek terms, *Mono*, which, being related to *monos*, means “unique” or “only” and *genes* which being related to *genos*, (and some believe ultimately to *gennaō*), means, “born,” or “begotten.” Kittel's exhaustive work, “A Theological Dictionary of the New Testament” says this:

“... in monogenes and related words the stem is genes—...In accordance with the strict meaning of *genos*, genes always denotes derivation...⁶¹ In Jn. 1:14,18; 3:16,18; I Jn. 4:9 monogenes denotes more than the uniqueness of incomparability of Jesus. In all these verses He is expressly called the Son, and He is regarded as such in 1:14. In John monogenes denotes the origin of Jesus. He is monogenes as the only-begotten.”⁶²

⁶¹ Kittel, Gerhard, ed., Bromiley, Geoffrey W., trans. & ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IV, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1967), pg. 738, note 6

⁶² *Ibid.*, pg. 741

The reason I quote this is because, again, many Christian leaders today are denying the eternal generation of the Son of God. They say that *monogenes* means only “one of a kind” or “one and only, and that it has nothing to do with the begetting or generation of the Son. Some Greek Lexicons, like Thayer’s and Moulton and Milligan’s, are used to give credence to such a belief.

For example, Thayer states in his lexicon,

“...μονογενής...used of Christ, denotes the only son of God...not because [He] was eternally generated by God the Father (the orthodox interpretation), or came forth from the being of God just before the beginning of the world (Subordinationism), but because of the incarnation...”⁶³

Now what is sad is that modern Christians will follow the affirmations of someone like Thayer, who denies the Faith, rather than someone like Athanasius, a Greek speaking Christian, who affirmed the Faith and who held to the meaning of *monogenes* as “only begotten.”

Dear reader, Joseph Henry Thayer held to heretical views and yet Christians will hold to him as an authority. Thayer denied the Trinity! He was a Unitarian. In fact, in the very introduction of the edition I just quoted from, the Christian Publishers warned the general reader to be wary of Joseph Henry Thayer. They state in their Publisher’s Introduction the following.

“A word of caution is necessary. Thayer was a Unitarian, and the errors of this sect occasionally come through in the explanatory notes. The reader should be alert for both subtle and blatant denials of such doctrines as the Trinity. Thayer regarded Christ as a mere man and the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force emanating from God...”⁶⁴

⁶³ Thayer, Joseph Henry, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI 1977), Pg. 418

⁶⁴ Ibid. pg. VII, (some parenthesis were taken out so as not to confuse the complete statement by the publishers). Nevertheless, these were the publisher’s exact words, excluding the parenthesis.

Beloved, you must ask yourself why modern Christian teachers quote Thayer as an authority of the meaning of *monogenes*, when Thayer was someone who not only was not being led by the Holy Spirit, but was also someone who actually denied the deity of our precious Lord Jesus Christ!

Why will they follow the affirmations of a confessed non-Christian, and deny the affirmations of a confessed Christian.

Now, apart from the incorrect assertions of Thayer regarding the word *monogenes*, we must admit, in a few cases, his assertions were true in ancient Greek. For instance, in the writing of Paramenides c. 500 B.C., *monogenes* was used in the sense of “kind” or “unique.” Kittel’s states the following:

“But the word can also be used more generally without ref. to derivation in the sense of “unique,” “unparalleled,” “incomparable...”⁶⁵

However, it should be noted that such a usage *is a minority usage*. In the vast majority of the cases “*genes*” carried the sense of “derivation,” or being “born.”

In Liddell and Scott, the stem “—*genes*” occurs 168 times in various Greek words. In all these occurrences, the *overwhelming majority* carry the sense of “derivation.” Of the 168 occurrences, 107 times it is used with the sense of “derivation” or “born.” However, only 22 times is it used with the sense of “class” or “kind.” Of the remaining uses, 28 times the definition is unavailable and the other 11 times miscellaneous meanings are assigned to the word.⁶⁶ (See Appendix B)

Kittel’s speaks to this fact as follows,

⁶⁵ Kittel, Gerhard, ed., Bromiley, Geoffrey W., trans. & ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IV*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1967), pg. 738

⁶⁶ Perseus Digital Library Project. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Updated Mar. 31,2009. Tufts University. Accessed Oct. 1, 2009 <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

“The word does not occur in Homer but is attested from the time of Hesiod. In compounds like dio-genes, ge-genes, eu-genes, sug-genes, the –genes suggests derivation (genos) rather than birth. Nouns as the first part of the compound give the source, e.g., from Zeus, the earth. Adverbs describe the nature of the derivation, e.g. noble or common, mono-genes is to be explained along the lines of eugenes rather than dio-genes. The mono-does not denote the source but the nature of derivation. Hence monogenes means ‘of sole descent,’ i.e., without brothers or sisters. This gives us the sense of only-begotten.”⁶⁷

For this reason, Kittel’s states that with its different usages:

“It is not wholly clear whether “monogenes” in John denotes also the birth or begetting from God; it probably does.... Though many will not accept this, he [John] understands the concept of Sonship in terms of begetting. For him to be the Son of God is not just to be the recipient of God’s love. It is to be begotten of God.... To be sure, John does not lift the veil of mystery, which lies over the eternal begetting. But this does not entitle us to assume that he had no awareness of it.”⁶⁸

Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, in their Greek Lexicon also state that, while

“...the meanings only, or unique may be adequate for all its occurrences here...some (e.g. W Bauer...) prefer to regard monogenes as somewhat heightened in meaning in John and I John to “only-begotten....”⁶⁹

G. Abbot-Smith in the Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament state that monogenes means, “only, only begotten.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid., pg. 737-38

⁶⁸ Ibid., pg. 741

⁶⁹ Bauer’s, Walter; Arndt, William F.; Gingrich, F. Wilbur, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1957), pg. 529

⁷⁰ Abbot-Smith, G., *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1968) pg. 296

So, while it must be admitted there were times when “-genes” in “*monogenes*” was used in the sense of “kind,” or “class,” it was a minority usage in a specific context. The common usage of “genes” was for “derivation” or “being born,” thus giving the idea of derivation of a son from a father or of a child from parents, or one begotten or born.

Consequently, as we continue our study, I think we will find that the common meaning of the word in the time of Christ continued to be “only-begotten” or “only born.”

Henry Alford speaks of this usage of the word in relation to Christ.

“*Monogenes* – This word applied to Christ is peculiar to John: see reff. In the N. T. usage it signifies the *only* son :—in the LXX, Ps. xxi. 20, the *beloved*, and Ps. xxiv. Hi, one *deserted, left alone*. It has been attempted to render the word in John, according to the usage in Ps. xxi. 20. But obviously in the midst of ideas reaching so far deeper than that of regard, or love, of the Father for the Son, the word cannot be interpreted except in accordance with them. It refers to, and contrasts with, the $\tau\epsilon\kappa\nu\alpha\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in vv. 12, 13. *They* receive their Divine birth by faith in Him, and through Him ; but He is the *monogenes* of the Father in the higher sense, in which He is $\gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ [begotten] the Son of God.”⁷¹

And thus he says in another place regarding the Son of God,

“His $\omicron\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\nu\omicron\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\varsigma$ [only begotten Son], the only one of God’s sons who is One with Him in nature and essence, begotten of Him before all worlds.”⁷²

One must remember that one needs to understand the meaning of “*monogenes*” in light of its current usage in the Apostle

⁷¹ Alford, Henry, *The Greek New Testament*, vol. I (Moody Press, Chicago, 1958) pg. 686

⁷² Alford, Henry, *The Greek New Testament*, vol. II (Moody Press, Chicago, 1958) pg. 400

John's time and not in the light of a usage hundreds of years before. To do otherwise must only be explained from either an attempt to obscure the concept of eternal generation of the Son or an honest ignorance of the importance of such a doctrine. Words cannot be understood only in light of their classical meanings, they must be understood in the light of their current usage. (Nevertheless, remember, even in its classical meaning *monogenes* was repeatedly used to mean *only-begotten*).⁷³

Words change meanings over time. For instance, in 1611 the word “prevent” in English meant to “precede someone or something.” Because of this, it was used in I Thess. 4:15 in the KJV of the Bible, to read “...we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.” Today, in some King James Versions, this word has been changed to “precede,” because “prevent” has changed its meaning.

Consequently, for one to claim that “prevent,” in today's English, means to “precede someone or something,” because it meant that 400 years ago, would not be exercising honest scholarship. Why? – Because the word is now used differently, and it must be *understood according to its current usage*. Today, it means “to keep from happening, or to thwart.”

In the same way, “*monogenes*” must not be understood only by its classical usage years before, but must *be understood by its usage in the time of John and thereafter by the Early Church Fathers* as they were formulating our Christian Faith into the Creeds. If this is our criterion, then I think one cannot help but admit that “*monogenes*” was used to mean “*only-begotten*.”

The word was used only nine times in the New Testament. Three times it was used in Luke (7:12; 8:42; 9:38), and in every case it meant, “only born,” or “only-begotten” child. Most likely, it was not translated “only-begotten” by the English translators in order to reserve that term for our Lord, but it is the same Greek word and means the same thing.

⁷³ See Kittel, Vol. IV, pgs. 737-38

If the word did not mean “only begotten,” but meant “in a class of their own” or “one of a kind” how were those children “one of their kind” or how were they “set apart,” or “unique” since those parents had no other children?” Where would the comparison come from to make those children so distinctive? This shows the minority usage of *monogenes* did not prevail in the minds of the New Testament writers. If Luke simply wanted to emphasize that they were the only children of their parents without reference to their generation, (meaning, perhaps, their siblings had died) he could have used the Greek word “*monos*” which means “only,” and is used in many cases in the New Testament (Lk. 4:8; 24:18; Jn. 17:3; I Cor. 9:6 etc.).

No, Luke was saying they were the only-begotten children of their parents. In other words, they had no brother or sisters. These verses show us that Luke understood *monogenes* to mean “only-born” or “only begotten.” It cannot mean “one of a kind” in these verses, for there is no comparison to make.

Next, the word is used once by the writer of Hebrews to refer to Abraham's son, Isaac. Heb. 11:17 says that Abraham “...offered up his only-begotten son.” Now obviously, *monogenes* refers to the begetting of Isaac, (who is a picture of Christ), because the context of the passage is referring to Abraham's “seed” (Vs. 18). *Monogenes* could not mean “one and only” son, because Abraham had other sons. Consequently, Isaac could not be his “one and only son.” But Isaac was his “*only-begotten*” or in this sense, his “*uniquely begotten*” son, for who else of Abraham's sons was begotten as Isaac?

Isaac was begotten of a miracle, because Sarah's womb was dead, as Paul says in Rom. 4:19. All of Abraham's other sons were begotten naturally, there was nothing unique with their birth, but Isaac was uniquely begotten by a miracle of God and, therefore, was Abraham's “only-begotten,” or “uniquely-begotten” child.

Now, the question may be asked, “Can, *monogenes* be understood, not only as “only begotten,” but also as “uniquely-begotten?” Some believe so when referring to Christ.

The idea of uniqueness comes from the prefix “mono-” which is related to the Greek word “monos.” *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, tells us that *monos*, was sometimes understood not only as “only,” or “alone,” but was understood also as “unique,”⁷⁴ (although it should be noted that J. A. Fitzmyer does not extend that meaning to *monogenes*).

However, many believe this meaning extends to *monogenes* and is a correct rendering for the word when applied to Christ. For example, Kenneth Wuest, who was a noted Greek scholar of the twentieth century, and professor of New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago rendered “*monogenes*” as “uniquely-begotten.”

“By faith Abraham offered up Isaac while being put to the test; even he who received the promises, offered up his **uniquely begotten**, with reference to whom it was said, In Isaac shall your offspring be called.”⁷⁵

Certainly, from the usage of the word in the gospel of John and in the book of Hebrews, such an understanding can be maintained. Surely, the Son is uniquely begotten of God unlike any other sons of God. We are sons of God by faith and regeneration. He is eternally the Son of God by nature and generation. John 1:13 says that we are begotten of God, (referring to Christians), yet one verse later John calls Christ, “the Only Begotten.” How can this be unless Christ is held distinct by His unique begetting? No other was begotten as He. He is the uniquely begotten Son of God.

In the same way, when *monogenes* is used of Isaac in Heb. 11:17, one can see a distinction in begetting. Abraham had other sons, and thus Isaac could not be his *only begotten* son, but certainly

⁷⁴ Balz, Horst and Schneider, Gerhard, *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI), pg. 441

⁷⁵ Wuest, Kenneth S., *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1961) pg. 531

Isaac could be Abraham's *uniquely begotten* son, for no other was begotten as he. He was begotten by a direct miracle of God.

In addition, if this heightened meaning was given to *monogenes* by John, it helps explain Clement's extra biblical usage of the word in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

We will touch upon later, but Clement talks about the Phoenix, a bird which lives 500 years, at which time it flies to a nest and dies and where upon its death a worm is begotten, (*gennao*), out of its flesh, which in turn grows into the new Phoenix for the next 500 years. In describing this bird he states, "This one being uniquely begotten (*monogenes*) lives for 500 years."

And so, we see from these verses that *monogenes* not only had a general connotation of "only-begotten," but also had a heightened meaning of "uniquely begotten," depending on its context.

Therefore, while it may not clear if *monogenes* can be understood as "uniquely begotten" solely from its etymology, it certainly can be understood in that way by its usage in the gospel of John and the book of Hebrews.

Words should not be understood only from their etymology. Words change their meaning over time. One must also take into account the current usage when determining the correct understanding. The reader will have to make the final decision as to whether *monogenes* should be understood as "only-begotten," or also as "uniquely-begotten."

However, let's assume we prefer the reading of "only begotten" to "uniquely begotten." Is there another way to understand why Isaac would still be called the "only begotten," when we know Abraham had other sons? I believe there is, and it is understood by considering the unique differences between Sarah, Hagar and Keturah – Abraham's wives, and by considering Abraham and Sarah in and of themselves. Let's look at the first perspective.

Isaac was given the title "only begotten" because, of all of Abraham's children, he may have been the only one who was

literally an *only begotten child*. In other words, Sarah had no other children. He was the only begotten son of Sarah. We know that Keturah had other children (Gen. 25:1-2). And, as we will presently see, Hagar may have had other children. So Isaac was literally the only one of all of Abraham's sons who could be considered to be an "only begotten" child.

When Hagar was sent away by Abraham, Ishmael was her only child. But it is possible that she later remarried and had other sons and daughters. Now someone may say, "Where does Scripture tell us that? Well, Heb. 11:17 tells us that! You ask how? Let me explain.

I Chr. 5:10 speaks of a tribe of people known as the Hagarites. This verse speaks to us of a matrilineage rather than patrilineage. This would be an unusual appellation unless Hagar was known to have other children, and, because of her importance in the Genesis narrative, perhaps, she was known as a matriarch of a tribe.

This may also help explain why the Hagarites were listed separately from the Ishmaelites in Ps. 83:6. The verse reads as follows,

"The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes."

Indeed, John Gill's comment on this verse is most interesting. He makes the following comment:

"of Moab, and the Hagarenes; the Moabites, who sprung from Lot by one of his daughters, in an incestuous way; and the Hagarenes are the same with the Hagarites, #1Ch 5:10, 19, 20 who dwelt to the east of the land of Israel, so called from Hagar, the handmaid of Abraham, but not by him, but by another husband, after sent away from him..."

In fact, some Jewish Rabbis held to this same view, Rabbis,

such as, Aben Ezra, and the famous Rabbi David Kimchi.⁷⁶

Consequently, the usage of *monogenes* in Heb. 11:17 may explain I Chr. 5:10, and Ps. 83:6. It may be showing us an important biblical fact, not clearly revealed in the Genesis narrative. Hagar may have remarried and had other children.

This is not unusual for the New Testament to do this. For example, Hebrews 9:4 shows us a fact that was not clearly revealed in the Old Testament. The Ark of the Covenant also contained within it the golden jar of manna and Aaron's rod that budded. This fact is not clearly revealed in the Old Testament account, but we learn of it from the New Testament. Or consider Stephens narrative in Acts.

Stephen tells us in Acts 7:16 that Abraham purchased a tomb from the sons of Hamor in Schechem. Some have thought this contradicts Gen. 33:19, which tells us it was Jacob, and not Abraham, that bought a piece of land from the sons of Hamor. However, when we read Gen. 49:30 we realize that sometimes a tomb also has a parcel of land associated with it.

Therefore, we can see Jacob, indeed, purchased the land from the sons of Hamor, but, according to Acts 7:16, we see that Abraham purchased the tomb, separate from the land, years earlier.

Therefore, since Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, already owned the tomb, Jacob decided later to purchase the land surrounding the tomb. And so, from this added fact in the New Testament, (that was not revealed to us in the Old Testament), we see there is no contradiction in the Bible.

In the same way, Heb. 11:17 may be showing us a fact that was not revealed in the Old Testament – Hagar had other children, meaning that Isaac was the only child of all of Abraham's children that could be considered “only begotten.” Keturah had

⁷⁶ See the above mentioned commentary by John Gill and *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, Vol. IV*, by John M'Clintock, D.D., and James Strong, S.T.D., Harper and brothers, New York, 1872, pg. 17

other children, Hagar had other children, but Sarah only had one child – Isaac, who was thus known as the Only-Begotten. In fact, a literal translation of Heb. 11:17 could be, “Abraham offered up the only-begotten,” and not, “Abraham offered up his only begotten.”

And so, we see one reason why Isaac was called the “only begotten” by the writer of Hebrews. Another reason may have been because, unlike God the Father, human fecundity requires both parents.

Isaac may have been known as the only begotten, because Isaac was Abraham’s only begotten son with Sarah. We clearly know from the Old and New Testament that Sarah had no other children. So if we consider Isaac from the perspective of both his parents he truly could be called “the only begotten” of both Abraham and Sarah. This may well have been the understanding of the writer to Hebrews, because the context of the passage is limited to Sarah and Abraham, (see vs. 11). The passage does not mention Abraham’s other wives or children.

More than likely, the reason for this was because “faith” was the theme of the chapter, and faith was not involved in the conception of Abraham’s other children or wives. The writer of Hebrews was concerned with stories of faith, and since the birth of Isaac involved the exercise of faith by both Abraham and Sarah, the context is limited to Abraham’s first wife, and in that context Isaac was truly the “only begotten” son of Abraham and Sarah.

Nevertheless, no matter how one wishes to understand the usage of *monogenes* in the book of Hebrews, one must realize the most important reason for understanding the derivational aspect of *monogenes* is the context of the passage. The writer is talking about the “seed of Abraham” in the very same sentence where he uses the word “monogenes” (vs. 18). Obviously, in the writers mind, the “monogenes,” the “only begotten” was the result of derivation from the seed of Abraham in Sarah, and this facet must not be forgotten or ignored when application is made to Christ.

Nevertheless, some still try to get away from the context of this passage and this understanding of *monogenes* by saying the

word should be understood only in the sense of “status” and not in the sense of derivation. They say this because, (even though Abraham had other children), Isaac was the only true and “legal son” of Abraham and that is what gave him the status as “one of a kind.” They say this is why *monogenes* should be understood as “one of a kind” and not as “only begotten.” They say Ishmael was not a legal son of Abraham. By making this argument, they take away the meaning of “derivation” or “begottenness” in “monogenes,” and replace the meaning with “status,” or “kind.”

They say Ishmael was the son of a slave and never enjoyed the status of a son, therefore, Isaac was “one of a kind.” The Code of Hammurabi is sometimes appealed to prove this point. The truth is, however, this is not correct. Ishmael did enjoy the same status of son that Isaac also enjoyed. Ishmael was not the son of a slave but of a wife (see Gen. 16:3), and so this replacement meaning given to *monogenes* cannot stand.

If Ishmael did not enjoy the status of a son then why did Sarah have to worry about casting out Ishmael? The son of a slave could never inherit that which belonged rightfully to a legitimate son. Even the Rabbis, who would have reason to disallow the sonship of Ishmael, believed he was a legitimate son. When Abraham was asked to offer up his son in sacrifice, they have him replying:

“But I have two sons.” “Thine only one, ‘was the reply.’ “But each is the only one of his mother!” “Whom thou lovest,” he was told. “But I love both!” and the answer came ‘Even Isaac.’⁷⁷

And in The Midrash Rabbah, Bereshith-Vayera, the Rabbis say Hagar was –

“to be a wife, not a concubine.”... [and in the footnote]... “Hagar was to

⁷⁷ Cohen, Dr. A., *The Soncino Chumash*, (The Soncino Press, London, Jerusalem, New York, 1983), pg. 108

enjoy all the rights of a wife.”⁷⁸

Also, if Ishmael was not the legitimate son of Abraham, (because some might believe that Hagar was indeed a concubine and not a wife) then Gad, Asher, Dan, and Naphtali could not be considered the legitimate sons of Israel and should not be considered heads of tribes because their mothers Zilpah and Bilhah (Gen. 35: 23-26) had the same status to Jacob that Hagar had to Abraham – that being a handmaid of their wives.

Hastings Dictionary of the Bible says this:

“We have already seen that claims were sometimes made that the children of a wife should oust those of a concubine from all or part of their share of the family inheritance. But these claims are not sustained by any legal ordinance or even by any general custom. The sons of Jacob's concubines rank as ancestors of tribes.... There was no difference of legitimacy in our sense between the sons of wives and concubines.”⁷⁹

Ishmael was not disallowed because he did not have the status of a son. Scripture specifically identifies him as Abraham’s “son” side by side with Isaac (Gen. 25:9). He was disallowed because Isaac was chosen by God to be the recipient of the promises. Ishmael was disallowed because of the sovereign choice of God.

So we see Isaac could not be called the “one of a kind,” because he was considered the only “legal son” of Abraham. This meaning given for “monogenes” cannot apply. Isaac was not the only legal son of Abraham. Abraham had other legal sons.⁸⁰

Rather, Isaac was given the title of *monogenes* because he

⁷⁸ Freedman, Rabbi Dr. H., *Midrash Rabbah, Genesis, Vol. 1.*, (The Soncino Press, London, New York, 1983) pg. 381

⁷⁹ Hastings, James, Ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 1*, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1988), pg. 848

⁸⁰ Keturah, unlike Hagar, is called a concubine (Gen. 25:6); however, as was mentioned above, her sons were also considered legal sons.

was, either, the only son of all of Abraham's sons who was the "only begotten" of his mother, or he was simply understood as the "only begotten" of both Abraham and Sarah together, or he was the only one who was "uniquely begotten," and in that sense, was a picture of Christ.

One other point needs to be made about this passage in Hebrews before we go on to the other passages. If Isaac was a picture of Christ, then Abraham, who was a father of many nations, would be a picture of God the Father. As Abraham had many sons, but only one "uniquely begotten son," so too, God the Father has many sons "begotten of God" (all Christians –Jn. 1:13), but only one "*uniquely begotten*" Son – the Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. What a beautiful picture this is of Christ and our salvation.

Last of all, "monogenes" is used five times by the Apostle John (Jn. 1:14; 1:18; 3:16; 3:18 I Jn. 4:9). It is sufficient to look at one passage in order to determine how John understood the meaning of monogenes.

In John 1:18, John tells us that Jesus was "...the Only-Begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father." Now if one wants to believe that monogenes means "one and only," or "one of a kind," then one would have to believe that John was denying the unity of the Godhead. He would be telling us that Jesus and the Father were not One, (which we know from John 10:30 is not the case). If the Father and the Son are to be One, they must have the *same substance*, but if *monogenes* means "one of a kind," then what John would be saying is that the *substance* of the second Person of the Godhead was "one of a kind." By definition, to be "one of a kind," no one else can have such a substance; it needs to be in a class by itself.

If that was true, then one would be saying that the second Person of the Godhead is a second God, different from the first Person of the Godhead, since He is a "one and only" God. This of course would be heresy, for such a view leads to Tritheism.

Apart from the eternal generation of the Son from the

Father, in which act the undivided substance of God is communicated without separation to the Son, the Son cannot have the same substance with the Father.

If the Father gave to the Son to have life within Himself (Jn. 5:26), when did this occur if not in His eternal begetting? If not through eternal generation then you have the Son possessing a substance that is not the same as the Father, nor as complete as the Father, (for it lacks the life). It might be considered of *similar substance*, but could not be considered of the *same substance*. This, of course, would be the heresy of Semi-Arianism. Or if such a giving of life occurred in time, then the Son could not be co-equal or co-eternal with the Father.

No, I think the disciple John understood “monogenes” to mean “only-begotten,” or “uniquely-begotten,” for that is the only way for the unity of the Godhead to be maintained. For while it is true that the subsistence of the second Person, being of the same substance as the Father, was uniquely generated or begotten, it could not be said the subsistence of the Holy Spirit was begotten, but rather was spirated. And the subsistence of the Father was not begotten or spirated, but was unbegotten. Only the subsistence of the second Person of the Godhead was begotten and that is what makes Him the “Only-Begotten God.”

Without eternal generation, there is no way the Son of God can be consubstantial with the other Persons of the Godhead. Without eternal generation, His oneness with the Father is dissolved, and His coinherence with the other Persons is nullified.

The same would be the case if you translated Jn. 1:18 as “the Only-Begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father.” (as the underlying Greek text of the KJV has it).

John tells us, in verse 12-13, that God has other children who were begotten by Him. However, our birth as children of God is not like the begetting of the Son of God. Therefore, the Son of God is known as the “Only-Begotten Son,” *since His begetting was unique, eternal and different from all the rest*. Indeed, He is the only Begotten for no one else was begotten as He was, for in Him

dwells all the fullness of the Godhead.

So one sees, that by the way John and other New Testament writers use the word “monogenes,” they understood “monogenes” to mean, “only-begotten” – denoting origin, derivation, and generation. It was not used in the sense of “class” or “status” without the sense of begottenness. It does not fit the context of the passages.

Subsequent Christian writers, who took up the Faith of the Apostles and who ultimately explained it in Creedal Form, confirm this usage. It is to these writers we would like now to turn our attention.

TESTIMONY OF EARLY CHRISTIANS

Common sense dictates that if one wants to ascertain what the Apostle John meant by using the word “monogenes” one should see what those closest to him understood the word to mean. We should look for the meaning from those men who lived closest to him, not from modern teachers 1900 years later whose mother tongue is not even Greek. Without fail, it can be shown that the early Christians understood “monogenes” to refer to the generation of the Son of God.

The first one, nearest to the time of the apostles, and who, indeed, may have been the co-worker of the apostle Paul was a Christian named Clement (A.D. 30-100) who wrote from the church in Rome. He spoke of a legendary bird called the Phoenix, which was “uniquely-begotten.”⁸¹

The Greek word he uses is “*monogenes*.” The phrase could be translated thus: “This one, being “only-begotten,” lives 500 years.” Or it could be translated, “This one, being “uniquely-begotten,” lives 500 years.” He goes on to speak of this sole or unique begetting and the word he uses in the Greek to describe this is “*gennao*,” which means, “to beget.”

In addition, when one reads Ovid, (the Roman writer from whom Clement, more than likely, first learned about this bird), one finds the context of the passage filled with the idea of begottenness and the idea of being born. More than likely, it was this unique begetting that Clement was referring to when he used the word “monogenes.”

The legendary bird was supposed to fly to a nest after 500 years, at which time it would die. At its death a worm was “begotten” (*gennao*) from its flesh, (thus the term only-begotten),

⁸¹ See Lightfoot, J.B., *Apostolic Fathers, Greek Text, Vol. II*, (Hendrickson, Peabody MA 1989) pg. 87

which would grow feathers and wings and become the new Phoenix bird for another 500 years.

The next one we would like to look at is Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202), who was a pupil of Polycarp, who in turn was a pupil of the Apostle John himself. When discussing the Only-Begotten this is what he says:

“If any one, therefore says to us, 'How then was the Son produced by the Father?' we reply to him, that no man understands that production, or generation, or calling, or revelation, or by whatever name one may describe His generation, which is in fact altogether indescribable. Neither...angels, nor archangels, nor principalities, nor powers [possess this knowledge], but the Father only who begat, and the Son who was begotten...the Only-Begotten Word of God.”⁸²

And in another place he says,

“The Gospel according to John relates the princely, and efficacious, and glorious generation of Christ from the Father...but Matthew relates that generation which belongs to Him as man...”⁸³

In addition, when Irenaeus' writings were translated into Latin around 200 A.D., the Greek word “monogenes” from Jn. 1:18 was translated by the Latin word “*unigenitus*,” which can only mean “only-begotten” or uniquely-generated. The word is made up from two words, “*unicus*” which means “only” or “unique” and “*genitum*” which means to beget or bear.

Also, in the above quote, where Irenaeus uses “monogenes” in the phrase “Only Begotten Word,” it is also translated by the Latin word “*unigenitus*.” It is translated as

⁸² Roberts, Alexander; Donaldson, James, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1985), pg. 401

⁸³ Treffry, Richard, *An Inquiry into the Doctrine of The Eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ*, (Wesleyan Conference Office, London, 1865), Pg. 408-409

“unigenitum Dei Verbum.”

If the translators of Irenaeus understood the Greek word “monogenes” to mean “one and only,” or “one of a kind,” (as modern day translators would have us believe), then they would have used the Latin word “*unicus*” which means “one and only” or “unique.” Instead, they translated it by the Latin word “*unigenitus*” because they understood the Greek word “monogenes” to mean “only-begotten” in the same way Irenaeus understood it to mean.

This understanding of “monogenes,” to mean “only begotten,” is also confirmed for us by the fact that in the majority of extant Old Latin translations of the Greek Scripture, “unigenitus” is used to translate the word “monogenes” – by a margin of 4 to 1 in those particular passages where it is used of our Lord. In only 12 cases is *unicus* used, while in 49 cases the word *unigenitus* is used. Seven codices have *unigenitus* exclusively and only one codex uses *unicus* exclusively. When we include texts that may have some missing or unknown verses, we see ten codices use *unigenitus* exclusively, whereas two codices use *unicus* exclusively. Five codices have a mixture of *unicus* and *unigenitus*, with four out of five of those codices using *unigenitus* as the primary word to translate *monogenes*, and one, Codex Palatinus, using *unicus* primarily.

The Old Latin texts confirm that the most common understanding of “monogenes” was “only begotten,” in the days of the early Church, and not “one and only.” (For further information on the Old Latin Texts and Jerome’s Vulgate, see Appendix D)

Let’s now continue. Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165), who was born just a few years after the apostle John’s death, says the following in his Second Apology:

“For I have already proved that He was the Only-Begotten of the Father of all things, being begotten in a peculiar (unique) manner....”⁸⁴ [And again he says], “The Son of God, who alone is properly called Son, is

⁸⁴ Ibid., pg. 190, 251

His Logos before all created things, both co-existent and begotten...”⁸⁵

And in another place Justin state this,

“The Son of God, who alone is properly called Son, is His Logos before all created things, both co-existent and begotten; and by Him in the beginning did God create and adorn all things.”⁸⁶

And in another place he says,

“He was the Only-Begotten of the Father of the universe, the Logos and Power, properly begotten of Him, and afterwards made man of the virgin.”⁸⁷

And also this,

“... who also, by the Holy Spirit, is called the Glory of the Lord, sometimes also the Son, sometimes Wisdom, sometimes the Angel, sometimes God, sometimes Lord and Logos. – And these names He sustains both with respect to His administration of the paternal council, and to His being begotten of the will of the Father.—Thus do we behold upon one fire another produced, yet not to the diminution of that from which the kindling was derived.—The Scripture will bear witness that He, being the same God, was begotten of the Father of the universe, and exists as the Logos, the Wisdom, the Power, the Glory of Him who begat Him.”⁸⁸

Theophilus, (181 A.D.)

“The Word of the Father of the universe, by whom He made all things, came into Paradise, and conversed with Adam. For the Divine Scripture represents Adam as saying that he heard the voice. But what

⁸⁵ Treffry, Richard, *An Inquiry into the Doctrine of The Eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ*, (Wesleyan Conference Office, London, 1865), pg. 403

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 403

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 404

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 403

else is the voice but the Word of God, who is also His Son? – The Word was God, and begotten of God.”⁸⁹

Tertullian (c. 200 A.D.) states,

“We have been taught that He proceeds forth from God, and in that procession He is generated; so that He is the Son of God, and is called God from unity of substance with God.”⁹⁰

“Thus does He make Him equal to Him: for by proceeding from Himself He became His first-begotten Son, because begotten before all things; and His only-begotten also, because alone begotten of God, in a way peculiar to Himself,⁹¹ from the womb of His own heart—even as the Father Himself testifies: “My heart,” says He, “hath emitted my most excellent Word.” *The Father* took pleasure evermore in Him, who equally rejoiced with a reciprocal gladness in the Father’s presence: “Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten Thee;” even before the morning star did I beget Thee.”⁹²

Dionysius (c.260 A.D.) states,

“Equally to be censured are they who hold that the Son is a work, and think that the Lord came into being, whereas the Divine Scriptures testify to a “generation” fitting and becoming to Him.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibid., pg. 411

⁹⁰ Roberts, Alexander; Donaldson, James, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1985), pg. 34

⁹¹ What could be more succinct than this to show that “monogenes” was understood as not only as “only begotten,” but also as “uniquely begotten.”

⁹² Roberts, Alexander; Donaldson, James, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1985), pg. 601

⁹³ Bettenson, Henry, *Documents of the Christian Church*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1975), pg. 32

Athanasius (A.D. 298-373) whose mother tongue was Greek, the great defender of the faith up to, during, and after the Council of Nicaea says this:

“If then He is Only-begotten, as indeed He is, ‘First-born’ needs some explanation; but if He be really First-born, then He is not Only-begotten for the same cannot be both Only-begotten and First-born, except in different relations;—that is, Only-begotten, because of His generation from the Father, as has been said; and First-born, because of His condescension to the creation and His making the many His brethren.”⁹⁴

And again he says,

“And if the Only-Begotten is in the bosom (of the Father)...the One (then) is the Father, and the other (is the) Son; and One begets and the Other is Begotten.”⁹⁵

And also,

“...He must be Christ who says, ‘I am in the Father and the Father in me,’ who also is therefore the Only-begotten, since no other was begotten from Him.”⁹⁶

To say that “only-begotten” simply means “one and only” or “unique” and has nothing to do with the generation of the Son, means that Athanasius did not even understand his own mother tongue. One needs to understand that during the Council of Nicaea,

⁹⁴ Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry, sup., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. IV*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1991), pg. 382

⁹⁵ Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry, sup., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. IV*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1991), pg. 443

⁹⁶ Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry, sup., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. IV*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1991), pg.434

where Athanasius was defending the Faith, not only was every single word scrutinized, but also every nuance of every single word was carefully examined in order to determine which words to use in the Creed. To say that the true meaning of monogenes slipped by the framers of the Nicene Creed and that they totally misunderstood their own mother tongue is to say the least haughty, if not close to approaching arrogant.

These men were our ancient Christian brothers, who, while not being infallible, nevertheless were led by the Holy Spirit, not only to recognize our Canon of Scripture of the New Testament, but also to preserve the Faith from all heresy. One needs to understand the backgrounds of these creeds, if one truly desires to understand the truth.

Let's continue. Cyril (A.D. 318-380) says this:

“God then is...the Father of many, but by nature and in truth of One only, the Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; not having attained in course of time to being a Father, but being ever the Father of the Only-Begotten... Perfect Father, He begat a perfect Son, and delivered all things to Him who is begotten. Again he says, “And again on hearing of a Son, think not of an adopted son but a Son by nature, an Only-Begotten Son...eternally begotten by an inscrutable and incomprehensible generation.” And once again he says, “ Believe thou therefore on Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, and a Son Only-Begotten, according to the Gospel (of John) which says, For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.... He is then the Son of God by nature and not by adoption, begotten of the Father.... And whenever thou hear of God begetting, sink not down in thought to bodily things, nor think of a corruptible generation, lest thou be guilty of impiety. God is a Spirit, His generation is spiritual: for bodies beget bodies, and for the generation of bodies time needs must intervene; but time intervenes not in the generation of the Son from the Father.... For God was not previously without a Son, and afterward in time became a Father; but hath the Son eternally, having begotten Him not as men beget men, but as Himself only knoweth who

begat Him before all ages Very God.”⁹⁷

Hilary of Poitiers (A.D. 300-367) in his book on the Trinity says this:

“Listen then to the unbegotten Father, listen to the Only-Begotten Son..., I and the Father are One, I went out from the Father, No one knoweth the Son save the Father, neither doth any know the Father save the Son and He to whom the Son willeth to reveal Him. Penetrate into the mystery; plunge into the darkness which shrouds that birth, where you will be alone with God the Unbegotten and God the only begotten. Make your start, continue, persevere. I know that you will not reach the goal, but I shall rejoice at your progress. For he who devoutly treads an endless road, though he reach no conclusion, will profit by his exertions. Reason will fail for want of words, but when it comes to a stand, it will be the better for the effort made.

The Son draws His life from that Father Who truly has life; the Only-Begotten from the Unbegotten ... Living from Living...The Son is perfect from Him that is perfect, for He is whole from Him that is whole. This is no division or severance, for each is in the other, and the fullness of the Godhead is in the Son. Incomprehensible is begotten of Incomprehensible, for none else knows Them, but Each knows the Other.... There is a distinction, for They are Father and Son; not that Their divinity is different in kind, for Both are One, God of God, One God Only-Begotten of One God unbegotten.”⁹⁸

Lastly, though there are many more confessions of the truth, let me quote Augustine (A.D. 354-430):

“He was begotten before all times, before all worlds.... Do not imagine in this begetting a beginning of time: do not imagine any space of eternity in which the Father was and the Son was not.... Therefore ever Father without beginning, ever Son without beginning. And how, thou wilt

⁹⁷Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry, sup., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series Vol. VII*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1989), pg. 45, 64-66

⁹⁸Ibid., Vol. IX, pg. 55

say, was He begotten, if He have no beginning? Of eternal, coeternal. At no time was the Father, and the Son not, and yet Son of Father was begotten,”⁹⁹

And so we see ample evidence that early Christians understood “monogenes,” “only-begotten,” to refer to the eternal generation of the Son of God. This belief was forever settled in the Nicene Creed, which was written to clarify the faith as recorded in Scripture, and handed down by apostolic tradition. This is what the Creed states regarding the relationship of the Father and Son:

“We believe in one God the Father All-Sovereign, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all the ages, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made... .”¹⁰⁰

This is the faith we need to contend for in these last days. This is the faith of the apostles and the faith of those Christians, which followed after them. Some men may still contend that “monogenes” does not refer to the eternal begetting of the Son of God and that in Scripture the word should be translated as is seen in the RSV, NIV, and other modern Bibles. That is their prerogative, but there is no way they can contend that the early Christians did not believe that the word monogenes referred to the eternal generation of the Son of God.

The Historic Christian Faith confessed that Jesus was the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten before all time. They believed the second Person of the Godhead was the Son of God by eternal generation. There is no way they can deny this truth.

⁹⁹ Schaff, Philip, Ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series Vol. III*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1993), page 371

¹⁰⁰ Bettenson, Henry, *Documents of the Christian Church*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1975), pg. 26

Consequently, those who deny the eternal begetting of the Son of God must admit that they do not follow the Historic Christian Faith. They may continue to argue from classical Greek that they are correct, but there is no way they can argue from the Nicene Creed that the Early Church did not believe in the eternal generation of the Son of God, and that they based that belief upon the plain sense of Scripture.

So we see that the Greek word "*monogenes*" was understood to mean "only-begotten" during and after the time of the apostles of Christ. There are other examples that could be used. For example, when Jerome translated the Greek New Testament into Latin in the fourth century, he understood "*monogenes*" to mean "only-begotten," instead of "one and only."

When he translated John and in Hebrews into Latin he used the same Latin word the translators of Irenaeus used two hundred years before – "*unigentius*" – which as we have stated before can only be understood to mean only-begotten. In Luke's passages, he followed that same path that later English translators would follow, and used *unicus* in order to reserve the term "*unigentius*" only for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jerome's translation of the Bible, known as the "Vulgate" became the standard Bible of Western Christendom, until the time of the Reformation.

All these Greek speaking Christians from the time of the Early Church until the time of the Council of Nicaea understood "*monogenes*" to mean "Only-Begotten," and they all confessed a belief in the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God from the Father. This was their mother tongue, learned men who did not need someone to teach them what their own language meant. They all understood "*monogenes*" to mean "only begotten." They all affirmed his eternal begetting. Of this there can be no doubt.

Therefore, let us now move to the testimony of later and more modern Christians.

THE TESTIMONY OF LATER CHRISTIANS

Martin Luther, Theology professor and reformer in the 16th century.

"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord." This means: I believe not only that Jesus Christ is eternal and divine by nature, being begotten in eternity as God's true and only Son, but also that he has received power over all things from the Father in that, according to his human nature, he has been appointed Lord over myself and all creatures which, according to his divine nature, he has created with the Father."¹⁰¹

"These two words, "image" and "substance," declare the Father and the Son to be two distinct persons but one inseparable substance. The word "image" shows that the Son is not the Father, but the image of the Father, and a distinct person. The words "of his substance" indicate that in essence he is not distinct from the Father, but in the one same Godhead and of the same substance with the Father. Thus he is the very image of the Father's substance; not made, without beginning in time, **begotten** and existing from eternity; even as the divine essence was not made nor began to exist, but existed from eternity."¹⁰²

John Calvin, French theologian and reformer in the 16th century.

¹⁰¹ Luther, Martin, *Luther's two catechisms explained by himself: in six classic writings* (The Luther Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota 1908) Pg. 205

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pg. 238

“But in our time also there has arisen a heretic equally pestilent, Michael Servetus, who in the place of the Son of God has substituted an imaginary being composed of the essence of God, spirit, flesh, and three uncreated elements. In the first place, he denies Christ to be the Son of God, in any other respect than as he was begotten by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin. But his subtlety tends to subvert the distinction of the two natures, and thereby to represent Christ as something composed of God and man, and yet neither God nor man. For this is the principal point which he constantly endeavors to establish, that before Christ was manifested in the flesh, there were in God only some shadowy figures; the truth or effect of which had no real existence till the Word, who had been destined to this honour, actually began to be the Son of God. Now, we confess that the Mediator, who was born of the Virgin, is properly the Son of God. Nor indeed could the man Christ be a mirror of the inestimable grace of God, if this dignity had not been conferred on him, to be, and to be called, "the only begotten Son of God." The doctrine of the Church, however, remains unshaken, that he is accounted the Son of God, because, being the Word begotten by the Father before all ages, he assumed the human nature in a hypostatical union.”¹⁰³

John Gill, famous English Baptist Theologian and Preacher:

“Christ is the Son of God, Acts ix. 20. 2 Cor. i. 19, and indeed, it is the distinguishing criterion of the Christian religion, and what gives it the preference to all others, and upon which all the important doctrines of it depend; even upon the Sonship of Christ as a divine person; and as by generation, even eternal generation. Without this the doctrine of the Trinity can

¹⁰³ Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 1* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia, 1844) Pg. 439-440

never be supported.”¹⁰⁴

J. G. Bellett, beloved Christian teacher and writer from those Christians, who others have called, Plymouth Brethren:

“We must not, beloved, touch this precious mystery. We should fear to dim the light of that love in which our souls are invited to walk on their way to heaven. And - what is a deeper and tenderer thought, if I may be bold to utter it — we should fear to admit of any confession of faith (rather, indeed, of unbelief) that would defraud the divine bosom of its eternal, ineffable delights, and which would tell our God that He knew not a Father's joy in that bosom, as He opened it; and which would tell our Lord that He knew not a Son's joy in that bosom as He lay there from all eternity.”

“I cannot join in this. If there are Persons in the Godhead, as we know there are, are we not to know also that there are relationships between them? Can we dispense with such a thought? Is there not revealed to faith, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; the Son begotten, and the Spirit proceeding? Indeed there is. The Persons in that glory are not *independent*, but *related*. Nor is it beyond our measure to say that the great archetype of love, the blessed model or original of all relative affection, is found in that relationship.”¹⁰⁵

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, famous Baptist Preacher at Metropolitan Tabernacle in London:

“Before I enter into the illustration of this truth I wish to make one statement, so that all objections may be evaded as to the

¹⁰⁴ Gill, John, *A complete body of doctrinal and practical divinity or, A system of evangelical truths, deduced from the sacred Scriptures Vol. 1* (Printed for W. Winterbotham, London 1796), pg. 210

¹⁰⁵ Bellett, J. G., *The Son of God* (Loizeaux Brothers, New York, 1945) ch.1, ¶ 15,16

doctrine of my sermon. Our Saviour Jesus Christ, I say, was chosen out of the people; but this merely respects his manhood. As “very God of very God,” he was not chosen out of the people; for there was none save him. He was his Father’s only-begotten Son, “begotten of the Father before all worlds.” He was God’s fellow, co-equal and co-eternal.”¹⁰⁶

J.C. Philpot, Baptist preacher and editor of the *Gospel Standard*:

“If language means anything, the words positively declare that God had a Son, an only-begotten Son, and that He so loved poor, fallen man that He freely and voluntarily gave this only-begotten Son for his redemption. But *when* did God love the world? Before or after Jesus came in the flesh? Of course, before, for love moved Him to give His only-begotten Son. *Where*, then, was His only-begotten Son when God loved the world? In heaven, with God. And what was He in heaven with God? His only-begotten Son. Then He was His only-begotten Son in His divine nature, for His human nature never was in heaven till after the resurrection. And if His only-begotten Son in His divine nature, and if He existed as such from all eternity, what is this but eternal generation? Surely Jesus knew the mystery of His own generation; and if He call Himself God’s only-begotten Son, is it not our wisdom and mercy to believe what He says, even if our reason cannot penetrate into so high and sublime a mystery?”¹⁰⁷

“But you say, “I cannot understand this eternal generation. It seems to me so inconsistent, so self-contradictory, that I cannot

¹⁰⁶ Spurgeon, Charles Haddon, *Sermons delivered in Exeter Hall, Strand, during the enlargement of New Park Street Chapel, Southmark*, (Alabaster & Passmore, London 1855), pg. 77

¹⁰⁷ Philpot, J. C., *The True, Proper, and Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, The Only Begotten Son of God*, (Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, MT) Pg. 50-51

receive it." Do you mean, then, to receive nothing which you cannot understand, and which appears self-contradictory? Then you must on those grounds reject the two greatest mysteries of our most holy faith—the Trinity and the Incarnation. We do not call upon you to understand it. But if you love your own soul, we counsel you not to deny it, lest you be found amongst those who deny the Son, and so have not the Father (1 John ii. 23).”¹⁰⁸

Dean Burgon, professor at Oxford and well known textual critic:

“I know Him" (saith Christ), 'for I am from, (or of) Him.' [John 7:29] And because He is from, (or of) the Father, therefore He is called by those of the Nicene Council, in their Creed, ' God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.' "... In fact, they gathered those words of their Creed from this place; but not immediately, for (as Bp. Pearson remarks) they were in some of the Oriental Creeds before. He goes on to explain: "The Father is God, but not of God: Light, but not of Light. Christ is God, but of God: Light, but of Light. There is no difference or inequality in the Nature or Essences, because the same in both; but the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath that Essence of Himself, from none; Christ hath the same, not of Himself but from Him."

“By these words, then, the Eternal Son declares Himself to be the Only-Begotten of the Father, and asserts His Eternal Generation; as well as proclaims His Incarnation and divine Apostleship.”¹⁰⁹

Franz Delitzsch, noted theologian, professor, and Greek and Hebrew scholar of the twentieth century:

“In these three facts of inexpressibly rich significance, subsists God's eternally disclosed blessed life of love. And its

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Pg.57

¹⁰⁹ Burgon, John William, *A Plain Commentary on the Four Holy Gospels, Vol.2* (Herman Hooker, Philadelphia, 1859), pg. 716

relations are not such that the Father may beget the Son, and the Holy Ghost proceed from both, or not; but without Son and Spirit the Father would not be God, and without this threefold substance the Godhead would not be the Light, and the Love, and the Life. Moreover, its relations are not such that the Father at any time might be without the Son, and both without the Spirit; and neither are they such, that the Son could at any time be so begotten of the Father, as that He should be begotten of Him no more; nor that the Spirit should at any time have proceeded from both, so as that it should proceed no more; but these are everlasting facts which, if eternity be conceived of as a duration without beginning or end, are apprehended as in ever-during *becoming*, and nevertheless are still absolutely completed in every moment of eternity.... It is a process of everlasting becoming without resting, and yet, moreover, of everlasting completion without deficiency; and although the Godhead is not the product of this procession, yet its Being subsists in the threefold producing of this procession. It is exactly this interaction of *being* and *becoming* which is the life of the Godhead.”¹¹⁰

Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown,
Evangelical authors of Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary on
Whole Bible:

“...goings forth...from everlasting – The plain antithesis of this clause, to ‘come forth out of thee’ (*from Beth-lehem*), shows that the eternal generation of the Son is meant. The terms convey the strongest assertion of infinite duration of which the Hebrew language is capable (cf. Ps. 90:2; Prov. 8:22,23; John 1:1), Messiah’s generation as man coming forth unto God to do His will on earth is *from Beth-lehem*; but as Son of God, His goings forth are

¹¹⁰ Delitzsch, Franz, *A System of Biblical Psychology* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI 1966), pg. 57,58

from everlasting.”¹¹¹

Henry Alford, dean of Canterbury, renowned Greek scholar and author of the well-known *Greek New Testament in Four Volumes*:

“[Rom. 8:32] ...**did not spare His own Son**...His υιος μονογενης [only begotten Son], the only one of God’s sons who is One with Him in nature and essence, begotten of Him before all worlds. No other sense of ιδιου will suit its position here in a clause already made emphatic by γε, in consequence of which whatever epithet is fixed to υιου must partake of the emphasis.”¹¹²

“Monogenes – This word applied to Christ is peculiar to John: see reff. In the N. T. usage it signifies the *only* son:—in the LXX, Ps. xxi. 20, the *beloved*, and Ps. xxiv. Hi, one *deserted, left alone*. It has been attempted to render the word in John, according to the usage in Ps. xxi. 20. But obviously in the midst of ideas reaching so far deeper than that of regard, or love, of the Father for the Son, the word cannot be interpreted except in accordance with them. It refers to, and contrasts with, the τεκνα του θεου in vv. 12, 13. *They* receive their Divine birth by faith in Him, and through Him; but He is the *monogenes* of the Father in the higher sense, in which He is γεννηθεις [begotten] the Son of God.”¹¹³

A. T. Pierson, biographer of George Muller and famous Bible teacher and pastor:

¹¹¹ Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A.R.; Brown, David, *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI 1961) Pg. 817

¹¹² Alford, Henry, *The Greek New Testament, vol. II* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1958) pg. 400

¹¹³ Alford, Henry, *The Greek New Testament, vol. I* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1958) pg. 686

“As Messiah is represented as uncreated and eternally begotten, this cannot refer to existence, as then begun, but to a new existence, or career, a re-beggetting by virtue of which Messiah now takes the throne of the world and of all that involves.”¹¹⁴

Andrew Murray, noted missionary leader, evangelist and prolific devotional writer:

“Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. The words are used in Acts 13:33, of the resurrection of Christ. So the word firstborn in the next verse also has reference to the resurrection (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). The Son was not only begotten of the Father in eternity, but begotten again in the resurrection.”¹¹⁵

Joseph Barber Lightfoot, English theologian and English prelate:

“[Col. 1:] 15—17. He is the perfect image, the visible representation, of the unseen God. He is the Firstborn, the absolute Heir of the Father, begotten before the ages¹¹⁶; the Lord of the Universe by virtue of primogeniture, and by virtue also of creative agency. For in and through Him the whole world was created, things in heaven and things in earth, things visible to the outward

¹¹⁴ Pierson, Arthur T., *The Divine Enterprise of Missions* (Baker & Taylor, New York 1891), pg. 194

¹¹⁵ Murray, Andrew, *The Holiest of all: an Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (James Nisbet & Co. London, 1895), pg. 51-52

¹¹⁶ In spite of the fact that Joseph Lightfoot translated *monogenes* by *unicus* and understood it to mean “alone of his kind,” he did not think it negated the eternal generation of the Son from the Father as is evidenced by his affirmation of this truth in this portion of his writing.

eye and things cognizable by the inward perception.”¹¹⁷

A.T. Robertson, renowned Greek Scholar, author of numerous Greek works and Professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary:

“The only begotten Son (ο μονογενης υιος). This is the reading of the Textus Receptus and is intelligible after ως μονογενοϋς παρα πατρος in verse #14. But the best old Greek manuscripts (Aleph B C L) read μονογενης θεος (God only begotten) which is undoubtedly the true text. Probably some scribe changed it to ο μονογενης υιος to obviate the blunt statement of the deity of Christ and to make it like #3:16. But there is an inner harmony in the reading of the old uncials. The Logos is plainly called ‘theos’ in verse #1. The Incarnation is stated in verse #14, where he is also termed μονογενης. He was that before the Incarnation. So he is ‘God only begotten,’ ‘the Eternal Generation of the Son’ of Origen’s phrase.”¹¹⁸

H.C.G. Moule, well-known Bishop, teacher, professor, and famous contributor to *The Fundamentals*, Ed. By R.A. Torrey:

“We approach the subject of the Person and Work of our most sacred Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is “the Son of God, the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father...”

“Meanwhile, being divine, being properly God, He is Filial, He is the Son. For Scripture evidence on the eternal (as distinguished from the human) Sonship of Christ, see e.g. Joh. i. 18, xvii. 5, 24; Col. i. 13-17; Heb. i. 2, 8, ii. 14-17; 1 Joh. iv. 9. Not only

¹¹⁷ Lightfoot, Joseph Barber, *St. Paul's epistles to the Colossians & to Philemon: a revised text with introductions, notes & dissertations* (Macmillan & Co., London, 1876), pg. 144

¹¹⁸ Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 5 (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI 1960), pg. 17

as He is Man, but as He is God, He is so related to the Father that in divine reality, eternally and necessarily, He is the Son; as such, truly possessing the whole nature of "His own Father" (Joh. v. 18), and truly subordinate to Him, not in nature, but in order."

"The inscrutable mode of this blessed Filiation is named in the theology of the Christian Church "the Eternal Generation." ... Scripture reveals that the Christ is the Son antecedent to Incarnation. It also reveals that He is eternal. "Eternal Generation" (*gennêsis achronos, proaiônios*) combines these truths in the thought that the Begetting is not an event of time, however remote, but a fact irrespective of time. The Christ did not *become*, but necessarily and eternally *is*, the Son. He, a Person, possesses every attribute of pure Godhead. This necessitates eternity, absolute being; in this respect He is "not after" the Father. But Fatherhood is peculiar to the blessed First Person, and in this respect the Father is the Origin (*archê*) of the Son, "greater than the Son" (Joh. xiv. 28)"¹¹⁹

W. H. Griffith Thomas, co-founder of Dallas Theological Seminary and contributor to *The Fundamentals*, ed. by R.A. Torrey:

"...the former being applied to the Christian, and the latter to Christ as the one who is uniquely begotten of God."¹²⁰

"The Son "and" The Word " are complementary titles. The first guards the distinct Personality of the Son, the other guards His essential oneness with the Father. The phrase " begotten from everlasting of the Father " is an attempt to express in human language what is really incapable of full understanding and therefore of full expression, namely, the priority in Order of the Father in relation to the Son, and the equality of the Nature of the

¹¹⁹ Moule, Handley Carr Glyn, *Outlines of Christian Doctrine*, (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1890), pg. 57-59

¹²⁰ Thomas, W. H. Griffith, *The apostle John: studies in his life and writings* (Pickering & Inglis, London 1932) pg. 322

Son in relation to the Father. While the Father is thus prior in Order, He is not superior in Nature, and thus, however incompletely we are able to express it, we endeavour to provide for the two sides of the New Testament teaching on the Divine relations of the Father and the Son.”¹²¹

Louis Berkhof, famous Reform theologian and author of a well-respected Systematic Theology:

“The personal property of the Son is that He is eternally begotten of the Father...Several particulars deserve emphasis in connection with the generation of the Son; (1) It is a necessary act of God...(2) It is an eternal act of the Father. This naturally follows from the preceding. If the generation of the Son is a necessary act of the Father, so that it is impossible to conceive of Him as not generating, it naturally shares in the eternity of the Father. This does not mean, however, that it is an act that was completed in the fair distant past, but rather that it is a timeless act, the act of an eternal present, and act always continuing and yet ever completed. (3) It is a generation of the personal subsistence rather than of the divine essence of the Son. Some have spoken as if the Father generated the essence of the Son, but this is equivalent to saying that He generated His own essence, for the essence of both the Father and the Son is exactly the same. It is better to say that the Father generated the personal subsistence of the Son, but thereby also communicates to Him the divine essence in its entirety. But in doing this we should guard against the idea that the Father first generated a second person, and then communicated the divine essence to this person, for that would lead to the conclusion that the Son was not generated out of the divine essence, but created out of nothing. In the work of generation there was a communication of essence. It was one indivisible act. This is in agreement with the

¹²¹ Thomas, W. H. Griffith, *The Catholic faith: a manual of instruction for members of the Church of England* (Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1920) pg. 74

statement of Jesus, ‘For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself.’ (John 5:26).¹²²

Henry Clarence Thiessen, former professor of Dallas Theological Seminary:

“By eternal generation is meant eternal emanation. God says, “Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee” (Ps. 2:7). The word “today” denotes the universal present, the everlasting now. When Jesus said, ‘For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself’ (Jn. 5:26), he spoke of an eternal communication of the life of the Father to the Son.”¹²³

H. A. Ironside, well-beloved preacher and evangelist, who served as a pastor at Moody Church in Chicago:

“From this point on, the anointed eye loses sight of all else and is fixed upon Christ, for He it is who is now presented for the contemplation of our souls. It is Christ as the Uncreated Word, yet the Begotten Son by eternal generation; words admittedly paradoxical but after all distinctly scriptural. Some there are who have supposed the term *only begotten* necessarily implied a period, however remote, when the Son was not. This John’s gospel clearly refutes, for ‘the same was in the beginning with God.’ He was begotten, not in the sense of having a beginning of life, but as being on one nature and substance with the Father. Never was there a moment in the past eternity when He reposed not in the bosom of

¹²² Berkhof, Louis, *Systematic Theology*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1972) Pg. 93-94

¹²³ Thiessen, Henry Clarence, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1949, rev. 1977), pg. 98

Infinite Love.”¹²⁴

T. Ernest Wilson, beloved missionary and faithful minister of the Word.

“... (Ps. 2:7-9), I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee.” This is one of the decrees of the Godhead in eternity past, here revealed for the first time by the Son. It is one of the greatest Messianic passages in Holy Scripture. The eternal Sonship of Christ is one of the most vital, basic doctrines of the Word of God. It is denied by many heretical cults, but should be held and valued by all those who know and love our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the great passage on which the doctrine is based. Another term, used only by the Apostle John, is “the Only Begotten Son,” *the monogenes*. John uses the term five times.”

“Some theologians teach that the word “begotten” must *not* be understood as referring to an act in time, but to what they term an “eternal generation.” The word “day” is explained as “eternity.” Taken in this way, the eternal Sonship of Christ is safely guarded.

“But others maintain that the three places in the New Testament where the words are quoted give the explanation. In view of the definiteness of the term ‘this day,’ it would seem difficult to define it as synonymous with eternity. It must refer to some special act in what we know as time.

“Here we must be on our guard against those who say that He only became the Son of God at His incarnation and who

¹²⁴ Ironside, H.A., Proverbs and Song of Solomon *Ironside Expository Commentary Series* (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI 2003) pg. 58-59

deny His eternal Sonship.”¹²⁵

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, well respected Christian minister, author and co-worker of G. Campbell Morgan at Westminster Chapel:

“No, He is the only begotten, He is the Son of God by generation; we are sons of God by adoption. And that is a most essential distinction. Pg. 183¹²⁶

R. C. H. Lenski, famed Christian teacher and author of the *Commentary of the New Testament in 12-volumes*:

“ ‘God Only-begotten’ is such from all eternity, and the adjective predicates the inner Trinitarian mystery of the generatio aeterna [eternal generation]...The simple truth is that John is revealing to us who Jesus Christ really was: the Logos, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity.”¹²⁷

C. S. Lewis, famous Christian apologist, professor at both Oxford and Cambridge, and author of *Mere Christianity*:

“One of the Creeds says that Christ is the Son of God “begotten, not created”; and it adds ‘begotten by his Father before all worlds...’ We are not now thinking about the Virgin Birth. We

¹²⁵ Wilson, T. Ernest, *The Messianic Psalms*, (Gospel Folio Press, Grand Rapids, MI 1997) Ch. 1,
<http://plymouthbrethren.wordpress.com/2008/11/20/the-messianic-psalms-t-ernest-wilson/>

¹²⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: God the Father, God the Son; God the Holy Spirit; The Church and the Last Things Volumes 1-3 of Great doctrines of the Bible* (Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 2003), pg. 183

¹²⁷ Lenski, R.C.H., *Commentary on the New Testament, The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), pg. 97

are thinking about something that happened before nature was created at all, before time began. ‘Before all worlds’ Christ is begotten, not created...”¹²⁸

A. W. Tozer, beloved minister of Christ Jesus and well-known devotional writer

“During the Arian controversy 318 Church fathers (many of them maimed and scarred by the physical violence suffered in earlier persecutions) met at Nicaea and adopted a statement of faith, one section of which runs: *I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, The only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of Him before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made.*

For more than sixteen hundred years this has stood as the final test of orthodoxy, as well it should, for it condenses in theological language the teaching of the New Testament concerning the position of the Son in the Godhead.”¹²⁹

Kenneth Wuest, noted New Testament Greek scholar and professor of New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago:

“The word “only begotten” does not only mean that our Lord was the only Son of God, but that He, as God the Son, is alone of His kind, unique, begotten of God through eternal generation. He is the image of God in the sense that He is a derived representation of God the Father, co-existent eternally with Him, possessing the same essence, Deity Himself...”

“...What a tremendous thought. To think that the eternal

¹²⁸ Lewis, C.S., *The Joyful Christian*, 127 Readings (Simon & Schuster, New York 1996), pg. 39

¹²⁹ Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (Harper and Row, New York, 1975), pg. 28

God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the One who has no beginning, the Ancient of Days, yet was begotten. He proceeds by eternal generation from the Father as the Son, and because eternal, that birth never took place, it always was.”¹³⁰

John Walvoord, former President of Dallas Theological Seminary:

“The Scriptures represent Christ as eternally the Son of God by eternal generation...”

“The Only Begotten: “...(John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; I John 4:9)...The Revised Standard Version translates the expression by “only Son,” which, although not actually incorrect, seems to be an oversimplification of the real meaning which leaves the concept of “begotten” implied but not actually stated. The Authorized Version is more literal here. The thought is clearly that Christ is the Begotten of God in the sense that none other is. This is illustrated in the use of the same word in regard to Isaac (Heb. 11:17), who was not literally the only begotten of Abraham but was the only begotten of Abraham in the sense that he was the promised seed. It is used in the ordinary sense also in Scripture (Luke 7:12; 8:42, the only other references in the New Testament). The term is again a confirmation of the idea of eternal generation...”¹³¹

Henry Morris, well known Christian Apologist, teacher and co-founder of Institute of Christian Research:

“But why was it important for the Holy Spirit who inspired these five great verses to stress that the Lord Jesus was the incarnate

¹³⁰ Wuest, Kenneth, *Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament, Vol. 4* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1971) pg. 83,85

¹³¹ Walvoord, John, *Jesus Christ our Lord* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1969) pg. 41,44

only begotten Son of God? Many modern English translations of the New Testament apparently do not consider it important, for they render the phrase merely as "only son." It is so rendered in the Living Bible, the Revised Standard Version, the God's Word translation, the Twentieth Century New Testament, the New Living Translation, the Moffatt, Goodspeed, and Williams translations, and many others. The New International Version renders it "one and only son." There are still a few, however--the best-known being the New American Standard and the New King James--that render it correctly (as in the King James Version) as "only begotten Son."

"The Greek word for "only begotten" is *monogenes*, the very form of which clearly denotes "only generated"...It does not mean "one," or even "one and only." It is worth noting that, although Christ is called the Son, or Son of God, frequently in the New Testament, He is never (in the Greek original) called the "only" son of God... He is not just the only begotten Son of the Father, for He is also the *eternally begotten* Son of the Father. He is eternally "in His bosom," yet always "going forth" to "declare" the Father..."¹³²

And so we conclude this witness of godly men throughout the history of the Church to the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father and to the understanding of "monogenes" as "only begotten."

There is undeniable evidence that Christians have always understood the Lord Jesus Christ to be the "Only Begotten Son of God" from the earliest times. The translators of our Bible's have also understood *monogenes* in this way.

The King James Bible issued in 1611, which was translated by the leading Hebrew and Greek scholars of the day,

¹³² Morris, Henry, *God's Only Begotten Son*,
(www.icr.org/home/resources/resources_tracts_godsonlybegottenson)

understood “monogenes” to mean “only-begotten” and not “one and only.” To say that “monogenes” means “one and only” and has nothing to do with “generation,” would be to say that the forty seven leading Hebrew and Greek scholars, who translated the Hebrew and Greek Bible into English, did not know what they were doing. This is no minor doctrine where disagreement may prevail, *but this is a major and an essential doctrine* of the Bible. Those forty-seven translators of the KJV would not lightly treat such passages of Scripture without careful regard to the word’s meaning. They understood in their mind what “*monogenes*” meant and that is why they translated it “Only-Begotten.”

In addition, the translators of the American Standard Bible of 1901 understood “*monogenes*” to mean “Only-Begotten,” and the translators of the New American Standard Bible understood it in the same way.

Bible translations begin to show a change in the translation of “monogenes” in the late 19th and early 20th century. Until that time every major Bible translation understood “monogenes” in the sense of “only begotten.” (See Appendix C)

So it is most unfortunate that now in these last days, when we are told many will begin to depart from the true Faith, we have men changing the meaning of “*monogenes*” in such translations like the New International Version, The Message, New Living Translation, and the English Standard Version, to mean “one and only,” “only,” or “one of a kind,” thereby forever obscuring the doctrine of the eternal begetting of the Son of God.

This is not to question the “good faith” of these translators, but to show that error creeps forward slowly. I fear not for the faith of these translators, but for the faith of all the thousands of Christians who will be led to forget the truth that our precious Lord Jesus was the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten before all times by God the Father, and with such a loss of this truth will have their knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity greatly hampered. This in turn will open the door for their faith to be wrecked by the many cults and heresies that were told will be prevalent in these last days.

The proper understanding of the Trinity is a bastion against all heresy and error. Such a belief is the cornerstone of our Faith. To obscure the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God is the first step to obscuring the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. That is why the word “monogenes” is so important.

VERY GOD OF VERY GOD

In John 5:18, the Jews leaders desired to kill Jesus because He made Himself out equal to God the Father. He did this by calling Him His own (ἰδιον) Father. All Jews owned God as their Father (Isa. 64:8) because they all knew they were “of” Him, for they were all from Him. They were all descendents of Abraham, who was a descendent of Adam, who was “of” God, as Luke literally says in his gospel (Lu. 3:38). Therefore, they always referred to God as their Father. However, our Lord claimed a peculiar relationship to the Father. They were all “of” the Father, indirectly, through Adam, but Christ claimed to be “of” God, directly, by calling Him “my” Father. That is why the Jews always referred to God, indirectly, as “our” Father, but never, directly, as “my” Father. Christ was claiming that God was His own (ἰδιον) Father. The word “ἰδιον” denotes “something privately belonging to one’s own self,” “something not common to all.”

In other words, the Fatherhood of God was a common possession of all Jews, but Jesus was saying His possession of the Fatherhood of God was unique and different from all the rest.

This same word is used of the Son in Rom. 8:32. Paul tells us that God did not spare His (ἰδιοῦ) Son. In other words, the Sonship of Christ was unique and unlike any other sonship. We are all “sons of God” by faith and regeneration (John 1: 11-13). That is the common possession of all believers, but Christ has His own private and exclusive sonship with God. We are the sons of God. He is the Son of God.

This is the same reason the Jewish leaders wished to stone Him on another occasion. In the passage, John 10: 29-36, the Jewish leaders wished to stone Him because His claim to be the Son of God was considered blasphemous (vs. 36). Not only did He claim God was His Father in an exclusive sense, He also claimed to be a Son of God in an exclusive sense. Now again, why did the Jewish leaders

react in such a way? It was because, (even though they considered themselves to be sons of God, e.g. Mal. 1:6), they understood Christ's claim to Sonship to be a different type of Sonship. They understood that He made Himself the same as God substantially. They understood that He was saying He was of the same kind as God the Father and this could not occur except by divine fecundity.

Our Lord's purpose was to teach the truth. When people misunderstood the truth of things He would correct them. (Matt. 9:14-17; 12:1-7; 15:1-6; 17:10-13; 19:3-9; John 6:63; 10:6-18; 21:23) Because this was true, why did not the Lord correct their misperception, when He stated God was His Father? He knew people would understand the words "my Father" in their normal sense. Why did He not say, "O no, you misunderstand me, I am not saying I was begotten of God?" The reason He did not correct them is because they did not misunderstand Him.

The names "Father" and "Son" are revelatory words inspired in Scripture by the Holy Spirit to teach all men the eternal Trinitarian relationships of the First and Second Persons of the Blessed Trinity. The Son was not careless in the words He chose when He taught all those years ago. He does not wish to mislead us. The Church has always understood the words "Father" and "Son" in their normal and plain sense.

This needs to be stated because the same modern teachers, who deny *monogenes* means only begotten, also claim that Christ was not the Son of God in its normal meaning of being begotten, but believe He was the Son of God in a loose idiomatic sense. They claim the word "Son" was used as an Old Testament idiom, much in the same way as it was used in such Old Testament phrases as "sons of the prophets" (I Kings 20:35), or "son of perfumers" (Neh. 3:8). The word, they claim, should not be understood in a literal sense, but should be understood with the same idiomatic meaning of a "son of the prophets."

A "son of the prophets" would mean someone who was acting like one of the prophets of old, one who was displaying their qualities, someone who behaved in accordance with their nature,

but certainly the idiom would not mean one was a literal “son of a prophet.

They claim this is what is meant when Scripture calls Jesus the Son of God. They do not believe in the doctrine of eternal generation, which teaches that the Son was eternally begotten of the Father, and so was called the Son of God; they believe New Testament writers were using a Semitic idiom. They believe they were using this Old Testament idiom that conveyed the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, meaning He was had the same nature or character of God, but not that He was begotten of God.

However, if that is all Jesus was saying, why then did the Jews wish to stone Him? If Jesus was claiming to be a son of God in the same way as one might claim to be a “son of the prophets,” then the Jewish leaders would praise Him, not wish to kill Him. They knew their own law taught them to be sons of God, displaying the qualities of their heavenly Father (cf. Mat. 5:9). If Christ was simply using a Semitic idiom, they would have agreed with Him and would have said something like, “We know you are like our Father in heaven, we strive to be so also. As such, we know you are a great teacher (Luke 20:21), we aspire to be so also. But don’t you think, Rabbi, you should say I am ‘a son’ of God,’ rather than I am ‘the Son’ of God? Someone might misunderstand you!”

If they really understood Christ was using a Semitic idiom, that is exactly what they would have said. They would not have been so angry with Him. No, they understood exactly what Christ was claiming. Jesus was claiming to be “of” God, to be uniquely begotten by God in a way “not common” to any other person.

One needs to notice one thing about this idiom. It is almost always used in the plural in Scripture. It is “sons of the prophets,” plural, not “son of the prophet,” singular. Or it was “son of the prophets,” plural, not “son of the prophet,” singular. If it was singular, and read the “son of the prophet,” one would understand it was referring to a literal son of a prophet. The same is the case for all the other idiomatic phrases; the object is either singular with the genitive plural, or the object is plural and the genitive singular. It is

rarely used in the idiomatic sense when both the object and the genitive are singular. If it was, the reader would normally understand it in its literal sense.

When it is so used, (where the object and genitive are singular), the Old Testament idiom speaks of character or attributes. For example, Barnabas was called a “son of consolation” (Acts 4:36), or a peaceful man was called a “son of peace” (Luke 10:6). However, obviously, this idiom would not apply to the phrase “Son of God,” for the genitive bespeaks a Person, not a characteristic of a Person, like peace or consolation.

And so we see when the object or the genitive is plural, it is used in an idiomatic manner; when the object and the genitive are singular, (except when speaking of character), it is normally used in a derivative manner. When we come to the usage associated with our Lord, we see it is always used in the singular. Scripture says He was the “Son of God,” never that He was *of* the “sons of God.” That Old Testament idiom is never used of our Lord, with the sense given above.

However, even though we have demonstrated that the phrase, “Son of God,” was not used as an idiom, let us assume, for the sake of argument, that it is such an idiom. What are we then left with? How wonderful it is to still have this phrase in II John 1:3.

“Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, **the Son of the Father**, in truth and love.”

Here John uses a different phrase. He does not say “the Son of God.” He says “the Son of the Father.” It is not possible for some modern teachers to explain away the plain sense of this portion of Scripture by saying John was simply using the Semitic idiom. John does not use the phrase, the “Son of God.” He uses the phrase, “Son of the Father!”

If men would only accept the normal, everyday, and plain language of Scripture, all opposition to this doctrine would

disappear! Why? –if the Christ is the “Son of the Father,” and the normal and plain meaning of the phrase, “Son of the Father,” can only mean one who is begotten by the other, one will then accept the plain affirmation of the apostle John, and not belittle the doctrine of the Son’s eternal generation. He will, rather, try to understand the doctrine.

John was using plain language. Remember, when the apostle John wrote this epistle, he had his hands full with heretical teachers and Gnostics who continually distorted the true faith. I do not think that the apostle John would create more problems for himself by introducing “sloppy language” concerning the nature of Christ.

That would be all he would need! Just imagine, he would be saying to himself, “Because I was careless in my language, some people are actually thinking I meant the Son was “begotten” by the Father!” “How could I have been so careless in my language?” “If I had only been clearer in what I wrote!”

That would be absurd to think that John would make such a statement, or make such a mistake and create such a mess for himself. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit! No, John meant just what he said, Christ was the “Son of the Father,” and when one accepts that plain language of John, one has no problem with “eternal generation,” for if Christ was the Son of the Father, if He was begotten by Him, when did that occur? John would not think it occurred in some distant time, for that would contradict what he said in John 1:1. So, in John’s mind, when would that generation occur? He would say in eternity, because he would know the prophetic Scripture of Micah 5:2, which said his “goings forth” were from everlasting.

And so, even if one insists that the phrase, “Son of God,” is a Semitic idiom, and that, as such, it does not teach the Son’s eternal generation, one cannot escape the clear and succinct statement by John that Christ is the “Son of the Father.”

Even when we come to the phrase, the “Son of Man,” it is not being used by the New Testament writers as a simple Semitic

idiom, but is being used by them to reveal an important biblical doctrine. Yes, it was used as a Semitic idiom in the Old Testament, where it simply meant a human being. It is used that way in Daniel and Ezekiel, as well as in the important Messianic psalm – Psalm 8, but what some forget is that these Semitic idioms also carry a sense of procession.

Yes, a “son of the prophets” is not to be taken literally, but when one understands the processional language of Scripture, one realizes that, in this, there still is the connotation of procession. If one is called a son of the prophets, it is because he has *received* the same sense of character from the prophets. The word “son” still carries the sense of derivation, even in its idiomatic usage. Or, one might *derive* the same prophetic authority of a prophet, and, thus, be called a son of the prophets (see II Kings 2:1-15). Just because the phrase “son of the prophets” is considered an Old Testament idiom does not mean the word “son” loses its derivative sense.

The same truth can be seen in such a term as the “son of the perfumers.” It means he has derived the same skill of a perfumer, perhaps through an apprenticeship, with another perfumer. Again, as in the example before, the word “son” does not lose its derivative connotation. When one understands the reality, truth, and doctrine of Romans 1:20, such processional realities are not hard to discern.

Hence, when Daniel was called “son of man” (Dan. 8:17), and Ezekiel was called “son of man,” (e.g. Eze. 2:1; 3:3 and 24:16) the word “son” in that Semitic idiom did not lose its derivative connotation. The Semitic idiom was applied to them because they were men who saw great visions and mighty angels of God. They were given this title to remind them that they were “men,” simple human beings, men made lower than angels (Ps. 8:4-5). However, they were also being reminded that they were derived from a Man. They were a son of a Man. Here we see the derivative connotation of the word “son.” They were not powerful angels, created by an immediate act of God, but were humble men, descended from Adam, and so should not be lifted up by their great visions. It reminds us of Paul’s humiliation after he also saw great visions (II

Cor. 12:1-7).

And so, when this title is used of our Lord, it also should remind us of His humiliation (Phil. 2:7-8). Hebrews 2:9 tells us He was made “a little lower than angels.” What condescension our Saviour was willing to endure. Even though He was the Creator, the Eternal Son of God, He was willing to take upon Himself the lowly title “Son of Man,” and yet, His title “Son of Man” was more than just a Semitic idiom. It was also a literal statement of fact. The word “Son,” in “Son of Man,” was meant to convey generation and derivation, just as the word “Son” in “Son of God” was meant to convey generation and derivation.

Christ was called the “Son of Man” because He literally was the “Son of Adam (Man).” Remember, “Adam,” is many times, translated simply as “man,” for he was the first Man. Christ not only took on the “seed of Abraham” (Heb. 2:16), He also took on the seed of Adam, for Christ was the promised “Seed,” the One promised to mankind from the very earliest pages of the Bible (Genesis 3:15).

Christ not only had to be the Son “of” God, being consubstantial with God, in order to secure our salvation, He also had to be the Son “of” Man, being consubstantial (in a limited way) with Man, in order to save our souls. That is why He is the only one who can save mankind. He is the Son of God, as to His deity, because He *proceeded* from God His Father (Jn. 8:42), and the Son of Man as to His humanity, because he *proceeded* from His father Adam through Mary (Luke 3:23-38).

In addition, the fact that the title, “Son of Man,” was considered more than just an Old Testament idiom, (although even in that, as we have shown the word “son” still does not lose its literal connotation), is demonstrated and clearly revealed because of the underlying Greek text in the title “Son of Man” as used in New Testament.

When the writer of Hebrews quotes from the Old Testament passage of Psalms 8 in Hebrews 2:6 he uses the same underlying Greek words found in the Septuagint for “son of man,”

υιος ανθρωπου. These words are without the definite article (anarthrous) showing that the character or quality of man is being emphasized. The translators did this because the Hebrew phrase was a Semitic idiom as we have already mentioned, and by making the substantives anarthrous, they were emphasizing the same idiomatic meaning, that being, one who is human, a human being. As far as I can tell, this anarthrous construction is used in the LXX every time the phrase “son of man” is used in the Old Testament, or at least I can say the majority of the times.

However, what is most revealing is that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John did not follow this same linguistic construction when they recorded Christ’s assertion that He was the Son of Man. They wrote it as, ο υιος του ανθρωπου, literally, the Son of “the” Man.¹³³ By using the article before Man, the writer, or should I say the Holy Spirit, is emphasizing identity, as opposed to the character or essence of the anarthrous construction. The Holy Spirit is emphasizing to us that Christ was the Son of “the” Man (Adam). Most of the time Christ was not declaring He was the Son of Man spoken about in Daniel, but, most of the time, He was declaring He was the Son of “the” Man – the promised Seed of Genesis 3:15 – mankind’s only hope of salvation. He was declaring that He was the One that generations had long sought and prayed for, the One that was promised to mankind’s very first parents so long ago. What a wonderful Saviour He is!

Therefore, the title “Son of Man” is not a Semitic idiom when used of our Lord in the New Testament (except in the few places mentioned). It is meant to be understood in a literal sense.

For example, when the Lord tells us in Matt. 20:28 that the “Son of Man” came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many, He was not using a Semitic

¹³³ The only exceptions, as far as I can tell, in the New Testament are Heb. 2:6, which we have already discussed, and Jn 5: 27, Rev. 1:13 and Rev. 14:14. In those passages it seems the words are anarthrous because the emphasis is on the prophetic fulfillment of Christ as the Son of Man spoken of in Daniel 7:13.

idiom which simply meant, as a human being He was going to give His life as a ransom for many. No, He was saying the Son of “the” Man was going to give His life a ransom for many.¹³⁴ Only the Son of “the” Man could make such a sacrifice. Only as the promised Seed, could the Son of God ransom the many. Only He was the promised “Seed,” the son of Adam, as to His humanity. The title makes a contrast with His other title, the “Son of God,” which also is not a Semitic idiom, but is to be understood literally as to His deity. Christ is the Son of God as to His deity and the Son of Man as to His humanity. Both bespeak generation and derivation. And, as such, He was the only one who could procure forgiveness for mankind by His death upon the cross.

Even if one disagrees and believes the term “Son of Man” is simply an idiom bespeaking His humanity, such a one cannot ignore that such an idiom, when used of our Lord, is also based upon a biblical and literal reality. He literally took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh by being “of” Mary, “of” David, “of” Abraham, “of” Eve, and ultimately, as Luke 3:38 says, “of” Adam (Man). In other words, no matter how one wants to define the phrase, “Son of Man,” one cannot deny that it is used with a sense of derivation. He was “of” Man (Adam), as to His humanity, and “of” God, as to His deity.

You see, dear reader, the term “Son of God” is not telling us that the Son is divine, with no sense of derivation from God; it is being used to tell us that the Son is literally God, because He is “of” God. He is divine because He has a special derivative relationship to God. He is God because He is eternally begotten from God the Father. He literally is the Son “of” God. This has always been the Historic Faith!

It was for this reason Christians at the Council of Nicaea

¹³⁴ A few places, where the title “Son of Man” is used in a more general sense, i.e. simply carrying the idea of a human being without reference to Adam, can be found in such verses as Heb. 2:6 and Rev. 1:13. In both cases the word is anarthrous, indicating the emphasis is on substance and not on identity.

adopted the term “Very God of Very God.” They understood Jesus was the Son of God. They believed that He was the Son of God because he was begotten of God. He was “of” God.

Dean Burgon speaks of this truth when he comments on John 7:29. He says the following in his comment.

“For I am from Him, and He hath sent Me.” From whom I received My Essence by communication, from Him also received I this commission. Thus He which begotteth sendeth, and He which is begotten is sent. ‘I know Him’ (saith Christ), ‘for I am from (or of) Him.’¹³⁵ And because He is from (or of) the Father, therefore He is called by those of the Nicene Council, in their Creed, ‘God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.’ In fact, they gathered those words of their Creed from this place; but not immediately, for (as Bp. Pearson remarks) they were in some of the Oriental Creeds before. He goes on to explain: The Father is God, but not “of” God: Light, but not “of” Light. Christ is God, but “of” God: Light, but “of” Light. There is no difference or inequality in the Nature or Essences, because the same in both; but the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has that Essence of Himself, from none; Christ hath the same, not of Himself but from Him”

“By these words, then, the Eternal son declares Himself to be the Only-Begotten of the Father, and asserts His Eternal Generation; as well as proclaims His Incarnation and divine Apostleship.”¹³⁶

When Christian leaders claim that the Son was not “of” God and that the phrase, “Son of God,” should be understood only as an idiomatic phrase, they do not realize they are departing from the Faith. The orthodox viewpoint has always held Jesus was the Son “of” God. It has always been acknowledged by Christians of all ages that the phrase is used in its plain and normal sense. The Jewish leaders understood the phrase in its plain and normal sense

¹³⁵ Dean Burgon originally used brackets rather than parentheses.

¹³⁶ Burgon, John William, *A Plain Commentary on the Four Holy Gospels: intended chiefly for devotional reading*, Vol. 2 (Herman Hooker, Philadelphia, 1859) pg. 716

and that is why they wished to kill Him, because they believed He was blaspheming God.

This same doctrine is also taught in other verses. I Jn. 5:9-11 tells us that Christ is the Son “of” Him.

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”

“Son of Him” is a literal rendering of the last phrase of each verse which reads “His Son.” We do not speak this way in English and so it is rendered *His Son*, which is an acceptable translation, but literally the phrase reads the “Son of Him.” The Greek word αὐτου (Him) is in the genitive case. This gives us the rendering “of Him.”

Sometimes it is wiser to look to men of the last century, or should I say, the 19th century, when studying this doctrine of the Son. They seemed to have a special intuitive understanding of the Greek language that some teachers of the 21st century do not have. One of those teachers was Georg Benedikt Winer, the German theologian, linguist and Greek scholar.

Many will disagree, but I think he intuitively understood the special nuance contained in the basal function of the genitive case. He says the following regarding this case in his Greek grammar.

“The Genitive may be called-the Whence-case. Its primary import is that of issuing out of, or proceeding from.”¹³⁷

John is telling us that Christ was the Son “of” Him

¹³⁷ Winer, Georg Benedikt, *A Treatise on the Grammar of the Greek New Testament Regarded as a Sure Basis for New Testament Exegesis* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1882), pg. 230

(αυτου-genitive case). He was the one “issuing out” of, or “proceeding from” Him. What could be clearer or more succinct? Some may still claim there is a Semitic meaning in the phrase “Son of God,” but there is no way they can claim there is a Semitic idiom in this phrase, “Son of Him.” It is an impossibility. Here is solid proof that in John’s mind, as well as in all the other New Testament writers minds, that Christ was called the Son of God, not because of some Semitic idiom, but because He was “of” God. Here is proof that all the early Christians were right in calling Christ the Only Begotten Son of God, because he was eternally “of” God. Here is proof that our brothers at Nicaea got it right when they called the Son, Very God “of” Very God. They were simply following the revelation of Scriptures.

This wonderful truth is also revealed in Rom. 8:3, which reads,

“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.”

Here we also see the phrase “His own Son.” In the Greek it reads, τον εαυτου υιον. Literally, it would read, “the Son of Himself.” In English, of course, we normally use “his own” as the genitive form of “himself,” and so we do not see this reflexive pronoun. However, in this passage Paul is emphasizing the personal deity and consubstantiality of Christ with the Father by using this reflexive pronoun in the genitive case. God sent the Son “of” Himself. This bespeaks the Son’s procession out of the Father. This Scripture is specifically teaching us that the Son is derived out of the Father Himself in an even more emphatic manner than even John’s declaration of John 7:29.

Georg Benedikt Winer was right when he identified the basal function of the genitive as the “whence-case.” And when it was used with fecundity he called it the genitive of kindred.¹³⁸ This

¹³⁸ Ibid., pg. 237

use of the genitive is most clearly seen in the genealogy recorded in Luke 3:23-38 where basal function of the genitive is most clearly seen.

When one observes this distinction, (i.e. the New Testament writers use of the genitive to teach the Son's procession from the Father), one begins to clearly see the doctrine of the procession in many other verses. For example, Matt. 17:5 tells us that the Father spoke the following words from heaven,

“While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”

Here, we see that Christ is called the Son of God. Literally, the verse would read, “This is the beloved, the Son “of” me.” Here, again, the genitive is used. The Father clearly says the Son was “of” Him. However, if one believes that Christ was not literally the Son of God by begetting, then the Father would be most misleading in this statement. The Father knew the apostles would understand this statement to refer to the real Sonship of Christ. Perhaps, if He had only said, “This is the Beloved Son, hear ye Him,” one might argue the name “Son” could simply be a title that was assumed by the second person of the Godhead in eternity, but that is not what He said. Literally He said, “This is the beloved, the Son “of” me.” He clearly says the Son was “of” Him. If Christ was not really “of” the Father then this verse would be misleading the apostles.

In Matt. 21:37 the Lord gives us parable of the vineyard,

“Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they

said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.” (KJV)

The Lord concludes the parable with the statement “But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son.” Literally, it should read “They will reverence the son “of” me.”

When one reads this parable in its plain and literal sense one realizes that the householder was God the Father, and, of course, Christ applied the “son” to Himself. Christ considered Himself to be “of” the Father, and not simply the second Person of the Trinity who adopted the title “Son.”

In fact, in the Luke 20:13 account of this parable, Luke includes the word “beloved,” before the word son, which connects this parable to the oft repeated word of the Father “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Consequently, we see the Lord is connecting the normal meaning of sonship in the parable, with the actual and eternal Sonship He had with His Father. Christ was the Son, because He was the beloved Son “of” God. He was eternally begotten of God. Clearly, the Lord was not applying a Semitic idiom to Himself in this parable, but was speaking of normal sonship.

Matt. 27:54 says,

“Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God.’” (KJV)

The centurion and those soldiers with him confessed that Christ was the Son of God when they saw the way He died upon the cross. These Roman soldiers would know nothing of an Old Testament idiom. According to their pagan viewpoint, the gods begat sons. Therefore, when they became afraid and called Christ the Son of God, they meant that Christ was begotten of the Jewish

God, that he was derived from God, and yet Matthew did not correct the statement of the centurion and the soldiers in order to give a proper understanding of Christ's Sonship – that it should be understood as a Semitic idiom simply bespeaking sameness of nature and not sameness of nature from generation. He did not correct the statement so that the people of God would not be misled into a false concept of Sonship. In fact, when this was written, the Holy Spirit knew that any Gentile from a pagan background, who read this Gospel, would understand that the statement of the soldiers in its normal generative sense, that they were saying that Christ was the literal “son of God,” and yet the Holy Spirit let stand the statement without correction. Why? Because the New Testament writers were not using a Semitic idiom in regard to the Sonship of Christ, but were using a generative concept in regard to the Sonship of Christ.

Mark 14:61-62 is perhaps one of the clearest statements of the begottenness of the Son from the Father. The verse reads as follows,

“But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.” (KJV)

The High Priest asked Jesus if He was the “Son of the Blessed.” The word “Blessed” was a common appellation of the Jews for God. In fact, when one combines this occurrence with the account given to us in Matthew 26:63, one realizes the full question would have been, “Art thou the Christ, the Son of God, the Blessed.” This combining of the word Christ, with the idea of being the Son of God, could only come from one portion of Scripture. The only passage to which the High Priest could be referring to was Ps. 2: 2, 7 which combined the terms Christ

(Anointed) and the term “Son.” In other words, the very context of the High Priest question was that of “begottenness.” Ps. 2:7 specifically uses this word in connection with the word “Son.” The High Priest was not using a Semitic idiom. He was using the phrase “Son of God” in its normal sense. He was asking Christ if he considered Himself “derived” from God the Father. And what was our Lord’s answer to the enquiry? He said “I am.”

Here is a direct affirmation from our Lord that he was “of” God and that He was using the phrase “Son of God” in its normal sense.

Now, of course, the High Priest understood that Psalms 2 referred to the Messiah being installed as King upon Zion. As with all Jewish leaders of that time, he would not believe that the begetting in the Psalm referred to a literal begetting of the Messiah from God, but, rather, believed it referred to the installation of the Messiah upon Mt. Zion as the firstborn (Ps. 89:27).

But this is not how the High Priest was framing the question. He knew from the previous encounters of Jesus with the Jewish leaders that He was not claiming to be the Son of God according to the traditional Messianic understanding of “sonship” through “installation.” He was not claiming to be the Son of God, simply because He thought He would be installed as King upon Zion. The High Priest knew that Jesus was claiming a special and literal Sonship. His question to Jesus was not just if He was the Messiah, but if He was the Messiah claiming peculiar Sonship.¹³⁹

Moreover, if the High Priest was not understanding

¹³⁹ As was mentioned before, in the chapter *Psalms 2:7*, many Jews of that time believed in the special pre-mundane existence of the Messiah who somehow participated in the being of God. This may also have been behind this question to Jesus. He may have been trying to assert if Jesus claimed to be this Messianic being. This would give further explanation to the charge of blasphemy, since many Jewish leaders thought this Messianic speculation to be heretical. It would also show that the High Priest was not thinking of “sonship” from an idiomatic point of view, but was thinking of “sonship” from a derivational point of view.

Sonship in this way, he would not have called the answer of Jesus blasphemy; instead, he probably would have asked Him other questions in order to assert if He really was the Messiah or not. No, by his reaction to the answer of Jesus, we understand that he was thinking of “sonship” in its normal and plain sense. He was framing the question of “sonship” from his understanding of Jesus’ own understanding of Sonship, and not from his own understanding of Messianic sonship.

And finally, in John 19:7-9 we read of the Jewish leaders accusing Christ before Pilate of making Himself out to be the Son of God.

“The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.” (KJV)

The Jewish leaders were not using a Semitic idiom, because the message understood by Pilate was that Jesus was claiming to be the begotten Son of God. Pilate would not know of an Old Testament idiom. Because Pilate understood the phrase, “Son of God” in its normal sense he became afraid and went forth to Jesus to specifically ask Him, “Whence (ποθεν) art thou?” The Greek word ποθεν carries the connotation of origin. Pilate was not asking what nation he was from. He knew he was Jewish. He was asking “Where are you from?” He wanted to know if he was begotten, (according to Pilate’s thinking), from a god. Pilate understood the Jews were speaking of sonship in the sense of derivation.

All these verses show that the New Testament writers were using the normal meaning of sonship. They were not using a Semitic idiom like some would like to believe. They believed and confessed Christ’s eternal and unique begetting from God the Father, from whom He received the entire divine substance without division or diminution. This has always been the orthodox view. It has always been a part of the Historic Christian Faith. The Church has never taught that Christ’s Sonship was unreal, a mere

Semitic idiom, not to be understood literally, but always confessed it to be an integral part of His eternal Sonship from the Father. It underscored the true, real, and eternal relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Blessed Trinity. They were eternally Father and Son, because their relationship was based on real processional activity.

The final verse which declares this truth as a multifaceted diamond with great beauty and clarity is I Jn. 5:20, which reads as follows,

“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” (KJV)

This verse, may, indeed, be the primary verse from which the framers of Nicaea coined the phrase, “very God of very God.”

In this verse, John declares that the Son of God has come to give us the proper understanding of God the Father. He then concludes by calling Jesus Christ His Son, or literally, Jesus Christ “the Son “of” Him.” He then states that the Son, who is “of” Him, is the true God. This gives us the underlying truth to the phrase, “very God of very God.”

In the first part of the phrase, John calls God the Father, “Him that is true.” In the last part of the phrase, John calls Him, who is “of” Him, the true God. The word English word “very” comes from the Old French *verai*, which comes from the Latin *verus*, which means *true*.¹⁴⁰ Thus, sometimes the phrase from Nicaea is given as “true God of true God.”

This is what John says in verse 20. **God** the Father is *true*, and the Son *of* Him is the **true God** – “true God of true God,” “very God of very God.” Our brothers at Nicaea knew the precious Word of God. The Creed, their Statement of Faith, was taken straight out

¹⁴⁰ Guralnik, David B., Webster’s New World Dictionary, Second College Edition (The World Publishing Co., New York, 1970) pg. 1579

of Scripture. It is unfortunate that those who summarily dismiss this aspect of the ancient Statement of Faith do not understand the Statement, for in their dismissal of that Statement of Faith they are dismissing Scripture! I am afraid some of our ancient brothers understood Scripture, in regard to the Faith, better than many of our modern brothers.

And so we see the Scripture clearly teaches the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ. Christ was the eternal Son of God because He was eternally generated from an eternal Father, and because He was “of” Him, He was known as “very God of very God.” Amen. May we continue to affirm this precious truth of God.

The last unfolding of this great truth is what we may call the processional verses of John, where Jesus Himself teaches us the truth regarding His eternal procession from the Father. Let's now look at these.

PROCESSIONAL VERSES OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

In the Gospel of John not only does the Holy Spirit give evidence to our Lord's eternal generation by usage of the Greek word "monogenes," He also speaks forth this truth through what we may call the processional verses of the Gospel of John. These verses are:

"Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth (*exerchomai*) and have come (*heko*) from God, for I have not even come of My own initiative, but He sent Me.'" John 8:42

"I came forth (*exerchomai*) from the Father, and have come (*erchomai*) into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.' His disciples said to Him, 'See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth (*exerchomai*) from God.'" John 16:28-30 NKJV

"For the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; and they received *them*, and truly understood that I came forth (*exerchomai*) from Thee, and they believed that Thou didst send Me." John 17:8

In these few verses, we have three different Greek verbs used as the basis for the translation of the English word "come." The Greek words are "*heko*," "*erchomai*," and "*exerchomai*."

"*Heko*" was a significant religious word used in Greek. Kittel's' says:

"The term is especially important in the cultic and sacral sphere. It denotes the coming of the deity to men.... The god says who he is and declares why he has come."

“In the Septuagint it is... used of the eschatological coming of God.... God will come as the Redeemer of His people,... (Is. 59:20).”¹⁴¹

In the “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” a very familiar set of writings to the Jews living in the time of Christ, it is used of the coming of the Messiah. In Simeon 6:5 it says,

“The Lord God will come shining forth upon the earth.”¹⁴²

So we see the first Greek verb was a word used in conjunction with the coming of the Messiah. The second Greek word, “*erchomai*,” like “*heko*,” was used in the cultic sense in Greek. Kittel’s says that –

“...in the Septuagint it is used for 35 Hebrew words.... The word is also used with reference to the coming of God, of His Word, of His angels and of prophets to men. It is used especially of the coming of the Messiah.”¹⁴³

The word was also used in Psalms 118:26, which says, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.” This is the same verse used by the multitudes upon Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem in Mt. 21:9. In addition the Lord used the word many times of Himself in the relation of His incarnation and mission on earth (Mt. 5:17; Mk. 2:17; Lk. 5:32).

The third Greek word, “*exerchomai*,” is like unto the second except that it has a different emphasis. It is prefixed with the Greek preposition *ek*, which means to “go out or proceed out,” so that the word means more than just to come, but also carries the idea of origin or derivation. Abbot-Smith defines the word to mean, “to

¹⁴¹ Kittel, Gerhard, ed., Trans. & Ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1991), pg. 927

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, see page 928 for Greek Text

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pg. 667

go or come out.”¹⁴⁴

In the Septuagint, in Isa. 55:11 (KJV), it is used of the word of God, which goes forth out of His mouth. The verse states:

“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

This verse, obviously, is also a reference to the Eternal Word of God which proceeded forth from the Voice of God – our Lord Jesus Christ, whose procession from the Father is seen not only as a son from a father, but also as a word from a voice.

So we see the meanings of these three Greek words used in these processional verses of John. Let's now look at them in the light of those meanings.

If one looks back at the verses, one can see that “*heko*” and “*erchomai*” are always used in a secondary sense. For instance, in Jn. 8:42 the Greek verb “*heko*” is used second. The Greek verb “*exerchomai*” is used first. The same is seen in Jn. 16:28 where “*exerchomai*” is used first and “*erchomai*” is used second.

As we saw before “*heko*” and “*erchomai*” were recognized by the Jews as pertaining to the coming of the Messiah. In these verses, the Lord uses them to refer to His incarnation. Why then did the Lord use “*exerchomai*” as an additional word concerning Himself? If the Lord just wanted to make known that He came as the Messiah into the earth, why didn't He just use the same word “*heko*” or “*erchomai*”? Why use an additional word?

The reason is that many Jews did not fully understand the true nature of the Messiah. They all believed He would be of the lineage of David from the tribe of Judah. On this most agreed. Some even believed that He, in some sense would be divine (or, in some cases, even an angelic being). The one thing though that they did not understand is that the Messiah would be the God-Man. They did

¹⁴⁴ Abbot-Smith, G., *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1968) pg. 160

not understand that the Messiah would have two natures in one Person—the Divine and the Human. And for this reason, the Lord uses an additional verb “*exerchomai*.” He wanted to emphasize His Divine origin and thus His Divine nature.¹⁴⁵

One must remember that most Jews believed the Messiah would be the son of God in the same way they were sons of God, but none thought He would be the Only-Begotten Son of God in a unique way, and that this Only-Begotten Son of God would take upon Himself humanity and become, not only their Messiah, but also their Saviour. This is why the Lord used an additional word, because He wanted to teach them His Divine origin.

He wanted them to understand His eternal procession from the Father, and to understand that because of His eternal procession from the Father, the Father and He were “one.” “*Exerchomai*” refers to the eternal begetting of the Son of God from the Everlasting Father, His eternal “proceeding forth,” His eternal “coming forth.” This is why the Lord uses an additional verb.

This truth is also brought out by the usage of different Greek tenses. “*Exerchomai*” in these verses, is in the aorist tense. “*Heko*”¹⁴⁶ and “*erchomai*” are seen as the perfect tense. (*Heko* is a “present” used as a “perfect, or a “present” with “perfect” sense).

In Greek, it is very important to notice the tense of a verb. Dana and Mantey in their “Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament” state:

“The development of tense has reached its highest in Greek, and presents its greatest wealth of meaning. ‘Among all known ancient languages, none distinguishes the manifold temporal (and modal) relations of the verb so accurately as the Greek!... And ‘in the use of tenses the New

¹⁴⁵ It is most unfortunate that modern Bibles like the NIV have obscured this truth by imprecise translations. However, versions like the KJV, NKJV, and NASB have correctly translated these verses for the English reader.

¹⁴⁶ Abbott-Smith in the Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament say “*heko*” is a pf. with a present meaning.

Testament writers are by no means deficient in the requisite skill.' ¹⁴⁷

They go on to say concerning the aorist and perfect tenses:

“It is easy, under the influence of our English idiom, to confuse the Greek aorist and perfect. But, though it is true that 'the line between the aorist and perfect is not always easy to draw'..., yet it is very necessary that we always assume that the line is there, and do our best to find it...”

“We should certainly in fairness take it for granted that the New Testament writer intended the differentiation of meaning which is represented in this distinction, whether we are able to understand fully his reason or not... It is much more in keeping with a sound linguistic sense when the same writer insists that one 'ought,' in every case, to *look for* a reason for one tense being used rather than the other.”¹⁴⁸

In other words, the Holy Spirit inspired John to use not only two different words in these processional verses in the Gospel of John, but also different Greek tenses because He was trying to emphasize two distinct aspects of Christ's Mission and Person – His eternal begetting from the Father and His incarnational Mission to a dying world.

The one tense refers to His divine nature and the other to His Human nature. Both are essential to our salvation. Not only must the Lord be consubstantial with God the Father to insure the acceptability of His sacrifice upon the cross, but He also had to be consubstantial with humanity to insure the application of that death to all who believe. With that in mind, let's now look at these two tenses used by John.

The perfect tense is the Greek tense of completed action. Dana and Mantey say,

“It implies a process, but views that process as having reached its consummation and existing in a finished state.” “... In the indicative the

¹⁴⁷ Dana, H.E.; Mantey, Julius R., *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York, 1957), pg. 177

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 200-201

perfect signifies action as complete from the point of view of present time.”¹⁴⁹

They go on and say,

“The other element in the dual significance of the perfect tense is completed action.... Here it is not an existing state, but a consummated process which is presented.... Otherwise he would have used the aorist, which in the culminative sense denotes completed action without reference to existing results.”¹⁵⁰

In other words, Christ came into the world over thirty years before the time when He was presently speaking to the Jews and to His disciples, but that coming or incarnation had reached its consummation in the ministry God had given Him to do. The whole purpose of His incarnation was to bring Light to a dying world, and that by that Light, they might trust in Him for salvation by His subsequent death upon the cross. Only the perfect tense could emphasize this truth. The aorist on the other hand emphasizes something totally different.

Dana and Mantey go on to say that the aorist denotes “action simply as occurring, without reference to its progress.... It states the fact of the action or event without regard to its duration.”¹⁵¹ The results of that action, in past time, however, are not emphasized in the present, like the perfect tense does.

In other words, because John used two different words and different tenses, *he is telling us that he is referring to two different facts*. It is important to realize that every “Greek writer instinctively knew what tense to use in expressing an idea accurately.”¹⁵² “*Exerchomai*” could not refer to the same fact that “*heko*” and “*erchomai*” refer to because “*exerchomai*” is in the aorist tense,

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pg. 200

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pg. 202-203

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pg. 193-194

¹⁵² Ibid., pg. 194

which refers to action occurring, in and of itself without reference to its continuing progress, while “*heko*” and “*erchomai*” are used in the perfect sense where its present progress is emphasized. If all three words referred to the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ then John would have used the perfect tense for all three verbs. But by using the aorist tense for “*exerchomai*,” John is telling us he is referring to another fact, which had no connection with the coming or incarnation of the Lord as shown by the perfect sense of the verbs “*heko*” and “*erchomai*.”

So in conclusion, we see that Christ is speaking of two distinct truths. On the one hand, Christ speaks of His eternal generation or begetting from the Father when He eternally proceeded forth from the Father, and on the other hand, He speaks of His coming into the world through His incarnation and birth from the Virgin Mary.

Thus, we see that our Lord wanted to teach His disciples not only that He was the promised Messiah of the lineage of David, but that He also was the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. A Saviour who could save us to the uttermost because, not only was He the son of David, but He also was the Son of God. May we, His disciples, today learn the same truth.

THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF DENYING THE ETERNAL GENERATION OF THE SON

In John 10:30, Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” In common theological parlance this has historically been understood to mean oneness in nature, or essence and being. In other words, there is only one nature of the Godhead, not three; there is only one essence of the Godhead, not three. There is only one Divine Being. The Philadelphian Confession of Faith says it this way:

“The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in Being and perfection.... In this Divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences [Persons], the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God...which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on Him.”¹⁵³

Because of this claim of Jesus, the rulers were ready to stone Him because they understood that for Jesus to be one with the Father, meant that He had to be in nature, God (vs. 33). They understood, even in their unregenerated minds, that Jesus was talking about a special relationship.

Jesus says a few verses later, in verse 36, that the Jews thought He was blaspheming because He claimed to be “the Son of God.” Now if one looks at the context of chapter 10 one sees that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. So where did the Jews get

¹⁵³ The Philadelphia Confession of Faith, (Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., Grand Rapids, MI), pg. 18,19

the idea that Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God? Obviously, it must have been because He claimed to be one with the Father.

Now all the Jews owned God as their Father (Isa. 63:16), and so it would not be unusual for them to be considered sons of God. It was not for that, they wished to stone Jesus, but because Jesus claimed something else for Himself that they would never dream of claiming. Jesus claimed to be one with the Father. In other words, Jesus' Sonship was different because His Sonship consisted of an oneness with the Father.

If God is "One," as claimed in the Shema of Israel (Dt. 6:4), then for Jesus to be "One" with God meant He had to be equal with God, and for a Son to be equal with God, He must have the same substance as God.

A Son could not be equal with God if He just had a similar substance, no, he had to have the same substance, and that is what Jesus was claiming and that is why the Jews wished to stone Him.

The same concept is seen in Jn. 5:18. Alford, in his Greek New Testament, comments on this verse as follows:

"The Jews understood His words to mean nothing short of peculiar personal Sonship, and thus equality of nature with God. And that this, their understanding was the right one, the discourse testifies. All might in one sense, and the Jews did in a closer sense, call God their, or our, Father; but they at once said that the individual use of 'My Father' by Jesus had a totally distinct, and in their view a blasphemous meaning...."¹⁵⁴

All Jews claimed sonship of God, but they understood Jesus to mean something different. Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God by a personal, unique, eternal begetting. The only way for the Son to be one with God is to have the same substance as God, and the only way for one to have the same substance as God is to be uniquely begotten by God.

In addition, the only way for Jesus to be equal with God (Jn.

¹⁵⁴ Alford, Henry, *The Greek Testament*, (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1958), pg. 745,746

5:18), is to be co-eternal with God, otherwise there would not be equality. Consequently, Jesus not only had to be begotten by God to have the same substance as God, He had to be eternally begotten by God the Father to be equal with God. That is why Jesus is known as the Only-Begotten Son of God, “begotten before all ages.”

If one does away with the eternal begetting of the Son, one has to do away with the oneness or unity of the Godhead, and if one does away with the oneness of the Godhead one is left with Three Persons who cannot be consubstantial, which brings us to the next implication.

If one denies that Jesus was eternally begotten of the Father, then one must admit that the Father and the Son are not consubstantial (*homoousios* – of the same substance), but must be *homoiousios* – of like substance. If one says the Son is of like substance then one has to admit to separation of essence.

If the Son was ungenerate, then one needs to answer the question, “How did He then become the Son?” If one says that He eternally existed as the Son “ungenerate,” then one must admit to “*homoiousios*,” but not to “*homoousios*,” which as we have said before would not only destroy the oneness of the Godhead, but also the coinherence and consubstantiality of the Godhead.

Perhaps a good analogy would be to view the Father and Son as we might view two stars. If one had two stars always existing side by side of equal size, brightness etc., we could say they were co-eternal, co-equal, co-powerful etc., but we could not say they were consubstantial, for while they would be “*homoiousios*—of like substance,” they could not be “*homoousios*—of the same substance.” The only way they could be co-eternal, co-equal etc., but also *consubstantial* is for there to be only one star, with one substance or essence expressed outwardly through the radiance of the light. The radiance or brightness of a star is generated by the star, and is distinct from the star, but is of the same substance as the star.

Athanasius used this analogy:

“For in this again the generation of the Son exceeds and transcends the thoughts of man, that we become fathers of our own children in time, since we ourselves first were not and then came into being; but God, in that He ever is, is ever Father of the Son.... Therefore, the sacred writers...have given us a certain image from things visible, saying, 'Who is the brightness of His glory, and the expression of His Person. (Heb. 1:30).... For who can even imagine that the radiance of light ever was not...or who is capable of separating the radiance from the sun...? But if He...is from God, as a genuine Son, as He is, then the Son may reasonably be called from the essence of God.... The illustration of the Light and Radiance has this meaning.... Radiance, thereby to signify His being from the essence, proper and indivisible, and His oneness with the Father.’”¹⁵⁵

The radiance of the sun, and the sun itself, while distinct, are of the same substance. The one is generated from the other. The ray proceeds from the sun proper. If you have the sun, you must have radiance. If you do not have radiance, you do not have the sun. They are both dependent on the other.

In the same way, without the Son you do not have the Father, and to be a Father you must have a Son. Thus both are co-eternal, co-equal and consubstantial and this can only be true through eternal generation. If one does away with eternal generation and calls the Son eternal, but ungenerate, then one is thrown back into the example of two stars, and makes the Father and Son “*homoiousios*,” but not “*homoousios*.” He is thrown into the camp of Semi-Arians, who held to the view of “*homoiousios*” and does not hold to the Historic Faith, which holds to the view of “*homoousios*.” To hold to the view of “*homoiousios*” is one step away from Tritheism, and indeed, in all but name only, is Tritheism as we will see.

These are not matters to be treated lightly. The Son of God cannot be the eternal Son of God apart from His eternal generation.

¹⁵⁵ Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry, sup., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. IV*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1991), pg. 157-58, 165

To be so, without eternal generation, is to make the Eternal Son a second (albeit co-equal and co-eternal) God. What one is left with, then, is Tritheism – three Gods all co-equal, co-eternal, co-powerful, existing each side by side from all eternity.

This is the final implication of denying the eternal generation of the Son. Without eternal generation one is left with Tritheism.

If one denies that monogenes means “only begotten,” or “only born” and should be understood by “kind” or “class,” then when one comes to John 1:18, which says Christ is the “only begotten” God, one is then left with Tritheism. It destroys the Trinity.

If Christ is “God, the one and only,” as some modern translations read, or is a “one of a kind” God, then, obviously, He becomes a second God, because He is “one of a kind,” there is no other God like him. He is one and only. He and the Father cannot be of the same kind, for the Son is “**one** of a kind.” If the Father and the Holy Spirit are of the same kind as the Son, then, obviously, the Son can not be called a “one of a kind” God. So, as I said before, one is left with tritheism – three different Gods, who all are of a *different* “kind,” not of the *same* “kind.”

However, if monogenes means “only begotten,” then the Trinity is preserved, for the Son is the “only begotten” God. The Father is unbegotten, and the Holy Spirit is spirated, and only the Son is begotten and so is known as the “only begotten” of all the Persons.

You see, with “one of a kind” one is dealing with *kind* or *substance*, and there can be no “difference” in the substance of the Godhead. They are all *homoousios*. When one says that one of the three Persons is “one of a kind,” one then declares that the other two must be of a *different* kind. However, the opposite is the truth. They are all three of the *same* kind, possessing the same substance. There is no “difference” in their substance or essence.

However, with “only begotten,” one is dealing with *mode of existence*, not substance, and there is a “difference” between the

three Persons in their mode of existence. The Father is unbegotten; the Son is begotten; and the Holy Spirit is spirated.

Therefore, if one states that the Son is the “Only Begotten” God, there is no difficulty, for the term “Only Begotten God” does not deal with “substance” or “essence,” but deals with a “mode of existence.”

With the “substance” aspect of the Godhead there can be no difference because of “homoousios.” With the mode of existence aspect of the Godhead, there can be difference, and, indeed, there is a difference. That is the reason why the meaning of “monogenes” cannot be “one of a kind” or “one and only,” but must be understood as “only begotten.”

This explains the distinction between the traditional viewpoint and the newer viewpoint. With the traditional viewpoint there is an intra-processional relationship between the Persons, whereby the Son receives the entire substance of God without division from the Father and is considered, therefore, to be of the “same kind,” and not “one of a kind” God.¹⁵⁶ This insures that the “only begotten” God is not seen as a second God, because the only begotten God is of the same kind as the Father; He receives the fullness of the Godhead without division or diminution in His begetting.

It seems some modern translators have understood this problem that was created, so that, in some new revisions, like the *Today's New International Version*, you will see a change at this verse.

Michael W. Holmes wrote the following concerning this:

¹⁵⁶ Of course, one does not have this problem if one accepts the majority reading of “Son.” Jesus is indeed, a “one of a kind” Son. There is none other as He is, since He is “uniquely begotten” of God by nature, while Christians are begotten by God in regeneration. The uniqueness of his begetting would be that one thing which made him “unique.” This is not to say that “one of a kind” is a correct translation of “monogenes;” but simply means that with the concept of “Son” one is once again dealing with “mode of existence,” and not with “substance.”

“In other instances, changes in the translation reflect a difference in judgment regarding how to punctuate the Greek text. In John 1:18 (*monogenes theos*) both the 1973 (“God the only Son”) and 1984 (“God the One and Only”) versions of the NIV understand *monogenes* (“only” or “unique”) as an adjective modifying the noun *theos*. The TNIV places a comma between the two terms (understanding *monogenes* as an adjective functioning as a noun, with *theos* in apposition with it): “the one and only Son, who is himself God.”¹⁵⁷

However, this does not alleviate the problem. Of course, the Son is God, but it is not enough to simply say Jesus is God. Arius could agree with that statement. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons could agree with that statement. The question remains, “What do you mean when you say, ‘Jesus is God?’” If He is understood as a “one and only,” or a “one of a kind” God, Arius, Jehovah Witnesses or Mormons could easily subscribe to such a statement. However, if He is understood to be of the “same kind” as the Father, the Only Begotten of the Father before all time, Arius, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or Mormons could never agree with that statement.

It seems the revisers of the NIV understood their original problem and so retranslated the text, but in doing so, they have now introduced their own words into the text, and still have not resolved the original problem. John did not exactly write what they now translate. Instead of addressing the real problem – the wrong translation of *monogenes* – they are changing the normal Greek structure of the verse to defend a position which is indefensible.

First of all, even though they basically do not follow the Byzantine text as the underlying text of their translation, they reintroduce the word “Son” from the Byzantine text. The Byzantine text reads, “only begotten Son.” Many earlier texts read, “only

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2002/sep/oct/2.25.html>
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begotten God.”

Now, the word, “Son,” may indeed be the correct variant, yet they did not follow that variant. They adopted the variant, “God.” But now it seems, because they have created a theological problem with their mistranslation of *monogenes*, they are now trying to soften their theological problem by the reintroduction of the concept of “Son” into the text, thereby taking the emphasis of “kind” off of God and putting the emphasis on the newly introduced concept of Son. This is done, not by accepting the actual variant of Son, but by giving *monogenes* yet another new definition in verse 18. They turn *monogenes* from an adjective into a substantive, and give it a new meaning of “unique Son.” Then they insert a comma after the word “Son” to complete the transformation.

Of course, what they are now doing is introducing a new definition of *monogenes*. They have rejected the historic definition of *monogenes* as “only begotten,” and replaced it with a definition of “one of a kind” or “one and only.” Now they reject that new definition of *monogenes* in this verse and introduce yet another completely different definition of “unique son,” or “only child,” all because of the theological problem they created for themselves by abandoning the original meaning of “only begotten.”

Now, of course, they are doing this in order to try to separate the two terms and make *Theos* in apposition. The problem is that in so doing, they are introducing more words into the text than John originally wrote. This is no mere introduction of words in order to facilitate translation. They are actually introducing words into God’s Sacred Word to change the Word, in order to try to free themselves from a theological problem they created for themselves by changing the meaning of *monogenes* from “only begotten” to “one and only.” They now introduce the relative phrase, “who is himself.”

The Holy Spirit did not inspire John to write the words, “who is himself.” They are not in the text. If this was the thought of the Holy Spirit, it would have been very easy to inspire John to add a relative phrase, “who being Himself,” which then, added with the

rest of the phrase, would be translated as, “who being Himself, God, who is in the bosom of the Father,” or “who being Himself, God, the one being in the bosom of the Father.” The fact of the matter is, such a phrase does not exist in the Word of God. It is a paraphrase of the text by modern translators to correct a theological problem of their own making.

If the word, “God,” was to be understood to be in apposition to the word, “monogenes,” it would have been simple to use a relative phrase showing apposition. The fact of the matter is, John did not.

Now, some will say the relative phrase is not added,, but is taken from the relative phrase ο ων (who is), that is already in John 1:18. They say this should be applied to *Theos*, rather than to the prepositional phrase that follows, but this would be highly irregular. It seems in all cases when John introduces a relative phrase by the root ο ων, and a prepositional phrase is present, the phrase is completed by the prepositional phrase (Jn.3:13, 6:46, 9:40, 11:31). Thus the relative phrase in Jn. 1:18 should be completed by the prepositional phrase, “in the bosom of the Father,” and should not be thought to refer back to *Theos* – “who is God.” Therefore, the words, “*monogenes Theos*,” must remain a simple adjective noun combination, with *monogenes* in the attributive position modifying the noun *Theos*.

It would be highly unusual for John to use such an awkward construction. He is using a normal adjective noun combination, which a normal Greek reader would understand as, “only begotten God,” or “one and only God,” or “one of a kind” God, (assuming their new definitions of *monogenes*).

Additionally, if the word, “God,” was supposed to be understood in apposition to *monogenes*, without the use of a relative phrase, perhaps John could have used the article before the word “God,” as was done many times in the LXX when translating, “Lord God,” two words that, indeed, are in apposition. In the Greek, the LXX reads, “*kurios o Theos*.” As you can see, *Theos* is preceded by the definite article. Perhaps, this might have given the sense of

apposition so desired.

Finally, some may explain the sense of apposition because of the new meaning that they have given to *monogenes* in verse 18 – “unique Son” or “only child.” This turns *monogenes* into a substantive, and explains the new translation of “one and only [Son], who is himself God,” or “unique Son, who is himself God.” However, this newest meaning they have assigned to *monogenes* is not accurate. One can see this when we get to John 3:16 and John 3:18, which combines *monogenes* with the word, “Son.” It would be redundant and nonsensical to say, “For God so loved the world that He gave His ‘unique Son, Son.’” This shows that this newest definition of *monogenes* is not correct but is a theological definition that was adapted to try to solve a theological problem. Only with the understanding of *monogenes* by “only begotten,” as an adjective modifying a noun, do the occurrences of *monogenes* in John 1:18; 3:16, and 18 make sense.

In verse 18 He is “the Only Begotten God.” In John 3:16 He is His “Only Begotten Son” And in John 3:18 He is “the Only Begotten Son.”

Therefore, grammatically the verse should be understood as earlier versions understood the passage. *Monogenes* is a simple adjective modifying *Theos*.

But then, with that grammatical construction, we are back to square one, the original theological problem. Christ is called an “one and only” God, a “one of a kind” God, which makes the Trinity into a Triad. It turns Trinitarianism into Tritheism.

The only way to clear oneself of the false theological implications, and remain faithful to the Greek syntax, is to understand *monogenes* as “only begotten,” rather than “one and only,” or “one of a kind.” Without such an understanding of *monogenes*, one is left with almost a “tritheistic” viewpoint.

So we see a few of the theological implications of denying the eternal generation of the Son of God. If one wishes to further study these matters I would suggest one read the works of Athanasius or the work of Augustine entitled, “On the Trinity.”

WHAT ETERNAL GENERATION IS, AND WHAT IT IS NOT

The Eternal Generation of the Son from the Father is an essential doctrine of the Faith. It should never be compromised, nor neglected, because it has been revealed to us in Scripture. However, there is much misunderstanding among many Christians today regarding this very important truth. As I have been meditating upon this, I have wondered why there is such animosity to a doctrine that has been affirmed by Christians for over two thousand years? Why do Christians worry about this doctrine today? I think there are a number of reasons, which we would like to look at now.

1) First, let's discuss the easy one. Some will state, "Well, you will never find the term "eternal generation" in the Scripture." This is usually the standard charge many will make against a point they wish to discredit. Now I am the first one to agree, Christians should always seek not to exceed the vocabulary given to us in Scripture. However, Christians who usually make this charge have no problem with the term "Trinity," which also is not found in Scripture. Or they have no problem with the term "Rapture," which is not found in Scripture. Consequently, the question that needs to be asked is whether Scripture teaches the doctrine behind the term. In a perfect world we would not need to use the word "Trinity," because there would be no heretical doctrines or viewpoints concerning the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit since all would possess perfect knowledge and communion with our blessed God. The same is true of the term "Eternal Generation." But because of heresies, the Church has had to adopt some language in order to oppose certain heretical viewpoints regarding the three Persons. "Eternal Generation" is a part of this language. Eternal Generation is just as legitimate a term as the word Trinity, because both doctrines are taught in Scripture.

2) The second reason has to do with the concept of time.

The real problem with the term “eternal generation” is not the term itself, but the false assumptions Christians hold about certain truths. If Christians do not conform their mind and thoughts to Scriptural parameters, they will never be able to properly understand the Trinity, let alone eternal generation. One of the first parameters we must conform our thoughts to is the parameter of time.

As was mentioned before, Christians have a false view of time. They view time as being eternal! They view time as going forever backwards and forever forwards. This is not biblical. Time has a beginning (Gen.1: 1; Jn. 1:1; II Tim. 1:9 & Tit. 1:2 NKJV).

And what is time? Time is a succession of moments. It is linear. Moment follows moment. Day follows day, month follows month, and year follows year. There is a beginning and end to every moment. This is how we think because we are finite. But we must disassociate ourselves from this mindset when we think of God. We must not bring the Creator down to our level of thinking. God created time. He never existed in time. There were never moments to God’s existence. One thing did not follow another thing with God. He did not do one thing today, to be followed by another thing tomorrow, because there were no tomorrows in eternity. He existed in an ever present “now.” He is the Holy one who inhabiteth eternity (Isa. 57:15). This is a difficult, but not impossible concept, to grasp since God has put the concept of eternity in our heart (Ec. 3:11.NKJV). We must exercise our faith to believe what Scripture says about time, and then refuse to ascribe moments to God’s eternal existence.

Ec. 3:14 tells us that everything God does is for forever, nothing can be added to it and nothing can be taken from it. This demonstrates that not only are God’s works or decrees immutable, but also His very existence is immutable because He exists in an ever present now in eternity. Nothing can be added to it, meaning there is no past with God, for if something is added to something, what it was formerly, before the addition, is now gone or in the past. Conversely, if something is taken from something, the thing now has a different future, since it now exists without something it once

had in the past. You cannot add to God's existence or subtract from God's existence. Who He is, is who He has always been and will ever be. As the Lord tells Moses, "I am who I am."

Consequently, when it comes to the generation of the Son, since Scripture tells us that the Son is of God, and that He proceeded out of God, this cannot be a thing which adds to God's existence, nor takes away from God's existence. It cannot be an activity in time, in which, at one moment, the Father did not have a Son, and in the next moment, He begat a Son, and now had something He did not have a moment before. That would be adding to God's existence, and would be ascribing a past and future to God. In other words, the moment He gained a Son, would create a past for God, and the moment before gaining a Son, would create a future for God. That would not be eternity. That would be time.

God never existed without His Son. The Son is eternally being begotten by the Father. It is an act which is ever continuing, yet ever completed. It does not exist as moments of time. There is no beginning to it, nor end to it. It is an eternal reality which always was and is. It cannot be added to, nor subtracted from. That is why it is called an eternal generation. Whatever God does by definition must be eternal, without beginning or end.

3) This brings us to our next point. One reason I believe some have a difficulty grasping eternal generation is because they do not understand the concept of "Person." As we mentioned in our chapter on Personhood, Person was never meant to carry the connotation of "individual." It was meant to carry the connotation of "subsistence." Some Christians understand Person as meaning a "being." They believe there are three "beings" within the Godhead. There are not three beings, but only one Divine Being, within whom subsists three Persons.

Again, part of the reason we think that way – that there are three separate beings – is because we exist in finite time, and in finite time things can only be understood by succession. We only perceive things if they are separate from each other. This is normal because we exist in space and time. As such, God reveals Himself

to us as being “set apart” from the two other Persons by space.

For example, God the Father presents Himself to us as the Ancient of Days in Daniel (Dan. 7:9-13), indeed, He even describes Himself with hair white like wool. Then He reveals His Son as the Son of Man who sits at His right hand. Thus, we are given a picture of two beings side by side. But we mustn't think that that is how God *really exists*. He only gives us a picture of Himself that way because it is the only way creatures existing in space and time can perceive the Persons. *In reality, the Father and the Son do not exist side by side.*¹⁵⁸ For the purpose of revelation they do, but in the reality of existence they do not. What do I mean? In reality, the Persons do not exist side by side because, in reality, they are “in” each other.

This is the biblical doctrine of coinherence (Jn. 10:38; 14:10, 11, 16-18; Rom. 8:2; I Cor. 2:10). In reality, the Father is everywhere, the Son is everywhere, the Holy Spirit is everywhere (Ps. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:23). They are all omnipresent and infinite. This is the teaching of Scripture. This is the reality of their existence.

If the Father really existed at one point in space, and the Son existed in a point of space near his right hand, say one meter away, you would then have a space where the Father was not, that being the space occupied by His Son, and there would be a space where the Son was not, that being the space where the Father was. That would mean they were not omnipresent, or everywhere at the same time. In reality they are everywhere and completely within each other. There is not a place where the other is not. Perhaps, in order to try to conceptualize this, pretend the universe is one giant sphere. Within this one sphere exists the Three Persons (who are spirit or spiritual) all filling up the sphere completely. Jer. 23:24 states:

¹⁵⁸ Obviously, the incarnation is another matter. That “is” a great mystery. The humanity of our Lord is not infinite, but localized, but that never changed his deity which always was, and ever will be, omnipresent.

“Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.” (KJV)

The Father doesn't fill up one third of the sphere, and the Son and the Holy Spirit fill up the other thirds. No, they all fill up the sphere everywhere completely. The Father fills the sphere up completely, everywhere. The Son fills up the sphere everywhere, and the Spirit fills up the sphere everywhere. Therefore, the only way for this to be, is for them to be completely within each other. That is the reality of Trinitarian existence. The only difference is that the universe is created by God. He does not exist in a sphere of the universe, but exists within, below, above and beyond the universe. A sphere of the universe would be finite. God is infinite and so is not contained by the universe, but if you extend the existence of the Persons beyond the sphere unto eternity and the infinity you still would have them everywhere, existing within each other.

When we understand this, perhaps, we can begin to disassociate ourselves from thinking of the Persons as three beings. They are three subsistences, three self-conscious egos within one Divine Being that are real and distinct, but not separated from each other. As the Philadelphia Confession of Faith stated, “In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word (or Son), and the Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each have the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided”

Therefore, it is not right to think that when God generated His Son, His Son was then separated from Him and existed separately from Him. That is how God represents Himself and the Son to us so we can understand each Person, but that is not how the Father and Son exist in reality. In reality, they are not separate from each other, distinct, yes, but not separate from each other for they are consubstantial and coinherent. Perhaps, this is why no one has ever seen the form of the Father, but only the Son (Jn. 5:37; Jn. 1:18). Certainly, men have seen the representation of the Father as the Ancient of Days, but no one has really seen the form of the

Father, but the Son, because in reality they are both infinite, everywhere, coinhering in each other.

Therefore, we must not perceive the Father Son relationship through the eyeglasses of human fecundity. We are the *ectype*, they are the *archetype*.¹⁵⁹ We are patterned after them, not they after us. They possess the true Father/Son relationship. Ours is an imperfect pattern of theirs. Theirs is a heavenly reality, ours is an earthly replica or picture of theirs. What is true of ours is not, necessarily, true of theirs, because we are finite and exist in time. They are infinite and exist in eternity.

Think for a second. Where do we get our concept of father and son? We are born and awake into an earthly reality. We grow and learn to speak a language, and soon call our parents mother and father. But where do we get those words from? We learn them from our parents. And where did they learn it from? – From their parents. Thus, it continues all the way back to Adam and Eve. So from whom did Adam learn the words for father and mother? He had no human father. He was created with language from God. God created him with the ability of language. Now, either he made up the word, father and son, once he had his first child, or, (which is probably more likely), the Lord told him, on one of those times of communion in the cool of the day, that He, meaning the Lord, was the Son of the Father. More than likely, Adam would then ask, “What does the word Father and Son mean?” At which point, the Lord would speak to Adam of the Trinitarian existence, and the part each Person took in creation and how the Holy Spirit hovered over the face of the deep before God said “Let there be light.” I am sure Adam grew in his knowledge of God in those times of communion. Therefore, he, more than likely, understood the concept of Sonship from Him, who was the eternal Son.

As such, he would have been told that he was created in the image and likeness of God and that he, too, would be a father and

¹⁵⁹ Archetype refers to the original, the perfect, the pattern, while ectype means the copy, the reflection, the image.

have a son, but that his father/son relationship, while similar to the Divine Father/Son relationship, would be different since he was a created being existing in time. He would understand the limits of the analogy of his own father/son relationship with the divine Father/Son relationship. He would realize he could not beget a son without separation, and, indeed, without his wife Eve. But he would understand that there were certain truths of the human father/son relationship that were analogous.

For instance, the concept of procession of one from the other was analogous, and the attachment of love that comes from such procession was analogous. In other words, God created the words, “father” and “son” for Adam, so as to help him understand certain truths about the eternal Father and Son relationship. He did this in order to help Adam understand the things about God, but, obviously, God did not create the human father/son relationship to be exactly like His divine Father/Son relationship, for the only way for that to be, would be for Adam and his son to also be eternal and infinite!

And so we see Adam didn't create the concept of father and son and then apply them to God, no God created the concept of father and son to teach Adam something about His own Father and Son relationship.

Let me give another example to help us understand this principle. The writers of the Old and New Testament did not create the concept of husband and wife and then apply it to God and Israel or Christ and the Church. No, God first created the husband and wife relationship, by first creating Eve and bringing her to Adam in order to teach Adam the truth of Christ and the Church. *The divine reality preceded the human reality, not the other way around.* We are told Adam was a type of Christ (Rom 5:14). Therefore, Christ, His work, and His marriage to the Church were in the mind of God before He ever created Adam, let alone before He created marriage.

Therefore, God created the husband wife relationship for the purpose of teaching by analogy. The same is true of the father/son relationship. God created it for the purpose of teaching

by analogy. And just as the human husband and wife relationship must not be stretched too far in analogy, nor should the father and son relationship be stretched too far. They must be understood to teach certain truths of the eternal reality within the parameters of Scripture.

For instance, as we said, Adam was created to be a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14), which tells us that Eve was meant to be a picture of the bride of Christ – the Church. Consequently, we can learn many things by this analogy about the divine relationship of Christ with the Church, all by observing the human relationship of a husband and wife. Paul uses this analogy to teach us in Eph. 5:22-27 that a husband should love his wife as Christ loved the Church, and a wife should submit to her husband because the Church submits to Christ. This is the proper use of analogy to help us understand certain truths concerning the divine relationship of Christ and the Church.

But now, let's suppose someone makes the observation in Genesis 1:22 that God told man and wife to be fruitful, to multiply, and to replenish the earth, and so, since we are called the bride of Christ, this fecundity must also be true of Christ and the Church. This would be stretching the analogy too far, and would be teaching something not found in Scripture. It would be taking the analogy of the human husband/wife relationship, (that God created to give us a limited picture of the Christ and the Church), beyond the parameters of Scripture, and, therefore, into error. In other words, it would be wrong to assume that whatever is true of the human husband/wife relationship, must be true of the relationship of Christ and the Church.

In the same way, it is wrong to assume that whatever is true of human father/son relationships must be true of the divine Father/Son relationship. It is simply an analogy, or type, created by God to give us some understanding of the divine Father/Son relationship. It would be wrong to make the human/father son relationship into the *archetype*, or pattern, that says whatever is true of the human relationship, must be true of the divine relationship.

We must realize that, just as the human husband/wife analogy is limited and must not be stretched too far, so too, the human father/son analogy is limited and must not be stretched too far, beyond the parameters of Scripture.

When we do this, we understand that the purpose of the human father/son relationship is to simply teach the truth of procession of one from another, not the separation of substance, the separation of being, or the subsequent existence of the one from the other.

The separation of substance, or being, in the human father/son relationship, is caused by “space,” and the subsequent existence of the son from the father is caused by “time.” Since God is not bound by space, there is no separation of substance between the Father and Son. Thus, the Father and Son are consubstantial. And because God is not bound by time, there is no subsequent existence of the Son from the Father. Thus the Father and Son are co-eternal and the one does not precede the other.

Therefore, since there is not a separation of substance or existence, the Son does not become another being, as a human son becomes another being, separate from his father. Thus, the Father and Son are “Persons,” not “beings.”

To try to put the truths, or parameters, of the human father/son relationship upon the divine Father/Son relationship would be the same as trying to put the truths or parameters of the human husband/wife relationship, expressed in fecundity, upon the relationship of Christ and the Bride.

Analogies must not be stretched too far, because created analogies can never be true in every way, because they are finite and limited by time, whereas the divine realities they typify are infinite and eternal.

Therefore, what does the human analogy of the human father/son relationship teach us of the divine Father/Son relationship? It teaches us three things. And if we limit ourselves to these three, and not stretch the analogy too far, we can increase our knowledge of God the Father, and increase our knowledge of His

relationship with His Son.

1) It teaches us procession. One thing proceeds from the other, meaning everything has a source. Within the Divine Being the source is God, the Father. All things proceed from Him. His Son, and indeed, the Holy Spirit proceed from Him, without any separation of substance, being, or subsequent existence in time. We must limit the human father/son relationship to this truth only. As the human son “proceeds” from his human father, so the Eternal Son “proceeds” from the Eternal Father. It teaches us that sonship bespeaks procession of one from another. In the Divine Father/Son relationship it teaches that the Son is “of” God. He is the Son “of” the Father. He is the one who eternally proceeds from God.

2) It teaches the one is an image of the other. When Adam’s son Seth was born, Scripture says, “And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat *a son* in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth.” So too, Christ is the image of the invisible God, because He is His Son (Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15). When Adam saw Seth, he saw one who was in his likeness and image. If not for the fall and sin, Seth would have been “perfect” in every way, as Adam was “perfect,” for his son was in his image and likeness. Assuming, before the fall, that animals could speak and communicate with man, if the animals wanted to know what Adam was like, all they would have to do was behold and talk with Seth.

Let us pretend this is so, and that sin never entered the world. And let us pretend that Seth traveled to the western most part of the garden and encountered a lion, and the lion wanted to know what the “ruler” of the garden – Adam – was like. What did he look like? Did he walk on four legs like I do? Did God give him a tail like me? What would Seth tell the lion? He would say, "I am Adam’s son." I am in his image and likeness. Look at me and you will learn what the ruler of the garden is like. If you have seen me you have seen Adam, my father.

In the same way, Christ told Philip when he asked Jesus to show him the Father, “Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen

the Father” (Jn. 14:9). And in another place, He said, “I and the Father am one” (Jn. 10:30).

The human father/son relationship teaches us about image and likeness, and that all the things of God can be known and learned from the Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:3).

3) And finally, it teaches us love. A father naturally loves a child because that child is from him, that child proceeds from him. And a son loves his father because his father is the one who begat him.

The story of Abraham and Isaac teach us the nature of love. We see the great love and tenderness of a father for his son and we learn of the implicit trust and love a son has for a father. In this way, the human father/son relationship helps us understand the great love and tenderness the Father had for His Son when Scriptures tells us that the Father declared, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.” And it gives us depth of understanding of God’s love *for us* when Scriptures says, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). God gave us the human father/son analogy to teach us of His love.

These are the three things that the human analogy teaches us. We are safe if we limit ourselves to these three things and not try to impose all the varied facets of human father/son relationships upon the divine Father/Son relationship. That is stretching the analogy too far.

Eternal generation need not be a mystery hidden from the understanding of mankind. God desires mankind to understand His relationship with His Son, and that is why He created human father/son relationships, and why He told us time had a beginning. May we learn what God desires to teach us and not make the human relationship into the *archetype*, and the divine, into the *ectype*.

ACTIVITY OF GOD

SPIRATION

When we come to the Holy Spirit, we find that the doctrine of procession is also intimated in various ways in the writings of the Old Testament. As we have already seen from the very first chapter of Genesis, the procession of the Holy Spirit is shown forth in the name “Spirit of God.” The Holy Spirit is from God. As we have already mentioned, even Judaism sees the Spirit as an emanation from God based upon that title. We even saw that in some cases He was called the Spirit of Jehovah. However, when we come to the New Testament the doctrine of procession is plainly declared. In the Gospel of John, our Lord clearly reveals this doctrine when He states:

“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.” Jn. 15: 26.

Now some, who wish to deny the orthodox doctrine of procession, claim this verse is simply referring to the sending of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost. In other words, the proceeding is equivalent to the sending. However, there are a couple of problems with this interpretation.

First of all, the Greek word translated “proceeds” is the word “*ekporeuetai*” which simply means, “to go out of.” If Jesus was equating this word with the sending of the Holy Spirit, which was to occur in a few weeks, He would have used the future indicative tense. However, *ekporeuetai* is in the present indicative tense, not in the future, showing that this activity is an ever-continuous action that is occurring at the time He is speaking, not at some time in the near future. In other words, there is never a

time when the Holy Spirit isn't proceeding, for it is an eternal procession like the eternal procession of the Son in generation. The Holy Spirit is ever proceeding from the Father.

Secondly, some still argue that even though John is using a present tense he is using what is called a “futuristic present.” This is the use of the present tense in Greek which is referring to a future event, but which is in the present tense, because the event is a certainty. For example, in Matthew 26: 2 Jesus says, “You know that after two days is the Passover and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” Now the verb, “will be delivered,” is really in the present tense, so that it would be accurate to translate it “the Son of Man is delivered up to be crucified.” This is the use of the “futuristic present.” The event has not occurred but is still in the future, but since the event is so certain to occur, it is written in the present tense. Therefore, those who would deny the procession of the Holy Spirit say that Jesus is simply using the “futuristic present,” because the sending of the Holy Spirit is just as certain an event as was the crucifixion.

Now this could be a plausible interpretation if not for one fact. If John were using the “futuristic present” then he would have been consistent in its use in the context of the verse. In other words, when he says “whom I will send,” the verb “send,” which is the Greek word “*pempho*,” should also have been written in the present tense, if he was using a futuristic present, but instead he uses the simple future indicative to show that future event.

In the same way when Jesus says “He will testify of Me,” the verb testify, which is the Greek word “*marturesei*,” should have also been in the present tense to show a “futuristic present,” but, instead, it also is in the future indicative tense. So, in other words, John uses a future indicative verb, then a present indicative verb, and then a future indicative verb again, making a clear distinction between the tenses of the verbs.

Remember, as we stated before, every “Greek writer instinctively knew what tense to use in expressing an idea

accurately.”¹⁶⁰ By using a different tense for “proceeds,” John is telling us that he is referring to a different fact altogether from the “sending” or the “testifying.” He is speaking about the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit of God, not about His coming at Pentecost.

The verb “send” refers to Pentecost, and so is in the future tense. The verb “proceeds” refers to the eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit, which has ever occurred, and so is in the present tense, in order to contrast it with the temporal sending of the Spirit at Pentecost.

This same verb is also used in Rev. 1:16, which declares:

“In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came (*ekporeuomene*) a sharp two-edged sword . . .”

The two-edged sword was proceeding out of the mouth of the vision of the Glorified Christ. This is a very picturesque depiction of the procession of the Holy Spirit. We know from Eph. 6: 17 that the sword is the “sword of the Spirit.”

The two-edged sword with which Christ judges the world (Jn. 16:7, 8) is none other than the Holy Spirit, and this Sword proceeds out of His mouth. Also in Eph. 6:17 Paul tells us the sword is the “word of God” and according to Jn. 6:63 the words of Jesus are “Spirit and are Life.” A word cannot be spoken if it is not borne along by the breath of the voice. To have a spoken word one must have a proceeding breath. The word is in the breath and the breath is in the word – so too with the very Word of God. When the Word (Son) proceeds from the voice of the Father, the Breath (Holy Spirit) proceeds from the voice of the Father. And so we have – Voice, Word, Breath – a perfect picture of the procession of the Son and Spirit.

What we have here is also a deeper revelation concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not proceed

¹⁶⁰ Dana, H.E.; Mantey, Julius R., *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York, 1957), pg. 194

apart from the Son of God. Within the Godhead, there is only one eternal movement, one eternal procession, which, however, is understood through the two modes of generation and spiration. The Son is eternally begotten, and the Spirit is eternally spirated, yet these are not two separate movements within the Godhead but one eternal movement understood through two modes. The Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son.

This truth is symbolically demonstrated in another occurrence of the verb “*ekporeumai*” in Rev. 22:1, which reads:

“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming (*ekporeumenon*) from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

Here we see the Trinity shown forth with the “water of life,” picturing the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:38, 39), proceeding from the throne of God (Father), and of the Lamb (Son).

This now shows us why sometimes the Spirit was referred to as, not only the “Spirit of God,” but also the “Spirit of Jehovah.” The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, and so can be called either the “Spirit of God,” or the “Spirit of Jehovah.” In the New Testament, of course, this truth can be seen in His being called the “Spirit of God,” or the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8: 9).

Lastly, Tit. 3:4-6 shows us the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit in the following verses:

“But when the kindness of God (Father) our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

Here we see the Holy Spirit was poured out from the Father, and poured through the Son. Since the economic Trinity is analogous to the ontological Trinity, this economic activity bespeaks the ontological operation of the Three Persons.

Therefore, in conclusion, we can see that the primary

activity of Father, in His eternal operations, is the begetting and spiration of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This doctrine, as we have already shown, was confessed as an essential aspect of the Faith from the time of the Apostles, through the early centuries of the Church, and down to our current age. Without the doctrine of procession, one cannot understand the doctrine of the Trinity, for it is through procession that we understand the unity of the Godhead, and it is that truth we would like to now turn our attention.

UNITY OF THE GODHEAD

The unity of the Godhead is shown in numerous verses in both the Old and New Testament. Although the Godhead consists of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we do not worship three Gods, but only one God. Within the Godhead, there is only one essence, nature, and being. God is one.

This unity is first revealed as we have already demonstrated in the plural name of Elohim used with a singular verb. God the Father is manifested and affirmed through the Son and Holy Spirit who both coinhere, and are consubstantial with Him. Plurality is shown through the plural use of the name, but oneness is shown forth in the use of the singular verb. This suggestion of the unity or oneness of God, however, is finally declared without equivocation in Deut. 6:4:

“Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one (*echad*).”

Now there has been much debate as to the meaning of this verse – from the many Christians who contend that Moses is stating that YHWH our Elohim (Trinity) is one YHWH, and the Jewish interpretation in the Zohar that states,

“Even so it is with the mystery of the three-fold divine manifestations designated by YHVH *Elohenu* YHVH – three modes which yet form one unity.”¹⁶¹

– to the most common Jewish viewpoint which states,

“He is One because there is no other God than He; but He is also One, because He is wholly unlike anything else in existence. He is therefore not

¹⁶¹ Sperling, Harry; Simon, Maurice; translators, *The Zohar, Vol. 3* (The Soncino Press, London; New York, 1984), pg. 134

only One, but the sole and unique God.”¹⁶²

Maimonides, that great Jewish Philosopher of the Middle Ages preferred to understand the oneness of God in the sense of “*yachid*” a singular oneness, rather than “*echad*,” which, while usually indicating a singular oneness, is also used to indicate unified oneness.

Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, known as Rashbam, the great Talmudic scholar of the eleventh century, also preferred to see “*echad*” as a singular oneness. Therefore, as Rabbi Hertz states in the Pentateuch and Haftorahs,

“Some moderns follow Rashbam's translation: ‘Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD alone.’”¹⁶³

So we see that there are many views in regards to this verse, but that should not surprise us since this verse is so important in regards to the Unity of God. Now the question should be asked, “Do we understand this verse to only be speaking of the uniqueness of God or also of the unity of God?” Does “*echad*” refer to a singular oneness or a unified oneness? To answer these questions let's look to Scriptures own interpretation of this verse, as found in the New Testament.

In Mark 12: 28-32 Jesus is asked what is the foremost commandment of all. In response Jesus answers according to the Septuagint version,

“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

And then the scribe who asked the question responds with the following comment.

¹⁶² Hertz, Dr. J.H., ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (Soncino Press, London, 1978), pg. 770

¹⁶³ Hertz, Dr. J.H., ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (Soncino Press, London, 1978), pg. 769

“Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him.”

Then Jesus, who was always concerned that people understand the truth of God's Word correctly, does not correct his response, but praises him that he answered wisely.

The scribe gave a twofold answer to the declaration. He says, “He is One” and “there is no one else besides Him. Now the question must be asked, “If the scribe understood Deut. 6:4 correctly, where does it declare “...there is no one else besides Him?” Where did he get this idea from? And why does he give a twofold answer to the concept of oneness? The answer I think can be found in the use of the Hebrew word “echad.”

Now contrary to what many Christians think, “echad” is not used primarily to denote a unified oneness, in fact it usually refers to a singular oneness. In the rest of the Book of Deuteronomy, “echad,” (where it is translated as “one” using the KJV), is used 17 other times and in all those other cases it is used as a singular oneness. However, it cannot be denied that “echad” also carries the sense of a unified oneness.

For example, in Genesis 2:24 the word “echad” bespeaks the union of Adam and Eve into “one flesh.” Genesis 34: 16 describe how two people will become “one people” through marriage – “Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people.” And Ezra 3:1 tells us of many people becoming “one man” in Jerusalem – “Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.”

There are many other examples indicating the same type of oneness throughout the Old Testament. Consequently, in the Jewish mind, “echad” carried not only the idea of a singular oneness, but also the ideal of a unified oneness, and this, I think, explains the scribe's twofold answer.

The Jews understood that there was some type of unified

oneness in the Godhead, although they did not quite understand it. As we mentioned before, the Jewish commentary Zohar many times speaks of a unified oneness in the Godhead. And to the fact that they also understood the Shema to be referring to three distinctive names, which must then be included in the “oneness,” there can be no doubt, for as we quoted before, they asked,

“How can the three Names be one?”¹⁶⁴

and in another place, they state:

“*The LORD our God the LORD* represent three grades...”¹⁶⁵

If the names were understood to be distinct names or grades, then obviously it would be those three distinct names or grades which must be included in the oneness, which by definition, must then be a “unified oneness.”

So, in other words, when the scribe asserted that God indeed is one, he is testifying to the *unified oneness* of God (Elohim). And when he states that there is no one else besides Him, he is testifying, like Rashbam centuries later, to a *singular oneness* – that the LORD is the LORD alone. This twofold assertion, of course, fits in with what we have learned of the word “*Elohim*.”

Since “*Elohim*” primarily refers to the Father, and He is also known as LORD, then obviously He must be known in His singular oneness. There is no other Father. He is the only Source of all. He is the LORD alone. There is no one else besides Him.

But as “*Elohim*” also refers to a plurality of Persons in the sense of an internal intensification within the Father through coinherence, He must also be known in His unified oneness. God is One, since the Son and Holy Spirit coinhere within the Father, and so are consubstantial, and exist in perfect communion.

¹⁶⁴Sperling, Harry; Simon, Maurice; translators, *The Zohar, Vol. 3* (The Soncino Press, London; New York, 1984), pg. 134

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pg. 64

So we see the *Shema* of Dt. 6:4 does, indeed, refer to the unity of the Godhead and does declare to us, without equivocation, that the plurality of the Godhead, (that is hinted at in other places) is indeed, unified and one. It also shows to us that this oneness is based upon consubstantiality, coinherence, and communion. It is only through these three qualities that the Godhead can be one. So with that in mind let's continue and look at these three qualities of oneness.

CONSUBSTANTIALITY

Consubstantiality – the sameness of substance – is seen in the book of Isaiah chapter 42, verse 8:

“I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.”

In this passage, the LORD refers to the Father, and He says that He will not give His glory to another, or His praise to graven images. However, we see in John 17:5 that Christ had the Fathers glory.

“Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

And we are told that such glory was given to the Son in verse 22, which says,

“The glory, which You have given Me.”

Now if this is true, does this not seem to contradict Isa. 42:8, because the Father states He does not give His glory to another? The difficulty, I think can be cleared up when we look

closely to the passage. Isaiah says the LORD will not give His glory to another. The key is in understanding the word “another.” The word “another” in the Greek Septuagint¹⁶⁶ is the Greek word “*heteros*.” In Greek, there are two common words used for “another,” the word “*allos*,” and the word “*heteros*.” *Allos* means “another of the same kind,” and *heteros* means “another of a different kind.”

W.E. Vine states the following regarding these two words,

“*Allos* and *heteros* have a difference in meaning, which despite a tendency to be lost, is to be observed in numerous passages. *Allos* expresses a numerical difference and denotes another of the same sort; *heteros* expresses a qualitative difference and denotes another of a different sort.”¹⁶⁷

Archbishop Trench states the following regarding these words,

“We may bring this distinction practically to bear on the interpretation of the N.T. There is only one way in which the fine distinction between *heteros* and *allos* . . . can be reproduced for the English reader.” In Galatians 1:6, 7 Paul says, “I marvel,’ says the Apostle, ‘that ye are so soon removed from them that called you into the grace of Christ unto another (*heteron*) Gospel, which is not another’ (*allos*). Dean Alford for the first ‘other’ has substituted ‘different’; for indeed that is what St. Paul intends to express, namely, his wonder that they should have so soon accepted a Gospel different in character and kind from that which they had already received, which therefore had no right to be called another (*allos*) Gospel. . . .”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ The Greek Septuagint, commonly known as LXX, was the Bible familiar to the Lord and the Bible that was many times appealed to and quoted from by the Apostles.

¹⁶⁷ Vine, W.E., *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981), pg. 60

¹⁶⁸ Trench, Richard Chenevix, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1958), pg. 360-361

So what we see Isaiah stating, is that the LORD (Father) will not give His glory to “another of a different kind” (*heteros*). In other words the reason why Jesus could say that the Father gave Him His glory is because the Son is not “another of a different kind” (*heteros*), but is indeed “another of the same kind” (*allos*). The Father and the Son are both consubstantial and thus could possess the same glory. To be of the same kind means they must be of the same substance and this consubstantiality explains why Jesus can declare, “I and the Father are one” (Jn. 10:30) and why they can consequently, possess the same glory.

The same is true of the Holy Spirit, for in John 14:16 the Holy Spirit is said to be “another” (*allos*) Helper, and thus too is “another of the same kind” and thus also possesses the same glory and, consequently, is called the “Spirit of glory.”

“If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” I Pet. 4: 14

Thus, we see that the glory of the Father is also the glory of the Son, which is also the glory of the Spirit because they are all consubstantial (*allos* – same kind) and consequently One.

In addition, since the Father, as YHWH Himself – as a subsistent – is seen in an oneness of singularity or aloneness, we must view all oneness in relation to the Father, since He is the only Father and Source. All things proceed from Him. The Son and the Holy Spirit are “another of the same kind” in relation to Him. The Son must be seen as consubstantial with Him, not the Father consubstantial with the Son. The Holy Spirit must be seen as consubstantial with the Father, not the Father as consubstantial with the Holy Spirit. All oneness must be seen in relation to the Father.

Because this is such an important doctrine and is the basis for understanding not only the unity of God, but also, specifically, the coinherence and communality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, let’s look at this doctrine in more detail in the New

Testament.

In the New Testament, this truth is seen primarily in three passages: John 1:1, John 10:30 and Philippians 2:6. We will now look at each one of these portions of Scripture.

JOHN 1:1

In the Gospel of John, chapter one verse one, John tells us that “the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This is a clear and concise declaration by John that the Son and the Father were consubstantial. He makes this plain by the presence and the absence of the Greek article.

Dana and Mantey, in their *Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* say the following regarding this important grammatical usage:

“The articular construction emphasizes the identity; the anarthrous construction emphasizes the character.”¹⁶⁹

“An object of thought may be conceived of from two points of view: as to identity or quality. To convey the first point of view the Greek uses the article; for the second the anarthrous construction is used. “...We adopt Robertson’s conclusion that it is more accurate to speak of the “absence” of the article than the “omission” of the article. When we use “omission” we imply “that the article ought to be present” ... while as a matter of fact it ought not to be, because the writer was seeking to convey an idea which the use of the article would not have properly represented.”¹⁷⁰

In other words, when one has an article present, and then

¹⁶⁹ Dana, H.E.; Mantey, Julius R., *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York, 1957), pg. 140

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pg. 149-50

not present, in any particular phrase, it is done to convey a specific thought. This is what is done in Jn. 1:1. The phrase “the Word was with God, and the Word was God” would look like this in Greek – ο (the) λογος (Word) ην (was) προς (with) τον (the) θεον (God) και (and) θεος (God) ην (was) ο (the) λογος (Word).

One can clearly see that John uses the article with “God” in the first part of the phrase, and deletes it with “God” in the second part of the phrase. By writing the phrase in this way he is telling us that his first usage of the word God is meant to convey the identity of God – in this case, God the Father. Then by not using the article in the next occurrence of the word “God,” he is telling the reader that it is not the identity of God he wishes to emphasize, but the character of God, the essence, the substance of God. John is saying not only was the “Word” with “God the Father,” but the “Word” was the same essence, substance or character of God the Father. This explains our Lord’s response to Phillip when Phillip asked the following.

“Phillip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?’” Jn. 14: 8-10

Character refers to substance. The “Word” is the same character as “God the Father,” because the “Word” possesses the same substance as God the Father. A characteristic is not some ethereal thing without any reality, but a characteristic is an aspect of something, an attribute of some substantial object. For example, a characteristic of fire is light and heat. If one has the substance of fire, one will have light and heat, because light and heat are simply the manifestations or character of the substance of fire. One cannot have light and heat without some form of fire. In the same way, if the Son has the same character as the Father, this can only be because He has the same substance as the Father.

Let me give another example. The Father is omnipresent.

Why? Because that is a characteristic of the substance of God to be everywhere. Well, the Son is also omnipresent (Jn. 3:13 NKJV). Why? Because He possesses the same substance of God, and that is a characteristic of that substance.

Dana and Mantey speak more about this grammatical Greek practice –

“The use of the articular and anarthrous constructions of Theos is highly instructive. A study of the uses of the term as given in Moulton and Geden’s Concordance convinces one that without the article Theos signifies divine essence, while with the article divine personality is chiefly in view...”

“...there is no definite rule governing the use of the article with Theos, so that sometimes the writer’s viewpoint is difficult to detect, which is entirely true. But in the great majority of instances the reason for the distinction is clear. The use of θεος in Jn. 1:1 is a good example. προς τον θεον points to Christ’s fellowship with the person of the Father; θεος ην ο λογος emphasizes Christ’s participation in the essence of the divine nature.¹⁷¹

And Kenneth Wuest says the following about this verse.

“The Word was God. Here the word “God” is without the article in the original. When it is used in that way, it refers to the divine essence. Emphasis is upon quality or character. Thus, John teaches us here that our Lord is essentially Deity. He possesses the same essence as God the Father, is one with Him in nature and attributes.”¹⁷²

Therefore, we can see that John was telling us that the Word was of the same essence as God the Father. He is telling us that the Son is consubstantial with the Father.

Now some object and say it should be translated as “the Word was a god.” They say an indefinite article should be used as it

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pg. 140

¹⁷² Wuest, Kenneth, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, vol. 4 (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI 1971), pg. 52

was used in such verses as Acts 12:22 and 28:6. The problem with this argument is that it ignores the context of the passage, and ignores the articular and anarthrous use by John in the very same verse!

One cannot deny that a noun without the definite article was sometimes used to demonstrate the essential quality of an object, as opposed to the mere identity of an object. John 3:6 is an example of this rule.

The verse tells us that, “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The first use of “Spirit” is articular. It has the definite article, much in the same way as the first instance of the word “God” in Jn. 1:1 has the definite article. That is why the word is capitalized. John is emphasizing the identity of the Spirit, that, of course, being the Holy Spirit. However, the second use of “spirit” in John 3:6 is anarthrous. It does not have the definite article, thus showing that John was referring to the essential quality of “spirit” and not to the mere identity of the one named “Spirit.” So by his anarthrous use John is telling us he is referring to the “spirital” quality of spirit.

Or take the first phrase in Rom. 1:21, which says in the KJV, “because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God.” The first use of God is articular, showing Paul was referring to the actual identity of God; however, the second use of God is anarthrous, showing that Paul was referring to the character or essential quality of that God. In other words, even they knew him to be the Creator – God, (God with the article), they did not treat Him as a Creator should be treated. They did not show Him the honour, that one being God, (God without article), should receive. They did not treat Him in a godly manner. They did not give Him the respect that one, being God, deserved.

There are many other examples we could give, but let it suffice with one more.

The literal translation of Rev. 21:7 is given to us in Darby’s translation. It reads as follows, “He that overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be to him God, and he shall be to me son.” The word “God” is anarthrous. The reason why I believe that John

leaves off the definite article is because John is saying more than just God will be “the God” of one who overcomes; he is saying God will be “God” to one who overcomes. God’s essential character is being emphasized over his mere identity. In other words, God’s character of faithfulness, love, and protective care, etc., is being emphasized. Therefore John is saying that God will be “the Faithful One” to the one who overcomes; God will be “the Loving One” to one who overcomes;” God will be “the Protective One,” etc. He is emphasizing the characteristics of God. That is why John is using the anarthrous construction.

Context will tell the reader why the anarthrous construction is being used. The New Testament writer often uses this rule to convey a specific truth or fact to the reader, especially when he switches from an articular construction to an anarthrous construction in the same sentence. If one cannot tell from the sentence, itself, whether the substantive should be indefinite or not, one will always be able to tell by the context, and when we come to the context of the first chapter of John we see that he makes it plain that he was declaring to the reader that the “Word” was “God,” of the same substance or essence of God, and not that the Word was “a” god.

In verse three, John says “all things” came into being through the Word. Literally it would read as follows –παντα (every thing) δι (through) αυτου (him) εγενετο (came into being) και (and) χωρις (apart from) αυτου (him) εγενετο (came into being) ουδε (no not) εν (one *thing*) ο (which) γεγονεν (has come into being)

Darby translates it as –

“All things received being through him, and without him not one *thing* received being which has received being.”

You see, the little word translated, “made,” in the KJV, is better translated as, “come into being” in this verse. Strong gives the meaning, “to become,” i.e. “to come into being,” to this

word.¹⁷³ The word, in this context, refers to more than just the physical things of this creation; it refers to anything that has come into existence, whether it be the heavens, the earth, angels, animals, or anything that has being. In other words, it can mean anything that at one time “did not have existence, but now has existence.”

If John was telling us that the Word was “a god,” in the sense that the Word was subsequent to God the Father, or came into existence subsequent to the eternal existence of God, then he would be declaring an impossibility, because a god other than God the Father would have to, by definition, “come into being” at a subsequent time. He would have to have a beginning of existence. This could not be true of the Logos, because John says in verse three, that not even “one *thing*” has “come into being,” that has “come into being,” except by the Word. This is the context in which the anarthrous construction must be understood.

Therefore, John is declaring is that the Word is eternal. He never came into being in time, for His was an eternal “becoming,” or begetting.¹⁷⁴ There was never a time in which He did not exist. He is the eternal Word of God, because He was “God” (essentially). He was of the same substance as God the Father. Everything that the Father was, essentially, the Word was, essentially. And since eternity is a characteristic of the substance of the Father, the Word is also eternal, because He possesses the same eternal substance. He is consubstantial with the Father.

This confirms for us that John was using the anarthrous construction of God in the second phrase of John 1:1 to declare that the “Word” was *essentially* the same as “God,” and *not* that the “Word” was “a” god.

One needs to understand that if John wanted to declare that the “Word” was “a” god, and was not declaring to us that the “Word” was consubstantial with God, there were many different linguistic techniques at his disposal. He could have used the

¹⁷³Strong, James, *Strong’s Complete Dictionary of Bible Words*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville 1996) pg. 597

¹⁷⁴ The first definition of *ginomai* in BAG is “be born or begotten.”

indefinite Greek pronoun “τις” to remove any ambiguity as to his thought. He uses it 45 other times in his gospel, and it is used a total of 419 times in the New Testament (e.g. Jn. 4:46; 5:5; Acts 22:12; Jude 1:4). If John wanted to say beyond equivocation that the Word was a second god, he simply could have used this indefinite pronoun. It would have then read as follows, “τις θεος ην ο λογος” (the Word was “a” god, or the Word was a certain god).

Or he could have used the word “*heteros*,” which, as we have already seen means “another of a different kind.” John uses it in John 19:37. If John wanted to say that the Word was a second god different from the Father he could have said, “ετερος θεος ην ο λογος,” (the Word was another god).

However, John did not use any of these other words, which would have left his meaning plain, because he was not telling the reader that the Word was “a” god; he was telling the world that the “Word” was “God.”

And so we see by the anarthrous Greek construction, the context of the passage itself, and by the absence of linguistic terminology available to John, he was declaring to us the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. He was telling us that the eternal Word was not only with God the Father from eternity, but also the Word was God – one with the Father essentially.

A statement attributed to Martin Luther says it best, “The Word was ‘with God’ was against Sabellius, and the Word ‘was God’ was against Arius” (which, obviously would include modern day Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Unitarians, and others).

JOHN 10:30

The next passage we would like to look at, which teaches the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, is John 10:30. Jesus proclaims to us, in John 10:30, the following declaration, “I and the Father are one.”

Here we see an interesting declaration. The verb, translated “are,” is in the plural form and is used with the masculine gender,

(i.e. the words I and Father), and with the neuter gender, (i.e. the word “one”). We do not see this in English, but what John is saying is that Jesus was declaring , “I and the Father (masculine genders), *we* are (plural form) one (neuter gender). In other words, the Son and the Father, two persons of the Godhead, are not simply one in their purpose, but are one in a “substantial thing,” that being their substance or essence (thus, the neuter gender). Jesus is declaring that He is consubstantial with the Father. All that the Father is, the Son is, save His paternity. They are “one” as to substance (neuter gender). He is affirming his consubstantiality, “I and the Father, *we are one.*”

We see this fact confirmed in verse 31 because we see the Jewish leaders take up stones to stone Him. And in verse 33 we see the reason why. They say it is because He was making himself out to be God. If Jesus was simply saying He and the Father were one in purpose, the Jewish leaders would not have wished to stone Him. They believed all Jews should be one in purpose with God. To them that is what it meant to keep the Torah.

No, they wished to stone Him because they understood Jesus was declaring His consubstantiality with the Father.

What we do not see in English is that John leaves off the article with the word “man” and with the word “God” in verse 33. In other words, as in John 1:1, John is using the anarthrous construction for the word “God.” He is showing the reader that he is talking about the essence or substance of God, and not just the mere identity of God. And by using the same construction for the word “man,” he is telling us that the Jews understood Him to be a man no different than they were.

John is telling us that the reason the Jewish leaders wanted to stone Jesus is that, (in their estimation), Jesus was essentially a “man” no different than they were, yet He was making Himself out to be essentially “God,” the same substance as God. John makes it plain for the reader that this was their understanding by his anarthrous use of “man” and “God.”

This not only shows forth the consubstantiality of the Son

with the Father, but also shows us that John is developing a theme throughout his gospel by his articular and anarthrous usage of the word God – Jesus was “essentially” God as to His divine substance. He is declaring the eternal and divine origin of Jesus. He is declaring the consubstantiality of Jesus with God the Father, and he is declaring the oneness or unity of the Divine Persons.

PHILIPPIANS 2:6

The last passage we would like to look at is Phil. 2:6. In this passage Paul also affirms our Lord’s deity and his consubstantiality with the Father. The passage reads in the NASB:

“Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,”

Or in the KJV:

“Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”

The first thing we notice, as we look at this passage, is the word Paul uses for “exist,” or for “being.” It is the Greek word “huparcho,” which carries the sense of existing or subsisting “down under.” We see it translated as “possess” in Acts 4:32(NASB), because the things of someone that exist, subsist as their own possession, because it is under their control. What they “have,” which is how the King James translates it, is what they “possess,” which is the word the translators of the New American Standard adopted.

In addition, when we realize that the things which now subsist in creation, (except, of course, God the Father), exist because of the action of someone else, (i.e. the creative act of God), we realize that all existence is based upon derivation from something other than itself. For example, the things which God

possesses in this universe, (the things which exist), subsist because of the creative act of God. They exist because God called them into being. It is used in this sense in Acts 17:29 which says, “we are (subsisting *as*) the offspring of God.” We subsist or have our being because we are from God. He is our Creator.

However, when we come to Phil. 2:6, we see a different understanding for Christ. When Paul tells us that Christ subsists in the very form of God, he is telling us that Christ is not a created being, but is one who is co-eternal with God the Father, because the word “form,” as we will presently see, bespeaks the outward manifestation of an inward reality. The inward reality of God the Father is that He is eternal, and for Christ to subsist as the outward manifestation of that eternal reality, means He must also be eternal, otherwise He could never exist in the form of God. The temporal can never manifest the eternal.

In other words, Paul declares Christ’s subsistence to be eternal, not temporal. Therefore, His subsistence cannot be the result of the temporal act of a Creator, but must be the result of an eternal act of a Father, i.e. His eternal generation. The Son’s eternal subsistence is eternally related to the Father’s eternal begetting.

Therefore, Paul is declaring that our Lord has always subsisted in, or always possessed the very form of God, and, therefore, is equal with God! As such, because He always possessed the form of God, Christ does not regard it “robbery to be equal with God.” Why? Because one doesn’t have to steal something that one already possesses. What Christ possesses, is not the result of a robbery, because it has always been His own peculiar possession from eternity. No one else possesses or subsists in the form of God! He is the only one. The equality of the Son with the Father is manifested by this consubstantiality. He possesses the same eternal substance of the Father, and, as such, eternally subsists in the form of God.

And this brings us to the word for “form.” It is the Greek word “*morphe*” where we get our English word “*metamorphous*.” It carries a different meaning than the other Greek word for “form,”

“eidos,” which simply carries the sense of outward appearance. “Morphe” carries the sense of outward appearance *based on inward reality*.

For example, “eidos” is used in Luke 3:22. It tells us the Holy Spirit simply appeared in the outward form of a dove. However, because “morphe” carries more than just the sense of outward appearance, it could never be used in Luke 3:22. It could not be used in the reference above, because the inward reality of the Holy Spirit was not that of an actual dove.

Kenneth Wuest’s definition of this word is quite helpful. He says:

“The Greek word has no reference to the shape of any physical object. It was a Greek Philosophical term. Vincent has an excellent note on the word. In discussing it, he has among other things, the following to say: ‘We must here dismiss from our minds the idea of shape. The word is used in its philosophical sense to denote that expression of being which carries in itself the distinctive nature and character of the being to whom it pertains...This mode of expression, this setting of the divine essence, is not identical with the essence itself, but is identified with it as its natural and appropriate expression, answering to it in every *particular*.’”¹⁷⁵

This explains why Christ had to be eternal. Since eternity is a “particular” of the divine essence, the only way for Christ to subsist in the “morphe” of God was for Him to be eternal also, otherwise He would not be “answering to it,” as Kenneth Wuest says, “in every particular.”

Kenneth Wuest continues:

“Thus the Greek word for ‘form’ refers to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature. This expression is not assumed from the outside, but proceeds directly from within...” “Our Lord was in the form of God. The word ‘God’ is without the definite article in the Greek text, and therefore refers to the divine essence. Thus,

¹⁷⁵ Wuest, Kenneth, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, vol. 4 (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI 1971), pg. 62

our Lord's outward expression of His inmost being was as to its nature the expression of the divine essence of Deity."¹⁷⁶

Moreover, since we know Paul meant "God the Father" by his use of the word "God" in the phrase "in the form of God," (we know this because he concludes the verse with Christ not considering it robbery to be equal with God, which could mean no one other than God the Father), we realize that "the expression of the divine essence of Deity," as Kenneth Wuest says, must refer to none other than the divine essence of *God the Father*.

This is an important distinction and must be kept in mind in order to properly understand the nature of Trinitarian relationships. This shows why a translation like the NIV is incorrect. Paul is not saying that Christ is "in very nature God," but is saying Christ is, if you will, the "very nature (form) of God." The essence of the Son was the same essence of the Father, and so is consubstantial with the Father, and, therefore, is the only One who can subsist in the form of God the Father.

Christ is God, but He does not possess the divine substance in and of Himself, apart from His Father, as the NIV implies. He is God because He was eternally begotten of God the Father and in that eternal generation, received the divine essence without diminution from the Father, and, as such, has always subsisted in the form of God, outwardly manifesting the fullness of the Father from all eternity (Col. 1:19; 2:9). This has always been the understanding of the Historic Christian Faith.

Therefore, let us now return to where we started with the prophet Isaiah. When God the Father tells us that all knees shall bow to Him, in Isaiah 45:22, and that He is also known as Jehovah, (yet as we already stated in Phil. 2:10, Jesus is identified as Jehovah the one to whom all knees shall bow), we see this can only be

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pg. 63

understood through consubstantiality (*allos*) of the Father and the Son. The Father is known as Jehovah, yet Jesus is primarily confessed to be Jehovah. Why? The Son is of the same substance as the Father as we have seen in John 1:1, John 10:30, and Phil. 2:6. Therefore, to bow the knee to the Father is to bow the knee to the Son.

And so we understand once again. To see the Son, is to see the Father.

“Phillip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?’” Jn. 14: 8-10

The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. In other words, to bow to the Son is to bow to the Father who coinheres in Him. If the Father is known as Jehovah, then most assuredly, the Son must be confessed as Jehovah, because the Son is consubstantial with the Father and thus coinheres within the Father. He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. And this leads to the next quality of unity – coinherence.

COINHERENCE

Coinherence is that quality of the Godhead that reveals to us the equality of the Three Persons. Jesus tells us in Jn. 14:9-11 that “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.” In addition, Jn.15: 26 tell us that the Spirit proceeds (*ekporeustai*– goes out of) from the Father, showing that He also is in the Father (cf. I Cor. 2:10-11). In addition, Christ's promise to come to us is fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit, implying a coinherence.

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”(Jn. 14:16-18).

In other words, if the Spirit dwells in us, Christ dwells in us. The same truth is shown in Rom. 8:9-11.

In verse 9, we are told that the Spirit of God (could mean the Father) dwells in us, as well as the Spirit of Christ (could mean the Son). Then in verse 11 we're told that if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you (the Father), He (the Father) will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit (meaning the Holy Spirit) who dwells in you. The Christian by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit also experiences the indwelling of the Father and of the Son.

John also speaks of the same mutual indwelling. As we showed before, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will dwell in His disciples in Jn. 14: 17. And then in verse 23 He says,

“If anyone loves Me he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”

All Three Persons indwell the believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, because all Three Persons indwell each other through their coinherence.

Now the question must be asked, “How does this show equality?” If Scripture only said the Father indwelt the Son and the Holy Spirit, but they not Him, then there would not be equality, for the Father could simply indwell them as He indwells us. But since Scripture also tells us that the Son and the Holy Spirit mutually indwell the Father, we see the equality. The only way for the Son and the Holy Spirit to coinhere in the Father is for there to be consubstantiality, an oneness of substance.

As we have already stated, the Son and the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father. The Father does not proceed Himself. He

is immovable. So if the Father does not proceed, how can His substance be possessed by the Son and the Holy Spirit? The answer is seen in what is called communication. The Father communicates His substance to the Son in generation and to the Spirit in spiration.

John 5:26 tell us that the Father gave the Son to have life within Himself. That giving was an eternal communication of substance. The life or substance of the Father is the same life or substance given to the Son. All that the Father is, save His subsistence, His paternity, is communicated to the Son. And there is our answer.

The Father's subsistence does not proceed, but the Father's substance does proceed through communication. The Father and the Son are consubstantial. They possess the same substance. They are one in essence.

Consequently, since the Father is omnipresent, the Son is omnipresent. The reason the Son coinheres in the Father is because the Son is omnipresent. Since the Father is everywhere and infinite, the only way the Son could be completely in the Father, would be for the Son to also be everywhere and infinite. And so, since the Son is omnipresent and possesses the same omnipresent substance as the Father possess, the Son is obviously in the Father and the Father is in the Son. They both fill all things simultaneously so to speak. *What we see from this is that coinherence is based upon consubstantiality.*

The same is true, of course, for the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is also consubstantial and thus coinherent, for He too possesses the same omnipresent substance Ps. 134:7.

If all Three Persons are everywhere at the same time, then obviously they must equally coinhere in each other. Omnipresence is a quality or characteristic of the Father's substance. It is an aspect of who He is in His essence. Obviously, if the Son and the Holy Spirit were not everywhere at the same time they would not be omnipresent. And if they could not be omnipresent, they could not have the same substance or essence of the Father. But, on the other

hand, if they were everywhere, then their substance would have to be the same substance as the Father's. And if there was not a place where they were not, then there could never be a place where the Father could exist without them. Thus, they would have to mutually coinhere in each other. Coinherence proves consubstantiality and consubstantiality proves coinherence and such coinherence results in equality.

This consubstantial coinherence brings us to the last quality of unity, and that last quality is communion. The Three Persons of the Godhead are a Trinity in unity because they all possess the same attributes and therefore exist in perfect communion.

COMMUNION

If God is perfect and just in all His ways (Dt. 32:4), then for perfect communion to exist there must not be any inequality. Our communion with God is on a different level because we are not equal with God. We will never have complete communion with all that God is, even in our glorified state, because we are not equal to God. There will always be a side to God's existence, which we will never know. Only the Son and the Holy Spirit fully know the Father (Matt. 11:27; Jn. 1:18; I Cor. 2: 10). All Three Persons are in perfect communion with one another because they fully know each other and possess all the same attributal substance. They all possess the same attributes of love, holiness, omniscience, and omnipotence and thus move together in an oneness of communion and unity.

Because the Son possesses the same substance of the Father in a filial way (i.e. as the result of His eternal begetting), He relates to the Father in a perfect filial way. Consequently, the Son moves in perfect relation to the Father. The mind of the Father is the mind of the Son. And because of this perfect relational communion, the Son can do nothing of His own initiative.

“Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” (Jn. 5:19).

The same, of course, is true of the Holy Spirit.

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.” (Jn. 16:13).

Since the Three Persons of the Godhead are all consubstantial, they all possess the same attributes, and thus are not only eternal, but are also omnipresent and thus fully coinhere in each other. This coinherence results in a perfect communion, because through their coinherence they are also omniscient and, consequently, fully know each other. This omniscience allows them to move in perfect harmony because they each fully love one another and thus respond in perfect union with one another. The Father loves the Son perfectly, and the Son responds in perfect love and obedience, while the Holy Spirit affirms such love in perfect unity.

So we see the unity of the Godhead through consubstantiality, coinherence, and communion. These three qualities reveal to us the perfect oneness of God.

BOOK TWO

THE DOCTRINE DEFINED

UNITY OF GOD

Scripture gives us three different facets to view the oneness or unity of God – essence, nature, and being. This is known as the simplicity of the Godhead. Within the Godhead, there is only one essence, one nature, one being. The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are all one in their essence. They are all one in their nature, and they are all one in their being. Essence, nature, and being are not three separate qualities of the Godhead, but three distinct facets of the Godhead as viewed from three different perspectives. Essence, nature, and being are three terms that apply to the sum total of Trinitarian existence.

It is unfortunate that in Church History these terms have been used interchangeably, especially essence and nature. However, it is very important to understand the distinction between these terms. They are not interchangeable.

As we continue on in this study, please note that we try to be very consistent in what term we use. When we say essence, we mean essence, not nature, and visa a versa. With that in mind let's continue.

The essence of God is revealed to us in Col. 2:9, which says, “For in Him all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form” (NASB). The Greek word translated “Deity” is the Greek word “*Theotes*.”

The nature of God is revealed in Rom. 1:20, which says, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” The Greek word translated “divine nature” is the Greek word “*Theiotes*.”

And finally the being of God is revealed in II Peter 1:4,

“By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” NKJV

The New English Bible translates this verse as thus,

“Through this might and splendor he has given us his promises, great beyond all price, and through them you may escape the corruption with which lust has infected the world, and come to share in the very being of God.”¹⁷⁷

The Greek word translated divine “nature” in the NKJV and “being” of God in the NEB is the Greek word “*Phusis*.”

Although each of these words refer to the same essential Godhead and therefore are sometimes translated similarly, nevertheless they are distinct words whose distinction must be maintained if we would properly understand the simplicity of the Godhead. The simplicity of God is defined by essence, nature, and being or in the Greek – *Theotes*, *Theiotes*, and *Phusis*. So with that in mind let's look at each of these facets separately.

But first, we must explain the difference between the first two words, for it is these two words which are most commonly confused in Trinitarian Theology, but which must not be confused in order to continue on in a proper understanding of God's Triune existence.

Essence and nature do not mean the same thing. Perhaps it would be good to once again quote Archbishop Trench at this time as he addresses this important distinction in his work *Synonyms of the New Testament*:

“Neither of these words occurs more than once in the N.T.;

¹⁷⁷ *The New Testament in Four Versions*, (Christianity Today, Inc., Washington DC, 1965) pg. 749

Theiotes only at Rom. 1:20 (and once in the Apocrypha, Wis. xviii. 9); *Theotes* at Col. ii. 9. We have rendered both by 'Godhead;' yet they must not be regarded as identical in meaning, nor even as two different forms of the same word, which in the process of time have separated off from one another, and acquired different shades of significance. On the contrary, there is a real distinction between them, and one which grounds itself on their different derivations; *Theotes* being from *Theos*, and *Theiotes*, not from "To *Theion*," which is nearly though not quite equivalent to *Theo*, but from the adjective *Theios*."

"... In Rom. 1:20, St. Paul is declaring how much of God may be known from the revelation of Himself, which He has made in nature, from those vestiges of Himself, which men may everywhere trace in the world around them.... But in the second passage (Col. ii. 9) St. Paul is declaring that in the Son there dwells all the fullness of absolute Godhead; they were no mere rays of divine glory which gilded Him, lighting up his Person for a season and with a splendor not his own; but He was, and is, absolute and perfect God...There is ever a manifestation of the divine, of some divine attributes, in that to which *Theiotes* is attributed, but never absolute essential deity."

"It may be observed, in conclusion, that whether this distinction was intended, as I am fully persuaded it was, by St. Paul or not, it established itself firmly in the later theological language of the Church – the Greek Fathers using never *Theiotes*, but always *Theotes*, as alone adequately expressing the essential Godhead of the three several Persons in the Holy Trinity."¹⁷⁸ (The Greek words were transliterated)

So we see that *Theotes*, which is derived from the noun *Theos*, defines God in His essential Deity, whereas, *Theiotes*, which is derived from the adjective *Theios*, defines that which may be known about God, not "essentially," but what may be known of God "manifestly." Or put another way, *Theotes* denotes that which may be known of God substantially and *Theiotes* denotes that which may be known of God subsistentially. *Theotes* refers to the essence of God and *Theiotes* refers to the nature of God.

A. T. Robertson confirms this when he states

¹⁷⁸ Trench, Richard Chenevix, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1958), pg. 7-8

“*Theotes* is Divine Personality, *Theiotes*, Divine Nature and properties.”¹⁷⁹

Now, while these two words are close in meaning, the distinction must be maintained. The difference is in the manner in which the Godhead is considered. *Theotes*, or the essence of God, bespeaks the “what” of God's existence, and *Theiotes*, or “nature of God,” bespeaks the “how” of God's existence. Essence and nature bespeak the same thing but from different perspectives. And indeed, it may be added, the Being of God tells us the “kind” of God's existence – Essence, nature and being – the what, how, and kind of God's existence – all the same substance but understood from different perspectives. So with that distinction laid down let us look at each one individually.

ESSENCE–THEOTES

Essence, as we have already stated, bespeaks the “what” of God's existence. It tells us that God exists in a substantial manner. And according to Col. 2:9, this substantial manner is seen in His Son Christ Jesus. By using the word *Theotes*, Paul is telling us that, in Christ, we see more than just Divinity in an abstract manner, but we see the fullness of the Godhead, all that God is. The very essence of God the Father resides in the Son. *He is very God of very God*. The Son is the perfect image of the invisible God because the very substance of the Father is possessed by the Son. This tells us that not only is the essence of God defined as “substance,” but also that that substance is communicated in the Father's begetting of an eternal Son. And because the Father's substance is communicated

¹⁷⁹ Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. IV, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1931) pg. 329

and possessed equally by the Son, the Son is consubstantial with the Father. The same of course, would be true of the Spirit.

So what we see thus far is that the essence of God may be defined as substance, communicating, and consubstantiality. The essence of God is substantial; it has always been communicated to the Son and Spirit, and thus results in the consubstantiality of the Three Persons. The essence tells us “what” God is. He is substance, always in communication, ever resulting in consubstantiality.

NATURE–THEIOTES

Nature, on the other hand, tells us “how” God exists. As A.T. Robinson stated, *Theiotes* is the “Divine nature and properties.”¹⁸⁰ *Theiotes* bespeaks the nature of God, and nature bespeaks the “how” of God’s existence. How does God or the Father exist? He exists in a subsistential manner. If God is substantial then the question must naturally be asked, how does that substance exist? The answer is “That God subsists.” Subsistence is the realization of substance. The substance of God subsists in a paternal manner and so does not subsist independent of giving. The Father’s nature of giving eternally brings forth the Son in eternal generation and the Holy Spirit in eternal spiration. The substance of the Father subsists in a paternal or giving manner, which is ever coinhering.

Thus, to answer the question, “How does God exist?” He exists in a subsistential way, a giving way and a coinherent way. This defines for us what the nature of God is. And since He exists in a subsistential, giving, and coinherent way He must obviously exist eternally with the Son and the Holy Spirit in a triune way.

This is the nature of God, as opposed to the essence of God, and, as Paul uses this word in Rom. 1:20, he is telling us that we

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pg. 329

should expect to find that creation bespeaks the “how of God’s existence.” In other words, since God only exists with the Son and the Holy Spirit in a triune way, so we should expect to find that the universe exists in a triune way as to its very nature – which, of course, is true. The universe consists of three properties and only three in its essential nature – space, matter, and time!

The last word, which bespeaks the simplicity of God, is the Greek word *Phusis*, and it is that word to which we would like now to turn our attention.

BEING–PHUSIS

As we stated before, Peter says we shall be “partakers of the divine nature” in II Peter 1:4. Nature is how this Greek word is most commonly translated (except for the NEB which translates it “Being”), but I think the word “Being” more closely conveys the meaning of this word, as we shall now try to demonstrate.

Now one must agree that the word “*phusis*” is used to refer to the constitutional nature of things and thus could be translated “nature,” (as we understand the word in English), but “*phusis*” contains such a fuller meaning than just “nature.” The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* states –

“The real problems in the Greek view of *phusis* are disclosed by the fact that from an early time the word played a role in the question of being. In accordance with the twofold meaning of *phusis*, this question developed in two different directions. The first concerned the true nature of things, the second the origin of all being, i.e. universal nature. But the two aspects cannot be separated and they often overlap.”¹⁸¹

In speaking of the use of the word in Pre-Socratic times, it

¹⁸¹ Friedrich, Gerhard, ed., Bromiley, Geoffrey W., trans. & ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IX, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1967), pg. 256

goes on and states.

“... *Phusis* is first used clearly in the sense of the true nature of things in Heracl. His starting-point is stated in the description of his own inquiry '...as I discussed (things), defined each according to its nature *kata phusin*, and explained its being.... If even in the famous Fr., 123 (I, 178): *phusis...kruptessai phile* 'the true nature loves to hide itself,' *phusis* does not mean personified universal *nature*, Heracl. again has in view the true being of things....”¹⁸²

As we get closer to the use of the word in the time of Christ, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* tells us that Philo uses the word as nature personified as “Being” “...the creator and sustainer of the world.”¹⁸³

And in the time of Josephus, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* tells us that in addition to the word being used as “nature” or “character” of things, when “...used of man... [it meant] “character,” “true being.”¹⁸⁴ He goes on to say, “in this connection the common dat. *phusei* usually means, not “by nature,” but rather “in character.”¹⁸⁵

So by the time we get to the time of Peter we find the word had developed from its earlier etymological meaning of the nature or constitution of things, to the meaning, the “being” or “character,” resulting from the “nature” or essence of a thing. It referred to the outward manifestation of an inward reality. *In other words, a thing took on a special characteristic based upon its essential nature.*

Consequently, in reference to the simplicity of God, *Phusis* explains to us the “kind” of God's existence based upon His essential nature. The word means so much more than just “nature” but is a personification of that nature which is revealed as “character” or “being.” Our God, in other words, is an attributal (characteristics), imparting, and communal Being. That is the

¹⁸² Ibid., pg. 256

¹⁸³ Ibid., pg. 267

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pg.270

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pg. 270

Phusis of God.

Therefore, when Peter tells us that we are made partakers of the divine nature he is not telling us that we somehow are partakers of God's essential nature, (which none can partake of save the Son and the Holy Spirit), but he is telling us that we are made partakers of the Divine Being. We are made partakers of God's character. We partake of God's love. We partake of God's holiness. We partake of God's joy.

In other words, Peter is telling us, not that we are *to become gods*, (as some suggest today), but we are *to become godly*. We partake of God in an “attributal” sense. We partake of His communicable attributes. We love Him because he first loved us. We should be holy because He is holy.

We also partake of God in an “impartational” sense. By grace, we become sons of God and God becomes our Father. The Spirit has been sent into our hearts whereby we cry Abba Father. He also imparts to us His love, joy, and peace.

And lastly, we partake in a “communional” sense. Our fellowship is with the Father and Son through the Holy Spirit, (I John 1:3; 2 Cor. 13:13). We become partakers of the Divine Being, by being in communion with Him.

So we see that the simplicity of God may be seen by three aspects: essence, nature, and being. Essence bespeaks the quiddity or “whatness” of God's existence. Nature bespeaks the “how” of God's existence and “being” bespeaks the kind of God's existence.

In addition, we saw that the essence of God was not only substantial but also was always communicated and was always consubstantial. The nature of God was subsistential, giving, and coinherent. And the being of God was attributal, imparting, and communional.

These are the nine qualities of Essence, Nature, and Being (See fig. 1). It is of utmost importance to understand these nine qualities for in understanding these nine qualities we will gain an understanding of the nine qualities of Person, and Activity, and Unity (See fig. 2), and when you combine the two, one sees that

Essence, Nature, and Being help define Person, Activity, and Unity (See Fig 2a).

So with that in mind let's take a closer look at these nine qualities.

Fig. 1

ESSENCE	Substantial	Communicating	Consubstantial
NATURE	Subsistential	Giving	Coinherent
BEING	Attributal	Imparting	Communional

Fig. 2

	PERSON	ACTIVITY	UNITY
	Substantial	Communicating	Consubstantial
	Subsistential	Giving	Coinherent
	Attributal	Imparting	Communional

Fig. 2a. Terms combined

	PERSON	ACTIVITY	UNITY
ESSENCE	Substantial	Communicating	Consubstantial
NATURE	Subsistential	Giving	Coinherent
BEING	Attributal	Imparting	Communional

THE QUALITIES OF SIMPLICITY

ESSENCE

Essence was defined by three qualities: substantial, communicating, and consubstantial. What this is telling us is that the essence of God is first of all substantial – it has substance. As to what that substance is, no one knows and perhaps no one will ever know. John of Damascus once succinctly said:

“The Deity being incomprehensible is also assuredly nameless. Therefore, since we know not His essence, let us not seek for a name for His essence. For names are explanations of actual things. But God, Who is good and brought us out of nothing into being that we might share in His goodness, and Who gave us the faculty of knowledge, not only did not impart to us His essence, but did not even grant us the knowledge of His essence.”¹⁸⁶

Moreover, he also states:

“But neither do we know, nor can we tell, what the essence (ousia–substance) of God is, or how it is in all, or how the Only-Begotten Son and God, having emptied Himself, became Man... How He walked with dry feet upon the waters. It is not within our capacity, therefore, to say anything about God or even to think of Him, beyond the things which have been divinely revealed to us...”¹⁸⁷

The closest, perhaps, we come to understanding the substance (what John of Damascus calls essence) of God is that He is spiritual. John 4:24 says, “...God is Spirit...”

Secondly, the essence of God has always been

¹⁸⁶ Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry, Ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, (T&T Clark; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Edinburgh; Grand Rapids, MI 1989), pg. 14

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 2

communicated. The substance of God has never existed simply as His own. It has always been communicated. There never was a time that the Son and the Holy Spirit did not possess the same substance as the Father. Therefore, it has always been communicated.

Thirdly, because the substance of the Father has always been communicated without division or diminution, it is a consubstantial substance. The substance that the Son and the Holy Spirit possess is the same substance the Father possesses.

In addition, it is important to understand that it is not a divided substance, in the sense that the Father communicated another substance like unto His own to the Son and the Holy Spirit. No, they all possess the one and the same substance simultaneously without division or diminution.

This is of utmost importance because some Christians say today, (in their denial of Eternal generation), that somehow the Son and the Holy Spirit possess the same substance without communication. In other words, they possess a substance eternally apart from the Father, never receiving it from Him but possessing it independently of Him. This of course is nonsensical, for you make the revelatory term “Father” meaningless. In addition, one makes the substance of the Son and the Holy Spirit to be a *similar*, but not the *same* substance.

Possession of a substance independently cannot be the same substance, but can only be a similar substance. That is semi-Arianism, and is the first step toward Tritheism. *Only when one has substance that is eternally communicated without diminution or division can one have substance that is consubstantial.* Anything else is, in all reality, Tritheism.

NATURE

Nature is defined by subsistential, giving, and coinherent. The nature of the Godhead must primarily be seen first in the

Father, but then also in the Son and Holy Spirit, as they are consubstantial with Him. The first aspect of nature is subsistential. To be subsistential means to be a subsistent that has a distinct mode of existence. It is in the nature of God to be subsistential. The Father does not exist by Himself, but has always existed with His Son and Holy Spirit. He has revealed Himself as One that has an unbegotten *mode of existence*, whereas the Son has a begotten *mode of existence*, and the Spirit has a spirated *mode of existence*. They all possess the same substance but subsist with a different mode of existence. It is this that gives distinction in the one Godhead.

Secondly, the nature of God is giving. What this means is that God has shown us it is His nature to give forth in begetting a Son and spirating the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is not His voluntary will to beget a Son (as if the Father could ever have existed without His Son), but it is His necessary will to beget a Son. It is part of His nature.

Indeed, the Father could not exist without the Son. A son must have a father to exist, but also one is not a father unless he has a son. Consequently, if God is an eternal Father so the Second Person must be an Eternal Son. In other words, God has shown us it is His nature to be giving. He has eternally begotten a Son and eternally spirated the Holy Spirit.

The third quality of the nature of God is to be coinherent with what He eternally generates or spirates. This means that He is in whatever is eternally produced. Since the Son and the Spirit are the only ones He has eternally begotten and spirated, respectively, they are the only ones the Father coinheres with.

All Three Persons are coinherent in each other because they are all consubstantial. Because the Father's substance is characterized by omnipresence, which means He is infinite or everywhere, so all who are consubstantial with Him, or those who possess the same substance, must be infinite or everywhere.

Consequently, all Three Persons coinhere within each other because all three are everywhere. And to put it in finite understanding, one must realize that the only way for something to

be completely within another thing is for them both to entirely possess the same space at the same time. This is coinherence. All Three Persons are coinherent because all Three Persons are consubstantial or infinite, equal, and eternal.

BEING

The last thing to consider is Being. As we saw, Being is defined by attributal, imparting, and communal. The Being of God is attributal, obviously, because He is defined by such attributes as love, holiness, omnipotence, eternity, etc. However, the Father's attributes are imparted to the Son and Spirit through generation and spiration respectively. The attributes of the Son and Spirit are the exact same attributes as the Father, except for the way in which they are exercised. For instance, the Father exercises a paternal love, whereas the Son exercises a filial love, and the Spirit exercises a spirital love, but the love of all three is exactly the same yet distinguishable. This exercise of all the divine attributes is of course, revealed by the last quality of the Being of God, which is communal.

The Three Persons of the Godhead have eternally been in communion one with another in perfect harmony. All three commune with one another in perfect oneness and unity for all three coinhere and are consubstantial with one another. This results in a perfect communion.

These are the nine qualities of Essence, Nature, and Being. By these qualities, we understand the Essence, Nature, and Being of the Godhead – the Simplicity of God. We see that all three terms are not interchangeable, but refer to a specific aspect of that Simplicity. But we also see that these same nine qualities now give us a proper understanding of the Person of God, Activity of God, and the Unity of God as seen primarily in the Father. And it is to that which we would now like to turn our attention. But before

we do, perhaps one other point needs to be made.

Our God is so great and transcendent. We would never be able to know Him or understand Him if He had not revealed Himself. However, in describing the qualities of Essence, Nature, and Being and understanding how God has revealed Himself, it should humble us and make us pause. God is not someone that can be analyzed and dissected and put into neat little boxes, and so it should give us angst to speak so assuredly that these qualities define God. God cannot be defined by us, but only by Himself. And yet if God has so revealed Himself to us as substantial, subsistential, and attributal; as one who communicates, eternally gives and is ever imparting, and as One whose Being is consubstantial, coinherent, and communal. We should humbly accept His revelation realizing that our being should be conformed to His Being.

We must realize that as a new creation we are *substantial* – we are born again and have new life! – We are *subsistential* – His life subsists in our spirit, body, and soul – we are also *attributal* – the characterization of His life is within us. The love, holiness, and righteousness, of Him should be the characterization of our walk in this life.

We should realize that what was true eternally of the Son and the Holy Spirit is true of us in a limited temporal way. New life was *communicated* to us from God in our new birth. Through a temporal generation of life from God, we were made sons and daughters. We were *given* life – begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (Jn. 1:13). In addition, were not His love, mercy, and grace *imparted* to us in that new birth?

Finally, we must realize that as the Son and Holy Spirit are consubstantial with the Father and so dwell in unity, we too have been made to be *consubstantial* with every child of God in a “limited” way, and so also should dwell together in unity, realizing that as God’s children we all have the same Divine life within us – none other than Christ Jesus Himself! (Col. 3:4).

Secondly, as all Three Persons are coinherent in each other,

we too have been given a “limited” *coinherence* with the Father and Holy Spirit by our relationship with the Son (Jn. 17:21-23).¹⁸⁸ And, lastly, as the Three Persons exists in a perfect communion, we too should have a perfect *communion* with all the brethren and with God Himself (I Jn. 1:3).

And so, we see that, although, by defining God by these qualities might seem too artificial or presumptuous, when we realize that it was God Himself who gave us these qualities to help us understand who He is, we can humbly realize that by understanding Him, we are able to understand ourselves and our new life.

We can see that by understanding how the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit relate and exists with each other; we are able to see how we as Christians should relate and exist with one another. This is the purpose of revelation and the doctrine of analogy – to have a Trinitarian mode of thinking so that we might understand that by learning about God, we can learn about ourselves and the way we should walk.

¹⁸⁸ Obviously, our consubstantiality with other children of God is not the same as the consubstantiality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We do not all possess the same substance, except in that we all possess the same Christ in our hearts. Nor is our coinherence the same as the coinherence of the Three Persons, except in that we are all made to be in Christ Jesus together.

PERSONHOOD OF GOD

Person, today, is the common theological nomenclature given to the English speaking Christian to aid him in the understanding of personal distinctions within the Godhead. Unfortunately, however, this word has been totally divorced from its original meaning. Today, when many Christians think of Three Persons within the Godhead, they tend to think of three individuals alongside each other, much as one might think of John, Henry, and Joseph, who while being three individuals, obviously are known as three separate beings. And this is the problem with many Christian views today. They perceive Three Persons to mean three separate individuals or beings. This, of course, is not what the word "Person" is supposed to convey.

L. Berkhof addresses this problem in his *Systematic Theology*:

"It is generally admitted that the word "person" is but an imperfect expression of the idea. In common parlance, it denotes a separate rational and moral individual, possessed of self-consciousness, and conscious of his identity amid all changes. Experience teaches that where you have a person, you also have a distinct individual essence. Every person is a distinct and separate individual, in whom human nature is individualized. But in God there are no three individuals alongside of, and separate from, one another, but only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence, which is not only generically, but also numerically, one. Consequently, many preferred to speak of three hypostases in God, three different modes, not of manifestation, as Sabellius taught, *but of existence or subsistence*. Thus, Calvin says, 'By Person, then, I mean subsistence in the Divine essence. – a subsistence which, while related to the other two, is distinguished from them by incommunicable properties.'"¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Berkhof, L. *Systematic Theology*, (W.M. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1941), pg. 87-88

This is indeed the very problem we find among many Evangelical Christians today. Although, they would never admit it, they have, with their abandonment of procession, and adoption of what may be called a “Christian Humanistic World View,” adopted a modern psychological interpretation of the word “Person.”

However, the question must be asked, “Should we abandon the term ‘Person?’” Some would say so. The problem, however, is that “Person” is the theological term the Church decided to adopt, and even though we agree that, perhaps, better terminology is available, like “subsistent,” we believe that for the sake of continuity, the term “Person” is the term we must use in explaining how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit subsist. They subsist as Persons.

If this is the case, then, what must we do to educate our brethren as to the proper understanding of the term “Person?” We believe that a proper understanding of Essence, Nature, and Being gives us that answer.

However, before we can proceed, perhaps it might be helpful to give the reader a brief etymology of the word “Person” as used in Church History. For the sake of brevity, perhaps it would be best to, once again, quote Francis J. Hall as he gives a concise history on this subject.

“...Tertullian...developed a Latin terminology which went far to determine the lines of subsequent thought in the West concerning the Trinity. His point of view was juristic. Substance, *substantia*, meant property capable of being jointly possessed by several Persons ... or parties having rights.”¹⁹⁰

“...It was this forensic use which lent itself to Tertullian’s purpose of vindicating the distinction of Persons in the Godhead... The substance of his thought is that there are three Parties who have equal possession of the fullness of divine substance and attributes.... A party at law is a subject of rights and duties...In himself he may be a “natural”

¹⁹⁰ Hall, Francis J., *Dogmatic Theology, The Trinity*, (Longmans, Green and Co. New York, 1918), pg.65-66

person, that is, a human being, or [he may be] an “artificial” person, that is a corporation. In any case, so far as legal parlance involves definition, he is a self simply, who is capable of rights and duties.

Similarly, Tertullian’s use of the term to signify the three divine possessors of the indivisible substance of God involved no fuller definition of these Persons in themselves than this: – that they are distinct selfs who in common possess the divine substance and nature. Such a use of the term *persona* does not include, in its necessary connotation, the ideas involved in modern popular and philosophical usage.”¹⁹¹

In other words, Tertullian never used the term “Person” in the sense of a “natural” person, or human being. He was using it the legal sense of an “artificial” person, or a “corporation.” He adopted the word because three artificial “selfs,” like a corporation, could own or possess the same substance or property. This fit in well with the Biblical truth that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all possessed the same divine substance without division or diminution. He never meant the term to mean three distinct persons or human beings.

Francis Hall continues,

“...The Greek theologians, [however] were unable to fix Trinitarian terms so quickly and summarily. Their speculations were more elaborate, and the terms, which were in use, were more subtle and more open to diverse interpretations. Ultimately, however, the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* became technical equivalents in Greek theology of *substantial* and *persona*....”

“But the new term [for *persona*, i.e. *hypostasis*,] was also liable to misconstruction. It was translated into Latin by *substantia*, and the assertion that there are three divine *hypostasis* seemed equivalent to dividing the substance of God, that is, to tritheism...” [However,] “...at the Synod of Alexandria, in 362 A.D., the two uses of the term *hypostasis* were formally distinguished and mutual misapprehensions were removed. The Cappadocian theologians did much to crystallize the term in the sense of Person, and the other use disappeared from orthodox terminology. Henceforth *mia ousia kai treis hypostaseis* became the recognized phrase; [one substance and three Persons], and was equivalent [in Latin] to one

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pg.176-77

substantia and three *personae*.”

“...Hypostasis, by reason of its etymology, served to emphasize the substantial and eternal reality of personal distinctions in the Godhead; while persona, for the same reason, bore witness to the truth ... that the divine Persons are not separate beings but modes of subsistence of one indivisible Being. As separately employed in theology, however, the two terms are practically equivalent; and both symbolize the three co-eternal “somewhats” or egos who subsist in, and possess, the divine ousia or *substantia*.”¹⁹²

And so we see the history of the term Person. It was never meant to convey the idea of three individual beings, but was meant to convey the idea of three distinct “self-consciousnesses” within one Divine Being who all possessed the one and the same substance with division or diminution.

However, with the rise of new philosophies and modern scientific thinking, confusion was, once more, introduced into the meaning of person which has continued even to this day.

The term “Person” came to be known as an individual being and Christians have been unable to divorce this modern definition of person from the theological definition of Person.

Modern psychological thinking defines “person” as a “rational being,” whereas theological thinking sees “Person” as a distinct “self-consciousness.” However, it is the former definition that has been picked up in modern times by many Christians and has become the basis for much of the confusion regarding Trinitarian truth and the almost heretical understanding of “Person” within the Godhead.

Francis J. Hall addresses this phenomenon as he concludes:

“...Descartes initiated the modern emphasis upon ego as the fundamental reality in personality. Such a development of thought ought to have facilitated a general understanding and acceptance of the...doctrine concerning the Trinity...” “It would have done so if modern philosophy had...confined the positive meaning of the term person to its

¹⁹² Ibid., pg. 65-70

patristic limits. But various causes led them to employ that term in a more comprehensive sense, as signifying all that goes to constitute and individual, self-conscious, and rational being.”¹⁹³

“Many Protestant theologians have adopted this terminology...and the result has been very confusing. It has become unnecessarily difficult for moderns to understand and accept Trinitarian doctrine. If person means all that the phrase “a rational being” signifies, to assert the existence of Three Persons in the Godhead can only be taken to imply that there are three divine beings. This reduces the doctrine of the Trinity to an appearance of hopeless self-contradiction and absurdity, for it seems to mean that three divine beings are one divine being.”¹⁹⁴

But Francis Hall reminds the reader that the term “Person” never carried this modern psychological meaning, but was a term adopted by the patristics to sanction neither “...the Sabellian definition of divine Persons as mere, aspects, *dramatis personae*, or the opposite and tritheistic definition of Persons as separate beings or individuals...” [He states], “The divine Persons...are real, eternal, and distinct Selves, but do not constitute separate Divine Beings.”¹⁹⁵

This brief discussion of the term “Person,” reminds us that, with regard to the Trinity, the term never carried the connotation, as it does today, of a separate and individual being. And it is this ultimate interpretation of the term “Person” that has caused some Christians to adopt an almost tritheistic view of the Godhead in consisting of Three Persons, or individual beings, who are somehow mystically one.

This misunderstanding of Person is one of the reasons the term “mystery” has been introduced into the Trinity, and rightly so, for if you view Persons as individual beings, it is indeed mysterious. *For logic tells you three beings cannot be one, for each being has a separate substance.* However, with the proper understanding of

¹⁹³ Ibid., pg. 187-8

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pg. 187-8

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., pg. 184

“Person,” the mystery disappears and the Godhead can be understood in their relational modes of existence.

And so with this brief history and proper understanding of the term “Person” in our mind, let’s continue with our study.

It seems one of the problems in viewing the term 'Person' has always been how we view God. As we saw in the first chapter, the word “God” (Elohim) was primarily used of the Father, although in a few instances it was used of all Three Persons together, perhaps what we would call the “Godhead” or simply “Trinity.”

In the East, the former concept of God has traditionally been emphasized, whereas in the West the later concept has been maintained. To say “God” in the East means to say the “Father.” To say “God” in the West means to say the “Trinity.”

This difference is a problem when we come to define the word “Person.” What do we mean when we say that there are Three Persons and one God? Do we mean that there are Three Persons and One God (with the word “God” meaning Father – like the East)? Or do we mean Three Persons and One God (with the word “God” meaning Trinity – like the West)?

Now obviously, you would answer, the word “God,” meaning Trinity, for if it meant Father it would be redundant, and rightly so. Yet, as we saw in chapter one, the word God, in almost all instances, is used of the Father, not the Trinity. Why then do we turn the minor usage (God – meaning Trinity) into a major usage when we attempt to define the Godhead? This, I think, has led to some of the misunderstanding between the East and West in defining the term “Person.”

Men of God have always attempted to give a generic definition of the term “Person” so that it may be interchangeably used of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and there is the problem,

for it must be remembered that all Trinitarian terminologies must begin with the Father.

There is not one definition of “Person” that can be used of all Three Persons. Person must first be defined in describing the Father. It is only with the Father that you can gain the basic understanding of Personhood, and only in relation to Him can the Personhood of the Son and Holy Spirit be understood. And this is not because of any inequality between the Three Persons. They are all co-equal and co-eternal. It is simply because of processional relationships. The only subordination within the Trinity is a subordination of order, not of substance or existence; but still, order cannot be ignored when defining “Person” So with that in mind let's proceed.

We saw that Essence, Nature, and Being were defined by nine qualities, and that those nine qualities must be seen in relation to the Father. These same nine qualities will give us a definition of Person, Activity, and Unity, (See Fig. 2) and this must first of all be seen as bespeaking the Person, Activity, and Unity of the Father.

Consequently, we see that “Person” is defined as “substantial, subsistential, and attributal” (See Fig. 2). What this is telling us, is that the essence of the Godhead must first be seen as the substance of the Father, and that the nature of the Godhead must first be seen as the subsistentiality of the Father, and that the being of the Godhead must be first seen as the attributes of the Father. The Father is substantial, subsistential, and attributal. This defines His Personhood and His alone, for the Son and Holy Spirit while being subsistential and attributal are not “substantial” but “consubstantial.” *This is a very important point. This is why one cannot have a generic definition of “Person,” without having some problems.*

If substantial, subsistential, and attributal were used to define all Three Persons, one would tend to give credence to a tritheistic view, even though, obviously, one would not mean to.

This is the problem some have had with Boethius definition.¹⁹⁶ If all Three Persons are substantial then it is logical to assume you have three substances, which obviously is not correct.

However, if you reserve the term *substantial* for the Father you demonstrate that there is only one substance in the Godhead. This maintains the balance between threeness and oneness for what you are doing is showing forth the *sameness*, *difference* and *distinguishing* qualities within the Godhead.

If the Person of the Father is defined as substantial and the Son and Holy Spirit as consubstantial, (in the very foundational basis of their Personhood), then you are showing the *sameness* or oneness of the Trinity, for they all possess the one and same substance together, not separately. Therefore, the substance of the Father is eternally communicated through generation and spiration and is the same substance that the Son and Holy Spirit possess. This is activity from the Father. And this is defined first by communication.

Therefore, we see that the first quality of the Personhood of the Father is that He is substantial and that this substance is eternally communicated through generation and spiration and thus, the first quality of the Personhood of the Son and the Holy Spirit is consubstantiality, which of course is the foundational basis of their unity.

The second quality of the Personhood of the Father is subsistentality, and this must be seen by two aspects. First of all, subsistentality bespeaks a subsistent. The first aspect of subsistentality is the localization or eternal actualization of the substance of God – and that is what a subsistent bespeaks.

A subsistent is the eternal actualization of the divine substance. It is the self-consciousness of a Person. However, the self-consciousness of the Three Persons exist in different manners and this shows us the second aspect of subsistentality –

¹⁹⁶ Boethius, (480 – 525AD), defined person as, ‘the indivisible substance of a rational nature.’

subsistence.

Subsistence means a mode of existence. And in the Godhead, there are three modes of existence: unbegottenness, begottenness, and spiration. The Father's mode of existence is unbegotten. He is the invisible source of the Godhead, and this is what makes His subsistent different. He exists in an unbegotten mode. Therefore, subsistentiaity shows us *difference* within the Godhead.

The modes of all three subsistents are different. The mode of the Father is unbegotten. However, as we saw in our chart, the second activity of the Father is to be giving, which, as the necessary act of His nature, eternally begets the Son and spirates the Holy Spirit. This gives us the subsistents of the other two Persons. The subsistent of the Son is eternally generated by the Father in the mode of begottenness, and the subsistent of the Holy Spirit is eternally spirated in mode of spiration. Since they proceed in two different modes, they exist in different modes. The mode of the Son is begottenness, and the mode of the Holy Spirit is spiration. This is the subsistence of the Three Persons.

It is very important to understand that the second qualities of the Three Persons show *difference* within the Godhead as the first qualities show *sameness*, because it is the balance by which one is protected from the ancient heresies of Sabellius and Arius, which are manifested today in Unitarianism and in the heretical sects of Mormonism and Jehovah Witnesses.

The Three Persons are consubstantial, since they possess the *same substance*, and thus, by definition, must be co-equal, and co-eternal. Yet the Three Persons are also distinct since they exist in *different modes of existence* and thus cannot be the same Persons. There is not one Person in the Godhead, but three, and this results in the unity of coinherence. All Three Persons coinhere in each other because all Three Persons have a different subsistent, and those different subsistents possess the same substance, which is infinite, and thus results in coinherence. Coinherence is the evidential basis of the Unity of the Godhead. And this brings us to the last quality

of Personhood – attributal.

The attributal quality of the Father is simply the characterization of His substance. He has an attributal substance. The Attributes of God are not separate things, but are all the same thing – the characterization of His own substance. Love is not something different from holiness, but love is holiness, or justice is not something different from mercy, but justice is mercy. Attributes are simply characteristic of the same substance. The substance of God is holy. The substance of God is love. The substance of God is just and merciful. They are all the same. However, the attributes of the Father are unimpacted as He did not derive them from any other since He is unbegotten. And since the Father's nature is to be giving, His attributal quality is distinguished from the other two Persons in that He is Paternal.

In other words, the Father's love is a paternal love, and in the eternal act of begetting and spiration, the Father imparts His attributes to the Son and the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the Son's attributes, (while being the same attributes as the Father's since attributes are simply characterization of substance and He possess the same substance), are not paternal but filial since He is not unbegotten, but begotten. And the Holy Spirit's attributal quality is spirital since they were imparted in spiration.

Therefore, the Father loves with a paternal love, the Son reciprocates with a filial love, and the Holy Spirit reciprocates with a spirital love. All the same love, but distinguishable since it is exercised by different subsistents. This results in the discernible basis of the unity of God – communionality.

Therefore, what we see through the definition of Personhood within the Godhead is, that the qualities of the Three Persons are the same, different, and distinguished, and this is what shows us distinction within the Godhead. The Three Persons are all distinct because the underlying qualities of their Personhood are the same, different, and distinguishable.

Thus, distinction is defined by same, different, and distinguishability. And this all defines Personhood. Not a

generic Personhood, but a Personhood rooted in the very Person of the Father.

So, in recapping, what we have learned is that one must first understand the Essence, Nature, and Being of the Godhead as first seen in the Father, and then, with such an understanding, one can understand Person, Activity, and Unity, again, as first seen in the Father. All understanding must begin with the Father and His activities, for it is only through that comprehension that one can fully understand the Trinity in unity.

Before finishing this section, however, perhaps it would be better to take a closer look at the activities of the Three Persons since this seems to be the weakest link in the theological understanding of many Christians today, at least in the Evangelical camp.

The activities of all Three Persons are the glue which hold the Trinity together. If you destroy the activities, you destroy the Trinity. If you have no procession, you can have no Trinity. A proper understanding of such activities is essential, if one desires to fully understand the Trinity.

ACTIVITY OF GOD

PERICHORESIS

“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void....” Isa. 55:11

When talking about the activity of the Godhead the first thing to remember is that God does not exist in time, but apart from time, since time is a created property of this universe. There is no eternity past, in the sense of time going on forever backwards. Time had a beginning in Gen. 1:1, and, before then, there was no time. With that being the case, there could not be succession, since succession is a quality of time.

Therefore, when we view the activity of God we must be sure to realize that there is no succession. All of the activities of the ontological Trinity are eternal. One act does not occur before another act. In fact, if God does not exist in time, then there can only be one eternal act within the Godhead, for to have more than one act would presuppose succession, and that would presuppose time, and as we have stated time did not exist before Gen. 1:1.

Therefore, when we talk about divine activity we must remember that we are talking about one eternal and necessary movement within the Godhead. The term we have assigned to this movement is the Greek word “*perichoresis*.”

The word “*perichoresis*” originally meant to “dance around” or “revolution.” The word was extremely rare until the time of John of Damascus. Leonard Prestige tells us that *perichoresis* meant –

“[to be]...of extremes (on opposites sides of a rotating mechanism) ..., [to] come round to, reciprocate or interchange with, pass or resolve themselves

into, one another, Gr. Naz. Or. 18.42. ...John of Damascus in...turn found the terms...indicated a sort of penetration or permeation....”¹⁹⁷

Although Prestige relates that this caused a problem in properly understanding an accurate Christology, he goes on and states:

“But John compensated...by an advance of real theological value. From the time of Saint John the Evangelist there had not been found any convenient general term to describe the mutual relations of the Three Persons of the Godhead to each other. Origen had safeguarded the timelessness of their active relations by his phrase 'eternal generation,' and Gregory of Nyssa had done more perhaps than any other to illustrate their mutual involution, but no one phrase existed which was capable of finally disposing both of Sabellianism and of Tritheism by casting a ray of explanatory definition over their simultaneity of mere being, and shewing in a single illuminating term how they were really three, eternally and not just successively, without being three of a species and consequently three Gods... What John of Damascus did was to remedy the defect by extending to 'theology' the term he had derived from the Christology of Maximus. He extended it not in the semi-technical sense of 'interchange' or 'reciprocity' which was its proper meaning, but in the new and fully technical sense of 'interpenetration in which he himself understood it, a sense really unsuited to Christology but admirably expressive of Trinitarian unity.”¹⁹⁸

In other words, John combined the idea of revolution with interpenetration. This showed that any activity of the Godhead must be, by definition, within itself. It disallowed any idea of separation or division in the Godhead, because, if each Person mutually coinheres in each other, how could there be division or separation of substance? This is important because what it showed us is that any activity of God must result in perfect unity.

¹⁹⁷ Prestige, Leonard, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. XXIX, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1928

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Perichoresis then means, the one eternal movement of the Godhead out from the Father and back towards the Father by which all Three Persons exist in perfect consubstantiality, coinherence, and communionality.

In other words, “*perichoresis*” defines the Trinitarian Persons activity in unity. This is the one eternal movement of the Godhead. This is very important to understand because it speaks of the simplicity not only of God's being, but also the simplicity of God's activity.

If the activity of God did not result in perfect unity, then one could not have equality amongst the Persons, for one Person's activity could be greater or more important than the other Person's activity.

What this means is that we cannot assign a greater importance to the Father's generation and spiration of the Son and the Holy Spirit, than the Son and Holy Spirit's reciprocal activity back to the Father. All activity is equal and harmonious. It would be wrong to say that the Son and Holy Spirit are dependent upon the Father's activity, but the Father is not dependent upon the Son and Holy Spirit's reciprocal activity. They all need each other's activity to truly be the one Divine Being.

This shows why some Christian's objection to generation is nonsensical when they say it shows subordination of the Son to the Father. What they don't realize is not only is the Son's existence dependent upon the Father through generation, but so too, the Father's existence is dependent upon the Son's own reciprocal activity. The Son gives back everything He receives.

This is the great circle of life within the ontological Trinity that is dramatically portrayed in the Economic Trinity. In the Economic Trinity, the Father gives life in the incarnation of His Son by the Holy Spirit and the Son in turn gives back that life to the Father through His sacrifice on the cross by the Holy Spirit. This is divine *perichoresis*.

This now leads us then to explain what this harmonious activity of the Trinity is. If we accept that *perichoresis* defines the

one eternal movement of the Godhead, then *perichoresis* must be seen from two different facets: Procession and Reciprocation (See fig. 3).

Fig. 3

DIVINE ACTIVITY WITHIN THE GODHEAD

1. One Eternal Movement:

PERICHORESIS

2. Two Facets of Perichoresis

**PROCESSION
RECIPROCATATION**

The first facet of the one eternal movement in the Godhead is procession. Procession is defined as the movement out from the Father and is understood by two modes and three aspects. Begetting and Spiration are the two modes of procession, and communication, production, and impartation are the three aspects (See fig. 4). It must be understood that these are not separate acts within the Godhead, as if succession was a part of His Being, but one eternal movement. The begetting of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit do not occur at a separate time. It must not be thought that the Son is first generated and the Holy Spirit is then spirated. No, it is simply two modes of the same act. This is not to confuse the two modes. Begetting is distinct from spiration. The Holy Spirit is not begotten, but is spirated. And if we remember our theological definition of “distinction,” we should then see sameness, difference, and distinguishability in these modes.

The sameness is that it is one act; the difference is that the Son is begotten from the Father, and the Holy Spirit is spirated from the Father through the Son; the distinguishability is that the Son is filial and the Holy Spirit is spirital.

In addition, procession is defined by three aspects – communication, production, and impartation (Jn. 5:26). This too must not be thought as three separate acts, but are simply three aspects of the same movement. Communication is production seen from a different angle, and production and communication are impartation seen from yet another angle. They are all the same in that they are one act, yet they are all different in that *communication refers to substance, production refers to subsistence, and impartation refers to attributes*, and because of these three different reference points, they can be distinguished and thus be distinct.

Fig. 4

DIVINE ACTIVITY OF THE FATHER

1. First Facet of Perichoresis

PROCESSION

2. Two Modes of Procession

**BEGETTING
SPIRATION**

3. Three Aspects of Procession

**COMMUNICATION
PRODUCTION
IMPARTATION**

The second facet of perichoresis is reciprocation. Reciprocation is defined by activity back toward the Father by the Son and the Holy Spirit and is also defined by two modes and three aspects. Imaging and Affirmation are the two modes of reciprocation, and reception, relation, and response are the three aspects (See fig. 5). All these, also, are the same act, yet seen from different angles.

Imaging and affirmation are the same in that they are one act. Yet it is the Son, not the Holy Spirit, that images, and the Holy Spirit, not the Son, that affirms – this is difference. The

distinguishability is that imaging gives forth manifestation, and affirming gives forth understanding. The three aspects are the same in that they are all one act. They are all different in that reception, like communication, refers to substance, relation refers to subsistence and response refers to attributes. And they are all distinguished in that each has its own reference point.

And so we see the great eternal circle of life within the Godhead. All activity begins from the Father and returns back to Him in the activity of the Son and the Holy Spirit: all distinct activities, yet the same one eternal movement. With this understanding laid down let's now look at each facet a little closer.

Fig. 5

DIVINE ACTIVITY OF THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. Second Facet of Perichoresis

RECIPROCATION

2. Two Modes of Reciprocation

**IMAGING
AFFIRMATION**

3. Three Aspects of Reciprocation

**RECEPTION
RELATION
RESPONSE**

PROCESSION

As we saw, procession is the first facet of perichoresis. It defines all activity from the Father. While it is the Son and the Holy Spirit who proceed, it is the paternity of the Father that is the cause of their procession. Procession, in an active sense, speaks of the giving activity of the Father as the cause, while procession, in a passive sense, speaks of begetting and spiration as the effect.

As we saw, the giving activity of the Father is not some separate act, but part of the one eternal movement within the Godhead. It is in the nature of the Father to give, thus causing the procession of the Son and the Holy Spirit. As a result this giving should be seen, not as a voluntary act, but as a necessary act. The Father would not exist if He was not causing the procession of His Son and the Holy Spirit. His whole existence is to beget a Son and spirate the Holy Spirit. It is no more a voluntary act than say breathing is a voluntary act in humans. We breathe not because we will to breathe, we breathe because it is a necessary act of our humanity. It is part of our nature to breathe, and if we did not physically breathe on this earth, we would not physically exist on this earth. So it is with the Father. If the Father would not cause the procession of the other two Persons, He would not exist. This is what makes procession eternal. If there was a time that the Father was not begetting a Son or spirating the Holy Spirit, He would not even exist, for they are all co-equal and co-dependent on each other. This timeless or eternal activity is understood as begetting and spiration.

Begetting, by definition, must be eternal because it is a necessary act of the Father. If one believes that there was a time when the Son was not, then one also must believe there was a time when the Father was not, for as we said before, if the Father was not causing the procession of His Son, He would not exist.

Spiration, of course, must be seen in the same way. The spiration of the Holy Spirit is eternal because it is part of the Father's eternal activity. Even the word "Spirit" implies this since

“*ruach*” can be understood as “breath,” and as we stated before, according to the revelatory example of mankind, if a human cannot exist on this planet apart from the procession of breath, so too the Father could not exist apart from His procession of the Holy Spirit. It is all part of His necessary activity.

Both of these modes are understood through the aspects of communication, production, and impartation (Jn 5:26). The Son's substance is communicated from the Father *by* generation. The Son's subsistentiality is produced by the Father *in* generation, and the Son's attributes are imparted from the Father *with* generation.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit's substance is communicated from the Father through the Son *by* spiration. The Holy Spirit's subsistentiality is produced by the Father through the Son *in* spiration, and the Holy Spirit's attributes are imparted from the Father through the Son *with* spiration.

This all defines the Father's activity within the Godhead. Let's now look at the activity of the Godhead from the perspective of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

RECIPROCATATION

As procession is activity from the Father, reciprocation is activity towards the Father. As procession is the result of the activity of the Father, so reciprocation is the result of the imaging and affirming activity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Both of these activities must also be understood as a necessary act.

The Son eternally has been and always will be in harmony with the Father's will, obeying or imaging the Father in perfect communion (Col. 1:15). His imaging of the Father is just as much a necessary act as the Father's causal activity in procession is necessary.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit has ever been affirming the Father's will, as it is manifested in the Son, in perfect harmony (Jn. 16:13-15). He is the Spirit of Truth; it is a part of His nature to

affirm what He knows of the Father's will (I Cor. 3:10-12). So, it too is a necessary act. It is in the Holy Spirit's nature to affirm, as it is in the Son's nature to image, and the Father's nature to cause procession.

This is the eternal perichoresis of the Godhead – the perfect circle of life – the procession of life from the Father and the reciprocation of life back toward the Father – all Three Persons working in perfect communion – in perfect unity.

Lastly, as the two modes of begetting and spiration were defined by three aspects, so the two modes of imaging and affirmation are defined by the three aspects of reception, relation, and response. The Father's substance is imaged by the Son's reception. The Father's subsistent is imaged by the Son's relationality, and the Father's attributes are imaged by the Son's response. In the same way, the Father's substance, through the Son, is affirmed by the Holy Spirit's reception, and the Father's subsistent, through the Son, is affirmed by the Holy Spirit's relationality and, lastly, the Father's attributes, through the Son, are affirmed by the Holy Spirit's response.

The significance of this is that it tells us that communication and reception speak to us *of giving and receiving within the Godhead*. The Father is ever giving and is thus selfless, and the Son and Holy Spirit are ever humbly receiving and so too are selfless. *Self-love or selfishness is not a part of the Godhead.*

Production and relation speak to us of relating within the Godhead. The Father eternally produces in a paternal way, and the Son eternally relates in a filial way and the Holy Spirit in a spirital way.

And, finally, impartation and response speak to us of perfect love within the Godhead. God is love, and the Father is ever imparting that love to the Son and Holy Spirit, with the Son and Holy Spirit ever responding to that love in perfect communion.

Therefore, we conclude our section on defining the doctrine of the Trinity in its many facets, qualities, and aspects. Perhaps it might be good if we would remind ourselves of what we stated earlier. Our God is so great and transcendent. We would never be able to know Him or understand Him if He had not revealed Himself to us.

However, defining all these facets, qualities and aspects of Triune existence should humble us and make us pause, for God is not someone that can be analyzed and dissected and put into neat little boxes. And so it should give us angst to speak so assuredly, and define so succinctly these facets, qualities, and aspects of God's Triune existence. God cannot be defined by us, but only by Himself.

Yet if God has so revealed Himself to us as one who *communicates*, eternally *gives* and is ever *imparting* to His Son and the Holy Spirit; and the Son and the Holy Spirit are ever *reciprocating* back to the Father in perfect *imaging* and *affirming* respectively. And if all Three Persons *receive*, *relate* and *respond* in perfect harmony – we should humbly accept His revelation and seek to conform *our being* to *His Being*.

We should realize that what is true of Him eternally is true of us in a limited, temporal way. We should realize that as His children we have had a new life communicated to us. We should realize He has given in us a new heart, and has imparted to us His love with infinite mercy and grace.

As such, we should reciprocate back to our Master and not hide our light under a bushel, but image to a dying world the glory and beauty of Christ Jesus our Saviour (II Cor. 3:18 - 4:7). We should also affirm, to all who will hear, the truth of the blessed gospel.

We should learn, not to think more highly of ourselves, than we ought, but realize that we have received all things from Him. (Rom. 12:3; I Cor. 4:7). We should learn to relate to all of God's children as brethren, realizing that we all possess the same life from God and therefore we should receive all whom Christ has

received (Rom. 15:7).

And lastly, we should respond to one another with lowliness of heart, esteeming others as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:3).

And so we see that, although, by defining God by these facets, qualities, and aspects might seem too artificial or presumptuous, when we realize that it was God, Himself, who gave them to us – to help us understand who He is – we can humbly realize that by understanding Him, we are able to understand ourselves and thus, live accordingly.

Yet this should be only the starting point in our study of the Trinity. God has given to us three great revelatory objects created to correspond to His own Triune nature – Universe, Man, and Scripture. By observing these created models, within the parameters of the Blessed Word of God, we can all grow in our knowledge of the Blessed Trinity.

“Great are the works of the Lord; *They are* studied by all who delight in them.” Ps. 111:2

May we all continue to study and learn of the God who is our Creator, Redeemer, Saviour, and Helper. God blessed forever. Amen

BOOK THREE

THE DOCTRINE PRACTICED

THE TRINITY AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

How then should we live? If the Trinity is now seen as the very basis of all existence, the basis of Creation, Man, and Scripture, does the doctrine teach us how we should live? Most assuredly so! The Trinity is the grand archetype of all existence. Everything corresponds perfectly to it, and, if this is so, how much more should we look to the intra-Trinitarian relationships to understand how we should live? If we consider God as perfect, then, most assuredly, the way the Three Persons relate to one another is perfect and should be the pattern for all relationships within finite existence. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many instances in today's Christianity.

If our God is a processional God, then Christianity should be a processional religion, but unfortunately, Christianity is becoming more and more non-processional in its living. If procession brings equality within the Godhead, then procession will bring equality among human relationships. The opposite, however, is practiced among current Christianity.

Equality is sought, not by understanding processional order, but by asserting one's rights. Rights are asserted rather than being laid aside, thinking that such assertion will guarantee equality, but if the Trinity should teach us anything else it should teach us that equality is gained from giving and receiving; from understanding source and order; from understanding love and obedience and from understanding that true unity and harmony can only be attained by true humility and selflessness.

What we see occurring today should not necessarily surprise us, however, for the Holy Spirit tells us this will be the case. In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, we are told

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despises of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”

The two key phrases in these verses are “lovers of self” and “having a form of godliness but denying its power” and it is to these two phrases we would like to now turn our attention so that we can understand how we should walk.

In the last days, men will be lovers of self. This, we are told, will be the condition of society in the last days, and as the Church is ever told to be vigilant against conforming to the current age within which she lives, such should be her vigilance today. The sad fact, however, is that this has not happened.

Over and over, from Christian radio, television, and books – self-love is taught. The modern psychological methods of society have been adopted by the modern Christian and what was once considered to be “secular humanism” has been gift wrapped in Christian theology and transformed into “Christian humanism.” Humanism, however, whether secular or Christian is still anti-Trinitarian for it rejects processional order.

In secular humanism, man becomes the standard, rather than God; and the same is the case in Christian Humanism, although “man” now becomes the “new man,” or “regenerated man.” In secular humanism, man looks to himself and his accomplishments. In Christian humanism, the regenerated man also looks to himself and his own strengths. However, the Trinity teaches us to look outside of ourselves.

Christian humanism teaches self-esteem. The Trinity

teaches us to esteem others. Christian humanism teaches one to believe in oneself (albeit regenerated self). The Trinity teaches one to believe and trust in one other than oneself. Christian Humanism teaches self-confidence. The Trinity teaches confidence must be found in one other than oneself. Christian Humanism looks inward. The Trinity looks outward. This is not mere semantics but a real problem in modern Evangelical Christianity. We have become non-processional in our living and instead are being taught to look within ourselves to find our strengths.

Where does this thinking come from? Ultimately, it comes from our Theology. Our perception of God becomes our perception of ourselves. The doctrine of the eternal begottenness of the Son of God has become all but forgotten in many Evangelical circles and even denied in others, yet the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God, or procession in its general sense, is the very basis of all Trinitarian life and existence. The Son could do nothing of His own self (Jn 5:30), but ever looked outside of Himself to the Father. He received everything from the hand of the Father. He was the eternal Son of God. He was completely equal with God the Father. He possessed all the same power as the Father, yet He did not live by that power within Himself, but humbly lived by the power of the Father through the filling of the Holy Spirit. (Lu. 4:1,14; Jn. 3:34). If the eternal Son of God, who became the Son of Man so lived, should we not live the same? The Son never loved Himself, why then do Christian leaders today teach us to love ourselves? The Son never esteemed Himself or tried to build up his own self-esteem. Why then do Christian leaders teach us today that our problem is that we have a low self-esteem? The Son's confidence was not in Himself (although if ever one was to do so, He would have been the one), but His confidence was in the Father (Jn. 5:30-32), why then do Christian leaders teach us what we need is self-confidence?

This turning inward to self does not come from Him who is above. We need to turn to God and daily seek the constant filling

of His Holy Spirit to live our Christian lives. We need the manifestation of His spiritual gifts and not seek the manifestation of our natural talents. We need to love others and not ourselves. Indeed, we need to love others as ourselves, meaning not to love them with the same proportion that we would love our self, but meaning we need to love them as if they were ourselves.

Love never turns inward on itself. Even the verse where the Apostle Paul tells us that no one ever hated his own flesh but loves it and cherishes it, is not inward, but outward, for that verse is fulfilled by the inner man loving the outward man – the human body. All love is ever outward. Yet today, Christians are taught to love self. The inward man is taught to love the inward man, or self. This is causing irreparable harm to our living, and is causing the decline we see in attitudes, marriages, and families. We need to get back to true Trinitarian living.

The second phrase was “having a form of godliness but denying the power.” What this is telling us is that in the last days Christians will have all the right forms of godliness, but will deny the real power of godliness or holiness – that being, of course, the Holy Spirit.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...”
Acts 1:8

The Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father through the Son is the Divine Person who empowers us unto all godliness, holiness, and activity. There are two powers by which a Christian can operate; his own power or by God's power. God's way is “...not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of host.” Man's non-processional way is to look within oneself and find the power.

The problem is that this is natural power, and not spiritual power. Much of Christian activity, today, is done in the strength of natural power, and when that is done, one exists with a form of godliness, but denies the power.

Peter states in Acts 3:12,

“Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk.”

And Paul states:

“And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that you faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” I Cor. 2: 4-5

Our natural power must be denied in the work of God that we might trust in the power of the Spirit. Our natural strength must be delivered to death. Paul says,

“For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (I Cor. 4:11)

and

“...we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not us.” (I Cor. 4:7).

To operate by our own power causes men to trust in human wisdom. All the modern psychological methods that have infiltrated the Church are nothing but human wisdom, nothing but human strength and power. No doubt there may be some truth in those methods as one may find, let's say, in the medical world, but the application of those truths to the work of God magnifies man and not God and may bring a “natural maturity,” but never a “spiritual maturity.”

Only spiritual truth will bring spiritual maturity. Natural or soulical truth will only bring soulishness. And soulishness denies the power of God. Now some today object and say that what God creates is good and that when we are regenerated we are

constituted a new man; and to use our own natural talents in the work of God is not only right and good, but also necessary. However, this thinking is not only non-scriptural but also non-Trinitarian. Our pattern is the Lord Himself.

Jesus was very God of very God. Yet He confessed, “I can of Myself do nothing.” (Jn. 5:30). He had all the power within Himself, yet He did not use that power but trusted in the power of God received in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. How much more should we look outside of ourselves and our own natural talents and strengths and look to the true power of God?

Now, obviously, God may manifest His power through the natural talents that He gave us, but the important point to remember is, that it is then His power being manifested, and not our own natural power. As the Trinity should teach us, source is important, and so, the source of our power is important!

A comparable example would be when the Lord inspired men to write the Holy Scriptures. The Lord used the natural styles and talents of the authors of Scripture, yet they did not use their own natural talents and rational to create the Scripture, but wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

We must look outside of ourselves and trust in the filling and power of the Holy Spirit to do any work of God. He must not only be involved in the birth of a vision, but must also be involved in the carrying out of that vision in whatever work or ministry He may give to us. We must not trust in our own organizational skills, charismatic personality, or creativity (indeed, they must be denied), but we must trust in the eternal power of God.

When we understand Trinitarian procession, we understand that we must ever look outside of ourselves for our strength and living. Perhaps we forget that God is not static but ever moving, and that what He gives is ever being given without fail. We do not receive the Holy Spirit in one static moment never to be repeated, but must ever be opening our hearts and minds to His daily filling.

Paul tells us in Gal. 3:5 that the Father ever supplies His Spirit to us, (the word for “supplies” being in the present tense). It

is an ever-continuing movement that is necessary for all eternity. If we will ever need the supply of the Spirit in eternity, why do we think we only need it once in this life?

True Trinitarian procession is ever moving and never static. So too, our dependence upon God and His power in the Holy Spirit should be ever renewed and daily desired. We must daily take up our cross, denying ourselves with all its own strengths, creativity and power, and ever look to the One who ever supplies us with His Spirit and, like our Lord before us, do nothing of ourselves, but everything from the eternal Father and God of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is true Trinitarian living. May it be so in our own lives.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ For further study on how we then should live see, *Press on to Spirituality*, available from Assembly Bookshelf.

THE TRINITY AND THE ASSEMBLY

As with our Christian walk, the Trinity has a practical effect on the Church. The Church should show forth the glories of God. Everything begins with God. The Church should meet the way it does not because she likes to meet in a particular way, nor just because she thinks this way is convenient. In fact, there may be more convenient ways to meet. But she should meet the way she meets because she tries to follow the pattern given to her in God's Word.

If we will not follow the Word, then why even follow the Lord? God wants us to worship Him, to obey Him, and to meet with Him according to the principles of His Word. So, in understanding the nature of the church, we have to understand that it begins with God and His will – His sovereign will – and the purpose He has had ever since the beginning.

So let's start from the beginning. As we stated before, God has created three great revelatory objects in this finite reality. He has created the universe, and in Romans 1:20 it says that the universe is a revelation of His divine nature, His eternal power, and His invisible attributes. *In other words, in the universe we can primarily see the nature of God – His Triune nature.* He has revealed Himself in Creation and He has revealed His Triune nature through Creation.

But God also created man. Gen 1:26 says, "Let us make man in our image and according to our likeness." Now, how is the revelation of God in man different from the revelation of God in creation? It is different, because, in Man, one can not only see the nature of God, one can also see the character of God.

Man is made in the image of God. (And, of course, we're speaking of Man as he was made before the fall, which pointed to the one Man, Christ Jesus, who was the God-Man). In Him, as the one perfect Man who redeemed humanity, one can see the

character of God. *Man shows forth, primarily, the character of God.* What did Jesus say to Phillip, when Phillip said “show us the Father?” He said, “Phillip have I been so long with you. He who has seen me has seen the Father.”

If you want to know who God is, and the character of God, you look to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want to see perfect love, you look at the Lord Jesus. If you want to look at perfect obedience, you look at Jesus, because everything that Jesus was – was an expression of who God the Father was. And so we see God has created two objects now, the Universe and Man, to show forth *His nature* and *His character*.

But there is one other great object that God created, and it is none other what we can hold in our hands, the Word of God. In God's Word, we understand the purpose of God. Within its pages, we can understand His purposes. *The Word of God primarily shows forth the purpose of God.*

Therefore, God desires to reveal to us, *His nature*, *His character*, and *His purpose*. And simply put, what is the purpose of God? *The purpose of God is to express His nature and His character.* That is why it so important to understand the way that we should meet. If we gather in someone else's name, we do not show forth the nature and character of God. We show forth the nature and character of someone else.

God is a jealous God. He wants to reveal Himself. In the Word, He has told us about Himself. He has told us that He is One, and that He is Triune. He is a perfect Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And within that perfect Trinity, there's a perfect relationship between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. There is no sin; there is no disharmony among the Three Persons. If we want to see a perfect relationship, we go no further than to look at the Eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And when you look at that perfect relationship, what else do you see? You see a perfect oneness, and a perfect love. He is the grand picture, or expression, of what a relationship should be – a pure love, a pure harmony, and a pure obedience between the Three Persons.

In addition, we see that all Three Persons are equal. Yet that equality does not mean that the Son acts by Himself. He does everything in obedience and harmony with the Father. There's a perfect order, harmony, and submission within the Three Persons. Everything proceeds from the Father, is manifested in the Son, and is given experience or reality by the Holy Spirit. That is the God whom we worship. Once one understands that, one understands that the purpose of God is to express His nature and character in the world. And when one understands that, one can see the importance of the Church being constituted in such a way that it reflects that same nature and character. God wants to express His perfect love through the Church.

When people come in off the street and they come into an assembly, they should be able to experience a perfect love that they cannot find in the world. They should be able to come into the midst and feel loved. Scripture says, "For God so loved the world," and that love is within us. He wants us to express it through the Church.

If the Church is to be an expression of the Trinity, then when someone comes into the Church, one should find perfect harmony, not disharmony. This too is a characteristic of God. The harmony of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit should be manifested in the Church. If this is so, we must understand how such harmony is produced.

Harmony is produced, first, by equality. We are all equal, we are all priests before God; but equality does not mean there is not submission. So we're told to submit to one another in love, and so God has set up an order within His church also. God desires the church to manifest His oneness, because by manifesting the oneness, you manifest the very life of God and who He is. All oneness proceeds from God.

John 17:11 states:

"I am no longer in the world, and yet they themselves are in the world [speaking of the disciples], and I come to you, Holy Father, keep

them in your name, the name which you have given me, that they may be one even as we are one.”

The Lord's Prayer was that His Church should be one. Many sing the stanza, “The Church’s One Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord.” God desires His saints to be one. Why is that? – Because oneness is an expression of the very life of God and who He is. It is an expression of the Triune nature of God. It is an expression of the Trinity. Disharmony and division are an expression of the enemy of God – that roaring lion –Satan.

Just think of it – before creation, there existed the eternal and perfect harmony between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And then when He created angels there continued to be perfect harmony. There was a perfect love, a perfect submission, a perfect obedience, and a perfect harmony. But then one day Satan became proud and rebelled against God. And at that moment, it was infectious. Not only did Satan fall and rebel, but what did he do? He took a third of the angels with him. And so now, all of a sudden, this perfect harmony was disturbed. And there you had the first division ever... in the universe, and Satan has been doing the same thing ever since.

Satan's job is to divide the church. The Holy Spirit's desire is to unify the church, because the unity gives forth the expression of God’s nature and character, *and the purpose of God is to express His nature and character* in this dying world. And He does that through the Church.

And so the Lord prays to the Father that they might be one, and He says, “Father, keep them in your name, the name that you have given Me, that they may be one even as we are.” (Jn. 17:11). Now which name is He referring to? He says, “keep them in your name (the Father),” so it’s referring to God's name. But then the verse says, that it is the name that He's given Him – to the Lord Jesus – so it couldn't be the name Jesus, and it couldn't be the name, or title Christ, because that never belonged to the Father.

Or you could look at it another way. It is referring to a name

given by God to the Son, “to give out to the world,” so that people might know who God really is, and I think that is what is being said here.

You know, some of you have a computer and you have these biblical software programs, so you could probably do this real quick, but I don't, so I had to take a concordance, and I just looked under Father and went down through all the verses the best I could. And this is assuming that whenever Father was referring to God, it was capitalized. So I went down and I looked for all the times in the Old Testament where the name Father was used and I only found it 4 times. It was used twice in Isaiah, it was used once in Psalms, and then it was used in Samuel in the promise to David and to Solomon, that he would be a father to him. Only 4 times was God referred to as Father. In most cases He was referred to as God, Elohim, or He was referred to as Jehovah, and there are many other names like, El Shaddai, Jehovah-jireh, etc. There are a lot of other names, but the name Father was only used 4 times.

Then I looked in the New Testament, and guess how many times the word Father was used in the New Testament. It was used 265 times. So in the Old Testament it was used 4 times to refer to God; in the New Testament, it was used 265 times, and I think that is the nomenclature that is being referred to here. Jesus came, not just to show God as the covenant God Jehovah, just not to show Him as the Creator, the great awe-inspiring God, Elohim, but He came to show people that God is a Father, and that He loves us as His children. And what does that bespeak? It bespeaks relationships – relationships, which are very important to God.

Therefore, when He prays that we may be one, and that we are to be kept in this oneness by that name, what is he telling us? He is telling us that our oneness results from being related to one Father. Our oneness is based on nothing else, except the fact that we have a common life, because we are all sons and daughters of God, the Father. Our God is a Father.

How could we ever be divided from another Christian, when he has the same life of God within him? He is our brother

and our sister. It's awful when there are divisions within physical families, but in most cases, families usually stay together. We all know the common phrase – "Blood is thicker than water." Families tend to stay together. Why? – Because they have a common life, they have a common ancestor. It binds them together, and so they love one another, and they try not to be divided.

Well, how much more should it be so because we have the same Father in heaven? We are to be one; because we are all related; because we have the same life, and we have the same Father. He begat us all to a new and living hope, as John says in the first chapter of his Gospel. He says,

"But as many as received Him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12, 13

God is our Father. That is why we need to be one. It's a shame that the Church is divided today. It's a shame, that as we look throughout the earth, there are all these many different denominations, and they all bicker with one another, and they all meet under different names. How we need to remember that we are related by a common bond, by the life of God and the Holy Spirit within us, and the Lord Jesus dwelling in our hearts. Do you think that God wants His children to be divided?

You know, it breaks one's heart when problems are experienced in earthly families. How much more does it break the heart of our heavenly Father when His children are not unified? Why do we meet the way we do? – Because we want to have a Father that is happy that His children are walking together in a harmony and in oneness. Why don't we divide from others? – Because we want our heavenly Father to be happy with His children. We want to be in a right relationship with Him and with each other. So we see the importance of oneness. Oneness gives us expression to our common bond, and to our common life – the

life that we have from God the Father. It gives expression to His nature.

So, we're kept one in the name of the Father, which shows that we are all begotten of God. But there is another name that is important. The Name we are to gather in. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the name He has given to His saints. You see names are important to God.

In God's Word, God was the first one to give a name, and He gave a name to Adam. He called him man—"Adam," and then he told Adam to name the animals, and then Adam gave Eve her name. Then, as you go on through the history, you see God giving different peoples, names. We have Abram, who was given the name "Abraham." Then you have Jacob, which meant "Supplanter," but then after God dealt with him for many years, God changed his name, and He gave him another name—the name "Israel."

Names are important to God, and they should be important to us, *because names give an expression of whom we are.* A name is given by God to express the *character* of the individual.

The Names by which God has revealed Himself also are very important. By those Names, we can understand who God is. We can understand His character. When God says He is Jehovah, we understand that He is the one "who was, who is, and who is to come." It means He is the Eternal One, and He is the covenant God. Names give a picture, an expression of who we should be, and with God, it gives a picture, an expression of who, indeed, He is.

If names are important to God and He tells us to meet in His Name, and He tells us to call ourselves by certain names, then we should certainly pay attention. He has given many names to His Church. He has given them the name "believers;" He has given them the name "saints;" he has given them the name "Christians;" he has given them the name "disciples;" and He has given them the name "brethren." He has given us different names to use because names are important to God. But let me ask you this, and forgive

me for my irreverence, but I am doing it to illustrate a point. What would you think if some Christian tells God the following?

“You know God, I prefer another name for you. I will call you Lord, but I also want to call you by a different name. I’m going to call you “Waneb.” I really like that name. I’m now going to call you “Waneb.” And because I like that name so much, I’m also going to call Christians, Wanebians? We will name ourselves the Wanebian Church”

Now, what would you think if a Christian did that? I know it’s a silly and ridiculous illustration, but wouldn’t we think that person is being awfully presumptuous? Presumptuous for him being a tiny little creature telling the very Creator of the universe, “I have a different name for you, than the name You told us was Your own. I’m going to call you Waneb.” We would say that is silly; and we would say that it is just as silly to call ourselves “Wanebians.”

But if we can see it on that level, why can’t we see that it is the same thing when we call ourselves a Catholic, a Baptist, or when we call ourselves a Presbyterian, or a Methodist, or a Lutheran? Did God give us those names? Aren’t we being presumptuous, to say to God, “I’m sorry but I don’t believe You named us very well. Therefore, I’m going to come up with a better name. I do not like to be called only “brethren,” “believer,” or “saint.” I’m going to call myself a “Methodist.” That is a really good name, Lord. I like that name.” (Or, of course, we could substitute any other denominational name, or even, brethren, with a capital B– Brethren.) Would not that be just as presumptuous as deciding to call ourselves “Wanebians?”

When we understand how important names are to God, when we understand that the eternal purpose of God is to express his nature and character, when we understand that God gives us names to give expression as to who He is, and that the names He has given to us give expression to who we are – it is then, and only then, that we can then see the presumption of it all. *The Trinity teaches us to see the importance of names, and how names reveal not only who we are, but also reveal what we think.*

We are called brethren by God. Why? – Because we have a common Father. We are called Christians. Why? – Because we are anointed by God with the Holy Spirit, and we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the anointed One. We are called saints. Why? – Because God has separated us from the world.

Names are revelatory and they are important, and God does not give permission to His children to change their names. It is the height of presumption for us to give ourselves different names. That is why we don't call ourselves Baptists, or Methodists, or Lutheran, and God forbid, that we turn the name brethren from a small "b" into a capital "B" and call ourselves the "Brethren." Then we do the same thing. The word "brethren" has to do with all of God's children, not a portion of God's children within the great family of God. We are small "b's" not big "B's." That is why we should not call ourselves Baptists, Methodists, or Catholics, or Orthodox, Lutheran, or any other name other than the one given to us by God.

Names are important, and this leads us to another point – the nomenclature of the church. When you go through Scripture, one finds that the church is always identified by its location.

A.P. Gibbs says in his booklet, *Scriptural Principles of Gathering*, the following in regard to this point:

“A reading of the New Testament, especially the Acts, will reveal the fact that believers, and believers only, gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20); for remembrance of the Lord in the breaking of the bread (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 11:23-24); for edification (Acts 2:41-47; I Cor. 12th to 14th chapters); and for prayer, etc. (Matt. 18:20; Acts 4:23-30). These companies, whether large or small, are called “churches” or “assemblies.” We find the expression, “Churches of the saints” (I Cor. 14:33); “Churches of God” (I Thess. 2:14); “Churches” (Acts 9:31; 15:41; 16:5); Churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16). In these churches or assemblies of believers, there is no mention of the minister or the book of discipline, or creed, or any special name, such as Baptist, Presbyterian, etc. by which these assemblies were distinguished from each other. It was merely their location that distinguished them. We find the Church of God, which is at Corinth, the churches of Galatia. The church which was at Corinth included all the believers in Christ in that city. A

letter addressed to the Church of God in Chicago or any other city you wish to name would apply to and include every regenerated person in that city. That term includes all, who by the Spirit of God, have been joined to the body of Christ.²⁰⁰

When we go to God's Word, if God's Word is the pattern which we follow, we will find that God has given his saints, (who are gathered together), a name. The name is simply this – the “church,” or the “assembly,” depending on how you translate it. It means the same thing. The church or the assembly is the gathered ones, or the called out ones. That is the name He has given to His saints. Their corporate name is the “church.” In God’s Word it might be called God’s church, or Christ’s church, or a church of saints or a church of gentiles, but in all cases, it is simply the “church.” You will not find in Scripture an improvement upon that.

Now, that being the case let me give an example. Some Christians, or assemblies, call the place where they meet the “Bible Chapel,” rather than the “Bible Church.” Why do they make such a distinction? The answer is that the name “church,” in Scripture, speaks of the gathered saints who belong to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It never refers to a building. The place where the saints meet is not a “church” in the biblical sense; it is just a building, and so many Christians use the name chapel for their buildings. In some assemblies, they might call it a Hall, and in others, they might call it a meeting place, but it is all the same; it is simply the place where they meet. Therefore, in order to be faithful to God's word, and in order not to be presumptuous and adopt a name other than the name given to us by God, they use the word Chapel for the building in which they meet.

Now, if as Christians we were to use the name “Bible Church,” for our building, we would exceed that which is written and it would not be long before we, ourselves, or, perhaps, others, would began to call us the “Bible Church,” and that would

²⁰⁰ Gibbs, Alfred P., *Scriptural Principles of Gathering*, (Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, Kansas) Pg. 20-21

eventually destroy the testimony of the Lord. We would become a denomination unto ourselves much the same way as other Christians have denominated themselves. We would be known as the “Bible Church” denomination.

No, we should use some other name for the building in which we meet, not the word “church.” We should be simply known as the church that is meeting on such or such street, or in such or such building, or the church that is meeting in a “chapel” called the Bible Chapel, or Grace Chapel, etc. Do you see the distinction? We should be the church that is meeting *in* the Bible Chapel, not the Bible Church.

If God's people would go back to God's Word and realize the importance of names, and be willing to conform their lives and their churches to His Word, they would once again bear witness to the nature and character of God. God has given His people names and it is not up to us to change, add, or subtract from that nomenclature.

What would happen, let's say, in a large family of twelve with the surname of Smith, if the young children came to the mother and father and said, “Mom, Dad, we don't like the surname you have given us and so we all are going to choose another name to add to our surname. We'll each choose our own unique name to add to the name Smith, and not only that, we don't like our given names either, and so we are going to choose our own given names.”

Would that not be presumptuous? Would it not bring confusion to the family? Would it not destroy the oneness and harmony of the family? And would it not bear witness to a deep problem within that family? Is it any different with God's family?

May we all realize the importance of names and not act so presumptuously in regard to the names that our Heavenly Father has given to us.

A. P. Gibbs says it this way:

“We shall search our Bibles in vain to discover the “Baptist” denomination, or the “Presbyterian” or the “Episcopalian” or the

“Congregational” or the “Methodist,” or a host of others we might name. Within each of these denominations there are very many genuine believers in our Lord Jesus Christ and, as such, we love them and gladly own them as members of the body of Christ; but we cannot love or own these denominations, for they are unscriptural in their formation, excluding as they do, many people of God. Is every believer in Christ a Baptist? An Episcopalian? A Lutheran? A Methodist? A Presbyterian? A Congregationalist? Of course not. These man-formed divisions separate the people of God into various distinct companies. With some, it is an ordinance that distinguishes them, as with the “Baptist;” with others it is a form of Church government, as “Presbyterian,” or of that particular sect, as “Lutherans” and “Wesleyans,” but all such divisions are unscriptural.

When we open the pages of the New Testament we find that the people of God are called “Christians,” “disciples,” “saints,” “believers,” “brethren,” etc. Are these titles true of all believers? Yes. Every child of God is a “Christian,” a “saint,” a “believer,” a “disciple,” and one of the “brethren.” “One is your Master, even Christ and all ye are brethren” said the Lord Jesus (Matt. 23:8). By the term “brethren” [as well as disciple, Christian, saint, etc.], therefore, every true believer in Christ is included, and so with each of the other Scriptural titles of God’s people.”²⁰¹

But every true believer could not be included in the name “Baptist,” “Lutheran,” etc. Within the term “Lutheran,” is every true believer included? Or by the term “Baptist?” No – only when we use God’s names or designations is every true believer included. To do otherwise, divides one believer in God’s family, from other believers in God’s family.

He continues:

“Many believers excuse their denominational affiliation by saying: “What’s in a name? We’re all out for the same thing. We’ll all go to the same place!” These same believers would change their tune if someone forged their name to a check for a large amount and cashed it at their bank! What would be the reaction ... if their wives suddenly decide to change their names and take another more suited to their poetic fancy?

²⁰¹ Gibbs, Alfred P., *Scriptural Principles of Gathering*, (Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, Kansas) Pg. 12

These husbands would rightly argue: “I gave you my name at our marriage, and you cannot change that name to suit yourself!” Why, then, should we alter the name that Christ has given to His own blood-bought people [His bride], and substitute for it another of our own making?”²⁰²

So we see the nomenclature of the church. God has given His family certain names, “Christian,” “believer,” “brethren,” etc., and most importantly the name “church.” We should not so lightly add to it, but should cling to it with the simplicity and wisdom of which He bestowed it upon us.

J. Vernon McGee once succinctly said,

“We understand that there are about three hundred sects in America today. My, how the Church is divided...!”

“My friend, that is the picture at the present moment. Were the Scriptural relationships observed and obeyed, the narrow and limited conception of the Church would not prevail as it does in this hour. These relationships, as we find them in God’s Word, enable believers to see beyond the limited border or confines of the Church or little group to which they belong. The Church needs a full-orbed view today – it desperately needs a 20-20 vision to see what the real Church of the living Christ is and always has been...”

“Let me state this kindly, but as far as His Church is concerned, it is one flock today. How tragic it is, and has been, to have the Baptist sheep over here, and the Presbyterian sheep over there, and the Methodist sheep in still another area. After all, Sheep are sheep and those who are in His flock are one. There is one flock and one Shepherd...”²⁰³

Now, what is the ground of the church? What is the church founded on? The church is founded on none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The ground of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only is it His Name that we are gathered in, it is He on

²⁰² Ibid., pg. 13-14

²⁰³ McGee, J. Vernon, *Christ, His Cross, His Church* (Thru the Bible Radio, Los Angeles, 1971), pg. 5-6,11

whom we are built.

We see that in Matthew 16 where the Lord says to Peter, “I say to you that you are Peter and upon this, *the Rock* (and I’m bringing out the full meaning here) I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” He is the Rock – the bedrock on which the church is built. He is also spoken of as the foundation of the church, and He is also spoken of as the chief cornerstone of the church. So he is the bedrock, he is the foundation, and He is the chief cornerstone. He is everything.

What is the difference between a foundation and bedrock? Well if you ever studied Herod’s Temple Mount in Jerusalem, you would know the answer. When Herod built upon the temple mount, they dug down through the dirt, all the way to bedrock. In some cases, those workers dug down over 100 feet. They would dig all the way down until they hit bedrock. Only then would they put the foundation rocks on the bedrock. Then they would begin to build the superstructure. Well, that is the word that is used here. Christ is the bedrock on which the church is built.

I think it is speaking of the Church, irrespective of time and space. It is the Church, which is the Body of Christ, which is being built. He is the bedrock on which it is built. Now that Church, that crosses centuries of time, where every true believer who is joined to Christ is a member, also has a local expression, and that is what occurs in cities throughout the earth. They are all local expressions of that Church.

Let me read to you another quick paragraph that another Christian wrote. This is by William Kelly and he says:

“If a man belonged to the church of God at Jerusalem, he belonged to the church of God at Rome. It was merely a question of locality. He was a member of the Church of God, and therefore, wherever it might be, he, if there, belonged to the church in that place.”²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Kelly, William, *Lectures on the Church of God*, (Believers Bookshelf, Inc., Sunbury, Pa), pg. 103

Now, what does he mean by that? When we are saved, we are made a member of the body of Christ. We become a member of the Church, the body of Christ. You cannot fully see that Church because it includes all true saints of every age. We become a member of that Church by life because we are born into God's family and we are made a member of His Body.

Now, if one is already are a member of the Lord's Church, and the local church is to be nothing more but an expression of that Church, how could one ever require membership of someone? If they are saved, they are already a member of us, and we are a member of them. We must embrace all of God's people. They are already members of us.

Another point, which must be understood, is this. The Church that began on the day of Pentecost (and will continue to grow until the rapture) is the Church the Lord said He would build. Let me ask a question; is that Church a Baptist Church? – Is it a Presbyterian Church? Is that great Church that started on the day of Pentecost and continues all the way to the Rapture, a Methodist Church? – a Nazarene Church? No. Isn't that obvious? It is simply the Church, the Body of Christ.

Well, if the local church is simply to be an expression of that Church, then we have to be the same as, by what some call, the universal Church. If the Lord doesn't call that Church, the Baptist Church, then we can't call ourselves a Baptist church. Otherwise, we are not expressing His Church. Does that make sense? See the importance of names. The local church should be an expression of God's Church that He is building, which started on the day of Pentecost and will go to the Rapture. To be an expression of that Church, we cannot call ourselves by any other name than by the name it is called. Therefore, we should simply identify ourselves as the “church” according to whatever city, street, or location in which we meet.

We maintain a simplicity, purity and oneness if we utilize the name that God has given us. For example, 1 Corinthians 1:2 tells us–

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”

It is the church of God. In fact, if you look at this verse closely, and you will see there is a verb “to be” there. If you translated this verse literally, it would be:

“To the church of God, the one existing (or being) in Corinth...”

In other words, it's the “church” of God, it's God's “church” and it happens to be existing here in Corinth, and it exists in other cities, and it is existing at that street or avenue, or it is existing in that house, or chapel, but it is just the “church” existing wherever it is located. That is the name God gave to us. We are the “church” – the called out ones. Remember the importance of names.

But now Paul says this:

“According to the grace of God which was given to me like a wise master builder, I laid a foundation and another is building on it, but each man must be careful how he builds on it, for no man can lay a foundation other than the one that is being laid, which is Jesus Christ.” I Cor. 3:10

Now let me expand that translation to bring out some of the meanings here. For no man can lay... and it is a word that means “another of the same kind”... No man can lay “another” foundation of the same kind beside, or along side the one which is being laid, which is Jesus Christ. He changes tense in this verse. He had what we would call in English the past tense and he switches to the present tense. He laid a foundation, but he says, “No one else can lay another foundation like that one that I laid, because the one I laid is the one which is being laid, which is Christ Jesus.” He uses the present tense, its ongoing, it's like the Lord is extending the foundation of the Church through the entire world. The Lord Jesus

Himself, by the Holy Spirit, is continually laying that foundation. And through Paul, He laid it in Corinth. And he is telling them to build upon that foundation. There's only one foundation.

The church has one foundation. The one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord. The foundation of the church is Christ and He is laying it throughout the world. And He lays it in different areas and we have to build on His foundation. We cannot lay another foundation of that kind by ourselves. Scripture says, "Except the Lord, build the house, they labor in vain who build it." Let me paraphrase that to get at the idea of what I'm saying here. Except the Lord, lay the foundation, they labor in vain who lay it. It has to be God, the Holy Spirit working through us laying the foundation of the church, and the foundation that the Holy Spirit will lay will be none other than Jesus Christ Himself. He will not lay any other foundation. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul brings this out because the verb, "being laid," is in the present tense. It's also in the passive voice, which means that someone else is doing the laying. It was not Paul doing the laying; it was God. God was the builder through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we see that the Holy Spirit is ever laying the foundations for the church to be built upon.

Also, in the verse "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." the word "gathered" is also in the passive voice, which means, simply, that someone else is doing the gathering. We do not gather ourselves together. We are gathered by the Holy Spirit. He lays the foundation, and He also gathers us together on that foundation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is His sovereign prerogative to lay the church where He will. We should not be founded on our own peculiar doctrine. We should not be founded upon another person's name. We should not be founded upon a specific ethnic group. We are founded upon the Lord Jesus Christ and we are gathered in His name only and none other. When the church does so, she will show forth the *character* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if we look closely at Scripture, we see the

church is founded only upon the Lord Jesus Christ and is basically identified by the city where they are located adopting no other name than the one the Lord utilized.

Now what is that telling us? It is telling us that in that particular city, all Christians, say at Corinth, gathered together in one place and so they were called the church in that city. They were an expression of the Church – the Body of Christ. This truth is also shown at Thessalonians. There it reads a little bit different, it says, the “church of the Thessalonians” in God. It doesn't say the “church in Thessalonica.” It says the “church of the Thessalonians.” Now what is that showing us?

What this verse tells us is that if you were a Thessalonian, in God the Father, in other words, you were saved; you were a member of that church. It was the church of the Thessalonians. But it also shows us that the jurisdiction of that church did not roll over to, say, Ephesus. It was a local assembly of the Thessalonians. They could not tell the Ephesians what to do. There is no hierarchy of churches.

In other places, it doesn't even say the church in such a city, but simply the saints in such a city. In the book of Romans Paul's addresses the Epistle to the saints in Rome not to the church in Rome like he did with the epistle to the Corinthians. He just says, “to all the saints of God who are in Rome.” Now, why didn't the Holy Spirit have Paul address it as the church in Rome? Is He trying to teach us something? I think He is. I think there's a principle here, there's a pattern. We have different patterns in God's word. We have a pattern with the church in Corinth and with the church of the Thessalonians. Then we have an example, like here in Rome. The epistle was not addressed to the church in Rome, because not all the Christians met together in one place. There was no citywide gathering as there was in Corinth and in Thessalonica, and so Paul knowing that, addresses it to all the saints in Rome.

However, in Rom. 16:5 we do find that there was a church in someone's house in Rome – the house of Aquila and Priscilla.

Now what is the significance of this? Is there a pattern here? Yes, I think there is. In all those other cases, without fail, the Holy Spirit uses a little preposition, “in” “εν,” in the Greek when talking about a church in a particular city. However, whenever He talks about the church connected with someone's home, He doesn't use the preposition “εν;” He uses the Greek preposition “kata.”

Nothing is by chance in God's word. Every single jot and tittle is inspired. So why did the Holy Spirit choose a different preposition when He was talking about the church according to someone's house? – Because He is showing us another pattern or principle. The preposition “kata” presupposes that there's more than one “church according to the house” in the city of Rome. You don't have the words “according to” in our English Bible, but that would be a translation that would bring out the full meaning. He says, in Romans 16:5, Greet the church that is in their house, and he is talking about Aquila and Priscilla. Greet the church which is “according to” their house. The preposition “kata” carries a distributive sense.

You remember the story when Jesus fed the 5000. He told His disciples to have the people sit “according to” groups of 50. The Holy Spirit uses the preposition “kata.” The larger group is broken into smaller groups. The preposition carries a distributive sense. So, when Paul is using it in Romans, all the saints in Rome (the larger group) is broken down into smaller groups – the house church. By using the preposition “kata,” it presupposes that there are other churches in other houses in the city.

Now, why would that be? – Because Rome was a big city. There were almost a million people in Rome at that time. When we realize that a lot of the early brethren were slaves, some were free men, but many were slaves. They only had limited freedom. They did not have cars. A slave would not have a horse or a chariot. It would be hard, if you were a slave in someone's house way on this side of Rome to ever be able to walk all the way across the city of Rome to another meeting. You did not even get that much time off, and that meant that sometimes they met real early in

the morning before sunrise, because they were slaves. So what happened is that the Holy Spirit, with His sovereign will, raised up churches according to different homes throughout Rome. Rome was too big for all the Christians to gather together to meet in one place; therefore, they met “according to different” houses or meeting places.

If it was someone’s house they would be known as the church according to that person’s house, or if they utilized a building, they were more than likely known as the church according to the name of that building. (For example, in Acts 19:9 were told that the disciples met daily, which I presume would include Sunday, in the School of Tyrannus. Today, we might say something like this: “we are the church or assembly that meets in the auditorium of Lincoln High School.)

Now let's look at another example. Turn to the book of Colossians. Colossians 4:15 tell us: “Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in his house.” Again, it is the preposition “kata,” the church that is “according to” his house – in a distributive sense. He goes on and says, “When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans.” So now you have a church according to a house, and you also have a church of the Laodiceans. What does this show us? It shows us that because he uses “kata,” carrying the distributive sense, there's more than one house church in Laodicea. But apparently, because Laodicea was small enough, all those house churches were also able to meet together as the citywide church. So they were also known as the church in Laodicea when they all met together.

So we see that the church was simply identified by where they met. It was the same church, for only one Church is being laid by the Holy Spirit. If the city was small enough and they all met together, it would be known as the church “in that city,” or the church of the name given to those who lived in that city. If the city was too big, and not all the Christians could meet together, they were identified by the place where they met, whether it was the

church according to Aquila and Priscilla's house, or the church at Nympha's house or, perhaps, the church in the School of Tyrannus. They were all the same church differentiated only by where they met. They did not create new names to identify themselves. They retained in simplicity the name God had given to them – the church (assembly). May we do the same today.

Let's not create artificial names to identify us in contradiction to the name God has given us. If there are many meeting places in our city, then we can only be the "church" according to where we meet, whether it is the name of the street, or the name of someone's house, or the name of the building, like a chapel or a hall. We can say were the assembly or church that meets at the Bible Chapel, in the same way Paul may have said in Ephesus – "we are the assembly that meets at the School of Tyrannus." In that way all God's people, whether known as brethren, saints, Christians, disciples or any other nomenclature given to us in God's Word, will be known as the "Church" and that in itself will be a testimony to the perfect harmony of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – *to the nature and character of God.*

In saying all this we are not so naïve to think all the churches in the world are going to drop their names and conform themselves to the Word of God. Nevertheless, in saying all this I would hope that all the assemblies would remember why they meet the way they meet. It took centuries and many generations for the church to get so far removed from the Word of God. May our prayer be not to let history repeat itself in relation to the assemblies and others of like-mindedness. May the new generation of believers in such assemblies continue to conform themselves to the Word of God, and, indeed, to the very nature and character of the Blessed Trinity. We may not be able to effect much change in the Christian world at large, but we can remain faithful to what God has already revealed to us and continue to be an expression of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we see the practical outworking of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. God was very precise in the names and words He used to reveal His Triune nature to mankind. He is “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” They are “Persons.” They subsist in One “Being.” The Son is the “Only-Begotten.” The Son and the Holy Spirit “proceed.” They are “consubstantial,” and “coinherent.” He is the LORD. His name is called Jesus. He is the Christ.

The study of the Trinity, should teach us to be precise in our nomenclatures. It should teach us not to be presumptuous, but to be faithful to the nomenclature and language of God, which He has given to His people.

The study of the Trinity should teach us to walk in a “processional” manner, ever cognizant of “source.” It should teach us that we can walk in peace and harmony with one another, through selflessness and love, realizing equality is through submission.

And finally, it should teach us to walk humbly with our God, knowing He has given to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, and that life and godliness is found in the eternal communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May that ever be our goal and prayer, and may unto Him be glory and honour in the church unto all generations, Amen.

THE TRINITY AND WORSHIP

Most assuredly, the doctrine of the Trinity should teach us how we should worship. By understanding how the eternal Son, in His humanity, worshiped the Father, will teach us how we should worship the Father. Worship is not based upon our desires, but must be based upon the desires of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I'm sure some of you have seen, as you have driving through town, the different signs in front of different church buildings. Many times one will see a sign that says "Traditional Worship" at 9:00 and "Contemporary Worship" at 11:00.

Doesn't that show us that in reality such worship is not worship for the "Lord," but is really worship for "ourselves?" We have different forms of worship because the people of God have their own tastes and desires. Some like to worship in this style and others like a different style. Is God so capricious that at 9:00, He desires Traditional worship, and at 11:00, He wants Contemporary worship? Does God change His desires like that? No, of course not. God is very clear about how we should worship, just as He is very clear about how we should gather together. God tells us He has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness. He tells us that through the Word of God, the man of God can be complete. Everything that we need to have concerning how we should meet and how we should worship, is all contained in God's Word.

So with that in mind let's begin our study by reading John 4:20-24. The Samaritan woman begins her discourse with the Lord Jesus by saying,

"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus said to her, woman believe me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you don't

know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such people the Father seeks to be his worshipers. God is Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth.”

Therefore, what we see here, is the Lord Jesus saying that something new is coming – something that hadn't been before. In fact, He says, it is even now. I think what He's referring to is this: the “hour that is coming” refers to the day when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost. That is the future. The phrase “and now is” refers to the present time and that in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, for the Spirit had already been poured out upon Him without measure (Jn. 3:34 KJV). So we see a pattern developing here.

God is Spirit and those that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and Truth. Now there are many differences of opinion about what this means. In fact, in some of your Bible's you'll probably see God is spirit, and the word spirit is in the lower case, a small “s.” In some of your Bible's you'll see God is Spirit, and it you'll see that the word Spirit begins with a capital “S.” When the word Spirit is capitalized, it refers to the Holy Spirit, when it is in the lower case, it generally refers to the human spirit. The reason why some translations will have one or the other is because in the Greek language the distinction between the Spirit of God and the human spirit is not determined by either an uppercase “S” or a lower case “s.” Sometimes in the Greek manuscripts, every letter was in an upper case, or sometimes every letter was in a lower case. So you wouldn't know through capitalization, if the writer was referring to the Holy Spirit or not. The translator would have to decide for himself from the context. So it became a matter of interpretation.

However, I think we will be able to see that John is referring to a combination of both. William Kelly speaks of this verse as follows:

“Not merely were spiritual life and redemption needful, but the Holy Ghost also; and accordingly here the Lord adds that “God is a Spirit;” and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”²⁰⁵

Therefore, William Kelly sees this as referring, most assuredly, to the Holy Spirit. If that is true, then what the Lord is saying is that God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him by the Spirit and Truth, in other words, by the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, when the Lord says, “an hour is coming,” He is referring to a worship, in the future, that will be led by the Holy Spirit of God. Such worship had not occurred before that time because the Holy Spirit had not been given (Jn. 7:39), nor had the Holy Spirit been poured out upon the Church (Acts 1: 8 and 2: 1-2, 42). Such worship had only been done in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to his humanity. And that is why He says “...an hour is coming and now is.”

Christ had already been worshipping by the Holy Spirit, according to His humanity (Lu. 4:8). Our Lord did not do anything by His own initiative or creativity, but only according to the will of His Father, through the power or fullness of the Spirit (Jn. 8:28; 16:13; Lu. 4:1). Our Lord’s worship was the perfect worship and the worship that should be a pattern for us all. His was the true worship that was then present, and one day would become the worship of the Church on the day of Pentecost.

This teaches us that we should be careful not to bring our own *creativity* or initiative into our worship, for that is not the true worship the Father desires. We do not decide for ourselves what would make good worship. He gave us His Son to be our pattern, and He never did anything by His own creativity or initiative, (even though His creativity would have been sinless and perfect).

If the Son would not be presumptuous in His worship, how much more should we not be presumptuous? Those who seek to

²⁰⁵ Kelly, William, *Lectures on the Church of God*, (Believers Bookshelf, Inc., Sunbury, Pa) pg. 136-137

introduce different styles of worship into the Church do not understand the true nature of worship. True worship is only done under the direction of the Holy Spirit according to the will of the Father, as revealed in Scripture. This will of God for our worship is revealed in I Cor. 11-14. If we would be true worshipers we must conform ourselves to these chapters. Worship should be done under the immediate leading of the Holy Spirit through the common priesthood of all believers by the operation of the spiritual gifts He has deposited amongst the saints. Worship is not done by natural talent, but by the manifestation of the Spirit.

True worship is not enhanced by the display of natural talent. True worship is not led by small groups of musicians or singers that are singled out because of their obvious talent. True worship is not led by a man, a woman, or group of people. True worship is only led by the Holy Spirit, directly (not through the mediatorship of a priest, a worship team or worship leader), but directly guiding the heart of each individual saint.

Paul confirms that this is the type of worship we should seek, in the book of Philippians. In Philippians 3:3 Paul says,

“For we are the true circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God and rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

The flesh that Paul refers to is not evil flesh, but good flesh. Circumcision was from God and was good. The worship of the Temple was from God and was good. The worship created by King David, with the choirs of priests was given by God and was good. All the true worship of the Old Testament was through the flesh and was good. It was very physical or of the flesh in the good sense. There was incense for the physical sense of smell. There were vestments for the physical sense of sight. There was beautiful music for the physical sense of hearing. There was the meat of the sacrifice for the physical sense of taste, and there was the washing of water of the laver for the physical sense of touch. All these were fleshly or physical and yet were good. But as Paul says, we no

longer put our trust in physical sense for worship. We no longer should seek for those things physical to aid our worship, for we now worship by the Spirit of God.

We no longer offer physical incense to God, but now offer spiritual prayers as incense to God. We no longer don elaborate vestments, but now clothe ourselves in Christ Jesus. We no longer rely on beautiful music of others, whether they are marvelous choirs, or talented musicians, but now make beautiful music in our hearts, being filled with the Spirit, singing in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, to the Lord. We no longer eat the flesh of the sacrifice, but now spiritually eat and drink the flesh and blood of our precious Saviour. And, finally, we no longer wash ourselves with the physical water of a laver, but now wash ourselves in the blood of the lamb, and the water of the Word.

We put no confidence in those types of fleshly things now. The old covenant has passed away. We now worship in a new and living way, in a tabernacle more beautiful and magnificent than any earthly cathedral. We now worship in the tabernacle made without hands in the heavenlies. And this is the new worship of the Holy Spirit of God that the Lord Jesus refers to in John 4:24.

True worship is now done by the Holy Spirit of God, but is that conclusive? Does that mean then that the Lord is speaking in John 4:24 only of the Holy Spirit? I would answer yes, except for one point. If John wanted to make sure that we understood that it was only the Holy Spirit he was talking about, he would have used the definite article to help clarify it for the reader, or he simply would have said the Holy Spirit, but he didn't. It says they that worship Him must worship Him "in Spirit" (not in "the" Spirit, or in the Holy Spirit, but, simply, in spirit) and truth.

Now, as we learned before, many times when a gospel writer does this and deletes the article, he's trying to make a point. When the article is included, the writer is always trying to point to the identity of a thing or person. When he leaves out the article in the Greek, he may be trying to point to the essence of that person or thing. So this is, I think, is what the Lord is saying and what John

is saying as he recorded it in his gospel – that God is Spirit (yes, capital “S” there, it’s clearly referring to God). God in His essence is Spirit. Then, when he says, “they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth,” He is saying “they that worship Him must worship Him in all that is essentially spirit.” In other words, in all that is “spirit” in a righteous sense, you must worship God the Father, and that is the true worshipers He seeks. So what does that mean?

How would this apply to us today? If we want to worship God in Spirit, we must worship in all that is essentially “spirit,” which means first and primarily by the Holy Spirit of God, as Philippians 3:3 says. We must worship by the Holy Spirit of God, who has been poured out upon us and now is the Sovereign Guide of our meetings and our gatherings. This is the primary thought that I believe the Lord is pointing to. But we must remember it also includes all that is “spirit.” It also means that we worship by our human spirit. When we turn to the book of Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 14, it states,

“How much more will the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience (and your conscience is part of your human spirit), from dead works to serve (or worship) the living God.”

That word, which is translated “serve,” can also be translated worship as it is in Acts 24:14; Phil. 3:3; Heb. 10:2 (KJV). We do need to use our human spirit in our worship of God.

Now what does that mean, to use your human spirit? It means that you worship God from the innermost, deepest part of your being. It means that when we come together and worship God, and we're singing a hymn of worship to God, we aren't thinking of what we're going to eat at lunch time. That is purely worship in the mind or in the soul. God demands our entire attention in the worship that springs from our very heart and flows out.

As Mary says in the Magnificent, (Luke 1:46-47) “My soul

doth magnify the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God, my maker.” My “spirit has rejoiced,” you will notice in the English, is in the past tense. My “soul doth magnify” you will notice is in the present tense. What does this show us? – That her worship or her song of praise began in her heart and it flowed out through her soul.

So there is an element where we need to worship God from our very heart, the deepest part of our being. Consequently, when we worship God in spirit, we worship first of all by the Holy Spirit, and we worship as the Holy Spirit leads within our heart – our spirit – and we respond back to the Lord.

Then finally, I think, if we worship “in spirit,” it means that we have to worship by the word of God. Why? – Because the Lord Jesus says that the words that He speaks are “spirit and life” (Jn. 6:63). And He says we must worship in spirit and truth. Truth refers to the Word of God. If we would worship God in spirit, we must worship under the sovereign leading of the Holy Spirit; we must worship from the very depths of our own spirit, our heart; and we must worship according to the Word of God. Those are the three things that God's Word tells us has the essential quality of “spirit” in a good sense.

It's used the same way in the book of Galatians when Paul tells us to walk by the Spirit. There's no definite article there. It means, walk by all that is essentially “spirit” in a good sense, which primarily means the Holy Spirit, as He leads us within our heart, or in our own human spirit, and as we walk in accordance with God's Word. If one wants to walk or worship in spirit, one will need to learn to walk and worship by all three.

So the Lord is introducing a marvelous thing here. He's saying that a new type of worship is going to come. It is not the worship that has been done in this temple, or on that mountain, but it is the worship that He Himself is now demonstrating and that will one day come in the future.

The Lord, while on earth, did not use incense, vestments, or other physical things to aid His worship. No, He worshiped in spirit by the leading of the Spirit. His was a perfect worship, whether He

was in Galilee, by the Jordon, or in the precincts of the Temple. He, in spirit, entered into the very presence of God His Father.

Therefore, the Lord, Himself, becomes the pattern for our worship. And on what basis did our Lord become our pattern? Let us turn to Genesis 22 to see. This is the story of the offering of Isaac.

In verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 22, it says, “Now it came about after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘take now your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’” And so Abraham responds to the revealed will of God, and he obeys.

Now let’s look at verse 4. “And on the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance, and Abraham said to the young men, stay here with the donkey and I and the lad will go over there and we will worship and return to you.” “We will worship and return to you” it says. Abraham considered that sacrifice that was to be done was an act of worship to God. We know that Isaac is a picture of Christ. So what we see is this – that Christ is a pattern of our worship because He, like Isaac, and indeed, unlike Isaac, did give His life as a ransom for many.

The Lord Jesus was the one that was sacrificed for us, and what I’m suggesting is that His sacrifice on the cross was the highest form of worship that could be done; His whole life on earth, as He was imbued with power of the Holy Spirit, became a pattern of how we should worship.

And how did that worship begin with the Lord Jesus? – The same way that it began with Abraham. God revealed His will to Abraham, and Abraham obeyed. God revealed His will to God the Son, and God the Son obeyed. His whole life was a life of obedience to God the Father. It says that during His life, in Hebrews 5:7, that though He was a Son, He learned obedience through the things which He suffered.

In the garden of Gethsemane, when He was praying, the

Lord says, "Not my will, but thy will be done." He, like Abraham, says "Yes, Father, I'll do thy will," and the Lord was sacrificed for us. That is the Lord's pattern of worship, and that should be the pattern for us.

First, we have to hear the call to worship. We have to hear the will of God. We as a local assembly need to understand that God has called us to gather together to worship Him, and He has given a pattern by which we may worship. And the beginning of that worship is sacrifice. Rom. 12:1 says,

"Therefore I urge you brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship."

What is the beginning of worship? What is the first thing we must do? We must all come to grips with Romans 12:1. As Abraham had to come to grips with God's call upon him to sacrifice his son, so we have to come to grips with God's call to us to sacrifice ourselves. If one has not dealt with Romans 12:1, one cannot fully, (I am not saying never or partially), buy one cannot fully worship God with the type of worship He desires.

If an assembly has not come to grips with Romans 12:1, it cannot fully worship the Lord, as He desires. We have to respond to the call of God, the will of God. We need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. It is a burnt offering. A burnt offering was burnt up completely. It is a total surrender and commitment of our life to the Lord.

Once we do that, and we obey the call of God, we then can go up to worship as Abraham and Isaac did. It is a worship that is pleasing to God because it is rooted in the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is based in sacrifice and obedience.

John 5: 19 tell us the Lord did nothing from Himself, but only what He saw the Father do. True worship begins with the Father, as it is expressed to the Son, and as it is made real to us by the sovereign leading of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. By that

action, it then returns back by the Spirit, through the Son, and unto the Father.

Therefore, true worship is like a grand circle. It begins from the heart of the Father, flows through the expression of the Son, is made known to us by the sovereign leading of the Holy Spirit, returns through the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ends in the glory of the Father.

This is part of the purpose that the Lord desires for His Church. Remember the purpose of God is that the nature and character of God should be expressed. And what is one aspect of the nature and character of God? – To be giving. God, the Father, is forever, giving to the Son. The Spirit is ever searching the deep things of God, and through the Son, is affirming the image of the Father that is expressed in the Son. And as the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, all that the Father is, the deep things of God, are given back in affirmation by the Spirit to the Father within their own ontological and eternal existence.

The Father was ever giving to the Son and the Son and the Spirit were ever giving back to the Father. That is their nature and He tells us His purpose is that that nature may be expressed in us.

How is that expressed? – Through worship that is led by the Spirit of God. So, when the Lord says, that God is Spirit and they that must worship Him in spirit and truth, it means that worship has to begin with the Holy Spirit of God as He moves within our spirits, and in response to that movement, we must be obedient and ready to give back to God by the sacrifice of our entire being to God.

Let's now turn our attention to the third aspect of true worship; worship that is done in accordance with the Word of God; worship that is prescribed by God, just as it was in the Old Testament; a worship that is not based on our own creativity, but a worship that is revealed by God for His Church – a worship that will give honour to the Blessed Trinity.

True worship in spirit and truth must also be according to the Word of God, for the Word of God is “spirit and life.” The

Holy Spirit will never lead us contrary to the Word of God. And just as worship was prescribed in the Old Testament for Israel, so worship is prescribed in the New Testament for the Church.

Hebrews Chapter 9: 1-5; 6-9a, says this:

“Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary, for there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one in which were the lampstand, and the table and the sacred bread, this is called the holy place, behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the holy of holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant, covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded and the tablets of the covenant... .” “...Now when these things having been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the first tabernacle, performing the divine worship, but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the first tabernacle was still standing which is a symbol for the present time.”

Scripture tells us it was a symbol for the present time. God had a divine worship within the tabernacle and He says it was a symbol for the present time.

You know the Lord was very precise in the Old Testament, as to how people should worship Him. They could not worship Him one hour with one type of worship and in the next hour with a different type of worship. When Moses received on the mount the instructions from the Lord, Moses was warned to be careful to follow the pattern. It says this in Hebrews 8:5.

“Who serve as a copy in the shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle: for, see, He says, that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you in the mount.”

That should cause us take pause and to take notice. God warned Moses to make sure you do it according to the pattern.

Christians need to realize it's not up to us to decide how we're going to worship God. God has given us a pattern by which He is approached. We cannot decide – now we're going to have Traditional worship, and now we're going to have Contemporary worship. We are not told to create our own worship. Worship is not for our enjoyment, but for God's. Yes, when we worship aright, we receive joy too, but our concern should be for God's enjoyment, not our own.

Worship was always an important thing to God, and it had to be done according to His pattern. We have talked about Cain and Abel. Abel worshiped God according to the way it was revealed. Cain did not. Cain created his own worship (with good intentions) and God did not have favor for Cain's worship.

In Saul we have another example of one who was worshipping by what he thought would be pleasing to God, but soon found out it was not, because it was not according to what God revealed (I Sam. 15:9-22).

Nadab and Abihu were ones who were careless in their worship. It says that they came in and offered strange fire unto the Lord, not according to the way the Lord had prescribed. The Lord judged them and put them to death (Lev. 10: 1-3). Can you imagine that?

Why was the Lord such with some things in the Old Testament? When Moses struck the rock three times, because of his anger, rather than once, He was told by God, "You can't go into the promised land." Why did the Lord respond so strongly? – Because Moses destroyed the picture or symbol. He became presumptuous, not realizing, (that by changing the manner that God prescribed), he changed the truth God was seeking to communicate. The whole Old Testament was to be a pattern and a picture of spiritual truths for the Church. That is why they had to be very careful to do it right.

We also have the story of David (II Sam. 6:2-16) when he wanted to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. He put it upon an ox cart to bring it up, and as they were going, it hit a little

pothole. Someone raised his hand up to steady the Ark so it wouldn't fall to the ground. What happened to that person? He died immediately. Why? He touched it. Why was that wrong? – Because only the priests were to carry the Ark and they had two poles by which to do it. So, David was very upset, but I'm sure he went back to the Word of God and he found out that what he had done was wrong. He then went back and did it the right way and there was great rejoicing. As a name is important to the Lord, so the pattern is important to the Lord.

“See to it that you make it according to the pattern.”

As Israel had to be careful to worship God according to the pattern He revealed in the Old Testament, so too the Church must be careful to worship God according to the pattern revealed to us in the New Testament.

Now, let's go back to Chapter 9 of Hebrews. Verse 9a states, “which is a symbol for the present time.” In other words, within that holy place there were three things. It says there was the lampstand, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense. These three things were a symbol for the present time, according to Scripture. When the priests went in to worship, they performed the Divine worship, as the New American Standard says. They did it in connection with those three articles, those three furnishings: the altar of incense, the table of showbread, and the lampstand.

Now, let me ask, “when they would come into the holy place, would the priests first go in and take care of the lampstand, and then go and take care of the showbread, and then maybe burn some incense?” Or when they went in to perform the divine worship, would they first go to the table of showbread, and then maybe go to the altar of incense, and then to the lampstand? In what order would they perform that worship? As far as I can tell, this is the only verse in the entire Bible that tells us the order in which they performed the Divine Worship – 2 Chronicles 13:10-11,

“But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the sons of Aaron are ministering to the Lord as priests, and the Levites attend to their work; every morning and evening they burn to the Lord burnt offerings; and a fragrant incense, and the showbread is set on a clean table; and the golden lampstand with its lamps is ready to light every evening, for we keep charge of the Lord our God....”

They began with sacrifice – the burnt offering. In the same way, as we stated before, we must begin worship with sacrifice, as seen in Gen. 22, and in Romans 12:1. Then it says that they first went to the altar of incense, then they went to the table of showbread, and then they went to the lampstand. That is the order in which they performed the Divine worship. Now why is that important? Well, back in Hebrews 9 it says that what was done then was a symbol for the “present time.” I Cor. 10: 11 tell us that whatever was written of old, was written for our example upon whom the end of the ages has come. It wasn't happenchance the way God had things done. It wasn't happenchance the way the tabernacle was set up. Those things bespeak Christ. Nor was the order in which they performed the Divine service or worship happenchance. It was done in a certain order because it was a symbol for this present time – the Church Age.

In other words, there was a threefold act or aspect of that Divine worship shown forth by the altar of incense, the table of showbread, and the golden lampstand. Isn't that interesting? Why do we always find threes in the Bible? – Because it speaks the nature of God – and God's purpose is what? Simply stated, God's purpose is to express His nature and character. Even our worship is to be an expression of the nature and character of God. The church is called, not only to express His life, *but also to express His nature in the way that we worship and gather together.*

Now, how do we see this carried over for the present time in the New Testament? Turn to the book of Acts 2:42. Now, here we also see an order. The order is in reverse because it is starting from the point of view of the apostles teaching on the day of Pentecost. It's starting from that point of view, but then it's

looking back, like when we think of approaching God, we think first of, by the Holy Spirit, and then we think of, through the Son, and then we think, to the Father. The true order, however, of the Trinity is not the Holy Spirit, the Son and the Father, but is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So with that context in mind let's read Acts 2:42.

“And they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread, and prayers.” (Darby)

In the phrase “and prayers,” there is an article that is not translated in the English. It is a definite article. It should be translated, “and the prayers.” It is speaking of prayers done at a specific time.

Therefore, according to Darby's translation, we see a threefold aspect. We see the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, we see the breaking of bread, and we see the prayers.

(Please notice Darby and, indeed, most translations – through the use of commas and prepositions– divide these things into three aspects not four. Now while it is possible to translate this verse in that way, I think if we look at the structure of the sentence very closely, we will find it very specifically shows us only three things without having to combine the teaching and fellowship together).

Young's Literal Translation brings out this distinction. He was the compiler of Young's Analytical Concordance. He translates it as follows –

“And they were continuing steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles, and the fellowship, and the breaking of the bread, and the prayers.”

One can see that the teaching is not combined with the fellowship in his translation. The threefold aspect in his translation is *fellowship, breaking of bread and the prayers*. He keeps them distinct from the teaching of the apostles.

Another translation that brings this out is the Philips Translation, which, perhaps, would be better known, not as a

translation, but as a paraphrase. He tries to bring out the unique Greek structure also, by adding the verb “*joined*,” to the sentence (which shows why it is a paraphrase, since there is no such verb in the text). However, by doing this he emphasizes the two different thoughts in this verse. He translates it as follows –

“They continued steadily learning the teaching of the apostles, and joined in their fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.”²⁰⁶

Here we see the threefold aspect clearly delineated, (even though he still indirectly links fellowship with the apostles by adding to the verse the word “*their*,” which is not found in the original Greek).

The teaching of the apostles should not be confused or joined to the threefold aspect of fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers.

How does Luke accomplish this? By using the Greek conjunction “*de*” at the beginning of the sentence before the teaching of the apostles, and then switching to a different conjunction, “*kai*” for the fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers. We do not see this distinction in the English, since most English translations translate both conjunctions by the same English word “and.” However, the conjunction “*de*” has a broader scope in English than the conjunction “*kai*.” In the KJV, it is translated by the various English words: but, and, now, then, also, yet, yea, so, moreover, nevertheless, for and even.

It can be used as a continuative conjunction or an adversative conjunction, but in the context of our verse in Acts it is used as a continuative conjunction. It shows us that verse 42 continues the thought of the previous verses. And, in order to clearly show this distinctive word used by Luke, perhaps, the English word “moreover” would be a better translation.

This continuation is also accomplished, by Luke, through his use of a periphrastic imperfect. The English words “they

²⁰⁶ *The New Testament in Four Versions*, (Christianity Today, Inc., Washington DC, 1965) pg. 347

continued steadfastly” are actually a periphrastic imperfect in the Greek, which means it is a combination form using a verb and participle. Literally it would be translated “they were adhering steadfastly.” Since it is an imperfect tense, it is telling us that it is referring to something that was already occurring in past time that continues to occur in the present time, without any thought as to its completion.

Therefore, by using the periphrastic imperfect, Luke is connecting the “steadfast adherence” to an act that was already occurring in past time. In the context of the passage, this could only be the glad reception and adherence, of not only the teaching of Peter, but, apparently, also the teaching of the rest of the apostles that occurred prior to their baptism in verse 41.

We know that Peter spoke many other words to the people that we do not have recorded in Scripture (vs. 40). We also know that apparently the other apostles were teaching and bearing witness (see Acts 2:14 with verse 37 and 42). Therefore, the teaching of the apostles in verse 42 that “they adhered steadfastly” to, must refer to the teaching the new converts had just received on that day of Pentecost.

Therefore, through the use of the conjunction “de” and the periphrastic imperfect, Luke is making a distinction between the “teaching of the apostles,” and the rest of the things listed in the verse.

Also, it should be noted the Greek does not contain the English preposition “in.” The teaching and the three other aspects are simply in the dative case that, perhaps, would be better understood by the use of the English word “to” (cf. Rom. 6:12; 8:12).²⁰⁷ The more precise English translation, therefore, would be as follows –

“Moreover (de) they adhered steadfastly to the teaching of the apostles, and (kai) to the fellowship, and (kai) to the breaking of bread, and

²⁰⁷ It seems the dative would be better understood as a dative of reference, rather than the locative.

(kai) to the prayers.”

So we see from the sentence structure, the teaching in Acts 2:42 refers to the “public teaching” of the apostles that had just occurred, which became a common practice of the apostles among the people. We see this in Acts 5: 25-28 –

“Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”

Now, we are not denying that the Apostles also taught in the homes. We know this from Acts 5:42. But in the immediate context of Acts 2:42, the teaching, referred to, had to be the public teaching of the apostles.

Therefore the teaching of verse 42 must be kept distinct from the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers which were done in private. The teaching was public, but “the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers” were done in private during those early days of the church. The former occurred in the public courts of the temple. The latter occurred in the private houses of Jerusalem.

We plainly see this in Acts 2:46 –

“And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart.” (ASV)

In addition, another reason why the “teaching of the apostles” must be kept distinct, from the rest is revealed to us by Luke’s use of the possessive genitive. The dative “teaching” was not joined

with the dative “fellowship,” (as most English translations imply), but rather to the genitive “apostles.” This, again, shows us that Luke was making a distinction between the teaching and the “fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers.”

The teaching belonged to the apostles, and so Luke writes the word “apostles” in the genitive case, but one could not equally say that the fellowship was exclusive to the apostles. It also included the fellowship of the original one hundred and twenty disciples (Acts 1:15). Nor, could one obviously say the breaking of bread belonged to the apostles. *It was the Lord’s Table, not the Apostle’s Table*, and, of course, Luke is not saying that the saints adhered to the prayers of the Apostles. Scripture does not tell us that the Apostles created liturgical prayers for use in the church.

And so, we should realize Luke is *not* declaring to us that the saints continually adhered to the “fellowship of the apostles,” nor to the “breaking of bread of the apostles,” or to “the prayers of the apostles.”

The fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers were not meant to be joined to the possessive genitive “apostles.” Only the teaching was meant to be joined to the genitive apostles. He is clearly showing us that the teaching refers to what occurred in verse 41 and the verses before, while the “fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers” is referring to something quite distinct.

The actual Greek structure and order of words is – periphrastic *imperfect* (they adhered steadfastly), *dative* (to the teaching), *genitive* (of the apostles), and *dative* (to the fellowship), and *dative* (to the breaking [of bread]), and *dative* (to the prayers). In other words, the order is as follows: *periphrastic imperfect – dative, genitive – dative, dative, dative*. Most English translations incorrectly give the following structure and order: *periphrastic imperfect – dative, dative, genitive – dative, and dative*.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Please note, however, structure is not used the same way in Greek as it is in English. That is why it was mentioned before that the way most English translations translate this verse is a possible translation, however, that does not mean that structure and order have no place in the Greek

So if the Holy Spirit made a distinction in this verse and separated out the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers as a threefold distinct occurrence from the public teaching of the apostles, what was the reason for this and what was He trying to teach us? Well, in order to answer this we need first to ask ourselves a question.

Generally speaking, when did the breaking of bread occur in the early church? Now obviously, it was done daily as we read in the above verse, but generally speaking it was done on the first day of the week. It was the common practice of the church to meet on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). There is indication that at the very first, they might have done it daily (at least, in Jerusalem), but that did not negate the fact that especially on the first day of the week, (because that was the day that the Lord rose from the dead), they broke bread.

If they broke bread on the first day of the week, when did they have the fellowship? – On the first day of the week. When did they have the prayers? – On the first day of the week. It was all

language. It can influence the way the sentence should be understood, and that is why we believe there is a better way to translate this verse. According to Robertson (R. 502) the genitive usually follows and does not precede the substantive, so that if Luke wanted to say “the teaching and fellowship of the apostles,” the genitive would have then followed after the two substantives “teaching and fellowship.” The fact that he did not do so, but simply had it follow the one substantive “teaching,” gives us a clue that in his mind the two should be kept distinct. Now, it should also be stated that it is possible, in the Greek, to put the genitive before a substantive for emphasis, but, again, if that is what he wanted to do, then, more than likely it would have preceded both substantives and not just one. Then, perhaps, it would be more plausible to translate it “the teaching and fellowship of the apostles,” but the fact of the matter is, he did not use that order. Also, it could not be understood to mean that “they continued steadfastly in the teaching, and in the fellowship of the apostles,” for as we said before, the fellowship did not belong exclusively to the twelve but was the portion of all the original one hundred and twenty members. The Spirit fell upon all, not just the twelve.

done together as a whole. There was a threefold gathering of the church. They gathered together for the prayers. They gathered together for the breaking of bread. They gathered together for the fellowship.²⁰⁹

And so, we see that the threefold gathering for worship of the church had, as its parallel in the Old Testament, the Tabernacle of God. The altar of incense, where the incense ascended to God, was a symbol of prayers (cf. Rev. 5:8). The table of showbread, which bespeaks the Lord Jesus, was a symbol of the breaking of bread. And the lampstand, that gave light, was a symbol of the fellowship of the saints.

Perhaps, we should notice here, as was mentioned before, it is “the” fellowship, with a definite article. The word fellowship, as used in the New Testament, meant a communication of one’s own possessions with others. In the physical realm it meant the sharing of one’s material possessions (Rom. 15:26; II Cor. 8:4 and Heb. 13:16), and in the spiritual realm, it meant the sharing of one’s own spiritual possessions. This could take the form of service, as is seen in Phil. 1:5, or it could take the form of sharing one’s own faith and spiritual knowledge, as is seen in Philemon 1:6-7 (NASB). It was also seen as the sharing of – the one spiritual possession that all Christians had in common, albeit, in various numbers, combinations and/or manifestations – spiritual gifts.

We see this connection by first understanding the connection of the lampstand with fellowship. Light comes from God (Gen. 1:3), and, indeed, God is light, and is called the Father of

²⁰⁹ It should also be mentioned, each of these datives in Acts 2:42 are preceded by a definite article. It is “the” prayers, “the” breaking of bread, and “the” fellowship. It is referring to definite aspects of the weekly gathering of the church. They were known as a specific portion or part of the gathering. That is one reason why it is so important to have breaking of bread every Sunday and not just once a month or once a quarter. It was always considered to be an important part of the weekly gathering. The same, of course, should be said of the prayers and the fellowship.

lights (Jam. 1:17). The Lord Jesus, of course, is the Light of the world (Jn. 8:12), and we are also called the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). Now, how can we, who were full of darkness (Eph. 5:8), be lights to the world? – Because we have been given the Holy Spirit and it is the Spirit of God that gives light, understanding, and wisdom (see Dan. 5:14 NKJV). Secondly we have been granted the Word of God which is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105). God's Word gives light (Ps. 119:130) and, as we hold forth the Word of life, we give forth light (Phil.2:15-16). And finally, we are told that when we gather together as an assembly, we, as a lampstand, give forth light (Rev 1:20).

When we fellowship with one another in church, gathering around God's Word, and when we minister to one another through the gifts of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is giving light to all.

Now, how do we know this? – Because the spiritual gifts are called manifestations of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:7-11), and the root of the Greek word translated “manifestation” means, “to shine.” This is why it is so important to understand that we serve not by our natural talents, but by our spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are not natural talents. Spiritual gifts will give forth spiritual light, for they are manifestations of the Holy Spirit of God, while natural talents are simply manifestations of our self and will not give forth the light which is life (Jn. 1:4). The light of the Holy Spirit, which is the same light as that of our Lord, will effect life. As such, He is called the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), and it is only by such a life that we can be set free and grow to full spiritual maturity. Natural talents may produce Christian morality, but only spiritual gifts can produce a spiritual maturity, and when we fellowship with one another through the exercise of spiritual gifts, the Holy Spirit is giving forth light and life to all. And, of course, the same thought occurs when we fellowship in His Word – we are receiving both light and life (Prov. 6:23; Heb. 4:12).

The lampstand, therefore, foreshadowed the ministry aspect of the church meeting (I Cor. 14), whereby we give forth and

receive back, both life and light.²¹⁰

So we see that in the Old Testament we have the altar of incense, the table of showbread, and the lampstand. In the New Testament, (of which it is a symbol), we have the prayers, we have the breaking of bread, and we have the fellowship. The order of worship that we have in the Tabernacle actually points to the present time and refers to the threefold gathering and worship of the church.

Now, let us go on. We will see this order confirmed in Paul's epistles. Turn to the book of 1 Corinthians 11:1 NASB, Paul says,

“Be imitators of me, just as I am also of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions just as I delivered them to you.”

Now, you may say, “Well, wait a minute; I thought you said traditions are wrong or bad.” Well, yes, traditions of men are wrong, but traditions of God are not wrong. These are the traditions Paul is speaking about. The traditions that Paul handed verbally or in writing to the saints are the traditions of God. Today we have them as the very Word of God. These are the traditions of God, and these are what we must follow and we must hold to firmly. The traditions of men invalidate the traditions of God, and we must not hold to them (Mark 7:5-13). We, like the Lord Jesus, should be opposed to man-made traditions, but we should embrace God's traditions, which are now inscripturated in the completed Canon of God's Word.

²¹⁰ It is also interesting to note that it was on the first day of the week when God said, “Let there be light!” (Gen. 1:3). Consequently, it is also on the first day of the week when God calls the church to a fellowship that gives light! How wonderful, the fellowship of the church, which gives light on the first day of the week in the *new creation*, is foreshadowed by God's command for light to shine forth on the first day of the week in the *old creation*!

That is why Paul was praising the church in Corinth. They were holding to the traditions of God, which he had delivered to them. They were not creating their own traditions, *or new ways of worship*, but were holding faithfully to the traditions of God. He was praising them that they were still practicing them, but the way that they were practicing them, had to be corrected.

So if I Cor. 11-14 contains the traditions of God that they were faithful in maintaining, but Paul simply had to correct the way in which they were practicing them, what was the order of the traditions and what was the first thing he had to correct in Chapter 11:2 down to verse 16? Prayer!

These verses refer to that first aspect of worship practiced by the church. It is the aspect of prayer. He talks about correcting their prayers and prophesying. They were doing good, by first having prayers because that was part of the tradition that he had delivered. The church gathered together first to pray (I Tim. 2:1), and that was good, but the way they were doing it was wrong. And so Paul corrects some problems in the assembly. The men must be careful to pray and prophesy unto God with their heads uncovered and the sisters should do the same with their heads covered.

(It should be briefly noted that as this prophesying is done unto God in the context (vs. 13), this cannot be referring to the prophesying of chapter 14 where the sisters are enjoined to remain silent. There are three types of prophesying in Scripture. First, there is praise and thanksgiving to God (see I Chr. 25: 1-3; I Sam 10:5; Ex. 15: 20-21; Acts 2:11 cf. 2:17). Secondly, there is telling forth the future, and thirdly, there is speaking forth the mind of God on a particular issue unto God's people – what we might call preaching today).

(Now, obviously, God does not need to be told about the future, nor does He need someone to tell Him what His own mind is. Consequently, since the prayer and prophesying in I Cor. 11 is directed to God (vs.13), and not to man (unlike I Cor. 14:3 where prophesying is directed to man), it must be referring to our prayers *and that aspect of prophesying we call thanksgiving* (as in I Chr.

25:1-3) – praise that is directed by the Holy Spirit unto God. This is the occupation of all the saints. Men and women together, but it needed to be done in an orderly fashion. Therefore, Paul corrects some problems).

Then after that, Paul moves onto the Lord's Table. Isn't that interesting? At first, he corrects the prayers of the church, now he is going to correct the breaking of bread meeting. Then after the breaking of bread meeting, he talks about the fellowship of the church as seen in chapter 12-14.

I Cor. 12:1 states –

“Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to unaware.”

And in I Cor. 14:1 he says –

“Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.”

And in I Cor. 14:3 he says –

“But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation, and consolation.”

And we know that this type of edification (building), which comes from the exercise of spiritual gifts, results in increase, growth – life (Eph. 4:16).

This is the third type of prophesying, that is different from the prophesying of chapter eleven, for this prophesying is directed *to men and not to God*, and so this is the aspect of the church gathering where the Scripture asks the sisters to remain silent (14: 34-35).

Now this type of prophesying, which is the result of revelation (vs. 30), will obviously give forth light. We commonly call it today, the illumination of the Spirit.

Eph. 1:17-18 speaks of this truth –

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”

And in I Cor. 14:26 Paul tells us this,

“What is the outcome then brethren, when you assemble each one of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation, let all things be done for edification.”

And so, what does this type of meeting correspond to? It corresponds to the fellowship of Acts 2:42, which corresponds to the lampstand in the holy place which gives light.

Therefore, we see a broad threefold gathering or worship of the church in the book of Corinthians. First, there are the prayers, then the breaking of bread, then the fellowship or ministry. All three aspects of their gathering together had to be corrected. It was good that they were gathering according to the pattern of God's Word. Yes, it was good that they held to the traditions of God, as the apostle taught them. It was good they were worshipping God in the prescribed way. However, it was bad in the way in which they were doing it, so Paul wanted to correct them.

Do we see the pattern here? What does this type of gathering bring to God? It brings honour to Him. Why? Because in gathering together in a threefold manner she is expressing the nature of the Godhead: The triune nature – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The prayers are first made by the church to God the Father. We also see this in 1 Timothy. Paul tells his young co-worker:

“But in case I am delayed, I write so you will know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of all truth.” I Tim. 3:15

Paul is writing to Timothy so that he will know how he should act in the gathering together of the saints. He is telling Timothy, this is the way you should behave when the church gathers together in assembly.

And in Chapter 2:1-4, what is the very first thing he tells Timothy is important for the saints to remember when they gather together in assembly? He says,

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

The first thing that he wanted Timothy to do, and the first thing he wanted Timothy to remind the church in Ephesus about, is that in their gathering they should conduct themselves first with prayer.

The *first thing* the church is called to do when she gathers together on the Lord's Day is to offer supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings to God the Father.²¹¹

²¹¹ We realize some believe this is not referring to the first thing a church should do, but to the first exhortation Paul has for Timothy. This is accomplished in modern translations by joining “first of all” with the verb “I exhort.” However, older translations, like the King James Version join “first of all” with the verb “be made,” showing us that it is referring to the first thing the church is called do in its public worship. In the Greek the verb “I exhort” precedes “first of all,” and the verb “be made” actually immediately follows “first of all” and is not at the end of the sentence like the English shows. “First of all” can be joined to either verb. It is possible to understand it both ways. Older commentators see it joined with “be made,” and thus believe it refers to public worship. New commentators see it joined to “I exhort,” and so believe it refers to the first of Paul's exhortation. According to Greek syntax it can be joined to either verb,

The emphasis is on the Father. Yes, the Son is involved and the Holy Spirit is involved. The next verse says, for there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and Jude says that our prayers should be done in the Holy Spirit. One Person of the Godhead never acts without the other two, *but the main emphasis here is the Father*, because it is His desire that we pray because He loves the entire world, and it was He who *first* gave His Only-Begotten Son.

He wants the church, when gathered together, to first pray for the salvation of all men. That is the first calling of the church. We must be an assembly that gathers together first of all to pray for that which is on our Father's heart. Our first act of worship as an assembly should be to pray for a lost world. What greater love and sacrifice was there, than the Father giving us His Son? What tremendous love God must have for lost sinners. When we begin our worship with prayer for the lost, we are reflecting the very heart of God. We are acknowledging the great sacrifice the Father had to make in giving His Son. What a terrible thing it is to forget or to minimize that great sacrifice. God's love for sinners was so great

and only Paul knows for sure which one he meant it to be joined with, but when understood within the greater context of God's Word, we believe the King James Version translated it correctly, and that it refers to the first thing an assembly is called to when they gather together.

Nevertheless, if indeed, it refers to the first exhortation to Timothy, it is still interesting to note that the first thing Paul corrects is the prayer of the assembly, the same as he did with the church in Corinth. However, the correction is not in reference to the manner of praying (i.e. head coverings), but rather the content of their praying. Apparently, some in Ephesus were becoming "politicized" in their thinking, (perhaps like the Zealots in Israel), and rather than praying for those in authority, they would rail against those in authority. Perhaps, it was the same spirit that Jude writes about in his epistle (Jude 8 NKJV). Paul reminds them of the true heart of the Father and that Jesus died for all, and, as thus, all should be prayed for with the love of God. Paul believed, that every ruler, no matter how evil, was set in place under the sovereign will of God (Rom. 13:1-5), and so should be honored, respected and prayed for.

that He was willing to even strike His own Son. Do we realize how hard that must have been? When we pray first for sinners we are humbly acknowledging the Father's great sacrifice and love.

We stated before, that we were one through the name, which was given to us by the Lord Jesus – the name of the Father. We are all his children. Well, as children we should be like our Father. His desires should be our desires. The Father's desire is that we, as a church, gather together for “the prayers” – prayers for those whom He loves, thanksgiving for His care and providence, and prayers for the needs of the assembly in order that we might lead a tranquil and peaceful life. *When we do that, we give honour primarily to the Father, and are showing forth His character.*

Then after the prayers, what comes? – The breaking of bread. Who is the one that primarily receives the honour in the breaking of bread? It is the *Son*. He says, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” Yes, the Father receives honour in the breaking of bread. Yes, the Holy Spirit receives honour in the breaking of bread. *But, the primary Person of the Blessed Trinity that receives honour is the Son Himself.* He says, “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

So the church gathers together secondly, to give honour to the Son. It is so important that the church break bread every Sunday. Otherwise, the Son is not receiving His honour on the Lord's Day. The whole purpose of the church is to give honour to the Son. How can we give honour to the Son, and then forget the whole meeting and gathering that He gave us to remember Him by? How can we give proper honour to the Son when we observe the Lord's Table at the end of a meeting once a month, or once a quarter, rather than every Lord's Day when the church gathers together to worship? To break bread every Lord's Day is according to the tradition of God! It is the tradition Paul delivered to the church in Corinth.

Therefore, we see the church needs to gather together first to give honour to the Father, by praying for those things which are close to His heart and the things we need as His children. Secondly,

she needs to gather together to break bread so that she can remember her dear Saviour and give the honour to Him as the Saviour of all mankind.

Then finally, we gather for fellowship through the proper exercise of spiritual gifts. By that, who do we give honour to? Yes, we give honour to the Father because all things begin with the Father. Yes, we give honour to the Son because we are all members of His Body. *But, primarily in the fellowship meeting, we give honour to the Holy Spirit because we give him His rightful place among the assembly of the saints.*

Look at 1 Corinthians 12:7:

“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good, to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; and to another faith by the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit.”

Now look at verse 11:

“But the one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one, just as He wills.”

When we meet as an assembly for fellowship, and have a meeting with not just one minister doing all the work, but a meeting where all the saints are being encouraged to exercise their spiritual gifts, who are we honoring? – *The Holy Spirit*, and so the circle is completed.

This is the threefold worship of the church. We gather together first to pray, and by that, we give honour to the Father. Secondly, we gather to break bread and by that, we give honour to the Son. And thirdly, we gather together to fellowship by ministering to one another through the use of spiritual gifts and in

that we give honour to the Holy Spirit.²¹²

²¹² Perhaps it would be good to state here that even though the order of our gathering has been made evident in Scripture, we would be well guarded to not turn it into a legalism. We prefer exhortation, not a legalistic spirit. We walk by grace, not by law. Scripture does not give us a specific command to worship *in this order*. However, we should keep in mind that *example is a strong basis for practice*. We meet on Sundays because of the example of the early church. There is not a verse that gives a specific command for the church to meet on Sundays, but who can deny that there is ample evidence that it was the common practice of the early church; and since we are commanded to imitate the example of the apostles (I Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9), we base our practice today on that example, and so meet on Sundays. In the same way, there is ample evidence that the church met in this threefold manner, and so should be the example for our practice. At the minimum, if one rejects the specific order of prayers, breaking of bread, and the fellowship, *one cannot reject the fact that each of those three aspects are present in the meetings of the early church*, (even if one prefers to observe it in a different order).

Nevertheless, we still believe that the order of prayer, breaking of bread, and the fellowship is given more than ample evidence in Scripture as being the order and practice of the early church. Consider, for instance, these other examples in Scripture, in addition to the ones we have already mentioned.

In I Thess. 5:16-21 we have a hint as to the order of worship or the gathering of the Thessalonian church in Paul's mind when he wrote these verses. First, he begins in verses 16-17 with prayer and prophesying. In the next verse (vs. 18) he gives us a hint about the breaking of bread for which we are commanded to give thanks. And, finally, in verses 19-21 he hints about the exercise of spiritual gifts within the fellowship portion of the meeting.

Also, if one looks at Heb. 10:19-25, we see first prayers hinted about in verses 19-22, whereby we approach to the throne of God the Father through the mediatorship of our High Priest. Next in order, we see the admonition to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, which hints at the breaking of bread meeting where we are to hold fast to the hope of His coming by our shewing forth or proclaiming the Lord's death till He come. And, finally, in verses 24-25 we have the fellowship shown forth through the mutual exhortation and edification of the saints in

Therefore, the *true nature* of the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is manifested and expressed in the threefold worship and gathering of the church. And if it is done in love – (as he tells us in the middle of his corrections to the Corinthian Church, in chapter thirteen) – it, obviously, shows forth *His character*.

This is what God desires according to His Word – for His triune nature and character to be expressed by His Church upon this earth. His purpose, simply stated, is for His Trinitarian nature and divine character to be manifested every Lord’s Day by His church upon this earth.

Perhaps God desires to re-illuminate today the threefold worship and gathering of the saints together in His church. Of course, it does not mean those things can’t be done on other days, just as the early church, in some cases, broke bread on other days (Acts 2:46). Obviously, on other days, they had fellowship (Acts 19:9). So too, obviously on other days, they had prayers (Acts 12:5). There is nothing wrong with mid-week prayer meetings, or Bible studies in homes. *However, that should never negate what the Word of God shows us is due to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit on the Lord’s Day.*

We should pray every day, but we should not do away with the most important time of prayer, the time when the church gathers together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Lord’s Day to worship and to bear witness to His nature. We may break bread on other days, but we should not do away with the most important time to break bread, the time when the church gathers together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Lord’s Day to worship and to bear witness to His character.

In addition, we may have Bible Studies and fellowship during the week but we should not do away with the most important time of fellowship, the time when the church gathers together in the

love.

So, one can see that the specific order of “the prayers, the breaking of bread, and the fellowship” is assuredly hinted at, if not made evident in many different places in Scripture.

name of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Lord's Day to worship and to bear witness to His purpose and all that He is.

Dear brethren, this is no mere matter of personal preference. Paul tells us these injunctions of his are the commandments of the Lord. He admonishes us all to recognize this fact. At the close of this section of I Corinthians he writes –

“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.” I Cor. 14: 37

The Lord desires us to meet together in this threefold manner. He foreshadowed it for us in the Tabernacle and gave it to us as an example in the Book of Acts. This manner of church gathering and worship is the “tradition of God” that we would be wise to follow (I Cor. 11:1). In fact, according to II Thess. 2:15, we are told to hold fast to this and to all “traditions of God.”

How sad it is that today, the “traditions of God” have been replaced with the “traditions of men.” Men have altered God’s prescribed ways and, in their place, have substituted their own ways.

Many churches have relegated the prayers of the church to Wednesdays or some other day. Many other churches have relegated communion, or breaking of bread to once a month. And many other churches have done away with “the fellowship” altogether, relegating the ministry to one man only and completely ignoring the injunction of I Cor. 14:26 –

“Well, then, my brothers, whenever you meet let everyone be ready to contribute a psalm, a piece of teaching, a spiritual truth, or a ‘tongue’ with an interpreter...” Phillip’s Modern English (paraphrase)²¹³

Because of this, how appropriate, today, is the warning of Paul in I Cor. 14: 37-38 –

²¹³ *The New Testament in Four Versions*, (Christianity Today, Inc., Washington DC, 1965) pg. 537

“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” I Cor. 14:37-38

In other words, if one does not understand the importance of these commandments of church worship and gathering, he or she cannot be a spiritual Christian. Even though such a one may claim to understand the will of God, such a one is, in reality, ignorant. And as such, Paul says, let such a one *be* ignorant!

Now, perhaps, we would never have the boldness or authority to say that, but God’s Word does. One might even think it a little harsh on the part of the apostle Paul to say that, but Paul understood the importance of these commandments. He understood the danger of presumption in altering the ways of God (Heb. 8:5). He understood the spiritual principle to “be careful” in the things of the Lord (Deut. 6:3, 25; 8:1; 11:32; 12:32; I Cor. 3:10 NASB). And, most importantly, he understood the danger of men pursuing that innate desire to worship God according to their *own desires and understanding*. These, indeed, are matters, most important, to ponder.

O Lord, may Thy Church recognize Thy commandments given to us, as revealed to us in the book of Acts and in I Cor. 11-14. May we realize Thy church is first called to gather together to pray in accordance with Thy Father’s desire. May we see that we are called together to break bread the first day of every week in remembrance, dear Saviour, of You and Thy manifold mercy and love. And may we all come to understand that Thy church is called together to fellowship – to manifest those spiritual gifts granted to her under the direction and guidance of the Blessed Holy Spirit. Amen.

May this be our prayer – may all churches gather together every Lord’s Day in the name of our Lord Jesus to worship and give

testimony to the *very nature and character of our Thrice Holy God.*
Amen.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

SECTION 1

Q. Who is God?

A. God is the Creator

(Gen: 1:1,26 -27; Ec. 12:1; Isa. 43:1; I Pet. 4:19)

Q. Is He only a Creator?

A. No, He is also a Father.

(Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jn. 20:17; Gal. 1:3)

Q. Whom is He a Father of?

A. He is the Father of His Only-Begotten Son.

(Jn. 1:14,18; 3:16,35; Rom. 15:6)

Q. Did He precede His Son?

A. No, His Son is Eternal.

(Micah 5:2; Jn. 1:1; 17:5)

Q. Who is the Holy Spirit?

A. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, who proceeded from the Father through the Son.

(Jn. 15:26; Titus 3:4-6; Rev. 22:1)

Q. Did the Father precede the Holy Spirit?

A. No, the Holy Spirit is Eternal.

(Heb. 9:14; I Cor. 2:10-11)

Q. How could the Father not precede His Son? Do we not precede the sons we beget?

A. Human paternity is not a pattern for Divine paternity, but

rather, human paternity is patterned after Divine paternity. All things have their source in God and are analogous to Him and not Him to us.

(Gen. 1: 26-27; Rom. 1:20; 5:14; Col. 1:16-18; 3:10; Rev. 3:14)

Q. Then what analogy does human paternity have in Divine paternity?

A. Human paternity shows us *aspects* of Divine paternity. The analogy cannot show us all aspects of Divine paternity since humans exist in time, and as the Son of God was not begotten in time, the analogy is limited. In addition, in human paternity, there is separation of substance; this cannot be true of Divine paternity, as the Father and Son are consubstantial and co-eternal. However, it does show us the principle of procession, in that a human son proceeds and is begotten by a father, as the Eternal Son eternally proceeds and is eternally begotten by the Father.

(Gen. 5: 3-32; Matt. 1: 1-17)

Q. What do you mean the Son of God was not begotten in time? Does not time travel back into eternity past as well as eternity future?

A. No, time had a beginning. Time has not always existed. Time is a property of this universe.

(Gen. 1:1; Jude 25 (NASB); Titus 1:2 (NKJV))

Q. So what existed before time began?

A. The God who is Eternal.

(Gen. 21:33; Ps. 90:2; Isa. 43:13)

Q. What is Eternity?

A. Eternity is the lack of time, which means an existence where there is no succession of moments. One thing cannot precede another thing for that would indicate successive moments. There is no past, for that would indicate a future, and there is no future, for that would indicate a past. There is only an ever present “now.”

Whoever exists in eternity does not have a past, for such a One has always been.

(Isa. 43:13 cf. Ex. 3:14; Ps. 90:2)

Q. Who then has existed in Eternity?

A. Only the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(Isa. 43:13; 57:15; Micah 5:2; Jn. 1:1; Heb. 9:14; I Tim. 1:7)

Q. So neither the Father, Son, nor the Holy Spirit ever preceded or existed before one another?

A. That is correct. All three have always existed.

(Ps. 2:7; 90:2; Micah 5:2; Isa. 9:6; Heb. 9:14; Jn. 1:1)

Q. If they are all eternal does that mean the Son is also called God?

A. Yes.

(Isa. 9:6; Jn. 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8)

Q. Is the Holy Spirit called God?

A. Yes.

(I Sam. 10:6,7; Acts 5: 3-4)

Q. Does that mean there are three Gods?

A. No, there is only one God.

(Deut. 6:4; Jn. 10:30; I Cor. 8:4; Jam. 2:19)

Q. Then how can the Son and Holy Spirit be called God?

A. It depends on how you define the word "God." If what you mean by the word, God, is a Person that is a Divine Being. Then, no, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not separate Divine Beings. There is only one Divine Being in whom subsists Three Persons. But if what you mean by the word "God" is a "title" ascribed to a Person within the one Divine Being to show possession of the same Divine Substance. Then yes, the Son is called God and the Holy Spirit is called God, for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all possess the same Divine Substance, and so are all co-eternal, co-equal, and

co-essential. Not three Gods or Divine Beings, but one God or Divine Being subsisting in Three Persons.
(Isa. 48:16-17; Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14)

SECTION 2

Q. How does the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to one another?

A. They relate to one another as Persons.
(Matt. 3:17; Jn. 12:28; 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:13-15; 17:1)

Q. What does the term “Person” mean?

A. The term “Person,” when used of the Father, shows a substantial, attributal and personal subsistent within the Divine Being. When used of the Son and Holy Spirit it shows us a consubstantial, attributal and personal subsistent within the Divine Being.

(Jn. 1:1; 3:35; 10:30; Rom 1:20; Isa. 46:9)

Q. How many Persons are there in the Divine Being?

A. Three.
(Matt. 28: 19; II Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6)

Q. What does substantial mean?

A. Substantial denotes the “what” of existence. It tells us the Godhead possesses substance. While we do not know the substance of God, we do know it is spirital, since God is Spirit.

(Jn. 4:24; Col. 2:9)

Q. Are all Three Persons substantial?

A. No, only the Father is substantial. The Son and the Holy Spirit are consubstantial. They possess the same substance, without diminution, of the Father.

(Jn. 1:1; 5: 26; 10:30; Col. 1:19; 2:9; Jn. 14:16 cf. 15:26)

Q. What does the term subsistent mean?

A. The term subsistent denotes a personal self-consciousness within the Divine Being that subsists in a peculiar manner. It tells us how the substance of the Godhead subsists. In the Godhead there are three subsistents – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
(Ex. 3:13-14; Isa. 45:5; 46:9; Jn. 8:24)

Q. What does subsist mean?

A. Subsist bespeaks the mode of existence of a Person within the Godhead. There are three modes of existence within the Trinity: paternal, filial, and spirital mode of existence. Each Person subsists in His own peculiar manner. The Father is unbegotten and so subsists in a paternal manner, the Son is begotten and so subsists in a filial manner, and the Holy Spirit is spirated and so subsists in a spirital manner.
(Rom. 8:9; 11:33-36; I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6; Jn. 1:14,18; 15:26)

Q. What does attributal denote?

A. Attributal signifies all necessary and discernible characteristics of the Divine substance. In relation to God, attributes such as love, holiness, and omnipotence are some characteristics of the Divine Substance.
(I Jn. 4:8; Isa. 6:3; Job 42:2; Rom. 8:38-39)

Q. What do the terms “generate” and “spirate” denote?

A. The term generate is another term for begotten. The Son is begotten by the Father and so is generated, and the Holy Spirit is neither generated nor begotten by the Father and so is spoken of as having been spirated. Within generation and spiration there is a communication of the Father's substance, a production of subsistentiaity, and impartation of all the Father's attributes, save His paternity.
(Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16; 5:26; 14:9; 15:26; Titus 3:4-6; Isa. 9:6)

Q. Are these acts done in time?

A. No, the begetting or generation of the Son is not done in time, but bespeaks His eternal relationship to the Father in eternity, and so is referred to as an eternal begetting, and the same is true of the spiration of the Holy Spirit. It is an eternal spiration. They are two modes of the one eternal movement within the Godhead.
(Mic. 5:2; Jn. 1:1, 14; 17:5)

Q. What does eternal movement denote?

A. Eternal movement is the term used to denote the one indivisible act of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is defined as perichoresis and is understood by two modes: procession and reciprocation. And since God is simple in His Being, all activity of the Godhead must be understood within this one eternal movement.
(Mic. 5:2; Jn. 5:19, 26, 30; I Cor. 15:28; Col. 1:15; Heb 12:29)

SECTION 3

Q. What does the term “Godhead” mean?

A. Godhead is a term used to identify the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existing in their unity. In the Authorized Version of the Bible, the Greek words “theios” (Acts 17:29), “theiotes” (Rom. 1:20), and “theotes” (Col. 2:9) are translated Godhead. However, in this study, since those words receive distinct nomenclatures, Godhead is used to bespeak the Trinity.
(Acts. 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9)

Q. Is the term Trinity found in the Bible?

A. No, the term “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, but is a term assigned to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to explain how they all relate to one another. Matthew 28: 19 tells us disciples were baptized in “...the name (singular) of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The term “Trinity” is the designation used by the Church to indicate that singular name. To baptize in the name of the Trinity, would mean to baptize in the name of the Father, and

Son, and Holy Spirit. Although, the term Trinity is not found in the Bible it does not mean the doctrine of the Trinity is not found in the Bible. The doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible is known as the doctrine of the “Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit,” and it fills the pages of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.
(Matt. 28:19; I Jn. 5:7; Gen.-Rev.)

Q. What does it mean that God is simple?

A. If God is immutable, meaning He does not change, since change presupposes imperfection, then it goes without saying that God must exist in simplicity. Simplicity is from the Latin “simplicitas” and means that God is not made up of parts or compounds. He exists within the simplicity of His unity and acts within the unity of His simplicity. It is a term, which is only possible with one who is eternal and is not bound by successive temporality.

(Ps. 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17)

Q. If the Trinity is not made up of parts, does that mean that it would be wrong to say the Three Persons are three parts of the Godhead.

A. Yes, the Three Persons are three distinctions within the Godhead, not three parts. Distinctions are defined by three facets: sameness, difference, and distinguishability.

(Jn. 1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 14:16)

Q. What does sameness denote?

A. Within the Godhead, sameness tells us that all Three Persons possess the one and the same substance, simultaneously, and without any diminution.

(Jn. 1:1; 10:30; 15:26; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3)

Q. What do you mean without diminution?

A. Without diminution means that the Father communicates all the Divine Substance, save His Paternity, to the Son and Holy

Spirit, without any diminishing or division of that Substance. The Substance is not parted out as one might divide up a pie. All Three Persons possess the one whole pie simultaneously and thus are known to possess the one and same substance without any diminution of that substance.

(Jn. 1:1. 10:30; 15:26; Col. 1:19; 2:9)

Q. What does difference denote?

A. Difference tells us that even though each Person possesses the same substance, they all possess it in a different manner or mode. The Father possesses it in an unbegotten mode, and so is paternal, the Son possesses it in a begotten mode, and so is filial, and the Holy Spirit possesses it in a spirated mode, and so is spirital.

(Jn. 1:18; 15:26; 20:17; Matt. 28:19; Rom. 8:9)

Q. What does distinguishability denote?

A. Distinguishability tells us that since each Person possesses the same substance in a different mode of existence, then each Person's attributes must be distinguishable in that the Father's attributes are paternal attributes, the Son's are filial attributes, and the Holy Spirit's are spirital attributes. Other than being distinguishable by the manner in which they subsist, they are the one and the same attributes. For instance, the attribute of love within the Godhead is the same love for all Three Persons, save that the Father exercises that same love in a paternal way, and the Son exercises that love in a filial way, and the Holy Spirit exercises that same love in a spirital way. This must be so, because they all possess the same substance, and attributes are simply characteristics of that one substance.

(I Jn. 4:8; Rom. 8:35; 15:30; Titus 2:11; II Cor. 13:14; Zech. 12:10; Heb. 10:29)

Q. Is there a term, which bespeaks this distinction, yet simplicity, within the Blessed Trinity?

A. Yes, the term "unity," which we define by consubstantiality, coinherence, and communality.(Deut. 6:4; Eph. 4:3; Jn. 1:1; 10:30;

I Jn. 5:7 (NKJV); Gen. 1:26; Prov. 8:30; Isa. 6:8)

Q. What is consubstantiality?

A. Consubstantiality is the term used of the Son and Holy Spirit to demonstrate that they possess the one and same substance that the Father possesses without division or diminution. Thus, they are one.

(Deut. 6:4; Jn. 1:1; 10:30; 14:16; Rom. 8:9; Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9)

Q. What is coinherence?

A. Coinherence means that all Three Persons indwell one another. Coinherence is based upon consubstantiality. Since all Three Persons possess the same substance, and since that substance is characterized by being omnipresent, then it goes without saying that all Three Persons must coinhere in one another since all Three Persons are everywhere together. They all fill up infinity together. In finite terms, there is not one place or part of a place where the other Persons are not also. Therefore, they must be in each other.

(Jn. 10:38; 14:10,11, 16-18; Rom. 8:2; I Cor. 2:10)

Q. What is communality?

A. Communality is the term that tells us that all Three Persons move in perfect harmony. If they all possess the same substance, and each coinhere in each other, then they must be in perfect communion, since they all exercise the same attributes. For instance, the Father loves the Son with a perfect love, and since the Son possesses that same attribute of love, He must respond with a perfect love. And as the Holy Spirit possesses that same love and coinheres in the Father and in the Son, He must also respond with that same perfection of love.

(Gen. 1:26; Prov. 8:30; Jn. 8:16; Mark 12:29-30)

SECTION 4

Q. How does one define the oneness of the Godhead?

A. The oneness of the Godhead is defined by essence, nature, and being.

(Jn. 4:24; Col. 2:9; Rom. 1:20; II Pet. 1:4; I Jn. 1:5; 4:8)

Q. What is the Essence of the Godhead?

A. The Essence of the Godhead bespeaks the “what of existence.” Essence pertains to the quiddity of an object, i.e. that which makes an object what it is – its substance. It tells us that the Godhead is defined as One Essence where all Three Persons possess the one and same substance, which is ever being communicated by the Father in the begetting and spiration of the Son and Holy Spirit respectively.

(Jn. 4:24; Col. 2:9; I Jn. 1:5; 4:8)

Q. What is the Nature of the Godhead?

A. The Nature of the Godhead tells us of the “how of existence,” whereas Essence told the “what of existence.” Nature tells us “how” that one Divine Substance exists. In relation to the Trinity, we know that the Godhead exists in a Triune manner. The Substance subsists in a paternal, filial, and spirital manner. God's nature is Triune. It tells us how God the Father exists ontologically together with His Son and the Holy Spirit.

(Matt. 28:19; Rom. 1:20)

Q. What is the Being of the Godhead?

A. Being tells us the “kind of existence” within the Godhead. The Divine Being is defined as Essence characterized by its attributal qualities. As the Divine Being is seen from the perspective of the Father ever imparting His attributes to the Son and Holy Spirit, it results in a Divine Being, which exists in a perfect communion. The Godhead is characterized by a perfect and communal kind of existence where all Three Persons move in perfect harmony.

(Gen. 1:26; 11:7; Isa. 6:8; Lu. 4:1,14; Jn. 3:34; 5:19, 30, II Pet. 1:4)

SECTION 5

Q. Has God given us any models whereby to understand His triune existence.

A. Yes, God has created the Universe, Man, and the Scriptures to correspond to His own Triune nature.

(Gen. 1:26; Rom. 1:20; Lu. 24:27, 44)

Q. How does the Universe correspond to Triune existence?

A. The Universe is a model to show us how the Divine nature is Triune. The Blessed Trinity has accomplished this by creating the universe to exist as a triunity consisting of three properties – Space, Matter, and Time. This analogy, of course, is limited, yet still; it bespeaks the Triune Nature of the Godhead.

(Gen. 1:1; Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20; Isa. 46:10; Heb. 11:3; Titus 1:29(NKJV); Ju. 25)

Q. How does Man correspond to Triune existence?

A. Man is a model to show us how the Divine nature is Triune by his being created as a triunity of properties in perfect unity – spirit, body, and soul. Man primarily shows us, not only the nature of the Godhead, but also the Character of God, in that Man can respond in love and obedience to his Creator.

(Gen. 1:26; 2:7; Deut. 6:5; Prov. 4:23; I Thess. 5:23)

Q. How does Scripture correspond to Triune Existence?

A. Scripture is a model, given to us by God, to show forth His triunity – in that Scripture exists as a perfect triunity of language, writing, and message. Scripture primarily shows us, not only the Triune nature of the Godhead, but also His character and most especially so, His Purpose.

(Ps. 119:89; Isa. 28:13; 40:7; Lu. 1:1-4; I Jn. 1:5)

Q. So there are three great revelatory Objects given to us by God in order to aid us in our understanding of the Blessed Trinity.

A. Yes, the Universe, Man, and Scripture.

(Gen. 1:1; Gen. 1:26; Lu. 24:27, 44; II Tim. 3:16)

Appendix B

Occurrences of the stem “-genes” in Ancient Greek as recorded in Liddell and Scott²¹⁴

Connotation of “derivation” or “born”	Connotation of “class” or “kind”	No translation available	Varied meanings	English Definition
			ἄειγενής	everlasting
	ἄετογενής			bearing a mark in the shape of an eagle
ἀφρογενής				foam-born
ἀγενής				unborn, uncreated
		αἰειγενής		
Αἰγυπιογενής				of Egyptian race
αἰθηρογενής				born in ether, sprung from ether
ἄλιγενής				sea-born
ἄλλογενής				of another race, a stranger
	ἀμφιγενής			of doubtful gender,
	ἀμπελογενής			of vine kind,
	ἀνομογενής			of different kind,
	ἄνομοιογενής			of different kind,
ἄρσενογενής				male,
ἄρτιγενής				just born
	ἄρτιογενής			of the even class
			ἀρχηγενής	causing the first

²¹⁴ Sourced from – Perseus Digital Library Project. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Updated Mar. 31,2009. Tufts University. Accessed Oct. 1, 2009 <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

				beginning of
Ἀσιαγενής				of Asiatic descent,
Ἀσιατογενής				of Asian birth
	ἀσυγγενής			not akin,
Ἀτλαγενής				sprung from Atlas
αὐθιγενής				born on the spot, born in the country, native
αὐτογενής				self-produced,
βοηγενής				born of an ox
		βουγενής		
βραδυγενής				late born
		Βρησαγενής		
		Δαλογενής		
Δαρειογενής				born from Darius
δευτερογενής				produced later,
Δηλογενής				Delos-born
		διαγενής		
διδυμογενής				twin-born
	διγενής			of doubtful sex,
Διογενής				sprung from Zeus,
διογενής				descended from Zeus, Zeus-born
Διθυραμβογενής				Bacchus-born
δρακοντογενής				dragon-gendere d,
δυσγενής				low-born
ἐβδομαγενής				born on the seventh day
ἐγγενής				innate, belonging to one's family
		ἐκγενής		
ἐλειογενής				marsh-born
ἐνδογενής				born in the house
			ἐπιγενής	growing after
	ἕτερογενής			of different kinds

εὐγενής				well-born, of noble race, of high descent
			εὐγενής	well
	φιλοσυγενής	εὐθυγενής		loving one's relatives,
φοινικογενής				Phoenicianborn
	φθερσιγενής			destroying the race
			φθορηγενής	breeding corruption
		γαηγενής		
γηγενής				earthborn
ἠπειρογενής				born
			ἡριγενής	a day
	ἰδιογενής			mating only with its kind
Ἴδογενής				born on Ida
Ἰνδογενής				born in India
ἰθαγενής				born in lawful wedlock, legitimate
Καδμογενής				Cadmus-born
κακογενής				base-born
		καταγενής		
κοχχογενής				born from a shell
κοινογενής				hybridizing
Κοιογενής				born of Koios
κορυφαγενής				head-born
κρατογενής				head-born
Κρητογενής				born in Crete
		κριογενής		
κρυφογενής				secretly born
Κυπρογενής				the Cyprusborn
κυθηγενής				born in secret,
		λαδογενής		
		Λατογενής		
Λητογενής				born of Leto
		Λιβυαφγενής		
λιμναγενής				born at
λινογενής				born
Λυκηγενής				Lycian-born

μελιγενής				ash-born
	μεσσογενής			middle-aged
μεταγενής				born after
μηλογενής				sheep-born
μιξεριφαρνογενής				of kid and lamb mixed together
μιξογενής				of mixed descent
μοιρηγενής				child of destiny, Fortune's child
μονογενής				only-begotten, single
		μουνογενής		
		νεαγενής		
νεπηγενής				just born
Νειλογενής				Nile-born
νεογενής				new-born
νοθαγενής				base-born
νυμφαγενής				nymph-born
νυμφογενής				nymph-born
ὄφιογενής				serpent-gendere d
οικογενής				born in the house, homebred
ὄμβρηγενής				rain-born,
ὄμηγενής				born together, twin,
	ὄμογενής			of the same race
	ὄμοιογενής			akin, of like kind
ὄνειρογενής				born of a dream,
ὄρειγενής				mountain-born,
	ὄρنيθογενής			bird kind,
	ὄρογενής			productive of terms
ὄστεογενής				produced in the bones
ὄψιγενής				late-born
παλαιγενής				ancient - born, full of years.
		παλαιογενής		[unavailable]
παλιγενής				born again

	<u>πανευγενής</u>			most noble
		<u>παντογενής</u>		
<u>πατρογενής</u>				begotten of the father
<u>Περσογενής</u>				of Persian origin
<u>πετρογενής</u>				rock-born
		<u>πετρογενής</u>		
<u>πληγενής</u>				half-brother, half-sister,
		<u>ποικιλογενής</u>		
<u>πολυγενής</u>				of many families,
<u>ποντογενής</u>				seaborn,
			<u>πορνογενής</u>	spurius,
<u>πρεσβυγενής</u>				first-born
<u>προγενής</u>				born before, primaeval
	<u>προσγενής</u>			akin
			<u>προσθαγενής</u>	previous
<u>προτερηγενής</u>				born sooner, older
<u>πρωτογενής</u>				first-born, primeval
		<u>Πυληγενής</u>		
<u>Πυλοιγενής</u>				born in Pylos, bred in Pylus
<u>πυριγενής</u>				born in fire
<u>πυρογενής</u>				fire-born
<u>πυρογενής</u>				made from wheat
<u>πυρσογενής</u>				fire-producing
<u>θαλασσογενής</u>				sea-born
		<u>θεαγενής</u>		
		<u>θειγενής</u>		
		<u>θειογενής</u>		
<u>θεογενής</u>				born of God
			<u>θερειγενής</u>	growing in summer
<u>Θηβαγενής</u>				Theban born
		<u>Θηβαγενής</u>		
<u>θηλυγενής</u>				of female sex, womanish
	<u>θνητογενής</u>			of mortal race
<u>Σινδογενής</u>				Indus-produced

Σουσιγενής				born at Susa
σπαρταγενής				producing the shrub spartos
συγγενής				inherited, inborn
Συριαγενής				Syrian-born
Ταρσογενής				born at Tarsus,
		ταυρογενής		
		τετραγενής		
τριγενής				thrice-born,
τριταιογενής				produced by tertian fever,
		Τριτογενής		
τυφλογενής				born blind,
ύδογενής				sprung from the water,
		ύλιγενής		
ύλογενής				born in the forest
	υπερευγενής			exceeding noble
			υστερογενής	not appearing until after the birth,
ώογενής				born of an egg,
			ώρογενής	who preside over the several hours of the day,
γαμαιγενής				earth-born
Χιογενής				of Chian growth
ψαλληγενής				sprung from harp-playing,
	ζωογενής			of animate kind, mortal
TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	
107	22	28	11	

Out of a total 168 occurrences of “genes” in various Greek words –
107 times it carried the sense of derivation, whether as descent or born.
22 times it carried the sense of class or kind.
28 times it was not defined.
11 times it had miscellaneous meanings.

Appendix C

Bible Translations of the Greek Word **Μονογενής**

Found throughout Church History in the New Testament Texts
John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; I John 4:9 & Heb. 11:17

Name	Ab.	Date	Translation of Μονογενής
Old Latin Translations	VTV	2 nd - 4 th cent.	only begotten (unigenitus, unicus) ²¹⁵
Vulgate	VUL	4 th cent.	only begotten (unigenitus)
Wycliffe New Testament	WNT	1384	only begotten ²¹⁶
Luther's New Testament	LNT	1522	only begotten (eingeborenen)
Tyndale Bible	TYN	1526	only begotten
The Geneva Bible	TGB	1560	only begotten
King James Version	KJV	1611	only begotten
English Revised Version	ESV	1885	only begotten
Darby's Translation	DAR	1890	only begotten
American Standard Version	ASV	1901	only begotten
Revised Standard Version	RSV	1952	only
New Catholic Edition	NCE	1953	only begotten
Reina Valera 1960 (Spanish)	RV	1960	only begotten (unigénito)
New American Standard Bible	NASB	1971, 1995	only begotten
Good News Bible	GNB	1976,	only
New International Ver.	NIV	1978	one and only
New King James Ver.	NKJV	1982	only begotten

²¹⁵ The majority translated it by unigenitus. (See Appendix D)

²¹⁶ Translated from Vulgate not original Greek.

New Jerusalem Bible	NJB	1985	only
New Revised Standard Version	NRSV	1989	only
Contemporary English Version	CEV	1995	only
God's Word	GW	1995	only
New Int. Readers Ver.	NIRV	1996	one and only
Holman Christian Standard Bible	HCSB	1999	one and only
English Standard Version	ESV	2001	only
The Message	MSG	2002	one and only
New Living Translation	NLT	2004	one and only

Appendix D

The Testimony of Old Latin Versions, Jerome and the Latin Vulgate

We mentioned before that when the writings of Irenaeus were translated into Latin, they translated the Greek word “monogenes” by the Latin word “unigenitus.” The same thing occurred when the Greek Scriptures were translated into Latin. In the majority of cases where the Greek word “monogenes” was applied to Christ, it was translated by the Latin word “unigenitus,” demonstrating that the early Latin Christians understood “monogenes” as “unigenitus.”

As was mentioned before, the word “unigenitus” is made up from two words, “*unicus*” which means “only” or “unique” and “*genitum*” which means to beget or bear. The word clearly means “only” or “uniquely” begotten, and it is this word which is used in the majority of cases to translate “monogenes” when speaking of Christ.

Below is a chart showing which word was used in the Old Latin Texts in those places where Christ is the subject matter.

Old Latin Texts of John 1:14; 1:18 & 3:16, 18

✓ = unigenitus for the Greek word μονογενης

0 = unicus for the Greek word μονογενης

Text	Jn 1:14	Jn 1:18	Jn 3:16	Jn 3:18
Codex Auren 8 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Bezae 5 th Century 400A.D.	missing	missing	0	0
Codex Brixianus 6 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Carnotensis 6 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Colbertinus 12 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Corbeiensis 5 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Gatianus 9 th Century 800 A.D.	✓	✓	?	✓
Codex Monacensis 6 th or 7 th Century	0	✓	✓	✓
Codex Palatinus 5 th Century	✓	0	0	0
Codex Rehdigeranus 8 th Century	missing	✓	✓	✓
Codex Sangallensis 48 5 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Sangallensis 60p4 9 th Century	✓	✓	?	✓
CodexSangermanensis Secundus 8 th Cent.	✓	✓	0	✓
Codex Usserianus Primus 7 th Cent.700 A.D.	missing	✓	0	✓
Codex Vercellensis 4 th Century	0	0	0	0
Codex Veronensis 5 th Century	✓	✓	0	✓
Codex Wurzburg/univ Mpthf67 9 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓

Some dismiss the assertion of this chart because they say that these Old Latin Texts were corrupted by Jerome's Vulgate translation. They claim that Jerome's use of *unigenitus* was influenced by a series of lectures by Gregory of Nazianzus. They assert that before Jerome studied with Gregory, he understood *monogenes* by *unicus*, but because of Gregory's influence, he changed his mind, and thus introduced the concept of *unigenitus*, "only begotten," into his own Latin translation, which, they then claim, corrupted the Old Latin Texts.

This story of Jerome and Gregory has been repeated over and over by many different people, but dear reader, there is not one shred of evidence to support such a conclusion. In fact, the whole assertion is mistaken. The statement is not true. Jerome believed the Lord Jesus to be the *Only-Begotten Son* before he ever studied with Gregory. Jerome didn't need Gregory to teach him the Faith concerning the nature of Christ, for he was ordained a priest before he ever studied under Gregory and, as such, he would have already agreed with one of the first Statements of Faith of the Church, the Nicene Creed, which declared 54 years before that Christ was "*monogenes*," or "*unigenitus*."

This is all the more confirmed for us because during that time, when he was ordained a priest, the church in Antioch was undergoing the Meletian Schism, and it was with the Eustathian group that Jerome finally allied himself and whose bishop, Paulinus, ordained him as priest. The Eustathian group was the group who adhered minutely to the Nicene Creed, and which believed the Lord was *monogenes*, in other words, *unigenitus*.

Jerome believed in the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father before he ever studied with Gregory. Gregory did not introduce some new doctrine to Jerome, nor did he change his mind.

The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia gives us the following chronology.

"Returning to Antioch, in 378 or 379, he was ordained by Bishop Paulinus, apparently with some unwillingness and on condition that he

still continue his ascetic life. Soon afterward he went to Constantinople to pursue his study of Scripture under the instruction of Gregory Nazianzen. There he seems to have spent two years; the next three (382-385) he was in Rome again, in close intercourse with Pope Damasus and the leading Roman Christians.”²¹⁷

Therefore, one sees that the assertion that Jerome came to understand that *monogenes* meant *unigenitus* and that the Lord was the Only Begotten of the Father, all because of his studies with Gregory, is unfounded and misleading. His time with Gregory came after he had already asserted his belief in the eternal generation of the Son.

This is also easily demonstrated by reading Jerome’s writings. Before he ever joined Gregory, Jerome wrote his *Dialogue against the Luciferians*. It was written around 379 A.D. The Introduction to this work in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Edition*, says the following about this treatise.

“This Dialogue was written about 379, seven years after the death of Lucifer, and very soon after Jerome’s return from his hermit life in the desert of Chalcis. Though he received ordination from Paulinus, who had been consecrated by Lucifer, he had no sympathy with Lucifer’s narrower views, as he shows plainly in this Dialogue.”²¹⁸

It is totally misleading to say Jerome did not adhere to the doctrine of the Only Begotten until after he studied with Gregory, as this treatise will clearly show.

²¹⁷ Jackson, Samuel Macauley, D.D., LL.D, Editor-in-Chief, *The new Schaff-Herzog encyclopedia of religious knowledge: embracing Biblical, historical, doctrinal, and practical theology and Biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical biography from the earliest times to the present day Volume 6* (Funk and Wagnalls Co. New York and London, 1910) Pg 126

²¹⁸ Schaff, Philip, Ed. Wace, Henry, Ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series Vol. VI*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1993), page 319

“And all the more because the current profession of faith no longer exhibited on the face of it anything profane. “We believe,” said they, “in one true God, the Father Almighty. This we also confess: We believe in the only-begotten Son of God, who, before all worlds, and before all their origins, was born of God. The only- begotten Son, moreover, we believe to be born alone of the Father alone, God of God, like to his Father who begot Him, according to the Scriptures; whose birth no one knows, but the Father alone who begot Him.” Do we find any such words inserted here as “There was a time, when he was not?” Or, “The Son of God is a creature though not made of things which exist.” No. This is surely the perfection of faith to say we believe Him to be God of God. Moreover, they called Him the only begotten, “born alone of the Father.” What is the meaning of born? Surely, not made. His birth removed all suspicion of His being a creature. They added further, “Who came down from heaven, was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified by Pontius Pilate, rose again the third day from the dead, ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of the Father, who will come to judge the quick and the dead.” There was the ring of piety in the words, and no one thought that poison was mingled with the honey of such a proclamation...”

“...Lastly, at the very time when rumour was rife that there had been some insincerity in the statement of the faith, Valens, bishop of Mursa, who had drawn it up, in the presence of Taurus the praetorian prefect who attended the Synod by imperial command, declared that he was not an Arian, and that he utterly abhorred their blasphemies. However, the thing had been done in secret, and it had not extinguished the general feeling. So on another day, when crowds of bishops and laymen came together in the Church at Ariminum, Muzonius, bishop of the province of Byzacena, to whom by reason of seniority the first rank was assigned by all, spoke as follows: “One of our number has been authorized to read to you, reverend fathers, what reports are being spread and have reached us, so that the evil opinions which ought to grate upon our ears and be banished from our hearts may be condemned with one voice by us all.” The whole body of bishops replied, Agreed. “And so when Claudius, bishop of the province of Picenum, at the request of all present, began to read the blasphemies attributed to Valens, Valens denied they were his and cried aloud, “If anyone denies Christ our Lord, the Son of God, begotten of the Father before the worlds, let him be anathema.” There was a general

chorus of approval, “Let him be anathema...”

“...After these proceedings the Council was dissolved. All returned in gladness to their own provinces. For the Emperor and all good men had one and the same aim, that the East and West should be knit together by the bond of fellowship. But wickedness does not long lie hid, and the sore that is healed superficially before the bad humour has been worked off breaks out again. Valens and Ursacius and others associated with them in their wickedness, eminent Christian bishops of course, began to wave their palms, and to say they had not denied that He was a creature, but that He was like other creatures. At that moment...the Nicene Faith stood condemned by acclamation. The whole world groaned, and was astonished to find itself Arian.”²¹⁹

From his own writings we see that Jerome understood the Lord to be *only begotten*, or *unigenitus*, before he ever joined Gregory. So the assertion that Jerome was swayed by Gregory to understand *monogenes* as *unigenitus*, and not as *unicus*, and therefore, by including *unigenitus* in his Latin translation – the Vulgate – he caused the corruption of the Old Latin texts, is completely unfounded.

More than likely, the corruption went the other way around. Most Vulgate texts were corrupted by the Old Latin Texts. Why? – Because there was such a resistance to the Vulgate that many Christians preferred to use their Old Latin Texts. In fact, many times the scribes would insert Old Latin phrases into the Vulgate.

Now, no doubt, over time, there would have also been corruption in the Old Latin texts, but until the Vulgate was accepted, most of the contamination went the other way. Sir Frederic Kenyon refers to this phenomenon.

He says,

“Then came the Vulgate, the revised Latin Bible of St. Jerome. Undertaken as it was at the express request of the Pope, it, yet, did not win immediate acceptance. Even so great an authority as St. Augustine objected to the extensive departures from the current version which

²¹⁹ Ibid., pg. 328-329

Jerome had made in his Old Testament. For some centuries the Vulgate and the Old Latin existed side by side. Complete Bibles were then rare. More commonly, a volume would contain only one group of books, such as the Pentateuch or the Prophets, the Gospels or the Pauline Epistles; and it would very easily happen that the library of any one individual would have some of these groups according to the older version, and others according to the Vulgate, Hence we find Christian writers in the fifth and sixth centuries using sometimes one version and sometimes the other; and when complete copies of the Bible came to be written, some books might be copied from manuscripts of the one type, and others from those of the other. Special familiarity with particular books was a strong bar to the acceptance of the new text. Thus the Gospels continued to circulate in the Old Latin much later than the Prophets, and the old version of the Psalms was never superseded by Jerome's translation at all, but continues to this day to hold its place in the received Bible of the Roman Church.”²²⁰

“Scribes engaged in copying the Vulgate would, from sheer familiarity with the older version, write down its words instead of those of St. Jerome; and on the other hand a copyist of the Old Latin would introduce into its text some of the improvements of the Vulgate.”²²¹

And so we see that there was quite a resistance to Jerome's Vulgate. In fact, it was the Gospels in the Old Latin that continued to circulate longer than other books in the Old Latin and so would have been more resistant to any changes from Jerome's Vulgate. So the chances that scribes would alter “unicus” to “unigenitus” in the Gospel of John are greatly exaggerated.

There is no doubt that some changes had to have occurred over time to the Old Latin text, as changes had to have occurred to the Vulgate, but there is no sound reason to conclude that all Old Latin Texts that have *unigenitus* were corrupted by the Vulgate and that is why they have *unigenitus* rather than *unicus*. There is no

²²⁰ Kenyon, Sir Frederic George, *Our Bible and the ancient manuscripts: being a history of the text and its translations* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1898) pg. 175

²²¹ *Ibid.*, Pg. 176

evidence to even suggest that assertion.

Now some will say, well some of the earlier Old Latin versions have *unicus* and some of the later Old Latin versions have *unigenitus*, therefore the later ones must have been changed from *unicus* to *unigenitus*.

One needs to realize that there is not a direct lineal descent from the earliest Old Latin Texts to the later Old Latin Texts, as if there was one parent Old Latin Text that originally had *unicus* and, when that pure Old Latin text was recopied by scribes, they changed the word into *unigenitus* because of the influence of the Vulgate. That is simply not true. The Old Latin texts were written from different parts of the Roman Empire and were not all related to a common source. Different Latin scribes in different parts of the empire would translate the Scriptures out of the Greek and into Latin for those Christians in their area. The accuracy of the translation would depend on the ability of the translator, and, just as today, some translators have a better grasp of the language than others. Not every Latin scribe or translator was equal in their ability or in their intellect. As Augustine said in *De Doctrina Christiana*, ii.11 when he was talking about the Old Latin texts—

"Translators from Hebrew into Greek can be numbered, but Latin translators by no means. For whenever, in the first ages of the faith, a Greek manuscript came into the hands of anyone who had also a little skill in both languages, he made bold to translate it forthwith."

In other words, the reason why some Old Latin texts had either *unicus* or *unigenitus* was because that particular translator chose those words to translate *monogenes*. It doesn't mean a corruption was involved. We do not know why he chose one word over the other or why in some cases both words are used in the same Gospel as the chart shows.

For example, Codex Monacensis translates *monogenes* by *unicus* in John 1:14, but then four verses later, in verse 18, it uses *unigenitus* for *monogenes*, which it also does in the remaining

verses in John. Or conversely, in Codex Palatinus, *monogenes* is translated by *unigenitus* in Jn. 1:14, but then four verses later and in the remaining verses of John it translates *monogenes* by *unicus*!

Obviously, if words were being altered in these particular verses in later copies of these codices, one would expect to find that if one word was altered in one verse, the same word would be also altered in the remaining verses. But, as that is not the case, it implies there was no corruption or alteration at all.

So the fact remains, when we consider all the Old Latin texts, we find that while some understood *monogenes* by *unicus*, the vast majority of Old Latin translators understood *monogenes* as *unigenitus*. *Unicus* was the minority understanding, and not the majority understanding, as many claim today.

Moreover, remember – the fact that Latin Christians understood *monogenes* to mean *unigenitus* is not only dependent on Old Latin Texts of the Greek Scriptures. As was mentioned before, *monogenes* in the writings of Irenaeus was translated by *unigenitus*, and the Latin Christian, Tertullian, who wrote 150-200 years before Jerome, (when many of the Old Latin texts were being written), certainly understood *monogenes* as *unigenitus*.

He writes in *Against Praxeas*, Chapter VII,

“Thus does He make Him equal to Him: for by proceeding from Himself He became His first-begotten Son, because begotten before all things; and His *only-begotten* also, because alone begotten of God, in a way peculiar to Himself, from the womb of His own heart—even as the Father Himself testifies: “My heart,” says He, “hath emitted my most excellent Word.”

And in the Latin it reads,

“exinde eum patrem sibi faciens de quo procedendo filius factus est primogenitus, ut ante omnia genitus, et *unigenitus*, ut solus ex deo genitus, proprie de vulva cordis ipsius secundum quod et pater ipse testatur, Eructavit cor meum sermonem optimum.”

Therefore, it is not accurate to say that if a later Old Latin text has *unigenitus* it must be a corruption by Jerome's Vulgate. Latin speaking Christians understood monogenes to mean *unigenitus* (only-begotten) long before Jerome was even born. As such, they commonly used that word in their Old Latin translations.

In addition, one must realize that an earlier text does not necessarily mean a better text. In other words, an earlier Old Latin text must be a better translation than a later Old Latin text. This is a misleading assumption. That would be like saying that some of our Greek manuscripts of a later date cannot be as good as an earlier Greek manuscript, or, if it is later, it is less likely to reflect the true reading of the original autographs.

A trusted friend once reminded me that Greek professor, Edward Goodrick, from Multnomah School of the Bible, once said, something to the effect, "Earlier manuscripts are not necessarily the better manuscripts. Sometimes an earlier manuscript may have been an inferior manuscript that was set aside from use and so, because of lack of use, was preserved, whereas the better manuscript was worn out through continual use and so had to be recopied and so was of a later date."

It is a false premise to claim that later Old Latin texts are inferior, and earlier Old Latin texts are better. Indeed, the later Old Latin texts may be the better one because it reflects a text that was well respected and continually used and so was a text that had to be continually recopied because the earlier copy wore out through its continual use.

Nevertheless, some people may still say if an Old Latin text has *unigenitus* it must be a corruption by Jerome's Vulgate. If someone still claims such a corruption, one only needs to ask, "How do you know it was corrupted precisely in John 1:14, 18; 3:16 or 3:18? It may have been corrupted, let's say in Matt. 5:8, or Rom 1:9, or in any number of other verses. If you ask that question, they will not be able to answer, because there is no evidence that shows those specific verses were corrupted. It is all conjecture! If someone

produces evidence to the contrary, I will bow to the obvious.

No – the reason later Old Latin texts have *unigenitus* in the Gospel of John is because it was a copy of an earlier Old Latin text which, more than likely, also had *unigenitus* in the Gospel of John. *Monogenes* was commonly understood by Latin Christians to mean *unigenitus*.

In the same way, one would also have to say, the reason some later Old Latin texts had *unicus* in the Gospel of John is because, more than likely, the earlier Old Latin text had *unicus* in the Gospel of John.

Now, could a scribe, when coming to a place where the original Old Latin text had *unigenitus* decide, because of his skill in language, that *unicus* would be a better translation than *unigenitus*, and so change it in his new copy? Certainly! That could explain why some “later” Old Latin texts, like Codex Palatinus, have *unicus* rather than *unigenitus*. Anything is possible. But more than likely, unless there is evidence to prove otherwise, the reason some later Old Latin texts have *unicus*, is because the earlier Old Latin texts they were copying had *unicus*. And the reason later Old Latin texts have *unigenitus*, is because the earlier Old Latin texts they were copying had *unigenitus*.

It would be convenient to ignore those Old Latin Texts that have *unigenitus*, and simply declare that they must be corruptions, but to do so is to create a “straw man argument.”

There is no doubt that for a period of centuries the two translations were intermixed, as was mentioned above, but one does not know where, when, and if any cross contamination occurred. There is no evidence that the Old Latin verses in John were corrupted by the Vulgate, and so, without such evidence, what we are left with is the undeniable fact that most Old Latin texts use *unigenitus* in regard to Christ, because that was the most common understanding of the word.

But let’s assume, for the sake of argument, some Old Latin texts were corrupted by Jerome’s Vulgate and in those texts the word *unicus* was changed to *unigenitus*. And let’s assume that

those Old Latin texts before Jerome were uncorrupt and reflected the original word the translator chose for *monogenes*. Would it change the results? Let's examine the evidence.

Henry Alford lists the following Codices as being what some like to call "pure," (i.e. being before Jerome). He states, "The ancient Latin versions before Jerome are known to us by the following mss."²²² He then lists the codices considered before Jerome, which are included in the chart below. Codex Bezae is also included, even though Alford did not include it. He does not list *j*. The mss. *h* and *k* do not include John. The chart only deals with those Old Latin texts which include those verses in John's gospel, as those verses are the verses in question.

²²² , Henry, *The Greek New Testament Vol. 1*(Moody Press, Chicago, 1958), pg. 140. This is found in his Prolegomena.

**Old Latin Texts Before Jerome Including
John 1:14; 1:18 & 3:16,18**

✓ = unigenitus for the Greek word μονογενης

0 = unicus for the Greek word μονογενης

Codex Bezae 5 th Century 400 A.D.	mis sing	miss ing	0	0
Codex Brixianus 6 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Colbertinus 12 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Corbeiensis 5 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Monacensis 6 th or 7 th Century	0	✓	✓	✓
Codex Palatinus 5 th Century	✓	0	0	0
Codex Rehdigeranus 8 th Century	mis sing	✓	✓	✓
Codex Sangallensis 48 5 th Century	✓	✓	✓	✓
Codex Sangallensis 60p4 9 th Century	✓	✓	?	✓
Codex Sangermanensis Secundus 8 th Cent.	✓	✓	0	✓
Codex Vercellensis 4 th Century	0	0	0	0
Codex Veronensis 5 th Century	✓	✓	0	✓

In these Old Latin versions before Jerome, as Alford calls them, (which I assume he means genuine Old Latin texts, not influenced by Jerome, because some are from later centuries) there is a total 44 recorded occurrences of the Greek word *monogenes*. In

32 cases it is rendered *unigenitus* and in 12 cases it is rendered *unicus*.

So even if one wants to change the parameters from Old Latin texts, to Old Latin texts before Jerome, (i.e. not be open to corruption), the majority still favour the translation of *monogenes* by *unigenitus* by a margin of almost 3 to 1!

Therefore, one can see by the evidence, the claim that the Old Latin texts routinely translate *monogenes* by *unicus* and not by *unigenitus* is unfounded and, actually, the opposite is the truth. The Old Latin texts show that that *monogenes* was routinely translated by *unigenitus*, meaning “only begotten,” and that *unigenitus* was the common understanding of *monogenes* by many early Latin Christians.

APPENDIX E

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father almighty;
And in Christ Jesus His only (*unicus*) Son, our Lord,
Who was born from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried,
On the third day rose again from the dead,
Ascended to heaven,
Sits at the right hand of the Father,
Whence He will come to judge the living and the dead;
And in the Holy Spirit,
The holy Church,
The remission of sins,
The resurrection of the flesh

When one reads the various Latin Creeds from the churches in the West, one realizes that many include the word *unicus* (only), rather than *unigenitus* (only begotten) in the Second Article. Why did the Latin Christians utilize this word in their Creeds, when many in the East utilized *monogenes* in their Greek Creeds? In other words, why did they say “only” Son, rather than “only begotten” Son?

The answer is simple, but first let me say the use of the one does not nullify the other. Both statements are true! Why do we assume the one negates the other? That would be like saying that if someone said, “I believe in God the Father and in *His* Son, Jesus Christ,” rather than saying in His “only” Son, must mean such a person did not believe Jesus Christ was God’s only Son. Obviously, someone would say, “That’s a silly conclusion.” Well, is it not just as silly to assume that because one uses the word *only*, and not the

word *only begotten*, such a person must not believe the Son was the only begotten of God His Father?

The fact of the matter is; Latin Christians who used “only” in their Creeds *did* believe Christ was also the only begotten of the Father before all time. It simply was not stated so succinctly in their Creed, but that does not mean they did not believe it.

Secondly, many wrongly assume that the Apostles’ Creed was a translation of an earlier Apostles’ Creed in Greek, and, as such, the use of *unicus* becomes significant because they assume it is a translation of the Greek word *monogenes* used in the Greek version. This simply is not true. Now, no doubt, some of the Creeds may have been translated from a Greek Version, and vice versa, but generally speaking, the Latin Creeds were not derived from earlier Greek versions, but were Creeds originally created by certain Latin churches out of their own baptismal confessions.

For example, some believe the Creeds found in the *Psalterium Graecum ET Romanum*, where one column is in Latin and the second column is in Greek, are translations of each other.

Consequently, they assume *unicus* in the Latin Creed is a translation of the *monogenes* in the Greek Creed. But this is not true. They are not translations of each other, but are Creeds derived from different sources which were simply put side by side. In fact, the Latin does not exactly correspond to the Greek.

For example, in the fifth line the Latin Creed says Christ was conceived “de,” “down from,” or “away from” the Holy Spirit. The Greek says Christ was conceived “ek” “out of,” or “from” the Holy Spirit. The Latin preposition does not correspond to the Greek preposition. It could not simply be that the Latin “de” was considered an equivalent to the Greek “ek,” (which, of course, it does not), because, later in line six when the Greek says Christ was born “ek” out of the Virgin Mary, the Latin agrees with the Greek and says Christ was born “ex Maria virgine.” If the one was a translation of the other, why would “ek” or “de” be translated “de” or “ek” respectively, (depending if the Latin was a translation of the Greek, or the Greek was a translation of the Latin), and then a few

words later translate “ek,” not by “de,” but by “ex,” or vice versa. Therefore we see the one is not a precise translation of the other.

The whole conclusion that the use of *unicus* in the Latin Creeds gives sure proof that *monogenes* was originally understood as *unicus* and not as *unigenitus* is simply a fabrication out of thin air.

Philip Schaff gives a concise statement about the nature and origin of the Creeds in his book *The Creeds of Christendom*.

“Faith, like all strong conviction, has a desire to utter itself before others—' Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;' ' I believe, therefore I confess...' There is also an express duty, when we are received into the membership of the Christian Church, and on every proper occasion, to profess the faith within us, to make ourselves known as followers of Christ, and to lead others to him by the influence of our testimony.”

“This is the origin of Christian symbols or creeds. They never precede faith, but presuppose it. They emanate from the inner life of the Church, independently of external occasion. There would have been creeds even if there had been no doctrinal controversies. In a certain sense it may be said that the Christian Church has never been without a creed. The baptismal formula and the words of institution of the Lord's Supper are creeds; these and the confession of Peter antedate even the birth of the Christian Church on the day of Pentecost. The Church is, indeed, not founded on symbols, but on Christ; not on any words of man, but on the word of God; yet it is founded on Christ as confessed by men, and a creed is man's answer to Christ's question, man's acceptance and interpretation of God's word. Hence it is after the memorable confession of Peter that Christ said, ' Thou art Rock, and upon this rock I shall build my Church,' as if to say, ' Thou art the Confessor of Christ, and on this Confession, as an immovable rock, I shall build my Church.' Where there is faith, there is also profession of faith. As ' faith without works is dead,' so it may be said also that faith without confession is dead.”

“But this confession need not always be written, much less reduced to a logical formula. If a man can say from his heart, ' I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,' it is sufficient for his salvation (Acts xvi. 31). The word of God, apprehended by a living faith, which founded the Christian Church, was at first orally preached and transmitted by the apostles, then

laid down in the New Testament Scriptures, as a pure and unerring record for all time to come. So the confession of faith, or the creed, was orally taught and transmitted to the catechumens, and professed by them at baptism, long before it was committed to writing...When controversies arose concerning the true meaning of the Scriptures, it became necessary to give formal expression of their true sense, to regulate the public teaching of the Church, and to guard it against error. In this way the creeds were gradually enlarged and multiplied..."

"The first Christian confession or creed is that of Peter, when Christ asked the apostles, 'Who say ye that I am?' and Peter, in the name of all the rest, exclaimed, as by divine inspiration, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. xvi. 16).' This became naturally the substance of the baptismal confession, since Christ is the chief object of the Christian faith. Philip required the eunuch simply to profess the belief that 'Jesus was the Son of God.' In conformity with the baptismal formula, however, it soon took a Trinitarian shape, probably in some such simple form as 'I believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.' Gradually it was expanded, by the addition of other articles, into the various rules of faith, of which the Roman form under the title 'the Apostles' Creed' became the prevailing one, after the fourth century, in the West, and the Nicene Creed in the East."²²³

We now can begin to understand why the Apostles' Creed has "only" (unicus) Son," and others have "Only Begotten" (unigenitus) Son. As we saw above, the Creed was the outgrowth of baptismal formulas. There was not one standardized Creed in the West that all others were copied or translated from. Certain individual churches would create a confession as to what they believed the Apostles revealed to them was the truth concerning the Faith, and they would use that in their baptismal formulas.

Remember, the Apostles and their fellow workers were always concerned that the truth of the Faith remained inviolate. For example, Paul admonished Timothy to commit to faithful teachers, within the assembly, the truth of what he taught concerning the

²²³ Schaff, Philip, *The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. 1*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1993), Pg. 4-6

Faith (II Tim. 1:13; 2:2). John admonished Christians to hold fast to what they had been taught in the beginning (I John 2:24). And Jude exhorted the saints to contend for the Faith which had once been delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). And so we see that at the baptism of believers, affirmations of faith were asked of the baptismal candidate in order to ascertain that they truly believed and understood the true Faith. For example, the Ethiopian eunuch was told by Philip he could be baptized only if he believed with all his heart that “Jesus was the Son of God” (Acts 8: 35-37). This is the first example of such a baptismal question in Scripture.

This was the basis of the origin of the Creeds. As such, we notice that the central tenet of the baptismal question was whether the person believed that Jesus was the Son of God.

The significance of this is evidenced when we recall, originally, the Gospel went forth first to Jerusalem, then to Judea and then Samaria (Acts 1:8). This is important to remember when we realize the required confession of faith required of the Ethiopian eunuch did not contain the word “only.” He was simply asked to confess that “Jesus was the Son of God”. Why is that? Well, because the nation of Israel and of the Samaritans did not believe that the God of Israel was like the heathen gods who begat many sons. No, they believed according to the Scripture, that God had only one unique Son, the Messiah (Ps. 2:7). Therefore, the baptismal candidate only had to be asked if he or she believed that Jesus was that Son of God, not if they believed Jesus was His “only” Son.

However, when the Gospel came to Gentile, there was a different set of religious beliefs. Gentiles were raised to believe that God had many sons. For example, Zeus had multiple sons such as Hermes, Apollo and Ares. He also had mortal sons such as Hercules of a mortal woman named Alcmene. In the Roman religion, the Romans were brought up to believe that the foremost God, Jupiter, also had many sons, such as Vulcan, Mercury and Mars.

Therefore, it was not enough to question a Gentile baptismal candidate whether he believed Jesus was the Son of God.

They needed to ask them if they believed Jesus was the “only” Son of God. They needed to ascertain whether the new believer really understood the truth of the Gospel. And so, we see a reason why the little word “only” may have been added.

The Jew did not need to be asked whether Jesus was the *only* Son of God; they needed to be asked simply if Jesus was the Son of God. But the Gentile needed to be asked if Jesus was the “only” Son of God.

But then someone may ask, “Why did they add “unicus” (only), rather than “unigenitus” (only begotten) before the word Son?” The reason was the other apostles did not utilize, as far as we know, the title *only begotten* for Christ, at least, not in Scripture. Paul never spoke of Christ as the “only begotten.” None of the other Gospels that circulated in the later part of the first century utilized the word “monogenes” (Only-Begotten). It was not even revealed in Scripture as a specific title of Christ until John wrote his Gospel near the end of the first century.

And so we see that the Gentile Christians for many years were limited to only a part of the Canon of Scripture. We forget that the early Christians did not have the entire Canon of Scripture as we do today. At first, the only New Testament Scriptures many Gentile churches would have possessed would have been the epistles of Paul. The churches would share his epistles with each other (cf. Col. 4:16). Remember, in those early days of the Gentile churches the Gospels were not yet written, especially the Gospel of John.

And so, if individual churches began putting together baptismal questions for the baptismal candidate, *for the most part*, they would have been restricted to Paul’s epistles, that is, until the latter part of the first century.²²⁴

F. F. Bruce tells us that even after the Gospels were penned they were not grouped together as a whole until some years after the last Gospel was written, which traditionally is assigned a date late

²²⁴ If Peter was in Rome, then, perhaps, in those later decades of the first century some western churches may have also had the Gospel of Mark, the epistles of Peter, and perhaps, Luke’s writings.

into the first century.

He states,

“Until about the sixties of the first century A.D. the need for written Gospels does not appear to have arisen. So long as the eye-witnesses of the great salvation-bringing events were alive to tell the tale, it was not so necessary to have a formal written record. But the apostles were not going to live on earth forever, and it was obviously desirable that their message should be preserved after they had gone. So we find Mark, the companion and interpreter of Peter, committing to writing in Rome the Gospel as Peter habitually proclaimed it; shortly afterward we have Matthew’s Gospel appearing in the East...and Luke, the companion of Paul, writes in two books for Gentile readers a narrative of the beginnings of Christianity...Towards the end of the century, John, perhaps the last surviving companion of Jesus in the days of His flesh, records his reminiscences of his Master’s life and teaching...The Gospels are not simple biographies – they are rather written transcripts of the Gospel preached by the apostles.

But we have not yet a canon in the sense of a collection of these writings. Towards the end of the first century, however, we find the beginnings of a movement in this direction. Not long after the writing of the fourth Gospel, the four Gospels appear to have been brought together in one collection. Thus, whereas previously Rome had Mark’s Gospel, and Syria had Matthew’s, and a Gentile group had Luke’s, and Ephesus John’s, now each church had all four in a corpus which is called The Gospel (each of the components being distinguished by the additional words, According to Matthew, According to Mark, and so on).”²²⁵

More than likely this collection of all the Gospels together began sometime at the beginning of the second century. Until that time, some churches would have copies of some of the Gospels and others would have copies of other Gospels. Those were not the days of instant publishing and mass market distribution. It was a long painstaking process to produce a copy and so it should not surprise us that this process took time.

²²⁵ Bruce, F. F., *The Books and the Parchments*, (Fleming H. Revell Co., Westwood, New Jersey 1963) pg. 106-7

Consequently, for the decades shortly following the death of Paul, the only New Testament Scriptures the churches in the West may have had was some of Paul's epistles, and perhaps, Peter's epistles, along with the Gospel of Mark, and possibly the writings of Luke. It would have been from those writings that their confessions of faith would have arisen. In any case, they would not have possessed the Gospel of John, for it would not be written until the end of the first century.

When we understand this we can understand why the Latin Churches picked the term *unicus* rather than *unigenitus*. For many years the churches may not have even known Christ by the title *monogenes*, or "Only Begotten." There is no evidence that Paul knew this title was used by our Lord. Peter did not use it in his writings, nor did Luke in reference to Christ. Remember, more than likely, Paul's knowledge of the earthly ministry of our Lord was limited to what he learned from the Apostles and those with firsthand knowledge. If John or one of the others had not spoken to Paul about our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus that night so long ago, he might not have known that the Lord's name included that title, and since John's Gospel would not be written for perhaps another 40-50 years, the churches in the West may not have been familiar with that title – although, they would have been familiar with the doctrine behind the title.

So when they were looking for a phrase to describe Christ's unique relationship with God the Father they, more than likely, would have looked at such verses as Rom. 8:3 and Rom. 8:32.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his **own Son** in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. 8:3

He that spared not his **own Son**, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Rom. 8:32

Here (vs. 32) we see Paul calling Christ God's own Son,

using the word “own” (ιδιον), which we have already mentioned, means “something privately belonging to one’s own self,” “something not common to all.” This would be an approximation of saying what the Creed declares, that they believed “in Jesus Christ, His *only Son*.”

Therefore the reason why some first century Latin Christians have *unicus* in their Creed, and not *unigenitus*, may be because they were not yet familiar with Christ’s title, *monogenes*, when they were composing their baptismal questions in those first few decades after the death of the Apostle Paul.²²⁶ As such, the title “*unicus*” was a perfectly appropriate title based upon the New Testament Scriptures they possessed. And when these baptismal questions were eventually put to writing in credal form, it would not be abnormal for them to utilize the very same words they used in their verbal confessions. They based their early Creed on their baptismal questions which in turn were based upon the New Testament Scriptures in their possession.

However, even though they had *unicus* and not *unigenitus* in their Creeds, it would be wrong to assume that they had no understanding of the truth contained in the word “*unigenitus*.” They did not have to contend with such a teaching that says Christ was not begotten of God. For them, the word “Son” was sufficient to show them that the Christ of the Blessed Trinity was begotten of the Father. To them the word “Son” was a revelatory term. They had no concept that it did not mean derivation. They had no concept of it meaning just Son in “purpose or character.” To believe such a concept to them would be contrary to Scripture and the teaching of the Apostles. Their use of *unicus* in no way diminished their

²²⁶ This is not to say that they did not understand the meaning of *monogenes* until John wrote his Gospel. Obviously, the Gentiles understood the meaning of *monogenes*, as we will presently, because Clement uses the word in his Epistle to the Corinthians in the last decade of the first century. What we are suggesting is that until John wrote his Gospel, they may not have known that *monogenes* was a title used by Christ himself.

understanding of the begottenness of the Son from the Father.

As was said before, to the Latin Christian the word “Son” was a revelatory word sufficient to teach the doctrine of the generation of the Son from the Father. When they used *unicus*, rather than *unigenitus* in the Apostle’s Creed they were emphasizing the “uniqueness” of this begetting, not denying it. To prove this point listen to a *Commentary on the Apostle’s Creed*, written approximately in the year 307 A.D. by Rufinus.

He states the following regarding the use of *unicus* in the Apostle’s Creed:

“Having shown them what Jesus is, Who saves His people, and what Christ is, Who is made a High Priest forever, let us now see in what follows, of Whom these things are said, His only (*unicus*) Son, our Lord. Here we are taught that this Jesus, of whom we have spoken, and this Christ, the meaning of whose name we have expounded, is the only Son of God and our Lord. Lest, perchance, you should think that these human names have an earthly significance, therefore it is added that He is the ‘only’ Son of God, our Lord. For He is ‘born’ ‘One of One,’ because there is one brightness of light, and there is one word of the understanding. Neither does an incorporeal ‘generation’ degenerate into the plural number, or suffer division, where He Who is ‘born’ is in no wise separated from Him Who ‘begets.’”²²⁷

Also Augustine states:

“Since this is the case, I repeat, we believe also in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten [*unigenitum*] of the Father, that is to say, His only [*unicum*] Son, our Lord.”²²⁸

And so we see why the Creeds differed in some particulars

²²⁷ Schaff, Philip, Wace, Henry, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III*, (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI 1989) Pg. 545-46

²²⁸ Schaff, Philip, Ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series Vol. III*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1993), page 323

from church to church. Each church adapted the Creed for their own local baptismal questions that were formulated according to the particular circumstances of their church, and, more than likely, also according to those portions of the New Testament Scriptures they possessed.

Another example which demonstrates this local variety is the fact that some Creeds would read that they believe “in Jesus Christ,” yet in other Creeds it would read “in one Jesus Christ” adding the little word “one.” Why would some churches add this word? Because in some churches Gnosticism was a real threat because Gnostics taught that Jesus was separate from Christ. They believed the Christ descended on Jesus at his baptism, who then left him before his death on the cross, so that Jesus and Christ were two separate persons. In order to ascertain that the baptismal candidate did not hold to this understanding they inserted the little word “one,” in order to affirm that Jesus and Christ were one and the same – “one Jesus Christ.”

Sir Peter King in his book on the Apostles’ Creed mentions this fact,

“But, though the Eastern Creeds did read in One Jesus Christ, yet in the west where the Churches were not so much invested and ravaged by the Gnostics, the Creed, as our present one doth, expressed this Article without the addition of the term One, saying, And in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord.”²²⁹

And in another place he states:

“Not long after the apostles days, and even in the apostolic age itself, several heresies sprung up in the church, subversive of the fundamentals of Christianity ; to prevent the malignant effects whereof, and to hinder such heretics from an undiscernible mixing themselves with the orthodox Christians, as also to establish and strengthen the true

²²⁹ King, Sir Peter, *The History of the Apostles Creed*, (Printed and Published by John Woods, Elizabeth-town, New Jersey, 1804), pg. 102

believers in the necessary truths of the Christian religion, the Christian verities [truths] opposite [opposed] to those heresies, were inserted in the creed.²³⁰

And finally,

“I would not be here mistaken, as if I did, mean, that none of those articles which were introduced into the creed, and settled there in opposition to heresies were ever used before, or demanded at baptism by the administerer thereof: but my meaning is, that every church [was]...at liberty to express the fundamental articles of the Christian faith in that way and manner, which she saw fit...”²³¹

And so we see why some Creeds would read one way and the others would read a little bit different. Each church would adopt the Creed to its own particular needs and dangers present from heresies. But now let us return to the main question in hand, why do some Creeds read *unicus* and some read *unigenitus*?

First, we have seen that in the first few decades after the death of the apostle Paul there was a gradual development of the Creeds in the West from baptismal questions which were formulated from whatever New Testament writings each church possessed, and were formulated in opposition to the prevailing heresies of the day. This would explain the prevailing use of *unicus* in the churches in the West.

Secondly, based upon this liberty of each church to formulate their baptismal questions, we have seen that the written Creeds of the churches differed from place to place in small particulars. As such, it would not be surprising that the Eastern churches, who would have greater access to John’s Gospel in the latter decade of the first century, would have been more likely to utilize John’s use of *monogenes* (*unigenitus*) in their baptismal questions before the churches in the West.

²³⁰ Ibid., pg 37

²³¹ Ibid., pg. 38

This would explain why eastern churches would sometimes have *unigenitus* and western churches would still have *unicus*. It was not because Latin Christians were translating the word *monogenes* as *unicus* from a standardized Greek Creed. There was no standardized Creed at that time, and the western churches use of *unicus*, more than likely, preceded the eastern churches use of *unigenitus*.

However, as time passed we find that, (more than likely by the end of the second decade of the second century), most Western churches would also have copies of John's Gospel, as well all the other three Gospels.

Therefore, it should not surprise us that *unigenitus* began to show up in some western Creeds, although most of them continued to use the word they were most familiar with, the word *unicus*. Either word was appropriate, for both words were rooted in the revelation of Scripture, and it must be remembered that to the Latin Christian, the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son was not based upon, nor negated by, the word *unicus*. It was a doctrine attested to by many portions of God's word and was not limited to the understanding of the word *monogenes* that they gained when they obtained a copy of John's Gospel (assuming there was not an oral tradition of the title *monogenes*).

But if the tradition of the earlier forms of the Apostles' Creed held fast among the Latin Christians, why did some adopt the word *unigenitus* in place of the word *unicus* to which they were so familiar? The answer is to remember that in those early days there never was a standardized Creed from which they copied. Each church adapted their Creeds to their particular needs. When we recognize this we can understand why *unigenitus* began to appear in a few western Creeds.

H. B. Swete says:

“St John's phrase [*monogenes*] finds indeed no place in sub apostolic writers: though Ignatius approaches to it when he calls our Lord the Only Son... It seems to have been first seized upon by the Valentinians, who gave the name Monogenes to the Aeon Nous. The Catholic writers

began, although slowly, to reclaim it; Justin uses it sparingly; it occurs once in the Smyrnan circular on the martyrdom of Polycarp; in Irenaeus at length it becomes frequent. Thus it is not unlikely that the word took its place in the vocabulary of the Church by way of protest against the Valentinian misuse of St John; and the same cause may have gained for it admission to the Creed. Valentinus taught at Rome during the episcopates of Hyginus, Pius, and Anicetus, i.e. between 140 and 160 A.D.—the very epoch to which the making of the Creed is assumed to belong. The Valentinians, or at least the Anatolic School, distinguished Monogenes from the historical manifestation, remarking that St John guards himself by writing " we " beheld His glory, glory as of the only-begotten," where the qualifying word "as" bars out complete identification. If the Church of Rome admitted the word under these circumstances, it can hardly have done so except by way of protest against the Valentinian interpretation. To confess faith in Jesus Christ as the Only-begotten Son, was to identify the Only-begotten with the historical Person who was born, and died, and rose again." ²³²

During the time John composed his Gospel, Gnostics were teaching that a Pleroma of thirty Aeons proceeded from God. They believed the purpose of those aeons, or offspring, was to make known the true God. In order to combat this heresy, John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declared in a clear and emphatic manner, Christ was not just His only (*unicus*) Son, He was also the *monogenes*, only begotten (*unigenitus*) Son of God, who dwelt in the bosom of the Father from all of eternity, and, as such, was the only one who knew the Father and who could properly reveal or declare the Father (Jn. 1:18).

When Valentinus arose years later, he taught that Monogenes was one of God's offspring whose purpose was to reveal God; however, he did not believe Monogenes and Jesus were one and the same person. Apparently, although we could never say for sure, *unigenitus* may have replaced *unicus* in some areas of the West in order to combat this Valentinian heresy.

²³² Swete, H.B., *The Apostle Creed: Its relation to primitive Christianity* (C. J. Clay and Sons, London, 1894), pg. 25-26

John's Gospel clearly declares that the "Only begotten" (*monogenes*) was the Lord Jesus Christ, who resided in the bosom of the Father from all eternity. If that is held as true, then, obviously, the Gnostic system was in error.

What could Valentinus do, since he believed in the Gnostic system and, indeed, desired to propagate it? An apostle, who knew the Lord Jesus, declared that Christ was the Only-Begotten from all of eternity. As such, he was affirming that there were no other offspring, (as the Gnostics called them), who emanated from God the Father to produce a Pleroma. There were no others who were begotten. There were no other beings in a Pleroma. What could Valentinus do? Well, change the meaning of *monogenes*! Redefine the word! And this is apparently exactly what he did.

He changed the meaning of the title that described the nature of the Son, into a simple proper name that was not to be understood as an adjective. Monogenes was just the name of one of many emanations from God. He was the Monogenes, the Only-begotten, the only one so named, not because He was the only one "begotten" by God, but because that was His given name. In other words, he was not given the title "only begotten" because of the relationship of His nature with God the Father. It was simply a name. Valentinus taught he should not literally be considered the "only begotten," meaning "only offspring," for God had many other offspring in his Pleroma.

By changing the meaning of *monogenes* from "only begotten," or "only born," to a word that was simply used as a proper name, Valentinus was able to claim John did not mean to say, by using the title "*monogenes*," that Christ was the "Only-begotten one of God. It was simply a proper name, and was not meant to be taken literally.

Indeed, Valentinus may have been the first person in the history of the Church to try to change the meaning of *monogenes* as it was understood by the Christian of the day. The enemy of our souls knows the importance of every revelatory word of Scripture, and if he cannot change ones acceptance of Scripture as inspired,

and thus authoritarian, then he will just change the meaning of the “words” in Scripture. He has no problem allowing Christians to have their Scriptures, if he can change the meaning of the “words” in the Scriptures to his own liking, thereby, changing the true meaning of the revelation.

And so we can understand why some churches wanted to expand the meaning of *unicus* to *unigenitus*, because the Valentinian heresy may have been rampant in their area. They wanted to retain the word *monogenes* with its proper meaning. They refused to let Valentinus rob the Church of that revelatory word.

Consequently, we can now understand the varied reasons why some Latin Creeds utilized *unicus*, while the Creeds in the East utilized *unigenitus*. It had nothing to do with translations of Greek Creeds into Latin, nor was it the result of a translation of the Greek word *monogenes* into the Latin word *unicus*. Most early Latin Creeds were not translations but were declarations of faith developed from early baptismal confessions that were put together autonomously by different local assemblies in accordance with their own local situations, and in accordance with the New Testament Writings each church possessed.

Nevertheless, if someone still disagrees with this viewpoint, as to why *unicus* was utilized in those early Latin Creeds, one cannot disagree with the fact that those Christians, who confessed Christ to be His only (*unicus*) Son, believed he was the only one who was *begotten* by the Father before all time. Their understanding of this doctrine did not simply depend on the word *unicus* or *unigenitus*, but on the word *Son*. They understood it in the normal and plain sense. The word *Son* was the basis for their understanding of the doctrine of eternal generation, not the word *unicus*. *Unicus*, simply meant he was the only Son of God who was begotten of the Father before all time, as opposed to all other sons, whether referring to angels who were created (Job 1:6), or to Christians, who were begotten by regeneration in time (Rom. 8:14).

APPENDIX F

GLOSSARY

Affirming – In Trinitarian Theology, affirming is a term used to distinguish the activity of the Holy Spirit from the activity of the Father and the Son. It bespeaks the reciprocal activity of the Holy Spirit in His relation to the Father and the Son in giving back to them, through His activity of witnessing, glorifying and, thus affirming, all that the Father and Son are in their own Persons.

Being – Being tells us the “kind of existence” within the Godhead. The Divine Being is defined as essence characterized by its attributal qualities. The Divine Being is understood from the perspective of the Father ever imparting His attributes to the Son and Holy Spirit, and, as such, it shows us a Divine Being which exists in a perfect communion. The Godhead is characterized by a perfect and communal kind of existence where all Three Persons move in perfect harmony.

Communication – In Trinitarian theology, communication bespeaks the eternal communication or giving of substance by the Father to the Son and Holy Spirit. It is a giving of His own substance without division or diminution. It is given to the Son in His eternal begetting, and to the Holy Spirit in His eternal spiration.

Consubstantial – In Trinitarian theology, consubstantial simply means possessing the same substance of the Father. The substance of the Father is no different from the substance of the Son and the

Holy Spirit for they all possess the same undivided substance. *See Homoousios, Substance, Substantial.*

Coinherence – Coinherence means that all Three Persons indwell one another. Coinherence is based upon consubstantiality. Since all Three Persons possess the same substance, and since that substance is characterized by being omnipresent, then it goes without saying that all Three Persons must coinhere in one another since all Three Persons are everywhere together. They all fill up infinity together. In finite terms, there is not one place or locality where the other Persons are not also. Therefore, they must be in each other.

Doctrine of Analogy – The doctrine of analogy is based upon the fact that God created all things to reveal something of Himself to mankind – something of His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and His divine nature. All of creation, according to Rom. 1:20, is created to be analogous to God's divine nature. All things were created to correspond to something within the Godhead. This correspondence, of course, *must be understood to be limited, for the finite cannot fully mirror the infinite.* Nevertheless, this does not preclude the fact that God tells us that something of Himself is always reflected in His creation. This doctrine is also based upon the fact that man was made in the image and likeness of God according to Gen. 1:27-28. The doctrine is the biblical basis for the use of types, figures, patterns and parables. Types, figures, patterns and parables are given to us by God to help us develop a correct, biblical understanding of who He is, and what He desires.

Economic Trinity – A theological concept expressing the activity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as they are manifested in finite reality through creation, redemption, sanctification, etc. Since God is One and does not change, the activity of the Economic Trinity, as seen in creation, must ever be the same as the activity of the Ontological Trinity. In Trinitarian Theology, it

bespeaks the activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit between Creation and the beginning of the new heaven and earth. We know things about the ontological Trinity, by understanding the Economic Trinity. *See Ontological Trinity, Pantological Trinity.*

Essence – The Essence of the Godhead bespeaks the “what of existence.” Essence pertains to the quiddity of an object, (i.e. that which makes an object what it is) – its substance. It tells us that the Godhead is defined as One Essence where all Three Persons possess the one and same Divine Substance, which is ever being communicated by the Father in the begetting and spiration of the Son and Holy Spirit respectively. *See Nature, Being.*

Eternity – Eternity is the lack of time, which means an existence where there is no succession of moments. One thing cannot precede another thing for that would indicate successive moments. There is no such thing as Eternity Past, as if time goes on forever into the past. Eternity is outside of time. Time was created by God and had a beginning. Before the beginning, there was no time. In eternity there can be no past, for that would indicate a future, and there is no future, for that would indicate a past. There is only an ever present “now.” Eternity is movement without change, whereas time is movement with change.

Eternal Generation – The term eternal generation is another term for eternal begetting. The Son is eternally begotten by the Father and so is eternally generated. Within generation, there is an eternal communication of the Father's substance, an eternal production of subsistentiaity, and an eternal impartation of all the Father's attributes, save His paternity. *See Spiration.*

Homoiousios – The term means “of like substance.” It was a semi-Arian term that was used to signify the possession of the Son of a “similar” or “like substance” to the Father. The problem with such a term is that it means that the substance of the Father is

separate from the substance of the Son. The term would be a more accurate term to signify the substance of a human son from a human father. We are begotten by our fathers, through which begetting there is the communication of a similar (in this case – human) substance. Our substance as sons is thus different, and separate from the substance of our fathers, although it is similar, in that both are human. This could never be used to bespeak the eternal relationship of the Father and Son, for then, there would two different substances, which while being similar, in that both are divine, would be separate from each other and would thus constitute two different gods, in the same way as a father and son constitute two different humans. This is why the term was rejected. We must always remember human fecundity reflects divine fecundity. Divine fecundity, never reflects human fecundity. God created human fecundity to be analogous to His divine fecundity only in the sense that it showed an external procession of a son from a father. He never meant it to show forth the constitutional nature of their relationship, simply because the finite could never fully show forth the infinite.

Homoousios – The term means “of one and the same substance.” It was utilized in the Nicene Creed to show forth the full equality and oneness of the Son to the Father, as well as their mutual eternity. It bespeaks the fact that the Son and the Holy Spirit both possess the same substance of the Father without division or diminution. It results in the consubstantiality of the Son and Holy Spirit with the Father.

Imaging – In Trinitarian Theology, imaging is a term used to distinguish the activity of the Son from the activity of the Father and the Holy Spirit. It bespeaks the reciprocal activity of the Son in His relation with the Father in giving back to Him of all that He is in His own Person. His Person is the exact expression and image of the Eternal Father.

Nature – The Nature of the Godhead tells us of the “how of existence,” whereas Essence told the “what of existence.” Nature tells us “how” that one Divine Substance exists. In relation to the Trinity, we know that the Godhead exists in a Triune manner. The Substance subsists in a paternal, filial, and spirital manner. God’s nature is Triune. It tells us how the Trinity exists ontologically and explains to us the eternal relationship of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

Observational Theology – Observational Theology is based upon the General Revelation of God. It is based upon the fact that God tells us that all things of creation correspond to some truth within Himself (Rom. 1:20; Gen. 1:26; Ps. 19:1). As such, it realizes that everything God does in revelatory. In finite reality, God has given us three great revelatory objects whereby we might better understand who He is – the Universe, Man and Scripture. Consequently, we are encouraged to “observe” and study them (Ps. 111:2 NASB; Isa. 40:26).

Only-Begotten – In the Greek, the word “monogenes” is a title of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity used by the Apostle John (Jn. 1:14,18; 3:16,18; I Jn. 4:9). It bespeaks His eternal and unique generation from the Father. He is known as “begotten,” in that He proceeds eternally from the Father. There never was a time when the Son was not. He is known as “only,” because His eternal begetting was unique, in that it results in consubstantiality. He possesses the same substance as the Father. His begetting occurred in eternity, apart from all time, and thus, no one else was begotten as He.

Ontological Trinity – The term bespeaks the eternal existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit apart from any relation with finite reality. In Trinitarian Theology, it thus came to refer to the eternal reality, activity and existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit before the act of creation. It is also known as Immanent Trinity.

See Economic Trinity, Pantological Trinity.

Pantological Trinity – In Trinitarian Theology the term bespeaks complete revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the new heaven and new earth (I Cor. 15:28) as distinct from their present economic activity in the current world of sin and death. The Pantological Trinity bespeaks a perfect communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with a finite creation that has been glorified and freed from any taint of sin and death. *See Economic Trinity, Ontological Trinity.*

Perichoresis – The root meaning of the term meant to “dance around” or to “revolve.” In Trinitarian Theology, perichoresis is defined as the one eternal movement within the Godhead whereby the begetting and spiration of the Son and Holy Spirit occur, and where the reciprocal imaging and affirming activity of the Son and Holy Spirit also occur. It is defined by the two facets of procession and reciprocation. It defines the eternal and thus simple activity of all Three Persons.

Person – The word “Person” comes from the Latin *persona*, which originally signified a mask used by an actor on the stage. This in itself would not be a good term for the Trinity, because it could support a false Sabellian view. However, it later developed into a legal term to signify one who could possess property or substance (*substantia*). Consequently, it became a perfect term to use of the Trinity, because more than one person was capable of jointly possessing the same property or substance at the same time. Thus, it came to signify Three Persons in the Godhead who could equally possess the same Divine substance. However, the emphasis was always upon the common possession of substance and never upon the constitutional nature of the Person (as it is today). Thus, the term “Person,” in Trinitarian Theology, never carried the connotation of an individual, for an individual presupposes a

separation of substance and being. There is no separation of substance within the Godhead. There are not three individual beings in the Godhead. Therefore, the term “Person,” when used of the Father, shows a *substantial*, attributal and personal subsistent within the Divine Being. When used of the Son and Holy Spirit it shows to us *consubstantial*, attributal and personal subsistents within the Divine Being. It thus shows that while they all possess the same divine substance, they subsist as three different, self-conscious, co-eternal, and co-equal subsistents that together constitute one Divine Being. *See Subsistent.*

Procession – In Trinitarian Theology, procession bespeaks the first facet of the eternal movement or perichoresis of God, whereby the Son and the Holy Spirit eternally proceed from the Father. Thus, procession is defined by the two modes of begetting and spiration, which, in turn, are defined by the three aspects of communication, production, and impartation.

Productional, production, produce – Words so many times are inadequate to convey certain thoughts. Christians have always attempted and rightly so, to only adopt biblical words in defining certain theological truths. However, because of the limitations of our language, sometimes new words have to be adopted to convey spiritual truth. For example, the Church has adopted the word “Trinity,” to define the Doctrine of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, although the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible. The same can be said of the word “productional.” A word was needed to bespeak, for the sake of clarity, the activity of the Father in eternally begetting and spirating the Holy Spirit, and the word that was chosen was the word “productional.” We realize the inadequacy of words, especially the word productional. However, if it is kept in mind that it is describing an eternal and not a temporal activity of the Father, it can be helpful in our understanding of Trinitarian Truth. The Father “eternally produces” or is the eternal source of the eternal begetting of the Son and the eternal spiration of

the Holy Spirit. It should never be thought of in a finite, creative or temporal sense, or as if the Son and the Holy Spirit did not always exist.

Reciprocation – In Trinitarian Theology, the term bespeaks the second facet of the eternal movement or perichoresis of God whereby, the Son and the Holy Spirit eternally give back of themselves to the Father by their respective activity. Thus, reciprocation is defined by the two modes of imaging and affirmation, which, in turn, is defined by the three aspects of reception, relation, and response.

Simplicity – If God is immutable, meaning He does not change, since change presupposes the lack of perfection or completion, then it goes without saying that God must exist in simplicity. Simplicity is from the Latin “simplicitas” and means that God is not made up of parts or compounds. He exists within the simplicity of His unity and acts within the unity of His simplicity. It is a term, which is only possible with one who is eternal and immutable and perfect in all His ways.

Spiritual – It is a generic term denoting, that which is essentially spirit. It bespeaks the substance of God. God is Spirit; therefore, the substance of God must be spiritual.

Spiration – The term spiration bespeaks the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father. Within spiration, there is an eternal communication of the Father's substance, an eternal production of subsistentiaity, and an eternal impartation of all the Father's attributes, save His paternity.

Substance – In Trinitarian theology, substance is the quiddity of God. It is the foundational aspect of His existence. It is eternal and the common possession of all Three Persons. One does not know what the substance of God is except that it is Spirit and is given such

characteristics in Scripture as light, life, holiness, etc. For man, by way of example, his substance would be his life (James 2:26)

Subsistent – The term subsistent denotes a personal, attributal, self-conscious identity within the Divine Being that subsists in a peculiar and distinct manner. It tells us how the one substance of the Godhead subsists in three distinct Persons. In the Godhead, there are three different, co-eternal, co-equal and consubstantial subsistents – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Subsistential – Subsistential refers to the second quality of a Person. It refers to the fact that a Person is a *subsistent* within the Divine Being that *subsists* with a peculiar mode of existence. The three peculiar modes of existence within the Godhead are paternal, filial and spirital. Therefore, subsistentality shows us difference within the Godhead; substantiality shows us sameness within the Godhead and the quality, attributal, shows us distinguishability within the Godhead.

Subsists – Subsist bespeaks the mode of existence of a subsistent within the Godhead. There are three modes of existence within the Trinity: the paternal, filial, and spirital mode of existence. Each Person subsists in His own peculiar manner. The Father is unbegotten and so subsists in a paternal manner, the Son is begotten and so subsists in a filial manner, and the Holy Spirit is spirated and so subsists in a spirital manner.

Substantial – Substantial denotes the “what” of existence. It tells us the Godhead possesses substance. While we do not know the substance of God, we do know it is spirital, since God is Spirit, and that it is possessed without diminution by three co-eternal and co-equal Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since the Father is first in order of the Divine Being, His Person is known as substantial and the Son and Holy Spirit are known as consubstantial. *See Consubstantial.*

Trinitarian Mode of Thought – The Trinitarian Mode of Thought is simply stated “a Trinitarian way of thinking.” It is a disciplined way of thinking where ones thought begins with God. It recognizes that God created all things to reveal something of His own character and nature, and thus it understands all finite things as being in some way revelatory of some aspect of God’s Being.

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B. P. Harris is an elder at The Bible Chapel in Sacramento, CA. He was saved at a young age in 1959 at Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles, CA, but now resides in Northern California where he has been happily married for 30 years.

It is my prayer that this “non-eloquent” work on the Trinity may be used by the Holy Spirit to edify the saints and glorify our precious Lord Jesus Christ, thereby, giving honour to God our Father. I pray this “rough” attempt to speak of the glories of the most Blessed Trinity will be blest by the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit.

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