LARGE PRINT

THE ONLY PERFECT MAN

The Glory of God in The Face of Jesus Christ

ERIC H.H. CHANG

Second Edition

Discover afresh the Biblical Jesus!

Jesus Christ embodies God's glory and fullness. More than that, he is the only perfect man who has ever lived. But whereas his perfection is often taken for granted and regarded as a given fact, on the contrary it is a most stupendous achievement unparalleled in salvation history, for it was as a true man and not the trinitarian "God-man" that Jesus became perfect through suffering, obedience, and God's indwelling. He was consequently exalted to God's right hand as His supreme plenipotentiary, and given all authority in heaven and on earth. Hence the subtitle of the book, "The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor.4:6).

Discussed in this book: • Yahweh the only true God • The historical roots of trinitarianism • Jesus of the Bible versus Jesus of trinitarianism • The four pillars of trinitarianism (John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1, Revelation 1) • Jesus as the "form of God" in Philippians 2 • The name above all names given to Jesus • Jesus' perfection as a model and inspiration to God's people • God's glory manifested in Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God.

Eric H.H. Chang was born in Shanghai, and came to know God in post-liberation China through a series of miracles. He graduated from the Bible Training Institute (Glasgow), London Bible College, and the University of London (Arts and Divinity, King's College and SOAS). He has done pastoral work in England, Canada, and Hong Kong. His publications include *The Only True God: A Study of Biblical Monotheism.*

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The Only Perfect Man

The *Glory of God* in the *Face of Jesus Christ*

Second Edition

The Only Perfect Man

The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ

Eric H.H. Chang

Edited and Completed by
Bentley C.F. Chan

Public Release

We are pleased to announce that *The Only Perfect Man*, a work by Eric H.H. Chang, is now available to the public as a free PDF e-book. This is the second edition of the original edition printed in the United States by CreateSpace, an Amazon.com company, under the following registration numbers (these numbers are valid only for the original CreateSpace print edition):

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biblicalmonotheism@gmail.com

Finally, this book is released to the public free of charge and in good faith, and with the same desire that Eric Chang had always had for the book, that it may proclaim Yahweh, the only true God, and His Son Jesus Christ.

This large-print edition is identical to the regular edition in content, but uses larger fonts. It is suitable for reading on an iPad or an Android tablet because the text remains legible in full-page mode.

Because of its use of large fonts, this e-book has around 900 e-pages but is equivalent to a 530-page print book.

The Only Perfect Man: The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ
by Eric H.H. Chang (with Bentley C.F. Chan)

Second Edition, version 2.1, February 27, 2016

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To Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior,
"the Son of God, who loved me
and gave himself for me"
(Galatians 2:20)

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Foreword

Those who seek after God's truth in a good and honest heart—and strive for the faith once for all delivered to the saints—will find in this book a kindred spirit. Chapter after chapter, page after page, this book offers the reader of any theological persuasion a rich encounter with the deep, penetrating insights of a former trinitarian and proponent of Christ's deity. The engagement is ultimately with the Bible itself, which is upheld in the present work as the sole and supreme authority on matters of faith and doctrine.

Unlike most non-trinitarians, the author did not come from any historically non-trinitarian movement, but had for decades lived in the world of trinitarianism, even the inner sanctums of trinitarian thinking. But one day his eyes were opened to the light of Biblical monotheism, and he has since desired to reverse the trinitarian teaching that he had been promulgating for years in his books, lectures, and church ministry trainings.

I have known Eric H.H. Chang and his wife Helen for over a third of a century. I first met him on September 11, 1977. Some 35 years later, Christmas Day 2012, I spoke with him for the last time. Eric Chang is my friend, my teacher, and my pastor. He is my spiritual father and mentor who

pointed me to God the Father and to Jesus Christ, Son of God and Lamb of God.

Before he died in January 2013, after having served God devotedly for more than half a century, Eric Chang had been working on the present book. He and I had a prior arrangement for me to get it published when the writing is done. But more than that, if he should depart before the writing is finished, I will complete the writing of the book. The latter scenario turned out to be true.

A few days after his death, Helen asked me to retrieve his manuscript files from his computer. Some of his notes were brief, some were developed, some were in between, which means that I could not avoid doing a fair amount of writing. I fearfully but cheerfully, in that order, took up the challenge of completing the writing of the book.

I believe that in God's eyes, Eric Chang's manuscript notes, despite some missing gaps, were "complete" in a real sense when they were passed to me, for God's timing in a person's life—and in his death—will work for good for those who love Him.

Although he had more things in mind to write on, what Eric Chang had already said in this book—and in his previous work, *The Only True God*—would be more than enough to discharge him of his earthly responsibility of proclaiming Yahweh as the only true God, and of passing on that responsibility to his readers. In these two books we see his commitment to the truth, his submission to the Bible's authority, his

pastoral concern for the church, and his love for God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

My role in this book

It is not uncommon for a book to be completed by someone else after the death of the original author. For example, the erudite *Theology of the New Testament* was written by the late Georg Strecker and "edited and completed" by Friedrich Horn.

I likewise declare on the cover pages of the present book that the original author, Eric H.H. Chang, is the sole author of the book, and that it has been "edited and completed" by someone else. I am, however, listed as the second author in the book's ISBN registration because I account for 35% of the book's contents in terms of information, and 65% of the written composition.

In this book I use a simple style of writing. Despite my equal esteem for British and American English, this book uses American spelling and punctuation only because I am more familiar with American conventions. In line with modern books, I drop all literary distinction between double and single quotes except for the purpose of nesting quotations. And I don't hesitate to use contractions.

It sounds like a cliché to say that on me rests the responsibility for all mistakes and shortcomings in the book, but in this case the responsibility is real and justly rests on me.

A man after God's heart

This book was written from a shepherd's heart by a man of God. Though trained in the Bible at several schools (Bible Training Institute, London Bible College, University of London), Eric Chang was not an armchair theologian but a true man of God who, as I can testify, followed God with his whole heart and had experienced apostolic miracles as recounted in his book, *How I Have Come to Know God*.

In 1997, my wife Sylvia and I spent a month in Israel with him and other coworkers, and there I was impressed by the concrete expressions of his love for Jews, Christians, and Muslims (notably a certain Ali Hussein of Cairo).

My prayer is that you, dear reader, will be blessed by this book, and that the glory of Yahweh God will shine through you in Jesus the Messiah, bringing life and light to those around you. May God our loving Father be pleased to use this book to impart insight about Himself and His great Name, and Jesus Christ the Son of God and the only perfect man who has ever lived.

Gratitude

Special thanks to Helen Chang for your friendship and encouragement; to Sylvia for your love over the decades and your feedback on the manuscript; to Agnes and Lee Sen for your fine research on "in Christ"; to Winston for your help in proofreading; to Chris for your help in all things technical

over the years; to my fellow regional overseers for your feedback, friendship, and caring leadership; to Felicia who gave me two good suggestions for the book; to those who have translated this book into Chinese, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia, with other languages coming up; to Robert a Canadian brother and Debbie an American sister for being God's two instruments who have brought me to know Him.

My gratitude to Sir Anthony Buzzard, Dr. William G. MacDonald, John Reichardt, Greg Deuble, Bruce Lyon, Jean-Philippe Parent, Dan and Sharon Gill, Maksim Ryzhikh, Clark Barefoot, and many others in the western world, for your friendship, your moral support, and your proclamation of the only true God. I am grateful to Sir Tim Berners-Lee, father of the World Wide Web, for making it possible to disseminate the truth without the fear of it being suppressed.

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Preface

In this book we discuss some of the most important and keenly debated issues arising from the trinitarian portrayal of Jesus Christ as God. It is our fervent hope that our contribution to the overall discussion, in terms of presenting the relevant biblical data, will motivate Christians everywhere to see the supreme authority of the inspired Scriptures in evaluating the truth of any doctrine.

This book, *The Only Perfect Man*, is the sequel to, but also the counterpart of my earlier book, *The Only True God*.[1] For convenience, these two books will sometimes be referred to as TOPM and TOTG, respectively. Beyond the symmetry of their titles, there are several points of similarity—and contrast—that connect the two books.

Firstly, TOTG and TOPM are both written from the perspective of Biblical monotheism and not that of trinitarianism. We take the term "monotheism" in its strict sense of the belief in one and only God, as opposed to the polytheistic belief in a multiplicity of divine beings. Our study of the Scriptures has led us to the solid conclusion that there is one

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[1] Eric H.H. Chang, *The Only True God: A Study of Biblical Monotheism*, Xlibris, Bloomington, Indiana, 2009, ISBN 978-1-4363-8947-1, Library of Congress Number 2008911119. The PDF edition is available from http://www.christiandc.org.

and only God, that He is one Person, that His name is Yahweh, that He is the Father of Jesus Christ. We are equally convinced that the Bible teaches that Jesus is the Son of God; Jesus is not God the Son; Jesus is not God; Jesus is the perfect image of God; Jesus manifests the full glory of God; Jesus exercises all the authority of God as God's appointed plenipotentiary.

Secondly, whereas the first book TOTG centers on Yahweh the only true God, the present book TOPM centers on Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the only perfect man who has ever lived.

Thirdly, TOTG and TOPM are connected—and likewise God and Jesus Christ are connected—by the Biblical truth that Yahweh, the only true God, came into the world by dwelling in the man Christ Jesus, the perfect temple of God, when Jesus was born into the world. (This is at odds with the trinitarian view that by incarnation the preexistent second person of the Trinity took on human existence as Jesus Christ such that Jesus now possesses both a divine nature and a human nature.) John's Prologue (Jn.1:1-18) says that God, who is the Word, came into the world to dwell in Jesus. Verse 14 ("the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us") aligns with the truth that Jesus' body is the temple in which God dwells (Jn.2:19), as will be discussed in chapter 3 of this book.

Fourthly, because TOPM was published after TOTG, one might think that the earlier book has to be read first before

embarking on the present book. But that is not so. TOPM is a self-contained book that can be read independently of TOTG. If you intend to read both books, you can read them in either order. For the benefit of those who have not read TOTG or have forgotten its contents, I will in the present book occasionally refer to certain chapters of the earlier book for some background information. You can then refer to the print edition of TOTG available from Amazon.com, or the PDF edition available at http://www.christiandc.org.

Fifthly, there is substantial carryover of TOTG into TOPM in that the discussion on monotheism and trinitarianism in the earlier book will continue well into TOPM. This is necessary for clearing the trinitarian obstacles that hinder our understanding of Jesus as the only perfect man.

Note:

- I would sometimes indicate that a section, on account of its technical nature, can be skipped without impairing the flow of reading. This is for the benefit of those who prefer not to read the technical details.
- Most footnotes may be skipped though many of them provide useful exegetical or biblical information. Appendixes may be skipped though the last one contains important information.
- BDAG refers to *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich). All citations from BDAG are taken from the 3rd edition; these can also be found in the 2nd edition, though sometimes under a different section number.

- HALOT denotes *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. We consult HALOT and BDAG because they are the foremost lexical authorities for biblical Hebrew and biblical Greek, respectively.

Statement of Belief: How I View the Word of God

In this study on Jesus the only Perfect Man, it is only right that the reader be given an understanding of how this writer looks at the Bible as a whole and the New Testament in particular.

Many books have been written on the Bible but their authors seldom indicate exactly how they view the Bible. Is the Bible to them an ancient religious document that may be of some or even considerable value for the study of antiquity? Is the Bible, then, a collection of ancient documents that are valuable for gaining an understanding of the nations of the ancient Near East, and of Israel in particular, but also of the enormous impact that the Bible has had, especially on western civilization?

But as an ancient document on religion and history, what *authority* does the Bible hold for our faith today? A view of the Bible that has no consideration of its authority would be of little more than academic interest to us, and would not have any defining meaning for our faith and the way we live.

I wish to make it clear from the start that this is not the way I view the Bible, the Scriptures. I instead view the Bible

as *the Word of God*. I do not mean that it is a piece of divine dictation given to the writers of its constituent parts, who during the dictation were functioning as robots or recording machines while their minds remained passive. On the contrary, I believe that every writer of Scripture could be described as a preacher or a prophet who had been given a message from God, and who then re-expressed that divine message from his own heart and mind with the full deliberateness of his character and indeed his whole being.

This is confirmed by the fact that the books of the Bible, including the New Testament letters, bear the linguistic styles of their respective writers and even their language abilities. For example, James has a high standard of Greek, either his own Greek or that of an amanuensis (roughly equivalent to a secretary in today's terms), in contrast to the "rough" Greek of Revelation. There would be no such linguistic or stylistic diversity if the contents of the letters were given to the writers word for word through divine dictation. As one who has preached many messages in my lifetime, I have some glimmer of understanding of what the prophet Jeremiah meant when he said that the message he had received from God was like a fire burning in his bones (Jer.20:9). This is not a statement that could have come from the mouth of a mere passive "stenographer" of God's Word.

A man of God who taught me the Word of God

I view the Bible as the Word of God not because of any loyalty to some denominational creed but because ever since the day I first experienced God, I have come to know Him as "the living God" (a term used in both the Old and New Testaments). That crucial day stretches back six decades to Christmas Day 1953, in liberated China, when I was mulling over an invitation to have refreshments at someone's home. I was undecided about going to a Christian home because I had considered myself, if not an atheist, at least an agnostic. After much hesitation, I arrived late at this home only to see that most of the people there were leaving. Only two remained: a man, just under 40, with a gentle, handsome and finely featured face, and a middle-aged woman with graying hair who was the one who had given me the invitation in the first place, and whose home hosted the small Christmas party.

I won't recount the other events of that evening—during which the woman remained largely quiet, and the younger man, Henry Choi, spoke to me about God and Jesus Christ—except to say that before the day was over, I had arrived at my own "Damascus road experience," as Paul's encounter with Jesus in Acts 9 is often called.[2]

[2] This experience of God and several others in my early Christian years are recounted in, *How I Have Come to Know God*, updated edition, OM Authentic Books, Andhra Pradesh, India, 2000. You can read this book online at http://www.christiandc.org.

Within a year of that life-changing experience of mine, Henry, who had become my teacher of the New Testament and in particular of John's Gospel which he brought to life in a way I had never heard from anyone else, was one night arrested outside his home and never seen again. To the knowledge of all his friends, Henry had never been involved in politics or expressed any interest in it.

Surely here was a man of God of whom it could be said that he was on fire for "God and His Christ". Henry was a research chemist, and he used his income from his work to fund his evangelistic and preaching activities in the neighboring villages in the greater Shanghai area. Was it for this that he was arrested? On this side of eternity, we will never know.

Hearing God's voice in God's Word: The first commandment

Studying the Bible is not like studying any other subject because the Bible is not primarily a book on history, geography or literature, but is first and foremost the word of God. Sometimes God does speak through the backdrop of history or geography but we cannot study the Bible in the way we study history or literature or any other subject if our aim is to hear God's voice in God's word. But if hearing God's voice is not our objective, then of course we can study the Bible as an academic subject.

What then must we do to hear God's voice when we read His word? We must start right at the beginning, with the first of God's commandments, the importance of which was brought out by a scribe when he asked Jesus which is the first of the commandments. Jesus replied:

> This first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:29-31, NKJV)

When we fulfill the two great commandments—love for God and love for neighbor—we will begin to hear God's voice in the Bible. What we previously thought were mere stories, historical events, poems and proverbs, now become the channel of God's communicating with us. What we thought were ancient writings that have lost their relevance for us today are now living words that speak to our hearts. The God we have been reading about in the Bible is now the God who reaches our deepest thoughts with His word. Now we understand why He is called "the living God" in both the Old and the New Testaments.

But if we don't fulfill the first commandment, we won't know God as the living God. Many Christians find themselves in this situation because they haven't been taught to love God with their whole being. In what meaningful sense

are we the disciples of Jesus if we don't fulfill what he has taught us about loving God? The consequences of this failure for our lives and the church are evident for all to see. Some Christian leaders have told me that after having served in the ministry for 20 or 30 years, they still don't have the spiritual power to fulfill the ministry to which they have committed themselves. The living God is hardly seen in the church today because the first great commandment has been neglected.

As trinitarians we rejected the *monotheism* of the first commandment that is central to the spiritual life of Israel as expressed in the Shema:

> "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "LORD" is literally "Yahweh")

It is never too late to return to Yahweh our God. If we return to the first commandment, we will experience a promise from God: "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten" (Joel 2:25). Then we will have the joy of knowing Him who is called "the living God".

Experiencing God is essential for understanding His Word

I still remember something from my student days in London that remains etched in my memory. My professor of Hebrew was discussing with me certain difficult texts in the Hebrew Bible when he paused and said to himself, "I wonder if there is really a God after all." I was taken aback by his statement, finding it hard to understand how anyone could devote a lifetime to studying the Hebrew Bible without believing in the existence of the God who is central to that Bible. Was he only interested in its literature?

I too was looking at the texts that were being discussed when my professor uttered those astonishing words. I took a look at him and saw that he was gazing heavenward towards the ceiling while speaking in deep contemplation. He was a well-known scholar who had published many books and articles on specialized topics on the Hebrew Bible. So why did he at this particular moment stop to think of God's reality? After a few minutes of reflection, he returned to the text before us and soon the session was over. But that incident left a deep impression on me. Here was an erudite scholar famous in the field of biblical studies who evidently had not come to any firm conclusion about God's reality.

He wasn't the only one in the Faculty of Divinity who had doubts about God's existence. Some of the other professors didn't believe in God apparently because they hadn't experienced Him as a living reality. They would, however, still

teach the Old and New Testaments as academic subjects, with God being one of the topics. That the Scriptures were given by divine inspiration was not something that they accepted, for they regarded the Bible as a product of human tradition, and found support for this view by pointing to the human errors evident in its pages as we have them today, including alterations to the biblical texts made either intentionally or by copying errors. In these tedious academic studies, God is lost sight of. It is a fact that many Bible-believing Christians have gone into theological studies with the aim of preparing for church ministry, only to lose their vision and even their faith because they too lacked the experience of the living God.

How we read the Scriptures is governed by whether we have experienced God's reality. A person who knows God will "hear" His word in a fundamentally different way from one who doesn't know God. When I speak of knowing God, I mean it as Paul meant it when he said, "I know whom I have believed" (2Tim.1:12). Many people believe in God in some vague sense but that is not a substitute for knowing God. A faith that is not rooted in the experience of God will soon become narrow, dogmatic, and hostile to those who don't share its opinions. But those who know God don't behave in this way.

I am mentioning all this because of its importance for understanding the message of this book, which is an exposition of Scripture. I believe in the Bible as the Word of God not

merely as a point of creedal dogma, but having lived by its teaching and discovering through this process that the Bible "works," I know it is the truth.

Jesus said to his fellow Jews, "If anyone is willing to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (Jn.7:17). And indeed I have found God's word to be true.

It doesn't mean that scholarship can be ignored or that biblical studies and accurate exegesis can be tossed aside. We can be sure that God is not glorified by careless work in studying the Bible, for God is a God of perfection. So even if we have not attained to a high level of technical competence, we should at least give our best efforts to the exposition of God's Word.

Introductory Remarks

Firstly, as stated in the book's title, *The Only Perfect Man*, the biblical Jesus is a man, a real human being like every human person in the world. He is not a "divine man" or a "God-man" as posited in trinitarianism. If there was ever such a person as a God-man, he would not be a real man. "Divine men" or "gods" (cf. "gods many," 1Cor.8:5) abounded in Greek mythology and were familiar to the early Christians who lived in pagan societies. Barnabas and Paul, in their mission among the Gentiles, were mistaken for the gods Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14:12) when the people of Lycaonia rushed out to worship them, even preparing sacrificial offerings to them. But Barnabas and Paul cried out, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature with you" (v.15).[3]

Jesus, as we see him in the New Testament, is a man with the same nature as all human beings, just as Elijah was a man with the "same nature" as us (James 5:17). Because Jesus shared the same nature as humans, he was "in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb.4:15).

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[3] BDAG defines *homoiopathē* in this verse as "with the same nature".

But being of the same nature doesn't mean that he is the same as us in every respect. This brings us to the next point.

Secondly, the man Jesus was *perfect*. His perfection was not, however, something that came to him automatically by any standing as God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, but something that he had learned through suffering and attained by Yahweh's indwelling presence in him.

Thirdly, Jesus is the *only* perfect man who has ever lived. Among all the human beings who have ever lived since the fall of Adam and Eve, there has been "none righteous, not even one" (Rom.3:10). But when Jesus came, there was finally one, but only one.

Because there has never been a sinless person in history apart from Jesus, he is an extraordinary man, a unique man, a glorious man, the only man who has attained to the zenith, the highest point, of Yahweh's eternal purposes for man. To emphasize this remarkable fact, it is appropriate in some contexts to use the capitalized "Man" to show that he is true man yet at the same time not an ordinary man, but one who had attained perfection by Yahweh's grace and power.

In some translations of the Hebrew Bible (the so-called Old Testament), a few people are said to be "perfect," but in such cases the Hebrew word is more appropriately translated "blameless," a rendering that is seen in some other Bibles. No human apart from Jesus has ever attained absolute perfection. What was achieved by the few righteous people in the Old Testament was not an absolute perfection but a relative

perfection or a relative blamelessness in comparison with humankind. But when we speak of Jesus as the only perfect man, we are speaking of his *absolute* sinlessness, of a *total* perfection with no ifs or buts, of an achievement that is truly astounding. The Perfect Man is the greatest miracle that Yahweh has ever done in Christ, for no man can ever attain to absolute perfection unless God empowers him every moment of his life. This was achieved in the case of Jesus also because he had lived every moment of his life in total obedience to his Father Yahweh.

Fourthly, because of his perfection, Jesus was exalted to the highest place in the universe second to God Himself. Jesus is seated at the "right hand of God," made second only to Yahweh in all creation. God has subjected everything to him and committed all power to him. As such, Jesus functions as God's visible representative, hence the subtitle of this book: "The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor. 4:6). Anyone who sees the face of Jesus sees the glory of God.

Writing from the perspective of a battlefield

This study is not a work of one who lives and works in the academic world, though academia is not unfamiliar to him, but that of a church minister and leader of a fairly large fellowship of churches. The mission of the church universal is to fulfill what Jesus said to his disciples, that the "gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world

as a testimony to all nations" (Mt.24:14). Advancing God's kingdom in a world in which powerful forces are opposed to Him inevitably means that our mission is not an easy walk-over but an intense fight (2Tim.4:7). That this struggle is not just a figure of speech drawn from the language of athletic competitions such as those held in Corinth, can be seen from the literal sufferings and close brushes with death that Paul had encountered (2Cor.11:23f).

What it means is that this book is written from the vantage point of a battlefield rather than the polished halls of academia. In turn it means that the subject-matter cannot be studied with the kind of academic detachment that some scholars may be able to indulge in, but rather with the subjectivity of personal involvement in a battle that is "unto death" (Rev.2:10; Mt.24:13; Mk.13:13). Personal involvement may at times give rise to an intensity and vehemence of expression that are far removed from the cool and dispassionate statements of those who look at the matter from a distance. Consider Jesus' anger when he made a whip of cords to drive out the merchants and money changers from the temple (Jn.2:15).

In reality few are disengaged from the important issues discussed in this study, for there are few topics that engage the emotions of the heart as much as the matters of faith discussed here.

Even so, when it comes to interpreting Bible passages, it is crucial for us to have the objectivity that equips us to study

them with care and accuracy, and with such academic competence as we possess, not allowing our doctrinal presuppositions to influence our understanding of what the Bible is saying to us.

Capitalization

In this work the terms "Bible" and "Scripture" are written in capitals as also sometimes their adjectival forms "Biblical" and "Scriptural," not because of bibliolatry (worship of the Bible) but to emphasis that the Scriptures (the OT and the NT), as the Word of God (not by dictation but by inspiration, 2Tim.3:16), are the final and absolute authority for faith and doctrine. The failure to adhere to this ultimate spiritual principle has resulted in the church's falling into fatal errors.

Pronouns that refer to God are sometimes capitalized, not only out of reverence but to distinguish references to Him from pronominal references to others within the same sentence. For example, the following sentence would be hard to understand without pronominal capitalization:

> Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. (Heb.2:8, ESV)

If we capitalize "he," which refers to God with all other pronouns referring to Christ, the meaning becomes clear:

> Now in putting everything in subjection to him, He (God) left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

On the same topic—the subjection of all things to Christ—Paul says:

> For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," *it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him*. (1Cor.15:27, ESV)

The meaning of the clause in italics is made clear if we capitalize "he" (referring to God). In fact, for clarity, NIV goes beyond translation when it inserts the words "God" and "Christ" into Paul's statement: "this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ".

A matter of crucial importance: procedure

A study of how trinitarianism developed will show that it began with the Gentile worship of Jesus. That the early Gentiles had a propensity for worshipping their god-men is seen in the worship of Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes (Acts 14:12).

Since the trinitarian worship of Jesus as God is not based on Scripture, it comes as no surprise that the Nicene Creed and a few subsequent early "Christian" creeds do not cite a single verse of Scripture to support their dogmatic assertions.

In short these are man-made creeds that are based on human authority and not on the authority of the Scriptures, the Word of God. No attempt is even made to conceal this fact. The church leaders, called Fathers and bishops, elevated themselves to being God's appointed authority invested with the supreme power to make binding decisions on doctrine and to cast an *anathema* (a curse) on those with different views.

It was not until the Reformation with its acceptance of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) as the doctrinal basis for the church, and with its rejection of the authority of the Catholic church, that there was a fundamental change in procedure as to how doctrine and practice are to be evaluated. But the problem for the Protestant church which came out in the Reformation was that it practically took in the entire Catholic church creed. As a result there is no fundamental difference in theology—notably trinitarian theology—between the Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. In the Catholic church as well as Protestant churches, the zealous loyalty to church dogma would raise its wary head whenever an effort is made in earnest, whether by Catholic or Protestant scholars, to evaluate doctrine solely on the basis of its fidelity to the Scriptures. The principle of *sola Scriptura* is in reality an instrument of the church to make the Scriptures conform to church dogma, notably trinitarianism. Procedurally, they start with trinitarianism and not with Scripture. We will examine these efforts in the course of this study.

How can trinitarians read the Scriptures apart from the only perspective they have ever known?

How can it ever be possible for those of us who come from a trinitarian background, given that we couldn't even be baptized without accepting the church creeds, to read the Bible without approaching it from the trinitarian point of view, which is the only perspective we have known? How can we read the Bible in its pristine purity if from the start we are required to read it through the prism of fourth and fifth century creeds? These creeds were formulated without any explicit citing of the Bible (whose authority was, in any case, supplanted by that of the church leaders who wrote the creeds) and required all Christians to believe in a three-person "Godhead". "Godhead" is a strange word that we didn't really understand, and soon discovered that no one else did either. But from the outset we were taught that God the Son, the second person of the Godhead, became incarnate as the man Jesus Christ.

Most Christians begin their Christian lives under the nurture of the churches that they joined, in which they now take up various activities and engage in various forms of worship. Many Christians, notably Catholics, don't even own a Bible, let alone read one, not even years after their conversion, which means that the church has become their sole spiritual authority.

But even among evangelicals who claim to uphold the Bible as the final authority in all matters of faith, the reality is

that they come to the Bible as trinitarians, and don't know how to read it except in the trinitarian way in which they have been brought up as Christians.

That was the way I read the Bible for most of my Christian life, starting from the age of 19 and going past 70. Whether I was evangelizing to non-Christians, leading Bibles studies, or building up the pastoral leadership of the church, somehow I would feel the need to impress upon my hearers that Jesus is God. How then is it possible for us to read the Bible and allow it to speak for itself when we habitually impose our preconceived ideas on it?

My trinitarian mindset also influenced the way I read the Old Testament. This was complicated by the fact that the Old Testament has no trace or evidence of a person called "God the Son," the central figure of trinitarian faith. This problem was taken care of, psychologically at least, by assuming that most of the instances in the Old Testament of "the Lord" (capitalized in most English Bibles as "the LORD") refer to the preexistent Jesus. But if "the LORD" refers to Jesus, where is the Father's place in the Old Testament?

Biblical versus Trinitarian Meanings of Bible Terms

Because trinitarian doctrine has changed the meanings of key terms in the Bible, it is important for us to clarify the meanings of some of these terms right from the start or else it would be impossible for us to understand what the Bible teaches. We now look at the terms *God*, *Lord*, *Father*, *Jesus*, and *Son of God*. These will be discussed only briefly, just enough to highlight the points of departure between the Biblical and the trinitarian meanings of these terms.

God

Right from the start we need to consider the central person of the Bible: God. By "God" trinitarians mean the Trinity—a God consisting of three persons who share one substance. But neither the concept of a divine substance (which comes from Greek thinking and polytheistic faiths) nor that of a tripartite God whose three persons share one substance, exists in the Bible. The one and only God of the Bible is called "Yahweh," a name which occurs some 7,000 times in the Scriptures. In striking contrast, the trinitarian God has no

name at all! Even if some trinitarians equate Yahweh with God the Father, the fact remains that this God the Father is only one of three persons in the "Godhead".

It is universally admitted by trinitarians (consult any Bible dictionary or systematic theology) that the word "trinity" does not exist in the Bible. In any case, "trinity" is not a name but a descriptive term for a non-existent tripartite God (non-existent, that is, in terms of its being absent from the Bible). The tripartite aspect of trinitarianism has given rise to the situation in which some Christians pray to the Father, others pray to Jesus, and yet others, especially those from charismatic circles, pray to the Spirit.

But Yahweh is one Person, not three, and He certainly has a name. Yet for all intents and purposes, that Name has been obliterated in Christendom. Most Christians don't know who Yahweh is, though they have heard of Jehovah, an inaccurate form of the Name which they associate with a group called the Jehovah's Witnesses, leaving them with negative feelings towards the name Jehovah and by extension Yahweh. The name Yahweh has been tossed out (except in academia) despite the fact that it occurs on almost every page of the Hebrew Bible (which Christians call the Old Testament), in fact six or seven times per page on average.

The New Testament, like the Old Testament, is strictly monotheistic, a fact that is known to all biblical scholars. But because true monotheism is incongruous with trinitarianism, trinitarians try to get around this by changing the meaning of

"God" such that God is "one substance" or "one essence" rather than one person despite the absence of the term "one substance" (or its concept) in the Bible.

The elimination of Yahweh's Name

The gradual disappearance of God's personal name, Yahweh, had its beginnings among the post-exilic Jews (those who lived after the return from the Babylonian exile) who felt that it was reverent to refer to Yahweh not as *Yahweh* but as *Adonai* (Hebrew for "Lord" or "my Lord"). Most crucially, the practice of not uttering the name Yahweh was soon reflected in what was being done in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible known as the Septuagint (from *septuaginta*, Latin for seventy), often shortened to LXX, the Roman numerals for 70, since according to tradition the translation was done by 70 or 72 translators. The LXX is not a "translation by committee" as we might understand that term today, but a collection of disparate translations done over a period of two centuries and was completed a century or so before Christ.

Most significantly, the LXX renders "Yahweh" as *kyrios* (Lord), the Greek equivalent of *Adonai* (Lord). In other words, God's unique personal name, Yahweh, was replaced with a descriptive title, "the Lord" (*kyrios*, a word that is also applied to human beings). Despite this mistranslation of "Yahweh," the Greek-speaking Jews had the benefit of know-

ing that *kyrios* in many contexts refers to Yahweh, the credit for which could be given to their Jewish religious heritage. But the same could not be said of the non-Jews (the Gentiles) because most of them don't know that *kyrios* (Lord) is often simply a substitute for "Yahweh".[4]

Because of the Gentile ignorance of this fact, within three centuries after the time of Jesus, the title "Lord" as applied to God was conflated with the title "Lord" as applied to Jesus, who was by then declared to be "God the Son," a trinitarian title found nowhere in the Scriptures. By as early as the mid-second century, by which time the western churches had become predominantly non-Jewish, the name "Yahweh" had practically disappeared from the church.

Significantly, with the elimination of the name Yahweh, the church entered into a state of spiritual decline that continues to this day. In the fourth century, the Roman emperor

[4] Most English Bibles render "Lord" in small capitals as "LORD" where the word in the Hebrew text is YHWH or Yahweh. In the history of the Bible, this convention is a relatively modern typographical device, and is not followed by all English Bibles (e.g. not by the Geneva Bible of 1599 or the modern-day *Orthodox Study Bible*). In the present book, we don't find it necessary to render "Lord" in small capitals as "LORD" except when quoting from Bibles that use such capitalization. It is usually more accurate to restore the name "Yahweh" or to point out that the original word in the Hebrew text is YHWH. A few English translations preserve the name "Yahweh," either consistently (NJB, WEB, Lexham English Bible) or some of the time (HCSB). ASV uses "Jehovah" consistently.

Constantine made himself the *de facto* head of the Christian church, a move that was for the political objective of stabilizing his empire. This further hastened the spiritual decline of the church; and not long after that, the Pope of Christendom was functioning like a Roman emperor. The church was being steadily absorbed by the world.

The elimination of the name Yahweh began with the post-exilic refusal to pronounce it for fear of unintentionally misusing it, notably by violating the third commandment ("You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain"). In the end, no one could be exactly sure how the Name was originally pronounced, though the authoritative 22-volume *Encyclopedia Judaica* says that the original pronunciation was "Yahweh" and that it has never been lost.

Does it matter today how His name was exactly pronounced? Doesn't God look into our hearts to see if we genuinely call upon Him and His name? Even if we knew how YHWH was originally pronounced, would we know with certainty where the stress was placed, on the first syllable or the second? (The stress is almost certainly placed on the first syllable because "Yah" is the short form of "Yahweh," hence YAHweh is more probable than YahWEH.)

The near elimination of Yahweh's name has given trinitarianism an opportunity to establish its errors. These errors will wilt and die if we restore His Name. And Scripture says that Yahweh's name is to be proclaimed, not suppressed:

> **Deuteronomy 32:3** For I shall proclaim the name of Yahweh. Oh, tell the greatness of our God! (NJB)
>
> **Isaiah 12:4** Give thanks to Yahweh; proclaim His name! Celebrate His works among the peoples. Declare that His name is exalted. (HCSB)

The Jewish reluctance to utter the name "Yahweh" explains why it is not used in the New Testament. The New Testament was written for the Jews in the first instance. Since they held back from uttering God's name, they would have shunned any evangelist who spoke it, and this would have shut the door on evangelism. The churches that Paul wrote to were composed mainly of Jewish believers though some of the churches had sizable Gentile minorities. And since Paul adhered to the principle of preaching the gospel "to the Jews first," he would never risk turning the Jews away from the gospel by uttering Yahweh's name. In any case, the reluctance to say Yahweh's name was not a serious problem in practice because the Jews knew that the title "Lord" in many contexts refers to Yahweh.

Lord

When the gospels and the New Testament letters were being written some 150 years after the LXX had been completed, the LXX had by then become entrenched and widely circulated in the Greek-speaking world. The Greek language itself had become the *lingua franca* or universal language of the

Roman world, especially in commerce, much as English has become the language of international commerce today. That is why the New Testament writers would usually cite Old Testament passages not from the Hebrew Bible but from the LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. It is only natural for the New Testament, which has come to us in Greek, to cite Scripture from the Greek LXX.

The word *kyrios* (Lord) in the LXX verses quoted in the New Testament refers to Yahweh in most instances. That Yahweh is called "Lord" in the LXX (and in the New Testament passages which quote the LXX) was not a source of confusion to the early Jewish believer, for he was aware of the referential equivalence of YHWH and "Lord". At the same time, he also knew that "Lord" is a broad term that may refer to persons other than Yahweh. When Peter told the multitudes in Jerusalem that God had appointed Jesus "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36)—that is, Jesus was exalted as Lord Jesus Christ at his resurrection—the Jewish believers did not confuse "Lord" as applied to Jesus and "Lord" as applied to Yahweh God.

But the situation changed when the New Testament writings fell into the hands of the Gentiles, for they were unable to distinguish "Lord" as applied to Yahweh and "Lord" as applied to Jesus. This conflation and confusion suited trinitarianism perfectly, and facilitated its rise in the early centuries of the western Gentile church.

In the New Testament, "Lord" may refer to Yahweh, to Jesus, or to either Yahweh or Jesus. This variability in meaning is not the result of any careless or deliberate confusion of persons, but arose from the fact that in the work of salvation, Jesus functions in perfect unity with Yahweh his Father who accomplishes mankind's salvation in and through Jesus Christ. In the work of salvation, God and Jesus cannot be separated. That is why in many instances we don't need to look for sharp distinctions in the use of "Lord". For example, "the Lord" may refer to God or to Jesus in verses such as 1Cor.16:7 ("if the Lord permits"), 1Cor.16:10 ("doing the work of the Lord"), and Phil.4:4 ("Rejoice in the Lord").

On the other hand, there are many instances of "Lord" that make a clear distinction between God and Jesus, for example, 1Cor.6:14, "And God raised the Lord," where "Lord" can only refer to Jesus. The distinction between God and the Lord Jesus is often made by an explicit reference to them as separate persons, e.g. "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom.1:7; 1Cor.1:3; 2Cor.1:2; Gal.1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil.1:2; 2Th.1:2; Phlm.1:3).

Sometimes it is not immediately clear who "the Lord" refers to, but an examination of the text would usually clear up the uncertainty, as is the case with "the Lord of glory" in the following:

> [7] But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. [8] None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1Cor.2:7-8, ESV)

Who does "the Lord of glory" refer to? Since Jesus is not mentioned in the preceding verse (v.7) or the following verse (v.9), and since God is mentioned in both these verses, do we take "Lord of glory" as a reference to God, as many have done? Yet a careful examination shows that "the Lord of glory" refers to Jesus, not to God, because:

1. In v.2, Paul speaks of "Jesus Christ" as the one who was "crucified". Hence context alone confirms that "the Lord of glory" in v.8 refers to Jesus.
2. James 2:1 speaks of "Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory".
3. Since God is immortal (Rom.1:23; 1Tim.1:17) and cannot die, "the Lord of glory" can only refer to Jesus, who is mortal and has died for mankind.

Any of these points would be sufficient to establish that "the Lord of glory" in 1Cor.2:8 refers to Jesus, yet we bring up all three to show that it is not difficult to find out who "Lord" refers to if we are willing to go through the proper exegetical procedure.

In the church today, "Lord" is used indiscriminately of God and of Jesus in a way that conflates the two. This serves the objectives of trinitarianism because trinitarians do not

want to make a distinction between God and Jesus. In trinitarian churches, referring to Jesus as Lord is tantamount to saying that he is God. But not so in the New Testament. Addressing Jesus as "Lord" is to acknowledge him as the master of our lives; it is not an assertion of his deity.

The New Testament, notably in Paul's letters, often makes an intentional distinction between "God" and "Lord". James D.G. Dunn says:

> In various passages Paul uses the formula, 'The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. The striking feature is that Paul speaks of God not simply as the God of Christ, but as 'the *God*…of our *Lord* Jesus Christ'. Even as Lord, Jesus acknowledges God not only as his Father but also as his God. Here it becomes plain that the *kyrios* title [Lord] is not so much a way of *identifying* Jesus with God, as a way of *distinguishing* Jesus from God. (*Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* p.110, emphasis Dunn's)

Today there is the further problem that "Lord" has become an archaic word that is no longer in everyday use, having been replaced by words such as *chief*, *boss*, CEO, and so on.

Because of the conflating use of "Lord" in the church today, this title will be used sparingly in this book until we come to our study of the New Testament application of "Lord" to Jesus.

My book *Totally Committed!*[5] expounded Deuteronomy 6:5 ("You shall love the LORD [Yahweh] your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might") from a trinitarian perspective, replacing Yahweh with Jesus as the object of commitment. I now realize that this is a serious error, indeed a serious sin, but like Paul I can only plead that I did it in ignorance and on those grounds hope to receive mercy (1Tim.1:13). Many thousands all over the world have read the book or received its teaching as a Bible course. I can only hope that they will have the chance to hear the message of the present work.

The Father

The Israelites regarded Yahweh God as their Father as seen in verses such as Isaiah 63:16 ("You, O Yahweh, are our Father") and 64:8 ("Yahweh, you are our Father"). In the Old Testament, nine persons are named Abijah, which means, "my Father is Yah(weh)" (Yah is the short form of Yahweh).

But to trinitarians, the Father is only the first person of the Trinity. Just as "Father" is not a proper name but a term that defines one's relationship to his own son, so in trinitarianism, God the Father has no name but is defined in

[5] *Totally Committed: The Importance of Commitment in Biblical Teaching*, Eric H.H. Chang, Guardian Books, 2001. A new 2016 edition that restores Yahweh God as the object of the believer's commitment is available from Amazon.com (ISBN 978-1515071686).

relation to the second person, God the Son, who ironically does have a name. His name "Jesus" is a very human name that was common in Israel in New Testament times.

Jesus

Trinitarians say that Jesus is "not just" a man but the God-man, as if Jesus is demeaned when we say that he is true man. In trinitarian dogma, no one other than Jesus, not even God the Father or God the Spirit, is God-man. This leaves Jesus in a category all of his own.

The trinitarian assertion that Jesus is fully God and fully man ultimately means that he is neither truly God nor truly man. It is simply impossible for anyone to be 100% God and 100% man at the same time. When we make Jesus 100% God and 100% man, we are fabricating a non-existent person to suit our doctrines, doing this without regard for reality or plain logic, and coming up with statements that are patently false, nonsensical, and unbiblical. Falsehood may sound convincing enough to deceive people but that doesn't make it true. False gods are worshipped in many religions but that doesn't make them true.

There is a subtle, and for this reason dangerous, implication in the God-man doctrine: Are we making Jesus more than God? In trinitarianism, God the Father is "only" God whereas Jesus is God + man. We cannot discount man as having zero value with nothing that can be added to God. In

fact, man is the apex and crown of God's creation—a creation that is deemed to be "very good" in God's eyes (Gen.1:31).

Even if we insist that man is worth nothing, the fact remains that a person who is both God and man would be far more appealing and attractive to human beings than one who is "only" God. It is psychologically easier for us to relate to someone who is human than to someone who is not. This goes a long way towards explaining the great appeal of the trinitarian "God-man" construct of Jesus and its power of deception.

It is the human element that accounts for the strong appeal of Mary, the mother of Jesus, to the Catholics who worship her. Whereas the Jesus of trinitarianism is vested with divinity and humanity, Mary is entirely human and for that reason would be more appealing than Jesus to many Catholics. Her appeal is strengthened by her status in Catholicism as "the Mother of God," making her power of persuasion before God unsurpassed in the eyes of her devotees. It is not surprising that statues of Mary are found in most Catholic churches, and that many churches are dedicated to her, such as the cathedral in Montreal called "Mary, Queen of the World". The fact that Mary is "merely" human and not divine does not deter her devotees from adoring and even worshipping her.

But if we go with the biblical view that Jesus is a true man, a 100% man, this will elicit the trinitarian protest that we are reducing Jesus to a "mere" man. But every human being on

the face of the earth is "mere" man or woman, yet was created in "the image of God". As for Jesus the "mere" man, it has so pleased Yahweh the Most High God to exalt him above the heavens and to seat him at His right hand, making Jesus second only to Yahweh in the universe. Jesus is thus "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb.2:7). But how can the *trinitarian* Jesus be crowned with—conferred with—glory and honor when as God he has always had this glory from all eternity?

The Son of God

Finally, what does the title "Son of God" mean to most Christians? As good trinitarians we stressed the word "God," so we read "Son of God" as "God the Son". Our eyes saw "Son of God" but our trinitarian minds were trained to see it as "God the Son". The fact that our intelligent and educated minds could so easily reverse the words back to front, is a fearsome demonstration of the power of error. But even if we clarified this error, most Christians still would not know what "Son of God" means in the Bible.

The title "Son of God" as applied to Jesus simply affirms that Jesus is the Messiah or the Christ, the one anointed by God (Messiah is the Hebrew term and Christ is the Greek term for "the Anointed One"). This basic fact is acknowledged by trinitarian references, e.g. *Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, which says that "Son of God is a

synonym for Messiah". It goes on to give examples of this equivalence such as Peter's confession of Christ as the Son of God (Mt.16:16) and the centurion's similar confession in Mk. 15:39 which "should be understood as an acknowledgment of Jesus' messiahship" (p.478).

The titles "Son of God" and "Christ" (Messiah) are found in juxtaposition for example in Mt.26:63 in which the high priest says to Jesus, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus kept silent before the presiding judges who wanted him to say something self-incriminating, so the high priest invoked the name of "the living God" to compel Jesus to say under oath whether he was the Christ, the Son of God. It would be ludicrous to conclude that the high priest was really trying to force Jesus to admit that he was "God the Son," not only because the actual term used by the high priest was not "God the Son" but "Son of God," but also because the Jewish people as a whole had never believed that the Messiah (the Christ) is God. In fact the Jews thought that the thoroughly human John the Baptist could be the Christ (Lk.3:15). But in typical trinitarian fashion, we read into the high priest's words something that he would never have thought of asking, namely, whether Jesus was the divine God the Son, the second person of the Trinity.

The juxtaposition of Christ and Son of God is also found in John 20:31:

> … but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John is asking his readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, these two titles being equivalent. The title "Son of God" is equivalent to "Messiah" (*mashiah,* מָשִׁיחַ), Yahweh's anointed King and the Savior of Israel and of the world. In donning our trinitarian spectacles, we read John as if he were asking us to believe that Jesus is God the Son. John does not ask us to believe that Jesus is God but that he is the Messiah. The Old Testament references to the Messiah do not indicate that he is divine. The Jews as a whole have never expected a *divine* Messiah.[6] N.T. Wright says something along the same line. [7]

[6] ISBE (revised, volume 3, "Messiah"): "Haggai and Zechariah as well as rabbinic Judaism understood the Messiah as an ordinary human being, although one 'anointed' by God and thus endowed with extraordinary capacities."

[7] N.T. Wright says: "'Messiah', or 'Christ', does not mean 'the/a divine one'. It is very misleading to use the words as shorthands for the divine name or being of Jesus. It is comparatively easy to argue that Jesus (like several other first-century Jews) believed he was the Messiah (see JVG, ch. 11). It is much harder, and a very different thing, to argue that he thought he was in some sense identified with Israel's God." (*The Incarnation*, p.52, Oxford University Press)

The two equivalent titles, Christ and Son of God, appear together several times in the gospels. In addition to the verses already cited, we have the following (all from ESV):

> **Matthew 16:16** Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
>
> **Mark 1:1** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
>
> **Luke 4:41** And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.
>
> **John 11:27** "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

In the New Testament, "Christ" (Messiah) and "Son of God" often appear together as synonymous titles. That is because the two titles refer to one and the same person in Psalm 2, which is the Old Testament basis for the equivalence. We now quote Psalm 2 in full because of its importance. Note the constant reference to the Messiah (the anointed King) or to the Son of God:

> [1] Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? [2] The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh and against his Anointed, saying, [3] "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." [4] He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. [5] Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and ter-

> rify them in his fury, saying, [6] "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." [7] I will tell of the decree: Yahweh said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. [8] Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. [9] You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." [10] Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. [11] Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling. [12] Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:1-11, ESV, "Yahweh" restored)

Verse 7 speaks of Yahweh's Son ("You are my Son; today I have begotten you"), this being the key verse that establishes the messianic aspect of the title "Son of God". And since the Messiah is the Anointed One, therefore v.2 ("his Anointed") and v.6 ("my King") refer to the Messiah-King whom God has established on "Zion, my holy hill" from which the Messiah will reign, not only over Israel but over all the nations to the "ends of the earth" (v.8). The Messiah will come in Yahweh's name as Yahweh's representative, and it is through him that the people will "serve Yahweh with fear" (v.11). The final verse (v.12) has yet another reference to the Son: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry… Blessed are all who take refuge in him". Kissing a king expresses reverence and submission.

The New Testament likewise says that Christ (the Messiah) comes in God's name: "I come in my Father's name" (John 5:43) and "the works that I do in my Father's name" (10:25).

The Son of God, the final heir to the Davidic throne, will be King not only over Israel but over all the nations of the earth. It is to this exalted position, the highest in all the earth, that Jesus the Messiah has been appointed by Yahweh. The Messiah will govern the nations of the earth—an earth in which Yahweh's name will be known to all its inhabitants. Christ will represent Yahweh in the administration of every matter in international affairs, ushering peace on earth and creating good will among men, as announced long ago by the angels at his birth.

For many centuries the Jews have been looking with eager expectation to the coming of the glorious Messiah, the One who will liberate them from the oppression they had endured under Gentile nations for much of their history. More than that, their Messiah will be like Moses who will teach them Yahweh's truth, and guide them in the ways of Yahweh God.

The challenge for the Jews is that they have no easy way of identifying the Messiah when he comes, for their Scriptures do not teach them to expect the arrival of a divine man but the arrival of "a prophet like me," that is, a prophet like Moses: "Yahweh your God will raise up a prophet like me" (Dt.18:15, NJB; quoted by Stephen in Acts 7:37).

CHAPTER 1

Yahweh, The One and Only God

Yahweh: God's personal name

Who is God and does He have a name? Why do so many biblical scholars and Bible dictionaries and Bible encyclopedias call Him by the name Yahweh? In English Bibles, when the word "Lord" is printed in small capitals as LORD, it indicates that the original word in the Hebrew text is YHWH or Yahweh, which is God's personal name. For example, the familiar phrase "the word of the LORD" is in the Hebrew text literally "the word of Yahweh" (e.g. 1Kings 18:1, "the word of Yahweh came to Elijah"). In Psalm 23:1, "The LORD is my shepherd" is literally "Yahweh is my shepherd". The familiar term "the Spirit of the LORD" is literally "the Spirit of Yahweh" (e.g. Ezekiel 11:5, "the Spirit of Yahweh fell upon me").

The typographical convention of rendering "Lord" as LORD in small capitals is explained in the prefaces of most modern Bibles. ESV says, "The ESV usually renders the personal name of God (YHWH) with the word LORD (printed in small capitals)." Note ESV's helpful reference to "the personal name of God," a reminder of the crucial fact that "Yahweh" or YHWH is God's personal name. This is seen throughout the Hebrew Bible, for example, in the Ten Commandments: "You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain" (Ex.20:7, literal rendering). It is also seen in Exodus 3:15 in which God says to Moses:

> Say this to the people of Israel, "Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." *This is my name forever*, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (ESV, "Yahweh" in the original Hebrew restored)

In saying, "This is my name forever," God was referring to His own name Yahweh which appears in the same verse. The word "forever" indicates that Yahweh is to be God's name not just for one generation but for all eternity; indeed it is "to be remembered throughout all generations".

It is standard knowledge among Bible scholars, liberal and conservative, that Yahweh is God's personal name, as seen in Bible encyclopedias such as ISBE ("Yahweh is the only truly personal name of God in Israel's faith"), in Hebrew lexicons such as TWOT ("Yahweh, the personal name of God"), and

in Bible commentaries such as UBC ("the knowledge of the personal name of God, Yahweh, was arguably the greatest gift of God entrusted to Israel").[8]

In fact the standard translation of Isaiah 42:8 makes no sense ("I am the LORD, that is my name") unless the name Yahweh is restored, as in NJB and HCSB: "I am Yahweh, that is my name".

The preponderance of the name "Yahweh"

Most Christians don't know that God's name is Yahweh or similar, or that He even has a name. The ignorance of God's name is unacceptable given that YHWH occurs 6,828 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. The ignorance is puzzling given that many academic works regularly use the name Yahweh or YHWH in their biblical and theological studies. For example, the exact word "Yahweh" occurs 2287 times in the revised *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 2090 times in *United Bible Societies OT Handbooks*, and 4023 times in the OT portion of *New American Commentary*.

We note that these are conservative Bible references lest we glibly dismiss "Yahweh" as a fabrication of liberal scholarship or Christian sects. The sometimes liberal *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, regarded by many as the most scholarly Bible

[8] ISBE (*God, Names of*); TWOT (484a, YHWH); *Understanding the Bible Commentary* (Dt.5:11).

dictionary or encyclopedia ever, has 3280 instances of "Yahweh".

What about *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), the well-known Hebrew word for "God" or "god"? Whereas *Yahweh* occurs 6,828 times in the Hebrew Bible, *Elohim* occurs about 2,602 times. Hence the primary term for God in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) is not "God" but "Yahweh".

Moreover, around 10% of the 2,602 instances of the term *Elohim* refer to false gods such as the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12), the golden calf (Ex.32:4), and the goddess Ashtoreth (1Ki.11:33). In rare instances, *Elohim* is used of human beings, e.g. Moses (Ex.4:16; 7:1), unjust judges (Ps.82:6), and possibly Samuel's spirit (1Sam.28:13). The other 90% of the instances of *Elohim* refer to the God of Israel. The combination "Yahweh Elohim" ("LORD God" in most Bibles) occurs 891 times.

All this tells us that the Bible's primary designation of the God of Israel is "Yahweh" rather than "God," not only in terms of numerical preponderance (6,828 versus 2,602 instances) but also in terms of precision of reference (the 6,828 instances of "Yahweh" all refer to the God of Israel and never to false gods, without exception). Hence it is unacceptable that God's unique and personal name Yahweh is rendered in most English Bibles as LORD, a title of honor that is sometimes applied to humans.

In fact some Bible scholars are calling for a return to the original name Yahweh. The standard five-volume NIDOTT theological dictionary says:

> The "translation" LORD is something of a problem from various perspectives. LORD obscures the fact that Yahweh is a name and not a title … In view of this reality, it could be argued that, as with other personal names, we simply transliterate what the original Hebrew was thought to be—Yahweh. (*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology,* vol.5, "Yahweh").

The identity of Yahweh: Who exactly is Yahweh?

In order to understand a person, whether human or divine, it is often helpful to make a few summary statements about him. This is helpful in establishing the precise identity of Yahweh:

- **Yahweh is the one and only God.** Yahweh says, "I am Yahweh, and there is no other, besides me there is no God" (Isaiah 45:5); and "there is no other god besides me" (v.21).
- **Yahweh is the only Creator.** Yahweh says, "I am Yahweh, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself." (Isaiah 44:24)

- **Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.** Yahweh instructed Moses to tell the Israelites: "Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." (Exodus 3:15)

- **Yahweh is the God and Father of Jesus Christ.** As a preliminary point, we note that Yahweh is our Father: "You, O Yahweh, are our Father" (Isaiah 63:16; also 64:8). "Is this the way you repay Yahweh, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father who created you?" (Dt.32:6; cf. Mal.2:10). But more specifically, Yahweh is also the God and Father of Jesus Christ: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (Jn.20:17). Just three chapters earlier, Jesus calls his Father "the only true God" (John 17:3), an exclusive identification that aligns perfectly with Isaiah 45:5: "I am Yahweh, and there is no other, besides me there is no God". Hence Yahweh is the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

"Yahweh" in the Scriptures

In the Bible there is one and only God, and there is no other besides Him. He has revealed His name as Yahweh which in Hebrew is יהוה, transliterated into English as YHWH. Because it consists of four consonantal letters, it is called the Tetragrammaton ("four letters"). Since Hebrew is written

from right to left, the first letter, Yod, corresponding to Y in YHWH, is the small curved letter at upper right:

יהוה

Yahweh is mentioned on almost every page of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), often several times on one page. To be specific, YHWH occurs 6,828 times in the Old Testament, or almost seven times per page on average, assuming that the OT section of a typical Bible has 1,000 pages. It occurs 34 times in Deuteronomy 28 alone.

The short form of "Yahweh" is "Ya" or "Yah" which occurs 49 times in the Old Testament, with 40 of these found in the Psalms, e.g. three in the following passage:

> I shall live to recount the great deeds of Yah. Though Yah punished me sternly, he has not abandoned me to death. Open for me the gates of saving justice, I shall go in and thank Yah. (Psalm 118:17-19, NJB, with "Yahweh" changed to "Yah" to conform to the original Hebrew text).

Catholic Encyclopedia ("Jehovah, Yahweh") says that the name Yahweh is embedded in 163 personal names. Some of them incorporate "Yahweh" in the first syllable (Jehoahaz, Jehu, Jehoshaphat, Joab, Joel, Jonathan, Joshua, Judah), others in the last syllable (Elijah, Hezekiah, Hilkiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Josiah, Micaiah, Nehemiah, Uriah, Zechariah, Zephaniah). Given that "Jeremiah" alone occurs about 130 times in the Old Testament, and "Joshua" about 200 times, and

"Judah" about 800 times (to give just three examples which combine for over 1,000 occurrences), we can probably estimate on the low side that the OT has at least 6,000 occurrences of "Yahweh" embedded in the 163 proper names, if not 8,000 or 10,000 or more. When we include the 6,828 and 49 occurrences of "Yahweh" and "Yah" respectively, we could easily arrive at a total of more than 14,000 occurrences of "Yahweh" in its various forms.

When "Yahweh" is embedded in the first syllable of a name, it is often shortened to "Je" as in the case of "Jehoiada" or "Jehu". It is in this form that Yahweh's name appears in the Hebrew form of "Jesus". Another form is "Jo" which is found in names such as "Joab" and "Joel".

Those who don't know Hebrew might not know that "Y" and "J" in these transliterated names represent the same Hebrew letter Yod, the first letter of YHWH, which is why YHWH can be transliterated "Jahweh" as in German. In pronunciation, the German "J" is the same as the Hebrew Yod ("y" is not used in German except when foreign words such as *yacht* or *yoga* are borrowed), so Yahweh's name is sometimes spelled with a "J". In fact the German "J" sounds closer to the Hebrew Yod than does the English "J".

From all this we see that the first letter in Yahweh—the consonant Yod—can be followed by one of several possible vowels such as "a", "e", or "o". Yet the name Yahweh is still represented by the Yod (which, interestingly, is the physically smallest letter of the Jewish consonantal alphabet, and this is

surely not without spiritual significance). This is confirmed by the fact that even if the first syllable "Yah" stands by itself, the reference to Yahweh's name remains perfectly clear.

In the case of the name "Jesus" (from Hebrew *Jehoshua* or *Yehoshua*), the short form Yah is used with "e", so the reference to Yahweh appears in the "Ye" or "Je" of "Jesus". In the English spoken 500 years ago (as represented by KJV 1611), "J" is closer to the German "J" than even to the modern English "J".

The fact that Yahweh's name can shortened to "Yah" indicates that the essential element of "Yahweh" lies in the first syllable "Yah". Moreover, the fact that "Yah" can exist as "Ye" or "Ya" or "Yo" when embedded in Hebrew names indicates that the key element of "Yah" is the initial Yod. So the tiny letter Yod is the essential component of "Yahweh"; every other letter can be left out (e.g. by reducing "Yahweh" to "Yah") or changed (e.g. "a" into "e" or "o") without impairing the recognizability of the divine name. But we can never remove the indispensable Y (or J in some languages).

But where is Yahweh in the New Testament?

But turning a few pages from the Old Testament to the New Testament, suddenly the name Yahweh seems to have disappeared, as if the New Testament were a totally different book with only a faint connection to the Old Testament! Until I had come to see the centrality of the name and person of

Yahweh in the New Testament, the apparent absence of His name in the New Testament puzzled me (even though it can be explained by the absence of "Yahweh" in the LXX). Then it dawned on me that in fact His name appears on almost every page of the NT, and sometimes, as in the OT, several times on one page. How could I have been blind to this fact? As one who knows some Hebrew, it was inexcusable of me.

So where is Yahweh's name in the New Testament? It appears in every instance of "Jesus"! *Jesus* is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Yeshua* (i.e. Joshua). The first syllable of *Yeshua*—namely *Ye*—is a common short form of "Yahweh" when it is embedded in proper names.

Here is the striking thing: There is no way for us to invoke the name "Jesus" without referring to "Yahweh" as the cornerstone of that name. Although trinitarians have knowingly or unknowingly pushed aside the all-glorious Yahweh from their doctrinal scheme of things, they cannot run away from His name no matter what they do! Such is Yahweh's wisdom that every time "Jesus" is spoken, Yahweh is proclaimed the Savior of the world! He makes the ignorant speak the truth even in their ignorance!

Yahweh's prominence in the New Testament lies not only in the fact that His name is embedded in Jesus' name ("Yahweh saves"), but also in the amazing revelation that Yahweh Himself, the one and only God, came into the world to dwell in Jesus, the temple of God.

Moreover, the one who gave Jesus his name in the first place was Yahweh Himself, through an angel of the Lord ("you shall call his name Jesus," Mt.1:21). The reasons for this are now clear, and one can exclaim with Paul, "How unsearchable are His (Yahweh's) ways."

> "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21, NIV)

This verse reveals God's purpose in giving Jesus the name "Jesus". But "Jesus" was a common name in New Testament times, as can be confirmed by consulting a Bible dictionary. None of the many others who were called "Jesus" saved people from their sins, so the popularity of the name does not, in itself, explain why it was given to Jesus. Yet it was Yahweh Himself, rather than Joseph or Mary, who chose this name for him, in which case the meaning of the name "Jesus" would explain God's intentions for him.

"Jesus" is equivalent to "Joshua," a short form of "Jehoshua" (יְהוֹשׁוּעַ or יְהוֹשֻׁעַ); all these mean "Yahweh is salvation" or "Yahweh saves". The explanation given in Mt.1:21—"because he will save his people from their sins"—now makes sense. In Jesus and through Jesus, Yahweh will save His people.

The similarity of these words to Psalm 130:8 ("He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins") is unmistakable (and is noted by BDAG, *autos*, def.2a). In the LXX (in which the

verse is numbered 129:8), the similarity between Psalm 130:8 and Matthew 1:21 is even more pronounced, since both begin with the emphatic pronoun "he" (*autos*). Hence, Matthew 1:21 is likely an intended reference to Psalm 130:8, indicating that God's promise in Psalm 130:8 is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The similarity between the two verses is unmistakable when we compare Matthew 1:21, Psalm 129:8 (LXX), and Psalm 130:8 (Hebrew):

> **Matthew 1:21**: αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.
>
> **Psalm 129:8 (LXX)**: αὐτὸς λυτρώσεται τὸν Ισραηλ ἐκ πασῶν τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτοῦ
>
> **Psalm 130:8 (Hebrew)**: וְהוּא יִפְדֶּה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכֹּל עֲוֹנֹתָיו

Here is a literal translation:

> **Matthew 1:21**: For he will save his people from their sins
>
> **Psalm 129:8 (LXX)**: He will redeem Israel out of all their lawlessness
>
> **Psalm 130:8 (Hebrew)**: He will ransom Israel from all their sins

The message is essentially the same in all three statements. The only meaningful difference is the omission of "all" in Matthew's statement. Do we then conclude that the salvation in Jesus Christ is a partial salvation that does not deliver us from all our sins? Anyone who has read the New Testament

would not for a moment think so, so it is clear that "all" is implied.

The name "Yahweh" is mentioned every time we say "Jesus". Despite the churches' tendency to sideline Yahweh, all along He has been confronting us with His name Yahweh in the name Jesus. The New Testament is God-centered. And given its Jewish character, it is Yahweh-centered. "God" occurs 1,317 times in the NT whereas "Jesus" occurs 917 times (244 times in John's Gospel).[9]

When we realize that the New Testament is Yahweh-centered, we will gain a better understanding of how God relates to the biblical Jesus. We will see, for example, that God works in Jesus and through him, notably in the plan of salvation as expressed in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son". Yahweh's love for mankind is seen in the giving of His unique Son. "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift" (2Cor.9:15).

[9] "Christ" occurs 529 times in the NT but is combined with "Jesus" as in "Christ Jesus" or "Jesus Christ" some 270 times, not counting other combinations such as "the Christ appointed for you, Jesus" (Acts 3:20). Hence we cannot simply add 917+529 to get the number of *distinct* references to Jesus. As for "God," there are a few instances of "god" that do not refer to Yahweh (e.g. "the god of this world," 2Cor.4:4) just as not all instances of "Jesus" refer to Jesus Christ (e.g. Col.4:11). These exceptions do not alter the statistics significantly.

On the other hand, the fact that Jesus is mentioned over 900 times tells us that speaking of the New Testament as Yahweh-centered does not do justice to the fact that Jesus is also a focus of the NT. In fact the NT has two foci which complement each other: Jesus never does his work apart from Yahweh his Father, and Yahweh always works through His Son Jesus Christ. It can be said that in God's plan to save humankind, Yahweh and Jesus are in a joint venture or joint enterprise, to use the language of commerce, but always with Yahweh as having the precedence as the One who initiates every action. His preeminence in all things is expressed by Paul: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36).

The only true God in John 17:3 is the Father, not Jesus Christ

I marvel at the fact, yet am also saddened by it, that as a trinitarian I could not see the clear meaning of many of Jesus' words. The word "bewitched" that Paul uses in Galatians 3:1 is perhaps not too strong to describe the spiritual blindness that pervades trinitarianism. To see what I mean, let us consider what Jesus says in John 17:3:

> This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

Here Jesus is not making an abstruse or complex theological statement. His words are clear and simple. Even if the meaning of "eternal" is vague to some, surely the vocabulary of the sentence as a whole is not beyond that of a primary school student. Indeed John's Gospel is known for its simple style and vocabulary. So why is it that seeing we do not see, and hearing we do not hear, nor do we understand (Mt.13:13)?

What is Jesus saying in John 17:3? Within one sentence, Jesus twice uses the pronoun "you" (singular in Greek) to address the One he is praying to. It is clear from verse 1 ("Father, the hour has come, glorify your Son") that Jesus is praying specifically to his Father. This is not denied by trinitarians. Therefore Jesus is simply saying, "You, Father, are the only true God," a statement that rules out everyone else, including Jesus himself, as being God. How then could we have failed to grasp this short and clear statement? Yet as trinitarians we completely failed to understand it.

In addressing his Father as the only true God, Jesus is ruling out any other, even a so-called "god" or "God," as true God, and this is reinforced by his use of the article "the" and the adjective "only," both of which, especially in combination, imply strict exclusion. The triple emphasis (the+only+ true) is a triple rejection of any divine person alongside the Father of Jesus Christ. Similarly, in John 5:44, Jesus calls the Father "the only God".

Who exactly is the Father whom Jesus calls the only true God? He is none other than Yahweh Himself, the God of

Israel and the creator of all things. For who can be "the only true God" (Jn.17:3) but Yahweh who is the only God ("I am Yahweh, and there is no other, besides me there is no God," Isa.45:5)?

How could we have been so blind as to think that the Father is not the sole person in "the only true God," or that Jesus is speaking to the three persons of the Trinity including Jesus himself? Does the "you" (singular in Greek) uttered by Jesus include "me"—Jesus himself? Is Jesus praying to himself? And what do we make of the words that follow, "and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"? Here Jesus makes a clear distinction between "Jesus Christ" and "you" by which he excludes himself from "the only true God".

John 17:3 defeats every attempt to make it trinitarian

The monotheism of John 17:3 is rock solid and defeats every attempt to give it a trinitarian interpretation. This explains why some commentaries either avoid mentioning John 17:3 altogether, or simply quote the words "the only true God" without comment. Other commentaries quote only the first part of John 17:3 ("And this is eternal life, that they may know you") followed by extensive commentary, but are completely silent on the second part ("… the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent").

But a few trinitarians make a direct attempt to explain away Jesus' clear statement in John 17:3. This is often done

by altering Jesus' words in a way that widens or expands the definition of "the only true God" to include Jesus Christ or even the whole Trinity into the redefined "only true God". Augustine, for example, after quoting John 17:3 *correctly*, goes on to change the order of Jesus' words in a way that allows Jesus Christ to be absorbed into "the only true God". Then he does the same for the Holy Spirit. In the following quotation, Augustine's altered sentence is highlighted in color:

> "And this," Jesus adds, "is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." The proper order of the words is, "That they may know Thee and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent, as the only true God." Consequently, therefore, the Holy Spirit is also understood, because He is the Spirit of the Father and Son, as the substantial and consubstantial love of both. For the Father and Son are not two Gods, nor are the Father and Son and Holy Spirit three Gods; but the Trinity itself is the one only true God. [10]

Trinitarianism has blinded us to the plain meaning of Jesus' words. One would have thought that the meaning of John 17:3 is so clear that no further discussion would be needed to show that it is incongruous with the trinitarian

[10] Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 1, vol.7, *St. Augustine: Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John*, tractate CV, chapter XVII.1-5, paragraph 3, translated into English by Rev. John Gibb, D.D.

Christ of the Nicene Creed. But as trinitarians, we ignored what Jesus had so plainly taught. I say "we" because I myself had zealously taught and preached the Trinity for some fifty years. A "trinitarian of trinitarians" (cp. Acts 23:6), I proclaimed this doctrine with utter zeal, and had led many to the trinitarian Christ. I am not self-righteously pointing my finger at trinitarians as though I am better than they. I am only genuinely trying my best to understand how I, and many others, could be so entangled in serious error without realizing it. Until there is a better explanation for this, it seems to be bewitchment.

Seeking an explanation for this blindness, I came across the article "Trinity" in ISBE (vol.5, p.3012f) written by B.B. Warfield who is known as "the last of the great Princeton theologians". Reading his article carefully, I began to see the subtle process by which Jesus' words, and with them all of biblical monotheism, could be so easily brushed aside with philosophical sophistication and the persuasive argumentation of human wisdom.

Only the first part of Warfield's essay is quoted below. It is skillfully presented. First he admits what cannot be denied, namely, that trinitarian language is unbiblical and derived from philosophy, while boldly asserting that it is nonetheless Scriptural in essence. Using the language of chemistry, Warfield says that trinitarian truth is the "crystallization" of what is hidden in Scripture as a "solution" and in "solvent" state.

While admitting that the Trinity is a doctrine extrapolated from "fragmentary allusions," Warfield boldly goes on to say that it is nonetheless a "genuinely Scriptural doctrine".

Warfield gets bolder in the next paragraph and says that the Trinity is in fact "indiscoverable" in Scripture and can only be known by revelation! By this clever sophistry, he has transformed a glaring trinitarian weakness (the lack of biblical support) into a supposed strength, and the non-existent into something knowable only by trinitarian illumination!

For brevity we quote only the first paragraph of his essay. Note the boldly unscriptural argumentation that comes out, without exaggeration, in almost every sentence:

> The term "Trinity" is not a Biblical term, and we are not using Biblical language when we define what is expressed by it as the doctrine that there is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence. A doctrine so defined can be spoken of as a Biblical doctrine only on the principle that the sense of Scripture is Scripture. And the definition of a Biblical doctrine in such un-Biblical language can be justified only on the principle that it is better to preserve the truth of Scripture than the words of Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity lies in Scripture in solution; when it is crystallized from its solvent it does not cease to be Scriptural, but only comes into clearer view. Or, to speak without figure, the doctrine of the Trinity is given to us in Scripture, not in formulated definition, but in fragmentary allusions; when we assemble the *disjecta membra* [Latin for "scattered

> members"] into their organic unity, we are not passing from Scripture, but entering more thoroughly into the meaning of Scripture. We may state the doctrine in technical terms, supplied by philosophical reflection; but the doctrine stated is a genuinely Scriptural doctrine.

Here we see how easily the writer moves in one bold step from Scripture to non-Scripture. This is seen in almost every sentence, even from the start of the article. But did we catch it?

A crucial thing to notice is that Warfield defines trinitarianism as "the doctrine that *there is one only and true God*, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons" (italics added). The words in italics are a direct reference to John 17:3 in which Jesus declares that the Father is "the only true God". But by not quoting Jesus in full, Warfield intentionally or unintentionally sidesteps the crucial word "you" (singular in Greek) in John 17:3. Jesus is not merely saying, "there is one true God"; he is saying, "You (i.e. Father) are the only true God". Jesus is not just making a general statement on monotheism but specifies exactly who is the only true God.

The same fundamental error is made in the hymn, "We believe in One True God," by Tobias Clausnitzer, 1668, and translated from the German by Catherine Winkworth, 1863. Whereas Jesus says that only the Father is true God (Jn.17:3), the first line of this hymn goes off on a tangent: "We believe in one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit". Just as puzz-

ling, the Scripture verse given by a hymnbook as the biblical basis of this hymn is none other than John 17:3! A similar error is seen in the title of a book by Clarence H. Benson: "The One True God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit".

It is this crucial fact—that Jesus addresses his Father as the only true God—which is suppressed in trinitarianism. The error then slides into a trinitarian distortion of the word "monotheism" to make it mean something other than monotheism, namely, that "in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence" (Warfield). But how can the doctrine of a Godhead of three persons be monotheism, the doctrine of one and only God?

Starting with a reference to Jesus' lucid words spoken to the Father in John 17:3, the ISBE article immediately moves on to terms such as "substance" and "subsistence" and "Godhead" which are unintelligible to most people and which do not come from anything in the Scriptures, but are in fact "technical terms, supplied by philosophical reflection," an apt description that is supplied by none other than B.B. Warfield himself!

Monotheism versus idolatry

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul makes a strong stand for monotheism in statements such as "there is no God but one" and "there is one God, the Father" which are clear echoes of Old

Testament monotheism. Paul's exposition is notable for the interweaving of strands of thought on monotheism and those on idolatry, switching back and forth between the two themes effortlessly.

> [4] Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." [5] For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"— [6] yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1Cor.8:4-6, ESV)

Paul says that there is no God but one (v.4), and uses the Greek word *oudeis* (none, nothing) to say that an idol "is nothing at all" (NIV) or "has no real existence" (ESV). In saying that man-made idols are nothing, Paul is echoing the many Old Testament statements that mock the worthlessness and ineffectiveness of idols (1Sam.5:3; Isa.40:20; 41:7; 46:6-7).

The dual themes of 1 Corinthians 8—monotheism and idolatry, portrayed as conflicting opposites—tell us that if we abandon monotheism, idolatry will abound; but if we uphold monotheism, idolatry will be destroyed.

In Old Testament times, the land of Israel was filled with the idols which the Israelites had set up in shrines and high places. It is not surprising that the Old Testament uses some 18 different Hebrew words to refer to idols or idolatry. The

Israelites were worshipping the false gods fashioned from wood, stone, silver and gold (Dt.29:17; Isa.31:7; 44:13-17). The depth and pervasiveness of their idolatry in the land of Israel can be seen in many verses, including:

> **Jeremiah 11:13** You have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal (= "Lord") are as many as the streets of Jerusalem. (NIV)
>
> **Isaiah 2:8** Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made. (ESV)

A perceptive description of the evil of idolatry is given by Ahuva Ho in *The Targum of Zephaniah: Manuscript and Commentary* (pp.412-413, italics are in the original):

> Idolatry is the most condemned abomination, for this is the root of all evil. It caused the destruction of the Temples and the exile. "The Wicked" as idolaters is self-explanatory. Idolatry is expressed in syncretism, apostasy and agnosticism: they worshiped both YHWH and foreign gods. They swore in the name of YHWH then *repeated that vow in the name of their idols* (1:4b–5). They *worshiped* Baal and allowed priests to officiate. They worshiped the hosts of heaven. They *rushed to worship idols and to imitate the ways of the Philistines* (1:4–5, 8–9).

It would be mistaken to think that the Israelites were only worshipping their idols ceremonially as a religious ritual. Their idolatry went deeper, for the leaders of Israel had taken the idols *into their hearts*, an abomination that is mentioned several times in Ezekiel: "these men (the elders and leaders of Israel, v.1) have taken their idols into their hearts" (Ezek.14:3; also vv.4,7). They believed in their idols with all their hearts: "their soul delights in their abominations (idols)" (Isa.66:3). So fervent was their faith in their gods, represented by their idols, that they offered the blood of their sons (Ezek.16:36; vv.20-21) and set up high places to "burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal" (Jer.19:5).

In 1 Corinthians 8:4, quoted above, the negative statement "an idol is nothing" or "an idol has no real existence" has as its counterpart the positive affirmation "there is no God but one," a striking echo of "Yahweh is one" in Dt.6:4 (*kyrios heis estin* in LXX). Paul does a play on the words "nothing" and "no" (they are basically the same word in Greek) that cannot be brought out by translation: "An idol is *nothing* at all in the world, and there is *no* God but one" (1Cor.8:4). This puts the *nothingness* of idols in stark contrast with the affirmation that there is "no" God but the one and only Yahweh.

The Greek word for "one" (*heis*) appears again in verse 6 where it occurs twice: "there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ". Thus it is made clear that Jesus is Lord but not God.

The words "one God" do not for Paul refer to the first person of the Trinity called God the Father; similarly the words "one Lord Jesus Christ" do not for Paul refer to the second person of the Trinity called God the Son. Both these persons do not exist in the Scriptures.

It doesn't mean that the term "God the Father" is absent in the Bible. It is found in several verses (Gal.1:1; Eph.6:23; Col.3:17; 1Pet.1:2; 2Jn.1:3) but never in the trinitarian sense of the first person among three in the Trinity. The titles "God the Son" and "God the Holy Spirit" are, however, wholly absent in the Scriptures, a fact that does not seem to trouble trinitarians.

The affirmation that "God is one" rules out three divine persons in a Trinity, who have "no real existence" as far as the Scriptures are concerned. Those who reject that God is one will fall into the delusion and final disaster of idolatry. As trinitarians, we put our faith in a non-existent God who, like the idols in the Old Testament, was fabricated by man—in this case, fabricated by the western Gentile church. I myself fervently believed and taught this man-made dogma for more than half a century, mistaken in my belief that the church can never be wrong.

> They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! (Romans 1:25)

A Brief Survey of "the only God" (*ho monos theos*) in the New Testament

Twice in John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of the Father as *ho monos theos* (ὁ μόνος θεός), that is, "the only God":

> **John 5:44** How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the **only** God?
>
> **John 17:3** And this is eternal life, that they know you the **only** true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

The words shown in boldface correspond to Greek *monos*, as in most of the remaining verses we will quote in this present section. In every major translation of John 5:44, Jesus speaks of his Father as "the only God". Similarly, in John 17:3, Jesus calls his Father "the only true God". Similar statements are found in Paul's letters (the following verses are from ESV):

> **Romans 16:27** … to the **only** wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.
>
> **1 Timothy 1:17** Now to the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the **only** God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

> **1Timothy 6:15-16** …he who is the blessed and **only** Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who **alone** has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.

The following is significant for saying that only God is holy:

> **Revelation 15:3-4** "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you **alone** are holy." (ESV)

All major English translations render *monos* in this verse as "alone," a rendering which correctly expresses its meaning in the context. In the six Bible passages quoted so far in this section, the predominant English rendering of *monos* is "only" rather than "alone," but that is only because of the nature of the English language which does not permit "the alone God". But if this were permissible in English, "the alone God" would also carry the sense "the only one who is God".

Whereas English has to use two words "alone" and "only" to express the idea of one and only God depending on the grammatical context, languages such as Greek and others have no problems in using the same word in all six references such as the German "allein" in the various versions of Luther's Bible, or the French "seul" in Louis Segond's Bible (1910).

The word *monos* occurs in several other places in John—and in other contexts—where it is usually translated "alone" in English Bibles: John 8:29; 16:32 (twice); 12:24 ("unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains **alone**"), so its meaning in John is clear.

John 1:1 is the only place in the NT where "the Word" is identified with God. But Jesus' two references to his Father as "the only God" make it clear that John 1:1 cannot be taken as saying that the Word is a second person within the Godhead, but that it shares the nature of the One from whom the Word is sent forth. But if besides the Father there is another who is also God, then the Father would not be the *only* one who is God, and therefore not the one who *alone* is God.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, also has *ho monos theos* (the only God), as seen in the following two verses:

> **Psalm 86:10 (85:10 in LXX)** For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you **alone** are God. (NIV)
>
> **2 Kings 19:15,19** O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you **alone** are God over all the kingdoms of the earth … O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you **alone**, O LORD, are God. (NIV; this verse is almost identical to Isaiah 37:16,20)

Paul also uses the term "one God" (*heis theos*):

> **1 Corinthians 8:6** yet for us there is **one God**, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (ESV)
>
> **Ephesians 4:5-6** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **one God** and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

In both passages, when Paul speaks of "one God," he is referring explicitly to the Father and not to Jesus Christ. He also makes the vital distinction between Jesus as "one Lord" and the Father as "one God". Other statements in the NT on "one God" are:

> **Romans 3:30** since there is only **one God** (*heis ho theos*)
>
> **Galatians 3:20** a mediator does not represent just one, but **God is one** (*ho theos heis estin*)
>
> **James 2:19** You believe that **God is one** (*heis estin ho theos*); you do well. The demons also believe
>
> **Mark 12:29** The most important is, Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, **the Lord is one** (*kyrios heis estin*)

In the last of these verses, Jesus is quoting Dt.6:4 which in the LXX has the same phrase *kyrios heis estin* (the Lord is one). The Hebrew of Dt.6:4 has יְהוָה אֶחָד (*Yahweh echad*, one and only Yahweh) or, with fewer markings, יהוה אֶחָד. The

word *echad* ("one") is explained in Jastrow's dictionary as "singular, unique," citing Ezek.33:24 and Dt.6:4.

In Ezek.33:24 cited by Jastrow ("Abraham was only one man … but we are many"), the word "one" (*heis*, LXX) is contrasted with "many" (*polus*, LXX). HALOT says regarding *echad*: "numeral one … Deuteronomy 6:4 Yahweh is one; or, the one Yahweh, Yahweh alone, Yahweh only".

As we might expect, trinitarians try to evade these facts by making "one" to mean a oneness or unity within God in order to promote the idea of God as three persons. To the monotheist who knows of no fragmentation within God, the idea that it is necessary to speak of a unity within God is bizarre. What trinitarians often try to do is to make *echad* ("one") take on the meaning of unity expressed by some other Hebrew word such as *yachad*, which means "together" or "community" as in the well known Psalm 133:1 ("how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity").

The Greek *heis* ("numeral one," BDAG) has the same basic meaning as the Hebrew *echad* ("numeral one," HALOT). Any quotation of Dt.6:4 in the NT would follow its meaning in the Hebrew, for neither the Hebrew word nor the Greek word means "oneness" or "unity"—but simply "one".

A Trinitarian's Distortion of the Hebrew "One"

The Hebrew word for "hear" or "listen" is *shema*. For this reason, *Shema* is the term used by the Jews as a designation of the sacred proclamation in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one," as translated in most English Bibles. This is actually a misrendering because it obscures the fact that "the LORD" in the original Hebrew is YHWH. The verse says literally, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one". New Jerusalem Bible has a good translation: "Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh".

In the Internet there is wide circulation of an article [11] by a writer whose thesis is based on the writings of a second writer, a certain Nick Norelli, who argues that "one" in Dt.6:4 is to be interpreted along the lines of trinitarianism. To be specific, there are two articles: the first which quotes Norelli, and the second by Norelli himself. Although our discussion centers on these two articles, starting with the first and going on to the second, it touches on a wide circle of books and articles that present more or less the same arguments.

[11] http://www.reocities.com/bicwyzer.geo/Christianity/eschad.html as it was on March 31, 2013.

The first article (the one that cites Norelli) is remarkable for its misspelling of the Hebrew word for "one" as "eschad" (the correct transliteration is echad or eḥad). This misspelling (which reveals an ignorance of the Hebrew alphabet by inserting a non-existent "s") is consistent in the whole article except where it quotes other sources. We mention this so that where the misspelling appears in our discussion, it won't be construed as a mistyping or a misquotation. [12]

The first of the two articles, in the section called "The Argument," begins by quoting the following statement made by a rabbi (who is not named): "The word *echad* in the Hebrew language functions in precisely the same manner as the word 'one' does in the English language." The article then goes on to say that what the rabbi "neglects to mention is that there are two words for 'one' in Hebrew".

In short, the article is accusing the rabbi of covering up the evidence vital to the trinitarian case. The article goes on: "once this becomes clear you will see that the whole point of Eschad becomes very clear." In other words, the rabbi is

[12] The Hebrew word for "one" (אֶחָד) is sometimes transliterated *echad*. The "c" is added before the "h" to indicate the hard or guttural "h" as distinct from the soft "h". In some books the hard "h" is indicated by an under-dot (ḥ) but English keyboards cannot easily type this, so the dot is often omitted or the "h" is rendered "ch". But the writer of the article doesn't know any of this, so he comes up with the non-existent *eschad*, yet has the temerity to criticize a rabbi who has spent his life studying the Hebrew Scriptures, something that his critic has obviously not done.

accused of obfuscating the issue by withholding the crucial piece of information that there are two Hebrew words for "one". This is a daring accusation from one who is not even able to transliterate the Hebrew word for "one".

Contrary to the accusation made against the rabbi, let it be stated without fear of factual contradiction that, not surprisingly, the rabbi is correct when he says, "The word *echad* in the Hebrew language functions in precisely the same manner as the word 'one' does in the English language." Or for that matter, in any other major language such as Chinese, German, and French. And contrary to the accusation levelled against the rabbi, the rabbi did not neglect to mention that there is another word for "one" in Hebrew, for Hebrew has no other word for "one" besides *echad!* But the rabbi's critic blindly follows a certain Nick Norelli, who in what we call the "second article" appears to be not much more knowledgeable about basic Hebrew and biblical exegesis than this critic, but nonetheless writes an article on this subject which has the "form" of scholarship (that is, replete with footnotes) but lacks the necessary "substance".

In the second article, Norelli's,[13] it is remarkable that Norelli fails to understand the meaning of another Hebrew word "yachid" that he himself brings up for discussion. Of this word he says correctly:

[13] rdtwot.files.wordpress.com/2007/06/yachid-vs-echad.doc, as it was on March 31, 2013.

> The 1917 JPS Tanach renders *yachid* as *only* 10 out of the 12 times that it appears in the Hebrew text, the other two times being rendered *solitary*, and 8 of those 10 times the word is used in reference to an only child.

Let us clarify what Norelli is saying: The Hebrew word *yachid* occurs 12 times in the Hebrew Bible; the 1917 JPS translation renders *yachid* as "only" 10 times and as "solitary" twice. This is correct.

What is immediately obvious is that even by Norelli's own statement, in no instance is *yachid* ever translated as "one" in the JPS Tanach! In other words, Norelli himself admits that in no instance does *yachid* ever function as a second Hebrew word for "one"! He is apparently unaware that he is directly contradicting his own thesis when he concedes (correctly) that the basic meaning of *yachid* is "only" rather than "one". This word is often used in the sense of "only son," but "one" is not one of its definitions.

Just as puzzling, Norelli goes on to list all the 12 instances of *yachid* in the Hebrew Bible. These 12 instances, which I gathered with the BibleWorks program, are listed in the following. All verses are from ESV or NASB, with verse numbers conforming to those in English Bibles, not the Hebrew Bible:

> Gen.22:2 Take your son, your **only** son Isaac
> Gen.22:12 you have not withheld your son, your **only** son
> Gen.22:16 have not withheld your son, your **only** son
> Jdgs.11:34 She was his **only** child
> Psa.22:20 Deliver my soul from the sword, my **only** life
> Psa.25:16 I am **lonely** and afflicted
> Psa.35:17 Rescue my soul from their ravages, my **only** life
> Psa.68:6 God makes a home for the **lonely**
> Prov.4:3 I was a son…the **only** one in the sight of my mother
> Jer.6:26 Mourn as for an **only** son
> Amos 8:10 like the mourning for an **only** son
> Zech.12:10 as one mourns for an **only** son

Had Norelli even glanced at this list, he would have seen that "one" never occurs in the 12 verses! In English Bibles, *yachid* is consistently translated "only" (apart from the two instances translated "lonely," a concept which in Hebrew is also based on the concept of "only"). Even with the evidence right before his eyes which he himself gathers, Norelli does not see that *yachid* means "only" and not "one"! What is the problem? It is one that I have had some experience of: blindness induced by trinitarianism; one simply *refuses* to see the obvious. This is frightening, so may God have mercy on us.

If you take this list of 12 verses to a Bible study, and ask everyone there to read them in as many English Bibles as they

can get hold of, see if they can find one version that translates *yachid* as "one".

What Norelli "neglects to mention" (to use a phrase that was unjustly used against the rabbi) is this: Whereas Norelli correctly notes there that are 12 occurrences of *yachid* in the Hebrew Bible, he fails to mention the crucial fact that there are 977 occurrences of *echad!* A minor oversight? Or is this a deliberate concealing of evidence vital to the understanding of "one"?

You would recall that in the first article, the rabbi's critic confidently said that there are two Hebrew words for "one," giving the reader the impression that the two are common words that are so closely related as to be semantically similar, differing only in usage such that *yachid* is a singular "one" whereas *echad* can be singular or compound, thereby lending support to trinitarianism. If this were really so, then insofar as the two words synonymously mean "one" in Hebrew, we would expect a wide distribution of both words throughout the Hebrew Bible. But the statistics show this to be entirely false (977 versus 12).

Only *echad* is found throughout the Bible whereas *yachid* is a rare word that occurs in limited contexts. For example, *yachid* occurs 3 times in Genesis 22 to refer to Abraham's "only" son Isaac, this alone accounting for one quarter of all instances of *yachid* in the whole Bible! Of the 12 instances of

yachid, 8 refer to an only child, this alone accounting for two thirds of all references.[14]

With a statistical difference as striking as 977 versus 12, even the semantic difference is overshadowed by this numerical contrast. The writers of the two articles have taken us "for a ride". Or perhaps they themselves have been misled by others. Articles based on the same doctrinally-motivated premises are legion in the Internet and some books.

Let it be stated that *echad* is the only word for "one" in Hebrew, and that *yachid* ("only") can never replace "one" in the Shema (Dt.6:4). Try reading the Shema with "one" replaced by "only"! Yet Norelli argues that *yachid* is a singular "one" whereas *echad* can be singular or compound as to make God a triunity. You can strike up a hollow victory by making up your own rules, or in this case your own definitions, but you will end up deceiving yourself and others, which is hardly a wise thing to do since it involves the word of God. Ultimately it is the living God to whom we will answer.

As for the fact that numeral "one" can have a singular or composite meaning in Hebrew, is that not true of all major languages? We can speak of one person or one family, so how "one" is to be understood in any language is determined from the sentence as a whole, and not from the word "one" itself.

[14] The remaining four instances of *yachid* do not refer to an only child, and are found in the Psalms where Bible translators have difficulty finding suitable translations of *yachid* that fit the context.

By itself "one" cannot be used to prove that God is triune since "one" can also mean unitary one. The meaning of "one" in Dt.6:4 can only be established from the verse or from its context, neither of which has the slightest indication of a triune God, or in this case a triune "Yahweh".

To illustrate what this means, the statement "not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt" (Ex.10:19) refers to a numerally single locust, not two or three locusts united as one. On the other hand, "one man" can have one of two possible meanings, depending on the context. It may refer to a numerally single man ("Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land," Ezek.33:24) or a unity of men ("they came out as one man," 1Sam.11:7). Hence the meaning of "one man"—either singular or compound—is governed by the context, either by the singular "he" (Abraham) or the plural "they" (the Israelites). (In these verses, quoted from NASB or ESV, *echad* is used.)

It seems that Norelli is trying to achieve psychological influence on his readers by leaving a question mark in their minds: Maybe, just maybe, the word "one" ("Yahweh your God is one") should be understood as a compound "one" and therefore as a reference to the Trinity. If Norelli succeeds in leaving this question mark in the reader's mind, he has already achieved his objective even though he knows full well that his argument proves nothing.

But anyone who allows that question mark to settle in his mind will be an easy victim of the pernicious error of trin-

itarian polytheism. The Hebrew Bible is uncompromisingly monotheistic, a fact that no responsible biblical scholar would deny. Since the Shema of Dt.6:4 is brought up in these two articles, let's look at it again: "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one".

The writers of these two articles are, in fact, more daring than most other trinitarians in that they apply the composite "one" to Yahweh rather than to God. In this verse, "one" refers explicitly to Yahweh, which means that their argument collapses immediately. Why? For a start, there are 6,828 occurrences of "Yahweh" in the Hebrew Bible. In every instance in which Yahweh refers to Himself in the first person, the singular "I" or "me" or "my" is used, not the plural "we" or "us". Similarly, whenever Yahweh is spoken of in the third person, the singular "he" or "him" or "his" is used, not the plural "they" or "them". Against this overwhelming evidence, Norelli tries to establish that "one" has a compound meaning in Dt.6:4.

If the thousands of occurrences of the first and third person singular ("I" and "me" and so on) are not sufficient evidence for Norelli and others of like persuasion, what about the verses that state that Yahweh is God and there is "no other" (e.g. Isaiah 45:5, "I am Yahweh and there is no other, besides me there is no God")? Notice the first person singular ("I" and "me").

But those who close their eyes to the truth will never be persuaded by any amount of biblical evidence. Could it be

that it is ultimately trinitarianism that they really care about, and not Scriptural truth? Little wonder that the rabbi quoted in the first article is frustrated with the trinitarian argument based on a spurious explanation of "one". He could have said that this argument is nonsense, but is polite enough not to say so.

And could it be that the two writers don't know that "Yahweh" is not a general term for God but the personal name of the God of Israel? How can a personal name have a multi-personal reference? How can a personal name such as Jesus Christ or William Shakespeare, when used referentially, refer to more than one particular person? It is well known in biblical scholarship that "Yahweh" is not a general or synonymous way of referring to God. *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, "Names of God," says:

> If *El* (god) was a general term for the divinity in the thought of the peoples of the Bible lands and the Ancient Near East, the name *Yahweh* was a specifically Hebrew name for God … It is significant that the use of this name [Yahweh] for God was unique with the Israelites. The other Semitic peoples do not seem to have known it or at least did not use it in reference to the Deity except as contacts with the Hebrew people brought it to their attention. It was the special property of the covenant people.

As the specially revealed name of the God of Israel (Ex.3:14), "Yahweh" has no multi-personal reference. It refers to Him alone, and He declares that "there is no god besides me"

(Dt.32:39; cf. Isa.44:8; 45:5). This was already declared in the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before (or besides) me" (Ex.20:3; Dt.5:7) where "me" refers explicitly to Yahweh (Ex.20:2 and Dt.5:6). Can the writers of the two articles hope that on that Day they might escape the serious charge of violating the First Commandment?

I have responded in a stern tone to these two writers whose exposition is so mediocre as to be worthless for a study of God's word. Because the word of God is "the word of life," those who are not careful to "divide" it rightly (2Tim.2:15) will have to answer to the living God for leading others into error. Expounding the Scriptures is not a game that people with too much time in their hands might want to play. We must strive to understand God's truth no matter what the cost may be, even the loss of our cherished doctrines. Only God's truth must prevail if we are to enter into eternal life. For this reason, I will attend with respect and open-mindedness to any exposition of God's word that is genuinely committed to the truth.

Jesus understands "one" in Dt.6:4 as numeral one

Some trinitarians take "one" in Dt.6:4 ("Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is one") not as numeral "one" (which would make YHWH the one and only YHWH, excluding all others as Yahweh) but as a compound "one" in order

to imply that Yahweh is a compound unity of (three) persons.[15]

The Jews as a whole have never whole interpreted Dt.6:4 to mean a compound YHWH. Old Testament scholarship has generally taken *echad* in Dt.6:4 to mean numeral one in such a way as to exclude all others from being Yahweh.[16]

But amid the endless trinitarian objections to the unitary meaning of *echad* in Dt.6:4, what settles the matter is what Jesus himself said to a scribe in the following conversation. We will briefly discuss the three highlighted sentences:

> [28] And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" [29] Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [30] And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' [31] The

[15] A surprising exception is the highly trinitarian *ESV Study Bible* which concedes that Dt.6:4 is a "statement of exclusivity, not of the internal unity of God".

[16] HALOT, the foremost Hebrew-English lexicon, puts *echad* of Dt.6:4 under the heading "numeral one" and assigns to this verse the sense "Yahweh is one" or "the one Yahweh" or "Yahweh alone" or "Yahweh only". Keil and Delitzsch on Dt.6:4: "What is predicated here of Jehovah does not relate to the unity of God, but simply states that it is to Him alone that the name *Jehovah* rightly belongs, that He is the one absolute God, to whom no other *Elohim* can be compared."

> second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." [32] And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. [33] And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." [34] And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Mark 12:28-34, ESV)

It suffices to make a few observations:

- A scribe asks Jesus which is the foremost commandment.
- Jesus tells him that the foremost is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."
- The scribe agrees with Jesus: "You are right, Teacher".
- Moreover, the scribe agrees specifically with Jesus' interpretation of Dt.6:4: "You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him". The words "no other besides him" indicate that Yahweh is to be understood in terms of numeral "one" with the sense of exclusion, and not a compound "one".
- Jesus saw that the scribe had "answered wisely" and tells him that he is not far from the kingdom.

In short, the Lord Jesus and the scribe agree that Yahweh in Dt.6:4 is a numerally singular God and that all others are excluded from being Yahweh, thereby closing any trinitarian "loophole" in Deuteronomy 6:4.

"Echad" as correctly explained by a Jew

The following paragraphs are from another Internet article,[17] this time by a certain Jason, a Jewish blogger who writes on the subjects of Judaism, Christianity, and the Hebrew language. It correctly explains the meaning of *echad* ("one") and rejects Norelli's explanation of the word:

> In his "The Defense of an Essential: A Believer's Handbook for Defending the Trinity," Nick Norelli took up the argument common among missionaries that *echad* (אֶחָד, the Hebrew word used in Dt.6:4 to say that HaShem [18] is "one") "is a word that allows for plurality within one and diversity within unity" (page 3). This is the most common argument when the subject of the Trinity comes up in the face of the declared unity of G-d in the text of the Hebrew Bible.
>
> Is it true that *echad* refers to a "compound unity" as missionaries say? Actually, no. It isn't true in the least. The word *echad* is used in the same way as the word "one" in English. That is, it means a singular as opposed to a plural. If I say that

[17] http://www.thehebrewcafe.com/blog/?cat=19, as it was on April 1, 2013.

[18] Hebrew *HaShem* ("the Name") is used by Jews as a reverential way of referring to YHWH, the God of Israel.

> I have one book, I mean that I have one and not two. Similarly, when I tell you that I want one hamburger from the grill, I mean just one—and not two. It is not the word "one" or *echad* that [in itself] indicates a compound unity—not in the slightest. It is the noun to which [*echad*] refers which itself may be compound. A hamburger is composed of a bun, meat, sauces, and toppers. A hamburger itself is a compound unity, just as a cluster of grapes is a compound unity. It is not the word "one" that [in itself] indicates or allows for plurality …
>
> What do we mean when we say "one"? We mean simply "not two (or more)" of something. It is not the word "one" that allows for or bears the sense of composition. Rather, it is the thing itself to which I refer that contains and bears this sense.

Chapter 2

The Historical Roots of Trinitarianism: Constantine and Nicaea

A basic definition of the Trinity

Even among those who uphold the doctrine of the Trinity, few know anything about it beyond the basic "God in three persons" formula. Even fewer know about the historical events that culminated in the creedal formulation of trinitarianism.

Since we will be looking at the historical roots of trinitarianism in this chapter and the "four pillars of trinitarianism" in the next few chapters, it is only right that we gain a basic understanding of what is the Trinity. The following definition of the Trinity is representative of how it is explained in the English-speaking world, and adheres to the trinitarian

language of standard definitions given by trinitarians, some of whom we will cite.

For the meanings of English words, we consult *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (5th full edition) and *Oxford Dictionary of English* (3rd edition), abbreviated AHD and Oxford, respectively.

The following point-by-point explanation of the Trinity includes a few of my explanatory notes:

- There is one and only one God.
- God subsists in three persons.
- Note: The word "subsist" is unfamiliar to most people, but it is commonly used in trinitarian writing to mean "to exist, be" (AHD).
- The three persons are: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.
- God is not God except as Father, Son, and Spirit—*the three together*.
- The three are distinct from each other, yet are not three Gods.
- Each is fully God.
- The three are coequal and coeternal.
- Note: Trinitarians often use the term "Godhead" to refer to the triune God (AHD defines "Godhead" as "the Christian God, especially the Trinity").
- God is three persons but only one "being" or "essence".
- Note: Although the word "being" usually refers to a human being, trinitarians use it in the sense of "one's basic or essential nature" (AHD, similarly Oxford).

- Note: Although the word "person" usually means a human person, in trinitarian language it usually refers to a divine person (e.g. "God in three persons").
- Note: Trinitarians often use the Greek word *hypostasis* as an approximate equivalent of "person". Hence God is three *hypostases* (three persons).
- Note: The three *hypostases*—Father, Son, and Spirit—share one *ousia* (essence or substance). Hence trinitarians speak of three *hypostases* in one *ousia* (three persons in one substance).
- Note: From *ousia* comes *homoousios* (of one essence or substance), which is historically the key term in trinitarianism because it is this term that supposedly makes trinitarianism "monotheistic".
- Note: Because the three persons are of one substance, they are said to be "consubstantial".
- By incarnation the second person of the Godhead—namely, the eternally preexistent God the Son—acquired a human nature and took on human existence as Jesus Christ, who now, as one person, possesses both a divine nature and a human nature, and is both fully God and fully man through the "hypostatic union" (of Christ's two natures, divine and human, in one person or hypostasis).

This definition is complete in the sense that any further discussion on the Trinity is fundamentally an elaboration on these basic points, e.g. how the three hypostases relate to one another, or how they have different roles in salvation history (the economic Trinity), or how Christ's divine nature relates

to his human nature (debate over this last question resulted in years of bitter sectarian conflict *within* trinitarianism). Anyone who reads the formal or technical literature on the Trinity will soon discover that they tend to use Greek and Latin terms or concepts, and are imbued with neo-Platonic and other philosophical concepts. These generate more confusion than illumination on how the three persons can be one God. We will encounter a few of these concepts in this book, such as that of *communicatio idiomatum*.

Our basic definition of the Trinity is based on dozens of definitions given by trinitarian authorities, both Protestant and Catholic, including the following six definitions (which can be skipped on a first reading). We include a seventh statement, on the incarnation.

> "The Christian doctrine of God, according to which he is three persons in one substance or essence." (*New Dictionary of Theology*, "Trinity")
>
> "The trinity of God is defined by the Church as the belief that in God are three persons who subsist in one nature. The belief as so defined was reached only in the 4th and 5th centuries AD and hence is not explicitly and formally a biblical belief." (*Dictionary of the Bible*, Father John L. McKenzie, "Trinity")
>
> "The term designating one God in three persons. Although not itself a biblical term, 'the Trinity' has been found a convenient designation for the one God self-revealed in Scripture as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It signifies that within the one essence of the Godhead we have to distinguish three 'persons'

> who are neither three gods on the one side, nor three parts or modes of God on the other, but coequally and coeternally God." (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, "Trinity")
>
> "The term 'Trinity' is not a Biblical term, and we are not using Biblical language when we define what is expressed by it as the doctrine that there is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence." (B.B. Warfield, ISBE, "Trinity")
>
> "The Trinity is the term employed to signify the central doctrine of the Christian religion—the truth that in the unity of the Godhead there are Three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, these Three Persons being truly distinct one from another. Thus, in the words of the Athanasian Creed: 'the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God.' In this Trinity of Persons the Son is begotten of the Father by an eternal generation, and the Holy Spirit proceeds by an eternal procession from the Father and the Son. Yet, notwithstanding this difference as to origin, the Persons are co-eternal and co-equal: all alike are uncreated and omnipotent." (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, "The Blessed Trinity," under "The Dogma of the Trinity")
>
> "It is time to lay down a basic, fundamental definition of the Trinity. But we need a short, succinct, accurate definition to start with. Here it is: Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit … When speaking of the Trinity, we need to realize that we are talking about one *what* and three *who's*. The one *what* is the Being or essence of

> God; the three *who's* are the Father, Son, and Spirit." (*The Forgotten Trinity*, James R. White, pp.26-27)
>
> [The incarnation is] the act whereby the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what he is, God the Son, took into union with himself what he before that act did not possess, a human nature, "and so He was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person, forever". (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, "Incarnation"; the words in quotation marks are cited by *EDT* from the Westminster Shorter Catechism).

Homoousios has no biblical support, and is rejected by Luther

The word *homoousios* ("of one substance") is historically the key term in trinitarianism because it is this term or its concept that, on account of the word "one," gives trinitarianism some semblance of monotheism. The early trinitarian view that *homoousios* or its concept is "the foundation of orthodoxy" (Victorinus) is shared by modern trinitarians, yet the word *homoousios* itself is found nowhere in the Bible. That it has no biblical basis is noted by a lexical authority, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT, ed. Colin Brown, article *God > The Trinity > NT*). The following excerpt from this article cites Karl Barth who, despite being a trinitarian, frankly admits that the doctrine of the Trinity is not found in the Bible. The following excerpt has two levels of quotation. For the convenience of the reader, I

put Barth's words in color in order to separate them from the surrounding words of NIDNTT:

> The NT does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity. [Barth says:] "The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of equal essence and therefore in an equal sense God himself. And the other express declaration is also lacking, that God is God thus and only thus, i.e. as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These two express declarations, which go beyond the witness of the Bible, are the twofold content of the Church doctrine of the Trinity" (Karl Barth, *CD*, I, 1, 437). It also lacks such terms as *trinity* … and *homoousios* which featured in the Creed of Nicea (325).

Since *homoousios* is not a biblical term (as noted by Barth and NIDNTT), it comes as no surprise that strong objections to this term have come from the ranks of trinitarians. Sure enough, Martin Luther, a trinitarian, vehemently opposed *homoousios* for being an unscriptural term, going so far as to "hate" it. *Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (p.151) quotes Luther as saying, "Our adversaries … are fanatics about words because they want us to demonstrate the truth of the trinitarian article … by asking us to assent to the term *homoousios*". Cambridge Companion goes on to say that "trinitarian terms such as *homoousios* are for Luther a 'stammering' and 'babbling'".

Luther rejects *homoousios* even more vehemently in a statement quoted in Adolf Harnack's seven-volume *History of Dogma*:

> [Luther] declared such a term as *homoousios* to be unallowable in the strict sense, because it represents a bad state of things when such words are invented in the Christian system of faith: "… but if my soul hates the word *homoousios* and I prefer not to use it, I shall not be a heretic; for who will compel me to use it … Although the Arians had wrong views with regard to the faith, they were nevertheless very right in this … that they required that no profane and novel word should be allowed to be introduced into the rules of faith." (*History of Dogma*, vol.7, ch.4, p.225, cf. Erlangen edition of Luther's works, vol.5, p.505)

So vehement was Luther's objection to the use of *homoousios* that he was willing to concede that the heretical Arians were "very right" in rejecting this "profane" word. Luther knew that his objection to *homoousios* would expose him to the charge of heresy because *homoousios* is the foundation stone of trinitarianism's dubious claim to monotheism, and that without *homoousios*, trinitarianism would descend into explicit tritheism (the doctrine of three Gods).

A Catholic scholar's admissions about trinitarianism

Luther comes from the ranks of Protestantism but is there similar dissent from the ranks of Catholicism? Hans Küng, one of the greatest Catholic theologians of the 20th century, wrote a section titled "No doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament" in his classic *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (p.95ff). Küng firmly and explicitly rejects trinitarianism in his work, but can we find a similar dissenting voice from the ranks of *trinitarian* Catholics? Yes.

An esteemed Bible dictionary—one of the most popular for two decades and in its time the most widely used one-volume Bible dictionary ever—was the scholarly *Dictionary of the Bible* by Father John L. McKenzie, which, though written by a Catholic, was also widely used by Protestants. The following are excerpts from "Trinity," an article in the dictionary. In this article, McKenzie, himself a trinitarian, makes some observations that are unfavorable to trinitarianism, including that: (i) The doctrine of the Trinity was reached only in the 4th and 5th centuries, and does not represent biblical belief. (ii) The trinitarian terms used for describing God are Greek philosophical terms rather than biblical terms. (iii) Terms such as "essence" and "substance" were "erroneously" applied to God by early theologians. (iv) The personal reality of the Holy Spirit is uncertain and was a later development in trinitarianism. (v) The Trinity is a mystery that defies understanding. (vi) The Trinity is not mentioned or foreshadowed

in the Old Testament. Here are some excerpts from his article:

> TRINITY. The trinity of God is defined by the Church as the belief that in God are three persons who subsist in one nature. The belief as so defined was reached only in the 4th and 5th centuries AD and hence is not explicitly and formally a biblical belief. The trinity of persons within the unity of nature is defined in terms of "person" and "nature" which are Greek philosophical terms; actually the terms do not appear in the Bible. The trinitarian definitions arose as the result of long controversies in which these terms and others such as "essence" and "substance" were erroneously applied to God by some theologians.
>
> . . . . .
>
> The personal reality of the Spirit emerged more slowly than the personal reality of Father and Son, which are personal terms … What is less clear about the Spirit is His personal reality; often He is mentioned in language in which His personal reality is not explicit.
>
> . . . . .
>
> … in Catholic belief the Trinity of persons within the unity of nature is a mystery which ultimately escapes understanding; and in no respect is it more mysterious than in the relations of the persons to each other.
>
> . . . . .
>
> The OT does not contain suggestions or foreshadowing of the Trinity of persons. What it does contain are the words which

> the NT employs to express the Trinity of persons such as Father, Son, Word, Spirit, etc.

The Gnostic use of *homoousios*

Gnosticism is widely regarded as the greatest threat to the life of the early church in the first two centuries. We won't explain what Gnosticism is (but see Appendix 7 for a brief explanation) since it is a standard topic in church histories, except to mention that it was a cancerous movement that grew deep roots in the church and nearly killed it. Eminent historian Justo L. González says, "Of all these differing interpretations of Christianity, none was as dangerous, nor as close to victory, as was gnosticism." [19]

It will come as a shock to trinitarians that the Gnostics were the first to use the word *homoousios*. The first person known to have used it was the Gnostic theologian Basilides (2nd century A.D.) who used *homoousios* to explain his concept of a "threefold sonship consubstantial with the god who is not". [20]

When Gnosticism was at its peak, *homoousios* had a reputation for being a Gnostic term. Well before the Council

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[19] *The Story of Christianity*: *The Early Church to the Present Day*, vol.1, p.58.

[20] Hippolytus in *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 7:22. See the scholarly Wikipedia article "Homoousian" cited in Appendix 7 of the present book (The Gnostic Origins of *Homoousios*).

of Nicaea in 325, the church fathers were already aware of the Gnostic use of *homoousios*. According to R.P.C. Hanson's authoritative work, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.191: "Hippolytus quotes Gnostics as using the word *homoousios*"; "Clement of Alexandria also uses the word in quotations of Gnostic authors, as does Irenaeus"; "Origen similarly uses the word only when he is quoting Gnostic heretics." The academic authority of R.P.C. Hanson's work is well known to all church historians and patristics scholars.

Although Gnosticism was in decline by the third or fourth century, it left some of its roots in the church as seen in the adoption of *homoousios*. A central concept in Gnosticism is the emanation of divine beings, the lesser from the greater. It is therefore not surprising that at Nicaea it was decreed on pain of anathema that the second person emanates from the first person, much as light emanates from a source of light. Nicaean formulations such as "God of God, Light of Light" and other lofty descriptions are nothing more than direct echoes of Greek philosophy and religion.

Trinitarianism or tritheism?

Trinitarianism is the doctrine of one God in three persons whereas tritheism is the doctrine of three Gods. Tritheism is a special case of polytheism, the belief in many Gods (e.g. Hinduism). Trinitarians deny that trinitarianism is tritheism, yet the two are intrinsically indistinguishable. To put the

matter plainly, trinitarianism is tritheism that denies it is tritheistic.

In trying to make sense of trinitarianism, the immediate problem that we encounter is its use of doublespeak, in assigning two different meanings to the word "God" and then switching back and forth between them, sometimes to evade logical dilemmas. There is the first sense of "God" in which God is not God except as Father, Son, and Spirit—*the three together*. This formulation is designed as a means of avoiding explicit tritheism. (Karl Barth says that this is one of the two foundational tenets of trinitarianism.)

But there is a second (and contradictory) sense of "God" in which each of the three persons of the Trinity is individually and fully God: "So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God" (Athanasian Creed). Trinitarians say that each person is "fully God" (White, Grudem, Bowman) or "fully and completely God" (ESV Study Bible, p.2513). The historically important Fourth Lateran Council (1215, Rome) is even clearer: "each is God, whole and entire". In other words, the Father is God whole and entire; the Son is God whole and entire; the Spirit is God whole and entire; and yet the three together are one God whole and entire.

In trinitarianism, each person of the triune Godhead, whether the Father or the Son or the Spirit, is fully God, coeternally God, and coequally God, such that trinitarians can and do speak of "God the Father, God the Son, and God

the Spirit" in language that ascribes whole deity to each. Whole deity of each is maintained even if we reverse the word order within each of the three clauses: "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God" (Athanasian Creed).

Trinitarianism posits that each person—whether the Father or the Son or the Spirit—is "fully" God ("each is God, whole and entire," Fourth Lateran Council). Moreover, trinitarianism assigns sufficient distinction between the persons such that the Father is not to be confused with the Son, nor the Son with the Spirit, nor the Father with the Spirit. The Athanasian Creed says, "For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit".

Since the three are each "fully" God yet are three distinct persons, it would be semantically correct to say that they are three Gods (tritheism). The force and clarity and obviousness of this argument is noted, yet its validity is rejected, by the Athanasian Creed: "And yet they are not three Gods, but one God".

This clear violation of semantic sense for which the Athanasian Creed offers no explanation apart from denial, must be rejected unless it is allowed by mitigating factors such as explicit Scriptural support. But does the Bible teach the three-in-one trinitarian formulation? Many trinitarians admit that it is absent in the Scriptures. For example, Dr. Charles C. Ryrie, author of *Ryrie Study Bible*, and longtime

professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, makes a shocking admission:

> But many doctrines are accepted by evangelicals as being clearly taught in the Scripture for which there are no proof texts. The doctrine of the Trinity furnishes the best example of this. It is fair to say that the Bible does not clearly teach the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, there is not even one proof text, if by proof text we mean a verse or passage that 'clearly' states that there is one God who exists in three persons … The above illustrations prove the fallacy of concluding that if something is not proof texted in the Bible we cannot clearly teach the results … If that were so, I could never teach the doctrine of the Trinity or the deity of Christ or the deity of the Holy Spirit. (*Basic Theology*, pp. 89-90)

Millard Erickson, well-known trinitarian and specialist on trinitarian doctrine, and the author of *Christian Theology*, writes:

> [The Trinity] is not clearly or explicitly taught anywhere in Scripture, yet it is widely regarded as a central doctrine, indispensable to the Christian faith. In this regard, it goes contrary to what is virtually an axiom of biblical doctrine, namely, that there is a direct correlation between the scriptural clarity of a doctrine and its cruciality to the faith and life of the church. (*God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, p.11)

The standard way of explaining away the tritheistic underpinnings of trinitarianism—namely, by positing that the three persons share one essence (*homoousios*)—is unconvincing. That is because a common essence characterizes tritheism as much as it does trinitarianism! Whether we speak of a unity of three Gods (tritheism) or a unity of three persons in one God (trinitarianism), the three share the one substance or essence of deity. Applying the concept of "one essence" to three persons who are each "fully" God does not make them "one God"; it only makes them a perfect union of three full Gods in one essence. Hence the concept of *homoousios* (one in substance)—whose first known use was by the Gnostic theologian Basilides, and which was later adopted at Nicaea against the objections of some bishops from both camps—offers no help to trinitarianism but in fact draws unwelcome attention to trinitarianism's affinity with tritheism!

The tritheistic underpinnings of trinitarianism come out in many books such as James R. White's *The Forgotten Trinity*, a book endorsed by J.I. Packer, Gleason Archer, Norman Geisler, and John MacArthur, indicating its acceptance among leading evangelicals.

White first gives what he calls a "short, succinct, accurate" definition of the Trinity: "Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." (p.26) Here White makes a distinction between "Being" and "person"

such that God is three persons yet one Being. To explain what this means, White says:

> When speaking of the Trinity, we need to realize that we are talking about one *what* and three *who's*. The one *what* is the Being or essence of God; the three *who's* are the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Hence trinitarianism's claim to monotheism is based on the concept of "one Being" or "one essence" rather than "one person". In his attempt to give trinitarianism some semblance of monotheism, White is forced to make God a *what*, not a *who*. The God of trinitarianism is technically an "it" rather than a "He".

If you take this to mean that the trinitarian God is not a person, you are correct. Tertullian says: "God is the name for the substance" (cited by J.N.D. Kelly in *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.114). C.S. Lewis, a wholehearted trinitarian, says: "Christian theology does not believe God to be a person. It believes Him to be such that in Him a trinity of persons is consistent with a unity of Deity. In that sense it believes Him to be something very different from a person." (*Christian Reflections*, p.79).

In the strange logic of trinitarianism, the mere use of "one" as in "one substance" is enough to qualify trinitarianism to be monotheism. This is what we might call "monotheism by vocabulary". The only way for trinitarians to obtain "one God" from the notion of "one substance" is to

define God as a substance (Tertullian), which is why trinitarians such as James White do not hesitate to say that God is a "what".

Just as strange, the tritheistic concept of "three persons who are each fully God" (note the crucial word "fully") does not disqualify trinitarianism from being monotheism. This is trying to have it both ways, to have monotheism and tritheism, to have God as one and God as three, to have one God and three who are each fully God. In the final analysis, the convoluted logic of trinitarianism is the result of an attempt to prove, almost mathematically, that three equals one or that 1/3 equals one.

White continues: "The Father is not 1/3 of God, the Son 1/3 of God, the Spirit 1/3 of God. Each is fully God, coequal with the others, and that eternally." This statement is problematic because if God is three persons, then anyone who is "fully God"—note the word "fully" used by White, by which he means whole and entire God—would have to be all three persons at the same time or else he would be partially God (unless we change the definition of "God" using doublespeak).

The problem runs deeper than that, for if Jesus is not all three persons at the same time, he would not be God at all, for God must always exist as three persons or else we would be breaking the "monotheism" of trinitarianism such that it becomes tritheism. White rejects the idea that Jesus is one-

third of God, yet it cannot be denied that Jesus is one-third of the Trinity, which trinitarians equate with God.

White's assertion that the three are each "fully God" is but a naked assertion of pure tritheism. But trinitarians vehemently deny that their doctrine is tritheistic by insisting that God is not God through the Father alone, or the Son alone, or the Spirit alone, but by all three together. This is one of the two foundational tenets of trinitarianism (Barth) and is explicitly stated by Erickson, a prominent spokesman for trinitarianism:

> God could not exist simply as Father, or as Son, or as Holy Spirit. Nor could he exist as Father and Son, or as Father and Spirit, or as Son and Spirit, without the third of these persons in that given case. Further, none of these could exist without being part of the Trinity… None has the power of life within itself alone. Each can only exist as part of the Triune God. (*God in Three Persons*, p.264)

Erickson's statement that "none has the power of life within itself alone" is a most shocking way of describing someone who is supposed to be fully God (and, in the case of the Father, directly contradicts John 5:26 which says that "the Father has life in himself"). Equally shocking is the statement, "none of these could exist without being part of the Trinity". Erickson is not merely saying that God is ontologically triune, but that each person has no power of existence on his

own outside the framework of the Trinity! That statement is probably designed as a means of avoiding explicit tritheism.

Erickson's statement that "God could not exist simply as Father, or as Son, or as Holy Spirit" directly contradicts the trinitarian assertion that the Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, and the Spirit is fully God.

The stark reality is that Erickson has done the best he could in his attempt to explain trinitarianism, a doctrine that has never been explained coherently for two thousand years. That is why trinitarianism is often said to be a mystery (cf. White, p.173, "a mystery beyond the comprehension of man"). It remains a mystery up to the 21st century because trinitarians still cannot explain coherently how three persons, each of whom is God whole and entire, can be one God together. This accounts for the predictable retreat into "mystery" even by a brilliant mind as Augustine's.

But that is a distortion of the meaning of "mystery" in the Bible. In the Bible, a mystery is not something illogical or beyond logical comprehension, but something that is unexplained only because we are missing some crucial information, e.g. the mystery of how the pyramids were built, or a mystery being investigated by Sherlock Holmes (but once he solves it, it is no longer an incomprehensible mystery).

Paul says that we understand a mystery as clear as light when God reveals it to us: "to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (Eph.3:9). Paul aspires to "declare the my-

stery of Christ" not incomprehensibly but "that I may make it clear" (Col.4:3-4), a statement cannot be true of the mystery of the Trinity.

In trinitarianism, a mystery remains a mystery even after an explanation has been given for it! But not so in the Bible. The following Bible dictionary says that a mystery is not something "for which no answer can be found" but something that "once revealed is known and understood":

> But whereas "mystery" may mean, and in contemporary usage often does mean, a secret for which no answer can be found, this is not the connotation of the term *mystērion* in classical and biblical Gk. In the NT *mystērion* signifies a secret which is being, or even has been, revealed, which is also divine in scope, and needs to be made known by God to men through his Spirit. In this way the term comes very close to the NT word *apokalypsis*, "revelation". *Mystērion* is a temporary secret, which once revealed is known and understood, a secret no longer. (*New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., "Mystery")

In fact the unbiblical teaching of Sabellianism or modalism (which, to explain it simplistically, says that God, in history, is manifested in three modes, Father, Son, and Spirit, similar to how H_2O can be liquid, ice, or vapor) is infinitely more logical than trinitarianism. That is because modalism is free of self-contradiction, as is tritheism. If trinitarianism is to be logical and self-consistent, it can only be so as modalism or tritheism, both of which are as unbiblical as trinitarianism.

Tritheism, being a special case of polytheism, would be expected to borrow from the language of polytheism. Sure enough, the famously polytheistic religion of Hinduism would occasionally speak of the "divine essence" or "divine substance" [21]—a fact that further exposes trinitarianism's affinity with tritheism and polytheism.

The trinitarian term "divine substance" is also used in polytheistic Greek mythology [22] and in Gnosticism, [23] yet is notably absent from the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures!

In my days as a good trinitarian, I believed in a tripartite Godhead. Because we trinitarians believed in three coequal persons, we could not speak properly of one God but of one Godhead. For some strange reason, we could not speak of three Gods even though each of these divine "persons" (as trinitarians also call them) are fully and coequally God. There is every right to speak of three Gods, and not just three persons, in the Trinity who are said to be one in "substance," a word derived from the Greek *ousia* which is used more appropriately of material things, but which has been conscripted into trinitarian use because a better word could not

[21] Klaus Klostemaier, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, p.124; Klaus Klostemaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p.487; Steven Rosen, *Essential Hinduism*, p.193; Sri Swami Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, p.134.

[22] Richard Caldwell, *The Origin of the Gods*, Oxford, p.137.

[23] Jean-Marc Narbonne, *Plotinus in Dialogue with the Gnostics*, p.39; and Sean Martin, *The Gnostics*, p.38.

be found. When you start inventing terms such as "trinity" or "God the Son" or "God-man," you will be forced to invent other terms such as "substance" and impose meanings on words such as "God" which are not intended in the Bible.

If "God is spirit" (John 4:24), how can God be a substance? In the trinitarian absurdity, which is not based on biblical procedure, the material concept of "substance" is brought in to explain how there can be three persons in the "one" trinitarian God. Common sense tells us that if there are three persons (not just three faces or three heads on one person), each of whom is *fully* God, then there are three Gods. This is incontrovertible in terms of the laws of syntax, semantics, and plain language. Yet Christians including myself have been so befuddled that we could not see the obvious. The brainwashing power of tradition is frightening because it leads to blindness. The spiritual state of the church is just as Jesus put it, "the blind leading the blind," with the inevitable consequence that both "fall into a pit" (Mt.15:14; Lk.6:39).

May Yahweh God be merciful to those in the church who pursue the truth, and may He grant them what He had promised:

> I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. (Isaiah 42:16, ESV)

Historical Currents: Constantine and Nicaea

How has the doctrine of the Trinity with its use of unbiblical language and its infusion of Greek philosophical concepts such as *homoousios* and *hypostasis* and *eternal generation* become the cornerstone doctrine of Christianity? The answer is to be found in the historical events of the early church.

Some three hundred years after the time of Jesus, the Gentile church had by then made him an object of worship. The divine Jesus, called God the Son, was a creation of the Gentile (non-Jewish) church that had assumed for itself the right to elevate Jesus from being man to being God. Deified men were familiar to the Gentile world of the day; indeed the Greeks had many gods who appeared all too human, and the Romans worshipped as gods many of their own emperors, including Constantine.

The way the Gentile church deified Jesus reminds us of what Jesus said about the way some had been treating John the Baptist: "they did with him whatever they wished" (Mt. 17:12). With similar brazenness, the churches did with Jesus whatever they wished. Did they really think that Jesus would have consented to their "lifting him up" to be God (cp. John

8:28, where "lifted up" refers instead to his being lifted up on the cross)?

From that time on, the biblical Jesus faded from the Gentile church in matters of faith and practice, and the one who took his place was the God-man Jesus Christ of trinitarianism.

We must not be quick to assume that the intentions of the church leaders were wrong when they did this. In deifying Jesus, they undoubtedly thought that they were doing what is right. But good intentions do not justify wrong actions, violence, idolatry, or unbiblical doctrines, as goes the saying, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions".

The deification of Jesus in 325 and the Spirit in 381

Few Christians know that trinitarianism was not generally accepted in the Christian church until A.D. 381, three and a half centuries after the time of Jesus, in which year the Council of Constantinople, convened by the Roman Emperor Theodosius I, affirmed that the Holy Spirit is of the same "substance" as the Father and the Son. It was the first such official declaration in church history; and by this ecclesiastical pronouncement, the Holy Spirit was declared the third person of the Trinity. Before this happened, there had been no trinity of "consubstantial" beings. To speak of a Trinity in the New Testament is therefore anachronistic, for the church

did not even recognize the Holy Spirit as a part of a trinity until 350 years after the time of Christ.

The formal deification of Jesus took place a half century earlier, in 325 at the Council of Nicaea, despite the fact that the New Testament has no clear or straightforward or incontrovertible statement that Jesus is God. The process of deifying Jesus started even earlier, in the latter half of the second century, when bold and scripturally unsustainable statements were being made by some Gentile church leaders on the deity of Jesus. The deification of Jesus then gained momentum in the Hellenistic Gentile church, during which process Jesus was being elevated higher and higher towards deity, but not without entailing much controversy and hostility, even physical violence which was carried out with no apparent concern for the disgracefulness of such behavior.[24]

The problems with the Council of Nicaea

The ancient city of Constantinople is located within the area of today's Istanbul, Turkey, whereas the ancient city of Nicaea is located 60 miles away, within today's Iznik, Turkey. These were Greek-speaking cities in the Byzantine Empire at

[24] For a history of this protracted conflict, see Philip Jenkin's *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years*; and Richard Rubenstein's *How Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity During the Last Days of Rome*.

the time of Emperor Constantine (born 272, died 337). The city of Constantinople was founded in 330 by Constantine himself on the site of the earlier Byzantium. Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Muslims in 1453, and was renamed Istanbul.

In 325, Emperor Constantine, also known as Constantine the Great, brought together the First Council of Nicaea which in its definitive Nicene Creed introduced the key word *homoousios* to declare that Jesus is of the "same substance" (consubstantial) with God the Father and therefore coequal with Him. With the official deification of Jesus in place, the church now had two Gods (ditheism) or two persons who are coequally one God (binitarianism) by virtue of their sharing one substance.

A few decades later, in 381 at the Council of Constantinople, the Holy Spirit was added as the third person to the Godhead to formally make God a trinity. The doctrine of three persons in the Godhead, a formulation that is polytheistic rather than monotheistic, was not viewed as problematic, unbiblical or heretical by much of the Gentile church, for it was a church that, after all, was immersed in a milieu in which polytheism had taken deep root, and in which Gnostic concepts were familiar to its populace.

In short, the deity of Christ, in terms of his consubstantiality with the Father, was not officially established until 325, a few months after Constantine had become the sole emperor of the Roman empire. Seeing the sectarian conflicts among

church leaders over the issue of Christ's deity, and fearing that this may destabilize the unity of his empire, Constantine immediately instructed the Christian bishops to gather at his residence in Nicaea.

He took personal charge of the proceedings of this council even though he was not technically a Christian (he was not baptized until 12 years later, just shortly before he died). Not being a Christian, he knew little about Christian doctrine, and had to depend on the counsel of one or two Christian advisors. Despite being a non-Christian who lacked a deep understanding of Christian doctrine, he imposed *doctrinal* unity upon the gathering of some three hundred bishops who represented a multitude of different—in many cases, irreconcilable—doctrinal views. He lacked a good knowledge of Christian teaching but as an astute politician, he knew it would be politically expedient to support and establish the stronger elements of this assembly of bishops. The party that favored the full deity of Christ was slightly stronger than the one that did not, even though the majority of bishops still believed in the subordination of the Son to the Father. That being the case, it was politically astute of Constantine to support the side that was advocating the deity of Christ. In any case, the deification of Christ was not something that Constantine himself would have found objectionable because Roman emperors too were deified, himself included.

Thus the Council of Nicaea, consisting of some 300 church leaders, assumed for itself the authority over all

Christendom to deify Jesus, declaring him God by invoking no authority but its own. This relatively small group of church leaders did with Jesus "as they wished" when they "lifted him up" as God and thereby "crucified the Son of God again" (Heb.6:6). They thought that they were glorifying Jesus by declaring him to be of the same substance as God the Creator. But how is a person glorified when he is declared to be what he is not, and then made into an object of idolatry?

The number of bishops at Nicaea cannot be established with certainty. Contemporary reports range from 220 attendees (according to Eusebius of Caesarea, the most important historian of the early church from the early church) to 318 attendees (Jerome and Rufius; cf. Wikipedia, *First Council of Nicaea*, "Attendees"). Of the estimated 1,800 bishops of the church at that time, only 300 attended the council, some of whom "were poorly enough acquainted with Christian theology" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol.11, p.44, *Nicaea, Councils of*). This last observation is clearly a cause for concern in regard to making official declarations on fundamental Bible doctrines.

We can draw a few conclusions from these observations. Firstly, only one in six church leaders were present at Nicaea. Given that the council was fully funded by Constantine who provided for the travel, food and accommodation expenses of every participant, why were 83% of the bishops absent from the council? (At that time, a bishop was basically a senior church clergy.) Even the bishop of Rome, whose office later

became the Papal office, did not attend the council, but sent a representative there. What kind of authority did this council actually have?

And how do we account for the discrepancies in the reported number of attendees? The figures were provided by bishops who had personally attended the council, yet there is a difference of 100 between the highest and lowest estimates. One can only wonder at the council's reliability in matters of historical observation. Or did some of the bishops attend the meetings inconsistently?

The statement by *The Catholic Encylopedia* that some of them had a poor understanding of Christian teaching leads to the question: How many are "some"? 10? 50? 100? On what basis were they appointed bishops if they were unable to give proper teaching to their own congregations?

Another problem—though not of their own fault—was the dire lack of access to the Scriptures even among the bishops. Recognizing this problem, Constantine commissioned Eusebius of Caesarea to make fifty copies of the Bible.[25] But this imperial decree was issued in 331, which made it far too late to moderate the doctrinal verdicts of Nicaea in 325.

[25] *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, p.261.

The Nicene Creed

The term "Nicene Creed" is technically ambiguous because it can refer to the historically important creed adopted at the Council of Nicaea in 325, or the expanded creed adopted at the Council of Constantinople in 381. The later creed of 381, formally known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed but often simply the Nicene Creed, is the one adopted by trinitarian churches today because it includes the Holy Spirit in a trinity whereas the earlier creed of 325 contains no explicit trinitarian formulation.[26]

The following is the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed as found in J.N.D. Kelly's *Early Christian Creeds* (3rd ed., p.297), a standard work on the early church creeds. For a historical-theological discussion on the creed, see *Early Christian Doctrines*, chapters 9 and 10, by the same author.

[26] The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed differs slightly in its various forms as adopted by the Lutheran Church, the Catholic Church (from the Latin Rite), the Orthodox churches, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the Anglican Communion. Some of the differences between their versions of the Nicene Creed carry overtones of early theological disputes, e.g. "and from the Son" appears in some versions but not in others.

> We believe in one God, the Father, almighty,
> maker of heaven and earth,
> of all things visible and invisible;
>
> And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
> the only-begotten Son of God,
> begotten from the Father before all ages,
> light from light, true God from true God,
> begotten not made, of one substance with the Father,
> through Whom all things came into existence,
> Who because of us men and because of our salvation
> came down from heaven,
> and was incarnate from 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 to heaven,
> and sits on the right hand of the Father,
> and will come again with glory to judge living and dead,
> of whose kingdom there will be no end;
>
> And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver,
> Who proceeds from the Father,
> Who with the Father and the Son is together
> worshipped and together glorified,
> Who spoke through the prophets;
> in one holy Catholic and apostolic church.
>
> We confess one baptism to the remission of sins;
> we look forward to the resurrection of the dead

> and the life of the world to come.
>
> Amen.

Few Christians know anything about trinitarianism beyond the bare fact that it is a doctrine of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit united in one substance as one God. In fact some Christians don't even know about the one substance, for they simply equate trinitarianism with the notion that Jesus is God. But if asked whether trinitarianism is a biblical doctrine, they would answer with a resounding "yes". But are they aware that this doctrine did not become a creed until the fourth century? The Catholic scholar, Father John L. McKenzie, says: "the belief that in God are three persons who subsist in one nature … was reached only in the 4th and 5th centuries AD and hence is not explicitly and formally a biblical belief."

How can a doctrine that arrived some 300 years after Jesus be a biblical doctrine? Or did the doctrine somehow "evolve" out of the Bible over a 300-year period, to use the evolutionary language that is freely applied to many disciplines today? The truth of the matter is that trinitarianism developed in the Gentile Hellenistic church from the latter part of the 2nd century after it had lost most of its connections to the early Jewish church from the middle of the same century. The Gentile church in its determination to exalt the man Christ Jesus higher and higher in the direction of deity, indeed towards full equality with God, went through a doctrinal pro-

cess that culminated in the formal deification of Jesus Christ at the Council of Nicaea in 325.

The early church knew that Jesus is not coequal with his Father

Even up to the time of Nicaea and slightly beyond, the majority of church leaders did not accept the coequality of Jesus with his Father. The majority still believed, in agreement with the Bible, that Jesus was lower than and subordinate to his Father, a doctrine which in its various forms is known as *subordinationism*. In fact subordinationism was the "orthodox" position prior to Nicaea but became the "heretical" position after Nicaea. It is a historical fact that subordinationism was the common orthodoxy of the church right up to the time of Athanasius in the fourth century. (Athanasius was the most ardent proponent of trinitarianism in the early church.) We see this historical fact in statements made by two esteemed academic authorities:

> "**Subordinationism**. Teaching about the Godhead which regards either the Son as subordinate to the Father or the Holy Ghost as subordinate to both. It is a characteristic tendency in much of Christian teaching of the first three centuries, and is a marked feature of such otherwise orthodox Fathers as St. Justin and St. Irenaeus … By the standards of orthodoxy established in the 4th cent., such a position came to be regarded as clearly heretical in its denial of the co-equality of the Three

> Persons of the Trinity." (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., pp. 1552-1553)
>
> "With the exception of Athanasius virtually every theologian, East and West, accepted some form of subordinationism at least up to the year 355; subordinationism might indeed, until the denouement [resolution] of the controversy, have been described as accepted orthodoxy." (R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, page xix)

The academic reputation of R.P.C. Hanson's work in patristic studies is hard to overstate. Catholic and Protestant scholars have said of this book: "the most comprehensive account of the subject in modern English scholarship," "the standard English scholarly treatment of the trinitarian controversies of the fourth century," and "for almost twenty years, Hanson's work has provided the standard narrative description of the doctrine and dynamics of the fourth-century trinitarian conflicts".

If subordinationism was the orthodox position even as late as 355 (R.P.C. Hanson), how did the Nicene Creed of 325 manage to declare Jesus' coequality with God? Most Christians don't know the answer to this question, yet it is of the greatest importance because it concerns the central tenet of trinitarianism, that Jesus is God. So what is the answer to this question? The answer is *Constantine*.

Constantine

Few Christians know anything about Constantine the Great (A.D. 272–337) who became the sole emperor of the Roman Empire on September 19, 324.[27] From September 324 when he became the sole emperor, to March 325 when the Council of Nicaea commenced, there was a separation of only six or seven months.[28] It was Constantine himself who summoned the church leaders to his residence in Nicaea. He later spoke to them at the council, and largely directed [29] the proceedings of the 300 or so church leaders ("bishops"). He was the pivotal advocate [30] of the key word *homoousios* which was used by

[27] *Eusebius, Life of Constantine*, A. Cameron and Stuart Hall (Oxford), p.41.

[28] "The first Council of Nicaea was summoned in 325 CE by Constantine within seven months of the victory that installed him as sole ruler of the empire." (*Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*, vol.1, p.552).

[29] Hans Küng: "But it was the emperor who had the say at the council; the bishop of Rome was not even invited. The emperor convened the imperial synod; he guided it through a bishop whom he appointed and through imperial commissars; he made the resolutions of the council state laws by endorsing them." (*The Catholic Church: A Short History*, p.36)

[30] Constantine "was also credited with the successful *homoousios* formula agreed at Nicaea" (*The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*, vol.1, p.548). Hans Küng: "Constantine himself had the unbiblical word 'of the same substance' (Greek *homoousios*, Latin *consubstantialis*) inserted; later it was to cause a great controversy" (*The Catholic Church: A Short History*, p.37).

the council to affirm that Jesus is of the "same substance" as God the Father.

Let's get this clear. The decisive creed of the church is based on the unbiblical doctrine of consubstantiality that was advanced by a Roman emperor who at the time was not even baptized, and was still the chief priest of the empire's pagan rites! The word *homoousios* was itself unbiblical and Constantine probably received it from one of his Christian advisors (most scholars think it was Ossius,[31] the bishop of the city of Cordova in Spain).

The thoroughly pagan nature of *homoousios* can be seen in the following historical observation: "[Ossius of Cordova] probably mentioned to the emperor that the Platonic concept of a first and second Deity was somewhat similar to the Christian belief in God the Father and his Son the Word, and how this similarity might be used in converting pagans to Christianity." [32]

"Constantine, urged by his Spanish adviser, even threw in a phrase of his own: the Son is *homoousios* with the Father … The moderate majority were uneasy" (Stephen Tomkins, *Short History of Christianity*, p.49). Jaroslav Pelikan: "As Constantine had proposed the *homoousios* in 325, so his son Constantius intervened on the opposite side with the ruling: 'I do not want words used that are not in Scripture.'" (*The Christian Tradition*, vol.1, pp.209-210)

[31] J.N.D. Kelly (*Early Christian Doctrines*, p.237) refers to the "ancient tradition that it was Ossius who suggested ὁμοούσιος [*homoousios*] to Constantine".

[32] *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, pp.112-113.

The heated debates at Nicaea, mainly between trinitarians and Arians, were not centered on Scripture (though the protagonists on each side would sometimes invoke Scripture to support their cases). Fundamentally, both trinitarianism and Arianism are unbiblical, and both are rooted in Greek philosophy. The lofty Nicene phrase, "Light from light," for example, is the teaching of emanation that was prominent in Gnosticism.

Remarkably, the early church creeds did not cite a single verse of Scripture in support of the deity of Jesus. We must not, however, anachronistically expect the early Gentile church to rely on the Scriptures for guidance in all matters of faith. The principle of *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone) was established only much later in church history, and has never been accepted by the Catholic Church. In reality, the historic church councils regarded *themselves* the final authority in all matters of faith, a position that endures in the Catholic Church to this day.

In the drafting of the Nicene Creed which Constantine participated in, he imposed [33] the word *homoousios,* the Greek equivalent of the Latin *consubstantialis*, probably through the advice of one or two of his counsels. This became the pivotal word in trinitarianism, yet was provided by a pagan emperor who, as head of the Roman Empire, appointed himself the head of the Church, that is, the "Bishop of bishops," at a time when he was still functioning as the *Pontifex*

[33] *Ibid.*, p.197.

Maximus, the chief pagan priest of the Roman Empire.[34] It makes one shudder to know that the Nicene Creed was formulated under the auspices of a still pagan Roman emperor, and primarily for political reasons, notably the preservation of the unity and stability of his empire.

It is important to note that when Constantine was baptized shortly before he died, he was baptized not by a trinitarian bishop but by the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia! [35] What it means is that Constantine died an Arian, that is, as one who does not accept the deity of Jesus and his consubstantiality with the Father! Can anyone make sense of this? Perhaps it tells us how much or how little Constantine cared about Christian doctrine except when it could be used to further his political purposes.[36]

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[34] The thoroughly pagan nature of the office of Pontifex Maximus can be seen in the detailed and scholarly Wikipedia article of the same name.

[35] "In the final irony, the emperor's deathbed baptism would be performed by an Arian, the same Eusebius of Nicomedia whose interests Constantine had protected in 325" (*Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, p.130). Constantine was baptized on Easter 337 by the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, and died on May 22, the day of Pentecost, while preparing a campaign against Persia (*Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, p.49).

[36] *Eusebius: Life of Constantine* (p.44) says "doubts have been expressed about the genuineness of Constantine's Christianity," notably by Jakob Burckhardt in *The Age of Constantine the Great*, Alistair Kee in *Constantine Versus Christ*, and Eduard Schwartz in *Charakterköpfe aus der Antiken Literatur: Vorträge*.

Will anyone still want to maintain that all this "evolved" out of the Bible? Constantine forced the church into doctrinal unity, and overrode the majority who still believed in the subordination of the Son to the Father. He established the Nicene Creed as the faith of the church by command, backed by the law of the Roman Empire.[37] Constantine did this for the purpose of maintaining political unity in his empire. By suppressing dissent in the church, the freedom of the church—*libertas ecclesiae*—was stamped out by the many instances of excommunication from the church and banishment as criminals under Roman law. To put it simply, one must believe that Jesus is God or face the horrible consequences.

Few Christians know anything about the historical development of trinitarian dogma and the Nicene Creed. Some may be shocked to hear that the pivotal enabler of this doctrine was the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine, who was not even a baptized Christian at the time he convened the Council of Nicaea in 325. He directed the proceedings of the council both personally and through his appointed representatives, guiding the council to adopt the then controversial view that Jesus is coequal with the Father in one essence, and eventually making this dogma part of state law in the

[37] Hans Küng: "This creed became the law of the church and the empire—everything was now increasingly dominated by the slogan 'One God, one emperor, one empire, one church, one faith'" (*The Catholic Church: A Short History*, p.37).

Roman Empire.[38] Thus we have a doctrine central to Christendom which was determined by an emperor who at Nicaea was still functioning as the chief priest of the Roman pagan deities. This, then, is the origin of official trinitarian dogma.

The unbiblical nature of *homoousios*

The Nicene Creed, like its key word *homoousios*, has no biblical basis (the word appears nowhere in the Bible), which is not surprising given that the creed was drafted by an assembly of Gentile church leaders under the oversight of an as yet non-Christian emperor, at a time when the Gentile church had already been losing touch with its Jewish roots even as far back as almost two centuries earlier. The New Testament, it ought to be remembered, was written by Jews with the exception of Luke–Acts.[39] The concepts espoused by the

[38] That the Nicene Creed is binding on all bishops in Christendom and by extension all Christians, is seen in many historical observations such as the one in the previous footnote, but also the following statement: "It was Constantine himself who summoned over 200 bishops to attend the Council of Nicaea in Bythinia in Asia Minor in May 325. Because of its size and because it was the first Church council to set out a creed to be assented to by all bishops, the Council of Nicaea was eventually to be accepted as the first general or ecumenical council of the Church, its authority in theory binding on all Christians." *Jesus Now and Then*, Burridge and Gould, p.172.

[39] That is, the combination of Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles viewed as one composition written by the same person, Luke, to a certain Theophilus.

Nicene Creed would have sounded foreign to the New Testament writers.

We have seen that *homoousios* is unbiblical and that the early church Fathers associated its use with the Gnostics. Indeed the first man known to have used it was the Gnostic teacher Basilides (2nd century A.D.) who used *homoousios* to explain his concept of a "threefold sonship consubstantial with the god who is not". We have also noted that Martin Luther vehemently opposed the use of *homoousios*, and that NIDNTT (ed. Colin Brown) says, in agreement with Karl Barth, that *homoousios* has no biblical basis.

Regarding *homoousios* (Latin *consubstantialis*), Hans Küng, one of the preeminent theologians in contemporary Catholicism, says that "*consubstantial*, with its background in Greek philosophy, was incomprehensible not only to Jews but also to Jewish Christians". Küng continues:

> Constantine himself had the unbiblical word "of the same substance" (Greek *homoousios*, Latin *consubstantialis*) inserted; later it was to cause a great controversy. The subordination of the Son to the one God and Father ("the" God), as was generally taught by Origen and the theologians of the previous period, was now replaced by an essential, substantial equality of the Son with the Father, so that in the future it was possible to speak of God the Son and God the Father. [40]

[40] Both statements by Küng are from *The Catholic Church: A Short History*, p.37.

Küng makes some important observations here. Among them is that prior to Nicaea, the teaching of the subordination of the Son to the Father was standard in the church. Thus Nicaea is the triumph of a powerful minority in the church, and a radical departure from the teaching of the church in the first and second centuries. There were, of course, a few leaders such as Justin Martyr and Melito of Sardis who earlier on were already taking the position that Jesus is God and as a result were promulgating ditheism or binitarianism (the belief in two divine persons) though not yet trinitarianism since they did not regard the Holy Spirit as the third divine person.

Because the Nicene Creed had deviated, as Küng points out, from the earlier teachings represented by people such as Origen the famous Alexandrian teacher, it comes as no surprise that the deviation of the Nicene Creed from the New Testament was all the more pronounced on account of the greater time separation. After the NT period, the teachings of the church leaders, in combination with the separation of the Gentile church from its Jewish mother church, especially after A.D. 135, [41] led to teachings that were becoming progressively distant from the New Testament.

From the fourth century, the acceptance of this new creed was made the determining mark and touchstone of faith for the Christian. He is required to believe that Jesus is God or

[41] *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed., J.D.G. Dunn, SCM Press, 2006.

else he will be condemned by the church as a heretic and by the state as a criminal. This is a complete violation of the spirit of the Bible which never prohibits anyone from examining the Bible and coming to his or her own genuine conclusions in the pursuit of God's truth. And since the Bible does not teach the deity of Jesus in the first place, it is doubly certain that the Bible nowhere makes salvation conditional on believing in his alleged deity. It can be said without any fear of contradiction that no verse in the New Testament states that one must believe that Jesus is God in order to be saved. It demonstrates how contrary the Nicene Creed, with its doctrinal requirements, is to the spirit of the Word of God as taught in the New Testament.

Constantine's Creed

These historical facts are known to church historians and patristics scholars but very few Christians know anything about them. They may be surprised to hear from the great British patristics scholar, J.N.D. Kelly, that the Nicene Creed which established Christ's coequality with God is in fact *Constantine's creed* (Kelly twice calls it "his creed").[42]

[42] J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, says that Constantine was willing to tolerate the different Christian groups "on condition that they acquiesced in *his creed*" (p.237), and that "while the emperor was alive, *his creed* was sacrosanct" (p.238). Emphasis added.

The trinitarian creed that establishes Christ as God is, let it be said again, Constantine's creed. This historical fact doesn't register in the minds of most Christians, just as it didn't register in my mind when I was a trinitarian. Looking back at my own biblical and theological training in England, which adds up to six years of study at two Bible colleges and a university, I don't recall that the historical roots of trinitarianism were ever discussed, not even in courses on church history. Why was this so? I frankly don't know the answer to this question. I won't go so far as to say that there was a cover-up.

I did a careful study of the work by Dr. J.N.D. Kelly, which is still an authoritative work on early Christian doctrines. I still have an old copy of this work which I read in my student days, with carefully written notes on the margins of every page. J.N.D. Kelly's book is, however, a work on church doctrine and not a work on church history, so the historical details won't be presented in the same way as they would in a historical work about the church (despite Dr. Kelly's impressive knowledge of church history). It was not until I had read more deeply into the church history of that period that the significance of the events of that era finally hit me. Even though Dr. Kelly was not writing specifically on church history, his familiarity with the subject comes out with striking clarity when he bluntly describes the Nicene Creed as "his (Constantine's) creed". Somehow the force of these words didn't strike me when I first read them. How did I overlook

them? This is a question I myself cannot answer. Was it because I had thought that these scholars, Dr. Kelly included, were Christians and probably trinitarians, so they would not mean anything negative by this statement? But how can such a statement be taken positively?

What is clear by now is that trinitarian doctrine arose from what the eminent theologian Hans Küng calls the "realpolitik" of Constantine (*realpolitik* is a German word for "practical politics"). In other words, Constantine was not primarily interested in any true theological stance of the Christian church.[43] Christian theology was probably not something that he, as a non-Christian at the time, would understand—or care to—for what ultimately mattered to him was the politics of his empire, its unity and stability.[44]

He viewed the church as an important component of his empire, so he did not tolerate any division or quarrel within the church that may threaten the empire's unity and stability. From the perspective of politics and governance of empire,

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[43] J.N.D. Kelly: "Whatever the theology of the council was, Constantine's own overriding motive was to secure the widest possible measure of agreement. For this reason he was not prepared to bar the door to anyone who was willing to append his signature to the creed. There is thus a sense in which it is unrealistic to speak of the theology of the council." (*Early Christian Doctrines*, p.237)

[44] As put bluntly by a popular-level history: "Constantine probably didn't care whether Jesus was God. He did, however, care about a united Empire." (Timothy Paul Jones, *Christian History Made Easy*, p.39).

this made sense. But it also shows that the Nicene Creed, written some three hundred years into the Christian era, had strayed far from the New Testament, far from the early Jewish church in Jerusalem, and far from the churches that Paul established through his missionary efforts.

As a trinitarian most of my life, I worked very hard to find some New Testament basis for my trinitarian faith, especially for my unwavering belief that Jesus is God. Although the biblical evidence for trinitarianism is truly meager, I tried to make the best of it. In retrospect and in shame, I was unwilling to look at any credible evidence to the contrary, for I had simply assumed that the deity of Christ is beyond dispute. Likewise, the church, which is almost universally trinitarian today, will not look at any evidence in Scripture that is contrary to the doctrine it holds dear. Any scholar who ventures to point out an error in our trinitarian "exegesis" will be ignored and even condemned as a liberal or heretic or infidel destined for hell.

How many of us trinitarians are even remotely aware that the pillar of our faith is Constantine's Creed? Rev. Dr. J.N.D. Kelly (1909-1997) died some years ago, so it wouldn't be possible for us to know how he would have explained the term "his creed". But Kelly was not a biblical scholar, so he might not have reflected on the connection between the Nicene Creed and the New Testament. But this is something that we are obliged to consider if we take the New Testament as God's Word in which our spiritual lives are rooted and

which we consider to be something more than a mere collection of ancient religious documents that scholars study out of academic interest.

The search for the Biblical basis of trinitarianism

It was not until the fourth century of the Christian era that the deity of Jesus gained official recognition through the intervention of Constantine, the officially pagan Roman emperor without whose help it wouldn't be certain that the trinitarian party in Nicaea could have gained the official deification of Jesus which later culminated in the doctrine of the Trinity. It was only after trinitarianism had been established as the official doctrine of the Roman Empire, especially after A.D. 381, that an effort was made to some degree of earnestness to see what biblical foundations, if any, could be found for this doctrine.

Formal trinitarian doctrine as we know it today did not initially grow out of the Bible, but was the later result of a *retrospective* search for the biblical evidence for the established doctrine. This undertaking has never been successful as might be expected under the historical circumstances. To this day, trinitarians are still mining the New Testament for whatever evidence they think could be used for proving the deity of Jesus. Every vague statement is pounced upon to serve this purpose. Even the statement, "I and the Father are one" (Jn.10:30), is seized upon as indicating consubstantial-

ity, ignoring the fact that the same spiritual oneness is available to every believer: "But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1Cor.6:17).

Since trinitarianism is not rooted in the New Testament and did not come from it, but was retroactively imposed on the Bible, it has no biblical validity whatsoever. Therefore, in our study of biblical monotheism and the biblical Jesus, we are not obligated to disprove trinitarianism. Trinitarianism is rightly to be regarded as heretical for it is a creedal system that has, through the actions of its promulgators, swerved from the Bible. All trinitarians should ponder carefully, with fear and trembling, the fact that their doctrine is of Gentile origin, both pagan and Hellenistic, and was developed only after the gospel had been entrenched in the pagan nations in which the Gentiles lived, beginning from more than a century after the time of Christ.

Historical aftermath

The Council of Nicaea under the auspices of Constantine, the *de facto* head of the church, paved the way for making Nicaean Christianity the official state religion of the Roman Empire. That official step was taken by Emperor Theodosius I (together with his co-rulers Gratian and Valentinian II) in the Edict of Thessalonica of 380 which declared that the creed of the earlier "First Council of Nicaea" shall be the basis of the Empire's sole recognized religion. This new edict was

to take immediate effect not just in Nicaea or Constantinople but the whole Roman Empire.

But did this bring God's blessings on the Roman Empire? Almost immediately after the edict was issued in 380, the empire began to fall apart. Theodosius himself was the last emperor to rule over both the western half and the eastern half of the Roman Empire. The Empire has never again been reunited.

The decline was so rapid that in 410, only a generation after the edict, Rome was sacked and pillaged by the Visigoths. Its infrastructure, notably its water conduits and sewage system, was destroyed, and its population was reduced to almost nothing. The great city of a million people was eventually reduced to a town of 10,000 as its inhabitants fled the intolerable conditions created by a shortage of food and water.

Does anyone see the connection between the destruction of Rome and the establishing of the Nicaean doctrine? Christian books generally do not mention this fact, so few Christians know anything about it.

Does the destruction of Rome reveal something of God's mind? This was the point of no return for the Roman Empire, and it has never since regained its ancient glory. This was the first time in 800 years that Rome had been sacked. Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Empire, became the "new Rome". The western half of the empire did not survive for long and the glorious empire collapsed. Meanwhile,

the eastern part of the Roman Empire, which had shrunk to the region of modern-day Greece and Turkey, continued on until it was conquered by the Ottoman Muslims in 1453, and Constantinople was renamed Istanbul.

For the sack of Rome, see Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, various editions. Gibbon wrote emphatically and in detail that Christianity contributed directly to the fall of Rome, and was criticized by Christians for what he wrote. There is a recent book with a similar title by the American historian James W. Ermatinger which is not a revision of Gibbon's work. In his work, Ermatinger says that "Christianity in many ways contributed to the fall of the empire" (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, p.39).

We see something similar in the 2007 25th anniversary issue of *Christian History and Biography* which has a cover story on the fall of Rome and its connection to Christianity. The article says that the Christians in Rome believed that Rome was unconquerable. Coins issued by the Roman Empire, now officially trinitarian, bore the words *Invicta Roma Aeterna* ("Eternal, Unconquerable Rome"). The article says that a few years before the horrific pillage of Rome in 410 by 40,000 "barbarians," the Christian poet Prudentius wrote that Rome could not possibly fall because Rome had embraced the Christian faith. He even boasted that "no barbaric enemy shatters my walls with a javelin and no man with strange weapons, attire and hairdress, wanders around the city he has

conquered and carries off my young men". Yet when Rome fell on August 24, 410, the calamity was so violent and ruinous that when the great biblical scholar Jerome heard about it in Bethlehem, "he put aside his *Commentary on Ezekiel* and sat stupefied in total silence for three days." [45]

Soon many had come to the conclusion that the destruction of Rome was a divine judgment against Christians, a view that prompted Augustine to write *The City of God.* It was also widely believed that the fall of Rome was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Revelation 14:8 of the fall of "Babylon".[46]

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[45] In episode 3 of the BBC documentary series, *History of Christianity,* the narrator, a professor of church history at Oxford, says: "The greatest empire which the West had ever known seemed to be tottering into ruin. From the beginning of the 4th century, the Roman Empire was Christian. *But then the Christian God seemed to have given up on it.* In the West, barbarians overran it. In 410, they seized Rome itself." The sentence in italics brings out the somber tone of its narrator, Diarmaid MacCulloch, known for his *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, a work that won the 2010 Cundill Prize in History.

[46] There are six references to Babylon in Revelation. Thayer's Greek-English lexicon, on *Babulōn*, says, "allegorically, of *Rome* as the most corrupt seat of idolatry and the enemy of Christianity: Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21." The ISBE article "Babylon in the NT" says that "most scholars hold that Rome was the city that was meant". To the believers in John's day, a prophecy regarding literal Babylon would have little meaning because Israel was under the Roman Empire and was not threatened by Babylon. John himself was a prisoner of Rome, not Babylon, on the island of Patmos (Rev.

The Church's authority to persecute heretics

Most modern versions of the Nicene Creed omit the fact that the definitive Nicene Creed of 325 contains a closing *anathema* against those who do not accept the creed: "(the dissenters) are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church" (as translated by Philip Schaff in *Creeds of Christendom*). The Greek word used here, *anathema*, is much stronger than the English word *condemn*, for it implies condemnation to hell as is seen in the three definitions of that word in BDAG: "1. that which is dedicated as a votive offering, *a votive offering*; 2. that which has been cursed, *cursed*, *accursed*; 3. the content that is expressed in a curse, *a curse*". We can rule out definition 1 because the Creed would hardly regard the dissenter as a votive offering to God. This leaves only definitions 2 and 3, which means that anyone who disagrees with the Nicene Creed is, by the same creed, condemned to hell.

Similarly the Athanasian Creed closes with a condemnation: "This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved," as translated by Philip Schaff in *Creeds of Christendom*. Schaff himself disapproves of the "damnatory clauses" of the Athanasian Creed:

1:9). If John had intended "Babylon" to be a reference to Rome, as is probably the case, then his teaching about Babylon would be significant.

> THE DAMNATORY CLAUSES. The Athanasian Creed, in strong contrast with the uncontroversial and peaceful tone of the Apostles' Creed, begins and ends with the solemn declaration that the catholic faith in the Trinity and the Incarnation herein set forth is the indispensable condition of salvation, and that those who reject it will be lost forever. The same damnatory clause is also wedged in [between the first part and the second part of the Creed]. This threefold anathema … requires everyone who would be saved to believe in the only true and living God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one in essence, three in persons, and in one Jesus Christ, very God and very Man in one person.
>
> The damnatory clauses, especially when sung or chanted in public worship, grate harshly on modern Protestant ears, and it may well be doubted whether they are consistent with true Christian charity and humility, and whether they do not transcend the legitimate authority of the Church. (*Creeds of Christendom*, chapter 10, paragraph 3)

Ever since Nicaea, the church has come up with its own definition of what is heresy, and condemns those who do not accept its standard of what a Christian is supposed to believe. In other words, by the fourth century, the church had boldly displaced the Scriptures, arrogating to itself the authority to be the final determinator of what Christians may or may not believe. That is still the case in the Catholic Church today. While the Protestant church in its various denominations accept in principle the Scriptures as the final authority, its

doctrinal mindset has long been ensnared in trinitarianism for the reason that its dogmatic foundation is almost entirely derived from that of the Catholic Church out of which the Protestant church emerged. (Luther himself was an Augustinian monk in the Catholic Church.)

The Protestant church broke away from Catholicism essentially on two main points as put forward by Luther: first, the important matter of justification by faith; second, the rejection of the supreme authority of the Pope and his supposed infallibility. But apart from these two points, the rest of Catholic dogma, including the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople and the other trinitarian councils that followed, was incorporated into Protestantism. As a result there is no fundamental theological difference between Catholicism and Protestantism, a fact that has made it easy for Protestants and even Protestant ministers to convert to Catholicism as so often happens today. It also happens in the reverse direction: Catholics who are not particularly enamored of the Pope would have little difficulty joining Protestant churches.

As for defining what is heresy, the church from the time of Nicaea has considered itself the sole authority on faith, and on who is and who is not a heretic. The Catholic Church declared Luther a heretic and by extension the Protestants who followed him, though in recent years the Catholic Church has taken a more conciliatory tone towards Protestants.

After Nicaea, the now unified Roman state and what it regarded as its church took up a policy of persecution against "heretics". In an ironic twist of history, the once persecuted Christian church had now become the persecutor of Christians, marking some of them as heretics and pagans. The savagery of Christian persecutors is probably best known from the horrors of the Inquisition with its institutional use of torture, execution, and massacres in the prosecution of "heretics," but the process started centuries earlier.

When a church or a group of Christians gives itself the right to declare what is heretical and what is orthodox, or who is a heretic and who is not, then all sorts of fearful things can happen that will forever remain on record as a disgrace to the church. Jesus had already warned his followers of this when he said, "A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God" (John 16:2, NIV).

As for Protestants, one would think that they, having been condemned as heretics themselves, would not be so inclined to condemn others in the same way, but sadly this is not the case. The horrific persecutions of the Anabaptists beginning from the time of the Reformation will forever be a stain on the church.

Tens of thousands of Anabaptists were killed by Catholics and Protestants, the latter in parallel with the scorching denunciation of the Anabaptists by Luther, Zwingli and Calvin (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., p.55). This is consistent with the estimate, given by several sources,

of 50,000 Anabaptists killed by the year 1535. Some of the better known Anabaptist victims were Jacob Hutter (burned at the stake in Innsbruck), Hans Hut (tortured shortly before he died in Augsburg), and the theologian Balthasar Hubmaier (tortured and burned alive in Vienna; three days later, his wife was drowned in the Danube with a stone tied around her neck).[47]

Protestants who know of these atrocities (e.g. those who teach church history in Bible institutions) would understandably not want to speak of them, so the average Christian doesn't know anything about these shameful events. Calvin's active role in the condemnation and the burning at the stake of Michael Servetus is another well documented historical event that few Christians, even Calvinists, know about.[48]

The arrogating to oneself the right to determine who is and who is not a heretic goes on today. But because the church no longer has the power of the state, it can no longer persecute its opponents or dissenters through physical mea-

[47] In Utrecht, sisters-in-law Maria and Ursula van Beckum were burned at the stake; they were tied to the stakes loosely so that onlookers could see them flinch reflexively when they were set on fire. *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*, Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht (eds.), pp.352-356, Wilfred Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 1996.

[48] On of the trial and execution of Michael Servetus over doctrine, see *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus, 1511-1553*, Roland H. Bainton, professor of ecclesiastical history at Yale; and *Out of the Flames*, by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone.

sures, but there remains a weapon of choice: slander and defamation. This is done even through the Internet to carry out shameless smear campaigns against the targeted churches or church leaders. These slanderers are often the same people who claim to accept the authority of the Scriptures, yet are blind to the severe condemnation of the sin of slander in these same Scriptures. This is the extent to which many in the church have fallen into yet another sin: hypocrisy, which Jesus condemned in Matthew 23. These are the same people who are deaf to Jesus' warning, "Judge not" (Mt.7:1).

The point we need to emphasize here, if there is to be any hope for the future of the church, is that the church urgently needs to see that it has fallen into error and hypocrisy, and is in desperate need of having its eyes opened to these realities so as to be able to repent for the sake of its own salvation. The fact is that the church has lost its credibility, and is viewed by the world as little more than a social or religious institution of little, if any, relevance in the modern age.

The shift from holy living to doctrinal assent

A grave departure from New Testament practice with serious consequences for the spiritual life of the church is that from Nicaea onward, becoming a Christian is largely viewed as a matter of assent to, or acceptance of a creed. The Nicene Creed of 325 explicitly says that salvation is conditional upon accepting its doctrinal clauses. This is incongruous with the

New Testament mission of going out into the world to make disciples (Mt.28:19), not creedal compatriots.

The "believism" that is standard in the church today involves little more than the acceptance of a church creed, usually based on the Nicene Creed, but without requiring any radical change in one's spiritual life. This is sadly the kind of "faith" that has been the norm in the church from the 4th century to the present day. It is not hard to foresee the negative impact that believism will have on the moral life of the church. The conduct of many Christians is not up to the standard of the decent non-Christian. The sins of church leaders are reported all too often in newspaper headlines. Fundraising is the main activity of many churches today. What credibility does the church have in the world? Until we are liberated from this creedal concept of faith, and heed the New Testament call to become new people in Christ, there will be no hope whatsoever for the church.

Chapter 3

The First Pillar of Trinitarianism: John's Prologue (1:1-18)

John chapter 1, specifically John's Prologue (1:1-18), is the first of what I used to call "the four pillars of trinitarianism," that is, the four chapters in the Bible that I had long regarded, in my staunchly trinitarian days, as providing the strongest support for the doctrine of the Trinity: John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1, and Revelation 1.

For many years I would call up these four pillars when explaining (and advocating) trinitarianism to my students who were preparing for the full-time ministry. I now examine these four pillars in four chapters, starting with the present chapter, but no longer from a position of trinitarianism. My aim is to undo what I had been teaching many people over the years, in the hope of making up for the trinitarian errors

that I had taught others, and which I myself had learned from others.

John's Prologue is the first pillar not only in terms of canonical order (it precedes the other three pillars in the Bible's book order) but also in terms of its importance to trinitarianism. My earlier book, TOTG, covered John's Prologue and its pivotal verse, John 1:1, devoting three chapters (7,8,9) to its exposition. Our present discussion on John's Prologue will complement TOTG but also overlap with TOTG, in equal measure.

Observant readers of the New Testament would notice there is little in the synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke—that is of use to trinitarianism. It is apparently not of serious concern to trinitarians that three of the four gospels cannot be drawn upon to support the deity of Christ.

The fear of pronouncing God's name

We begin our discussion on John's Prologue with some brief remarks on the Jewish prohibition of uttering God's name. Our starting point is a short quotation—so short that it isn't even a complete sentence—yet one whose significance can hardly be overstated:

> "the God who may not be named nor spoken of"
> (Philo, *On Dreams, that They are God-Sent*, XI, 1.67)

We will discuss Philo later. It suffices for now to say that he was a Hellenized Jewish philosopher who strived to combine Greek philosophy and Jewish religious thought into one coherent intellectual system; his ideas were later used by trinitarians. For now we reflect on his statement that God "may not be named nor spoken of". It mirrored the belief of the Jews of Philo's day that God's name, YHWH, is too sacred to be uttered. And because Philo was a contemporary of Jesus, the same prohibition of uttering God's name was observed by the Jews of Jesus' day. The prohibition continues to this day among the Jews.

The historical roots of this prohibition go back six centuries before Christ when the Babylonian empire under Nebuchadnezzar defeated the nation of Israel (which by then had already been reduced to the kingdom of Judah) and laid siege to Jerusalem, its capital. The destruction of Jerusalem was almost total; the city was razed to the ground, and Solomon's Temple was plundered and destroyed. Most of the Jews, especially the elite, were deported to Babylon.

Exactly as the prophet Jeremiah had forewarned Israel (2Chr.36:21; Jer.29:10), the people went into exile for 70 years as punishment for their idolatry. Their time in exile was a period of spiritual cleansing and purification. It took no less than the destruction of Israel as a nation by the ancient superpowers—Assyria, Babylon, Egypt—as well as captivity in foreign lands, for the people of Israel to return to their pure and original devotion to God. When they finally

returned to Israel from exile, marking the start of what is called the "post-exilic" period of Israel's history, they looked back at all their sufferings—the calamities, the humiliations, the killings, plus exile to foreign lands—and understood that these things happened because they had turned away from Yahweh.

After returning to Israel from exile, they entered a new phase in their history during which Israel steadfastly refused to worship any god other than Yahweh. From that time on, Israel remained strictly monotheistic and no longer practiced idolatry or polytheism. The Israelites began to recite the Shema every day. "Shema" (Hebrew for "hear") is the first word of Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one". Here "Lord" in Hebrew is literally "Yahweh," the personal name of God. The Shema is literally saying, "Hear O Israel, Yahweh our God is one Yahweh". To this day, every devout Jew would recite the Shema daily, but without uttering the name "Yahweh".[49]

After the Babylonian exile had ended, monotheism became entrenched in Israel. The people began to fear and reverence God even to the extent of not pronouncing the name "Yahweh". There is, however, no Scriptural basis for the prohibition against uttering God's name, for Yahweh had earlier said to Moses, "[YHWH] is my name forever, the

[49] The Shema originally referred to the sacred proclamation of Dt.6:4 but has since been extended to include Dt.6:4-9 and 11:13-21, and Num.15:37-41.

name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation" (Ex.3:15). A few chapters later, Yahweh said to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (Ex.9:16). In Leviticus, Yahweh told the Israelites that whenever they swear by His name, it must not be under false pretenses (Lev.19:12). Near the end of the Pentateuch, Moses sang the words, "I will proclaim the name of Yahweh. Oh praise the greatness of our God!" (Dt.32:3). And a Psalmist wrote, "Give thanks to Yahweh, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done" (Ps.105:1). Calling on Yahweh's name is not just a matter of praise but of salvation: "Whoever calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved" (Joel 2:32). (All verses cited in this paragraph are from NIV with "Yahweh" in the Hebrew restored.)

The Torah or the Law (or Instruction) taught the people of Israel to proclaim the name of Yahweh. Yet after returning from exile, they no longer uttered God's name, a prohibition that has no Scriptural basis or historical precedent. Prior to the exile, the Israelites would regularly read out the name of YHWH which was written on almost every page of their Scriptures right up to the last page. But after the exile, they no longer spoke His name. With their new fear and reverence of Yahweh, they knew that if they should sin against Him once more, they will be uprooted again as a nation. They didn't want to be exiled again, so they determined not to speak

God's name at all for fear of using it in vain (Ex.20:7; Dt. 5:11). Instead of calling Him Yahweh, they called Him by the substitute "Adonai" (Lord). But whereas "Yahweh" is God's personal name, "Adonai" is not a name but a title.

The Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, does not transliterate "Yahweh" into Greek but renders it as *kyrios*, the Greek word for "Lord" and the equivalent of the Hebrew "Adonai". The Septuagint was merely following the practice of the day—of not saying "Yahweh"—that had been established a couple of centuries earlier.

What Philo says about God's name, that it may not be spoken, is therefore without basis in the Scriptures, yet has become the norm for religious practice among the Jews. The man-made refusal to utter God's name which is written in their own Scriptures has had significant consequences for the Jews, some of whom have forgotten the name of the God who had rescued them out of slavery in Egypt and brought them into a new existence as a nation. With undoubtedly good intentions, they now refrained from uttering Yahweh's Name in order to prevent any accidental blaspheming of the Name, a grave sin that in the Law would incur the death penalty. However, the authoritative Jewish work, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, rejects the prohibition of uttering the name "Yahweh" (see Appendix 1).

The "Word" as a metonym for God

If God could not be named or spoken of, how would one refer to Him? This was usually done indirectly by means of a metonym or circumlocution such as "the Majesty" (Heb.1:3; 8:1), "the Highest" (Lk.1:35), or "Power" (Mt.26:64), all of which refer to God. A metonym is a name or a word that stands for something that is closely related to it (e.g. "Washington" is a metonym of the U.S. government). Many Jews today refer to God as "the Name" (HaShem).

With nearly 7,000 occurrences of "Yahweh" in the Hebrew Bible, what word or words did the people of Israel use as a metonym of Yahweh? The name Yahweh was commonly represented by the circumlocution "the Word of the Lord" or "the Word". In Jesus' day, every religious Jew who lived in Israel understood that "the Word" (*memra* in Aramaic) is a reference to God.

Aramaic, not Hebrew, was the main spoken language in the Israel of Jesus' day. Its use in the New Testament is seen, for example, in the word *bar* ("son") in names such as Barsabbas, Bartimaeus and Bar-Jonah (*bar* is Aramaic, *ben* is Hebrew). The use of Aramaic is seen in Jesus' words, *Talitha koum* ("Little girl, I say to you, get up") spoken to a dead girl (Mk.5:41), and also in Jesus' cry at the cross, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Mk.15:34 records this as, "Eloi Eloi lema sabachthani?" which is Aramaic.[50]

[50] Matthew 27:46 has, "Eli Eli lema sabachthani?" which is Aramaic except for the Hebrew "Eli". But some important NT codices,

Aramaic and Hebrew are related languages but are not mutually intelligible without some prior exposure to both.[51] In Jesus' day, many could not read the Hebrew Bible adequately and had to depend on the Aramaic translations. A translation of the Hebrew Bible—usually of a portion of the Bible—into Aramaic is called "Targum" ("translation"). The various Targums collectively formed the Aramaic Bible in Jesus' time but also in the time when John was writing his Gospel. Martin McNamara, an expert on the Targums, says:

> A *targum* is an Aramaic translation of a book or books of the Old Testament, Aramaic being the language spoken rather generally in Palestine in the time of Christ, and indeed for some centuries preceding it. In the regular synagogue service, sections of the Pentateuch and of the Prophets were read out in Hebrew and were immediately translated into Aramaic. (*Targum and Testament*, p.11)
>
> The Palestinian Targum, recited every Sabbath in the synagogues, would have been well known to Christ and his apostles, as well as to the Jewish converts to Christianity. (p.167)

In poetic language, the familiar metonym "the Word of the Lord" could reasonably be shortened to "the Word" (*memra*), a form which is in fact often seen in the Targums

including the Sinaiticus and the Vaticanus, have the Aramaic "Eloi" (see the critical apparatus of NA28).

[51] *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, p.137.

but also in John 1:1 which paraphrases the opening words of Genesis:

> "In the beginning God" (Genesis 1:1)
> "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1)

The identification of "God" in Genesis 1:1 with "the Word" in John 1:1 cannot be missed except by trinitarians, not only because "the Word" (*memra*) was a familiar metonym of God in John's day (hence John 1:1, "the Word was God"), but also because the two parallel statements are the opening clauses of their respective books. A trinitarian who does not miss the identification is Thomas Constable of Dallas Theological Seminary who writes:

> Obviously the word "Word" (Gr. *logos*; Aram. *memra*, used to describe God in the Targums), to which John referred, was a title for God. The Targums are Aramaic translations of the Old Testament. Later in this verse [John 1:1] he identified the Word as God. John evidently chose this title because it communicates the fact that the Word was not only God but also the expression of God. (*Dr. Constable's Expository Notes*, 2010, on John 1:1)

The link between the *logos* of John 1:1 and the *memra* of the Targums is also noted by the New Testament scholars J.B. Lightfoot (*A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*) and C.K. Barrett (*The Gospel According to St. John*). Alfred Edersheim compiles detailed connect-

ions between Jehovah and the Memra in chapter IV of *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. More recently (2010), John Ronning gives data on the connection between John's Prologue and the Targums in his fervently trinitarian work, *The Jewish Targums and John's Logos Theology*.

In the Targums, "Yahweh" in most instances is replaced by "the Word of the Lord" but also by "the Word" in some instances. Although "the Word of the Lord" is the predominant metonym of Yahweh in the Targums, it is occasionally shortened to "the Word" even in the Targums; e.g. Gen.5:24; 9:17; 16:1; 28:10; Ex.15:8; 33:11; Lev.24:12; Dt.4:12; 5:22,23; 33:3; of the Targum Yerushalmi, i.e., Jerusalem Targum.[52]

The parallel between "Yahweh" and "the Word" is found even in the Hebrew Bible. In the following verse, *dabar* ("word") stands in metonymic parallel with "Yahweh":

> Whoever gives attention to the word (*dabar*) finds happiness;
> whoever trusts in Yahweh is blessed. (Proverbs 16:20)

The deep spiritual meaning of "the Word"

John's use of "the Word" as a metonym of Yahweh ("and the Word was God")—similar to the metonymic use of *memra* ("Word") in the Aramaic Targums—finds rich expression in the well-known OT phrase, "the word of Yahweh" (or, in

[52] Also called "Targum Pseudo-Jonathan" because of an accident of history (Wikipedia, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*).

most Bibles, "the word of the LORD"). This important term occurs about 242 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. It uses the key word *dabar* (דָּבָר, "word") which carries the meaning of verbal communication. The noun (*word*, *speech*) occurs more than 1400 times in the Hebrew Scriptures; the verb (*speak*, *declare*), more than 1100 times.

The Word of Yahweh is integral to the very person of Yahweh; hence "the Word" is a familiar metonym of God. The Word of Yahweh is the means by which Yahweh speaks to humankind, communicating His will, His intentions, His love, His salvation. The Word is the channel by which He reveals Himself to us. For this reason, the Word of God is "living and active" (Heb.4:12) and is filled with God's life ("the word of life," 1Jn.1:1). Through the living Word of God, we come into contact with Yahweh's life and creative power, and above all with Yahweh Himself.

With the Word as a metonym of Yahweh, John declares that "the Word was God" (John 1:1). This Word "became flesh" in Jesus (v.14) and is now embodied in him such that Yahweh now dwells in Jesus, that is, true God now lives in true man. "For in him (Christ) the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col.2:9, ESV, note "bodily"). The man Christ Jesus embodies the Word of Yahweh, hence he embodies Yahweh's fullness, grace, life, and power.

In John 1:14 ("the Word became flesh"), the Greek word for "became" is *ginomai*, which means "to experience a change in nature and so indicate entry into a new condition"

(BDAG). This is the definition of *ginomai* that BDAG assigns to John 1:14. The Word who is Yahweh by metonymy entered into a new state of being or a new mode of existence in Christ, namely, that of human life (cf. "entering a new mode of existence," Wuest's NT translation, Jn.1:14). BDAG also defines *ginomai* as "to make a change of location in space," which aligns with the wonderful truth that Yahweh came into the world to dwell in Jesus bodily. Yahweh had earlier proclaimed that He will come to His people (Isa.40:3-5,10) and to His temple (Mal.3:1), which ultimately is Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "the Father who dwells in me does his works" (Jn.14:10).

Since Yahweh, with His Word, dwells in Jesus, John is able to say, "we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth". This Son embodies "the Word" which tabernacles in him; he is the temple of God that embodies God's Shekinah glory: "the Word became flesh and dwelled (literally *tabernacled*) among us".

How Yahweh's Word functions in relation to Yahweh is seen in various metaphors. For example, Yahweh compares His Word (*dabar*) to the rain that comes down from heaven in order to water the earth, nourishing it and blessing all life. The Word goes out from Yahweh's mouth and carries out His purposes:

> As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11, NIV)

The Word of Yahweh finds ultimate expression as the Word dwelling in Jesus Christ. Just as Yahweh's Word will not return to Him empty but will accomplish His purposes, so Jesus says, "I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave me to do" (John 17:4).

Word and Spirit

God created all things by His Word, yet the Spirit of God was also involved (Gen.1:2-3). Psalm 33:6 says, "By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host". Here we see the Hebrew parallelism between *dabar* (word) and *ruach* (breath or spirit). The LXX of this verse has a similar parallel in Greek between *logos* (word, cf. Jn.1:1) and *pneuma* (spirit or breath).

The vital link between God's Word and God's Spirit is well known, and is noted by *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (1984, p.521, *Holy Spirit*):

God's creative word (Gen.1:3ff) is closely akin to God's creative breath (Gen.2:7). Both ideas are identical elsewhere with God's spirit.

The connection between Word and Spirit is seen also in the NT. When Jesus speaks, he "speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without measure" (Jn.3:34). "It is the Spirit who gives life," hence Jesus' words are "spirit and life" (Jn.6:63). We are "born of the Spirit" (Jn.3:8) yet also "born again through the living and abiding word of God" (1Pet. 1:23). The sword of the Spirit is the word of God (Eph.6:17).

God's Word and God's Spirit are not two *hypostases* (persons) distinct from God, but are two aspects and expressions of God.[53] God is spirit in His very nature (Jn.4:24). The Word is the form, the Spirit is the substance. The Word is the seed (Lk.8:11) that contains the Spirit of life (Rom.8:2); cf. "the word of life" (1Jn.1:1).

Just as God's Word and God's Spirit were involved in the old Genesis creation, they are involved in the new creation which God had planned "before the foundation of the world" (Mt.25:34; Eph.1:4; 1Pet.1:20; Rev.13:8).

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[53] When we say that a man achieved great success by his wisdom, we don't mean that wisdom is an entity distinct from him. Similarly, the statement, "It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens" (Jer.10:12, ESV), doesn't mean that God's power, wisdom, and understanding are three separate persons distinct from Him.

The danger of misapplied metonyms

In using the "Word" (Greek *logos*, Hebrew *dabar*, Aramaic *memra*) as a metonym of Yahweh, John's Prologue is proclaiming the wonderful message that Yahweh—God the Creator—has come into the world to dwell in the man Jesus Christ, in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells "bodily" (Col.2:9).

Metonyms of God can, however, be misunderstood or misapplied to a person other than Yahweh, including metonyms such as "the Majesty" (Heb.8:1) or "the Majestic Glory" (2Pet.1:17) or "Power" (Mt.26:64). This was what happened in the case of Simon the magician who was called "the Great Power of God" (Acts 8:10).

John wrote his gospel many years after the events in Acts, and was aware of what had happened in the early days of the church, and of the danger of the misplaced application of metonyms. This would explain the second and third clauses of John 1:1 ("and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"). Evidently these were intended as a safeguard to ensure that "the Word" would not be mistaken as a second divine person alongside God.

In studying John 1:1, we need to be aware that the word "God" is understood differently by different people, depending on whether their beliefs are pagan or Christian, monotheistic or polytheistic. Some Roman gods are the same as Greek gods with different names (e.g. Roman Jupiter is the same as Greek Zeus). But "God" in Greco-Roman culture

would mean something different from "God" in the Bible, so it is important to specify which God we are taking about, especially in explaining God to Greeks but also to people in general, Greek or Jew. This is what John does in John 1:1, making it specific that the God he is speaking of is Yahweh, the Creator of all things.

Verses 2 and 3 are similarly designed to prevent the reader from applying "the Word" to someone other than Yahweh. Yet Gentile Christians have done the very thing that John had intended to prevent! They did this by imposing the meaning "with" on the word *pros* in John 1:1b ("and the Word was *with* God") and John 1:2 ("he was in the beginning *with* God"), even though "with" is not the primary meaning of *pros*.

Does *pros* mean "with" in John 1:1?

This is the most important question we can ask about John 1:1, for how we answer it will govern the way we interpret the whole verse. For convenience, we denote the three clauses in John 1:1 by the suffixes a, b, c:

John 1:1a In the beginning was the Word,
John 1:1b and the Word was <u>with</u> God,
John 1:1c and the Word was God.

In John 1:1b, the word "with" is translated from the Greek preposition *pros* whose primary meaning is "to" or "towards" rather than "with". Trinitarians render John 1:1b as "and the Word was with God" despite the fact that "with" is not the usual meaning of *pros*. There are in fact other prepositions that are more commonly used for conveying the idea of "with": (a) *syn* means together "with" someone or something (cf. *synchronize*, *sympathy*); (b) *meta* means "with" someone or "after" someone (cf. *metaphor*); (c) *para* means "beside" someone or something (cf. *parallel*).[54]

But *pros* is not one of these prepositions. If John had intended to express the idea "with God" in John 1:1b, he would have used one of the other three prepositions instead.

This comes out in the data compiled in *Modern Concordance to the New Testament*, an important Greek-language tool that is useful for its categorizations by classes of meaning. This concordance is praised by Protestant and Catholic scholars alike [55] and is particularly useful for finding out what a Greek word *actually* means in *actual* writing.

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[54] A well-known instance of *para* is used in Proverbs 8:30 (LXX) of the personified wisdom who was "beside" God at the creation ("I was beside him like a master workman").

[55] This concordance is praised as a "magnificent achievement" by David Noel Freedman, general editor of the *Anchor Bible* series, and well-known expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls; and as "the best modern language concordance that I have seen" by Raymond Brown, eminent Catholic scholar and specialist in biblical studies.

In its data under the heading "With" (pp.679-681), *Modern Concordance* gives 164 instances of *meta*, 66 instances of *syn*, 34 instances of *para*, but only 16 instances of *pros*! Hence *pros* rarely carries the meaning "with" even though the word itself occurs 700 times in the New Testament, far more frequently than the other three prepositions: *syn* (128 times), *para* (194 times), *meta* (469 times). In fact, a few of these 16 instances of *pros* do not obviously carry the meaning "with" as we understand "with" in English.

The following table shows beyond doubt the preponderance of the prepositions *meta*, *syn*, *para* over the preposition *pros* for the meaning "with". The table is based on the comprehensive data compiled under the heading "With" in *Modern Concordance.* The last cell of the table has only one line, indicating that *pros* seldom means "with" despite occurring 700 times in the NT, far more often than the other three prepositions.

Verses listed in Modern Concordance in which prepositions *meta*, *syn*, *para*, and *pros* mean "with"
Meta: 164 of 469 occurrences (35%)
Matt 1:23; 2:11; 9:11; 9:15; 16:27; 17:17; 26:18; 26:20; 26:29; 26:36; 28:20; Mark 1:13; 1:29; 2:16; 2:19; 3:7; 5:24; 8:10; 8:38; 11:11; 14:14; 14:17; Luke 1:28; 1:58; 1:66; 1:72; 2:51; 5:30; 5:34; 6:17; 7:36; 22:11; 22:15; 22:53; 24:29; 24:30; John 3:2; 3:22; 3:26; 4:27; 6:3; 7:33; 8:29; 9:37; 11:54; 13:33; 14:9; 14:16; 14:30; 16:4; 16:32; 17:12; 18:2; Acts 7:9; 10:38; 11:21; 14:27; 15:4; 18:10; Rom 15:33; 16:20; 16:24; 1Cor 16:23; 2Cor 13:11; 13:13; Gal 6:18; Eph 6:24; Phil 4:9; 4:23; Col 4:18; 1Thess 3:13; 5:28; 2Thess 1:7; 3:16; 3:18; 1Tim 6:21; 2Tim 4:22; Titus 3:15; Phlm 1:25; Heb 13:25; 1John 4:17; 2John 1:2; 1:3; Rev 1:12; 2:16; 3:20; 4:1; 10:8; 21:3; 22:21; Matt 12:30; 17:3; 25:31; 26:23; 26:38; 26:40; 26:51; 26:69; 26:71; Mark 3:14; 4:36; 5:18; 5:37; 14:18; 14:20; 14:33; 14:67; 16:10; Luke 5:29; 11:23; 22:21; 22:28; 22:33; 22:59; John 6:66; 9:40; 11:16; 12:17; 13:8; 13:18; 15:27; 17:24; 18:26; 19:18; Acts 2:28; 7:38; 1John 1:3; 1:6; Rev 3:4; 3:20; 3:21; 14:1; 17:14; 20:4; 20:6; 22:12; Matt 5:25; 12:3; 12:4; 27:54; Mark 1:36; 2:25; 5:40; Luke 6:3; 6:4; John 11:31; 20:24; 20:26; Acts 9:19; 9:39; 20:34; Titus 3:15
Syn: 66 of 128 occurrences (52%)
Luke 7:6; 24:29; 24:44; John 18:1; 1Cor 15:10; Matt 26:35; 27:38; 27:44; Mark 15:27; 15:32; Luke 8:1; 8:38; 8:51; 9:18; 22:14; 22:56; 23:32; John 12:2; Acts 4:13; Rom 6:8; 8:32; 2Cor 4:14; 13:4; Phil 1:23; Col 2:13; 2:20; 3:3; 3:4; 1Thess 4:14; 4:17; 5:10; 2Pet 1:18; Mark 2:26; Luke 2:13; 5:9; 7:12; 8:45; 9:32; 24:10; 24:24; 24:33; Acts 5:17; 5:21; 13:7; 14:4; 22:9; 22:11; 27:2; Rom 16:14; 16:15; Gal 2:3; Col 2:5
Para: 34 of 194 occurrences (18%)
Matt 6:1; 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 1:30; 2:52; 9:47; 11:37; 18:27; 19:7; John 1:39; 4:40; 8:38; 14:17; 14:23; 14:25; 17:5; Rom 2:11; 2:13; 9:14; 1Cor 3:19; 7:24; Gal 3:11; Eph 6:9; 2Thess 1:6; James 1:17; 1:27; 1Pet 2:4; 2:20; 2Pet 3:8
Pros: 16 of 700 occurrences (2%)
John 1:1; 1:2; 12:32; 14:3; Rom 4:2; 5:1; 2Cor 5:8; 1Jn 1:2; 2:1; Mt 13:56; Mark 6:3; 9:19; 14:49; 1Th 3:4; 2Th 3:10

Also shown in this table are the percentages of occurrence for the meaning "with": *meta* 35%, *syn* 52%, *para* 18%, *pros* 2%. The low percentage for *pros* (2%) means that *pros* seldom carries the meaning "with"—only 16 times in 700 occurrences, or once in 44 occurrences. Hence, *in actual usage*, "with" is not the usual meaning of *pros* but only the secondary or tertiary meaning. Yet it is the lesser meaning of *pros* that has been conscripted for trinitarian use in John 1:1.

The meaning of "pros" in the standard lexicons

The meaning "to be with someone" that trinitarians seek in John 1:1b ("the Word was with God," implying a second person) is not the usual meaning of the preposition *pros*. This fact is seen not only in the way *pros* is actually used in the Bible (cf. *Modern Concordance*) but also in how it is defined by lexical authorities. The BDAG Greek-English lexicon gives the following definitions of *pros*. Some readers may wish to skip the definitions but it may be helpful to glance at the words shown in boldface (all italics and boldface are BDAG's): [56]

> 3 with accusative, **marker of movement or orientation toward someone**/something
>
> (a) of place, person, or thing ***toward***, ***towards***, ***to***, after verbs
>
> α. of going
> β. of sending
> γ. of motion generally
> δ. of leading, guiding
> ε. of saying, speaking
> ζ. of asking, praying

[56] We quote the entire third section of BDAG's definition of *pros* (with citations omitted, abbreviations spelled out, Greek transliterated). We omit the first and second sections because these pertain to the genitive and the dative whereas the third section pertains to the accusative (which matches the case used in John 1:1).

(b) of time ***near***, ***at***, or ***during (a certain time)***

α. denoting approach *toward*

β. of temporal duration *for*

(c) of goal ***(aiming) at*** or ***(striving) toward***

α. with conscious purpose *for*, *for the purpose of*, *on behalf of*

β. generally of design, destiny

γ. of the result that follows a set of circumstances (*so that*)

(d) of relationship (hostile or friendly), ***against***, ***for***

α. hostile *against*, *with* after verbs of disputing, etc.

β. friendly *to*, *toward*, *with*, *before*

(e) to indicate a connection by marking a point of reference, ***with reference/regard to***

α. *with reference to*

β. *as far as … is concerned, with regard to*

γ. elliptically *ti pros hēmas*

δ. *in accordance with*

ε. expressing purpose

(f) in adverbial expressions

(g) ***by***, ***at***, ***near*** *pros tina einai be* (*in company*) *with* someone

Of the many definitions listed here, the one that matches the *trinitarian* reading of John 1:1b ("the Word was with God") is the very last one (g). In fact this is the one that BDAG assigns to John 1:1. But being in the very last position, defini-

tion (g) is not considered by BDAG to be the principal meaning of *pros*. The trinitarian choice of the last meaning of *pros* for John 1:1b, to the exclusion of many other possible (and more plausible) meanings, would be totally arbitrary if we have no compelling reason for choosing the last option and rejecting all the other options (conformity to trinitarian doctrine is not a valid compelling reason).

And when we examine definitions (a) to (g) in BDAG, an important fact emerges: the dominant sense of *pros* (with the accusative) is not characterized by "with" but by "to" or "towards".

We see something similar in another lexical authority: the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English lexicon.[57] In this lexicon, a principal meaning of *pros* with the accusative is "in reference to". Hence "the Word was with God" would actually mean "the Word had reference to God," that is, the Word referred to God or pointed to God. This is logically consistent with John's third clause, "and the Word was God," with these two

[57] See *pros*, C-III, 1-5. LSJ's long explanation of *pros*+accusative is given under several headings. The section relevant to John 1:1b is the one under the heading "III. of Relation between two objects". The following is LSJ's definition (with citations omitted): "1. *in reference to, in respect of, touching;* 2. *in reference to, in consequence of;* 3. *in reference to* or *for a purpose;* 4. *in proportion* or *relation to, in comparison with;* 5. *in* or *by reference to, according to, in view of;* 6. *with the accompaniment* of musical instruments; 7. πρός c. acc. freq. periphr. for Adv., π. βίαν, = βιαίως, *under compulsion;* 8. of Numbers, *up to, about*."

clauses forming a natural progression. In fact nothing in the massive LSJ lexicon on *pros* supports the trinitarian reading of John 1:1b ("and the Word was with God"). This lexicon, unlike lexicons of biblical and Christian literature, is not particularly interested in providing doctrinal support for trinitarianism.

This referential meaning of *pros* is common in the Bible, and is seen for example in Mark 12:12: "he spoke the parable against them," which in the Greek is literally, "he spoke the parable with reference to them". This is confirmed by the *Linguistic Key to the Greek NT* which translates *pros autous* in this verse as "with reference to them".

Conclusion: From the lexical information in BDAG and Liddell-Scott-Jones, John 1:1 should read: "In the beginning was the Word (i.e. God), and the Word had reference to God (i.e. pointed or referred to God), and the Word was God (by metonymy)."

Does *pros ton theon* really mean "with God" in Jn.1:1?

We have looked at the single word *pros*. What about the whole phrase *pros ton theon*? Does it really mean "with God" in John 1:1? To get an idea of its true meaning, we can simply see how ESV, a fervently trinitarian Bible, generally translates it. The phrase *pros ton theon* that we find in John 1:1 occurs 20 times in the New Testament: twice in John's Prologue and

18 times outside the Prologue.[58] In the 18 verses outside the Prologue, ESV never translates *pros ton theon* as "with God" except in Rom.5:1 ("we have peace with God," which does not carry the sense of "with God" which trinitarians seek in John 1:1b). ESV instead translates *pros ton theon* as "to God" or "toward God" in 14 of the 18 verses outside John's Prologue! The same is true of NASB. In other words, where ESV is not compelled by trinitarian dogma, it never translates *pros ton theon* in the sense of "with God".[59]

The meaning "to" or "toward" for *pros* is noted by some *trinitarian* commentaries. The following says that *pros ton theon* means "toward God":

> Most translators render this statement "and the Word was with God". Actually it is difficult to translate the Greek phrase *pros ton theon* (in both vv. 1 and 2) into English. Literally it means "toward God." (*New American Commentary*, John 1:1)

[58] The 18 instances outside John's Prologue are in Jn.13:3; Acts 4:24; 12:5; 24:16; Rom.5:1; 10:1; 15:17,30; 2Cor.3:4; 13:7; Phil.4:6; 1Th.1:8,9; Heb.2:17; 5:1; 1Jn. 3:21; Rev.12:5; 13:6. The two instances in John's Prologue are John 1:1 and 1:2.

[59] The Concordant Version gives the correct meaning "toward" for John 1:1: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was toward God, and God was the word."

NAC is not the only trinitarian commentary which says that *pros ton theon* means "towards God" in John 1:1. Others include *New Bible Commentary* ("the thought is literally 'towards God'"); *The Preacher's Commentary* ("The literal translation could be "the Word was towards God"); and *The Bible Speaks Today* ("*With* here is literally 'towards'").

Why do trinitarians impose the meaning "with" on John 1:1?

Why do trinitarians impose the meaning "with" on the word *pros* in John 1:1 but not in the rest of the New Testament? The reason is doctrine. The trinitarian rendering—"the Word was with God"—would imply another entity that was "with" God at the creation, and trinitarians want to imply further that this entity is the preexistent Jesus. But to prove their case from the Bible, three conditions would have to be met.

First, it must be shown that the physical creation in Genesis 1 involved another entity besides Yahweh. But anyone who is familiar with the Genesis account would know that no one was involved "with God" when He brought creation into being. There is no record of any person, being, or entity besides God who was involved in the creation. There is also no "second deity," a term used by Philo but which is interpreted by trinitarians to mean something different from what Philo meant. Thus whatever *pros* might mean in John 1:1, it

does not mean "with" in any sense that implies another person alongside the one and only God.

Second, even if it could be shown that there is an entity "with God" in the Genesis creation, it must be further demonstrated that this entity is a real person and not just a reification, hypostatization, or personification of something like wisdom in Proverbs 8:30. So whether the Word in John 1:1 is another divine person besides Yahweh would still need to be proved, and as far as Scripture is concerned, that effort would be futile because there is simply no such person. Yahweh expressly declares that He alone is God (Isa.45:5) and that He created the heavens and the earth by Himself (44:24). Hence, even if we take *pros* in John 1:1 to mean "with God," that is still not sufficient to prove trinitarianism.

Third, it must be demonstrated that John identifies "the Word" with Jesus, which is something trinitarians have never done. In fact, trinitarians have not gone beyond the first point, let alone the second and the third.

Trinitarians admit that their understanding of *pros* creates a conflict between John 1:1b and John 1:1c

It will come as a surprise to many that the key word in John 1:1 is not *logos* (word) or even *theos* (God)—these words are not controversial in themselves—but the tiny word *pros*. That is because the way we understand *pros* in John 1:1b governs the way we interpret the whole verse.

In fact, *pros* is not an obscure or mysterious word but a common word with a well-established meaning that creates no complications for John 1:1 unless we steer *pros* away from its main meaning. We have seen from BDAG and Liddell-Scott-Jones that *pros* has several meanings but the primary meaning is characterized by "to" or "toward" whereas the secondary or tertiary meaning is "with". The former would make John 1:1b say that "the Word had reference to God" or "the Word referred to God" whereas the latter would align with the trinitarian rendering, "the Word was with God".

As we have seen, *Modern Concordance* indicates that at most 16 of the 700 instances of *pros* in the New Testament carry the meaning "with".

If we have no compelling reason for rejecting the primary meaning of *pros* for John 1:1, then the choice of its secondary meaning would be entirely arbitrary and probably invalid. In fact it is the opposite that is true, for we do have a compelling reason for choosing the primary meaning of *pros*: *referential consistency*. We likewise have a strong reason for rejecting the lesser meaning of *pros*: *referential inconsistency*. To see what this means, let us compare the two competing renderings of John 1:1:

Primary meaning of *pros*:
a. In the beginning was the Word,
b. and the Word had reference to God,
c. and the Word was God.

Secondary meaning of *pros*:
a. In the beginning was the Word,
b. and the Word was with God,
c. and the Word was God.

The two renderings are identical except for the underlined words. The first rendering has the weighty advantage of referential consistency: the word "God" means the same in line #b as in line #c (they both refer to the same person, God Himself). This is what gives the whole verse its natural flow and progression, with line #b leading naturally to line #c. But the second rendering lacks referential consistency because the word "God" in line #c is forced to have a different meaning from "God" in line #b, as many trinitarians admit.

The inconsistency between lines #b and #c in the second reading is problematic yet is demanded by trinitarians in order to avoid modalism but also to imply a second person who was "with" God. Many trinitarian scholars are aware of this trinitarian inconsistency, as anyone who reads their literature on John 1:1 would know. Most trinitarians would, however, quietly ignore the issue because it serves their doctrine to have a second divine person.

But the root problem is this: It makes no sense to say that the Word "was with God" at the same time the Word "was God"! This is a genuine dilemma for trinitarians, as we shall see. When John 1:1 is translated in the trinitarian way as in most Bibles, a logical conflict arises between John 1:1b and John 1:1c. The problem is not with John 1:1c ("and the Word was God," which is a valid translation though not the only one), but with John 1:1b ("the Word was *with* God," a less probable rendering that is nonetheless demanded by trinitarians in order to safeguard trinitarianism).

But the conflict is an artificial one because it is not inherent to John 1:1. The conflict is created when trinitarians force *pros* to take on its secondary rather than its primary meaning, in order to imply a second divine person.

The conflict between John 1:1b and 1:1c in trinitarianism is not trivial, and is noted by many trinitarians. We now give five examples of this. These examples, especially the fifth one, expose the dilemma that is created when we push *pros* in John 1:1b away from its primary meaning. The first four examples are brief and simple. The fifth is longer and touches on the Jehovah's Witnesses' flawed interpretation of John 1:1.

Five examples of the trinitarian effort to resolve the conflict between John 1:1b and John 1:1c

Example #1. F.F. Bruce, trinitarian and well-known NT scholar, is aware of the conflict between John 1:1b and John 1:1c when they are translated in the standard way. He says of John 1:1c that "the meaning would have been that the Word was completely identical with God, which is impossible if the Word was also 'with God'" (*The Gospel of John*, p.31). Note the strong word "impossible" that F.F. Bruce uses to describe the conflict. This conundrum impels him to search for a rendering of John 1:1c that would resolve the conflict without surrendering trinitarian doctrine. For example, he speaks positively of the rendering in New English Bible, "what God was, the Word was," but admits that it is just a paraphrase. In the end, F.F. Bruce doesn't seem to have found a solution that is satisfactory to himself beyond taking John 1:1c to mean, "the Word shared the nature and being of God".

Example #2. *IVP New Testament Commentary*, which often expresses a trinitarian opinion, mentions the same logical problem that F.F. Bruce discusses, and then concludes, "These two truths seem impossible to reconcile logically and yet both must be held with equal firmness." (These "two truths" are the two contradictory clauses that F.F. Bruce points out.) But after admitting that the two clauses "seem impossible to reconcile logically" (strong words), the com-

mentary makes no effort to find a resolution beyond the bare suggestion that we simply accept the two "with equal firmness".

Example #3. H.A.W. Meyer, in *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John* (p.48), is aware that it is possible to read John 1:1b in the referential sense (the Word referred to God) and correctly saw that this would make the Word a "periphrasis" (an indirect term) for God himself. But this periphrasis undermines the trinitarian insistence that the Word is a second distinct person who was "with" God the Father. So Meyer rejects the periphrasis in favor of the standard rendering, "the Word was with God". But he immediately sees the same logical conflict that F.F. Bruce sees. So Meyer insists that "God" in John 1:1c "can only be the predicate, not the subject," and proposes the reading, "He was *with* God, and possessed of a *divine nature*" (italics Meyer's), which is more or less the standard trinitarian interpretation.

Example #4. The NET Bible (whose footnotes in the NT often express a trinitarian opinion but less so in the OT) is aware of the conflict between John 1:1b and 1:1c in the way they are translated in most Bibles. To resolve this, NET takes the principle that any reading of John 1:1c that collides with John 1:1b can be "ruled out". In other words, the *trinitarian* reading of John 1:1b takes precedence over any possible rendering

of John 1:1c. This is seen in the following statement (the words in parentheses are NET's):

> The construction in John 1:1c does not equate the Word with the *person* of God (this is ruled out by 1:1b, "the Word was with God"); rather it affirms that the Word and God are one in *essence*.

NET acknowledges the conflict between the standard reading of John 1:1b ("the Word was with God") and that of 1:1c ("the Word was God"), the latter of which equates the Word with God (or with what NET calls "the person of God"), which is not what NET desires. NET acknowledges the dilemma that this poses for trinitarians, and is forced to say that the common rendering of John 1:1c ("the Word was God") is ruled out by 1:1b ("the Word was with God"). It then concludes that the Word in 1:1c is not the "person of God" but someone who is "one in essence" with God (this is adding quite a lot to John's simple statement). This is in fact the trinitarian view that God is not a person but an essence or a substance. We have already quoted C.S. Lewis, a trinitarian, as saying: "Christian theology does not believe God to be a person. It believes Him to be such that in Him a trinity of persons is consistent with a unity of Deity. In that sense it believes Him to be something very different from a person." (*Christian Reflections*, p.79).

In the end, NET translates John 1:1c as "the Word was fully God," a trinitarian paraphrase that depersonalizes the term "God" so that it no longer refers to *the* God. It is a qualitative statement of God's essence rather than an equation of identity between the Word and God ("the Word was God").

The trinitarian interpretation of John 1:1 is similar to that of the Jehovah's Witnesses in terms of exegetical procedure; their disagreement is really over doctrine, not exegesis

Example #5. This is the longest of our five examples but perhaps the most eye-opening. It is slightly technical, so some readers may wish to skip over the technical details. But it is written in such a way that you can glide over the technical details and still get the main point.

It is not our aim in this example to study trinitarianism or the Jehovah's Witnesses in depth but to show that they are similar for all intents and purposes in their grammatical analysis of John 1:1. The similarity is surprising given their sharp disagreement over the divinity of Jesus.

In the final analysis, the true disagreement between trinitarians and the Jehovah's Witnesses is over doctrine, not exegetical procedure. In fact they seem to agree on every aspect of exegetical procedure that matters for the interpretation of John 1:1:

- They agree on the Greek text of John 1:1 (i.e. no textual issues)
- They agree, word for word, on how the first two clauses, John 1:1a and John 1:1b, ought to be translated into English
- Both take "the Word" in John 1:1 as a reference to Jesus Christ
- Both take "God" in John 1:1b as a reference to God the Father
- Both take *pros* in John 1:1b in its secondary sense of "with" (the Word was "with God"), rejecting its primary sense
- Both take "the Word was with God" in John 1:1b as referring to two distinct persons, Jesus Christ and God the Father
- Both are aware of the conflict between John 1:1b and John 1:1c when they are translated the standard way
- Both try to resolve the conflict by changing the meaning of "God" in John 1:1c so that it means something different from "God" in John 1:1b
- Both take "God" in John 1:1c as predicative, qualitative, indefinite (Greek grammarians tend to say definite but trinitarians tend to say indefinite in order to safeguard trinitarianism)
- Both use the predicate anarthrous *theos* argument to justify their respective qualitative readings of "God" in John 1:1c
- Both depersonalize the word "God" in John 1:1c such that "God" no longer refers to the person of God but is a divine quality or essence. In other words, both take John 1:1c not as an equation of identity (the Word was God by metonymy) but as a qualitative statement of God's essence or divinity (which is the trinitarian view, e.g. J.P. Lange, Marcus Dods, H.A.W. Meyer, C.K. Barrett, R. Bowman).

If trinitarians and the Jehovah Witnesses agree so closely—indeed almost perfectly—in exegetical procedure, where is the area of disagreement? What they disagree over is not exegetical procedure but doctrine, specifically over which term is the most appropriate for describing Jesus' divine nature: "God" (trinitarians) versus "a god" (JWs).

This unexpected similarity in exegetical procedure comes out in one of the most detailed grammatical-exegetical analyses of John 1:1 ever written by an evangelical. Robert M. Bowman Jr., an apologist for trinitarianism, wrote a book called *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, which gives a detailed exposition of John 1:1 from a trinitarian perspective, interwoven with a critique of the Jehovah's Witnesses' interpretation of the same verse.

For convenience we refer to the Jehovah's Witnesses as the JWs without intending anything pejorative in the use of that term. Their translation of the Bible, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (2013 edition), is abbreviated NWT.

We won't go into the details of Bowman's book except to summarize the two main currents that run through his exposition of John 1:1.[60] Ironically, these two currents, especially

[60] For the details, see Bowman's *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1989), and the Jehovah's Witnesses' *Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, 1965, pp.1158-1160 (the 1965 edition has a more detailed exposition of John 1:1 than the 1984 edition).

the second, weaken Bowman's own trinitarian interpretation of John 1:1.

First current: Like many trinitarians, Bowman is fully aware of the conflict between John 1:1b and 1:1c when they are translated in the trinitarian way. He refers to the conflict explicitly:

> What needs to be treated in some depth is the question of how the Word can be with God and yet be God … The Word certainly cannot be with "God" and be "God" unless the term *God* somehow changes significance from the first to the second usage. (pp.25-26)

Bowman here explains to us the dilemma which confronts trinitarianism: If the word "God" in John 1:1b means the same as "God" in John 1:1c, then trinitarianism cannot be correct. That is because if "God" means the same in John 1:1b as in 1:1c, we are forced to choose between one of two possibilities, both of which are detestable to trinitarians: either true Biblical monotheism (the Father, not Jesus, is the only true God, John 17:3) or the error of modalism (Jesus = Father = Spirit, just as H_2O can be water, ice, or vapor). Neither is acceptable to trinitarians, and this explains the trinitarian effort to make "God" in John 1:1c mean something different from "God" in John 1:1b. That is the very dilemma that Bowman is trying to address when he explicitly requires that

"the term *God* somehow changes significance from the first to the second usage" (i.e. from John 1:1b to John 1:1c).

But Bowman's efforts to resolve the conflict is notable for the casual manner in which he alters the words of John 1:1 here and there without batting an eye, in contrast to the careful attitude of F.F. Bruce who hesitates to do this to even one word. Bowman speaks freely of "shifts" in wording, of changing the "significance" of words, of coming up with a "translation-paraphrase" (which is really a euphemism for "paraphrase"). So it comes as no surprise that after making all the alterations, here is his final and fully trinitarian reading of John 1:1:

> In the beginning the Word was existing; and the Word was existing in relationship with the person commonly known as God, that is, the Father; and the Word was Himself essentially God. (p.26).

Second current: Bowman's exposition of John 1:1 reveals the shocking fact which I had already sensed some time ago, that the trinitarian interpretation of John 1:1 is fundamentally similar to that of the Jehovah's Witnesses in terms of grammatical-exegetical procedure! In fact, trinitarians and the JWs agree on the first 80% of their interpretation of John 1:1 and diverge only in the final 20%. This accounts for the many grammatical-exegetical presuppositions that they share in common for the interpretation of John 1:1 (see the bullet points listed a few pages back).

Bowman admits agreement with the Jehovah's Witnesses on three key aspects of *theos* (God) in John 1:1c: the qualitativeness of the anarthrous *theos* (p.37); the predicateness of *theos* (p.38); the indefiniteness of *theos* (pp.41,47). With these things in agreement, Bowman faces the rather difficult—almost impossible—challenge of disproving "the Word was a god," which is the JWs' rendering of John 1:1c.

This bring us to the greatest irony of all: Bowman, on p.62, after giving the longest grammatical analysis of John 1:1 that I have seen, has no choice but to admit that the JW's rendering of John 1:1c ("the Word was a god") is "a possible rendering" and is "grammatically possible" (Bowman's words)! Bowman therefore concedes that the Jehovah's Witnesses are grammatically correct in their translation of John 1:1, but he rejects it only because it is not doctrinally acceptable to him.

There is nothing unusual or farfetched about a trinitarian who admits that "the Word was a god" (the JWs' rendering) is grammatically possible. Thomas Constable of Dallas Theological Seminary, a trinitarian, likewise concedes that "the Word was a god" is grammatically possible, but like Bowman he rejects it as *doctrinally* unacceptable:

> Jehovah's Witnesses appeal to this verse (John 1:1) to support their doctrine that Jesus was not fully God but the highest created being. They translate it "the Word was a god." Grammatically this is a possible translation since it is legitimate to supply the indefinite article ("a") when no

> article is present in the Greek text, as here. However, that translation here is definitely incorrect because it reduces Jesus to less than God. (*Dr. Constable's Expository Notes*, on John 1:1)

The true disagreement between trinitarians and the JWs is over doctrine, not exegetical procedure. After agreeing in the first 80%, they diverge in the final 20%, namely, over the degree and the proper description of Jesus' divineness: "God" versus "a god". But even here they agree more than disagree because when trinitarians speak of "God" in John 1:1c, they don't mean "the God" but "God" in the qualitative sense of a divine essence or nature, which is similar to the way the JWs understand "a god" to mean divine or godlike. In fact, Bowman (on p.63) and the JWs (in a footnote in NWT) both agree that the rendering "and the Word was divine" is a valid alternative reading of John 1:1c—yet further evidence of the agreement between their respective grammatical-exegetical procedures.

In the final analysis, Bowman's disagreement with the JWs is really over which is the best word for describing the divineness of the Word: either "God" or "a god," both in a qualitative sense. This is nothing more than a theological spat over the qualitative meaning of *theos* in John 1:1c. In fact Bowman uses many pages just to argue that his qualitative understanding of *theos* is better than the JWs' qualitative understanding of *theos*!

The weakness of Bowman's analysis of John 1:1—and therefore that of the JWs—is that they never consider the possibility (recognized by Meyer) that *pros* could be taken referentially. This would make John 1:1b read, "the Word referred to God," which harmonizes perfectly with the next clause, "the Word was God" without ever depersonalizing "God". Bowman never considers this possibility because it would undermine his trinitarian presuppositions but also because trinitarians are in perfect agreement with the Jehovah's Witnesses on the meaning of *pros* in John 1:1b (Bowman, p.25).

How monotheism differs from both trinitarianism and the JWs in the interpretation of John 1:1

By way of summary, we now quickly list six key differences between Biblical monotheism on one side, and trinitarianism and the Jehovah's Witnesses on the other side, in their respective interpretations of John 1:1. These are abbreviated BM on one side, and TR and JW on the other side.

Firstly, all three teach that "the Word" in John 1:1 is preexistent but disagree on who the Word is: either the second divine person called "God the Son" (TR) or a "spirit creature" who is neither God nor man (JW); or the Word who is God Himself, by metonymy (BM, cf. "the Word was God").

Secondly, TR and JW read *pros* in John 1:1b by its secondary meaning ("the Word was with God"), creating a conflict

between John 1:1b and 1:1c. By contrast, BM reads *pros* by its primary meaning ("the Word was towards God" or "the Word referred to God"), which leads to no such conflict, and in fact flows naturally to Jn.1:1c ("and the Word was God").

Thirdly, to resolve the conflict, both TR and JW are forced to change the meaning of *theos* ("God") in the transition from John 1:1b to 1:1c whereas BM is wholly consistent, requiring no change in the meaning of "God".

Fourthly, TR and JW cannot read John 1:1c ("the Word was God") in a straightforward manner as an equation of identity, so they take it as a reference to God's essence, thereby depersonalizing the term "God" in John 1:1c into a divine essence or divine nature. By contrast, BM reads John 1:1c ("the Word was God") in a straightforward manner that preserves the personality of "God" and identifies the Word with God Himself. This equation of identity ("the Word was God") is not to be taken as a mathematical equation but as a truth in which "the Word" refers to God by metonymy.

Fifthly, TR and JW need to paraphrase John 1:1c to make it mean what they believe it to mean (Bowman even characterizes his rendering of John 1:1 as a "translation-paraphrase"). By contrast, BM doesn't need to paraphrase John 1:1c because BM takes the straightforward reading of John 1:1c ("and the Word was God").

Sixthly, JW and especially TR need to use extra-biblical terms to explain their interpretations of John 1:1 and 1:14. In the case of JW, the non-biblical term that comes to mind is

spirit creature (see the supplementary note below). In the case of TR, a vast catalog of extra-biblical terms is called upon in a convoluted attempt to explain the trinitarian understanding of John 1:1 and 1:14: *trinity, Godhead, God the Son, substance, homoousios, hypostasis, second person, two natures, hypostatic union, eternal generation, perichoresis, communicatio idiomatum*, and so on. By contrast, BM sticks to John's basic vocabulary to explain John 1:1 and 1:14 (even *memra* simply means *dabar* or *logos* or *word*, these four being metonymic references to Yahweh God in Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and English, respectively).

Supplementary Note: The Jehovah's Witnesses on the origins of Christ

One of the clearest explanations of what the Jehovah's Witnesses teach about the origins of Jesus Christ is found in their book, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (2005, 224 pages).

Here is a summary of the main points in chapter 4 of the book (pp.37-45, "Who is Jesus Christ?"): Prior to the creation of the universe, God created the Son of God, a "spirit creature" who is neither God nor man, and lacks a physical body (spirit creatures include angelic beings, p.96). Jesus is said to be the "only begotten" Son because he was the only person ever to be created *directly* by God; God then created the rest of the universe through the Son. Before the Son was

born into the world, he was "the Word" who delivered God's messages to other sons of God, "both spirit and human". When the Word became flesh, the Son left heaven to live on earth as a man. The spirit creature that had been the Son of God became human when Jehovah transferred the Son's life from heaven to Mary's womb. Jesus became the Messiah when he was baptized in the latter part of the year 29 C.E. And after Jesus died, "his heavenly Father resurrected him back to spirit life" on the third day.

In an appendix, "Who is Michael the Archangel?" (pp.218-219), the answer given is that "Jesus himself is the archangel Michael".

A serious error is the JWs' denial of Jesus' *bodily* resurrection. They teach that Jesus was resurrected back into an "invisible spirit" with no human body (*Let Your Name be Sanctified*, p.266). Jesus "was not raised out of the grave a human creature, but was raised a spirit" (*Let God be True*, p.272), for he cannot "become a man once more" (*You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, p.143). The seriousness of this error lies in the denial of the humanity of Jesus: He is intrinsically a spirit creature who is neither human nor divine, and was man only temporarily during his time on earth. The resurrection of Jesus is not a bodily resurrection but simply a return to Jesus' intrinsic state as a spirit creature.

This error contradicts what the *risen* Jesus says: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For

a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (Luke 24:39)

Many theological errors stem from a failure to see the true humanity of Jesus Christ, whether we are talking about the Gnostics, trinitarians, Arians, or the Jehovah's Witnesses.

John 1:1-3 is Derived from Genesis, not Philo

The "Word" in John 1:1-3

We now quote John 1:1-2 three different ways: (i) from a mainstream Bible, ESV; (ii) a literal translation of the Greek; (iii) the same literal translation with comments inserted (shown below in color).

> **John 1:1-2 ESV** [1]In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God.
>
> **John 1:1-2 literal translation** [1]In the beginning was the Word, and the Word had reference to God, and God was the Word. [2] This in the beginning had reference to God.
>
> **John 1:1-2 literal translation with comments inserted** [1]In the beginning (referring to Genesis 1:1) was the Word (a metonym for Yahweh), and the Word (Yahweh) had reference to God ("identifying God," ITNT), and God was the Word (Yahweh). [2] This (the Word) in the beginning (another reference to Genesis 1:1) had reference to God.

If in verse 2 we move the words "in the beginning" to the start of the verse to match the structure of verse 1, we will see a clear parallel:

> **v.1**: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word had reference to God
> **v.2**: In the beginning this Word had reference to God

The repetition is undoubtedly for emphasis, similar to the emphasis in the triple use of "Word" in John 1:1. Here is verse 3 (ESV):

> **v.3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

The first half of this verse ("All things were made through him") points to Yahweh as the Creator. This is the third time (in only three verses!) that John goes back to Genesis 1:1, making it clear that John 1:1-3 is to be understood in connection with Genesis.

Verses 1 and 2 in John 1 are parallel to the first half of Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning God …") whereas verse 3 is parallel to the whole of Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"). That "God" in the Genesis account refers to Yahweh is confirmed in Genesis 2:4: "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when Yahweh God made earth and the heavens."

Even in the Nicene Creed, only God the Father, not God the Son, is the Creator of all things visible and invisible. But trinitarians go beyond the Creed when they say that the Son is the creator or co-creator with the Father. So they apply John 1:3 ("all things were made through him") to Jesus, whom they equate with the Word.

When reading John 1:1-3, there are two solid, incontrovertible facts that must be kept in mind: (1) John nowhere identifies the Word with Jesus; (2) Genesis 1 makes no mention of any person or entity working alongside God in the creation account.

It must be kept in mind, too, that John's Prologue is poetry. This fact is widely known in New Testament scholarship though there is some discussion as to whether it is a hymn.[61]

We now proceed as follows: (i) discuss the trinitarian use of Philo's Logos for interpreting John's Prologue; (ii) show why Philo's Logos cannot be used in support of trinitarianism; (iii) show that John 1:1-3 is rooted in Genesis, not Philo; (iv) show that the Genesis creation was done by Yahweh alone without any help from a secondary agent, and that therefore John 1:3 ("all things were made through him") refers to Yahweh and not to Jesus.

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[61] A strong case for reading John's Prologue as a hymn is developed by M. Gordley in *The Johannine Prologue and Jewish Didactic Hymn Traditions: A New Case for Reading the Prologue as a Hymn*, Journal of Biblical Literature, vol.128, no.4, 2009, pp.781-802.

The trinitarian use of Philo

Trinitarians assume that the Word in John 1:1 is the preexistent Jesus Christ even though there is no trace of any divine being apart from Yahweh in the Old Testament. The OT verse that is often cited as evidence of a triune God is Genesis 1:26 in which God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." It is then concluded that the plural "us" constitutes proof of God's triune nature despite several alternative explanations and despite the lack of any explicit reference to who might be the supposed second divine person in Genesis 1:26. We won't discuss this verse here except to point out that some trinitarians do not accept the trinitarian interpretation of Genesis 1:26:

- *Zondervan Bible Commentary* (ed. F.F. Bruce), on Genesis 1:26: "Leupold still argues strongly for the traditional Christian view that the plural refers to the Trinity. This should not be completely rejected, but in its setting it does not carry conviction … Probably the plural is intended above all to draw attention to the importance and solemnity of God's decision."
- *New English Translation* (NET Bible), in a footnote on Genesis 1:26: "Many Christian theologians interpret [the plural 'us'] as an early hint of plurality within the Godhead, but this view imposes later trinitarian concepts on the ancient text."
- Dr. Thomas Constable, trinitarian of Dallas Theological Seminary: "We should not use [the plural "us"] as a formal proof of the Trinity since this reference by itself does not

prove that one God exists in three persons." (*Expository Notes*, on Genesis 1:26)

- *Great Texts of the Bible*, a 20-volume commentary compiled by James Hastings, on Genesis 1:26: "We are told that the language in which that creation is spoken of, i.e. 'Let us make man,' implies the doctrine of a plurality of persons in the Deity … We are told again that we are to establish on this account the doctrine of the Trinity. There is no reason, only ignorance, in such a view."
- Keil and Delitzsch view the plural "we" in Genesis 1:26 as pluralis majestatis ("a plural of majesty") rather than a reference to a triune God, and as bringing out "the fullness of the divine powers and essences which [God] possesses".
- *Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Text*, Genesis 1:1-2,4a: "However, taken all by itself, Genesis 1 is not an obviously trinitarian text. Although in history Christian commentators have been tantalized by the plural exhortations of 'Let us make man in our own image … ,' Hebrew scholarship long ago dispensed with the notion that this refers to any actual plurality within God—this was not in the minds of those who composed Genesis and so ought not be understood that way by later readers either."

The absence in the Old Testament of a divine being who exists alongside Yahweh is evidently of no great concern to most trinitarians because some of them have borrowed from Philo, a Jewish philosopher, the idea that the Word (Logos) is a "second god".

Philo was steeped in Greek philosophy and theosophy, and used Greek ideas to promote Judaism. He gave special prominence to the Logos (the Word), a concept that is of great appeal to Gentiles steeped in Greek culture. It was a prominent concept in Greek philosophy as taught by Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and others.

What makes Philo's Logos useful to trinitarians is that although Philo teaches that the Logos is only an abstract intermediary between God and man, in a few statements he calls the Logos a "second god". It is then concluded by trinitarians that John borrowed the concept of Philo's Logos as a "second god," and applied it to John 1:1 to declare that Jesus is a second divine person. We now show that the trinitarian appropriation of Philo's Logos is erroneous and without basis.

Philo does not, as we shall see, regard the Logos as something on equal standing with God but as an abstract concept that is distinct from God and subordinate to Him. This is hardly surprising because Philo is at heart a Jew and a strict monotheist. Although he uses abstract language to personify the Logos, he does not actually believe that it is a real person, but treats it as a philosophical concept. Yet from the frequent references to Philo by some trinitarians, one might be forgiven for gaining the (mistaken) impression that Philo is a Christian! [62]

[62] The trinitarian use of Philo is noted by *New Bible Commentary*, on John 1:1: "[Logos] was widely used in Greek literature, and many scholars have supposed that its significance for John can be under-

Some trinitarians assume without evidence that John, a fisherman, knew about Philo's philosophy; to them the connection is self-evident and needs no proof. It is further assumed that because John knew about Philo's philosophy, he went on to embrace it and incorporated Philo's Logos into his gospel.

The fact is that Philo does not think of the Logos as a real person but as a religio-philosophical concept. But this does not deter some trinitarians from appropriating Philo to make the Logos in John 1:1 a second divine being. They do this because there is nothing in the Scriptures to support the existence of a second divine person called "God the Son".

Philo was a pious Jew who put his own life in danger

A lot of academic material is available to those who are interested in Philo and his ideas.[63] His philosophical ideas, though abstract, are actually not hard to explain or understand. But because they are, for the most part, not directly relevant to

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stood only against such a background … This idea was much more fully developed in the writings of Philo of Alexandria." Note the illuminating word "only".

[63] A readable book on Philo is Kenneth Schenck's *A Brief Guide to Philo* (2005, WJK, 172 pages). More technical is *Cambridge Companion to Philo* (ed. A. Kamesar, 2009, Cambridge University Press, 301 pages). For Philo's own writings, see *The Works of Philo* (1993, Hendrickson, 944 pages).

our study, we now give only a short biography of Philo, and then mention a few things about his teachings.

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C. to A.D. 50), also called Philo Judaeus, was born before Jesus and died after Jesus. He was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. He is noted for his efforts to harmonize Greek philosophy and Jewish religious teaching, and to combine Plato and Moses into one philosophical system.

Philo was known to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus who says in *Antiquities of the Jews* that Philo was skilled in philosophy. Josephus also says that Philo steadfastly refused to honor the Roman emperor as god, and publicly resisted emperor Caligula's plan to erect a statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple. In fact Philo was the most visible spokesman in the Jewish opposition to the statues of Caligula set up in the synagogues of Alexandria. It was a dangerous stand for Philo to take because all this turmoil was taking place at a time when the Romans were crucifying Jews in Alexandria.

We mention Philo's bold and public opposition to emperor worship to show that Philo was staunchly Jewish in his religious sensitivities. In fact he was a strict monotheist.

Philo's Jewish piety is noted by Eusebius of Caesarea (c. A.D. 263-339), known as the father of church history for his *Ecclesiastical History*. He says that Philo is a Jew who is steeped in the teachings of his forefathers and in the laws and

customs of the Jewish nation. He confirms that Philo calls the Logos a "second God".

But Eusebius' explanation (see Appendix 9) of what Philo means by "second God" is of no help to trinitarians because it bears no resemblance to the Word in John 1:1 as understood by trinitarians (that the Word is a second divine person). To the contrary, Eusebius says that Philo proposes the "second God" as a means of avoiding a direct, unmediated connection between the divine and the human, and the immortal and the mortal, especially in the teaching that man was created in the image of God. Instead of being created in the image of God, man is said (by Philo) to be created indirectly in the image of the "Logos of God".

That is how Eusebius understands Philo. What about Philo himself? Does he teach that the Logos or second God is a divine being? Is his Logos even a real person? The answer to both questions is *no*, as can be verified from Philo's own writings. We will skip the details and give only a few points in summary. Those who are interested in the details are referred to Appendix 9.

What Philo really means by Logos (a quick summary)

One of the most accessible books on Philo is Kenneth Schenck's *A Brief Guide to Philo* (2005, WJK), the first significant introduction to Philo in a quarter of a century.[64] Schenck's book is not a book on religion or Christianity *per se*, but on Philo and his philosophical writings, which means that Schenck's book is less likely to be doctrinally motivated to interpret Philo through the prism of trinitarianism (the book has no discussion on trinitarianism beyond a survey of John's *logos* in the chapter, "Philo and Christianity"). Here is a summary of Schenck's explanation (pp.58-62) of what Philo means by the Logos:

- Philo teaches that God is one
- Philo occasionally speaks of the *logos* as a "second God"
- Philo says that many people mistake his *logos* for God
- Philo sometimes depicts the *logos* as God's reason in action, and sometimes as a boundary between God and His creation
- Philo says that the *logos* is neither created nor uncreated; yet he puts it on the created side of the creation
- Philo does not regard the *logos* as a person, but as a hypostasis, though not a personal one.

[64] In the opinion of G.E. Sterling, professor of NT and Christian Origins, University of Notre Dame, and general editor of the *Philo of Alexandria Commentary*.

For the details, see Appendix 9. Philo does not teach that the *logos* is a real person. Yet some early binitarians found his *logos* useful for their doctrine. Early church leaders who were steeped in Greek thinking such as Justin Martyr, one of the foremost interpreters of the *logos*, readily adopted the concept. His strongly anti-Semitic statements in his *Dialogue with Trypho* show the degree of his departure from the Jewish roots of his faith. His statements, along with similar ones made by other early church fathers, hastened the "parting of the ways" between Jews and Christians.

Scholarship is aware that Philo's logos is not a person

The problem with the trinitarian use of Philo's Logos for John 1:1 is threefold. First, Philo was a strict Jewish monotheist. Second, there is no evidence that John, or even the scholarly Paul, was aware of Philo, much less had use for his teaching. Third, although Philo proposes the Logos as an intermediary between God and man, his Logos is not equal with God, and is not even a real person. The last point is noted by *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ISBE, and *Encyclopedia Judaica* (their statements are given in Appendix 9).

The reader who is interested in Philo's own statements is referred again to Appendix 9 of the present book. It contains numerous citations from *The Works of Philo*, translated by C.D. Yonge. Since most readers may wish to skip the appendix, we will quickly mention that the quotations in the ap-

pendix are arranged in three sections to show that Philo: (i) believes in one and only God; (ii) does not believe that the Logos is a real person; and (iii) depicts the "second God" not as a real person but as the words, thoughts and intentions emanating from a divine Being.

Philo's concept of God is that of a remote transcendent Being who is inaccessible to man. But the God of the Bible is just the opposite, for He took the initiative to reach out to man. Interestingly it was during Philo's lifetime that God came into the world to dwell in the man Jesus Christ. Yahweh's coming into the world is the message of John's Prologue and of the good news of the New Testament.

The Genesis roots of John's Prologue

It makes no sense to say that John derived his Logos concept from Greek philosophy via Philo when John had at hand the biblical concepts of the *dibbur* and the *memra* ("word"). John was inspired by Hebrew Scripture, not Greek philosophy or theosophy.

The scholar among the apostles was not John [65] but Paul. If any apostle knew about Philo of Alexandria in Egypt, it

[65] Unless we are talking about another John. Because the writer of 2 John and 3 John calls himself "the elder," some have suggested that the writer of these letters was a certain "John the Elder" or "John the Presbyter," who was a different person from John the apostle. Even if this were so, we still would not know anything about this John the Presbyter.

would be Paul, not John. Yet there is not a hint in Paul's letters that he knew about Philo or had any use for his philosophy. Moreover, John 1:1 tells us in plain language that the Word has to do with Genesis 1:1 ("in the beginning"). This is repeated in the next verse ("this was in the beginning with God"). In short, John's Prologue has to do with Genesis 1:1, not Philo. A.T. Robertson says, "John's standpoint is that of the Old Testament and not that of the Stoics nor even of Philo, who uses the term Logos" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, John 1:1). Similarly, F.F. Bruce says:

> The term *logos* was familiar in some Greek philosophical schools … It is not in Greek philosophical usage, however, that the background of John's thought and language should be sought … The true background to John's thought and language is found not in Greek philosophy but in Hebrew revelation. (*Gospel of John*, p.29)

In John 1:1-3, we find three unmistakable references to Genesis 1 (see the words in boldface):

> [1] **In the beginning** was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
> [2] He was **in the beginning** with God.
> [3] **All things were made through him**, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (ESV)

If we, amazingly, had missed these three references to Genesis, there is yet another in verse 10: "the world was made through him". Yahweh in His wisdom knows how to leave us "without excuse" (Rom.1:20)!

In John's day there was no chapter/verse numbering system for the Bible, for that came much later. How then would one refer to a passage in Genesis or any other in Scripture? This was often done by quoting its opening words, in this case, "In the beginning". This is explained by a commentary that sees a Genesis connection in John 1:1:

> When hearing the phrase "in the beginning," any person in John's day familiar with the Scriptures would immediately think of the opening verse of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" … Echoes of the creation account continue here with allusions to the powerful and effective word of God ("And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light"). (*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds NT Commentary*, vol.2, on John 1:1)

In John 1:2 ("He was in the beginning with God"), the Greek word translated "he" is *houtos* ("this one"). Hence a more accurate rendering would be, "This was in the beginning with God"; this meaning comes out in KJV ("The same was in the beginning with God") and ITNT ("This word, expressed in the beginning, belonged to God"). Marshall's Greek-English interlinear renders *houtos* in John 1:2 as "this one" in the English parallel, as does the Greek-English interlinear by Brown and Comfort.

But most Bibles have "he" in v.2 ("He was in the beginning with God"); this is a trinitarian interpretation that implies a different person from God the Father. How powerful is the influence of a translation on the reader who cannot, or does not, check the original Greek text!

The Creator in Genesis 1

In Genesis 1, Yahweh created all things through His word. In this chapter alone, the phrase "and God said" or similar occurs eleven times. Eight of the instances (vv.3,6,9,11,14,20, 24,26) are declarations of an act of creation in the manner of, "And God said, Let there be light". The other three instances (vv.22,28,29) are ancillary commands given to the things God had already created, along the lines of, "And God blessed them and said, Be fruitful and multiply". Six of the eleven instances conclude with, "and it was so".

All eleven refer to God's acts of creation through the speaking of His word. What is important is not just the fact that He spoke, but that His word brought creation into being.[66] This is a concrete and living expression of the Word of God. Yet the creative power of the Word resides not so much in the Word as in the One who speaks it. When God

[66] In eight stages, namely, the creation of: light; an expanse amid the waters; dry land amid the seas; vegetation; lights for day and night; birds and marine creatures; land animals; man and woman (though, strictly speaking, they were "formed" by God).

speaks, He sends forth His power by His dynamic and creative Word that accomplishes His purposes straightaway; hence the repetition of "and it was so".

We now see that "Word" is the primary metonym of God in Genesis 1. A metonym of God points to a specific aspect of His character, attributes, and works. The description of God as the Word in John 1:1 ("the Word was God") highlights His creative power as displayed in His creation.

It also declares that God has come into the world to dwell in Jesus Christ in order to establish a *new* creation consisting of those who are "born from above" or "born anew" (John 3:3-8). Genesis 1 is about the physical creation, yet it already gives an intimation of the new creation by pointing to it in seed or prophetic form. The very last of the eight authoritative declarations of creation (in the manner of, "And God said, Let there be light") relates to the creation of man ("Let us make man in our image," v.26), yet it does not conclude with the customary "and it was so". It may be a hint that God's work in man hasn't yet been concluded, for man hasn't yet been perfected. This hint is strengthened by fact that although the phrase "God saw that it was good" occurs six times in Genesis 1 (vv.4,10,12,18,21,25), Genesis abruptly stops using it just before it comes to the creation of man in verses 26-28. But after moving past the creation of man, Genesis reverts to "and it was so".

The last verse of Genesis 1 concludes the whole creation account with the observation, "Behold, it was very good," a summation of the glorious creation. God will fulfill His purposes for His creation through His appointed Messianic King; then all things will indeed be "very good".

The repeated use of "and God said" is an emphatic way of saying that God created all things by His Word. Thus it is easy to see why the Word is a metonym of God. The power of His Word is seen in Psalm 33:8-9: "Let all the earth fear Yahweh; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm."

Jaroslav Pelikan, eminent historian of Christian doctrine, draws a direct link between "the Word" of John 1 and "God said" of Genesis 1:

> These opening words of [John 1] declare the common faith that Christianity shares with Judaism … The vocable "word" here translates the Greek noun *logos*, which comes from the verb *legein*, "to say" or "to speak"… But whatever other meanings it may or may not be said to have, "In the beginning the Word already was" may be read as a summary and paraphrase of the repetition of the elevenfold "In the beginning God said" from the first chapter of Genesis. (*Whose Bible is It? A Short History of the Scriptures*, p.25)

In the Old Testament, Yahweh is the only Creator

Trinitarian interpretations of John 1:3 are often feats of circular reasoning: Since Jesus is the Word and the Word is God, therefore Jesus is the creator of all things ("all things were made through him"). And since Jesus is the creator of all things, he is God. One can be caught in this merry-go-round reasoning without realizing it.

Jesus is not the creator or co-creator of the universe, for Scripture consistently teaches that Yahweh alone is the creator of all things. This is seen in many OT passages which give not the slightest hint that He was assisted in any way by another person (the following are from ESV unless otherwise indicated, with "Yahweh" in the Hebrew restored):

> **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
>
> **Nehemiah 9:6** You are Yahweh, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them.
>
> **Psalm 8:3** When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place …
>
> **Psalm 19:1** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
>
> **Psalm 102:25** Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

Isaiah 40:28 Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 45:12 I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host.

Isaiah 48:12-13 I am he; I am the first, and I am the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together.

Isaiah 51:13 Yahweh, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth.

Jeremiah 10:12 It is he (Yahweh, v.10) who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens. (repeated in 51:15)

Jeremiah 27:5 It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me.

Jeremiah 32:17 Ah, Lord Yahweh! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm!

Jeremiah 51:19 He is the Maker of all things, including the people of his inheritance—Yahweh Almighty is his name. (NIV)

> **Zechariah 12:1** Thus declares Yahweh, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him …
>
> (Also Psalm 136:5-9; 146:5-6; Isaiah 42:5)

These verses show that Yahweh created all things without help from anyone. This is stated with double emphasis ("alone" and "by myself") in the following verse:

> **Isaiah 44:24** I am Yahweh, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.

In the New Testament, Yahweh is the only Creator

The New Testament continues the Old Testament teaching that Yahweh is the only Creator. The following NT passages give no hint that Christ assisted in God's work of creation (all from ESV unless otherwise noted; note also my comments):

> **Acts 4:24** When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. (NIV)
>
> **Comment**: In this prayer the people declare that God is the maker of all things. Twice (vv.27,30) they refer to "your holy servant Jesus," which means that Jesus is a different person from God who made the heavens and the earth.

Acts 7:48-50 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?"

Acts 14:15 the living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them! (CJB)

Acts 17:24-26 The God who made the world and everything in it … he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.

Comment: The immediate context says that God had appointed a man whom He raised from the dead (v.31). Hence Jesus is a different person from the God who "made the world and everything in it" (v.24).

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (NIV)

Ephesians 3:9 God who created all things …

Revelation 4:11 Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

Revelation 14:7 … worship him (God) who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.

No fewer than four of these texts are from Acts. This is the book that records the going forth of the gospel of salvation from the center of the spiritual world, Jerusalem, to the center of the secular world, Rome. In the promulgation of the gospel it is important to declare who is the God from whom the gospel proceeds, and who is the God who sends His apostles into the world to preach it.

That God is the creator of heaven and earth—and everything in them—is His unique "mark of identification". Trinitarians ought to think of what they are doing when they reassign Yahweh's mark of identification as Creator to their preexistent God the Son. In so doing are they not treating Yahweh with contempt, seeing that according to Scripture He alone is the creator of all things? His creation reveals His glory (Rom.1:20), yet trinitarians dare to wrest that glory from Him and give it to the second person of the Trinity who does not exist in the Scriptures.

In Romans 1:25, Paul refers in the singular to "the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." This is a doxology and as we shall see in chapter 7, doxologies are almost always addressed to Yahweh God.

Jesus also refers to the Creator in the singular: "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female?" (Mt.19:4)

John 1:3: "All things were made through him"

Since the Word in John's Prologue refers to Yahweh, therefore John 1:3 ("all things were made through him") refers to Yahweh, and with that the case is closed. But trinitarians will argue that John 1:3 says that all things were made "through him" rather than "by him," implying a second person who is not identical with Yahweh the Creator yet is nonetheless His agent in the creation. The intention is to say that Jesus is that second divine person.

We now briefly examine "through him" as applied to Yahweh and to Jesus in the New Testament. Those who depend solely on English translations won't get the full picture because the various Bible translations render John 1:3 differently; some have "through him" and others have "by him".

To make the matter easy to understand, we look at the word *dia* (used in John 1:3) which in Yahweh's wisdom is easily recognized even by those who don't know Greek. When transliterated into English, this word is *dia*, which looks like the word in Greek script, δια! And when we examine *dia* (a preposition), we will see that it is sometimes used in the New Testament of God (Yahweh) in connection to His being the Creator.

The meaning of a Greek preposition varies according to the grammatical "case" of the word that follows it (often the genitive or accusative but also the dative). The preposition *dia* can take either the genitive or the accusative. In John 1:3, *dia* ("through") is used with the genitive, so we are interested

in the instances of *dia*+genitive which pertain to the creation. For reference, here is John 1:3 again, noting the *dia*+genitive:

> **John 1:3** All things were made through him (*dia*+genitive), and without him was not any thing made that was made.

An important verse for our present discussion is Hebrews 2:10 because it has two instances of *dia* which relate to the creation, the first with the accusative, the second with the genitive:

> **Hebrews 2:10** For it was fitting that he (God), for whom (*dia*+accusative) and by whom (*dia*+genitive) all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. (ESV)

This verse is saying that the God who created all things ("by whom all things exist") is also the one who made Jesus perfect through suffering. This immediately makes Jesus a different person from God the Creator. This crucial fact, in combination with the fact that God is mentioned here as the Creator using the *dia*+genitive construction as in John 1:3, greatly weakens the trinitarian assertion that the Word in John 1:3 refers to Jesus. BDAG (*dia*, B2a) says that *dia*+genitive in Hebrews 2:10 "represents God as Creator".

In Romans 11:36, *dia*+genitive refers to God as Creator without mentioning Jesus: "For from him and through him (*dia*+genitive) and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." The triple "him" refers to Yahweh who is men-

tioned two verses earlier by an allusion to Jer.23:18 and Isa. 40:13, both of which speak of Yahweh. But Jesus is not mentioned at all in Romans chapter 11, nor in chapter 12 except in v.5 in a different context ("we are one body in Christ").

Nowhere in the NT is the Genesis creation attributed to Jesus. But trinitarians, having decided *ex cathedra* (on their own authority) that the Word in John 1:3 refers to Jesus since Jesus is the creator of all things, now use this same verse to say that Jesus created all things! This kind of circular reasoning is common in the trinitarian literature on John's Prologue. Yet it is clear from the above passages that God, the creator of all things, is a distinct person from Jesus Christ.

Those who wish to research the topic further can examine the instances of *dia*+genitive pertaining to God or Jesus Christ, either exhaustively with the BibleWorks software program or by looking up the references listed in BDAG, *dia*, A. The investigation will yield three verses highly relevant to our present discussion (the asterisk denotes the *dia*+genitive in the following three verses, all from ESV):

> **Ephesians 4:6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through* all and in all.
>
> **1 Corinthians 1:9** God is faithful, by* whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
>
> **Hebrews 1:2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through*

> whom also he created the world. (We will look at this verse in chapters 4 and 5 of this book)

The first verse speaks of God the Father, not the Son; the second and the third verses speak of God as being distinct from "his Son". Even in the third verse which speaks of the Son, the creator is still the Father. All this strengthens the fact that the Word in John 1:3, and therefore also in John's Prologue, refers to Yahweh and not to Jesus. The plain fact is that the Word nowhere refers to Jesus in John's Gospel or the New Testament.

In the beginning

My earlier book, TOTG, concluded by pointing to the glorious Old Testament message, revealed long ago by Yahweh, that He Himself will be coming into the world to accomplish His saving plan for humanity. John's Gospel begins with a poem that proclaims this truth.

The poem may have been written originally in Aramaic which was the common spoken language in Israel until at least A.D.135. Most NT scholars believe that John's Gospel was written in the 90's of the first century, which would mean that Aramaic was still current in John's day.

When the poem was expressed or re-expressed in Greek, its key word *logos* ("word"), a concept rooted in Hebrew religious thought, would be unintelligible to John's Greek-

speaking and Greek-thinking readers unless it is explained by the original leaders of the church who were Aramaic-speaking Jews like the apostle John. By ignoring the Aramaic, scholars to this day debate fruitlessly over the meaning of the Word in John 1:1. Trinitarians insist that the Word refers to Jesus even though there is not an iota of evidence for this identification in the New Testament.

But even if Jesus is the Logos, his being "in the beginning" does not prove that he is God. "In the beginning" refers to the time when the heavens and the earth were created. The creation account in Genesis appears to have specific reference to our solar system, not the entire universe. This is not to say that the universe was not created by God, for undoubtedly it was. But looking at the Genesis account with its reference to the sun and the moon, we can be sure that the account is mainly about the solar system and the creatures in it. There is no specific mention of stars apart from Genesis 1:16, but even here it is unlikely that the verse is speaking of the creation of stars, as noted by some scholars.[67] The stars were undoubtedly created by God, for nothing can come into being

[67] UBS Old Testament Handbooks, vol.1, Gen.1:16: "*He made the stars also*: the words *he made* are added by many English translations, but they are not in the Hebrew." Another reference says, "Thus v.16 is not an account of the creation of the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day but a remark that draws out the significance of what has previously been recounted." (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, abridged, K.L. Barker and J.R. Kohlenberger III eds., on Gen.1:16)

apart from Him. But Genesis 1 and 2 are mainly about the creation of man and not how the universe as a whole came into being.

In James Ussher's calculations, the world came into being some 6,000 years ago, an estimate that he arrived at by assuming that the world was created in six literal 24-hour days. Counting back to Adam via the genealogies in the Bible, he arrived at a figure of just over 6,000 years. For those who accept his calculations, "in the beginning" was not very long ago and would hardly prove that Jesus is the eternal God or the eternal "God the Son" of trinitarianism.

The same holds true even if we look at time from a scientific perspective. There is general consensus among cosmologists that the universe came into being through the Big Bang about 13.77 billion years ago.[68] This figure is not as intimidating as it once was, for nowadays we would speak of financial matters in terms of billions or even trillions of dollars. Even if Jesus existed 13 billion years ago, that still would not prove his divinity, for God is eternal and infinite: "from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps.90:2). Yahweh is "the everlasting God" (Gen.21:33; Ps.90:2; Isa.40:28; Jer. 10:10). With Him there is no beginning or end. He is the beginning and the end of everything, including the universe and all created beings. It doesn't take a mathematician to

[68] NASA at http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/uni_age.html. We are using the American definition of billion: 1,000,000,000.

know that infinity cannot be contained in a number with a finite number of zeros, even a trillion trillion zeros.

Where is Yahweh in John's Prologue?

John's Prologue is rooted in the Old Testament and not in Greek philosophy or Philo. But our thinking has been so swayed by Christocentric trinitarianism that we don't see Yahweh in the New Testament. He has vanished from our thinking and line of sight.

Where does Yahweh appear in John's Prologue? Since Jesus is said to be God in trinitarianism, Jesus is the one who immediately comes to mind when we encounter a name or noun or pronoun in the Prologue, whether it is "Word" or "life" or "light" or "him" or "his". Not even God the Father of trinitarianism makes an appearance!

But the opening clause of John's Prologue, "In the beginning was the Word," refers to Yahweh, not only because the Word is an established metonym of Yahweh but also because Yahweh "in the beginning" created the heavens and the earth by Himself. At the Genesis creation, Jesus had not yet existed, yet all things were created for him, that is, with him in view.

How many times is God referred to directly or indirectly in the 18 verses of John's Prologue? Many people may be surprised by the preponderance of references to Yahweh in the Prologue, either directly ("God") or metonymically

("Word") or pronominally ("He"): vv.1,1,1,1,1,2,2,3,4,5,6,9, 10,10,10,11,11,11,11,12,12,12,12,13,14,14,18,18,18. There are more instances than these but we omitted a few because some readers may count fewer instances than we. But irrespective of the exact count, these serve to bring home the point that Yahweh is central to the Prologue. "Jesus Christ" is named only once, at the end of the Prologue (v.17, "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"), whereas John the Baptist is named twice (vv.6,15).

In the New Testament, "God" (*theos*) occurs 1,317 times, not counting the many instances of the divine passive in which God is the author of an act without being named (e.g. Heb.9:28). On the other hand, "Jesus" (*'Iēsous*) without "Christ" (*Christos*) occurs 672 times; "Christ" without "Jesus" 281 times; "Jesus Christ" 135 times; and "Christ Jesus" 95 times; for a total of 1183 times, fewer than the 1,317 instances of "God". These figures do not include the pronouns referring to God or instances of the divine passive.

That God is mentioned more frequently than Jesus in the New Testament aligns with the fact that God is central to the NT as also to John's Prologue. As trinitarians we read the NT as if Christ is the central figure and God has a less prominent role than Jesus who is, after all, God! The fact is that Jesus is not called "God" in the New Testament; hence the elevation of Jesus to God amounts to idolatry.

The Israelites were deeply inclined towards idolatry. They had barely left Egypt when they clamored for something to

worship. Aaron obliged them by making a golden calf under whose image they worshipped the Canaanite god "Baal," a word which means "Lord". Because the Israelites also called Yahweh "Lord" (Adonai), a situation developed in Israel in which "Lord" could refer to Yahweh or Baal. The Israelites in the end didn't care much which Lord they were worshipping, and most of them ended up worshipping Baal. That was the main reason for their exile.

The situation of ancient Israel was later mirrored by the Gentile church soon after the time of Jesus. Since Yahweh is called "Lord" and Jesus is called "Lord," Yahweh was soon replaced by Jesus in the church, and almost no one had noticed that anything had happened! The church now has a tripartite God, the Trinity, ensuring that there is no room in this "Godhead" for the real Yahweh. The "church of God" (a term which occurs nine times in the New Testament) had been commandeered by the bishops of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and other cities in the Roman Empire, with the emperor, starting from Constantine, as the general overseer.

The herald in the Prologue

> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. (John 1:6-8, ESV)

Why is John the Baptist given so much prominence in the Prologue when his place in the four gospels as a whole does not have similar prominence? It is because he is none other than the herald of Yahweh's coming! This was foretold by Isaiah:

> A voice cries, "Prepare in the desert a way for Yahweh. Make a straight highway for our God across the wastelands. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be levelled, every cliff become a plateau, every escarpment a plain; then the glory of Yahweh will be revealed and all humanity will see it together, for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken." (Isaiah 40:3-5, NJB)

This passages mentions "Yahweh" three times. A voice cries out to proclaim His coming. It also proclaims "the glory of Yahweh" which in John's Prologue is the "glory" (Jn.1:14) that shines forth in Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist confirms that he is the herald spoken of by Isaiah: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord (Yahweh),' as the prophet Isaiah said." (John 1:23)

All four gospels quote Isaiah 40:3 (Mt.3:3; Mk.1:3; Lk.3:4; Jn.1:23) and are united in declaring that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled by Yahweh's coming into the world in Christ. This is a most astonishing event for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us

The Word is mentioned in verses 1 and 2 of John's Prologue, but is not mentioned again until verse 14:

> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14, ESV)

John's Prologue culminates in the statement, "And the Word became flesh". This is poetic language and is not meant to be taken literally to mean that God changed into flesh,[69] but that He came into the world "embodied" in Jesus the Messiah (cf. Col.2:9, "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily"). Indeed, the language of "dwell" comes out in the Greek of John 1:14, in the words "dwelt among us". Here "dwelt" is literally "tabernacled"; hence John is saying, "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us".

In English, *tabernacle* is a noun, not a verb, but Greek has a verb form of "tabernacle": *skēnoō* (to tabernacle), which is the verbal cognate of the noun *skēnē* (a tabernacle). BDAG

[69] In an earlier section, "The spiritual meaning of the Word," we briefly looked at the meaning of the Greek word *ginomai*, translated "became" in John 1:14 ("And the Word became flesh").

says that the noun *skēnē* is used in the LXX of "Yahweh's tabernacle" and "the Tabernacle or Tent of Testimony". BDAG also says that the verb *skēnoō* in John 1:14 is "perhaps an expression of continuity with God's 'tenting' in Israel". Scripture elsewhere says that Jesus is the temple of God (Jn.2:19), as are those in Christ (1Cor.3:16).

The following verses in Revelation are helpful for bringing out the meaning of "tabernacle," both the verb and the noun, albeit in a different context from John 1:14. The words in italics correspond to the Greek *naos* (a temple) or to *skēnē* (a tabernacle) or to *skēnoō* (to tabernacle):

> **Revelation 7:15** Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his *temple;* and he who sits on the throne will *shelter* them with his presence. (ESV)
>
> **Revelation 12:12** Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who *dwell* in them! (ESV)
>
> **Revelation 21:3** Behold, the *tabernacle* of God is among men, and He will *dwell* among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them. (NASB)

Once we see that it was Yahweh Himself and not the second person of the Trinity who "became flesh and tabernacled among us" (Jn.1:14)—similar to Yahweh's declaration, "My tabernacle that is among them" (Lev.15:31)—we will see Yahweh's glorious indwelling presence in the man Christ Jesus through whom Yahweh worked and spoke. The right

way of understanding the power in Jesus' words and deeds, including his miracles, is to see God's presence in him. Indeed these mighty miracles were done by God "through" Jesus (Acts 2:22). There is no need to resort to what we were doing before, attributing Jesus' God-empowered activities to his own alleged divinity as God the Son. That was the way we used to assert that Jesus is God, disregarding John's intention that through his gospel we may believe that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of God" (Jn.20:31) rather than God the Son.

Yahweh came into the world to dwell in flesh, that is, bodily, in order to reconcile the world to Himself in Christ (2Cor.5:19). John's Gospel is a proclamation of Yahweh's saving activity in Christ. Jesus plainly said that it was his Father, Yahweh, who worked and spoke through him, but we trinitarians were stone-deaf to this plain statement. If it were not for God's mercy, we would have no hope of seeing the truth.

We have seen his glory

> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

The glory mentioned here is God's glory and presence in Jesus Christ, and is explained by Paul as "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor.4:6). The glory in John 1:14 is related to the light mentioned a few verses earlier in John's Prologue, in verses 4 and 5: "in him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." This in turn relates to Gen.1:3 ("let there be light"), thus returning to Genesis once again!

Not only is light linked to glory, it is linked to life ("the life was the light of men"), as seen also in the following OT verses (all from ESV):

> **Job 33:28** He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit, and my life shall look upon the light.
>
> **Job 33:30** to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be lighted with the light of life.
>
> **Psalm 36:9** For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.
>
> **Psalm 56:13** For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

The words "light of life" in two of these verses are quoted by Jesus: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn.8:12) In the Genesis creation, God is the giver of life to His creatures (cf. John 1:4, "In Him was life").

John's Prologue mentions "light" again in v.9: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world". Yahweh, the One coming into the world, is identified as the true light. The picture of Yahweh as light is seen in many Old Testament verses: Ps.27:1 ("Yahweh is my light and my salvation"); Ps.84:11 ("Yahweh is a sun and shield"); Isa.2:5 ("let us walk in Yahweh's light"); Isa.60:1 ("your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh has risen upon you"); Isa.60:19 ("Yahweh will be your everlasting light"). Since God's fullness dwells in Jesus, it follows that God's light will shine through Jesus:

> And the city (New Jerusalem) has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Revelation 21:23 ESV, also Rev.22:5)

God is the light whereas Jesus is the lamp, confirming that the Word in John 1:1 is Yahweh in the first instance and not Jesus.

At the transfiguration of Jesus (Mt.17:1-9; Mk.9:2-9; Lk. 9:28-36), God's glory shone through Jesus in a way that was visible to the three disciples who were with him, Peter, James and John. Years later, Peter recalls this event, noting that

Jesus' glory was something that Jesus had "received" from God the Father, who is called the Majestic Glory:

> … we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. (2Peter 1:16-18, NIV)

John almost certainly referred to this manifestation of glory, of which he was an eyewitness, when he said in John 1:14, "We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth".

John 1:18: The only Son or the only begotten God?

ESV and HCSB, two modern Bibles that were first published at around the same time, give conflicting translations of John 1:18 (italics added):

> **ESV:** No one has ever seen God; *the only God*, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
>
> **HCSB:** No one has ever seen God. *The One and Only Son*—the One who is at the Father's side—He has revealed Him.

Which rendering is correct? ESV has "the only God," a trinitarian rendering which makes Jesus the only God, whereas HCSB has "the One and Only Son," a non-trinitarian rendering which makes Jesus the Son of God. These divergent renderings represent two main camps. One camp includes HCSB, CJB, KJV, NJB, RSV, REB, which prefer "the only Son" or variations such as "the one and only Son". The other camp includes ESV, NASB, NIV, NET, which prefer "the only God" or variations such as "the only begotten God".

These in turn represent two opinions on which Greek text-type is to be used for translating this verse: the Byzantine versus the Alexandrian. The "only Son" rendering is based on

the Byzantine text-type (popularly known as the Majority Text), which is the text-type with the widest attestation (support) among all known Greek manuscripts. On the other hand, the "only God" translation is based on the Alexandrian text-type represented by manuscripts which, though fewer, are generally of an earlier date and are given more weight in UBS5 and NA28.

The criterion of early date is reasonable but does not by itself take into sufficient account the fact that even early manuscripts can have errors (e.g. a misunderstanding of the Aramaic, as we shall see). Careful NT exegesis takes into consideration both the Majority Text and the UBS5/NA28 critical text, so it is not a matter of choosing the one to the exclusion of the other.

Among Bibles with the "only God" rendering, there is further differentiation between "the only God" and "the only begotten God" as seen in ESV versus NASB (italics added):

> **ESV** No one has ever seen God; *the only God*, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
>
> **NASB** No one has seen God at any time; *the only begotten God* who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

ESV's rendering is problematic in terms of logic and theology. What sense do we make of "the only God"? If Jesus is the only God, then Jesus must be invisible in some sense, for the same verse says that "no one has ever seen God". Even

worse, if Jesus is the only God, that would exclude the Father as God, a conclusion that even trinitarians would find blasphemous; it would also contradict John 17:3 which says that the Father is the only true God. NIV 1984 matches ESV in absurdity: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

[The next two or three paragraphs are slightly technical, so some readers may wish to skip them and jump to the next section, "The internal evidence"]

The Greek text underlying the "only begotten God" reading is the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA27/NA28) and the United Bible Societies Greek NT (UBS4/UBS5). The companion volume to UBS4, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed.), explains on pp.169-170 that manuscripts P^{66} and P^{75} were what influenced the "majority" of the UBS editorial committee of five scholars to prefer "the only begotten God". But one of the five, Allen Wikgren, a distinguished Greek and NT textual expert, registered his objection to the committee's decision in a note that is included in the commentary in which he says that *monogenēs theos* (the only begotten God) "may be a primitive (early) transcriptional error in the Alexandrian tradition"; this is the tradition that asserted Jesus' deity and triumphed at Nicaea. Wikgren adds, "At least a D decision would be preferable." When a text in UBS4 is classified as {D}, it means that "there is a very high

degree of doubt concerning the reading selected for the text". In UBS4/5, the actual classification is {B}, expressing the opinion that the textual evidence is in favor of *monogenēs theos* (the only begotten God), though not overwhelmingly.

Another committee member, Matthew Black, in his book *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, cites with approval another Aramaic scholar's assessment that:

> … one of Burney's most valuable observations of this kind [a misreading of the Aramaic] is that the disputed *monogenēs theos* in John 1:18 mistranslates *yehidh 'elaha*, "the only-begotten of God" (p.11).

In other words, "the only begotten of God" was misunderstood as "the only begotten God"! It is alarming that the decision of a "majority" of the five-member committee resulted in millions of copies of the Bible being printed with "the only begotten God" rather than "the only begotten Son". Most readers don't know the truth behind this reading.

The internal evidence

Here is the situation so far: The manuscript evidence for John 1:18 is divided between "the only begotten Son" and "the only begotten God". The divide is reflected in the divergence within the UBS committee—hence the {B} level of uncertainty in UBS5 in favor of "the only begotten God"—but also in the divergence among Bibles, some of which prefer the

trinitarian reading (ESV, NASB, NIV, NET) and some the non-trinitarian (HCSB, CJB, KJV, NJB, RSV, REB). Hence the textual evidence does not, by itself, settle the issue. So what about the internal evidence?

The word *monogenēs* means "only begotten" or "only" or "unique". In the New Testament, this Greek word is used of Jesus only in John's writings, including John 1:18. Interestingly, the five instances of *monogenēs* in John's writings all refer to Jesus. The following are the four verses in the NT outside John 1:18 in which *monogenēs* is applied to Jesus (all verses are from NASB):

> **John 1:14** And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
>
> **John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
>
> **John 3:18** He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
>
> **1 John 4:9** By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

A few observations:

- Of these four verses, the last three have the word "Son" (Greek *huios*) in the phrase "only begotten Son". Hence, outside John's Prologue, whenever *monogenēs* is used of Jesus, it always refers to the only begotten Son, never the only begotten God.
- The first of these four verses, John 1:14, does not have the word "Son" or the word "God". Hence it constitutes "neutral" evidence for deciding between "the only begotten Son" and "the only begotten God".
- But if we take John 1:18 to mean "the only begotten God" (the trinitarian reading), we run into the difficulty that this verse now contradicts the other verses which speak of "the only begotten Son". The fact is that "the only begotten God" appears nowhere in the NT outside the debated John 1:18. Why would John be inconsistent with himself, using "the only begotten Son" consistently in his writings except in the debated John 1:18? If we detach John 1:18 from the rest of John's writings by making it say "only begotten God," it would be left without parallel anywhere in John's Gospel or the NT.
- On the other hand, if we take John 1:18 to mean "the only begotten Son," all five verses would harmonize.
- It comes as no surprise that of the five verses, John 1:18 is the only one with textual issues. The other four have no textual issues and are given zero comment in UBS5's critical apparatus.

One could argue as a principle of textual criticism that since "the only begotten God" is the more difficult reading than "the only begotten Son," it is more likely that the former was changed to the latter in order to smooth out this difficulty. Perhaps so, but this overlooks the fact that the textual issues surrounding John 1:18 are not doctrinally neutral, unlike the situation with most other verses with textual issues such as the verse just after it, John 1:19, which has textual issues but is doctrinally neutral ("the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him").

The issue of doctrinal motive is crucial because the process of deifying Jesus began before A.D. 200. If indeed "the only begotten God" was the established reading in the early manuscripts of around A.D. 200, wouldn't it be quickly adopted by the Gentile church leaders who by that time were already elevating Jesus to deity? Yet the fact remains that the majority of NT texts have the "only begotten Son".

That is why Allen Wikgren, whom we have quoted, says that the "only begotten God" reading may be an early "transcriptional error in the Alexandrian tradition," a statement which implies that the "only begotten God" reading may be the result of trinitarian influences in the early church.

James F. McGrath, in *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context*, makes some striking comments on John 1:18, including the observation that manuscripts P^{66} and P^{75} (regarded by some as tipping the balance in favor of the "only begotten God" reading) contain evid-

ence of trinitarian tampering. For example, both manuscripts delete the word "God" from John 5:44 to avoid saying that the Father is "the only God". Moreover, P^{66} adds "the" to "God" in John 10:33 to imply that Jesus calls himself "the God". The following is an excerpt from McGrath's book (p.65, his footnotes omitted):

> The attestation of two early Alexandrian papyrus manuscripts of the Gospel, known as P^{66} and P^{75}, is frequently given more weight than it deserves. P^{75} is indeed a very early text, but it frequently gives a reading which is generally accepted to be inferior, and in a few instances shows signs of conscious additions or alterations having been made. Also significant is the agreement of these two manuscripts in omitting the word *God* in John 5:44, which almost all scholars agree was part of the original text. Beasley-Murray regards this as accidental, but it may equally be the case that the scribes who copied these manuscripts had difficulty referring to the Father as the *only* God, since the Logos can also be spoken of as "God." Also significant is that P^{66*} adds the definite article before the word "God" in John 10:33. There are thus indications that the copyists of these manuscripts had a particular theological view which their transcription reflects. Both of these manuscripts preserve inferior readings in abundance, and although their combined weight needs to be taken very seriously, it is not conclusive, as indicated by the general agreement that "only God" is the original reading in the instance just cited (John 5:44).

Philip Wesley Comfort, in his fervently trinitarian textual commentary, *A Commentary of the Manuscripts and Text of the New Testament*, says on p.248 that "the only begotten God" is the more probable reading for John 1:18 partly for the reason that it would align with the rest of John's Prologue in upholding the deity of Christ and is therefore a fitting conclusion to the Prologue and a mirror of John 1:1. But this argument is unconvincing because it can equally argue for the opposite, by exposing an obvious trinitarian motive for giving John 1:18 a trinitarian reading, a factor that carries weight because of the rising deification of Jesus in the early church.

In the final analysis, irrespective of what may be the external or internal evidence, the overall result is that Bibles such as CJB, KJV, HCSB, NJB, RSV, and REB, despite their trinitarian leanings to one degree or another, have chosen to interpret John 1:18 in a non-trinitarian way. By contrast, ESV gives John 1:18 a trinitarian rendering despite the immense difficulties that it creates. It makes John contradict himself and implies that Jesus is "the only God" to the exclusion of God the Father.

Thayer's Greek-English lexicon (on *monogenēs*) rejects the reading "only begotten God" for John 1:18 for the reason that it is incongruous with John's speech and way of thinking, and may have been doctrinally motivated:

> The reading *monogenēs theos* (without the article before *monogenēs*) in John 1:18, which is supported by no inconsiderable weight of ancient testimony … is foreign to John's mode of thought and speech (John 3:16,18; 1John 4:9), dissonant and harsh—appears to owe its origin to a dogmatic zeal which broke out soon after the early days of the church. (Greek transliterated)

John 1:18: Only Son or unique Son?

Whereas KJV has "only begotten Son" for John 1:18, many translations omit "begotten" because scholars are aware that *monogenēs* simply means "only" or "unique". When *monogenēs* refers to a son, it simply means an only son or a unique son without the word "begotten". "Begotten" is an archaic English word for "born"; an "only born son" is simply an "only son".

The application of *monogenēs* is not limited to Jesus. It is used of Isaac the only son of Abraham (Heb.11:17); of a widow's only son who died and was raised from the dead (Lk. 7:12); and of the only son of a man (Lk.9:38). It is also used of female offspring, e.g. Jairus' only daughter (Lk.8:42).

In the NT, *monogenēs* is used of Jesus only in John's writings (Jn.1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1Jn.4:9). BDAG gives two definitions of *monogenēs*:

> 1. pertaining to being the only one of its kind within a specific relationship, *one and only, only*
>
> 2. pertaining to being the only one of its kind or class, *unique (in kind)* of something that is the only example of its category

In short, BDAG gives two basic definitions of *monogenēs*: *only* and *unique*. The glosses (BDAG's summary definitions shown in italics) nowhere contain the word "son" or "born," though many of BDAG's citations for the first definition have to do with human offspring.

The word *monogenēs* consists of two parts: the first part, *mono*, is easily recognized as the first part of *mono+theism* ("one and only" + God); the second part comes from a Greek word for "born" (or "begotten" in archaic English). From BDAG's explanation of *monogenēs*, it is clear that the meaning of this word stems mainly from the first part of the word (*mono*) rather than the second part.

Which then is the more accurate rendering of John 1:18, "only Son" or "unique Son"?[70] Since both renderings are lexically valid, the question of which is the intended meaning can only be answered by seeing which fits the New Testament data better.

Whereas most translations prefer "only Son" when *monogenēs* refers to Jesus, BDAG allows for "unique Son". BDAG notes that in John's writings, *monogenēs huios* is used only of

[70] The Complete Jewish Bible incorporates both: "only and unique Son".

Jesus; then it says that in all such instances, "the renderings *only, unique* may be quite adequate for all its occurrences here." In other words, for the term *monogenēs huios*, BDAG allows for both "only son" and "unique son" in all instances.

But if we choose "only Son" for John 1:18, we run into a problem with the word "only" because in the Bible, the title "son of God" is applied not only to Jesus but to many categories of beings as noted by many scholars.[71] It means that Jesus is not literally the "only" son of God. In fact the *plural* "sons of God" appears in both the Old and New Testaments (Job 1:6; Mt.5:9; Gal.3:26). The fact that Jesus is called the "firstborn" (Rom.8:29; Col.1:15,18; Rev.1:5) indicates that he is not the only son. In God's predetermined plan, Jesus is to be "the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom.8:29). That is why Jesus speaks of his disciples as his "brothers" (Mt.25:40; 28:10; Jn.20:17). Jesus and his believers belong to the same family: "Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Heb.2:11, NIV 1984). What is beautiful about this verse is that Jesus, the one who is holy by reason of his perfection, is not ashamed to accept as his brothers

[71] *Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, article "Son of God," says that "son of God" or "sons of God" applies to the following categories of beings or entities: Israelites; Israel as a whole; God's people; Zion's king; David's offspring; the righteous man; heavenly beings; and finally Jesus Christ.

those who have not (yet) attained to perfection. There is no self-righteousness in him.

Adam is "the son of God" (Lk.3:38) as are all believers (Mt.5:9; Gal.3:26). The sons of God are those who cry out to God, "Abba, Father," and are fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14-17).

From the New Testament data, there are many sons of God, so Jesus is not literally the "only" son of God. Therefore taking John 1:18 as referring to "the only Son" would leave us in an exegetical quandary. But the problem disappears as soon as we take *monogenēs* in John 1:18 to mean "unique," a definition that in any case is lexically possible. It means that John would be bringing out the *uniqueness* of Jesus as Yahweh's "one and only Son" by virtue of his being, for example, the one and only perfect man. Though there are many sons of God, Jesus is the unique Son of God. This makes perfect sense and harmonizes with the New Testament.

The following excerpts from three standard references explain *monogenēs* in a way that brings out Jesus' uniqueness as Son of God.

> *Monogenēs* is literally "one of a kind," "only," "unique" (*unicus*), *not* "only-begotten," which would be μονογέννητος (*unigenitus*), and is common in the LXX in this sense (e.g. Judg 11:34; Ps 21(22):21; 24(25):16). It is similarly used in the NT of "only" sons and daughters (Lk 7:12, 8:42, 9:38), and is

> so applied in a special sense to Christ in Jn 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1Jn 4:9, where the emphasis is on the thought that, as the "only" Son of God, He has no equal and is able fully to reveal the Father.' (Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the NT*, *monogenēs*)
>
> *Monogenēs,* pertaining to what is unique in the sense of being the only one of the same kind or class—"unique, only." τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν "he gave his only Son" Jn 3:16… "he who had received the promises presented his only son" or "…was ready to offer his only son" He 11:17. Abraham, of course, did have another son, Ishmael, and later sons by Keturah, but Isaac *was a unique son in that he was a son born as the result of certain promises made by God*. Accordingly, he could be called a μονογενής son, since he was the only one of his kind. (*Louw-Nida Lexicon of the NT Based on Semantic Domains*; *monogenēs*, 58.52, emphasis added)
>
> ["Begotten" is] used especially of God's act in making Christ His Son: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (Ps 2:7) quoted in Acts 13:33 in reference to His resurrection (compare Rom 1:4). The same passage is cited (Heb 1:5) as proving Christ's filial dignity, transcending the angels in that "he hath inherited a more excellent name than they," i.e. *the name of son*; and again (Heb 5:5) of God conferring upon Christ the glory of the priestly office. (T. Rees in ISBE, article "Begotten," emphasis added)

The last of these excerpts reminds us that the New Testament application of "begotten" and "son" to Jesus Christ is rooted in Psalm 2:7 in which God declares the promised

Messiah to be His Son, the one who will rule over Israel and all nations (vv.8-10). The declaration "You are my Son; today I have begotten you" in Psalm 2:7 is quoted in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5. But even where Psalm 2:7 is not quoted explicitly, the concepts "begotten" and "son" when applied to Christ are implicitly derived from Psalm 2:7.

John adds "unique" or "only" to "son" in the case of Jesus in order to bring out his uniqueness. That is because in John's Gospel, believers are also called sons of God for the reason that they are "not of the world" (Jn.15:19; 17:16) but are "born from above". The rendering "born from above" for John 3:3,7 in NJB, NRSV, CJB, ITNT [72] is correct since *anō-then* means "from above" according to BDAG and Thayer. The words "from above" are parallel to "from heaven" (John 3:31). Of course, whereas the title "son of God" applies to Jesus and believers, only Jesus the unique Son is the Messiah.[73]

[72] *Idiomatic Translation of the New Testament* by Dr. William G. MacDonald, author of *The Greek Enchiridion*.

[73] For a balanced study of Paul's concept of the Messiah, see *The Jewish Messiahs, the Pauline Christ, and the Gentile Question*, Matthew V. Novenson, pp.357–373, Journal of Biblical Literature, vol.128, no.2, 2009.

Is Wisdom in Proverbs 8 to be identified with Christ?

Some trinitarians equate wisdom in Proverbs 8 with Christ, just as they equate the Word in John 1 with Christ. The theme of Proverbs 8 is wisdom, which is presented as a principle of godliness, but is famously personified in Proverbs 8 as the wisdom who speaks in the first person (e.g., "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion," v.12). Most significantly, wisdom is said to be present with Yahweh before and during the creation of the universe. Note the words in boldface, especially in v.30:

> 22 The LORD (lit. "Yahweh") **possessed me at the beginning of his work**, the first of his acts of old.
> 23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
> 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.
> 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, **I was brought forth,** 26 **before he had made the earth** with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world.
> 27 **When he established the heavens, I was there**; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might

> not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
> 30 then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,
> 31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.
> (Proverbs 8:22-31, ESV)

Just as trinitarians identify the Logos with Christ, so they identify the personified wisdom of Proverbs 8 with the preexistent Christ. But not all trinitarians agree with this identification, and for a very specific reason. One of them says: "Many have equated wisdom in this chapter with Jesus Christ … But because wisdom appears to be a creation of God in 8:22-31, it is unlikely that wisdom here is Jesus Christ." [74] This explanation is notable for the reason given for rejecting the identification of wisdom with Christ, namely, that wisdom in Proverbs 8 "appears to be a creation of God"—and trinitarianism would never accept the idea that Christ was created!

A careful reading of Proverbs 8 shows that wisdom (which incidentally is feminine in both Hebrew and Greek) is never directly involved in the work of creation. It is only Yahweh who creates. Wisdom is only a firsthand witness who is present with Yahweh at the creation, delighting and rejoicing in Yahweh's work. In v.30 of some Bibles (ESV, RSV, NASB),

[74] Allen P. Ross, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol.5, p.943, cited in *Dr. Constable's Expository Notes*, 2010, on Proverbs 8.

wisdom is described as a "master workman," but some other Bibles (NIV, CJB, KJV) omit these words because the Hebrew text doesn't allow them, according to some scholars.[75]

In Proverbs 8, wisdom speaks in the first person, but it doesn't mean that wisdom is a separate person from Yahweh. Wisdom is just one of His attributes and is not a separate person from God. Similarly, wisdom and understanding in Proverbs 3:19 are not separate persons from God: "Yahweh by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens".

The trinitarian identification of wisdom with the pre-existent Christ is negated by the fact that wisdom in Proverbs 8 was created by Yahweh. The United Bible Societies OT Handbooks, a series which deals with issues of Bible translation rather than theology, concludes on the basis of Proverbs 8:22 that wisdom was created, and that this fact should be reflected in Bible translations:

[75] ISBE, article "Wisdom," explains why "master workman" may be incorrect: 'The most famous passage is Prov 8:22-31, however. The Wisdom that is so useful to man was created before man, before, indeed, the creation of the world. When the world was formed she was in her childhood; and while God formed the world she engaged in childish play, under His shelter and to His delight. So Prov 8:30 should be rendered (as the context makes clear that *'mwn* should be pointed *'amun*) "sheltered," and not *'amon*, "as a master-workman."'

> Wisdom is not engaged in an independent creative act and, aside from the Lord as creator, Wisdom has no independent existence. In verse 22 it is the Lord who creates Wisdom. (UBS OT Handbooks, Prov.8:22)

The following are four renderings of Proverbs 8:22, the verse which according to UBS Handbooks speaks of the creation of wisdom (italics added):

> **ESV**: The LORD *possessed me* at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.
>
> **CJB**: ADONAI *made me* as the beginning of his way, the first of his ancient works.
>
> **NIV**: The LORD *brought me forth* as the first of his works, before his deeds of old.
>
> **RSV**: The LORD *created me* at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.

There are significant differences between the four versions, notably in the words highlighted in italics. ESV represents the trinitarian position by not portraying wisdom as something created. But the other three versions all say explicitly or implicitly that wisdom was created: "made me" (CJB); "brought me forth" (NIV); "created me" (RSV). The Septuagint explicitly says, "the Lord created me".

Whether we take Proverbs 8:22 to say that Yahweh "possessed" wisdom (ESV) or "created" wisdom (RSV, LXX), are we saying that God had no wisdom until He brought it into

existence? That cannot be, for wisdom is an inalienable part of God. It would be absurd to suggest that the first thing God had to do was to acquire wisdom, for this would imply that He had no prior wisdom. Paul speaks of God as "the only wise God" (Romans 16:27).

But read poetically, Proverbs 8 is not a problem, and was not a problem to the Jews. The problems were created later by Christians, beginning from the middle of the second century, who applied to Proverbs 8 the poetic device of personifying wisdom (similar to the personification of love in 1Cor.13:4, "love does not envy or boast")—*and then made wisdom into a real person*.

We easily fail to see what is so perceptively stated by ISBE in the article "Wisdom": "And Wisdom is a quality of man (Prov 8:31-36), not a quality of God." ISBE is not saying that God has no wisdom but that the purpose of Proverbs is to teach wisdom to those who seek it. Proverbs is an instruction manual. As a book of instruction, it is like the "Torah," which is usually translated "Law" but which means "instruction" or "teaching". In Proverbs, wisdom is practical and spiritual in its guidance for daily living.

The principle of wisdom in Proverbs finds full expression in the life, the person, and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Wisdom is an essential element of his perfection. One could say that Jesus is the embodiment of wisdom, though in New Testament he is not explicitly identified with wisdom.[76]

[76] In the NT, wisdom is personified only in Mt.11:19 ("yet wisdom

Jesus is said to have wisdom (Mt.13:54; Mk.6:2; Lk.2:40,52); to impart wisdom (Lk.21:15); to possess wisdom as hidden treasure (Col.2:3); and to be ascribed wisdom (Rev.5:12). Christ is spoken of as the wisdom of God (1Cor.1:24,30).

is justified by her deeds") and Lk.7:35 ("yet wisdom is justified by all her children").

Chapter 4

The Second Pillar of Trinitarianism: Colossians 1:15-19

Some years ago, while training students preparing for the full-time church ministry, I would call this section of Colossians the second pillar of trinitarianism because it is one of the main Bible passages used by trinitarians to prove Jesus' deity, notably verse 16 which is interpreted as saying that Jesus is the creator of all things and is therefore God. But this interpretation is not supported by the biblical evidence, as we shall see.

We will look at verse 16, then verse 17, then verses 15 and 18 together (because of their common use of "firstborn"), then verse 19. Here is the passage that constitutes the second pillar of trinitarianism (note v.16):

Colossians 1:15-19 [15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. (ESV)

Which is correct, "in him" or "by him"?

For trinitarians, the key verse in this passage is verse 16 which starts with, "For by him all things were created," or in some Bibles, "For in him all things were created". These two renderings are identical except for the difference of one word—"by" versus "in"—which carries immense implications for trinitarianism. Which translation is correct?

The first word in v.16 is *hoti*, a Greek word that means "for" or "since" or "because". It is a connecting word that links this verse to the preceding verse (v.15) which speaks of Jesus as the "firstborn of all creation".

But the key term for trinitarians in verse 16 is *en autō*, literally "in him" ("for in him all things were created," referring to Christ). This is correctly and literally translated as "in him" by NIV, NJB, RSV, NRSV, REB, and incorrectly as "by him" in ESV, NASB, HCSB.

Two points to mention here. Firstly, the 1984 edition of NIV had the incorrect translation ("by him"), but in the 2011 edition, this has been corrected to "in him".

Secondly, although ESV, NASB, HCSB render *en autō* in v.16 as "by him" in order to make Paul say that all things were created by Christ, yet just three verses later (v.19), these same Bibles translate *en autō* correctly as "in him". Even more telling, these three Bibles translate *en autō* as "in him" or similar in 99% or 100% of all instances of *en autō* in Paul's letters—with the glaring exception of Col.1:16 where they have "by him" even though "in him" would have made better semantic sense. The arbitrariness of the way these Bibles render Col.1:16 exposes the doctrinal leanings of the translators.

In fact the Greek preposition "en" (*en autō*, "in him") is not an obscure or mysterious word but is a word similar in meaning to the English preposition "in". They are similar not only in spelling and fundamental meaning but also in their many nuanced shades of meaning. This can be confirmed by a meticulous comparison of the definitions of "en" listed in the BDAG Greek-English lexicon and the definitions of "in" listed in *Oxford Dictionary of English* (the massive 2010 3rd edition). To those who are unfamiliar with BDAG, its definitions may seem different from Oxford's, but that is only because BDAG gives the definitions using technical terms and unfamiliar abbreviations. But when we look through the technical jargon, there is much common ground between Greek "en" and English "in". In fact the Greek "en" doesn't

seem to be much more nuanced or varied than the English "in", and some of the definitions in Oxford are just as abstruse as any in BDAG (e.g. Oxford's 4th definition of "in" is quite abstract: "indicating the quality or aspect with respect to which a judgment is made"). Native speakers of English are usually unaware that the English preposition "in" is complex and nuanced when it is analyzed and formally defined.

We notice the similarity in spelling between Greek "en" and English "in". Oxford gives the following etymology: Greek "en" to Latin "in" to Old English "in" to modern English "in," with influences from German and Dutch. The ancient word "en" is one of the most enduring and ubiquitous words in the Indo-European family of languages, and is preserved today in Italian "in", Catalan "en", Czech "en", Dutch "in", German "in", Portuguese "em", Romanian "în", Slovak "in", Spanish "en"—all with the same basic meaning. Some of these modern languages preserve the ancient spelling "en," which predates the Greek.[77] Although etymology is not always reliable in determining the meaning of a word (e.g. English *deception* means something different from French *déception*, "disappointment"), the fact remains that "en" has survived a few millennia with little change in fundamental meaning.

[77] For a general outline of the evolution of "en," see the article "Indo-European Roots" in *American Heritage Dictionary* (5th full edition, not the college edition).

Even if we didn't know these details, the fact that Greek "en" has survived in English "in" with little change in fundamental meaning can be seen in the amazing fact that although the New Testament was written 2,000 years ago in a different language from English, the phrase *en autō* is translated by English Bibles as "in him" with near 100% consistency. The fact is that the English "in him" carries not just the basic meaning of the Greek *en autō* but also many of its nuances.

Many trinitarians reject the trinitarian reading of Colossians 1:16

In fact many trinitarian authorities reject the trinitarian rendering "by him" for Colossians 1:16:

- *Vincent's Word Studies*, on Colossians 1:16, says that the correct translation is "in him" rather than "by him," and that "in him" is "not instrumental but local"
- A.T. Robertson, *Robertson's Word Pictures*, takes Colossians 1:16 as saying "in him" rather than "by him"
- Nicoll's Expositor's Greek Testament has "in him"
- *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (a commentary), on Colossians 1:16, says that "in him" is the literal rendering, and is "far better" than "by him"
- *Pulpit Commentary* reads Colossians 1:16 as, "For in him were created all things" and says that "en" in Paul always means "in" and never "by"

- Lange's *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* reads Colossians 1:16 as saying, "because in him all things were created"
- Meyer's *Critical and Exegetical Commentary* reads Colossians 1:16 as "in him were all things created," saying that this is "the logically correct confirmation" of "the firstborn of all creation"
- Henry Alford's *Greek Testament* (5th ed.) rejects "by him" in favor of "in him".

BDAG doubts the instrumental meaning ("by him") for Colossians 1:16, a verse that BDAG puts under the 4th definition with the heading, "marker of close association within a limit, *in*" (italics BDAG's). BDAG's definition is technical and is put in a footnote [78] which may be skipped.

Daniel Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (pp. 373-374) says that *en*+dative rarely, if ever, expresses agency. Here are excerpts from this grammar but some readers may wish to skip them (boldface added):

[78] BDAG: ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα (prob. to be understood as local, not instrumental, since ἐν αὐ. would otherwise be identical w. δι' αὐ. in the same vs.) *everything was created in association with him* [Col] 1:16 (cp. M. Ant. 4, 23 ἐν σοὶ πάντα; Herm. Wr. 5, 10; AFeuillet, NTS 12, '65, 1–9).

> Some have suggested that either the naked dative or ἐν + the dative can express personal agency in the NT. However, once a clear definition is given for personal agency, this will be seen to be **a rare or nonexistent category** …
>
> [Blass-Debrunner-Funk] accurately assess the NT situation of the naked dative used for personal agency: "Dative of agency is perhaps represented by **only one genuine example in the NT** and this with the perfect: Luke 23:15." In summary, we can say that **there are very few clear examples of the dative of agency in the NT** …
>
> The slightly different phenomenon of ἐν + the dative is also considered by many to express agency on a rare occasion. Yet **no unambiguous examples are forthcoming**. Thus what can be said about the dative of agency can also be said of ἐν + the dative to express agent: **it is rare, at best**.

See also Wallace's "Dative of Agency" (pp.163-166).

To be true to the grammatical facts and to be consistent within Colossians chapter 1, we ought to read v.16 to mean that all things were created "in" Christ, not "by" Christ. This is the literal and straightforward reading. By contrast, the trinitarian reading "by him" seeks to establish Christ's preexistence and his involvement in the Genesis creation. But this reading is rejected by many trinitarian commentaries and by Bibles such as NJB, RSV, NRSV, REB, NIV 2011, despite their trinitarian leanings to one degree or another.

The trinitarian reading "by him" overlooks two things. Firstly, in the preceding verse 15 (which is tied strongly to v.16 by *hoti*), Jesus is called "the firstborn of all creation," a title that would make little sense if Jesus is also the creator of all things. Secondly, "by him" overlooks the fact that "in him" or "in Christ" is a central concept in Paul's letters. Not only is "in Christ" a common construction in Paul's letters, it is uniquely Pauline in a specific sense not found in the other NT writings: "in Christ" is the sphere in which God carries out His work of salvation, reconciling the world to Himself (2Cor.5:19). Ultimately it is God, not Christ, who is the main focus of the term "in Christ".

When Colossians 1:16 is read in its Pauline context, it begins to make sense: Christ stands in the preeminent position of being "the firstborn of all creation" (v.15) because it was "in him" that God created everything, that is, with Christ in view. Christ is the reason God created all things! This reveals the heights of God's glorious purposes in creating all things. Anyone who has eyes to see this revelation will marvel at it. Some English Bibles miss this beautiful truth when they make Colossians 1:16 say that all things were created "by him"—by Christ.

Summary: The five reasons for rejecting "by him"

In summary, *en autō* in Col.1:16 ought to be rendered "in him" rather than "by him" for five reasons: Firstly, "in him" is the literal and straightforward translation of *en autō*. Secondly, since "in him" makes semantic sense in the context, there is no reason to change it to "by him". Thirdly, the rendering "by him all things were created" makes no sense in the light of the preceding statement that Christ is the "firstborn of all creation"; this would be saying that the one who created all things is also the firstborn of his own creation! Fourthly, the Bibles that render *en autō* in Col.1:16 as "by him" would elsewhere in Paul's writings render *en autō* as "in him" with 99% or 100% consistency. Fifthly, "in him" affirms the "in Christ" principle that is fundamental to Paul's teaching (we will return to "in Christ" later).

Christ as the reason for God's creation

We follow up on our statement that Christ is the reason for God's creation. The NT contains a few passages which link Christ to the creation. But since the OT and the NT unequivocally state that God alone is the creator of all things ("Yahweh alone stretched out the heavens," Isa.44:24), what are these passages saying about Christ? Some trinitarians point to Hebrews 1:2 to say that Christ is the creator of all things because of the words "through whom":

> … but in these last days he (God) has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom (*dia*+genitive) also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:2, ESV)

We note a few things. Firstly, the word "heir" implies that Jesus is the recipient, not the creator, of all things. Secondly, the fact that he was "appointed" the heir of all things means that all things were given to him by God's authority, not Christ's authority. Thirdly, this verse doesn't say that it was the Son who created the world, but that it was God who created the world (or "universe," NIV) through the Son.

The issue is not whether God created the world (He did create the world), but whether "through whom" would mean that God created the world not by Himself but through an agent, Jesus Christ. If so, this would collide with the consistent Bible teaching that Yahweh created all things by Himself.

Grammatically, the statement is ambiguous because "through whom also he created the world" can also mean "because of whom he also created the world" (that is, God created the world with Christ in view).

Preposition *dia* can also mean "because of"

The preposition *dia* usually means "through" but it can sometimes mean "because of" in the sense of "on account of," as defined in three references.

The first is BDAG. In explaining *dia*+genitive in Heb.1:2, BDAG (*dia*, A5) says, "At times *dia* w. gen. seems to have causal mng … because of … Rom.8.3; 2Cor.9.13". Here BDAG gives two examples of *dia*+genitive which carry the meaning "because of": Romans 8:3 (the law was weakened "because of" the flesh) and 2Cor.9:13 ("because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God," NASB).

The second reference is Daniel Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* which on p.369 assigns to *dia*+accusative the meaning "because of, on account of, for the sake of". No other meaning is given.

The third reference is Thayer's Greek-English lexicon which on p.134 says that *dia*+accusative means "by reason of, because of" (also Greenlee, *Concise Exegetical Grammar of New Testament Greek*, p.31).

Whereas BDAG allows the meaning "because of" for the *dia*+genitive construction, Wallace and Thayer assign the meaning to the *dia*+accusative construction. It indicates that the meaning "because of" is intrinsic enough to, and strong enough in, *dia* for it to span two cases, the genitive and the accusative (the only two cases that *dia* can take), though unequally, for the meaning comes out more strongly in the accusative than the genitive.

Hence Hebrews 1:2 can be rendered "through whom also he created the world" or, if context allows, "because of whom also he created the world". Both are lexically and grammatically valid, so we need to look at the context to establish the

intended meaning of the verse. The latter reading (that God created all things "because of" Christ) finds support in the immediate context which says that Christ is the "heir" of all things (i.e. the recipient, not the creator, of all things). By contrast, the other reading (that God created all things "through" Christ) contradicts a later verse, Hebrews 2:10, which makes no mention of a secondary agent in creation, but on the contrary makes a clear distinction between God the Creator and Jesus such that Jesus is not the one who created all things:

> **Hebrews 2:10** For it was fitting that he (God), for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder (Jesus) of their salvation perfect through suffering.

The *dia*+genitive construction that we see in both Hebrews 1:2 and 2:10 is also found in 1 Corinthians 8:6, twice in fact (see the two asterisks):

> Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through* whom are all things and through* whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:6)

All things come from God the Father and we exist for Him. Everything owes its existence to God, the one "from whom are all things". So what does this mean in regard to Christ? What can it mean but that God created all things, including

us, *because of Jesus Christ and for his sake*? As we have seen, *dia*+genitive can at times mean "because of" (BDAG, *dia*, A5).

Similarly, the Babylonian Talmud says, "The world was created … for the sake of the Messiah." [79] This statement aligns with the biblical truth that man is the reason for the Genesis creation. God created the sun and the moon not because He needed them for illumination but because man needed them.

In Col.1:16, the verse being discussed, we see three Greek prepositional constructions, *dia*+genitive and two more:

> **Colossians 1:16** For by him (literally "in him," *en*+dative) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him (*dia*+genitive) and for him (*eis*+accusative). (ESV)

It is in him and for him—not by him—that all things were created. On this verse, Thayer's Greek-English lexicon (ἐν) says, "in him resides the cause why all things were originally created". In other words, Christ is the reason for God's creation.

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[79] *The Soncino Talmud*, ed. Rabbi Dr. Isidore Epstein, Soncino Press, London, Folio 98a (98b in some editions of Soncino's English translation).

In Christ

In our trinitarian days, we took *en autō* in Colossians 1:16 to mean "by him" when it should have been "in him," taking it as instrumental to imply that all things were created by Christ. Since "in Christ" is a key concept in Paul, let us see how he uses the *en*+dative construction in reference to Christ.

The term *en Christō* (in Christ) occurs 73 times in Paul. The similar term *en autō* (in him) occurs 24 times in Paul, of which 19 refer to Christ (8 times in Colossians, including 1:16). In Paul's letters, *en tō Iēsou* (in Jesus) occurs only in Eph.4:21. Every verse was individually checked and verified.

Adding the 73 instances of "in Christ," plus the 19 instances of "in him" referring to Christ, plus the sole instance of "in Jesus," we have a total of 93 instances of "in Christ" or variations in Paul's writings so far. See Appendix 10 for every instance of "in Christ" or its variations in Paul's writings.

Here is a crucial fact: In none of these 93 instances is it linguistically necessary to translate the term as "by Christ" or "by him"! For Colossians 1:16, many Bibles have "in him" but others have "by him" for doctrinal reasons. NASB and ESV have "by him" in Col.1:16, but "in him" everywhere else in Paul's letters!

Colossians chapter 1, the second pillar of trinitarianism, has six instances of *en* referring to Christ: three instances of *en Christō* (*in Christ*, vv.2,4,28) and three instances of *en autō* (*in him*, vv.16,17,19). The latter term occurs several times in

the next chapter, Colossians 2, in verses 6,7,9,10,15. All in all, we have a large number of verses in the immediate context for the purpose of comparison and examination. Hence the meaning of "in Christ" can be determined to a considerable degree of certainty.

To see how ESV renders "in Christ" according to its trinitarian leanings, the following is a list of all the occurrences of *en Christō* (*in Christ*) and *en autō* (*in him*, all referring to Christ) in Colossians 1 and 2; all these have the *en*+dative construction. In each instance, ESV gives the correct and literal rendering "in Christ" or "in him," with the glaring exception of Col.1:16 (see the boldface) which ESV renders as "by him" but which could have been rendered "in him," especially in view of v.15 and Paul's "in Christ" teaching:

Col.1:2	To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ
Col.1:4	we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus
Col.1:16	**For by him all things were created**
Col.1:17	in him all things hold together
Col.1:19	For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell
Col.1:28	that we may present everyone mature in Christ
Col.2:6	as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him
Col.2:7	rooted and built up in him and established in the faith
Col.2:9	For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily
Col.2:10	and you have been filled in him
Col.2:15	by triumphing over them in him

Appendix 10 lists all the instances in Paul's letters of "in Christ" and its variations conforming to the *en*+dative construction. In no instance is it necessary, grammatically or lexically or semantically, to render it as "by Christ" or similar. NASB 1977 and a few other Bibles never use the preposition "by" to translate the *en*+dative construction referring to Christ—except in Colossians 1:16.

Colossians 1:16: the new creation, not the old Genesis creation

In studying Colossians 1:16, it is crucial to keep in mind the vital distinction between the old creation and the new creation. In the old Genesis creation, Yahweh is the sole creator without any co-creator (Isa.44:24, "I am Yahweh, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself").

Colossians 1:16, on the other hand, is about the new creation, not the old creation, for two important reasons.

Firstly, the preceding verse (v.15, joined strongly to v.16 by *hoti*) says that Christ is the "firstborn of all creation". The word "firstborn" means the eldest son in a family among other siblings. This is made explicit in Rom.8:29 which says that we have been "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (ESV). This refers to the new creation because we become Jesus' brothers by being "born again" or

"born from above," with Jesus as the firstborn. Jesus speaks of his disciples as his "brothers" (Mt.25:40; 28:10; Jn.20:17), and he is not ashamed to call us his brothers (Heb.2:11). Hence the creation in Colossians 1:16 is the new creation in Christ, not the Genesis creation.

Secondly, Colossians 1:16 speaks of creation not in terms of the sun and the moon and stars, but things "in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." The word "invisible" refers to eternal spiritual things as opposed to transient physical things (e.g. 2Cor.4:18, "the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal"; also Rom.8:24; 2Cor.5:7; Heb.11:1,13). Hence the creation in Colossians 1:16 is the new creation rather than the old creation.

Both the old and new creations are created by Yahweh God, but the new is created in Christ and through Christ—not by Christ. That is why Colossians 1:16 has "in him" and "through him" and "for him"—but not "by him". The new creation is in Christ because Yahweh, before the foundation of the world, had Christ in view for the new creation. The new creation is "through Christ" because it was brought into being through the suffering and shed blood of Jesus.

"In Christ" in Paul's letters

In Paul's letters, "in Christ" has the special meaning of the sphere in which God does His work of salvation and of reconciling the world to Himself in Christ (2Cor.5:19). That the "in Christ" principle is specially Pauline is seen in the fact that it occurs most often in Paul's letters (*en Christō* occurs 73 times in his letters).

Since "in Christ" is the sphere in which God does His work of salvation, it also has to do with our union with Christ: If we are "in Christ" then Christ is in us ("Christ who lives in me," Gal.2:20), as seen also in Jesus' words, "you in me, I in you" (Jn.14.20). To be "in Christ" we must first be "baptized into his death" (Rom.6:3); then we are "united" with him (v.5) and live by the power of his resurrection life. These are not just metaphorical concepts but a spiritual reality in the present age.

The "in Christ" principle is also expressed pronominally as "in him" (*en autō*), which is the form used in Col.1:16 ("in him all things were created"). It appears again a few verses later: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (v.19). Here, as in 2Cor.5:19, the purpose for God's fullness to dwell in Christ is to establish reconciliation, as confirmed by the next verse: "through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col.1:20, NIV). Here we see the term "through him" that we saw in verse 16.

The multiple interconnections involving "in him" and "through him" in Colossians 1:15-19 make this a closely knit and strongly coherent passage which reveals Christ's exalted role in God's eternal plan for His creation. It is *in Christ* that we see God's purpose in creating all things, and *through Christ* that God's eternal purposes will be accomplished. All this is *for Christ*, as tersely summed up in, "Christ is all and in all" (Col.3:11). And just as all things are created for Christ (Col.1:16), so all things belong to us in Christ (1Cor.3:22; cf. 2Cor.4:15).

But trinitarians are so keen to make Christ the creator of all things that they make Col.1:16 say that all things were created *by Christ, through Christ, and for Christ!* In that case, there would be nothing left for the other two persons of the Trinity to do in the work of creation! For trinitarians, Christ is for all intents and purposes the only God who really matters.

It is difficult, even impossible, to make sense of the trinitarian rendering of verses 15 and 16: Christ is "the firstborn of all creation, for by him all things were created". How is the creator of all things also the firstborn of his own creation?

The trinitarian quandary stands in contrast to the elegant coherence of Romans 11:36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." The pronoun "him" refers not to Jesus but to Yahweh, who is mentioned two verses earlier (v.34) in a quotation of the Old Testament. A comparison of Rom.11:36 and Col.1:16 shows

that they cannot both be right if we translate the latter in the trinitarian way ("by him all things were created"). The trinitarian reading would give one of two possibilities: either that two Creators created everything (which is biblically impossible) or that Jesus is the only creator to the exclusion of Yahweh (a blasphemous conclusion). Anyone who thinks that trinitarianism is just a matter of doctrinal preferences would be wise to think on the eternal consequences of this system of belief.

The rendering of Colossians 1:16 in the Complete Jewish Bible, a messianic Jewish translation, makes more sense than the trinitarian one: "because in connection with him were created all things—in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, lordships, rulers or authorities—they have all been created through him and for him."

In fact it is against trinitarian belief to say that all things were created "through him and for him," for trinitarians insist that Jesus is the creator of all things. That is why they change "in him" to "by him" in Colossians 1:16.

All this shows how dangerous it is to read the Scriptures through the lens of our dogma. But the guilt of the Bible translators is greater because the average reader of the Bible is unable to analyze the original languages and is dependent on the translations. For this reason the translators will bear the guilt for misleading the readers.

As if this were not enough, these translations go on to say that Jesus not only created all things and did so by himself,

but that he did it all *for himself*. How do we reconcile this self-centered Jesus with the self-giving Jesus whom we see in the Scriptures? In the end, everything is motivated by Jesus' desire to do all things for himself! What the translations have done is to change something beautiful into something repulsive!

But the Bible has a different picture. Right from the beginning, Yahweh's eternal plan to bring creation into being was carried out in connection to Christ ("in Christ"), but also "through Christ": through his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his exaltation. Something wonderful is revealed here, namely, that God created all things with Christ in view—"for him". Christ is the goal of—and the reason for—Yahweh's creation! This is the astonishing message that trinitarianism has lost sight of.

The plan of creation originated with Yahweh, and is carried forward by His wisdom and power, so that all the glory will be given to Him when the magnificent fulfillment of His plans is seen by all. Hence the doxology in Romans 11:36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

God's work in Christ has another aspect: God's people established in Christ by God's work. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10, ESV) This truth is well expressed by Lars Hartman:

"Christ" also denotes a divine sphere, or a divine realm of power, which God has established through him and his work … The same Christ is also the origin of a new humanity, in which religious, social and other barriers are eliminated: "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (1Cor 12.13; Gal 3.28). (*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus: Baptism in the Early Church*, p.80)

The next few pages are important, but readers who find them too detailed may skip them on a first reading, and proceed to the section "Colossians 1:17 — He is before all things".

"In the Lord Jesus"

We now consider a few more prepositional constructions in Paul's writings. We have looked at *en Christō* (in Christ) and its semantic equivalent *en autō* (in him) when it refers to Christ. In both cases, "Christ" and "him" are in the dative, since the preposition *en* takes the dative.

The construction "in the Lord" (*en kuriō*) occurs 48 times in the New Testament (e.g. "in the Lord Jesus," Rom.14:14; 1Th.4:1; 2Th.3:12). All are found in Paul with the exception of Rev.14:13 ("blessed are the dead who die in the Lord") where it carries the same meaning as in Paul; this leaves 47 instances in Paul. It conforms to the *en*+dative construction, giving us so far a total of 140 occurrences in Paul of this type of construction which refer to Christ (140 = 47 + the 93 instances mentioned so far).

"In God"

For completeness we mention "in God" which in the Greek is either *en theō* (Rom.2:17) or *en tō theō* (Rom.5:11); again, both conform to the *en*+dative construction. "In God" is seen in 1Thess.1:1 (repeated in 2Thess.1:1): "Paul, Silvanus, and

Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Here "God" and "Lord Jesus Christ" are in the dative because they share the same preposition "en". The Thessalonians are in God and in Christ in some interrelated way. To be in God is to be in Christ, and to be in Christ is to be in God. This is powerfully expressed in the following Pauline concepts: "God in Christ" (2Cor.5:19; Rom.6:11; 8:39; Eph.4:32; Phil.3:14); "Christ in God" (Col. 3:3); "of God and of Christ" (2Tim.4:1; Eph.5:5); cf. Jn.17:21.

"Through Christ"

Another prepositional construction is "through Christ" (*dia Christou*) and the related "through him" (*di' autou*) when it refers to Christ. Here "Christ" and "him" are both in the genitive, giving us the *dia*+genitive construction.

"Through Christ" brings out Christ as an instrument in God's eternal plans, notably in the new creation and the work of salvation. Checking the many verses where this term is used, it is clear that Christ is the one through whom and in whom God accomplishes man's salvation.

To our surprise, in no instance does "through Christ" or "through him" refer to the Genesis creation; all instances refer, directly or indirectly, to the new creation which God brought into being through Christ. The following list includes all the NT instances of "through Christ" (*dia Christou*) and "through him" (*di' autou*, referring to Christ), plus a few

related *dia*+genitive forms such as "through our Lord Jesus Christ" or "through a man". All are from ESV except where indicated otherwise:

John 1:17	grace and truth came through Jesus Christ
John 3:17	that the world might be saved through him
Acts 13:38	through this man the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed
Rom.1:5	through whom we have received grace and apostleship
Rom.1:8	I thank my God through Jesus Christ
Rom.2:16	God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ (NIV)
Rom.5:1	we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ
Rom.5:9	saved from God's wrath through him (NIV)
Rom.5:11	We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ
Rom.5:17	reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ
Rom.7:25	Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ
1Cor.8:6	one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist
1Cor.15:21	resurrection of the dead comes also through a man (NIV)
1Cor.15:57	victory through our Lord Jesus Christ
2Cor.1:5	through Christ we share abundantly

2Cor.1:20	it is through him that we utter our Amen
2Cor.5:18	God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself
Eph.2:18	through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father
Col.1:16	all things were created through him and for him
Col.1:20	through him (Jesus) to reconcile to himself (God) all things
Col.3:17	giving thanks to God the Father through him

"Through him" is also used of God:

Rom.11:36	from him and through him and to him are all things
1Cor.1:9	God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ
Gal.4:7	if a son, then an heir through God
Heb.2:10	through whom everything exists

In fact, all the prepositions used of Jesus are also used of God (e.g. "through" is used of both Jesus and God the Father in Gal.1:1). But the reverse is not necessarily true, that is, not all the prepositions used of God are used of Jesus, notably *ek* (*from, out of*) which is used of God ("from God" or "out of God") but never of Jesus in relation to the creation of all things (*ta panta*). Here are some examples of *ek*, all referring to God (all from ESV):

Rom.11:36	from him (out of him) and through him and to him are all things
1Cor.8:6	from whom are all things (cf. 1:30)
1Cor.11:12	all things are from God
2Cor.5:18	all this is from God

Though God does all things and creates all things without depending on anyone, He still chooses to do these things "through Christ," notably in the work of salvation ("the Father who dwells in me does his works," Jn.14:10). But ultimately all things proceed from Yahweh God: "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph.4:6), confirming again the solid biblical teaching that God the Father (Yahweh) alone created all things (Isa.44:24).

Thayer's lexicon, on *dia*, says that God is the first cause:

> Where it is evident from the religious conceptions of the Bible that God is the author or first cause: Jn.11:4; Acts 5:12; Eph.3:10; 4:16; Col.2:19; 2Tim.1:6; Heb.10:10; 2Pet.3:6.

To this list one might add Heb.3:4 ("the builder of all things is God") and Eph.3:9 ("God who created all things").

"All things" (*ta panta*)

In our survey so far, we have encountered a few verses that speak of "all things" (*ta panta*) either in relation to God (e.g. all things were created by God) or in relation to Christ (e.g.

all things exist for Christ). Here are some important instances of *ta panta* (all from ESV unless noted otherwise):

Col.1:16	For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. (NIV 2011)
Rom.11:36	For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.
1Cor.8:6	yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.
1Cor.11:12	And all things are from God (the phrase *ek tou theou*, "from God," occurs 5 times in Paul)
Eph.3:9	to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things
1Tim.6:13	I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus
Heb.2:10	For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.
Heb.3:4	For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

In these verses, it is God rather than Christ who is the creator of all things. The phrase *ta panta* ("all things") occurs 35 times in the NT, mostly in Paul (30 times). The phrase *ta de panta* ("but all things") occurs 4 times. The form *pantōn* (all things) is used frequently by Paul (e.g. Col.1:17).

"For Christ" and "into Christ"

Thayer's Greek-English lexicon defines *eis* (into) as follows: "εἰς, a preposition governing the accusative, and denoting entrance into, or direction and limit: *into, to, toward, for, among.*"

Two *eis*+accusative constructions are relevant to our discussion. The first is *eis Christon* (into Christ or for Christ) which occurs 12 times in the New Testament, mostly in Paul (10 times). It is used in a variety of contexts but the meaning of *eis* remains the same, pointing to Christ as the goal, object, or purpose. Here are a few examples (from ESV) of *eis*+accusative referring to Jesus Christ as the object of faith:

Acts 24:24	heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus
Gal.2:16	through faith in Jesus Christ
John 12:11	many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus

A related construction is *eis auton* (into him) which occurs 38 times, usually referring to Jesus as the object of something, e.g., the object of insult during his trial (Mt.27:30) or the one on whom (or into whom) Yahweh's Spirit descends (Mk.1:10). It is used 16 times in John's writings of Jesus as the object of faith. It occurs 8 times in Paul (4 times of Christ, 3 times of God), sometimes with the meaning "for Christ" as in Colossians 1:16 ("all things were created through him and for him").

Here "for him" indicates that Christ is the goal of, and the reason for, Yahweh's creation of all things. This is a most significant revelation in Scripture, yet is made unremarkable in trinitarianism because it would mean that "God the Father" (the first person) created the universe for "God the Son" (the second person), being nothing more than a case of God creating something for God.

But in biblical monotheism, Yahweh created all things for a man—the true man Christ Jesus—and then for believers in Christ. This is an astonishing revelation of God's love for man. Hence Scripture admonishes all believers "to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1Tim.6:17). Paul does not envisage the Christian life as one of constant deprivation and hardship though these may come to us as a result of hostility and persecution as has happened so often in the history of the church.

God's creation is for Christ, with Christ as the goal, the purpose, and the destination of the new creation. Christ, as

the conclusion of God's creation, is the "first and the last" (Rev.1:17), a title that is also applied to Yahweh (Isa.41:4; 44:6; 48:12). Ultimately it is Yahweh who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Rev.21:6). But Christ who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col.1:15) is also "the first and the last" (Rev.1:17; 2:8) as well as the "author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb.12:2). [80]

Colossians 1:17 — He is before all things

We now proceed to Colossians 1:17 which says of Christ: "And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together". Trinitarians take "before" as a time reference, and "all things" as the Genesis or physical creation, thereby arguing for Christ's preexistence. But what Paul has in view is not the physical or material creation but the new creation; hence he speaks of spiritual powers represented by "thrones or dominions or principalities or powers" (v.16), both visible and invisible.

In Greek as in English, "before" (*pro*) can mean priority in spatial location, priority in time, or priority in rank (BDAG, *pro*). In Colossians 1:17, "before all things" translates *pro pantōn*. Although BDAG puts this verse under its second definition of *pro* ("*earlier than, before*"), it could just as well

[80] Later we will see that the truly eternal title "who is and who was and who is to come" in Rev.1:8 and other verses is ascribed to God, not to Jesus.

be translated "above all things" (priority in rank) which would be under BDAG's third heading ("marker of precedence in importance or rank"). In fact, under this third heading, BDAG cites James 5:12 and 1Peter 4:8, both in which *pro pantōn* occurs *exactly* as in Colossians 1:17.

If we take "he is before all things" as priority in time (the trinitarian view), it would refer to preexistence. But if it is understood in terms of rank and precedence ("he is above all things"), it would refer to Christ's exaltation. It is the latter and not the former that harmonizes with the whole context of Col.1:17, which is about his glorification. Hence it is clear that *pro pantōn* is to be understood as speaking of Christ's preeminence over all creation. This is confirmed in the next verse, "that in everything he might be preeminent" (v.18). Hence context alone rules out one interpretation (priority in time) in favor of the other (preeminence over all things).

In English but not in Greek, "before" is usually taken as a time reference, and this is evidently how the translators intend the reader to understand it. But a look at Greek-English lexicons shows that priority in time is not the first meaning of *pro* in Greek. BDAG's first definition of *pro* is, "marker of a position in front of an object, *before, in front of, at*". It is position, not time, that comes first to the Greek mind when he sees the word *pro*. The same priority is seen also in Thayer's Greek-English lexicon under *pro*, whose first definition has to do with space, not with time.

In addition to these two possible meanings of *pro* in Col.1:17 (*pro* as a time reference versus *pro* as rank and preeminence), there is a third meaning that expresses how God's plan which is unfolding in the present age had been in His view before the creation of the world. Even before Jesus was born into the world—and all the more before he was exalted to God's right hand and to preeminence above all creation—he had already existed in God's mind: "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake" (1Pet.1:20, NIV).

Yahweh in His foreknowledge extended that act of election to believers—to those in Christ—before the creation of the world: "Thus he chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy and faultless before him in love" (Eph.1:4, NJB). Christ had to be chosen first before God could choose us "in Christ."

This third meaning of *pro* is independent of the first two, or it could incorporate the two meanings to express what is in God's supernal mind. Whereas *secular* Greek-English lexicons might not be expected to have this third definition of *pro*, lexicons of New Testament Greek could reasonably be expected to provide a biblical definition for *pro* in relation to God, and, in this case, to God's choosing of Christ before the creation of the world.

In him all things hold together

The second half of Col.1:17 says, "in him all things hold together" (this time most Bibles have "in him" rather than "by him"). "Hold together" translates one Greek word, *sunistēmi*, which basically means staying together or being closely united. This echoes Eph.1:10 which says that God has a "plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth". The words "heaven" and "earth" indicate that God has in view nothing less than the *cosmic* scope of His redemptive work in Christ. The same cosmic outlook is mentioned again two verses after Col.1:17:

> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him (Christ) to reconcile to himself (God) all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col.1:19-20, ESV)

Sin is discord, disharmony and hostility, whereas peace is the removal of hostility and the establishing of unity between mutually hostile parties, creating one new, coherent, and harmonious entity. That even the things in heaven are reconciled "by the blood of his cross" (v.19) is a striking revelation. It tells us that sin and discord extend to heaven itself (cf. "war in heaven," Rev.12:7) and that the magnitude of what was achieved at the cross through Jesus' blood amounts to so great a spiritual power as to reconcile even spiritual beings with Yahweh. This is an extraordinary revelation.

Colossians 1:15 and 1:18: Firstborn of all creation, and firstborn from the dead

In Colossian 1:15-19, "firstborn" (*prōtotokos*) is twice used of Jesus:

> **1:15** He is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn** of all creation.
>
> **1:18** And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the **firstborn** from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent (or "hold the first place").

American Heritage Dictionary defines "firstborn" as: "adj. First in order of birth; born first. n. The child in a family who is born first." In the LXX and the NT, "firstborn" (*prōtotokos*) often means the one who is born first in a family:

> **Genesis 35:23** The sons of Leah: Reuben the **firstborn** of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. (NIV)
>
> **Luke 2:7** And she gave birth to her **firstborn** son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger (ESV)

The same word *prōtotokos* is used of Christ in Romans 8:29:

> For those whom he (i.e. God) foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the **firstborn** among many brothers. (Romans, 8:29 ESV)

Concerning this verse, BDAG under *prōtotokos* says,

> … of Christ, as the first firstborn of a new humanity which is to be glorified, as its exalted Lord is glorified *prōtotokos en pollois adelphois* Ro 8:29. Also simply *prōtotokos* Hb 1:6 (Greek transliterated)

BDAG is to be commended for being among the few works to recognize that Christ is "the firstborn of a new humanity". Many other lexicons (such as Thayer, *prōtotokos* 2b) simply assume that the word "creation" in "firstborn of all creation" refers to the material Genesis creation. The possibility of the new creation doesn't seem to cross their minds even though it is seen in other verses in which "firstborn" appears, e.g. "that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). In the NT, "brothers" is a common term for believers, and it is said of them that Jesus "is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Heb.2:11). That "brothers" refers to the new creation and not the Genesis creation is seen in the fact that not all the people of the world are the brothers of Jesus, but only those who are born again or from above. This is brought out picturesquely in Heb.12:23: "the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven".

Trinitarians deny that Jesus is the firstborn in the sense of being the first to be born among many brothers who are also born (Rom.8:29), and they do this by separating the *honor* given to the firstborn from *the fact* of being born first. In other words, Jesus is accorded the honor given to the first-

born, but it is denied that he is the first in a succession of many brothers to be born. This is the kind of thing that trinitarians do when they want to deny that Jesus is part of God's creation as the firstborn of that creation, yet insist that Jesus is firstborn *only* in the sense of the honor bestowed on him. That is because trinitarianism maintains that Jesus is not part of the creation but is preexistent to it.

If the only aspect of "firstborn" that Paul wants to apply to Christ is preeminent honor, why wouldn't he simply use the word "honor" or one of its synonyms that would be less problematic to trinitarians? But as soon as Paul uses the word "firstborn," it cannot be denied that it *could* mean that Christ is the first in a series of those who are born or created. The fact that Jesus is the "firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29) draws the unwelcome connection (unwelcome, that is, to trinitarians) between the birth of Jesus and the birth of his brothers.

It is gratuitous to alter "firstborn of all creation" to "firstborn *before* all creation" since there is no biblical basis for inserting the word "before" (or "prior to," Thayer *ibid*., p.555, *prōtotokos*) into the text. A glaring distortion of Colossians 1:15 is seen in *Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words* ("First-Begotten, Firstborn"): "the clause means both that He was the 'Firstborn' before all creation and that He Himself produced creation."

The fact remains that in Col.1:15, Paul does not say "firstborn *before* all creation" but simply "firstborn of all creation".

The trinitarian reading "firstborn *before* all creation" has the grave effect of separating the word "firstborn" from "all creation" which were originally joined by the genitive "of" ("firstborn *of* all creation"). Even a partitive genitive [81] offers no basis for changing "of" into "before". If Paul had intended to say "*before* creation," he could have done so in Greek without the help of trinitarians! Yet this way of distorting Scripture is common practice in trinitarianism. In this instance, the aim is to avoid the conclusion that Christ is a part of "all creation," that is, to deny that he was created by Yahweh.

When believers are one day *perfectly* conformed to Christ the firstborn (Rom.8:29), will they not also bear Christ's image in the way that Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Col.1:15)? Thus everyone in the "assembly of the firstborn" will bear the image of the firstborn (1Cor.15:49).

That is why Paul says, "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21), and "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal.2:20). Though Paul is not perfect in the absolute sense, he is still able to tell the Galatians that they have received him as Christ himself (Gal.4:14). If Paul at this imperfect stage already bears Christ's image and manifests his

[81] A partitive genitive is a genitive in which "the substantive in the genitive denotes the *whole of which* the head noun is a part" (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p.84). This can be explained with the construct "A of B". In a partitive genitive, A is a part of B the whole. This "part of whole" construct is seen in "half of my possessions" (Lk.19:8) and "the poor of the saints" (Rom.15:26).

fragrance (2Cor.2:14,16), how much more will he in "the age to come" (Eph.1:21; Heb.6:5)! Every believer will ultimately bear Yahweh's image through Christ, and radiate God's glory in the world.

Jesus is "the beginning of God's creation" (Rev.3:14), a statement that aligns with Colossians 1:18, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent". Thayer's lexicon (*archē*, 2) defines "beginning" in Col.1:18 as "the person or thing that commences, the first person or thing in a series, the leader".

The three key words we have brought up (*archē* beginning, *aparchē* firstfruits, *prōtotokos* firstborn) point to Jesus Christ as the "second man" and the "last Adam" (1Cor. 15:47, 45), and the head of God's new creation (Col.1:18). Jesus is the final and greatest and ultimate Man in Yahweh's eternal plan for mankind. Colossians 1:18 combines in one statement the declaration that Jesus is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, and the head of the new creation: "And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent." There is nothing here that can be used in support of trinitarianism. In fact ISBE explains Jesus Christ as the "firstborn" without referring to any trinitarian concept:

> In three passages (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15; Heb 1:6), Jesus Christ is the firstborn—among many brethren (Rom 8:29); of every creature (Col 1:16). This application of the term to Jesus Christ may be traced back to Ps 89:27 where the Davidic

> ruler, or perhaps the nation, is alluded to as the firstborn of Yahweh. (ISBE, *Firstborn*)

That the New Testament speaks of Jesus as the firstborn—the eldest son in a family—was a problem to me when I was a trinitarian, for no one can be the eldest without being part of a family. Yet the plain fact is that Rom.8:29 speaks of Jesus as "the firstborn among many brothers".

Jesus is also "the firstborn from the dead" (Col.1:18), the first to be raised from the dead by God: "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1Cor.15:20 NIV, cf. v.23, "Christ, the first-fruits"). Only if Christ had truly died could he be the "firstfruits" or the "firstborn from the dead" (also Rev.1:5).

As trinitarians we found Colossians 1:15 problematic: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." How can Jesus be the firstborn of all creation unless he is part of the creation? To our trinitarian minds, Jesus cannot be part of the creation. We insisted that Jesus, being God, was not part of "all creation" but was uncreated and preexistent to it.

One trinitarian makes the rather astonishing statement that "the context (of Col.1:15) does not admit the idea that He is a part of the created universe" (T. Rees, ISBE, "First-Begotten"). The writer is saying that Paul's statement on the "firstborn of all creation" in v.15 is dissonant with its context, as though Paul is in conflict with himself!

Colossians 1:15 most definitely says that Christ is part of the created universe. Christ is the firstborn and the most highly exalted of all creation (cf. Psalm 89:27, "I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth"; also Rev.1:5). In any case, how can Jesus not be part of the created universe when Scripture says that he was the "firstborn son" of Mary (Luke 2:7)? He was born into the world as all human beings are; and having been born into the world, he is, like all men, part of "all creation".

Conforming to the image of Jesus the firstborn

We note three things about "firstborn" as applied to Jesus. First, "firstborn" has to do with a son. Second, it implies there are others born after him, with Jesus being the "firstborn among many brothers" (Rom.8:29). Third, Jesus is the first of many brothers not just in priority but also in that he is the *image* that those after him will bear. The same verse, Rom. 8:29, says that these will "be conformed to the image of his Son". [82]

In the new creation, Jesus is the firstborn on whom the Father bestows the highest honor. God's plan includes bringing into being "the children of God" through regeneration.

[82] J.D.G. Dunn says: "The Jesus who is Lord and the image of God is also the last Adam and pattern to whom believers are being conformed, the eldest brother in the family of the new creation." (*Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, p.148)

One could say that the new creation is "materialized" in the children of God through Christ and in Christ. This new community of God's children is what Paul calls "the body of Christ," that is, the church (*ekklēsia*, those called out by God). What is meant in the word "church" is not to be applied indiscriminately to some of the churches as they exist in the world today, most of which worship a different Jesus.

God's eternal plan for Christ encompasses not only the children of God (Mt.25:34; Eph.1:4; Rev.13:8), the true believers, but the whole universe. This is the cosmic aspect of Christ in God's eternal plan which is given only brief mention in the New Testament.

Colossians 1:19: All the fullness of God dwells in Jesus

Colossians 1:19 says of Jesus, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell". This is supplemented by another verse in Colossians which speaks of God's bodily presence in Christ: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col.2:9, NIV).

BDAG, *theotēs*, referring to the latter verse, says that "the deity" is "the state of being god, *divine character/nature, deity, divinity*, used as abstract noun for *theos* (God)".[83] Hence "all the fullness" of God means that every aspect of the

[83] By "abstract noun," BDAG means that "the deity" refers to God Himself, but using indirect or abstract or qualitative or conceptual terminology.

person of Yahweh (cf. "abstract noun," BDAG) and not just some aspect of His being (such as His Spirit, His power, His wisdom, His word, etc.), but His whole Being or Person, lives bodily in Jesus.[84] All the fullness of God—all the fullness of the Deity—dwells in Christ bodily.

It will come as a surprise to trinitarians that God's people are also filled with God's entire fullness: "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph.3:19). The "you" is plural (because "filled" is plural in the Greek), expressing the corporate nature of God's people who, as God's temple and God's dwelling place, are filled with all His fullness:

> In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph. 2:21-22, NET)

Just as Yahweh, the only true God, does not fit into the Trinity, so Paul's statements in Col.1:19 and 2:9 about God's fullness dwelling in Christ make no sense in trinitarianism. For if Christ were God, then these two statements ("in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" and "in Christ the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily") would mean that "God the Son" is filled with all three persons: God the Father,

[84] In Col.2:9, "lives" is the present active of *katoikeō* ("to inhabit, live"). The word "bodily" translates *sōmatikōs*, defined as "bodily-wise" and "corporeally" and "in concrete actuality" (*Vocabulary of the Greek NT*, Moulton and Milligan).

God the Son, and God the Spirit (for if any is missing, it would not be the fullness of God).

Are we saying that God is filled with God? That God the Son is filled with himself? Or that the human nature of the God-man Jesus is filled with God? The latter proposition is untenable because the human nature is only an aspect of a human being, and does not represent the whole man. What sense does it make to say that "all the fullness of God" fills Jesus' human nature?

But if Paul is saying that it is the *man* Christ Jesus in whom the fullness of deity dwells, then Colossians 1:19 would make perfect sense.

But if Paul is speaking of "God the Son" of trinitarianism, then Colossians 1:19 would be nonsensical because it would be saying that the whole fullness of the Deity (the Trinity) dwells bodily in "God the Son," that is, the fullness of God dwells in God! It is a tautology that makes no sense, for if God's fullness does not dwell in God, how is He God in the first place? Paul's statement makes sense only if there is a person other than God in whom God's fullness dwells. The magnificence of Col.1:19 and 2:9 lies in the fact that His fullness dwells in a *human being*, the man Christ Jesus. This is unique in the history of creation.

The two aorists in Colossians 1:19, *eudokēsen* and *katoikēsai* (in "pleased to dwell") refer to a specific point in time (the aorist is sometimes called "the punctiliar"). If we go along with the trinitarian view, then at what point in time was God

the Son filled with God's fullness, and was he God before this happened? Trinitarians have no satisfactory answer to this question because in their view, Jesus has always been God from eternity past, and therefore has always had the fullness of deity.

But if this verse is applied to the biblical Jesus, a human being, it would make perfect sense to say that at some particular point in time, he was filled with God's fullness, especially in the light of John's Prologue, notably John 1:14.

Since Jesus is filled with God's fullness, we can now better understand John 1:16, "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace," that is, from Yahweh's fullness in Christ we have all received the abundance of saving grace by which we are "born from above" (Jn.3:3,7). The church, the body of Christ, is also filled with God's fullness. In every instance, it is always *man* in whom God's fullness finds expression ("that you may be filled with all the fullness of God," Eph.3:19).

Chapter 5

The Third Pillar of Trinitarianism: Hebrews 1

Hebrews chapter 1 is what I used to call the third pillar of trinitarianism. Woven into the fabric of the chapter is a catena of quotations from the Old Testament which take up more than half the chapter and are called up for the purpose of demonstrating that Jesus is the promised Messianic king of Israel. No Old Testament text ever speaks of the Messiah as divine, nor is this the intention of Hebrews. Here is Hebrews chapter 1 in full:

> **Hebrews 1**: [1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

> After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [4] having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. [5] For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? [6] And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." [7] Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." [8] But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. [9] You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." [10] And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; [11] they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, [12] like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end." [13] And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? [14] Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (ESV)

Hebrews 1:2

To prove the deity of Jesus, trinitarians need to find a verse that speaks of him as the creator of the world. If Jesus is the creator or a co-creator or even an agent of creation, then he is evidently preexistent and divine. The scarcity of such verses in the Bible drives trinitarians towards a search for one. And since such a verse cannot be found, why not just make one up? This statement is not meant as a joke but a point to be taken in all seriousness.

In the last chapter we have seen that "through whom also he created the world" in Hebrews 1:2 can also mean "because of whom also he created the world," a reading that offers no support for Christ's preexistence. We now revisit this verse from a different angle and note the four places in ESV's rendering of this verse that deviate from the Greek text.

We now quote Hebrews 1:2 twice, the first time from ESV and the second time also from ESV but with its four deviations from the Greek text shown in boldface and marked with superscript numbers 1,2,3,4 for reference:

> **Hebrews 1:2** in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
>
> **Hebrews 1:2** in these last days he has spoken to us by **his**[1] Son, whom he appointed **the**[2] heir of all things, through whom also he **created**[3] the **world**[4]. (ESV)

The last few words of this verse, "through whom also he created the world," are precisely the reading desired by trinitarianism because it implies that Jesus played a role in the Genesis creation. Yet alarm bells are set off when New Jerusalem Bible says something different: "through whom he made the ages". Which translation is correct? Here is the verse as it stands in NJB and in the Greek text:

> **Hebrews 1:2 NJB** … in our time, the final days, he (God) has spoken to us in the person of **his**[1] Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the ages.
>
> **Hebrews 1:2 NA28** … ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι᾽ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας [*aiōnas*]

Anyone who can read Greek would immediately know that NJB, not ESV, has the correct translation. In the Greek, the crucial word is the very last one in the verse, namely, *aiōnas*, a plural of *aiōn*.[85] In fact the English word "eon" (an age) comes from Greek *aiōn* via the Latin *aeōn*.

Whereas ESV has made four alterations to Hebrews 1:2, NJB has made only one. We now list out the four ESV alterations marked above by the four superscript numbers; this will be followed by a more detailed discussion of the fourth alteration.

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[85] On the plural of *aiōn* ("the ages"), Thayer's lexicon makes the rather picturesque comment, "the plural denotes the individual ages whose sum is eternity".

Alteration #1: In "his Son" of Hebrews 1:2, the word "his" is not found in the Greek, so why does ESV add it? The inclusion of "his" does not make the statement doctrinally incorrect, but why introduce a word into the text which is not there, thereby limiting the meaning of "son"? The fact is that the Scriptures teach that God is "bringing many sons to glory" (Heb.2:10), not just one son.

Alteration #2: Similarly, the word "the" in "the heir" is not in the Greek, so why does ESV add it? What does "the heir" imply but that Jesus is the only heir? What is the reason for imposing on "heir" a limit that is not found in the Bible? Paul says that believers are also heirs: "if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom.8:17).

Alteration #3: The word "made" (preserved in NJB) has been changed by ESV to "created". The reason for the change is obvious: man can make things but only God can create things. Changing "made" to "created" is a fundamental alteration that implies Jesus is God. The difference in meaning between "make" and "create" is not as pronounced in English as in Greek; but even in English, the statement "I made this bread" (perhaps by baking) would be understood differently from "I created this bread" (which could take one of several possible meanings, including creating bread by a miracle).[86]

[86] The Chinese language also makes a distinction between *make* (做 or 造 or 制造) and *create* (创造).

Alteration #4: This is a huge alteration which is reflected in the contradictory renderings of NJB ("through whom he made the ages") and ESV ("through whom also he created the world"). NJB correctly translates *tous aiōnas* as "the ages" (which is the literal translation [87]) whereas ESV changes it to "the world" to imply that the world was created through Jesus. Interestingly, the exact construction *tous aiōnas* occurs 29 times in the Greek New Testament, yet ESV never translates it as "the world" except here in Hebrews 1:2!

Lexically, *tous aiōnas* in Hebrews 1:2 does not mean "the world" but "the ages". It comes from the plural of *aiōn* which means "age" (hence the plural "ages"). For English-speaking people, this point is easy to grasp because the English word "eon" is derived from this word *aiōn*. That *aiōn* carries the sense of time and ages (as does "eon" in English) is further seen in the fact that *eis ton aiōna* (or *eis tous aiōnas*) is the standard Greek expression for "forever" (it occurs 54 times, e.g. 2 John 1:2).

This fact is acknowledged by Thayer and other Greek-English lexicons, yet Thayer tries hard to find a trinitarian circumvention of this fact, through a supposed metonymy.

The word "metonymy" may seem arcane but its concept is easy to grasp. American Heritage Dictionary says that a metonymy is a figure of speech in which a word is substituted for

[87] The Greek-English interlinear NT by Alfred Marshall gives the literal translation as "the ages" rather than "the world," as also the interlinear by Brown/Comfort.

another with which it is closely associated. AHD gives two examples of metonymy: "Washington" stands for the United States government, and "sword" stands for military power.

Thayer's lexicon (p.19) brings up a non-existent metonymy in order to say that *aiōn* means "the worlds, the universe" by metonymy. This lexicon seems to be the only one in which this contrived metonymy is found. Its definition of *aiōn* is correct up to a certain point (by focusing on "age" rather than "world"), that is, until it brings up the metonymy in the last sentence:

> 1. age, a human lifetime, life itself
>
> 2. an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity
>
> 1a. universally, forever, Jn.6:51,58; 14:16; Heb.5:6; 6:20, etc.
>
> 2. by metonymy of the container for the contained, *hoi aiōnes* denotes *the worlds, the universe*, i.e. the aggregate of things contained in time: Heb.1:2; 11:3

Contrary to what Thayer says in the last statement, *aiōn* is never by metonymy the "container" of the created material universe of Genesis. There is simply no biblical evidence for this alleged metonymy. Not surprisingly, Thayer cites no literary precedent for this unusual meaning. This so-called metonymy was evidently fabricated for trinitarian use. Is this "rightly handling the word of truth" (2Tim.2:15) or is it "distorting the word of God" (2Cor.4:2)?

By contrast, the unabridged 1973 edition of the standard Liddell-Scott-Jones (LSJ) Greek-English lexicon makes no mention of "world" or "universe" in its definition of *aiōn* (contra ESV), much less say that *aiōn* is a container of the world or universe (contra Thayer). The first edition of LSJ was published in 1843, 46 years before the publication of Thayer's lexicon in 1889. So why did Thayer give an unprecedented definition of *aiōn* not found in LSJ—which in his time was an established and authoritative lexicon as it still is to this day—without providing any literary evidence for it?

The following is the definition of *aiōn* (with the Greek transliterated) in the 1996 9th edition of LSJ. It gives no such meaning as "world" or "worlds" (contra ESV), much less any mention of an alleged metonymy.

> *aiōn, ōnos, ho:-a period of existence:*
>
> 1. one's *lifetime, life,*
>
> 2. *an age, generation,*
>
> 3. *a long space of time, an age, ap' aiōnos of old, for ages,* N.T.; *ton di' aiōnos chronon, for ever,*
>
> 4. *a definite space of time, an era, epoch, age, period, ho aiōn houtos* this present *world*, opp. to *ho mellōn*, N.T.:- hence its usage in pl., *eis tous aiōnas for ever.*

A third Greek-English lexicon, BDAG, on *aiōn*, classifies Hebrews 1:2 under heading 3 with the definition, "the world as a spatial concept". But BDAG is not sure of this classification, and admits that "many of these passages (i.e. those just cited by BDAG, including Heb.1:2) may belong under 2". Heading 2 gives the definition, "a segment of time as a particular unit of history, *age*," which agrees with the literal and fundamental meaning of *aiōn*. In any case, the world created in Genesis is not just "a spatial concept" but also a spiritual concept that points to the new creation. The new creation is vital for understanding Hebrews 1:2 and other verses in Hebrews (e.g. Heb.11:3).

In the Bible, *aiōn* never refers to the material creation of Genesis. Hence Hebrews 1:2 does not speak of any involvement on Jesus' part in the Genesis creation of the world. To the contrary, Yahweh's purpose for His creation is that Christ should be heir of all creation, with his brothers becoming joint heirs with him. That is why the same verse, Heb.1:2, speaks of the Son as the one whom God "appointed heir of all things," and then immediately goes on to say that it is through Christ that God established the ages (NJB, "through whom he made the ages"; or ITNT, "around him he also formulated the epochs").

In summary, *aiōn* does not refer to the material world or universe but to the ages or epochs of human history from Genesis to the end of this age. As we have seen, the English *eon* comes from Greek *aiōn* via Latin *aeōn*.

The two principal ages in salvation history

In what way then is Christ central to the ages? What Hebrews is concerned with is "salvation history". In the New Testament and in Judaism, salvation history is divided into two principal ages: "this age" and "the age to come". The two converge on Jesus the Messiah and are mentioned together in Mt.12:32 ("whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come") and Eph. 1:21 (God placed Christ "above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come"). Yahweh has made Christ the center of the epochs, for Yahweh is the eternal King of "the Ages" (1Tim.1:17, which has the same plural *aiōn*), fulfilling His plan of salvation for mankind through Christ.

The present age began with Abraham and continues to the present. The age to come began with Jesus the Messiah and will continue up to the fulfillment of all that God has promised. This means an overlap of the two ages, and they will continue to overlap until Jesus comes again (Acts 1:11; Mark 13:26). The overlap of the ages is what makes it possible for us to experience "the powers of the age to come" right now (Heb.6:5). Although "this present age" can be said to have commenced with Abraham, it is equally valid to say that it commenced with Adam's disobedience. Whichever is the case, this present age will continue "to the end of the age" (Mt.28:20, *tēs sunteleias tou aiōnos*), concluding with the

general resurrection—an awesome display of Yahweh's life-giving power—and with the final judgment.

In this present age, God performs many wonders such as: the revealing of His Name Yahweh; the deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt; the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Sinai; and above all, the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ, followed by his perfection (achieved through suffering), his death, and his resurrection for the salvation of the world.

In the book of Hebrews, the two ages or epochs (this age and the one to come) correspond to the two covenants: the "first covenant" and the "new covenant" (Heb.8:7-8). Hebrews says of the first covenant that "what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (8:13). The new covenant is a "better covenant" (7:22) and spiritual in nature, involving the heart and mind: "I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (8:10; 10:16). Jesus accordingly "has been given a ministry as far superior as is the covenant of which he is the mediator, which is founded on better promises" (Heb.8:6, NJB). Hence the new covenant is said to be the "eternal covenant" (13:20).

"Covenant" (*diathēkē*) is a key word in Hebrews, and occurs far more frequently in Hebrews (14 times) than in any other NT book (the next highest is Galatians, 3 times). The earliest recorded covenant between God and man is the one

God made with Noah, by which He promised never again to afflict the world with a flood (Gen.9:9-17).

Of the early covenants, a significant one was the one that Yahweh made with Abraham when he was still called Abram (Gen.15:18); the covenant defined the boundaries of the land that will be given to Israel. Circumcision was the sign of this covenant (Gen.17:10) as it is to this day among the Jews. This covenant later became the basis of God's covenant with Israel through Moses: "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Ex.2:24; 6:5ff).

The verse we are discussing, Hebrews 1:2, says that Christ was "appointed heir of all things" by God. Here "all things" means much more than the sun and moon and stars, for Christ will reign as Lord over all living things, including and especially men and angels. The term "all things" directs our attention not to the past (the Genesis creation) but to the future (cf. the forward-looking word "heir").

But before an inheritance can be bestowed in the spiritual realm, the reality of sin, which has put men and angels under bondage, must be dealt with. The sins of the present "evil generation" (Mt.12:45; Lk.11:29) must be atoned for—and reconciliation with Yahweh must be achieved—before one could speak of the Son's inheritance. By definition, a son inherits from his father what belongs to the father; hence whatever Christ inherits from the Father must, on account of God's holiness, be pure and holy. Hence the necessity of

atoning for man's sins and his being reconciled with the Father.

God made these ages through Christ and with Christ in view. Like the mighty works, wonders and signs that God did "through" Jesus (Acts 2:22), the ages are God's work through Jesus.[88] The ages are not random or incidental periods of time, for in them God works out His eternal plan of salvation through Christ, just as the signs and wonders which God did through him had the purpose of pointing us to salvation in Christ.

Though man has some degree of freedom to maneuver within segments of time, he cannot control time, and is under time's control. But it is the opposite with God the Almighty, the Eternal, for He "creates" time (cf. "he made the ages," Heb.1:2, NJB) and marks out its ages according to His eternal purposes.[89]

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[88] A connection between Hebrews 1:2 and Acts 2:22 is seen by comparing **δι᾽ οὗ** καὶ **ἐποίησεν** τοὺς αἰῶνας ("through whom he made the ages") in Hebrews 1:2 with δυνάμεσι καὶ τέρασι καὶ σημείοις οἷς **ἐποίησεν δι᾽ αὐτοῦ** ὁ θεὸς ("mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him") in Acts 2:22, noting the correspondence of the words in boldface.

[89] In Heb.1:2 ("through whom he made the ages," NJB), the Greek for "made" is *poieō* (ποιέω). Here it does not mean "created the world" (ESV) but "made (marked out, appointed) the ages". The sense of appointment in the word *poieō* is seen in: Heb.3:2 ("who appointed him"); Acts 2:36 ("God has appointed him both Lord and

The word *aiōn* has to do with time (cf. *eon*). To translate it as "world" or "universe" is misleading because "world" has meanings unrelated to time, as seen in any Greek or English dictionary. Yet some translations render *aiōn* in Heb.1:2 as "world" rather than "age" to say that God created the material world through Jesus, thereby "proving" Jesus' preexistence.

Hebrews 1:3

> **Hebrews 1:3** The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (NIV)

We compare the first part of this verse with two verses from 2 Corinthians 4:

Heb.1:3a	The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being
2Cor.4:6b	the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
2Cor.4:4b	the light of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Christ"); Rev.5:10 ("you have appointed them a kingdom and priests to our God"); Mk.3:14 ("he appointed the twelve"); and so on.

The latter two verses come from the same Bible passage and are separated by only one verse (v.5). When viewed as a unit, the two verses have clear parallels to Hebrews 1:3a. Because Jesus Christ is "the image of God," he is "the radiance of God's glory" that is seen "in the face of Jesus Christ". See the words in color.

But if Jesus is God as he is in trinitarianism, Hebrews 1:3 would make no sense because the glory he reveals would be primarily his own divine glory. But the glory that shines through the biblical Jesus is God's glory.

The Greek word *charaktēr*, translated in Hebrews 1:3 as "representation" (NIV) or "imprint" (ESV), refers to outward, visible form. BDAG defines the word as "an impression that is made, *outward aspect, outward appearance, form*". The word *form* in this definition aligns with the fact that Christ is the "image of God" (2Cor.4:4). Because "representation" and "image" are used of Jesus the perfect man, something significant is revealed: Because of his perfection, Jesus is uniquely the visible image of the invisible God and the exact (perfect) representation of God. The fact that Jesus makes visible the invisible God is the most powerful fulfillment of God's purpose in creating man, namely, to reveal Himself to man and all creation. God's self-revelation is the vital first step in communicating with the sentient beings in His creation.

Referring to Christ, Hebrews 1:3 speaks of "sustaining all things by his powerful word," where "sustaining" translates *pherō*, a verb with various meanings: *lead*, *bring forward*,

bear, endure, *uphold*, *carry* (e.g. it is used of Jesus carrying the cross, Lk.23:26).

In Hebrews, Jesus and Moses are compared but also contrasted (e.g. Heb.3:3, "Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses"). Hence in the Bible, *pherō* is used of both Moses and Jesus: Moses "carried" (led, bore with) the people of Israel,[90] and similarly Jesus "carries" the world by "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb.1:3). In Heb.1:3, *pherō* is a present participle, indicating that Jesus is doing the sustaining now and will continue to do so into the eschatological future. His sustaining of all things does not look back to the distant past or to preexistence or to the material creation, but to the power and authority that come with his exaltation to the highest place at God's right hand (Heb.1:3). This is not just a seat of honor for Jesus to "rest on his laurels," sitting back and relishing the greatness of his achievements. With his exaltation comes the authority to rule as Yahweh's plenipotentiary over His universe, to command "all things" (1:3). Because Jesus has been exalted by God and given a name above every name (Phil.2:9), he is now the "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), having been given authority over everyone and everything in heaven and on earth with the exception of God Himself (1Cor.15:27), at whose right hand Jesus sits. In this

[90] In the LXX, *pherō* is used of Moses as the one who "carried" the people of Israel, e.g. Num.11:14 ("I am unable to carry all this people alone," cf. vv.11,17) and Deut.1:9 ("I am not able to bear you [the Israelites] by myself").

verse, Hebrews 1:3, Yahweh is referred to by the metonym "the Majesty in heaven" (as also in Hebrews 8:1).

Hebrews 1:4-5

> **Hebrews 1:4** … having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The words "having become as much superior to angels" would make no sense if applied to the trinitarian God the Son, for if Jesus is God as he is in trinitarianism, then he would be inherently superior to angels. He cannot "become" superior, that is, elevated to superiority over angels, for that would imply prior inferiority. That the writer to the Hebrews could so easily speak of Christ's "becoming" superior to angels clearly shows that he doesn't think of Christ as God.

> **Hebrews 1:5** For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? (ESV)

The Father-Son relationship was not granted to angels but to the Messianic king ("you are my Son, today I have become your Father," Ps.2:7); to Solomon ("I have chosen him to be my son," 1Chr.28:6); and to those in Christ ("in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God," Gal.3:26). Here are some relevant verses:

> **Psalm 2:7** I will proclaim the decree of Yahweh: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father."
>
> **1 Chronicles 22:10** [Solomon] shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever. (also 17:3 and 28:6)
>
> **Psalm 89:26** [David] shall cry to me, "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation."

Hebrews 1:6

> **Hebrews 1:6** When he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." (ESV)

Hebrews 1:6 is probably a concatenation of two OT verses, Ps.97:7 (Ps.96:7 in LXX) and Dt.32:43, in the form as they appear in the LXX (the Greek OT) rather than the Hebrew Scriptures.[91] The exact nature of the concatenation cannot be established with certainty since Heb.1:6 is a free concatenation of a few words from one of the verses, and a few words from the other.

Yet we cannot fail to notice the similarity in wording between Heb.1:6 and the two OT verses as they stand in the LXX. We now put Hebrews 1:6 together with its probable LXX parallels, Ps.96:7 (Ps.97:7 in most Bibles) and Dt.32:43:

[91] In translating Dt.32:43, some Bibles (ESV, NJB, NRSV) follow the LXX, and some (NASB, HCSB, NIV) follow the Hebrew Bible.

> **Hebrews 1:6** When he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship* him." (ESV)
>
> **Psalm 96:7 LXX** "Do obeisance* to him, all his angels!" (*New English Translation of the Septuagint* [92])
>
> **Deuteronomy 32:43a** "Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down* to him, all gods" (ESV; LXX has "sons of God")

The asterisk * indicates that the Greek word so marked, whether in the NT or LXX, is *proskyneō* (which has several meanings, fundamentally "bow down to" or "pay homage to" but sometimes "worship"). The two OT texts from which Hebrews 1:6 is derived—Ps.96:7 (LXX) and Dt.32:43—both refer to Yahweh.[93] Hence *proskyneō*—which in Hebrews 1:6 is rendered "worship" (ESV) or "pay him homage" (NJB, REB) or "reverence" (ITNT)—is in the Old Testament applied to Yahweh, the one and only God.

Why does Hebrews 1:6 say, "Let all God's angels worship him"? If this verse is indeed derived from Ps.97:7 (LXX 96:7) and Dt.32:43—despite some uncertainty about this (*Clarke's Commentary*, Heb.1:6)—it would be a merging of a few

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[92] The *New English Translation of the Septuagint* is a scholarly translation of the major critical edition of the LXX, the Göttingen Septuaginta *editio maior*.

[93] That is because Psalm 97 (Psalm 96 in LXX) refers to Yahweh six times (vv.1,5, 8,9,10,12). As for Dt.32:43, a reference to Yahweh is found a few verses earlier (v.39).

words from one verse and a few from the other. The concatenation may be free yet the overall message is unmistakable: the Messiah is the firstborn, hence God's angels must "worship him" (ESV) or "pay him homage" (NJB, REB) or "revere him" (ITNT) or "adore him" (Douay-Rheims).

Christ has been granted the honor and privileges as the firstborn who is superior to angels. The point about his superiority over angels is brought out in the *immediate* context of Hebrews 1:6 in no less than three statements: Christ is superior to angels (v.4); Christ is the Son of God in a way that angels are not (v.5); Christ sits at God's right hand as angels do not (v.3). Because Hebrews 1:6 comes right after these three verses (3,4,5), it is a continuation of their train of thought, namely, that Christ is superior to the angels. Hence all angels must "worship him" or "pay him homage".

The exaltation of Christ is seen in the gospels and in Paul's letters, and expressed by men and angels. In Matthew 2:11, magi fell before the infant Jesus and "worshipped him" (ESV) or "did him homage" (NJB, REB) or "adored him" (Douay-Rheims). Years later, God exalted him such that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil.2:10). The words "in heaven" are eminently applicable to God's angels and therefore to Hebrews 1:6 ("Let all God's angels worship [or reverence] him"), with the difference being that Philippians is describing a post-resurrection scenario.

In chapter 8 of this book, we will examine the NT data on *proskyneō* and discover that when the word is used of Jesus, it means "to pay homage to" rather than divine worship.

The fact that *proskyneō* means "pay homage to" rather than "worship" when it is used of Jesus (as we will see in chapter 8) also comes out in the context of Hebrews 1:6 which declares two things: (i) Christ is the firstborn; (ii) Christ is superior to God's angels. Concerning (i), nowhere in Scripture is the firstborn ever worshipped as God, as can be verified by combing through the more than one hundred verses in the Old and New Testaments that refer to a firstborn. On the contrary, Jesus the firstborn Son declares that his Father is "the only true God" (Jn.17:3). Using "reverence" rather than "worship" in Hebrews 1:6 would align with this truth and also with the affirmation that Christ is superior to angels. Angels are to pay homage to Christ, the one who is superior to them, and at whose name all must bow their knees (Phil.2:10).

Hebrews 1:8

> **Hebrews 1:8** But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom." (ESV)
>
> **Psalm 45:6** Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness. (ESV)

Hebrews 1:8 is a quotation of Psalm 45:6. It is important to note that Psalm 45 is an enthronement psalm: "I address my verses to the king" (v.1). He has become the king of Israel through an anointing (v.7, "God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness") which reminds us that kings of Israel are anointed. Psalm 45 is announcing the anointing of a human king at his ascension to the throne of Israel. The king is human rather than divine because verse 2 says that he comes from "the sons of men".

On the one hand the king is human, yet on the other he is addressed "O God". This would make sense only if "God" is understood in the same way as in Jesus' statement, "I said you are gods" (Jn.10:34), a quotation of Psalm 82:6 ("you are gods").

Among scholars who have studied Psalm 45:6, it is universally acknowledged that although the king is called "God" or "god" in this verse, he is still human. This is seen in the following trinitarian authorities:

> The writer addressed his human king as "God" (Elohim). He did not mean that the king was God but that he stood in the place of God and represented Him. (*Dr. Constable's Expository Notes*, on Psalm 45:6)
>
> Because the Davidic king is God's vice-regent on earth, the psalmist addresses him as if he were God incarnate. A similar use of hyperbole appears in Isa.9:6, where the ideal Davidic king of the eschaton is given the title "Mighty God". (NET Bible, on Psalm 45:6)
>
> In what sense can the king be called "god"? By virtue of his divine appointment, the king in the ancient Near East stood before his subjects as a representative of the divine realm. (*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*, vol.5, Psalm 45:6)
>
> Although the Israelite king was not regarded as divine (as the kings of Egypt were), it is possible that he could be addressed as "God" either in a form of Oriental hyperbolic language or as a representative of God (cf. Ex.21:6; 22:8,9,28; Ps.82:6). (*Zondervan Bible Commentary*, F.F. Bruce ed., on Psalm 45:6)
>
> The simple and natural sense is that Solomon reigns not tyrannically, as most of the kings do, but by just and equal laws, and that, therefore, his throne shall be established forever. Although he is called God, because God has imprinted some mark of his glory in the person of kings … It is true, indeed, that angels as well as judges are called collectively "Elohim," "gods" (John Calvin's Commentary, on Psalm 45:6)
>
> If, however, the king is addressed as *Elohim*, we should note that he is still reminded that it is "God, your God," who "has

> set you above your companions." The Hebrew term *Elohim* has a wider range of meaning than our terms "God" and "gods." In Ex.21:6 and 22:8-9,28 (possibly 1Sam.2:25), it appears to be applied to human judges (see also Ex.4:16; 7:1). (*Understanding the Bible Commentary*, Psalm 45:6)

Since God is the ultimate king of Israel ("Yahweh, the King of Israel," Isa.44:6; cf. Zeph.3:15), the throne of Israel is God's throne. Every king of Israel who occupied that throne did so as Yahweh's regent and representative.

In any case, what is the point of the trinitarian assertion that Jesus is God on account of Hebrews 1:8 ("Your throne, O God, is forever and ever") since this would make "God" lower than the angels for a while (2:7)? Psalm 45:7 (quoted in Hebrews 1:9) says that God is the God of the anointed king even though the latter is addressed "O God". Hence there is still a distinction of persons between God and the anointed king. If we identify "O God" with a divine Jesus, this would make God the God of God.

The focus in Hebrews 1:8 is not on "O God" but "Your throne is forever and ever". The Son's throne is eternal because it is Yahweh's. The heavens and the earth, though created by Yahweh (Heb.1:10, quoting Psalm 102:25 which refers to Yahweh), will perish (Heb.1:11,12). But it is said of Yahweh, "you remain the same, and your years will have no end" (v.12).

Because of the eternal nature of God and His throne, the Jews in Jesus' day knew that the "Christ will remain forever" (Jn.12:34), a confidence that is strengthened by God's promise to David, "His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me" (Ps.89:36; cf. Isa.9:7; Ezek. 37:24-25; Dan.7:14).

But trinitarians will argue that the writer to the Hebrews knowingly and intentionally took Psalm 45:6 with the explicit words, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever," and applied it to the Son. Several observations can be made in response to this, and these complement each other.

Firstly, the main Bible available to the Greek-speaking Jews in the time of the New Testament was the Septuagint (LXX). Unlike what we can do today, namely, choose a Bible that reads "Your divine throne" (RSV), or another that reads "Your throne is from God" (NJB), or another that reads "Your throne, O God" (NIV), the writer to the Hebrews had no choice but to quote the LXX as it stood, because he would never take the liberty to delete the words "O God" from the version of Scripture (the LXX) that was available to him, even if all he wanted to say was that the throne is eternal. In using a few words of Psalm 45:6, he would quote the whole sentence.

Secondly, the Jews as a whole do not believe that the Messiah is God, and would not think of Psalm 45:6 as evidence for his deity. Picking out this one verse from the Old

Testament as proof that the Messiah is God would be absurd to most religious Jews.

Thirdly, many biblical scholars are aware of an important way of reading Psalm 45:6 that heightens its message for those who are waiting for the coming of the Messiah who will reign over all nations in God's name. In Exodus 4:16, Yahweh told Moses that he will "be as God" to Aaron. Three chapters later, in Exodus 7:1, Yahweh said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh". If God made Moses "as God" to Aaron and "like God" to Pharaoh, how much more will He make Christ "like God" to the world, the visible image of the invisible God (cf. Col.1:15)?

Fourthly, among scholars who have studied Psalm 45:6a ("Your throne, O God, is forever and ever")—whether they are trinitarian (John Calvin) or non-trinitarian (Michael Servetus), whether they are Christian (Craig Broyles) or Jewish (Robert Alter), whether they are Protestant (Peter Craigie) or Catholic (Father Mitchell Dahood)—it is universally acknowledged that although the king in Psalm 45:6 is called "God" or "god," he is not divine but is the human representative of God. I have checked over a dozen authorities, both ancient and modern, and none has expressed any contrary opinion to this.

We can be sure that the writer to the Hebrews, who is thoroughly steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the ways of his forefathers, would be fully aware that in Psalm 45:6, the king who is addressed "O God" is not divine but human (in

fact he would have to be human because he comes from the ranks of "the sons of men," v.2). So if the writer to the Hebrews could apply the same verse, Psalm 45:6, to Jesus purposefully and with a heightened awareness of its Scriptural continuity, would he not also think of Jesus in similar terms, that Jesus is called "O God" not because he is divine but because he is the human representative of God? Why would the writer to the Hebrews understand Hebrews 1:8 in a way that contradicts his understanding of Psalm 45:6? And what about his audience, the recipients of his letter to the Hebrews, who are after all called the Hebrews? Would they not also be aware that in Psalm 45:6, the king who is addressed "O God" is not divine but human?

All in all, Hebrews 1:8 offers no evidence for the deity of Christ. Ironically, Hebrews 1:8 would be of greater help to trinitarians if it were not linked so closely to Psalm 45:6!

It is the exactness of the quotation of Psalm 45:6 in Hebrews 1:8 that causes Christopher M. Tuckett (Lecturer in NT Studies at Oxford) to be cautious about ascribing deity to Jesus from Hebrews 1:8:

> One should, however, perhaps be a little cautious. The quotation of Psalm 45 is an exact repetition of the words of the psalm which are there addressed to the king. There is presumably no idea of ascribing divinity to the Israelite king in such language when used in the Old Testament, and hence one should be wary of assuming that such an idea is present in Hebrews 1. In any case the dominant thought seems to be not

> so much that the Son can be called 'God'; rather it is that the throne of the Son is 'for ever and ever' and that, as he has loved righteousness and hated wickedness, God has anointed him above his fellows. His position is above that of the angels because, due to his ethical stance, he has been appointed *by God* to a position on a 'throne' which will be for ever. (*Christology and the New Testament*, pp.96-97).

Hebrews 1:10

> **Hebrews 1:10** You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands. (ESV)
>
> **Psalm 102:25** Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. (ESV)

Hebrews 1:10 is a quotation of Psalm 102:25. Other verses in the OT that use similar imagery to describe Yahweh's creation of the heavens and the earth are Isa.42:5; 48:13; 51:13; Jer.32:17; Zech.12:1.

The "you" in Psalm 102:25 refers to Yahweh on account of v.22 ("worship Yahweh"); hence it is Yahweh God who is spoken of in Psalm 102:25 as the creator of the heavens and the earth. This identification is seen also in the OT verses just listed and in the book of Hebrews as a whole. For example, Hebrews 2:10 (cf. 3:4; 11:3) says of God: "For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing

many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering". This verse makes a distinction of persons: There is God by whom all things exist, and there is Jesus who was perfected by God. This corresponds with the overall teaching that Yahweh is the only creator.

Irrespective of how we read Hebrews 1:10, it would be erroneous to take it as an exception to, or a contradiction of, the entrenched biblical fact that Yahweh God is the only creator. This indicates that Hebrews 1:10—and more broadly verses 10 to 12—refers to Yahweh rather than Jesus.

Only one verse separates Hebrews 1:10 from 1:8 ("your throne, O God, is forever and ever"). The combination of these two verses shows that Yahweh the Creator has granted the Son and his throne to remain forever. As Yahweh will remain forever ("you are the same, and your years have no end," 1:12), so the throne of Christ will remain forever. In Hebrews 1:10-12, God's immortality is seen in the three phrases shown in italics:

> **Hebrews 1:10-12** You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth *in the beginning*, and the heavens are the work of your hands; *they will perish, but you remain*; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and *your years will have no end*. (ESV)

This passage, a quotation of Psalm 102:25-27, speaks of Yahweh's immortality: His years will have no end, and He remains even if the heavens and the earth perish. But the trinitarian "God the Son" is capable of dying and does not have the immortality mentioned in this passage. Hebrews 1:10-12 cannot be literally true of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn.1:29).

Regarding the use of Psalm 102:25 in Hebrews 1:10, and more generally the use of OT passages in Hebrews, either the writer to the Hebrews is indiscriminately applying to Jesus verses from the OT that refer to Yahweh (despite the Jewish belief that the Messiah, the Son of God, is human and not divine) or there is an important reason for making the connection. What reason can there be but that Jesus is the one who represents Yahweh perfectly and who literally embodies Yahweh such that God lives in him *bodily* ("in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily," Col.2:9)?

The letter to the Hebrews was written by a Jew to fellow Jewish believers. Would anyone doubt that these Jews were committed monotheists? Even Philo, a Hellenized Jew steeped in Greek philosophy, was a committed monotheist. It defies reason to extract proto-trinitarianism from Hebrews 1.

There is no doubt that the writer to the Hebrews, who was steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures, was aware that the OT verses he was quoting referred to Yahweh. Why then would he quote them in relation to the Son?

Did the writer to the Hebrews think that the Son was Yahweh Himself? If he did, then Yahweh would be the "firstborn" who was brought "into the world" by Yahweh (Heb.1:6)! This answer does not work. The problem with our inquiry lies in the way we framed our question, that is, with the assumption that the OT verses quoted in Hebrews are applied to the Son rather than to the coming or the appearing or the manifestation of the Son in the world. The OT verses quoted in Hebrews are applied to the coming of the Son, that is, to his having been "brought into the world" (Heb.1:6). And the coming of the Son into the world also involves the coming of God into the world. Only with this understanding would the catena or chain of OT verses on Yahweh make sense in the book of Hebrews. Then we will see that Hebrews 1 echoes the message proclaimed in John's Prologue that God came into the world and dwelled in Jesus.

From the train of thought presented in Hebrews 1, it is clear that if Jesus is God, then the whole catena of OT quotations would be redundant because they would be making statements that are self-evident. If Jesus is God, it goes without saying that his throne will be "forever and ever" (v.8) and that he is superior to angels. In fact, trinitarianism faces the conundrum that Jesus, who is supposedly God, was made lower than angels (2:9) but then "became" superior to angels (1:4), implying prior inferiority. For similar reasons, it is problematic to say that a divine Jesus has "inherited" a more excellent name than the angels (v.4). Hebrews 1, far from

supporting the trinitarian idea of "God the Son," effectively serves to undermine it.

But if Jesus the Son of God is truly human like the rest of humanity, then all that is written about him in Hebrews 1 would be of the highest significance. It is utterly astonishing that Yahweh would exalt man to such heights of glory. Mortal man is made immortal, and the gift of eternal life is given to all who are in Christ. "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality" (1Cor.15:53). God's people, the saints, will even reign with Christ in glory and power:

> The kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them. (Dan.7:27; cf. Rev.1.6; 5:10)

The great blessings conferred on Jesus the Messiah-King will be shared with his people. Jesus is the head of the body, and the blessings poured on the head are also for the benefit of the body. Such is God's boundless love and generosity bestowed on man in Christ. In fact Hebrews writes more about Jesus' humanity than does any other New Testament letter.

With Jesus' exaltation to the heavenly heights "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named" (Eph.1:21), and with Jesus' place at "the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb.1:3), one

might think that Jesus is now beyond the reach of humankind in their pitiful and needy situations. Yet God and Jesus Christ have put us in their view, extending to us the eternal blessings in Christ, including that of eternal life!

Hebrews 2: A spiritual reflection

Although the third pillar of trinitarianism is Hebrews chapter 1, we will say a few things about chapter 2 by way of spiritual reflection. This chapter, like chapter 1, brings in a catena of Old Testament verses that place strong emphasis on Jesus' humanity:

> **Hebrews 2:6** It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?"

Again we see the important place of man in God's eternal plan and outlook. Hebrews 2:6 is a quotation of several Old Testament verses:

> **Psalm 8:4** …what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
>
> **Psalm 144:3** O Yahweh, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him?
>
> **Job 7:17** What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him?

Hebrews continues:

> **Hebrews 2:7-8** You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet. (ESV)

This is a quotation of Psalm 8:5-6 in which we see something striking when quoted from NASB and NIV (note the italics):

> **NASB** Yet You have made him *a little lower than God*, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.
>
> **NIV** You have made them *a little lower than the angels* and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.

These two renderings are startlingly different in their first sentences: "You have made him a little lower than God" (NASB) versus "You have made them a little lower than the angels" (NIV). The discrepancy arises from the fact that in Psalm 8:5, the Hebrew Bible has *Elohim* (God) whereas the Greek LXX has *angelos* (angel or messenger).

The next two verses in Hebrews repeat the point that Jesus was for a while made lower than the angels:

> **Hebrews 2:8-9** At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death … (ESV)

In all the verses cited, we see not only the focus on man, but also the fact that the writer to the Hebrews takes for granted that Jesus is human ("What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?") with no explanation given or required, and with no hint of any alleged deity or preexistence.

The next verse, Heb.2:10, makes a distinction between the One by whom all things exist (God) and the one who was made perfect through suffering (Jesus). These are two distinct persons, with the former making the latter perfect:

> **Hebrews 2:10** For it was fitting that he (God), for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation (Jesus) perfect through suffering.

The next four verses, Hebrews 2:11-14, have some striking words:

> **2:11** For, indeed, he who makes holy and those made holy are all from one (God). This explains why he is not ashamed to identify with them as brothers. (ITNT)
>
> **2.12** "I shall proclaim your name to my brothers. Within the congregation I shall sing hymns to you." (ITNT)

> **2.13** And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me." (ESV)
>
> **2.14** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things (ESV)

The first of these verses, 2:11, says that the one who makes holy (Jesus) and those who have been made holy (the believers) are all from one God. Jesus, the one who is perfect, is not ashamed to accept as his brothers those who are not perfect at the present time. The word "brothers" appears also in the second of these verses, 2:12, which is a quotation of Psalm 22:22 (21:23 in LXX) which says: "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you".

Since Jesus is true man, he is our brother. But trinitarians say that Jesus is also God, thereby making it possible for God to be our brother. Because this link is theologically problematic (and a uniquely trinitarian dilemma), trinitarians tend to underemphasize the entrenched fact that Jesus is our brother.

In the fourth verse, 2:14, the words "share" and "partook" are translated, respectively, from *koinōneō* and *metechō*, these two words being "practically synonymous" (Moulton & Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek NT*, *koinōneō*). Because Jesus shares our humanity, he shares the "flesh and blood" of "the children" (the believers), indeed the flesh and blood of all humanity.

The third of these verses, 2:13, carries echoes of Psalm 16:1: "Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge". The LXX (15:1) has, "Guard me, O Lord, because in you I hoped" (ANETS). Similar sentiments of taking refuge in God are seen in Psalm 18:2 ("my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge); Psalm 36:7 ("the children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings"); and Psalm 91:2 ("I will say to Yahweh: my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust"). Why would Hebrews refer to these statements in the Psalms but to show that Jesus shared the same kind of trust in God as do "the children" (his disciples, cf. Isaiah 8:18)?

There is also Isaiah 12:2 ("God is my salvation: I will trust and will not be afraid") which carries overtones of the words used for mocking Jesus at his crucifixion: "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him" (Mt.27:43). These were the hostile words of the religious leaders who nonetheless acknowledged Jesus' trust in God. What is striking is their reason for acknowledging his trust in God: "For he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (v.43).

In our trinitarian days, we understood the claim to be the Son of God as a claim to deity. Some have used this unfounded connection to hurl an accusation at Jesus (Jn.10:33-36; 19:7). But surprisingly or perhaps not, the leaders of Israel did not recognize that connection (as we will see in a later chapter), but understood Jesus' claim to be "Son of God" as expressing his trust in God as his Father (Mt.27:43; cf. Heb. 2:13). Their understanding is correct, for Jesus the Son of

God addressed God as “Abba” (Mk.14:36) like a child trusting in his father. Jesus taught his disciples to address God as Father, and to trust Him completely as he did.

Chapter 6

The Fourth Pillar of Trinitarianism: Revelation 1

Revelation chapter 1 is one of the four pillars of trinitarianism that I, in my trinitarian days, pressed into service for proving that Jesus is God, with the other three pillars being John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1. But a careful study of Revelation 1 will show that this chapter does not teach trinitarianism or the deity of Christ. Our discussion will be brief because we will be discussing related topics in the next chapter on the New Testament doxologies. Here is the entire Revelation 1:

> [1] The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, [2] who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. [3] Blessed is the one who reads

aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his

> mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.
>
> [17] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, [18] and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. [19] Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. [20] As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." (ESV)

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him

As trinitarians, we failed to notice or to emphasize sufficiently that the revelation of Jesus Christ did not originate from Jesus himself but in fact came from God, who gave it to Jesus in order that Jesus may show it to his servants (or slaves), notably the apostle John:

> The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. (Revelation 1:1, ESV)

It is striking that the book of Revelation begins with a clear distinction of persons, differentiating Jesus Christ from God in the statement that God had given the revelation to Jesus Christ. In language that offers no support for trinitarianism,

John simply says "God" instead of "God the Father," making Jesus distinct from God and not simply from God the Father, who in any case is the only true God (John 17:3).

The fact that the Revelation did not originate from Jesus Christ but was something given to him by God the Father, is acknowledged by many trinitarians. For example, H.A.W. Meyer says, "The revelation described in this book, Christ received from the Father," and J.P. Lange says, "[the revelation] which God gave unto him—God, i.e. the Father". [94]

Expositor's Bible Commentary, on Rev.1:1, delineates the chain of authorship that started from God: "there are five links in the chain of authorship: God, Christ, his angel, his servant John, and the servants in the churches." Similarly, *IVP New Testament Commentary*, on Rev.1:1, says:

> If Jesus is the immediate source of the revelation, God is its ultimate source. God gave the revelation to Jesus Christ to show it in turn to his servants. The point is much the same as in John's Gospel, where Jesus insists again and again that the words he speaks are not his own words, but the words of "him who sent me" (e.g., Jn 7:16-17,28; 8:28; 12:49-50).

But as trinitarians, we overlooked what was clearly stated in Revelation 1:1, and mistakenly thought that the Revelation originated from Jesus. The fact is that even after his glorifica-

[94] These two statements are quoted from H.A.W. Meyer's *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John* (p.95), and Lange's *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Rev.1:1).

tion, Jesus is not an independent authority from God, for even now he functions in submission to the Father as he previously did on earth.

Who is and who was and who is to come

John's salutation to the seven churches of Asia in verses 4 and 5 is remarkable for its use of terms that in the Bible are unique to the book of Revelation:

> John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth (Rev.1:4-5, ESV)

This greeting may be nothing more than a Johannine expansion of a Pauline greeting that was familiar to the early church: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ".[95] But if we take John's salutation more literally, notably regarding the seven spirits who are before the throne, then it would be a message sent to the seven churches on behalf of three parties: God "who is and who was and who is to come"; the seven spirits [96] who are before God's

[95] Rom.1:7; 1Cor.1:3; 2Cor.1:2; Gal.1:3; Eph.1:2; Phil.1:2; 2Thess. 1:2; Phlm.1:3.

[96] If the seven spirits who are before God's throne (Rev.1:4) are understood literally as actual spirits, they may be "the seven angels

throne; and Jesus Christ. John again makes a distinction of persons, this time differentiating Jesus Christ from the One "who is and who was and who is to come," a divine title that in the Bible is unique to Revelation. The title occurs three times in Revelation, the first time here (1:4) and repeated in 1:8 and 4:8, but also in shorter form in 11:17 and 16:5, for a total five times:

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who stand before God" (8:2), with angels being "ministering spirits" (Heb.1:14). In addition, Rev.3:1 speaks of "the seven spirits of God and the seven stars," where the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches (Rev.1:20), suggesting that "the seven spirits of God" may also be angelic. If this is so, there may be a parallel between the following three sets of seven: the seven spirits before God's throne (Rev.1:4), the seven spirits of God (3:1), and the seven angels who stand before God (8:2), with angels as ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14). Two more verses may be relevant. Rev.4:5 equates "the seven spirits of God" with the seven torches of fire before God's throne, bringing to mind that angels are "a flame of fire" (Heb.1:7). Rev.5:6 speaks of "the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth," reminding us that angels (messengers) are "sent" (Rev.22:6,16).

Most Bibles have "seven spirits" in Rev.1:4. One or two Bibles have "sevenfold Spirit," but this is interpretative. The Greek is *tōn hepta pneumatōn*, literally "the seven spirits" (plural). In the same chapter, in Rev.1:20, John speaks of the seven stars (*tōn hepta asterōn*), not the sevenfold star; he also speaks of the seven churches (*tōn hepta ekklēsiōn*), not the sevenfold church. BDAG takes *hepta* as numeral seven, never sevenfold.

Rev.1:4	Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come…
Rev.1:8	"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."
Rev.4:8	Day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"
Rev.11:17	We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.
Rev.16:5	You are just, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments (referring to God, v.1)

In none of these verses does the title "who is and who was and who is to come" (or a shorter form) refer to Jesus Christ. In each case, it refers to God, the Father of Jesus Christ, as acknowledged by many trinitarians.

Some trinitarians say that the three clauses in "who is and who was and who is to come" refer to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, respectively, but this conclusion is so baseless that it is specifically rejected by many trinitarian references: *Pulpit Commentary* (Rev.1:4) says that "every clause applies to the Father, not one to each Person". Alford's *Greek Testament* (Rev.1:4) says that the "compound appellation" is "to be applied to the Father". *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Rev.1:4) says that the title, "who is and who was and who is

to come," refers specifically to "the Father". It goes on to say that this title expresses Yahweh's timelessness:

> The descriptive name of the Father occurs nowhere else except in Revelation (4:8; cf. 11:17; 16:5). It is generally understood as a paraphrase for the divine name represented throughout the OT by the Hebrew tetragrammaton YHWH ... The complete combination of these three tenses [present, past, future] occurs in a Palestinian Targum on Dt 32:39 … The tenses indicate that the same God is eternally present with his covenant people.

Commentary on the NT Use of the OT, on Rev.1:4, explains that "who is and who was and who is to come" refers to the YHWH of Ex.3:14, by pointing to John's unusual use of Greek grammar. Some readers may wish to skip the following quotation because of its slightly technical nature:

> The description of God as "the one who is and was and is to come" is an interpretation of the name "YHWH," based on reflection on Exod.3:14 together with twofold and threefold temporal descriptions of God in Isaiah (cf. Isa.41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12), which themselves likely are reflections on the divine name in Exod.3:14. The name in Exod.3:14 was also expanded in a threefold manner by later Jewish tradition, most notably Tg. Ps.-J. Deut.32:39, "I am he who is and who was, and I am he who will be." The first element, "the one who is" (*ho ōn*), derives from Exod.3:14 LXX (*egō eimi ho ōn*), and although the preposition *apo* calls for the genitive, John

> keeps *ho ōn* in the nominative in order to highlight it as an allusion to Exodus.

All in all, the exalted title, "who is and who was and who is to come," belongs to Yahweh God, not to Jesus, and expresses God's eternal timelessness (Ex.3:14, "I am who I am"), which is also brought out in Psalm 90:2: "Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God". The picture of Yahweh as the One who extends His reach into the infinite past, through the present, and into the future, is elaborated in verse 8:

> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev.1:8)

Yahweh is the Alpha, the first letter, for all things originate from Him. He is the Omega, the last letter, for all things return to Him in the glorious accomplishment of His purposes.

Jesus the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead

> … Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. (Revelation 1:5)

Here is a beautiful portrait of Jesus Christ, the "faithful witness" to his Father even unto death, just as it is said of him

in Phil.2:8 that he was obedient unto death, even death on the cross. Hence, in Revelation, the first thing that is said of Jesus' earthly life is his absolute faithfulness to Yahweh his Father, both by his life and by his death. Jesus' perfection lies in his perfect faithfulness to his Father in carrying out the work that had been entrusted to him, to witness to the Father. Perfection is not an abstract ideal but something that is displayed in Jesus' matchless life quality.

Because of Jesus' faithfulness unto death, the Father raised him from the dead. Thus he is the firstborn of the dead (v.5) who has the keys of Death and Hades (v.18). As the firstborn, Jesus is the first and the last (v.17), both the beginning and the goal of the new creation which effectively began with his resurrection from the dead.

Although "the first and the last" refers to God in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12, in the New Testament there are several ways of reflecting on this title as given to Jesus, not least from his own life and teaching: "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the last and the servant of all" (Mk.9:35). "The last will be first, and the first will be last" (Mt.20:16).

Jesus is the first and the last as the Good Shepherd. The shepherd is the first for leading the sheep forward, and the last for looking back to see if any is straggling behind, just as a guide would lead a group of climbers up a mountain, yet look back to see if anyone is left behind.

Finally, Jesus is the first for being "the firstborn of the dead" but also the "firstborn of all creation" (Col.1:15), a

reference to the new creation rather than the old (as we saw in chapter 4). In this new creation, Jesus is the author and completer of our faith (Heb.12:2), hence the first and the last.

The third element in Revelation 1:5, coming after "faithful witness" and "firstborn of the dead," is "ruler of kings on earth," an echo of the exaltation of Jesus in Phil.2:9. This third element has not yet come into full force ("we do not yet see everything in subjection to him," Heb.2:8) but will be fully realized at his "coming with the clouds," at which time "every eye will see him" (Rev.1:7).

As ruler of the kings on earth, Jesus has been given the highest position in the human sphere. In an earthly war waged against Jesus who is called the Lamb, he is also called "Lord of lords and King of kings" (Rev.17:14). Unlike others who are called "king of kings" (Artaxerxes in Ezra 7:12, Nebuchadnezzar in Dan.2:37), Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18), though not over God, for Jesus will live in subjection to God for all eternity (1Cor.15:27-28). Jesus also says, "I myself have received authority from my Father" (Rev.2:27), implying that his supreme authority is not an intrinsic authority but something given to him by the Father.

The saints who are being persecuted (Rev.1:7) will look to Jesus' coming with eager expectation. They have much to be grateful for amid their sufferings which are a consequence of their following him on earth, and grateful above all for his

saving love: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever." (vv.5-6)

Priests to his God and Father

The verse just quoted says that Jesus has made us "priests to his God and Father" (v.6)—not priests to Jesus himself. He redeemed us by his blood, not so that we may live for ourselves or even ultimately for him, but that we may serve "his God and Father" as priests. Jesus' selflessness, yet another aspect of his perfection, is seen powerfully in his self-giving love by which "he freed us from our sins by his blood"(v.5).

The fact that Jesus has made us priests to his God and Father offers nothing in support of Jesus' alleged deity, but instead tells us that God is also "his God and Father". Later on, in the space of one verse, Rev.3:12, Jesus speaks of God as "my God" four times:

> The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. (ESV)

In retrospect I wonder how as trinitarians we believed that Revelation chapter 1 offers support for trinitarianism and the deity of Christ. On the contrary, it reveals just the opposite: Revelation 1 proclaims Jesus as man, through whose blood—the essential element of human life—sinners are freed from their sins (v.5). Man has sinned and it is by a man that he is redeemed. Redemption is not carried out by means of a God who cannot die but by means of a man who can die. This was what Yahweh in His perfect wisdom had planned before the ages (2Tim.1:9; 1Cor.2:7; Titus 1:2), having in view a perfect man through whom He will save all who call on His name.

That Jesus has made us priests to his God and Father implies that there is a temple in which to serve God, for where do priests serve if not in a temple? And indeed, on the Lord's day (Rev.1:10), John sees "seven golden lampstands" (v.12) which, in the Bible, always stand in the Holy Place of the temple. In "the midst of the golden lampstands" John sees "one like a son of man" (v.13), a clear reference to Daniel 7:13 ("one like a son of man"). The one standing in the midst of the lampstands is "clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest" (Rev.1:13). This is a picture of the high priestly garments (Ex.28:4; 29:5), but the picture alone is not sufficient to tell if Jesus is wearing high priestly garments. That is because the seven angels in Rev.15:6 are similarly clothed: "out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests."

What is more determinative of the priestly nature of the one "like the son of man" is the fact that he stands in the midst of the golden lampstands. Whereas household lamps are found in ordinary homes (Mt.5:15; Lk.8:16), golden lampstands are hardly household items, much less so when seven of them are standing together. The number seven points to the perfect heavenly temple on which the earthly temple was modeled (Num.8:4; Ex.25:9,37,40; Acts 7:44; Heb. 9:2).

Whereas Rev.11:4 depicts, in a different context, two powerful prophets as "two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth," the seven lampstands in Revelation represent the seven churches of Asia (Rev.1:20). Standing amid the lampstands is "one like a son of man," the church's high priest (Heb.2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:10; 8:1-3; 9:11). "It was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens" (Heb.7:26). Note the many adjectives used of Jesus' perfection: "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners" (ESV) or "holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners" (NIV).

Jesus, the glorious and exalted one

There can be no doubt that this glorious divine-like "son of man" (Rev.1:13) who stands among the lampstands is Jesus himself, for he is the one who also says, "I died, and behold I am alive forevermore" (Rev.1:18); verse 5 speaks of Jesus as "the firstborn of the dead".

Amazingly, the form and appearance of Daniel's "son of man" has, in the Revelation, changed to resemble that of the Ancient of Days in Daniel: "The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow" (Rev.1:14). This is similar to the picture of God in Daniel: "the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool" (Dan.7:9). Jesus the son of man has—after his death, resurrection, and exaltation—become the image of the Ancient of Days! God the Almighty now manifests Himself in the man Jesus, the one who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth! God's glory shines in the face of Jesus Christ (2Cor.4:6). Jesus perfectly fulfills God's original purpose in creating man as "the image of God" (Gen.1:27). Because Jesus is the perfect image of the invisible God (Col.1:15), to see Jesus is to see God. Even his voice which is "like the roar of many waters" (Rev.1:15) is like God's voice (Ezek.43:2). The perfect man is a perfect reflection of God.

"In his right hand he held seven stars" (Rev.1:16) which are "the angels of the seven churches" (v.20). And "from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword" (v.16), an allusion to Isaiah 11:4: "he shall strike the earth with the rod of his

mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked," a reference to the Messiah king of the Davidic line. Indeed, the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb.4:12).

The glorious picture of Jesus in Rev.1:16 ("his face was like the sun shining in full strength") is similar to that of the mighty angel in Rev.10:1, "I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire".

Jesus' glorious appearance brings to mind the transfiguration which took place in his earthly life: "he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light" (Mt.17:2). Likewise, through redemption in Christ, "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt.13:43).

When John saw Jesus in the Revelation, he saw what Paul calls "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor.4:6). Then John fell at Jesus' feet (Rev.1:17) which is similar to what Ezekiel did when he saw Yahweh's glory: "Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh. And when I saw it, I fell on my face" (Ezek.1:28). Similarly, Daniel said, "I saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me … I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground" (Dan.10:8-9; cf. vv.17-19).

Jesus put his right hand on John and said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore" (Rev. 1:17-18).

Likewise Yahweh says, "I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no god" (Isa.44:6; 48:12; cf. 41:4 and 43:10). Jesus now acts on Yahweh's behalf as His only begotten Son and regent over all creation, especially the new creation consisting of true believers, and here specifically the believers of the seven churches of Asia.

The monotheism of the Revelation

In this brief survey of Revelation 1, we have found nothing that supports the deity of Christ. The trinitarian title "God the Son" is found nowhere in it. What we see instead is the glory of the Perfect Man, who is the perfect image of God; he is God's representative who shines forth God's glory with matchless power and splendor.

From the monotheistic character of Revelation, we should learn to be cautious about hastily assuming, as I have done in the past, that what appears to be Old Testament titles of God can simply be assumed to have the same meaning when used of Christ. For example, "I am the first and the last" in Rev.1:17 is also found in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12 (cf. 41:4). Are we to assume without further ado that "first and last" means the same in both cases, such that the one who says, "I am the first and the last" in Rev.1:17 is one and the same as Yahweh God?

In saying "I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no god" (Isa.44:6), Yahweh reveals Himself as the only God, an identification that cannot be applied to Jesus because that would exclude His Father as God (contra John 17:3, which says that the Father is the only true God).

However, the truly divine title that expresses God's eternal timelessness, being rooted in God's self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush, is "who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev.1:4,8; 4:8). This divine title is unique to Revelation and is never applied to Jesus, a fact that is consistent with the uncompromising monotheism of the Revelation.

It is more in line with Scriptural teaching to say that God has conferred on Christ some of His divine titles and attributes. Christ acts as the Father's plenipotentiary such that when he speaks, it is God who speaks through him; when he does something, it is the Almighty who works in him; and when he comes in the name of his Father, the Lord God comes in him (Rev.22:12-13).

The Lamb that was slain

By far the most frequent title of Jesus in Revelation is "the Lamb". It is used of him 28 times in the book of Revelation (= 4 x 7; the spiritually significant numbers 4 and 7 appear throughout Revelation).

In Rev.13:11 there is another "lamb" who makes his appearance in the world as an imitation of God's Lamb with the

purpose of deceiving the world: "Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon." This different lamb, by its appropriation of the title "lamb," is symbolic of a "different Christ" (cf. 2Cor.11:4).

The atoning death of Jesus the Lamb of God is central to the New Testament from start to end, but is given heightened focus in Revelation which, as the last book of the Bible, can be said to be the climax and conclusion of the New Testament. It is the only book that gives a blessing to its readers (Rev.1:3; 22:7). In Revelation, Jesus stands out as the slain Lamb of God.

One third of each of the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke) is focused on Jesus' final days, that is, on his suffering and death. This theme is even more emphatic in John: almost half of his gospel is focused on Jesus' final days, his death, and his resurrection.

Already at Jesus' birth, his death was foreshadowed by the imagery of a sword piercing his mother's heart (Lk.2:35).

The title Lamb of God that is central to Revelation already appears early in John's Gospel (Jn.1:29,36). The theme of the Lamb of God permeates the New Testament. It is the hub from which every other teaching radiates, forming the circle that encompasses NT teaching. Conversely, every teaching in the NT is related to this hub, for inasmuch as it radiates from it, it can be traced back to it.

In 1Cor.5:7 Paul invokes the imagery of the Lamb at the Passover, though he would more often write instead of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection by God's power. Jesus' suffering is given much prominence in Hebrews but also in the apostolic preaching after Pentecost, in the book of Acts.

Without the Lamb of God, there would be no regeneration, no renewal, and no perfection in the believer's life. When we see the deep things of the Lamb of God, we will understand the deep things of the New Testament. The Lamb of God is the fountain from which everything flows. It is the center of the New Testament, the remainder of which constitutes its exposition and application.

The sacrificial lamb must be without spot or blemish (1Pet.1:19). That is why only Jesus the perfect man can be "the savior of the world" (Jn.4:42; 1Jn.4:14). "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Jesus is never worshipped in the Revelation

The Greek word for "worship" is *proskyneō*, which occurs 60 times in the New Testament, with 24 of the occurrences (40%) found in Revelation. That is a high number for one book, yet none of the 24 occurrences of *proskyneō* in Revelation refers to Jesus with one possible exception! The object of worship in the Revelation is Yahweh alone and not Jesus Christ.

This fact may be unsettling to Christians, yet it aligns with the fact that the book of Revelation gives far less prominence to Jesus than to God. The name "Jesus" occurs only 14 times in Revelation, a small number given that "Jesus" occurs about 917 times in the NT (even Philippians, a short letter, has 22 occurrences). The word "Christ" occurs over 500 times in the NT, but only 7 times in Revelation (versus 46 times in Ephesians). Does it not indicate that Jesus Christ is not the central figure in Revelation?

In BDAG and Thayer's Greek-English lexicon, *proskyneō* fundamentally means "bowing the knee" (see chapter 8 for the full details). It can be used in the weak sense (bowing the knee without worship) or in the strong sense (worship). An instance of the weak sense is found in Rev.3:9: "I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you" (NIV). Here the prostration is not an act of worship but of submission before believers.

It will come as a surprise to trinitarians that the book of Revelation never uses *proskyneō* of Jesus, neither in the weak sense nor the strong sense, with the sole and limited exception of Rev.5:14. To demonstrate this, we now do a quick overview of *proskyneō* in Revelation. Along the way we will encounter another word, *piptō* (to fall).

The word *proskyneō* is used twice of John's bowing before the angel who was showing him the heavenly things: "Then I fell down at his feet to worship him" (Rev.19:10); "I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me"

(22:8). John bowed before the angel, but the angel stopped him and said, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." (22:9)

In Rev.1:17, John collapsed at Jesus' feet out of fear but this time the word used is not *proskyneō* but *piptō* (to fall):

> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last." (Rev.1:17, NIV)

A few chapters later, in Rev.5:8, *piptō* is used again in relation to Jesus: "the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb". In all English Bibles, *piptō* is here rendered "fell down" (or similar) rather than "worshiped".

There is only one other similar use of *piptō* in Revelation. In this instance the Lamb is not by himself but is at the right hand of God who is seated on the throne:

> 13 "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" 14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down (*piptō*) and worshiped (*proskyneō*). (Rev.5:13-14, NIV)

The two passages just cited, Rev.5:8 and 5:13-14, are the only ones in Revelation that come close to the worship of Jesus. In 5:8, the heavenly beings fall before Jesus but there is no mention of worship. In 5:14, just quoted, we see the two aforementioned Greek words: *piptō* (translated "fell down") and

proskyneō (translated "worshiped"). Worship is mentioned this time because it is directed mainly to the one "who sits on the throne"—that is, to God.

Here is a crucial observation: In the book of Revelation apart from 5:14, the word *proskyneō* always refers to God and never to Jesus, *without exception*. Hence it is clear that when *proskyneō* is applied to both God and Jesus in the sole verse Rev.5:14, it is God and not Jesus who is the principal reason for the use of *proskyneō*. This is consistent with the fact that in the immediate context of Rev.5:14, the central figure is God seated on His throne.

We are reminded of the way the people of Israel bowed before God and before King David (note the highlighted words):

> **1 Chronicles 29:20** David then addressed the whole assembly: "Now bless Yahweh your God!" And the whole assembly blessed Yahweh, God of their ancestors, bowing down in homage to Yahweh, and to the king. (NJB)

In the Hebrew text, YHWH occurs three times in this verse. In the LXX of this verse, the word translated "bowing down in homage" is *proskyneō*, the very word used in Rev.5:14. The use of *proskyneō* in 1Chr.29:20 is crucial because it tells us that the LXX translators did not hesitate to apply *proskyneō* to David when *proskyneō* is also applied to Yahweh! The parallel between David in 1Chr.29:20 and Jesus in Rev.5:14 is

heightened by the fact that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah from David's line.

We note that in 1Chr.29:20 the main intended recipient of the worship is not David but Yahweh by the fact that David said, "Now bless Yahweh your God." Yet that does not rule out David participating with Yahweh as the recipient of the *proskyneō*.

The combination of *piptō* and *proskyneō* appears also in Rev.7:11, but not in reference to Jesus:

> … They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" (Rev.7:11-12, NIV)

There is mention of God who is seated on His throne but there is no mention of the Lamb. The combination of *piptō* and *proskyneō* is seen also in the following:

> And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign." (Rev.11:16-17, NIV)

The 24 elders give thanks to the One "who is and who was," which, as we have seen, is a title of Yahweh. The elders fall on their faces and worship God, but again there is no mention of the Lamb.

The final verse in Revelation that has both *piptō* and *proskyneō* is 19:4 which does not mention the Lamb at all: "And the 24 elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne."

In my trinitarian days, I saw Jesus as the central object of worship in Revelation. Yet only one verse (Rev.5:14) has any possible support for that, but it is weakened by the fact that the Lamb appears not alone but alongside God who is seated on His throne. The sole instance of the adoration of Jesus *alone* is in Rev.5:8, but it is expressed not by *proskyneō* but by *piptō,* a word that is not translated "worshiped" in English Bibles. In fact, Rev.5:8 is sandwiched in between Revelation chapters 4 and 6, both of which are centered on the worship of Yahweh.

In Revelation, the central object of worship is not the Lamb but the One who is seated on His throne. The Lamb is not the main occupant of that throne for it belongs to God who is mentioned about a dozen times as being seated on it. Jesus has his own throne but it is distinct from God's (Rev. 3:21); we are granted to sit with Jesus on his throne just as Jesus is granted to sit with his Father on his Father's throne.

Monotheism is powerfully entrenched in Revelation. In John's heavenly visions, no one but God is worshipped above all else, and He is the One who sits on the central throne.

Appended Note: The coming again of Yahweh

> **Revelation 22:12-13** [12] Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. [13] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

In this passage, we cannot assume that just because v.12 has the words "I am coming soon" that this passage refers to Jesus. Owing to the trinitarian marginalization of Yahweh in the church, it is not generally known that Yahweh's glory will be revealed at Jesus' return. This is not to deny that Revelation speaks of the return of Jesus (Rev.1:7; 22:20). Yet it is equally important to note that many Bible verses outside Revelation speak of Yahweh's coming in various scenarios: "Yahweh came from Sinai and dawned from Seir" (Dt.33:2); "Our God comes" (Ps.50:3); "Yahweh my God will come" (Zech.14:5); "Yahweh is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt" (Isa.19:1); "the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isa.40:5); "the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones" (Jude 1:14). We see this also in Revelation:

> **Revelation 6:15-17** [the people of the world, great and lowly] hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (ESV)

Here the plural "their" ("their wrath") refers to two persons: Yahweh God seated on His throne and Jesus Christ the Lamb. If Yahweh is not manifested in some visible way (note the word "face"), why would the people of the world try to hide from Him? Yahweh, who is seated on His throne, is mentioned before the Lamb, for the coming involves Yahweh and then also the Lamb.

In Rev.22:7 is the declaration, "Behold, I am coming soon". Against our expectations, the two verses preceding this verse speak of God: "the Lord God" (v.5) and "the God of the spirits of the prophets" (v.6). Verse 3 speaks of "the throne of God and of the Lamb," differentiating God from the Lamb. There is no doubt that Yahweh is the one who is speaking in verse 7 ("Behold, I am coming soon"), and that He will return with the Lamb.

Chapter 7

Doxologies in the New Testament

The Greek word *doxa* (δόξα) means "glory". Doxologies are praises and attributions of glory to God. If the New Testament is really as Christ-centered as trinitarians say it is, why are there so many doxologies directed to God the Father and almost none to Jesus Christ?

But notwithstanding this fact, Jesus has brought so much glory to God that doxologies to God arose spontaneously to proclaim Jesus' wonderful work by the power of Yahweh who indwelled him. This will become clearer when we look at the powerful expressions of praise to God on account of Jesus. Let us begin by looking at the New Testament doxological expressions.

The doxological expression "to Him be glory forever"

The doxological expression "to Him be glory forever" or similar (e.g. Rom.11:36, *autō hē doxa eis tous aiōnas*) occurs 13 times in the New Testament (7 times in Paul's letters) and is always concluded with "Amen" (in the case of Rev.5:13, the "Amen" is uttered by others). Contrary to what we might expect, none of the 13 doxologies is directed to Christ except in Rev.5:13 where the doxology is directed not to him alone but to him and God the Father together (we discussed this special case in the previous chapter). Here are the 13 references:

Rom.11:36 To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Rom.16:27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

Gal.1:5 our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Eph.3:21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Phil.4:20 To our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

1Tim.1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

2Tim.4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Heb.13:21 that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

1Pet.4:11 in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Jude 1:25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty … before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Rev.1:6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Rev.5:13 To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!

Rev.7:12 … honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.

All these doxologies are directed to the Father and none to Christ (with the sole and limited exception of Rev.5:13 in which Christ is the second object of the doxology after God the Father). And where Christ is mentioned, he is spoken of as the one *through whom* (Rom.16:27; 1Pet.4:11; Jude 1:25) or *in whom* (Eph.3:21) God is glorified.

Some commentators see 2Tim.4:18 as referring to Christ, but from the general nature of doxologies in Paul's letters, this is hard to see. Neither Jesus nor Christ is named in chapter 4 except in verse 1, which belongs to a different section of

the letter. Jesus is not explicitly called "Lord" in this section, and "Lord" could just as easily refer to God the Father as it does in 2:19 (twice). Hence no absolute conclusion can be made as to whether 2 Timothy 4:18 refers to Jesus or not; but if it does refer to Jesus, it would be a departure from the other doxologies in Paul's writings.

Additional note: The special case of 2 Peter 3:18

[This note may be skipped on a first reading]

The doxology in 2 Peter 3:18, which is not included in the list above, is addressed to Christ:

> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18, ESV)

This doxology does not stand on the same level as those listed in the previous section, for two reasons. Firstly, it does not have the same wording as the other doxologies. The word "forever" that is used in the other doxologies is here replaced with "both now and to the day of eternity". The unusual phrase "the day of eternity," which commentators find difficult, is found nowhere else in the Bible, neither in the New Testament nor the Old, but is found in the apocryphal book Sirach, in 18:10. Even there it is not an exact match because Sirach has the preposition *en* where 2 Peter 3:18 has *eis*:

> What is man, and of what use is he? What is his good and what is his evil? The number of a man's days is great if he reaches a hundred years. Like a drop of water from the sea and a grain of sand, so are a few years in the day of eternity. (Sirach 18:8-10, RSV)

It is believed that Sirach was written in Hebrew around 180 B.C. and translated into Greek around 55 years later. It belongs to the tradition of the Jewish Wisdom writings.

Secondly, although 2 Peter 3:18 is concluded with "Amen" in most Bibles, the UBS3 Greek text assigns "Amen" the lowest degree of textual certainty {D} and encloses "Amen" in square brackets to indicate that the reading is disputed. In UBS4, "Amen" has been elevated to {C}, but is still enclosed in brackets as also in NA27. Most significantly, "Amen" is removed altogether from the main text of UBS5 and NA28, as also in Westcott-Hort.

Since "Amen" appears in the 13 doxologies listed above except Rev.5:13, the uncertain status of "Amen" in the doxology of 2 Peter 3:18, in combination with other considerations, means that the doxology doesn't stand on the same level as the others.

Extended doxologies in the New Testament

We now briefly survey, with minimal commentary, the major or extended doxologies in the New Testament outside Revelation (those in Revelation will be covered in the next section). The doxologies in this section include about half of those listed in the previous section which are based on the doxological structure "to Him be glory forever". Each doxology in this section will be quoted in full from Scripture and then briefly discussed. The first is:

> **Romans 11:33-36** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (ESV)

This doxology is addressed to God alone. Neither Jesus nor Christ is mentioned by name in the whole chapter, though v.26 ("the Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob," quoting Isaiah 59:20-21) refers to God's salvation *through* Christ.

In the next doxology, God is called "the eternal God" and "the only wise God":

> **Romans 16:26-27** but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (ESV)

Here the words "to the only wise God be glory forevermore" conclude Romans chapter 16 just as the words "to him be glory forever" in the preceding doxology, Romans 11:36, concludes Romans chapter 11. Similar language is used in the short but magnificent doxology of 1 Timothy 1:17:

> **1 Timothy 1:17** To the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

This doxology, located near the beginning of 1 Timothy, is complemented by another near the end of 1 Timothy:

> **1 Timothy 6:15-16** [15]…he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, [16] who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (ESV)

We cannot hastily assume that the latter doxology refers to Christ just because he is mentioned in v.14. A look at the internal content of this doxology reveals that it cannot refer to Christ. First, the term "only Sovereign" can hardly refer to Christ since the earlier doxology, in 1:17, speaks of God as "the only God". Second, the earlier doxology, in 1:17, speaks

of God as "immortal," a statement that is mirrored in "who alone has immortality" in the later doxology. The fact that Christ died means that he is not immortal. But if despite this fact we still insist that Christ is immortal, we would make Paul's statement to say that Christ "alone" has immortality, ruling out God the Father as immortal! Third, the clause "whom no one has ever seen or can see" can hardly apply to Jesus.

This doxology does not conclude with the familiar formula "to whom be glory forever" but with the slightly different "to him be honor and eternal dominion" (v.16).

The next doxology, in Hebrews 13:20-21, is not of the Pauline model but a prayer for blessing. But insofar as it speaks of God as "the God of peace" and the one "who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus," it does have doxological elements.

> **Hebrews 13:20-21** Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (ESV)

Jude 1:24-25 is not a doxology of the Pauline type, but like Heb.13:20-21 it does have doxological content in that it speaks of "His glory" and "the only God, our Savior". The concluding ascription of glory to God, "before all time and

now and forever," corresponds to the truth that God is the one "who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev.1:8).

> **Jude 1:24-25** Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (ESV)

For completeness we list the three instances of the expression of praise, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". The following three verses (from ESV) all begin with the word "blessed" to express praise and adoration.

> **2 Corinthians 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.
>
> **Ephesians 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.
>
> **1 Peter 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

These three belong to three different NT letters, and each appears at the start of its respective letter. Yet they all use the same doxology, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," indicating that it may have been crystalized

into a doxological form widely used in the early church, perhaps at the commencement of house church meetings.

We note a few things: (i) These three NT letters begin by saying that God is "blessed"—i.e., praised, glorified, adored—before going on to other things. Thus Yahweh is the center and focus of the letters. (ii) Christ is not included as the object of the praise; rather, it is in Christ that Yahweh blesses the believer with every spiritual blessing. (iii) Yahweh is, first and foremost, "the God and Father" of our Lord Jesus Christ; and it is in Christ that God also becomes our God and Father. What stands out from these doxologies is that there is only one God, namely, the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

Extended doxologies in Revelation

God who is called "the Lord God Almighty" in Revelation 4:8 is always the focus of worship and adoration in Revelation:

> [8] And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" [9] And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, [10] the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, [11] "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for

> you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:8-11, ESV)

Revelation portrays God as the one who sits on the throne (v.9; also 4:2; 5:1; 6:16; 7:15; 12:5). The 24 elders have their own thrones, and these are placed "before God" (11:16; 4:4).

Jesus also has his own throne: "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev. 3:21). Within one sentence, Jesus speaks of "my throne" and "his throne," making a distinction between two thrones, one belonging to God, the other to Jesus. At his Father's throne, Jesus is granted a place at His right hand, just as the victorious saints will be granted to "sit with me on my throne". Although Jesus is granted to sit with the Father on the Father's throne, Jesus is not mentioned in the doxology of Rev.4:8-11, a remarkable omission given that the doxology gives much prominence to thrones and is replete with emphatic references to God's throne and to the worship of God before His throne.

Revelation 11:17 is another paean of praise to God, yet again there is no mention of Jesus:

> "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign." (Rev.11:17)

In the following doxology of Revelation 14:7, an angel commands those who dwell on earth to "fear God and give Him glory" and to "worship Him":

> And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water." (Rev.14:7, ESV)

In the following doxology of Revelation 15:3-4, those who have overcome the beast join in heaven to worship God by singing the song of Moses and "the song of the Lamb". Just as Moses led the Israelites in the praise and worship of God (Ex.15:1-21) after crossing the Red Sea, so Jesus leads the heavenly multitudes in worshipping God!

> And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Rev.15:3-4, ESV)

The following doxology in Revelation 16:5-7 is offered to God by an angel:

> And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and

> prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!" And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!" (Rev.16:5-7, ESV)

In the following doxology of Revelation 19:1-8, praise and worship is offered to God by a great multitude in heaven. There is no mention of Christ apart from the marriage of the Lamb. No worship is directed to the Lamb, yet the marriage of the Lamb is presented as a cause for glorifying God who is seated on the central throne.

> After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants." Once more they cried out, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and

> pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Revelation 19:1-8, ESV)

Finally, in Revelation 21:23, in the heavenly city, "the glory of God gives it light" (replacing the sun) and the Lamb is its "lamp" (replacing the moon).

Conclusion so far

Our survey of the New Testament doxologies shows that Yahweh God is the sole object of worship. Just as there are no doxologies to Jesus (apart from one or two uncertain verses), so there are no prayers to Jesus in the New Testament, as we shall see. This is a fundamental fact and it shows that there is no basis for the trinitarian deification of Jesus. The few debatable verses that trinitarians use in their support cannot stand by themselves when the whole New Testament context is taken into account.

Trinitarians reject the plain fact that Jesus was neither worshipped in the NT church nor the one whom believers prayed to in their daily lives. On the contrary, Jesus places himself among those who worship God: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (Jn.4:22). As for prayer, Jesus prayed all night to the Father (Lk.6:12). Even after his resurrection and glorification, Jesus continues to intercede for us (Rom.8:34; Heb.7:25; 1Jn.2:1).

Jesus Christ, the one exalted to the zenith of creation, indeed to a position second to that of God Himself, is a real human being like any of us. This is astonishing, even mind-boggling. We now see how much more wonderful is the biblical message about Jesus Christ than the trinitarian one. The same is true of every New Testament passage in which Jesus is eulogized in magnificent terms, though never as God.

In fact some of the adulations of Jesus in the Bible are problematic to trinitarians because they make him less than divine. For example, Christ is honored as "the firstborn of all creation" (Col.1:15), an exalted title that no matter how we interpret it refers to the eldest son. No son is equal to his father in every respect, for a son, by definition, derives his existence from his father in some way, otherwise he would not be called a son except by adoption, an idea that would be reprehensible to trinitarians if applied to Jesus. But if Jesus is a true man as he is in Scripture, then the glorious attribution, "firstborn of all creation," would be an extraordinary proclamation of the highest praise.

Because Jesus is man ("the man Christ Jesus," 1Tim.2:5), the eulogies and adulations ascribed to him in the NT (e.g. his exaltation to God's right hand) gain heightened significance. Once we have been freed from trinitarian blindness, these magnificent praises and glorifications stir us powerfully, for they reveal the heights of Yahweh's love and grace shown to the man Christ Jesus, and through him to those who are in Christ. Whereas in trinitarianism the praises are

no more than Jesus' due as God, in biblical monotheism they are a wondrous display of Yahweh's boundless grace shown to man. Hence all the praises poured forth on Jesus in the NT are "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11; cf. 1Pet.4:11). This is contrary to trinitarian thinking because it deflects the accomplishments from the Son to the Father.

In the New Testament, Jesus is never the object of worship in the way worship is offered to God. We read of people who paid homage to Jesus, usually by kneeling before him. In the ancient Near East, kneeling or bowing was a familiar gesture of respect and courtesy, but was not in itself understood as an act of divine worship. Abraham bowed before the Hittites (Gen.23:12), and David bowed before Saul (1Sam.24:8) despite knowing that God had rejected Saul as king. But some Christians would never kneel to anyone or anything except before crucifixes or sacred statues because of the mistaken notion that kneeling before someone is necessarily an act of divine worship. (The next chapter has a discussion on the meaning of *proskyneō* when the word is applied to Jesus.)

There is no worship of the Holy Spirit in the Bible

The Bible says absolutely nothing about the worship of the Spirit. The total silence will come as a surprise to those who believe that the Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and is to be worshipped as God. That the Bible never speaks of worshipping the Spirit is noted by ISBE, a trinitarian reference:

> Evidence for the divinity of the Spirit is thinner and hazier than symmetrical fifth-century trinitarian statements suggest (cf. Athanasian Creed). The Spirit is called "God" at most once (Acts 5:3). OT passages about Yahweh are not applied to the Spirit. No ontological statements of divinity appear, as they do with regard to Christ. And the Holy Spirit in the NT is never an object of worship or prayer. (ISBE revised, vol.4, "Trinity," "Divinity of the Spirit") [97]

The only verse in the Bible that may give a hint of the worship of the Spirit is John 4:24: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth". But most trinitarians (e.g. John Calvin) do not think that "spirit" in this verse refers to the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is a statement of God's spirit nature; hence most Bibles have the lowercase "spirit" (NASB, ESV, NIV, NJB, HCSB, NET, RSV), though NKJV has "Spirit".

Given the Bible's total silence on worshipping the Holy Spirit, the Nicene Creed is obviously wrong when it says that

[97] By "symmetrical" ISBE is referring to the way the Athanasian Creed uses symmetrical statements to assert the coequality of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, as in the following excerpt: "Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal." ISBE is saying that this formulation goes beyond the biblical witness, for the Bible never teaches the worship of the Spirit.

the Spirit is one "who with the Father and the Son is worshipped together." It also explains why trinitarianism could not be ratified until the late 4th century, at the First Council of Constantinople of 381.

Most Christians don't know that at the earlier and historically more important Council of Nicaea of 325, only the Son but not the Spirit was deified to coequality with the Father. This reflects the church's uncertainty about the deity or even the separate personality of the Holy Spirit. Because of this hesitation, the earlier binitarian creed of 325 is actually a "better" creed (in an ironic sense) than the later trinitarian creed of 381 for having one less error.

J.D.G. Dunn: Did the first Christians worship Jesus?

The question posed in the very title of James D.G. Dunn's book, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence*, is answered by Dunn himself in the book's final chapter under the heading "The Answer". Dunn's answer to his own question is a qualified and nuanced "no". The following are the last two paragraphs of his answer to his own question:

> In the light of such reflection and conclusion the particular question, 'Did the first Christians worship Jesus?', can be seen to be much less relevant, less important and potentially misleading. It can be answered simply, or simplistically, even

dismissively, with a mainly negative answer. No, by and large the first Christians did not worship Jesus as such. Worship language and practice at times do appear in the New Testament in reference to Christ. But on the whole, there is more reserve on the subject. Christ is the subject of praise and hymn-singing, the content of early Christian worship, more than the one to whom the worship and praise is offered. More typical is the sense that the most (only?) effective worship, the most effective prayer is expressed in Christ and through Christ. That is also to say that we find a clear and variously articulated sense that Jesus enables worship—that Jesus is in a profound way the place and means of worship. Equally, it has become clear that for the first Christians Jesus was seen to be not only the one by whom believers come to God, but also the one by whom God has come to believers. The same sense of divine immanence in Spirit, Wisdom and Word was experienced also and more fully in and through Christ. He brought the divine presence into human experience more fully than had ever been the case before.

So our central question can indeed be answered negatively, and perhaps it should be. But not if the result is a far less adequate worship of God. For the worship that really constitutes Christianity and forms its distinctive contribution to the dialogue of the religions, is the worship of God as enabled by Jesus, the worship of God as revealed in and through Jesus. Christianity remains a monotheistic faith. The only one to be worshipped is the one God. But how can Christians fail to honour the one through whom it believes the only God has most fully revealed himself, the one through whom the only God has come closest to the condition of humankind? Jesus cannot fail to feature in their worship, their hymns of praise,

> their petitions to God. But such worship is always, should always be offered to the glory of God the Father. Such worship is always, should always be offered in the recognition that God is all in all, and that the majesty of the Lord Jesus in the end of the day expresses and affirms the majesty of the one God more clearly than anything else in the world. (*Did the Early Christians Worship Jesus?*, pp.150-151)

The Lamb in the midst of the throne

[This section may be skipped on a first reading]

> "For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:17, ESV)

How do we understand the words "the Lamb in the midst of the throne" in Revelation 7:17? The phrase "in the midst" has the exact Greek form *ana meson*. A search for its root form *ana mesos* shows that it is used three times in the NT outside Rev.7:17, each in the same form *ana meson* (corresponding to the highlighted words in the following):

> **Matthew 13:25** his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat
>
> **Mark 7:31** in the midst of the region of Decapolis.
>
> **1 Corinthians 6:5** Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers?

These verses do not shed obvious light on the meaning of "the Lamb in the midst of the throne". Moreover, while there are many references in the book of Revelation to God sitting on His throne, there is no clear reference to the Lamb sitting in the middle or the center of that throne.

To be specific, God is described 11 times in Revelation as the One who "sits upon the throne" (Rev.4:9,10; 5:1,7,13; 6:16; 7:10,15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5). In none of these is Christ said to share the Father's throne. Only in Rev.3:21 is there any mention of Christ sitting on the Father's throne ("as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne"), but the same verse also says that Jesus has a throne of his own ("I will grant him to sit with me on my throne"), just as the 24 elders have their own thrones as we see five verses later (4:4, also 11:16). These 24 thrones are arranged "around" the throne of God, with Christ seated at God's right hand. This would locate Christ's throne at the right-hand side of God's throne.

In the New Testament, *en mesos* occurs more often (26 times) than *ana meson*, the two being "loose synonyms" (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol.5, p.400). More pertinent to our discussion is the fact that *en mesos* occurs seven times in Revelation where in each instance the exact form is *en mesōi*. Here are the seven verses (all quoted from ESV unless indicated otherwise):

Rev.1:13	in the midst of the seven lampstands one like a son of man
Rev.2:1	who walks among the seven golden lampstands
Rev.4:6	"in the midst of the throne" (NKJV) or "in the center, around the throne" (NIV)
Rev.5:6	"in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures" (NKJV) or "in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures" (NIV)
Rev.5:6	in the midst of the elders (NKJV)
Rev.6:6	a voice in the midst of the four living creatures
Rev.22:2	through the middle of the street of the city

Revelation 5:6 is listed twice because it has two instances of *en mesos*, both of which are explained by BDAG (*mesos*). For the first instance in Rev.5:6, BDAG suggests, "on the center of the throne and among the four living creatures". BDAG places the second instance under definition 2b ("as subst. neuter ἀνὰ μέσον"), leading to "in the midst of, among," that is, in the midst of the elders.

Hence the most accurate translation of the Greek of Rev.5:6 seems to be: "in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders" (which matches NKJV exactly). Why does John use "in the midst" twice in this verse? Could it be that the four living creatures, like the Lamb, are *within* the throne in some sense whereas the elders are not within but around the throne? This seems to find support in Revelation 6:6: "a voice in the midst of the

four living creatures". In view of the foregoing, this voice must be that of the Lamb.

But if the throne on which God sits is not viewed as a quasi-material structure but the symbol of His authority (just as "scepter" often carries this meaning, e.g. Gen.49:10; Ps. 45:6; 110:2), then the Lamb at its center would indicate that Jesus has a central role in the governing of God's universe. In this government the Lamb is assisted in some way by the four living creatures. Because God has given the Lamb a central role in the rule over His universe, His throne is appropriately called "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev.22:1).

Whatever else "in the midst of the throne" may mean, one thing is certain: To be "in the midst of the throne" is to be under the authority of "the One seated upon the throne".

In his standard commentary on Revelation, R.H. Charles comments on the Jewish antecedents of "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev.22:1). The commentary makes the significant observation that in the Jewish concept of the Messiah seated on the throne of God, worship is directed to God, not to the Messiah (see the last sentence in the following).

> This idea [of sitting on God's throne] with regard to the Messiah is pre-Christian: cf. 1 Enoch 51:3, "And the Elect One shall in those days sit on My throne." Likewise the Elect One is described as sitting on the "throne of glory," 45:3, 55:4, and as sitting on "the throne of His glory (i.e. God's glory)," 62:3,5 (cf. 51:3). Similarly, the Lord of Spirits places the Elect One "on the throne of glory" (61:8), "on the throne of His glory,"

> 62:2. This throne is called the Son of Man's throne, 69:27,29. Finally, it is to be observed that though the Lord of Spirits places the Elect One on the throne of glory in 61:8, and he judges all men, yet in 61:9, the praises of all are directed to the Lord of Spirits. (*Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol.2, pp.175-176)

Does Romans 9:5b Equate Christ with God?

Romans 9:5 says, "To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." (ESV). There is disagreement among Bibles on how the latter part of this verse before the "Amen" should be translated, as seen in the following:

> … Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. (ESV)
>
> … Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. (KJV)
>
> … Christ who is above all, God, blessed for ever. (NJB)
>
> … the Messiah. God who is over all be blessed forever. (NAB)
>
> … to Christ. May God who is over all be praised on into the ages! (ITNT)
>
> … the Messiah, who is over all. Praised be Adonai for ever! (CJB)
>
> … the Messiah. May God, supreme above all, be blessed for ever! (REB)
>
> … Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. (NASB)

> … Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! (NIV) [98]
> … the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. (RSV) [99]
> … the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. (NRSV) [100]

The varying translations of the doxology in Romans 9:5b fall into two main camps: those which identify Christ as God (ESV, NIV, NJB) and those which do not (NAB, RSV, ITNT, CJB, REB); included in the former are those (KJV, NASB, NRSV) which imply that Christ is God but in language that, to the English ear, might allow for slight ambiguity. Some translations (NIV, RSV, NRSV) acknowledge both meanings as being possible by giving alternative readings in footnotes.

The diversity of translation stems from one and only one problem: The interpretation of Romans 9:5 depends largely on what the translator thinks is the correct way of *punctuating* the statement in the Greek text. It is not an issue of textual attestation (there is no problem with the manuscript evidence) but of punctuation (the original Greek text had no punctuation). The ambiguous syntax of Romans 9:5 indicates that this verse cannot, by itself, be used as a proof text for or against trinitarianism.

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[98] NIV alternative: Or *Christ, who is over all. God be forever praised!*

[99] RSV alternative: *Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.*

[100] NRSV alternative: Or *Messiah, who is God over all, blessed forever;* or *Messiah. May he who is God over all be blessed forever.*

In fact many trinitarian Bibles have chosen to translate Romans 9:5 in the non-trinitarian way. One reason is that the words "who is over all" can hardly be applied to Christ since Paul elsewhere says that Christ will be subject to God in the final eschatological state of affairs (1Cor.15:27-28).

NRSV's rendering ("the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever") is the one closest to the syntax of the NA28 Greek text, but we should keep in mind that the punctuation was decided by the NA28 editorial committee and that the original Greek does not have the punctuation marks that we see in the following from NA28:

> ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν. (Romans 9:5, NA28)

Nonetheless, NRSV's use of "Messiah" rather than "Christ" in Romans 9:5 is helpful for reminding us that "Christ" is not fundamentally or originally a proper name but a title which means the Messiah (the Anointed One). The notion that the Messiah can be identified with God—or God with the Messiah—as one and the same person, is foreign to the Old and New Testaments. It was God Himself who anointed the Messiah (Acts 4:27; 10:38), appointing him the deliverer of Israel, the one whom David addresses as "my Lord" in Psalm 110:1.

H.A.W. Meyer [101] rules out equating Christ with God in Romans 9:5 and points out that in 2Cor.6:18, God is said to be the *pantokratōr* or mighty ruler (this word is defined by BDAG as "Almighty, All-Powerful, Omnipotent One"). First Meyer says:

> Paul has *never* [emphasis Meyer's] used the expression *theos* of Christ, since he has not adopted, like John, the Alexandrian form of conceiving and setting forth the divine essence of Christ, but has adhered to the popular concrete, *strictly monotheistic terminology* [italics mine], not modified by philosophical speculation even for the designation of Christ; and he always accurately distinguishes God and Christ.

Meyer then elaborates on Paul's distinction between God and Christ and the implausibility of identifying Christ with God in Romans 9:5:

> John himself calls the divine nature of Christ *theos* only in the introduction of his Gospel, and only in the closest connection with the Logos-speculation. And thus there runs through the whole New Testament a delicate line of separation between the Father and the Son; so that, although the divine essence and glory of the latter is glorified with the loftiest predicates in manifold ways, nevertheless it is only the Father, to whom

[101] H.A.W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Romans*, pp.361-362. His words are quoted with approval by James Denney, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol.2, p.658.

> the Son is throughout subordinated, and never Christ, who is actually called *God* [emphasis Meyer's] by the apostles (with the exception of John 1:1, and the exclamation of Thomas, John 20:28)—not even in 1 John 5:20. Paul, particularly, even when he accumulates and strains to the utmost expression, concerning the Godlike nature of the exalted Christ (as in Philippians 2:6ff.; Colossians 1:15ff., 2:9), does not call him *theos*, but sharply and clearly distinguishes him as the *kyrios* [Lord] from *theos* even in [Romans] 10:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3 …
>
> Besides the inseparable difficulty [in equating Christ with God in Romans 9:5] would be introduced, that here Christ would be called not merely and simply *theos*, but even "God over all," and consequently, would be designated as *theos pantokratōr* [God Almighty] which is absolutely incompatible with the entire view of the New Testament as to the dependence of the Son on the Father, and especially with passages like 8:34 (*entugchanei*), 1 Corinthians 3:23, 8:6, 11:3; Ephesians 4:5,6, and notably 1 Corinthians 15:28. Accordingly, the doxology of our passage cannot be referred to Christ, but must be referred *to God*. (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Romans*, p.362.)

James D.G. Dunn also concludes that Christ is not to be identified with "God over all" in Romans 9:5 because an "abrupt departure from Israel's monotheism" cannot be contemplated:

> Again, while Paul was already well used to associating Christ with God and attributing divine functions to Christ (1:7; 1 Cor 8:6), it is less likely that he would have intended Christ to be hailed as "God *over all*" (contrast 1 Cor 15:24–28). Just as unlikely is it that the juxtaposition of references to the Messiah of Israel and "God over all" would be read as an identity; the more conscious his readers were of the continuity between Israel's faith and Paul's gospel the less likely they would be to read the ambiguous phrasing as the abrupt departure from Israel's monotheism which the more straightforward syntax would imply. In fact it is probably Paul's desire to stress the universality of God's embrace, Gentile as well as Jew, which results in the unusual phrasing. Just as in 3:29-30 he used Jewish monotheism to make the same basic point, so here rather than the more regular form of doxology to the one God ("Blessed be God…") he chooses to stress that the God he adores is God *over all*: "he who is God over all, may he be blessed for ever, Amen." (*Word Biblical Commentary, Romans 9–16*, vol.38B, p.536, on Romans 9:5)

Dunn's statement and Meyer's are both of a generalized nature that applies to Paul's teaching as a whole and is not limited to Romans 9:5. The clear message is that Paul has never left "Israel's monotheism".

God blessed forever

To gain a better understanding of the doxology of Romans 9:5, we compare it with two other Pauline statements which have similar wording. In the following three verses (all from ESV), the Greek text enclosed in parentheses corresponds to the English words in italics:

> **Romans 9:5** To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is *God over all, blessed forever. Amen*. (*theos eulogētos eis tous aiōnas, amēn*)
>
> **Romans 1:25** because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, *who is blessed forever! Amen*. (*hos [theos] estin eulogētos eis tous aiōnas, amēn*)
>
> **2 Cor.11:31** The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, *he who is blessed forever*, knows that I am not lying. (*ho ōn eulogētos eis tous aiōnas*)

The doxology in the second of these verses, Rom.1:25, is obviously addressed to God. Nothing in the substance of this verse or Paul's teaching as a whole suggests that Paul would suddenly address this doxology to Christ. Just now we saw that Dunn speaks of "the continuity between Israel's faith and Paul's gospel" which makes unlikely any "abrupt departure from Israel's monotheism".

As for the doxology in the third verse, 2Cor.11:31, there is no doubt that it is addressed to God and not to Jesus, as seen

in the nominative case of *ho ōn* which agrees with the nominative case of "God" and not the genitive case of "the Lord Jesus".

That the doxologies in these two verses, Rom.1:25 and 2Cor.11:31, are addressed to God rather than Christ gives weight to the view that the doxology in Romans 9:5, which has similar wording in the Greek, is likewise addressed to God rather than Christ.

The word *eulogētos* ("blessed, praised") that is used in Romans 9:5 occurs eight times in the New Testament. In all eight occurrences, the object of praise is, without exception, God the Father rather than Jesus Christ (the words in italics correspond to *eulogētos*):

> **Mark 14:61** Are you the Christ, the Son of the *Blessed*?
>
> **Luke 1:68** *Blessed* be the Lord God of Israel
>
> **Romans 1:25** the Creator, who is *blessed* forever
>
> **Romans 9:5** God who is over all be *praised* forever
>
> **2 Corinthians 11:31** The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be *praised* forever
>
> **2 Corinthians 1:3, Ephesians 1:3, 1 Peter 1:3** *Blessed* be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Overall conclusion

I have examined every doxology in the New Testament and have confirmed that they are all directed to Yahweh alone as the object of worship. There are one or two debatable or limited exceptions to this, but there is not a single doxology to Jesus that can be established with certainty. This indicates that he was not an object of divine worship in the NT church. For this and other reasons, I have said that what the Gentile churches have done and are still doing is contrary to what we find in the New Testament, and as such is unquestionably idolatrous.

Our survey of the New Testament doxologies shows that not a single doxology can with certainty be ascribed to Christ. Romans 9:5 comes closest to this because it could, by its ambiguous Greek syntax, refer to the Father or to Christ. But when other factors are taken into account, notably the fact that nowhere else in Paul's writings is Christ ever spoken of as "God," scholars of the stature of H.A.W. Meyer, James Denney, and James D.G. Dunn all reject ascribing the doxology to Christ.

Despite all these difficulties for the trinitarian reading of Romans 9:5, some trinitarians are willing to make this verse an exception to Paul's entire teaching and ascribe its doxology to Christ despite being fully aware that the meaning of Romans 9:5 depends *solely* on how this verse is punctuated, as decided by the Bible translator or exegete.

The line must not be crossed

For those of us who come from a trinitarian background, what is shocking is that although Jesus has been exalted to the highest imaginable place in the universe, seated next to Yahweh Himself, not one doxology is unambiguously addressed to Jesus out of the many in the New Testament. There is also no prayer addressed to him, as we shall see. When Paul speaks of prayer he says, "I bow my knees before the Father" (Eph.3:14).

The point is clear: Jesus is never venerated as God. The line between the finite and the infinite is never crossed. The high veneration accorded the Lamb in Revelation 5:9-14 does not change this fact but underlines it, since a careful reading of Revelation 5 shows that the Lamb is venerated right in the midst of the worship of "Him who sits on the throne". This is similar to the way Israel venerated Yahweh and David together (1Chr.29:20).

To transgress the line is to cross it and overstep the established limits, as did the angels who "did not stay within their own position of authority" (Jude 1:6). Yahweh exalted Jesus to the highest place in all of creation next to and second only to Himself, but that is not good enough for trinitarians, so we exalted Jesus to coequality with Yahweh in all things, and flung aside the first commandment!

Death is the penalty for breaking any of the ten commandments. We can only hope that, like Paul in his persecut-

ion of the church, we will receive mercy and forgiveness because we disobeyed God in ignorance (1Tim.1:13). Whether the Fathers of the Gentile church of the mid-second century onwards could claim clemency on the grounds of ignorance, we won't know until the day of judgment. But those of us living in the present age would be wise to seize the opportunity for forgiveness.

The fact that Yahweh is "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph.1:17) already draws a sharp line between "God" and "Lord," that is, between the Father and Jesus Christ. Yet Yahweh was pleased to exalt Christ. Two verses later, Paul says:

> **Ephesians 1:19b-23**: (ESV)
> [19] … the working of his great might
> [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,
> [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
> [22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,
> [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This passage contains a lot of content that we may need to "unpack," and is more easily understood by looking at its flow:

Yahweh raised Jesus from the dead
and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places
far above all rule and power and dominion
and above every name that is named
not only in this age but also in the one to come.
He put all things under his feet
and gave him to the church as head over all things.

Is Thanksgiving Directed to Christ?

It may come as a surprise, even a shock, to some trinitarians that in all his letters, only once does Paul thank Jesus Christ directly: "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service." (1Tim.1:12) It doesn't mean that Paul is ungrateful to Christ, or that we should be ungrateful to Christ, for indeed Paul declares that Christ has loved us to the utmost, even unto death as the sacrificial Lamb of God.

Yet the surprising fact remains that only once in his many letters does Paul thank Jesus directly. On the other hand, Paul gives thanks to God many times. A few times he gives thanks to God *through* Jesus Christ in expressions such as "I thank my God through Jesus Christ" (Rom.1:8) or "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ" (Rom.7:25).

This tells us, firstly, that thanksgiving is ultimately directed to God, the Creator of all things. Indeed "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). And God out of His love has given us the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ, His only Son (John 3:16).

Secondly, just as Jesus constantly gave thanks to the Father during his time on earth, so he wants us to direct our thanksgiving to God. Since Jesus does all things to glorify his Father and to set an example for us, it is fitting that we too should glorify God through thanksgiving ("that it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God," 2Cor.4:15).

We now survey the Greek words for "thanksgiving" or "give thanks" in the New Testament (*charis*, *eucharisteō*, *eucharistia*, *eucharistos*). This will show us that in the New Testament, thanksgiving is directed to God the Father and not explicitly to Jesus Christ. It will also tell us where to direct our thanksgiving: to the Father whom Jesus wants to glorify.

Charis

The word *charis* (χάρις, grace, favor, gratitude) occurs frequently in the New Testament and has several related meanings. It occurs six times in the specific phrase "thanks be to," all occurring in Romans and Corinthians, and all used only of God, specifically in the expression *charis tō theōi* or *tō theōi charis*. These two phrases, which are identical apart from word order, both mean "thanks be to God":

Rom.6:17	"But thanks be to God"
Rom.7:25	"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ"
1Cor.15:57	"But thanks be to God"
2Cor.2:14	"But thanks be to God"
2Cor.8:16	"But thanks be to God"
2Cor.9:15	"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift"

In all six verses, the thanksgiving is addressed directly to God. Other relevant statements involving *charis* are:

Col.3:16	"with thankfulness in your hearts to God"
2Tim.1:3	"I thank (charis) God whom I serve"
Heb.12:28	"Let us be thankful" (NIV) to God

Again it is God who is thanked; He is the One to whom gratitude is directed.

Eucharisteō

The verb *eucharisteō* (εὐχαριστέω, be thankful, give thanks) is used mainly by Paul. It occurs 24 times (in 23 verses) in his letters, but only 14 times in the rest of the New Testament. Of the 14 verses outside Paul's writings, one has Jesus as the object of thanksgiving (a leper thanks Jesus for healing him, Lk.17:16); all the others have God the Father as the object of thanksgiving, mainly in connection with the feeding of the thousands or the institution of the Lord's Supper.

All the 24 instances of *eucharisteō* in Paul's letters have God as the object of thanksgiving except in Rom.16:4 where thanks is given to Prisca and Aquila. The following are the 24 instances of *eucharisteō* in Paul (it occurs twice in Rom.14:6):

Rom.1:8	"I thank my God through Jesus Christ"
Rom.1:21	"they did not give thanks to Him"
Rom.14:6	"give thanks to God" (twice, with identical wording)
Rom.16:4	"I give thanks" (to Prisca and Aquila)
1Cor.1:4	"I give thanks to my God always"
1Cor.1:14	"I thank God"
1Cor.10:30	"I take part in the meal with thankfulness"
1Cor.11:24	"when Jesus had given thanks" (to God for the bread)
1Cor.14:17	(God is not mentioned but implied)
1Cor.14:18	"I thank God"
2Cor.1:11	(God is not mentioned but implied)
Eph.1:16	(God is not mentioned but implied)
Eph.5:20	"give thanks always and for everything to God"
Phil.1:3	"I thank my God"
Col.1:3	"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"
Col.1:12	"giving thanks to the Father"
Col.3:17	"giving thanks to God the Father"
1Th.1:2	"we give thanks to God always"
1Th.2:13	"we also thank God constantly"
1Th.5:18	"give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will"
2Th.1:3	"we ought always to give thanks to God"
2Th.2:13	"we ought always to give thanks to God"
Phm.1:4	"I thank my God always"

In this list, only in Romans 16:4 is *eucharisteō* used of people (Prisca and Aquila). All the other instances refer to God the Father and none to Jesus Christ. This is not to say that we cannot give thanks to anyone but God. Indeed Paul expresses gratitude to Prisca and Aquila for risking their necks for him. He also gives thanks on one occasion to Christ Jesus (1Tim.1:12) for judging Paul to be faithful to his service. What is surprising is that this is the *only* instance of thanks addressed to Jesus in Paul's letters, and it is in the third person. With few exceptions, thanksgiving is *always* directed to God, the Father of Jesus Christ and the object of our gratitude. In fact there will be judgment and condemnation for those who do not glorify God by rendering Him thanks (Rom.1:21-24).

The same word *eucharisteō* occurs eleven times in the gospels: four times of Jesus' giving thanks at the feeding of the thousands (Mt.15:36; Mk.8:6; Jn.6:11; 6:23), and four times of Jesus' thanksgiving at the Last Supper (Mt.26:27; Mk.14:23; Lk.22:17,19). The remaining three instances are in Lk.17:16 (a Samaritan thanks Jesus for healing him), Lk.18:11 (a Pharisee thanks God that he is not like the tax collector), and John 11:41 (Jesus thanks his Father for hearing his prayer for the raising of Lazarus).

Outside the gospels and Paul's letters, *eucharisteō* occurs three times: Acts 27:35 (Paul thanks God for the bread), Acts 28:15 (Paul thanks God for the encouragement of seeing the

brothers in Rome), and Rev.11:17 ("we give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty").

Praise and thanksgiving are among the basic ingredients of worship. And the overwhelming evidence regarding these two elements of worship is that they are consistently addressed only to the Father.

Eucharistia

The word *eucharistia* (εὐχαριστία, thankfulness, gratitude, rendering thanks) occurs 15 times in the New Testament: once in Acts, 12 times in Paul, twice in Revelation. All these 15 instances, with the exception of Acts 24:3 (Tertullus thanks Felix), refer to thanksgiving to God. Seven of these refer to God *explicitly:*

2Cor.4:15	"increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God"
2Cor.9:11	"thanksgiving to God"
2Cor.9:12	"many thanksgivings to God"
Phil.4:6	"with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God"
1Th.3:9	"what thanksgiving can we return to God"
Rev.4:9	"the living creatures give … thanks to him who is seated on the throne"
Rev.7:12	"thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever"

Seven of the occurrences refer to God *implicitly:*

1Cor.14:16	"Amen to your thanksgiving"
Eph.5:4	"but instead let there be thanksgiving"
Col.2:7	"abounding in thanksgiving"
Col.4:2	"in prayer … with thanksgiving"
1Tim.2:1	"thanksgiving be made for all people"
1Tim.4:3	"to be received with thanksgiving"
1Tim.4:4	"if it is received with thanksgiving"

To summarize: Of the 15 occurrences of *eucharistia*, 7 refer to God explicitly, 7 refer to God implicitly, and one refers to Tertullus's gratitude to Felix.

Eucharistos

Finally, the word *eucharistos* (εὐχάριστος, thankful) occurs only once in the New Testament, in Col.3:15: "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful." Paul does not explicitly say who is the object of the thanksgiving, but it is most likely an implicit reference to God because Paul consistently uses all the cognate words—*charis* (in the sense of thanksgiving), *eucharisteō*, *eucharistia*—of God the Father and never of Jesus Christ, with one exception.

On the other hand, although God is the sole object of thanksgiving, it is *through Christ* that we give thanks to God (Rom.1:8; 7:25; Col.3:17), for it is through Christ that God's

promises are "yes" (2Cor.1:20), and through Christ that we offer a sacrifice of praise to God (Heb.13:15), and through Christ that God reconciles all things to Himself (Col.1:20).

Chapter 8

Are Worship and Prayer Directed to Jesus?

When *Proskyneō* is used of Jesus, Does it Mean Divine Worship?

Worshipping Jesus or paying homage to Jesus?

In Matthew 2:11, when the magi visited the infant Jesus, did they "worship" Jesus (ESV) or did they pay him "homage" (NJB)? Here we see two rather different ways of translating the Greek word *proskyneō*.

As we shall see, Greek-English lexicons give two definitions of *proskyneō*, one of which is primary and fundamental, and the other is secondary and derivative. The fundamental meaning is "to kneel before someone" or "to prostrate oneself before someone"—a bodily expression of paying homage to

someone without necessarily ascribing deity to him (e.g. bowing before a Roman commander). But in some contexts, *proskyneō* can have the derivative sense of *worship*. Whereas the first and fundamental meaning does not necessarily involve the attribution of deity, the second may involve divine worship.

When we encounter *proskyneō* in the New Testament, the question of which is its intended meaning is often settled by seeing who is the object of the *proskyneō*. If God is the object, *proskyneō* would by definition mean divine worship (e.g. Mt.4:10, "You shall worship the Lord your God"). But if the object is a human dignitary, then *proskyneō* would mean kneeling or paying homage without the attribution of deity (apart from idolatry).

Hence the intended meaning of *proskyneō* is often governed by who is the object of the *proskyneō*, and whether that person is viewed as divine. The mere use of *proskyneō* does not, in itself, confer deity on a person, for an act of kneeling does not necessarily involve divine worship.

In the ancient Near East, kneeling or bowing was a common gesture of reverence and courtesy, and was not in itself understood as divine worship. We see this not only in the NT but also in the LXX (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). To give just two examples, Abraham bowed before the Hittites (Gen.23:12) and David bowed before Saul (1Sam. 24:8; v.9 LXX). In the LXX of these two verses, *proskyneō* is

used. Hence it is erroneous to conclude that Jesus is God solely by the fact that *proskyneō* is used of him.

What does *proskyneō* mean when it is used of Jesus?

There are 60 instances of *proskyneō* in the New Testament, of which 17 are used of Jesus (as the object of *proskyneō* in all 17 instances). A full list of the 60 instances will be given later.

Where *proskyneō* is used of Jesus, ESV would often translate it as "worship" (e.g. the disciples "worshipped" Jesus after he had calmed a storm, Mt.14:33) but sometimes as "kneel" (e.g. the mother of the sons of Zebedee knelt before Jesus, Mt.20:20). ESV, NIV, NASB exhibit a tendency to translate *proskyneō* as "worship" when it is used of Jesus, presupposing his divinity.

But many other Bibles differ from ESV in the way they tend to translate *proskyneō* when it is used of Jesus. Whereas ESV says in Mt.2:11 that the magi "worshiped" the infant Jesus, other translations give no indication of worship: "did him homage" (NJB, NAB, NRSV, Darby), or "honored him" (CEB), or "adored him" (Douay-Rheims), or "bowed low in homage to him" (REB), or "prostrated themselves in reverence to him" (ITNT). This is despite the fact that some of these Bibles have trinitarian credentials, either by reputation or by the Catholic *Imprimatur*, the Catholic Church's seal of approval (for NJB, NAB, Douay-Rheims).

Whereas ESV renders Matthew 2:11 to mean the worship of the infant Jesus, this interpretation is rejected by the following trinitarian commentaries in their analyses of Mt.2:11: *Tyndale Commentary* says that "the verb *worship* (*proskyneō)* need mean no more than to pay homage to a human dignitary". John Calvin says that the magi did not "come to render to Christ such pious worship as is due to the Son of God," but intended to salute him as "a very eminent King". *Constable's Expository Notes* says that the magi's statement "does not necessarily mean that they regarded Him as divine" but "may have meant that they wanted to do Him homage". *Expositor's Bible Commentary* says that the magi's "statement suggests homage paid to royalty rather than the worship of Deity".

The difference of opinion over the meaning of *proskyneō* extends to other Bible verses. Whereas ESV says the disciples "worshiped" Jesus after he had calmed a storm (Mt.14:33), and that the women at the empty tomb "worshiped" Jesus (Mt.28:9), most of the aforementioned Bibles speak of bowing to Jesus or paying homage to him. For example, for Matthew 14:33, NJB has "bowed down before him," and NEB and REB have "fell at his feet". [102]

[102] The Revised English Bible, though largely unknown in USA, is a standard Bible in the United Kingdom, being the result of a collaborative effort of the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, the Methodist Church of Great Britain, and others.

The crucial question

This brings us to the crucial question: Since *proskyneō* can mean either worship or paying homage, which is the correct meaning when it is used of Jesus? Is it possible for us to arrive at a correct translation of *proskyneō* that does not depend on doctrinal presuppositions? Can we break the deadlock in which trinitarians interpret *proskyneō* to mean worshipping Jesus, and non-trinitarians interpret to mean kneeling before Jesus?

Compounding the problem is that a verse such as Matthew 2:11 (the magi "worshipped" Jesus) has no obvious internal evidence in favor of one interpretation over the other. If you presuppose that the magi worshipped Jesus, then *proskyneō* would mean "worship" to you. But if you believe that the magi paid homage to Jesus, then *proskyneō* would mean "pay homage" to you. So are there external and objective factors that can break the deadlock?

Fortunately, we do have a way of breaking the deadlock because there are four verifiable facts at our disposal that do not depend on doctrinal presuppositions. None is conclusive by itself, but when the four are taken in combination, they guide us to the correct meaning of *proskyneō* when it is used of Jesus.

Fact #1: Worship is not the fundamental meaning of *proskyneō* but only a derivative meaning

Two standard Greek-English lexicons, BDAG and Thayer, indicate that worship is only a secondary or derivative meaning of *proskyneō*. BDAG gives the following glosses (summary definitions), quoted here verbatim and in the same order as in BDAG (the lone boldface is mine):

- to express in attitude or gesture one's complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure
- (fall down and) **worship**
- do obeisance to
- prostrate oneself before
- do reverence to
- welcome respectfully

Thayer's lexicon gives the following definitions of *proskyneō*, quoted here verbatim and in the same order as in the lexicon (citations omitted, the lone boldface is mine):

- to kiss the hand to (towards) one, in token of reverence
- to fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence
- kneeling or prostration to do homage (to one) or make obeisance, whether in order to express respect or to make supplication
- It is used a. of homage shown to men of superior rank;
- b. of homage rendered to God and the ascended Christ, to heavenly beings, and to demons: absolutely (*or to **worship***)

The striking fact is that in BDAG and Thayer, the two tiny words in boldface are the only definitions of *proskyneō* that have anything to do with divine worship! In both these lexicons, the idea of worship is given far less prominence than the idea of kneeling or paying homage. In fact, only one quarter of the literary citations in BDAG are assigned to "worship," indicating that in New Testament, the more fundamental meaning of *proskyneō* is not worship but kneeling or paying homage.

Fact #2: *Proskyneō* is almost no longer used of Jesus after his ascension despite its continued use in the New Testament!

The word *proskyneō* occurs 60 times in the New Testament: 29 times in the four gospels and 31 times after the gospels. Hence the use of *proskyneō* is about evenly divided between the gospels and the rest of the New Testament. We include two tables below, a shorter one and a longer one.

The balanced split (29 versus 31 occurrences) is significant because of an astonishing fact: After the four gospels, *proskyneō* is no longer used of Jesus (with two exceptions) despite the continued use of *proskyneō* in the New Testament! To be specific, *proskyneō* is used of Jesus 17 times in the NT: 15 times in the four gospels but only twice after the gospels.

The 17 occurrences of *proskyneō* applied to Jesus Christ	
The Four Gospels	After the Gospels
Matthew 2:2	Hebrews 1:6
Matthew 2:8	Revelation 5:14
Matthew 2:11	
Matthew 4:9	
Matthew 8:2	
Matthew 9:18	
Matthew 14:33	
Matthew 15:25	
Matthew 20:20	
Matthew 28:9	
Matthew 28:17	
Mark 5:6	
Mark 15:19	
Luke 24:52	
John 9:38	

The next table—the longer one—shows all 60 occurrences of *proskyneō* in the NA28 Greek New Testament. The table is divided into two parts: the four gospels (with 29 occurrences) and after the gospels (with 31 occurrences). The 17 verses highlighted in color are the 17 that refer to Jesus, and correspond to the same 17 verses listed in the shorter table.

All the 60 occurrences of *proskyneō* in the Greek NT	
Matthew	**2:2** **2:8** **2:11** **4:9** 4:10 **8:2** **9:18** **14:33** **15:25** 18:26 **20:20** **28:9** **28:17**
Mark	**5:6** **15:19**
Luke	4:7 4:8 **24:52**
John	4:20 4:21 4:22 4:22 4:23 4:23 4:23 4:24 4:24 **9:38** 12:20
Acts	7:43 8:27 10:25 24:11
1 Corinthians	14:25
Hebrews	**1:6** 11:21
Revelation	3:9 4:10 **5:14** 7:11 9:20 11:1 11:16 13:4 13:4 13:8 13:12 13:15 14:7 14:9 14:11 15:4 16:2 19:4 19:10 19:10 19:20 20:4 22:8 22:9

In this table, a verse is listed multiple times if it has multiple instances of *proskyneō* (e.g. John 4:23).

From these two tables, we see that *proskyneō* is no longer used of Jesus after the four gospels, with only two exceptions: Hebrews 1:6 and Revelation 5:14. But Heb.1:6 does not count as post-Gospel because it is a reference to Jesus' physical birth:

> And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." (Hebrews 1:6, quoting Ps.97:7, LXX 96:7).

This verse is found in a passage in Hebrews that proclaims Jesus' superiority over the angels. But the idea of worship is not entrenched in this verse. NJB avoids using the word "worship" when it renders Hebrews 1:6 as "Let all the angels of God pay him homage"; ITNT has "All God's angels must revere him"; REB has "Let all God's angels pay him homage".

But the more significant verse for trinitarians is Revelation 5:14 because this is the only verse in the New Testament that comes close to the explicit worship of Jesus, by the fact that *proskyneō* is applied to Jesus together with God who is seated on His throne. This verse will be discussed soon.

Why the sudden drop?

What could account for the sudden drop—indeed, near disappearance—in the application of *proskyneō* to Jesus after the gospels (only two instances, in reality only one instance, as opposed to 15 in the gospels) despite the continued use of *proskyneō* in the New Testament?

The clue lies in the fact that the dividing point between the gospels and the rest of the New Testament also happens to be the dividing point between the earthly Jesus and the ascended Jesus. This accounts for the fact that *proskyneō* is

often used of Jesus in his earthly presence but rarely in his heavenly absence.[103]

This striking fact tells us that whenever *proskyneō* is used of Jesus, it ought to be understood as paying homage to Jesus rather than worshipping Jesus. After Jesus ascended into heaven, he was no longer physically present on earth; this would explain why people on earth no longer knelt to him.

But if we take the trinitarian view that *proskyneō* means the divine worship of Jesus, there would be no obvious reason for the worship to stop after his ascension into heaven. For if Jesus is really God as he is in trinitarianism, then divine worship should still continue in Jesus' absence, for an omnipresent God can be worshipped anywhere in the universe. In fact, if Jesus were God, we would expect an increase, not a decrease, in the application of *proskyneō* to Jesus after his ascension, because the risen Jesus is now the exalted Lord who has been given the name above every name.

Historically and chronologically, the very last time before Revelation 5:14 that *proskyneō* is used of Jesus is Luke 24:52, *which is precisely at the point of his ascension into heaven!* This is not a coincidence. Luke 24:52 is most significant for fixing the cutoff point precisely at the demarcation of the earthly Jesus and the ascended Jesus.

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[103] When we speak of Jesus' heavenly "absence," it is from the perspective of those living on earth, for Jesus is no longer on earth but in heaven. But in heaven, when *proskyneō* is used of Jesus (Rev.5:14), it is still in his physical presence—but in heaven.

Fact #3: *Proskyneō* is used mainly by John, yet he almost never applies it to Jesus!

Of the 60 occurrences of *proskyneō* in the NT, 35 are found in John's writings versus 25 in the rest of the NT, which would make *proskyneō* a predominantly Johannine word. Yet John applies *proskyneō* to Jesus only twice in all his writings! These two are John 9:38 (the formerly blind man bowed before Jesus) and Revelation 5:14 (the verse we have noted and will discuss soon).

On the other hand, John applies *proskyneō* ten times—in the full sense of worship—to Satan or the beast or the image of the beast! [104]

Although *proskyneō* is a predominantly Johannine word, John almost never uses it of Jesus, a fact that is surprising given that trinitarians regard John's writings as espousing a high Christology. But there is really nothing shocking about this at all, since it is in John's Gospel that Jesus declares that his Father is the only true God (John 17:3). In this same gospel, we see the intentions of Jesus' heart when he exhorts us to worship his Father: "worship the Father" (Jn.4:21); and "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him" (v.23).

[104] Rev.13:4 (2x); 13:8; 13:12; 13:15; 14:9; 14:11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4.

Fact #4: The *latreuein* word group is never applied to Jesus

To explain this fourth point, it would be helpful to divide it into subpoints:

- A "word group" is a group of words which share a common cognate.
- The *latreuein* word group consists of the words *latreuein*, *latreia*, *leitourgein*.
- Respectively, these three words mean: (i) to serve or minister as a cultic activity; (ii) cultic devotion; (iii) to render cultic service. The word "cultic" pertains to religious devotion to God.
- Here is the crucial observation: The *latreuein* word group expresses divine worship more strongly than any other word group in the New Testament, yet it is never used of Jesus in the NT!

These points are explained in section 1.2 of James D.G. Dunn's *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* The following excerpts are taken from pp.13-15 of the book (with Dunn's footnotes omitted):

> The most common of the other near synonyms is *latreuein,* which basically means 'to serve'. In biblical literature, however, the reference is always to religious service, the carrying out of religious duties, 'to render cultic service'.
>
> . . . . .

> And in several passages *latreuein* is translated 'worship' in English translations. It is noticeable that in each case the object of the verb, the one who is (to be) served/worshipped, is God. Apart from one or two references to false worship, the reference is always to the cultic service/worship of God. In no case in the New Testament is there talk of offering cultic worship (*latreuein*) to Jesus.
>
> . . . . .
>
> As with *latreuein*, so also with the matching noun, *latreia,* '(cultic) service, worship'. It refers always to the worship of God … Here we need simply note that the number of *latreia* references is very limited, and here too the 'service/worship' is never thought of as offered to Jesus.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Here we should also mention the infrequent *leitourgein*, 'to render cultic worship' (as in Heb. 10.11, and in a variant reading of Titus 1.9), but also 'to render material service', as in the giving to the collection that Paul was making for the poor in Jerusalem (Rom. 15.27). But most interesting for us is Acts 13.2, where Luke describes the church in Antioch 'worshipping (*leitourgountōn*) the Lord'. Is 'the Lord' here Jesus (as frequently in Acts)? Or does Luke speak of the worship of the Lord God? It is difficult to decide, although, as in the other 'Lord' = God references in Acts, the influence of Old Testament usage suggests that Luke was thinking of worship of God.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Bearing in mind that the *latreuein* word group is the nearest expression for the offering of 'cultic worship', the fact that it is

> never used for the 'cultic devotion' of Christ in the New Testament is somewhat surprising for Hurtado's main thesis and should be given some attention.

Conclusion of the four facts: Jesus is not worshipped

We have presented four facts that can be verified objectively and empirically and independently. None of these four facts is conclusive by itself, but when they are taken in combination, they show beyond doubt that *proskyneō*, when used of Jesus, means kneeling to Jesus, or reverencing him, or paying homage to him, and not worshipping him as deity. Indeed Jesus exhorts us to worship the One whom he calls, "my Father and your Father" and "my God and your God" (Jn. 20:17). True worship is not the worship *of* Jesus but worship *with* Jesus.

The special case of Revelation 5:14

The following is based on an earlier discussion in chapter 6, but is condensed in a way as to be a fitting conclusion to our present discussion.

The word *proskyneō* occurs 60 times in the New Testament, with 24 of the instances (40%) found in Revelation. That is a high percentage for one book, yet none of the 24 instances of *proskyneō* in Revelation is used of Jesus with the sole exception of Rev.5:14 where the 24 elders "worship" God and Jesus. Here the worship (*proskyneō*) is directed not to Jesus alone but also to God who is seated on His throne.

Here is a crucial observation: In the book of Revelation outside Rev.5:14, *proskyneō* always refers to God and never to Jesus, *without exception*. Hence it is clear that when *proskyneō* is applied to both God and Jesus in the sole verse Rev. 5:14, it is God and not Jesus who is the principal reason for the use of *proskyneō*. This is consistent with the fact that in the immediate context of Rev.5:14, the central figure is God who is seated on His throne.

We are reminded of the way the people of Israel bowed before God and before King David (note highlighted words):

> **1 Chronicles 29:20** David then addressed the whole assembly: "Now bless Yahweh your God!" And the whole assembly blessed Yahweh, God of their ancestors, bowing down in homage to Yahweh, and to the king. (NJB)

In the Hebrew of this verse, YHWH occurs three times. In the LXX of this verse, the phrase "bowing down in homage" corresponds to *proskyneō*, the word used in Revelation 5:14.

The use of *proskyneō* in 1Chr.29:20 is crucial because it tells us that the LXX translators did not hesitate to apply *proskyneō* to David when it is also applied to Yahweh! The parallel between David in 1Chr.29:20 and Jesus in Rev.5:14 is heightened by the fact that Jesus is the Messiah from David's line. We note that in 1Chr.29:20, the main intended recipient of the worship is not David but Yahweh by the fact that David said, "Now bless Yahweh your God." Yet that does not

rule out David (or Jesus in Rev.5:14) participating with Yahweh as the recipient of the *proskyneō*!

In the New Testament, Prayer is Addressed to God, not to Jesus Christ

In the previous chapter, we surveyed the New Testament to see if the doxologies and thanksgivings recorded in the NT are directed to Christ in the same way they are directed to God the Father. The overwhelming Scriptural evidence shows that this is definitely not the case.

What about prayer? Are prayers addressed to Jesus in the same way as they are addressed, or ought to be addressed, to the Father? To answer this question, we now look at the range of Greek words which cover the various aspects of prayer, notably that of making a request to God in prayer.

The Greek words for making requests to God in prayer

The verb *erōtaō* (ἐρωτάω, ask, request) occurs 63 times in the NT, seven times with the meaning of making a request to God in prayer. The seven instances are all found in John's writings: six times in John's Gospel and once in 1 John. The following is a list of the seven instances (two in John 17:9), all quoted from ESV. In each and every case, the request is made to God the Father and not to Jesus Christ:

John 14:16	I will ask the Father
John 16:26	I will ask the Father on your behalf
John 17:9	I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me.
John 17:15	I do not ask that you take them out of the world
John 17:20	I do not ask for these only
1 John 5:16	I do not say that one should pray for that

Another verb, *aiteō* (αἰτέω, ask), occurs 70 times in the NT, 29 times with the meaning of making a request to God in prayer. Of these 29 instances, eight are found in John's Gospel, all in chapters 14 to 16, and five are found in First John. [105] This leaves 16 occurrences outside John's writings.[106] Again, all these have to do with making a request to God, not to Jesus Christ, in prayer.

We mention two more words. The first is *deomai* (δέομαι, ask, plead for, request, beseech), which occurs 22 times in the NT, most often in Luke–Acts (15 times). It occurs once in Matthew and never in the Johannine writings. It occurs six times in Paul (Rom.1:10; 2Cor.5:20; 8:4; 10:2; Gal.4:12; 1Th. 3:10), but it is only in Rom.1:10 and 1Th.3:10 that the word refers to praying.

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[105] The eight in John's Gospel are 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23; 16:24 twice; 16:26. The five in First John are 3:22; 5:14; 5:15 twice; 5:16.

[106] The 16 instances are distributed as follows: Matthew 7 times, Mark once, Luke 5 times, and Paul's letters 3 times (Eph.3:20; Col. 1:9; Phil.4:6 as cognate *aitēma*).

The other word is the noun *deēsis* (δέησις, entreaty, prayer) which Paul often uses of prayer: of the 18 occurrences of this word in the New Testament, 12 are found in Paul's letters.

Regarding these two words: Whenever *deomai* or *deēsis* is used of prayer in the New Testament, it always refers to prayer to the Father, without exception. In many cases, it is used of Jesus praying to the Father. For example, in Lk.22:32, *deomai* is used of Jesus praying to the Father for Peter. In Heb.5:7, *deēsis* is used of Jesus who "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death".

Words for prayer

The word *parakaleō* (παρακαλέω, beseech, urge, exhort, comfort) occurs 109 times in the New Testament, but only twice in the sense of prayer. It is not the usual word for prayer but is a word that carries the sense of "call for help" (BDAG). The first instance of this word with the meaning of prayer is Mt.26:53 in which Jesus, as he was being seized in Gethsemane, rhetorically asked whether or not he could call to the Father for help and He will send him twelve legions of angels.

The only other instance of *parakaleō* in the sense of prayer is found in 2Cor.12:8 where Paul says that he pleaded with the Lord, either Jesus or God, three times for the

removal of the thorn in the flesh. But because *parakaleō* is not the usual word for prayer (used only twice in this sense) despite its being a common word in the New Testament (109 times, usually a plea for help), it is not determinative for our understanding of prayer. However, our overall examination of prayer in the New Testament may require us to note, for the sake of completeness, that this lone verse, 2Cor.12:8, does not negate the consistent Biblical pattern that prayer is addressed to the Father alone.

What then are the predominant words for prayer? In the New Testament, the main words for prayer are the verb *proseuchomai* (προσεύχομαι) and the noun *proseuchē* (προσεύχη). These occur 85 and 36 times, respectively, for a total of 121 times in the New Testament.[107]

Given the preponderance of these two words, it is striking that there is no instance, or at most one or two debatable and indirect instances, in the New Testament of *proseuchomai* or *proseuchē* being used of prayer addressed to Christ. On the other hand, these words are often used of Jesus praying to the Father during his earthly ministry. Not even after his ascension are we exhorted to address our prayers to Jesus Christ. Instead he continues to pray or intercede for us:

[107] The verb occurs 35 times in Luke–Acts and 19 times in Paul, whereas the noun occurs 9 times in Acts and 14 times in Paul. In the synoptics, the verb is used 19 times and the noun twice of Jesus' praying to the Father, for a total of 21 times in the synoptics. Neither Greek word is found in John's Gospel.

> **Romans 8:34** Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (ESV)
>
> **Hebrews 7:25** Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (ESV)

In both these verses, the word "intercede" or "intercession" is translated from the verb *entynchanō* (ἐντυγχάνω, intercede, appeal to). In the first verse, the word is used of Christ's appealing to God on our behalf. It is also used in Romans 8:27 of the Spirit's intercession for us.

Finally, *enteuxis* (ἔντευξις, petition, intercession) is found in 1 Timothy 2:1 and 4:5. In 2:1 the word is used with three other words related to prayer (*deēsis*, *proseuchē*, *eucharistia*, already examined). As expected, in both these verses, *enteuxis* refers to prayers addressed to God by disciples or believers.

Conclusion

Our survey of prayer in the New Testament has not shown any specific exhortation to pray to Christ. Rather, in this age Christ continues to pray to, and intercede with, the Father for us.

In the post-resurrection, post-Pentecost age, the only instance of a petition addressed to Jesus is Stephen's committing of his spirit to Jesus ("Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," Acts

7:59), followed by a plea for forgiveness for his persecutors ("Lord, do not hold this sin against them," v.60). But this is a case of a disciple committing his spirit to his Lord at death—like a sheep committing itself to its shepherd—and imitating the Lord Jesus who likewise asked that his persecutors be forgiven (Lk.23:34).

Another instance is found in Revelation 22:20 in which we see the welcoming exclamation, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus!" made in response to Jesus' announcement, "Surely I am coming soon." But this can hardly be classified as a prayer in the usual sense of the word.

These are the only two "prayers" directed to Jesus in the New Testament in the widest possible definition of the word "prayer". In fact these are more accurately described as *exclamations* to Jesus, not prayers to Jesus.

Calling on the name of Jesus?

What about calling on the name of Jesus? Let us consider the following:

> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours. (1Cor.1:2, ESV)

We note two things. First, as already seen in this verse, for Paul the church is not "the church of Jesus Christ" or "the

church of Christ" but "the church of God". The term "church of God" occurs several times in the NT (Acts 20:28; 1Cor.1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2Cor.1:1; Gal.1:13; 1Tim.3:5,15) whereas there is only one instance of a similar term used in relation to Christ, namely, "the churches of Christ" (Rom.16:16), a reference to some regional churches that sent their greetings to Rome. But when Paul refers to the church as a whole, he uses "the church of God" and never "the church of Christ".

Secondly, the title "Lord" that is used of Jesus in 1Cor.1:2 is hardly applicable to the eternally divine "God the Son," the second person of the Trinity, for it is a title that, in the exalted sense, was conferred on Jesus only *after* he had been raised from the dead. It was God who made Jesus "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36; cf. 5:31; Rom.14:9). This exalted title "Lord" is not to be confused with "Lord" in the everyday sense as used in the gospel narratives by people who addressed Jesus as "Lord" in the sense of Sir or Master or Teacher.

The Greek word *kyrios* ("Lord") was routinely used in everyday speech as a respectful form of address similar to "Sir" or "Mister" with no attribution of deity. The Pharisees used *kyrios* of Pontius Pilate (Mt.27:63); the Samaritan woman used it of Jesus before she knew he was a prophet (Jn. 4:11); some Greeks used it of Philip (Jn.12:21); the Philippian jailor used it of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:30); John used it of one of the 24 elders in the heavenly vision (Rev.7:14).

In the Greek Old Testament (LXX), Sarah used *kyrios* of Abraham (Gen.18:12). She did not of course speak Greek to her husband; the point is that the Jewish translators of the LXX (which predates Christianity) unhesitatingly applied *kyrios* to human beings. In the book of Genesis alone, *kyrios* is used by Ephron the Hittite (of Abraham, 23:11), Rebekah (of Abraham's servant, 24:18), Rachel (of her father, 31:35), Jacob (of Esau, 33:13), Joseph's brothers (of Joseph, 42:10), Judah (of Joseph, 44:16), and Joseph (of himself, 45:8).

Because Jesus was obedient to his Father unto death, it pleased God to exalt him to the highest degree such that "every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil.2:11). This lordship does not amount to any alleged deity. Paul is here speaking of Jesus' exaltation by God, to the glory of God. To confess that "Jesus is Lord" is to acknowledge that Yahweh glorified him by this title because of his unconditional devotion and obedience to his Father (this will be discussed further in chapter 10).

With these NT background points in mind, we can better understand the meaning of "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor.1:2), a phrase which incidentally occurs only in this verse in the whole New Testament. In view of the exaltation of Christ in Phil.2:9-11, it is remarkable that this phrase does not occur more often than it does. Even parallels to it are few, and most of them are found in Acts (the following are from ESV):

> **Acts 9:14** And here (Saul) has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.
>
> **Acts 9:21** And all who heard (Saul) were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name?"
>
> **Acts 22:16** And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

Jesus is the image of God (Col.1:15) and Yahweh's plenipotentiary and representative who comes in Yahweh's name. Calling on the exalted and glorified Jesus is to call on Yahweh who sent him and dwells in him. Similarly, calling on "the name of the Lord" in Romans 10:13 (a quotation of Joel 2:32) could refer to calling on Jesus through whom we call on Yahweh.

Praying Directly to God the Father

As trinitarians we worshipped and prayed to Jesus. Occasionally we would pray to the anonymous "Father" of the Trinity, but then always in Jesus' name and with the belief that we cannot pray to the Father except through the Son. Our inattention to the Father didn't trouble us because, with Jesus supposedly being God, we didn't feel that we were being denied access to God. But when God in His great mercy began to open my eyes to see the Scriptures in the wonderful light of Biblical monotheism, I was surprised to discover, upon looking anew at the Scriptures, that the NT church did not worship or pray to Jesus as we trinitarians did. The NT records no prayers to Jesus though trinitarians might regard as prayers the exclamations in Acts 7:59 and Rev.22:20, but that is possible only by stretching the definition of prayer to include any one-sentence exclamation to Jesus.

After Jesus' ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit on the church at Pentecost, the prayers of the early believers were addressed to God (Yahweh) whereas Jesus was mentioned as His "servant" (*pais*, e.g. Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30). The rest of the New Testament does not depart from this practice of praying only to God. In spite of Phil.2:10 ("at the name of

Jesus every knee should bow"), Paul says, "I bow my knees before the Father" (Eph.3.14).

The Psalmists prayed directly to Yahweh

The Psalms are a collection of 150 songs of prayer and praise to Yahweh. Anyone who reads the Psalms would know that the Psalmists would often acknowledge that Yahweh has heard and answered their prayers, and for that reason much praise and thanksgiving is offered to Him.

Christians who insist that we cannot pray to God except in Jesus' name could perhaps explain to us why the Psalms contain no reference to Jesus or to the necessity of an intermediary who makes possible such direct and magnificent communication with Yahweh as is found in the Psalms. This is less an issue of dogma than a matter of erecting spiritual barriers in people's lives. From the way some Christians explain prayer, one gets the impression that before Jesus came, anyone could pray directly to Yahweh; but after Jesus came, direct prayer to Yahweh was curtailed even for God's people by the necessity of praying in Jesus' name.

Why is it that in the Old Testament, anyone could pray *directly* to Yahweh the Most High God, yet this has supposedly become impermissible after Jesus came? In the Old Testament, Yahweh God was even willing to answer the prayers of foreigners who did not belong to Israel:

> When a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you (1Kings 8:41-43, ESV)

This is just one of several hundred passages in the Old Testament that speak of God's mercy to those who pray directly to Him without an intermediary. Anyone who is tangentially familiar with the Bible would know that the one who finds himself or herself in distress or danger can call upon Yahweh directly. Will Yahweh our Creator turn a deaf ear to His creatures when they sincerely call to Him for help, even if they haven't yet known Him as their Savior? Indeed Psalm 36:7 speaks of God's universal love for mankind: "The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings".

God's compassion is seen also in the thousands of real-life stories outside the Bible. Many have testified of how God had rescued them from calamity when they called out to Him despite not knowing Him. I have several books on my shelf that recount how God delivered those who cried out to Him despite having no claim to being Christians.

To close this section, here are a few verses in the Psalms in which the psalmists pray *directly* to Yahweh without invoking the name of Jesus or an intermediary, and quite often Yahweh hears their prayers (all verses are from ESV, with "Yahweh" in the original Hebrew restored):

> **Psalm 6:9** Yahweh has heard my plea; Yahweh accepts my prayer.
>
> **Psalm 39:12** Hear my prayer, O Yahweh, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! (cf. 17:1; 84:8; 86:6; 102:1; 143:1)
>
> **Psalm 69:13** But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Yahweh. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness.
>
> **Psalm 88:13** But I, O Yahweh, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you.
>
> **Psalm 116:4** Then I called on the name of Yahweh: "O Yahweh, I pray, deliver my soul!"
>
> **Psalm 118:25** Save us, we pray, O Yahweh! O Yahweh, we pray, give us success!

Praying directly to our Father

The New Testament does not abolish direct one-to-one communication between us and God. The "man Christ Jesus" (1Tim.2:5) is indeed the mediator between us and God, but his work of mediation was completed when he said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Then the veil in the temple was torn in two (Mt.27:51; Mk.15:38; Lk.23:45). Jesus "has now reconciled (aorist) you in his body of flesh by his death" (Col.1:22), for God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2Cor.5:19, i.e., reconciled to God the Father, as seen in v.18).

And having been reconciled to the Father, we can now pray directly to Him! Or do we insist that our reconciliation with God our Father is partial and incomplete? Or comes with conditions and restrictions that prevent direct communication with Him without an intermediary?

Anyone who cares about prayer would sympathize with the disciple who said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples" (Lk.11:1). Then Jesus answered: "When you pray, say, 'Father, hallowed be your name…'" This prayer is so esteemed in Christendom that it is often called the "model prayer" or "the Lord's prayer," and is regularly recited in some churches. Here is Matthew's account of the prayer:

> Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Matthew 6:9-13, ESV).

We note two things from this passage, and these serve to demonstrate the vast gulf between our traditional notions of prayer and what the Bible says about prayer. Firstly, to the question of how we ought to pray, the answer is found in two powerful words, "Our Father". We pray directly to the Father, not to Jesus.

There is not one instance of prayer to Jesus in the whole Bible unless we stretch the definition of prayer to include the exclamations in Acts 7:59-60 and Rev.22:20 which are so brief as to contain a combined total of only 17 words in the Greek, even fewer than in a typical Bible verse (e.g. the well-known John 3:16 has 25 words in the Greek). The absence of prayer to Jesus in the New Testament is hardly surprising to the monotheist, for prayers are addressed to God, whereas Jesus is not God.[108]

Secondly, the Lord's prayer does not conclude with the traditional closing words, "We pray for this in Jesus' name, Amen"—a formula that is universal in Christian practice but is found nowhere in the Scriptures!

In teaching us to address God as Father, Jesus graciously considers us to be on the same level as himself in terms of family hierarchy. Jesus speaks of God as "my Father and your Father, my God and your God" (Jn.20:17), which means that

[108] Historical note: "Some early theologians objected to [praying to Jesus], among them Origen. He argued that though it is proper to address requests and thanksgivings to saints or even ordinary human beings, prayer in the proper sense—a request to God for something which only God can grant, combined with praise—may be addressed only to God the Father (*On Prayer*, 14-16) … Jesus cannot be the object of such prayers because he himself offered them during his earthly life … Perhaps as a result of criticisms like Origen's, there is not much evidence from the following centuries of early Christianity of prayer directed to Jesus in baptismal and eucharistic liturgies." (*Jesus Now and Then*, Richard Burridge and Graham Gould, p.148)

Jesus is our brother and shares the same Father with us. In the same sentence, Jesus explicitly refers to his disciples as "my brothers".

Just as Jesus prayed directly to his God and Father, so we are to pray directly to our God and Father. In a family, do the younger siblings need to get authorization from the eldest brother every time they approach their father? Do they say to the father, "I now come to you in the name of elder brother"? We seem to have forgotten that we have been "born of God" (1Jn.3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18). 1John 5:18 says that we are "born of God" and that Jesus was "born of God"—in the same sentence!

Jesus is our mediator and only way to the Father (John 14:6). But after he had completed his work of salvation and reconciliation, we now have direct access to the Father. After having been fully reconciled with God, are we still under obligation to say "in Jesus' name" every time we communicate with our Abba Father? In fact the exclamation "Abba! Father" (Rom.8:15; Gal.4:6) is said directly to the Father.

But Christians reverse the matter, not realizing that it was God who in the first place sent Jesus to reconcile us to God Himself. Ultimately, the work of reconciliation is done not so much by Christ as by God through Christ and in Christ (2Cor.5:18-19).

Direct prayer requests

The hindering of direct communication with the Father by imposing the condition of saying "in the name of Jesus" is yet another consequence of the trinitarian error of sidelining the Father by making Christ the focus of a "Christocentric" faith.

Where is the Scriptural evidence for saying that we cannot approach the Father except in the name of Jesus? Why does Jesus himself teach us to pray, "Our Father in heaven"? Some trinitarians, in a disturbing effort to seek out ever more restrictions, will point to John 15:16 in which Jesus says, "Whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give it". When trinitarians quote this verse, there is often the implication that the Father won't hear our request unless it is validated with Jesus' authority. This interpretation flies in the face of what Jesus himself says about how the Father relates to His children: "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?" (Mt.7:11; cf. Lk. 11:13). Note the powerful words "your Father" and "ask him" and "how much more". Our heavenly Father is much more willing than our earthly fathers to give us good things! Yet in the trinitarian scheme of things, a child has more direct access to his earthly father than a child of God has in relation to his heavenly Father!

These two verses on asking the Father directly (Mt.7:11; Lk.11:13) appear just after the Lord's prayer (Mt.6:9-13; Lk.11:2-4) which is notable for addressing the Father directly

("Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name," or in Luke simply, "Father, hallowed be Your name"), but also notable for the absence of the traditional formula, "In Jesus' name we pray, Amen". The two surrounding passages, Mt.7:7-8 and Lk.11:9-10, bring out the threefold principle of asking (in order to receive), seeking (in order to find), and knocking (in order to have the door opened), all in relationship to the Father and not Jesus Christ.

Jesus says, "the Father himself loves you" (Jn.16:27), a beautiful truth that is echoed in his words to the Father: "You loved them just as you loved me" (17:23). In the light of all that Jesus has said about the Father, how can anyone still insist that the believer cannot approach the Father or ask Him for anything unless it is first validated by Jesus?

In any case, who is entitled to act in Jesus' name? Do most Christians live under his authority? Is the average Christian of such spiritual caliber that he or she can rightly ask for anything or do anything "in the name of Jesus"? Given the mediocre spiritual condition of most Christians today, why do they suppose that they can use Jesus' name to get whatever they want from the Father, unashamedly quoting the words, "whatever you ask the Father in my name" (Jn.15:16)? In the first place, those who live mediocre Christian lives would hardly seek spiritual things yet wholeheartedly pursue things that cater to their self-interests. Don't we hear this kind of selfish prayer all the time? "God, bless me and grant me good grades and a high-paying job". This way of thinking is breed-

ing a selfishness that has crept into the lives of many Christians.

And why do trinitarians think that this lone verse in John is sufficient justification for their blanket statement that no prayer is acceptable to God unless it is made in Jesus' name? If they had looked more closely at the context of this verse, they would have seen that the whole passage, John 14 to 16, is about the gift of the Holy Spirit (Jn.14:17,26; 15:26; 16:13) which at that time had not yet been given. The disciples had to wait for the day of Pentecost for the arrival of that gift. At Pentecost, the church in Jerusalem asked the Father for the gift of the Spirit as they met together with one heart and mind in prayer, and they did receive the Spirit (Acts 2:1-21).

As regards asking for the Spirit, let us take Jesus' statement to heart: "If you, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Lk. 11:13). No one can take the gift of the Spirit for granted; we must ask "the heavenly Father" for this precious gift. The early church prayed together for this gift and waited for it. But once the Spirit had been given to the church at Pentecost, did the church as a whole keep on asking for the Spirit again and again in all the days that followed as if they had never received it? From the scriptural data, clearly not. If a believer had prayed for and then received the gift of the Spirit, does he have to keep on asking for the gift of the Spirit "in Jesus' name" again and again? Evidently not, for why would we

keep on praying for the Spirit in Jesus' name again and again as if the prayer has never been answered? In fact the Spirit is meant to be with the believer forever (Jn.14:16).

It is possible that one's prayer for the Spirit has never been heard, for the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God (Acts 5:32). In any case, most Christians say prayers that have nothing to do with the gift of the Spirit. Such Christians should heed what Paul says: If anyone does not have the Spirit, he does not belong to Christ (Rom.8:9). The tragedy of the church today is that it is full of believers who pray in Jesus' name, yet do not belong to God. Then they wonder why their prayers are not heard despite the use of the formula "in Jesus' name".

Learning prayer from the Psalms

We reap much spiritual benefit when we use the Psalms as an instruction guide to prayer. The book of Psalms is the prayer book of God's people. The psalms come in different types: psalms of supplication, psalms of thanksgiving, and psalms of praise. Some people are dismayed when they encounter a psalm that prays for God's severe judgment on slanderers, evildoers and persecutors. This is believed to be contrary to the forgiving spirit of the New Testament. But that impression is incorrect, for the concern for justice is not any weaker in the New Testament than in the Old Testament, as can be

seen in Revelation, especially in regard to the martyrs (cf. Paul's concern for retributive justice, 2Tim.4:14-16).

The great value of the Psalms lies in the repeated assurance that Yahweh answers prayer, a truth that brings forth much thanksgiving from the psalmists. This is a much needed corrective to the trinitarian notion that for a prayer to be heard, it needs to be concluded in Jesus' name. No such formula is ever uttered in the Psalms, yet that doesn't prevent prayers from being heard.

Proverbs, too, testifies to the fact that "Yahweh is far from the wicked but hears the prayer of the righteous" (15:29). The key to answered prayers is not some kind of trinitarian formula but righteousness. The notion that God hears us because we utter "in Jesus' name" as a formula is one of the many errors we have inherited from our trinitarian background. Yet in Psalms and other books in the Bible, the prerequisite to answered prayer is righteousness. And Yahweh in His grace makes that righteousness available to us in Christ.

"In my name"

In the whole New Testament, the phrase "in my name" in relation to asking for something from God occurs *only* in John chapters 14 to 16, a section that is about the coming of the Holy Spirit. In these three chapters, "in my name" occurs 7 times (John 14:13,14,26; 15:16; 16:23,24,26). Here is John 16:23:

> In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

The two occurrences of "ask" in this verse represent two different Greek words. The first "ask" (*erōtaō*) usually has to do with asking a question.[109] The second "ask" (*aiteō*) usually has to do with asking for something.

The disciples may have asked Jesus many questions, but when it comes to asking for something, Jesus would guide them to the Father, not to himself (with one possible exception, discussed later). Likewise, Mt.7:11 teaches us to direct our requests to the Father: "How much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"

When Jesus says, "whatever you ask the Father in my name," he is not referring to things like cars and houses that prosperity preachers like to bring up. The "whatever you ask" is qualified by the words "in my name". And what is his name? His name is not "God" which in any case is not a name but a term of description. His name is *Jesus* which means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation" whereas *Christ* refers to Yahweh's anointed Messiah-King, the savior of the world. Here we see the motifs of salvation, suggesting that "whatever you ask" has mainly to do with salvation.

[109] It can occasionally refer to asking for something, as in Jn.14:16; 16:26; 17:9. But in these instances, it is Jesus who asks the Father.

Since the whole section John 14 to 16 is about the coming of the Spirit called the "comforter" (John 14:16), therefore "whatever you ask" has to do with God's power for salvation in the age following Jesus' departure at the completion of his earthly ministry, after which everything is governed by Yahweh's Spirit operating in the church. Jesus is telling his disciples that they can receive whatever they need in the spiritual life by asking the Father for the Spirit in his name and authority. And when the gift arrived at Pentecost, the disciples proclaimed the message of salvation to the nations.

The Holy Spirit was well known to the Jews. But in the Old Testament the Spirit of Yahweh did not indwell people, not even the great prophets and servants of God, but was depicted as "coming upon" people (e.g. upon Jahaziel who prophesied before King Jehoshaphat, 2Chr.20:14), empowering them to fulfill a task that Yahweh had sent them to do.

The situation changed with the coming of Jesus and the establishing of the new covenant in which the Spirit of Yahweh plays a central role. This was prophesied in Joel 2:8-32 ("I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh," v.28) and fulfilled in Acts 2:16-22. The Spirit is poured out, yet we are still to ask the Father for the Spirit (Lk.11:13). The Spirit won't be given until Jesus has been glorified in his death, resurrection, and ascension (Jn.7:39). This fact, in combination with Luke 11:13, clarifies much of what Jesus teaches about the Spirit.

An important theme in these three chapters, John 14 to 16, is the mutual indwelling that is so central to John 15 and

is the key to life under the new covenant. The mutual indwelling is seen in: John 15:4 ("abide in me, and I in you"), 14:20 ("I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you"), and 14:10 ("I am in the Father and the Father is in me"); also 17:21.

Is John 14:14 an exception to Jesus' teaching?

In John's Gospel, "in my name" occurs only in John 14 to 16, which are precisely the three chapters in which Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit. This indicates that asking "in my name" must somehow relate to the Spirit. In these three chapters, "in my name" occurs seven times and always in connection with praying to (or asking) the Father, with the possible but uncertain exception of 14:14: "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it".

The crucial difference in this verse is that the asking is directed not to the Father but to Jesus himself. Hence it is hermeneutically difficult to reconcile Jn.14:14 with the other verses in John where "in my name" has to do with asking the Father. Taken at face value, Jn.14:14 does not make obvious sense, not only because the other similar verses speak of asking the Father, but also because if we are asking Jesus directly, what is the point of asking him in his own name? As for the words "I will do it" in 14:14, it ought to be remembered that it is ultimately the Father who is doing it through Jesus, as we see four verses earlier: "The words that I say to you I do not

speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works" (Jn.14:10). So when Jesus says "I will do it," it is the Father who is doing the work through him. Jesus does nothing of his own (Jn.5:19), can do nothing on his own (5:30), and speaks nothing of his own authority (8:28), but does the work of his Father (14:10).

Not surprisingly, John 14:14 has significant textual issues. It is uncertain if the word "me" in "if you ask me" is in the original Greek of John 14:14. It does not appear in some important ancient uncials such as A D K L Q Ψ (see NA28's critical apparatus). UBS3 (p.390) classifies its uncertainty at level {B}, indicating "some degree of doubt". The degree of doubt remains at {B} in UBS4/UBS5.

There is even doubt about the whole verse itself, which is omitted by some manuscripts, as seen in the UBS5 footnote to John 14:14 ("*omit verse 14* f^{1} 157 565 *l* $76^{1/2}$ *l* $76^{1/2}$ *l* $211^{1/2}$ *l* $1074^{1/2}$ it^{b} vg^{ms} $syr^{s,pal}$ arm geo"). UBS4's companion volume, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek NT*, says, "Ver.14 is omitted by a scattering of witnesses, including several important ancient versions," though the commentary ultimately accepts the verse as part of the original text.

For similar reasons, the *United Bible Societies NT Handbooks* (vol.4, on Jn.14:14) arrives at the conclusion that the asking is directed to the Father:

> … this verse [Jn.14:14] is entirely omitted by some Greek manuscripts, though the evidence favors its inclusion … Some manuscripts do not have *me* in the phrase *if you ask me* … The Father could be assumed as the one to whom the prayer is directed.

The uncertainty over the word "me" in "if you ask me" is documented in many Bibles. ESV says in a footnote to Jn. 14:14 that "some manuscripts omit *me*". HCSB likewise says, "other mss omit *Me*". KJV, NKJV, RSV, REB omit "me" even in the main text, as does the French Louis Segond Bible.

John 14:14 is not otherwise problematic. The insertion of "me" into the Greek text is likely the work of a trinitarian or proto-trinitarian. A few late manuscripts have "the Father" instead of "me" but this could be an interpretive addition in the opposite direction, perhaps to harmonize this verse with the other similar verses in John chapters 14 to 16.

The Expositor's Greek Testament (vol.1, p.824) omits "me" in its Greek text. Regarding "in my name" in Jn.14:13, EGT says, "The name of a person can only be used when we seek to enforce his will and further his interests." Jesus always seeks to do his Father's will; hence invoking Jesus' name must always be done in conformity with the Father's will or else it would be a serious misuse of the name.

Many Christians invoke "in Jesus' name" as a magic formula to be used in prayer to get God to grant them what they ask, reducing Christianity to pious superstition with little connection to biblical teaching. The guiding principle that

Jesus intends for invoking "in my name" is seen in the previous verse: "Whatever you ask [the Father] in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (Jn. 14:13). Jesus' desire that the Father be glorified in the Son is the guiding principle of Jesus' life and ministry, and ought to be ours too.

Chapter 9

The Humanity of Jesus Christ

In this chapter we reflect on the humanity or humanness of Jesus Christ who in Scripture is called the Son of Man, or the Son of God, or the man Christ Jesus, but never the trinitarian "God the Son". Some of the material will overlap slightly with my earlier book, TOTG, but presented in a somewhat different way, and often by way of spiritual reflection, in order to appreciate the implications of Christ's humanity for our lives.

For anyone who studies the Scriptures, and has had some real experience of the living God, it shouldn't be hard to see that God simply cannot become a man. The gap between the divine and the human is simply unbridgeable in terms of nature. God is immortal, man is mortal. To become mortal, God would have to change His nature so as to cease to be God, which would be impossible. In the Scriptures, a fundamental truth about God is that He is unchanging. He is "the

eternal God" (Dt.33:27; Rom.16:26) and God from "everlasting to everlasting" (Ps.90:2). It is written of God that "you are the same, and your years have no end" (Ps.102:27; Heb.1:12), and "I, Yahweh, do not change" (Mal.3:6). "God is not man" (Num.23:19) that He should change His mind (1Sam.15:29), much less change His nature. Yet trinitarianism says that in the case of Jesus Christ, God became a man, which is impossible because that would involve the most fundamental change of all, and God would cease to be what He is. Yet this is the kind of absurdity and unintentional blasphemy that we preached in our trinitarian days.

If we proclaim the biblical truth that Jesus is not God, then in the view of trinitarians, we are making him "mere man". But in the Bible, Jesus is a true man, and like all human beings was "born of a woman" (Gal.4:4). Do trinitarians regard this as degrading? Trinitarians prefer a Jesus who is more than man; they want a divine being called "God the Son," a term that is not found in the Bible. As trinitarians, we had little concern for Jesus' humanity, and the same could be said of most of the bishops at Nicaea.

By the time Jesus had been deified by the Gentiles, the gospel that once met strong resistance among them and was rejected by them as "foolishness" would soon become the state religion of Rome. Gone was the shame of preaching a crucified Jewish king as the Savior of the world; now you need only believe in an Almighty Creator who became incarnate as Jesus Christ. Where in this is the "offense of the

cross" (Gal.5:11) or the one "despised and rejected of men" (Isa.53:3; 1Pet.2:4)? What is there to despise about a divine man? The point is that the basic character of the "gospel" had changed when the man Jesus was elevated to God.

Did the church leaders at Nicaea think that "God the Son" could save mankind? It is the man Jesus who saves us to the "uttermost" (Heb.7:25). Do trinitarians suppose that in God's plan of salvation, the sacrifice of a divine being would provide mankind with a more secure salvation? And where is the scriptural support for their concept of a divine Son who is the emanation of God? Doesn't it alarm them that no such being is found in the Scriptures? Yet they place their faith in a nonexistent being as their savior!

In contrast to this absurdity, a psalmist rejoices in the wonderful privilege of being God's creature. Man was exquisitely created by God, formed by God's own fingers. Then God breathed into him the breath of life (Gen.2:7). The psalmist praises God for having created him so wonderfully:

> For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! (Psalm 139:13-17, ESV)

The obedience of the one man

It is hard to overstate the crucial importance of Romans 5:19 for the soteriology of Romans and the New Testament. As trinitarians we expended much time and effort trying to prove the deity of Jesus but did not realize that our search for the supporting proof texts in the New Testament was undermining its doctrine of salvation.

> **Romans 5:19** For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Is Paul speaking of the obedience of God or of man? Since Paul is speaking explicitly of the obedience of the "one man" Jesus Christ—the counterpart of the "one man" Adam—why are we so keen to prove that this "one man" is God? What is behind our determined efforts? The obedience of God to God is not what matters for our salvation, nor the obedience of the second person to the first person of the Godhead who are coequal and share a common substance.

The obedience of God to God bears no relevance to the most important issue for man: his salvation. To get what Romans 5:19 is saying, let us look at it again: It was by one man's disobedience (Adam's) that "the many" (a metaphor for all men) were made sinners. Hence it is necessary that "through the obedience of the one man (not the obedience of God or the obedience of a person of the Trinity) the many will be made righteous."

The usual trinitarian reply—that the second person of the Trinity became man by incarnation—is, first of all, an admission that it is man's obedience that matters for salvation. It also does not solve the problem because to bring up incarnation is to admit that Jesus was not originally or essentially man; he had to become man, which he was not before. Trinitarians say that God the Son acquired a "human nature" through incarnation. But a human nature is not a whole human being, which means that Jesus is not "fully man" as posited in trinitarianism. But if we say that Jesus' human nature with a human body is a whole person, another problem arises: God the Son would then be united to a whole human person, making Jesus two persons.

The early trinitarians were aware of these problems when they condemned Nestorius as a heretic for promoting a teaching that the trinitarians understood to mean an amalgam of two distinct persons, an idea they rightly rejected.[110] But Nestorius was merely taking the trinitarian idea to its logical conclusion of two persons in the God-man. The trinitarians of the 4th and 5th centuries stepped back from that conclusion, and condemned it.

But in refusing to take the God-man concept to its logical conclusion (in order to avoid the untenable idea that Jesus is

[110] It is unclear from the history of dogma if this was what Nestorius, archbishop of Constantinople, really taught, for most of his writings have been lost, and most of what we know of his teachings have come to us from his enemies.

two persons), they went for the alternative: Jesus is God with a human nature. But how can this "God + human nature" construct be a true human being? The Jesus of trinitarianism is not a human being in any sense of the word "human"; he only possesses a human nature as if it is something that can exist independently of a whole human person. This exposes the utterly confused trinitarian concept of the God-man, an idea that does not stand up to elementary analysis.

The concept of Jesus as God-man, which makes it impossible for him to be a true human being, will come at the unspeakable cost of eternal salvation. It was in the light of Romans 5:19 that I wrote in TOTG that we don't need another God for salvation. What we need is a perfect man, one who is perfectly obedient to God.

To resolve the incongruity of the trinitarian Jesus with the biblical Jesus, we must first grasp that the former is not a human being like any human being who has ever lived on the face of the earth since the creation of Adam. He is not like Adam at all, and therefore not like any human being at all.

This is no trifling theological issue because our salvation hangs on it, a fact that we failed to see as trinitarians. If Jesus is not a true human being like Adam (or like us, Adam's descendants) but is the God-man, then the crucial words of Romans 5:18-19 cannot apply to him. As death came into the world through the transgression of the first Adam (*adam* means "man"), so in Yahweh's plan of redemption, atonement was made through the blood of the last Adam.

The importance of the last Adam in New Testament teaching was not something that we in our trinitarian days cared to expound. I confess that in my several decades of ministry, I had never, as a trinitarian, preached a message on the important place of the last Adam in the New Testament.

The three phases of Jesus' ministry of salvation

The New Testament is fundamentally concerned with salvation, and puts Jesus Christ into the framework of God's plan for the salvation of humankind (even Jesus' God-given name means "Yahweh is salvation"). The plan is rolled out in three phases, corresponding to the three phases of salvation spoken of in the New Testament: past, present, and future.

The *first phase* is from Jesus' birth to his death, resurrection, and ascension. With the completion of his earthly ministry, he "sat down at the right hand of God" (Mk.16:19; Heb.1:3; 10:12). His sitting down signifies the completion of that ministry. The completion is also signified by Jesus' use of the word "remembrance" at the Last Supper. This word (Gk. *anamnēsis*) occurs only four times in the NT, with three of the occurrences pertaining to the Lord's Supper (Lk.22:19; 1Cor.11:24,25) and explained by BDAG as "in remembrance (or memory) of me". The word "remembrance" points to a past event that carries significance for the present.

The first phase of salvation was completed with the declaration, "It is finished" (Jn.19:30), but also with, "I have

brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (Jn.17:4).

What was achieved in the first phase of salvation was reconciliation with God in Christ (2Cor.5:19). Through the atoning blood of Jesus the Lamb of God shed on the altar of the cross, humankind could now be reconciled with God. The barrier between God and man was torn down, as vividly expressed in the rending of the veil (recorded in all three synoptics, Mt.27:51; Mk.15:38; Lk.23:45) that had closed off the holiest place in the temple from the rest of the temple. In the temple services, the high priest as the people's representative would enter this holiest place, called the Holy of Holies, once a year (Heb.9:7) to come into God's presence, but never without the blood of sacrifice.

In Matthew 27:51, the word *schizō* which is translated "torn apart" with reference to the temple curtain is also used in the same verse of the splitting of rocks. The barrier between God and man that was created by man's sins and represented by the curtain, is as impenetrable as rock in terms of spiritual reality, as anyone trying to reach God would soon discover. It is not something that could be pushed aside as easily as a physical curtain.

But to achieve reconciliation, God has to come to us in Christ before we can go to Him. In Christ, Yahweh answered the plea so poignantly expressed in Isaiah 64:1, "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down," a verse that depicts the heavens as a veil or a garment that hides Yahweh from

our sight. Here, too, the picture is that of a veil being torn apart and Yahweh coming down to us. This is also the picture of the coming of the Spirit of God upon Jesus at his baptism ("immediately he saw the heavens being torn apart and the Spirit descending on him like a dove," Mk.1:10), signifying God's presence with him and in him.

The *second phase* of salvation has to do with the present time in which Jesus is in heaven at the right hand of the Father: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Heb.1:13). In this phase it is the Spirit of Yahweh, the Holy Spirit, who is working in "the church of God" (a term used in Acts 20:28; 1Cor.1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2Cor.1:1; Gal.1:13; 1Tim.3:5,15), drawing people to a saving faith in Christ. God does this work through His people and His church, the body of Christ.

The *third phase* of salvation has to do with Jesus' return to earth as King and Messiah, regarding which the angels had told the disciples: "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The three phases of salvation can be portrayed in another way, from Yahweh's perspective:

First phase: Yahweh came to dwell in a man, Jesus Christ, such that God's fullness dwelled in him bodily (Col.2:9). God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2Cor.5:19). In the New Testament, this phase is recorded in the four gospels.

Second phase: Yahweh is now in the world dwelling in His church, the body of Christ and temple of God, and through the church is continuing His work of reconciliation. This phase is the main focus of the section from Acts to Jude. Since this section of Scripture has to do with the present time, it is important for us to understand it correctly, for any error here will have serious spiritual consequences. Yahweh now dwells in His church "bodily" in much the same way He dwelled in Christ (now the head of the church) when Christ was on earth. The church's message to the world is, "Be reconciled to God" (2Cor.5:20,18; Rom.5:10), just as Christ came in order to "bring us to God" (1Pet.3:18).

The body of Christ is now in the world in the way that the head, Jesus Christ, was in the world. In other words, the church is now as Christ in the world, not only as a community or a spiritual organism but also as individuals. The body of each individual believer who has received the Spirit of God is now the temple of the Holy Spirit, that is, the temple of

God, in basically the same way that Jesus was the temple of God, except for the crucial difference that whereas Jesus attained absolute perfection through Yahweh's indwelling, we have not (yet) attained to the "stature of Christ". Even so, we can experience Christ in ourselves and not just in some abstract intellectual way. Hence Paul is able to say, "For me to live is Christ"; it is for this reason that "to die is gain" (Phil.1:21).

Third phase: Yahweh will return to earth in Christ. Yahweh's Christ ("the Christ of God," Luke 9:20) and Yahweh's church ("the church of God," Acts 20:28) will rule the earth. All who had refused to be reconciled with God will be judged. This third phase, the final phase of the present age, is the focus of the book of Revelation, but also of a few chapters in the synoptic gospels and some passages in the NT letters, notably 2 Thessalonians.

In this phase, Christ will "subject all things to himself" (Phil.3:21), fulfilling the purpose of the third phase of God's plan of salvation in Christ. The transformation of the body mentioned in this verse is the defeat of death and mortality. In putting on immortality, the bodies of the redeemed will be transformed into glorious and incorruptible bodies like that of Christ. The subjection of all things to Christ will include the defeat of death and its elimination from redeemed creation.

There is also the subjection of spiritual powers hostile to God which are called "principalities and powers" (KJV) or "rulers and authorities" (ESV): "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Col.2:15). We see something similar in the following passage:

> It has been testified somewhere (Psalm 8:4-6), "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his (man's) feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:6-9, ESV)

God's eternal purposes for creation include putting all things in subjection to *man's* feet. After Adam's fall, Yahweh carried out His eternal plan through the redemption that is in the "man Christ Jesus," the only mediator between God and men (1Tim.2:5). But if Christ is divine as he is in trinitarianism, then God's plan would not have been carried out, but would have been subverted, for it would be to the "second person of the Godhead" and not to man that all things will be subjected.

Job is puzzled by the value that Yahweh attaches to man and the attention He gives him ("What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him," Job 7:17). God's care for man is seen in His intention "before the foundation of the world" to "put all things under his feet," that is, all things in subjection to man. It is man—preeminently Jesus Christ, seated at the Father's right hand—who will rule over God's creation as His representative and plenipotentiary.

> **1 Corinthians 15:24-27** Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." (ESV)
>
> **Ephesians 1:18-23** having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he (God, v.17) has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (ESV)

God who is immortal cannot die

God is immortal, which means that God cannot die and does not die. But this truth is lost on many speakers of English because the word "immortal" does not, to most people, clearly or unambiguously convey the sense of "cannot die" or "does not die". One reason is that the words "mortal" and "immortal" are less concrete to most people than "die" and "death". Another reason is that "immortal" is often used in the sense of "deserving to be remembered forever" (*Oxford Dictionary*) as in "the immortal Shakespeare". Yet another reason is that "mortal" is sometimes used generically of people as in "the ambassador had to live in a style that was not expected of lesser mortals" (an example from *Oxford*).

But in Greek, the meaning "cannot die" comes out unmistakably in the word *athanasia* (immortality), which is a combination of the alpha privative "a" and *thanatos* ("death")—basically "no death".

The English *mortal* is related to the French *mort* and Latin *mortuus*, both of which mean "dead". In fact some Bibles render 1Tim.6:16a to explicitly say that God cannot die: "He is the only One who never dies" (Expanded Bible); "God is the only one who can't die" (NIRV); and "He alone can never die" (NLT). This is seen in Bibles in other languages. A French Bible has, "Il est le seul qui ne meurt pas" ("he is the only one who does not die," *La Bible: Parole de Vie*). The Chinese Union Bible is equally explicit: 就是那独一不死 ("the only one who does not die").

We trinitarians did not grasp that if Jesus is God, then by definition he would be immortal and could not have died. So either Jesus is not God and can die for the sins of mankind, or he is God and cannot die. I know of no theologian who has given a plausible solution to this conundrum. The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann even flaunts this issue by giving one of his books the title "The Crucified God".

The concept of a god who dies and rises again was familiar to the pagan world in which the Gentile church took root. Little wonder that some scholars have portrayed Christianity as preaching a pagan Christ (e.g. Tom Harpur's *The Pagan Christ*). Their criticism is not without basis because the God of the Bible is indisputably immortal. Pagan gods, by contrast, are said to die and rise again because they personify those aspects of nature that die in winter and rise in spring. There were many fertility gods in the ancient pagan cultures, a well-known example of which is Baal who was worshipped in the Canaanite nations and later by many in Israel. [111]

It can be said that the Gentile church has not raised Jesus to equality with the immortal God of the Bible, but to the level of the mortal pagan gods!

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[111] The Greek world at the time of Nicaea was familiar with the deities who are said to have died and come back to life, e.g., Attis (of Greek origin), Dionysus (Greek), Adonis (Greek with Semitic antecedents), Osiris (Egyptian), Ra (Egyptian), Tammuz (Sumerian and Babylonian), and Zalmoxis (Greek). See the respective Wikipedia articles under these names.

In contrast to the Canaanite concept of gods, Greek mythology presents an alternative pagan worldview: the immortality of gods. In Greco-Roman culture there is a pantheon of "gods many and lords many" (1Cor.8:5) who are called gods because they are said to be immortal. Immortality is an inalienable attribute of Greek deities.[112] Anyone who dies is not a god. By this criterion, Jesus is unquestionably human, unless Christians (unwittingly) classify him with the "dying and rising" agricultural gods whose existence is paralleled in the seasons (they die in autumn and rise in spring).[113] Unlike the dying and rising gods, the Greek gods are more like deified human beings. They behave like humans, and in some cases are more depraved than humans.

Ancient Greek culture, in contrast to the Hebrew Bible, has no overarching creation myth or narrative. In Greek mythology, some aspects of the natural world are emanations from, or domains of, the gods, e.g. Gaia is the goddess or the personification of earth, and Eurynome is that of the oceans.

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[112] Wikipedia, *Greek Mythology*, citing H.W. Stoll's *Religion and Mythology of the Greeks*: "The Ancient Greek gods have many fantastic abilities; most significantly, the gods are not affected by disease, and can be wounded only under highly unusual circumstances. The Greeks considered immortality as the distinctive characteristic of their gods".

[113] For a scholarly work on the dying and rising gods, see T.N.D. Mettinger's *The Riddle of Resurrection: Dying and Rising Gods in the Ancient Near East*.

There is no ultimate creator and no attempt to explain the ultimate origin of all things.

How could Jesus have died on the cross if he is God, and God is by nature immortal? There are no two ways about it. Scripture is clear that immortality is an intrinsic attribute of Yahweh, the Biblical God. A God who can be put to death by crucifixion is simply not the God of the Bible but is one of the pagan dying-and-rising gods who were familiar to the church fathers. But trinitarianism wants to have it both ways in the well-practiced art of doublespeak. Little wonder that books with titles like *The Pagan Christ* have sold in quantity.

In the present age, a reality of human existence is man's mortality. "It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb.9:27). Man is not innately immortal but will be made immortal at the resurrection of the dead (1Cor.15:53-54). Our future immortality is not an intrinsic immortality but a conferred one. Man has to be given immortality because his life, just as Christ's life, ultimately comes from God's life.[114]

And sure enough, when we are granted immortality, we will never die again and death will be defeated ("death is swallowed up in victory," 1Cor.15:54). God on the other hand is eternally immortal. He cannot die, has never died, and will never die.

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[114] Jesus says, "I live because of the Father" (Jn.6:57); "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (5:26).

Death is not the end of the story for us, for the next verse, Heb.9:28, has some good news: "Christ, having been offered (by God) once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (RSV).

As a man, Jesus Christ could die. But being without sin, he did not by law have to die. Yet he voluntarily offered his life for our salvation: "No one takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn.10:18). Death came into the world through Adam's sin, and with it pain and suffering, but Christ gave himself as a ransom for man's redemption (Mt.20:28).

If Jesus Christ were God, he could not have died for us, and we would be left in our sins without the hope of salvation. An inalienable attribute of God is that He is eternal ("the eternal God," Dt.33:27) and therefore immortal (1Tim.1:17). God had to bring about our salvation through the only means possible: the death of the Perfect Man, Jesus Christ. The salvation through Christ was not an afterthought, for Yahweh had worked out His marvelous plan of salvation "before the foundation of the world" (Eph.1:4; 1Pet.1:20).

An attempt to get around "immortality"

This section will be brief. Some trinitarians are aware that the word "immortality" is problematic to their doctrine, so they try to get around it by saying that immortality is to be under-

stood as the immutability of the soul rather than the inability to die. The end result is that a person who dies can still be said to be immortal. But this view of immortality is dissonant with the biblical view as put forth by Paul:

> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1Cor.15:54-55, ESV)

When mortal man puts on immortality, he is no longer perishable but imperishable, for death is swallowed up in victory (cf. Isaiah 25:8, "He will swallow up death forever"). Hence when a person becomes immortal, he will never die! Romans 2:7 links immortality to eternal life when it says that God will give eternal life to those who "seek for glory and honor and immortality". Our immortality does not make us divine, for it is a gift that is conferred on us. Only God is intrinsically immortal as explained in a Bible dictionary:

> In the true sense of the word, only God is immortal (1Tim.6:16; 1:17; 2Tim.1:10), for only God is living in the true sense of the word. Humans may be considered immortal only insofar as immortality is the gift of God. Paul points us in this direction. In Rom.2:7 Paul says, "To those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (NRSV). Paul also explained that the perishable nature of human life will put on the imperishable and

> that the mortal nature of human life will put on immortality. When that happens, the saying concerning victory over death will have been fulfilled (1Cor.15:53-55; Isa.25:8; Hos.13:14). (*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, "Immortality")

Paul says, "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1Cor.2:8). Here "crucified" points to Jesus' death on the cross. As trinitarians we ignored the unjettisonable truth that God is immortal and cannot be killed by crucifixion. God's immortality is an inalienable divine attribute, and is not open to negotiation or compromise (e.g., by saying that God "died for a few minutes at the cross"). God who is "from everlasting to everlasting" is immortal, whereas mortality is a stark reality that confronts all human beings.

God is invisible, man is visible

It is scripturally natural to go from God's immortality to God's invisibility, in that order, because the two are linked in the following statement:

> … he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:15-16, ESV)

Paul makes two crucial points: Only God is immortal ("who alone has immortality") and God is invisible ("whom no one has ever seen or can see"). God's intrinsic invisibility rules out Jesus as God because Jesus is visible. The additional fact that God "alone has immortality" rules out everyone else, including Jesus, as being immortal and therefore divine. If we apply the words "alone has immortality" to Jesus, we would be ruling out God the Father as immortal on the basis of the word "alone".

To rescue Jesus' deity from this passage, a popular commentary makes the bizarre statement that "Jesus is ascribed immortality, unapproachable light, and invisibility." Invisibility? Jesus is invisible? Here we see Paul's wisdom in interlocking the clause "who alone has immortality" with "whom no one has ever seen or can see" such that they cannot be separated, forcing us to choose between a visible and mortal Jesus (the biblical Jesus) and an invisible and immortal Jesus (an impossible Jesus).

Jesus is eminently visible. Paul says that he has seen Jesus: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1Cor.9:1). The answer is "yes" to all three rhetorical questions. Even if we take Paul's statement as metaphor, the visibility of the risen Jesus was not in doubt when he appeared to Cephas, to the Twelve, and to over 500 brothers (1Cor.15:5-6).

How do we know that Jesus is a human being? Or that anyone is a human being? Scripture describes mortal man as

"flesh and blood" (Mt.16:17; 1Cor.15:50; Eph.6:12; Heb.2:14). It brings out man's frailty and mortality, but also the fact that man, being a physical being, is visible to the human eye. But God is spirit (Jn.4:24) and inherently invisible. Invisibility is one of Yahweh's attributes (1Tim.1:17), though from the epiphanies of God in the Old Testament, we know that He can, and sometimes does, make Himself visible in order to fulfill a specific purpose. He appeared to Adam and Eve in the Garden and talked with them. He appeared to people in human form, sometimes mediated through the angel of the Lord (literally "angel of Yahweh") such that some have mistaken him for a man.

The point is that Yahweh is inherently invisible though He can become visible in order to fulfill a particular purpose. But man has no say regarding his own visibility, and the closest he can get to invisibility is to hide himself as in the case of Adam and Eve who, after they had sinned, sought "invisibility" by trying to hide from God. Sinners try to run from God, but unhappily for them, being human means that they cannot make themselves invisible, and certainly not to God.

Like all human beings, Jesus is visible to the physical eye. Like all human beings, he can go to a place that is out of the range of our sight, as in the present age when he is in heaven at the right hand of the Father. But the whole world will see Jesus when he comes again.

It is because Jesus is visible that he can be "the image of the invisible God" (Col.1:15). If God were inherently visible, He wouldn't need Jesus or anyone else to make Him visible, nor would He need to reveal His own glory "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor.4:6). Conversely, if Jesus is God, he too would be inherently invisible, in which case it would be redundant for God to make God visible.

At the final resurrection of the dead, the perishable body will be raised an imperishable body; the body lacking honor will be raised in glory; the weak body will be raised in power; and the natural body will be raised a spiritual body (1Cor. 15:42-44). Our "lowly body" will be transformed to be like the "glorious body" of Jesus Christ (Phil.3:21). When Jesus was raised from the dead, his body was transformed into a spiritual body while remaining a physical body. Now he can be visible or invisible as he chooses, as seen in the gospel accounts of his post-resurrection appearances. The transformation of the body for believers will take place at the resurrection of the saints. "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." (1Cor. 15:52)

"Ben Adam" (Son of Man) means a human being

When I was doing Divinity studies (theological studies) in England, I stayed in Jerusalem for a time to take a course on modern conversational Hebrew.

A few months into my studies there, I took a trip north to Galilee by bus. The bus was crowded and already full, yet people were still clamoring to get on board, with passengers standing in whatever aisle space was available amid the suitcases. An old man got on the bus and had no place to sit. Someone seeing that two children were occupying two seats, asked one of them to move over and let the old man sit. But immediately one of their parents shouted, "Yeladim gam ben Adam," which means, "Children are also human beings."

The term that the parent used, *ben Adam* (son of Adam, son of man), is precisely the term used in the Bible to refer to a man or a human being. The word "adam" means "man," but so does the term "son of Adam" ("son of man"). That bus incident impressed itself on my mind: biblical language was being spoken in my hearing!

This incident shows that "son of man" is still used in modern Hebrew to mean "human being". It doesn't have to be translated as "son of man" since it can be translated simply as "man".

The equivalence of "man" and "son of man" is seen in the Hebrew parallelism of Numbers 23:19: "God is not man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should change his mind". Also Psalm 8:4: "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"

The equivalence is seen also in the NT, for example, by comparing the parallel passages Matthew 12:31 (*tois anthrō-*

pois, "the men") and Mark 3:28 (*tois huiois tōn anthrōpōn*, "the sons of men").

The interchangeability between "man" and "son of man" in modern Hebrew (*ben Adam*, son of Adam) is seen in *Grammar of Modern Hebrew* (Lewis Glinert, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.390) in the way it takes for granted that *ben adam* means "person" and can be treated syntactically as one compound term that means man. The following quotation from this book is technical and may be skipped:

> Many constructions can become 'compounds', being felt to refer to a single concept, and thus become more rigid syntactically. For example, construct בן-אדם ~ בני-אדם *ben-adam* ~ (pl.) *bney-adam* 'person(s)' is a compound in casual usage in the way it becomes definite: הבן-אדם *ha-ben-adam* 'the person', rather than בן-האדם *ben ha-adam*.

The semantic equivalence of "son of man" and "human being" is seen in sources other than Hebrew grammars. The Google Translate facility at http://translate.google.com (May 18, 2013) translates the English "human beings" into Israeli Hebrew בני אדם ("sons of adam"). If you enter "human being" (singular), Google Translate will return אדם (*adam*), accompanied by an alternative translation בן אדם (*ben adam*, son of Adam), defined by Google Translate as "person, man, human being, mortal".

A different type of Jewish source is the Wikipedia article *Mensch* (Yiddish for "human being") which says: "In modern

Israeli Hebrew, the phrase *Ben Adam* 'Son of Adam' (בן אדם) is used as an exact translation of *Mensch* (human being)".

The Common English Bible consistently translates "Son of Man" as "the Human One" (e.g. "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Human One will be ashamed of that person," Lk.9:26). We feel that it is unnecessary for CEB to discard the well-established Jewish idiom "son of man," yet at the same time we are sympathetic to their concern that the true meaning of the idiom is lost on most Christians today.

Jesus calls himself the Son of Man

In the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke), the title that Jesus uses of himself above all others, indeed almost to the exclusion of all others, is "the Son of Man". Trinitarians place little emphasis on this title, even less on its fundamental meaning that would explain why Jesus chose it above all others for himself. In fact Jesus never calls himself "Son of God" in the synoptics.

In Aramaic, which was the main language spoken by Jesus and was the common language of Israel in his day, "son of man" simply means a man, as it does in Hebrew.

The fact that "son of man" is the predominant title that Jesus applies to himself shows that he identifies himself explicitly and unequivocally as man. For this reason, Paul calls Jesus the "last Adam" and the "second man" (1Cor.15:45,47).

When Jesus was about to heal a paralyzed man in the presence of an agitated crowd that included hostile religious leaders, he declared to them that he was the Son of Man:

> "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. (Mt.9:6-8, ESV)

The people's reaction to the healing tells us that they took the term "son of man"—which Jesus applied to himself in their presence—to mean that Jesus represented mankind when he received from God the authority to heal ("they glorified God who had given such authority to men"). Unless Jesus the Son of Man and the Last Adam represented mankind, the people would have no reason to glorify "God who had given such authority to men". Their notion of God giving authority to men aligns with what Jesus said to his disciples: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt.18:18).

"Son of Man" in the synoptic gospels

The following are excerpts of the article "Son of Man" in the revised ISBE (vol.4, pp.574-581). The article, right from its first sentence, says that "son of man" is often translated in English simply as "man". It also says that Aramaic was the "major spoken language of Palestine in the 1st cent A.D."

The following excerpts from ISBE give useful data on the frequency of the term "the son of man" (*ho huios tou anthrōpou*) in the synoptic gospels. We quote these excerpts for the benefit of those who are interested in the statistics and the categories of meaning, but some other readers may wish to skip them on a first reading.

> The title "Son of man" occurs 82 times in the Gospels; 69 times (in 39 pericopes) in the Synoptics (14 times in Mark, 30 times in Matthew and 25 times in Luke), and 13 times (in 11 pericopes) in John. In the Gospels the designation is used only by Jesus Himself except in one text, where His words are quoted. In Jn.12:34 the crowd responds to Jesus by asking, "How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" In addition, "Son of man" occurs once in Acts, where it is attributed to the dying Stephen (Acts 7:56) …
>
> No attempts are made in the Gospels to explain the meaning of the phrase. This absence of any definition or explanation may imply that the designation was so well known to Jesus' contemporaries that any such explanation would be superfluous. Alternately, the same phenomenon may be explained by supposing that the title was so familiar to the Evangelists

> that they assumed that their readers would not require explanation or definition …
>
> *Mark* In Mark the Son of man designation is used fourteen times, including two *earthly* sayings (2:10,28), nine *suffering* sayings (8:31; 9:9,12,31; 10:33,45; 14:21 [twice], 41), and three *future* sayings (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). Twelve of these sayings are placed after the episode of the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-30), when Jesus begins to predict His suffering and death …
>
> *Matthew* The phrase "Son of man" occurs thirty times in Matthew, including seven *earthly* sayings (8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:8,32; 13:37; 16:13), ten *suffering* sayings (12:40; 17:9,12,22f; 20:18f,28; 26:2, 24 [twice], 45), and thirteen *eschatological* sayings (10:23; 13:41; 16:27, 28; 19:28; 24:27, 30 [twice], 37,39,44; 25:31; 26:64). Two additional sayings are found in variant readings (18:11; 25:13). Six occurrences of Son of man are unique to Matthew (10:23; 13:37,41; 24:30a; 25:31; 26:2). Matthew obviously understands the Hebrew idiom, for he changes the phrase "sons of men" in Mk.3:28 to "men" in Mt.12:31 …
>
> *Luke* The Son of man designation occurs twenty-five times in Luke, including eight *earthly* sayings (5:24; 6:5,22; 7:34; 9:58; 12:10; 17:22; 19:10), seven *suffering* sayings (9:22,44; 11:30; 18:31; 22:22,48; 24:7), and ten *eschatological* sayings (9:26; 12:8,40; 17:24,26,30; 18:8; 21:27, 36; 22:69). Seven Son of man sayings are unique to Luke (17:22,30; 18:8; 19:10; 21:36; 22:48; 24:7; cf. Acts 7:56).

The second man and the last Adam

> **1 Corinthians 15:45-49** [45] Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. [46] But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. [47] The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. [48] As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. [49] Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (ESV)

The contrast between Adam and Christ is developed further not in Romans but in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul discusses it from a different perspective: Adam the first man versus Jesus the second man. This is a remarkable way of expressing the contrast because speaking of Jesus as the second man rules out anyone from coming in between the two as being relevant for man's salvation. Mankind's destiny therefore hangs on these two men and their actions. Whereas the first man brought death through disobedience, the second man brought life through obedience. The first man is called in Judaism "the firstborn of the world" [115] whereas the second is called by Paul "the firstborn of creation" (Col.1:15)—referring to the new creation.

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[115] *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology*, Robin Scroggs, page 38 (Fortress Press, 1966).

Jesus is not only the second man but also the last Adam who became "a life-giving spirit" (1Cor.15:45). Since "adam" means "man," Jesus is both the second man and the last man. Paul's description of Jesus as the last man rules out anyone coming after him as being relevant for mankind's salvation.

The man of heaven

As trinitarians, we took the words "man of heaven" in v.48 (see the highlighted words above) to mean that the preexistent God the Son physically came down from heaven. This is to misunderstand Paul because in the very same verse, he uses the equivalent title—"those who are of heaven"—of God's people, linking the two concepts with the connecting words "as is". If "man of heaven" is taken in the spatial sense as trinitarians have taken it, how would they explain Paul's statement that all believers "are of heaven" (present tense, not future tense)?

The term "of heaven" is not about the origin of one's existence but points to the contrast in v.48 between the earthly ("man of dust") and the spiritual ("man of heaven"). This contrast is reaffirmed in verse 46: "It is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual".

This verse (v.46) offers no support for Christ's preexistence because it says that the natural man comes "first" before the spiritual man. The precedence makes sense only in terms of chronology (Adam came earlier in time than Jesus), not in

terms of preeminence (which would make Adam greater than Jesus). Hence this verse offers no support for Jesus' preexistence. The chronology also comes out in Paul's contrast between the "first man" and the "last man".

Jesus says of his disciples that "they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (Jn.17:16). He also says, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn.15:19, cf. 1Jn.3:13). If the disciples are not of the world, then what realm do they belong to? The answer is that they are "of heaven". Just as Jesus is not of the world, so his disciples are not of the world but of heaven. This we saw in 1Cor.15:48 and is reinforced by verse 49 which says that believers will "also bear the image of the man of heaven".

Heaven is a familiar metonym of God. When Jesus asked the religious leaders whether John's baptism was "from heaven or from man" (Mt.21:25; Mk.11:30; Lk.20:4), he was really asking whether John's baptism received its authority from God or from man. A man who is "from heaven" is a man who is "from God".

Jesus, a real man in heaven

> "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (Luke 24:39)

The risen Jesus tells his disciples that he is not a spirit for "a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have". Underlying these striking words is the presupposition that man is not a "spirit," in contrast to God's spirit nature: "God is spirit" (Jn.4:24). Just as striking, Jesus puts himself on the human side of the contrast ("flesh and bones") rather than the divine side ("spirit") even after his resurrection.

Right now in heaven, Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God not as a "spirit" but as a man with a body of flesh and bones! The Bible gives no indication that Jesus was ever transformed into a "spirit" at some point prior to his ascension into heaven. It is true that Jesus could in his glorified body walk through walls and doors after he had been raised from the dead, yet at the same time he was still "flesh and bones".[116] The fact is that the man Jesus, existing in a physical body, is sitting right next to the Father in heaven, and is interceding for us. I previously had never thought of anything

[116] A physicist friend of mine who completed his doctoral studies in England explained to me that Jesus' body could penetrate walls and other obstacles in terms of quantum probability and frequency functions, but this is going beyond my knowledge of physics.

"physical" existing in heaven, but this is perhaps another case of truth being stranger than fiction.

In the New Testament, the more common similar term for a human being is "flesh and blood". Jesus uses it in Mt.16:17 when he says to Peter, "Flesh and blood has not revealed to you [that I am the Christ], but my Father who is in heaven." In John 6:53-56, Jesus speaks of his own flesh and blood as vital spiritual realities that believers must feed on as food and drink, not in a material sense but as spiritual sustenance. This teaching proved to be too hard for some of his disciples to take, so they left him (Jn.6:66).

"Flesh and blood" is perishable and impermanent whereas the kingdom of God is imperishable and eternal, which is why flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1Cor.15:50). That being the case, how could Jesus have taken his place in heaven in a physical body? His being in heaven would indicate that his body has been "spiritualized" or "glorified" in some sense (Phil.3:21), but not in a way that the body has become "spirit" (Jesus denies he is "spirit" even after his resurrection). He can still be touched, which would not be the case with a person who is "spirit".

Luke 24:39 is the only place in the New Testament where the term "flesh and bones" occurs. In the story surrounding this verse, not only could Jesus be touched, he also ate fish (v.43) to prove to his disciples that he was functional as a human being even after having been "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom.6:4). His own humanity was

evidently something that Jesus considered important to impress upon his disciples before he ascended to heaven. So it is worthwhile to read this remarkable account:

> As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. (Luke 24:36-43, ESV)

This is the first half of the account. Interestingly, the second half continues without interruption to Jesus' ascent into heaven, which means that Jesus entered heaven with the same body of flesh and bones! I have never heard anyone mention this astonishing fact. Therefore let us read the rest of this amazing account. The following is the uninterrupted narrative starting from the time Jesus ate broiled fish to the time he ascended into heaven:

> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and

> the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. (Luke 24:42-51, ESV)

This is an uninterrupted train of events leading up to Jesus' ascension into heaven. The narrative continues into the book of Acts and is concluded in Acts 1:9 with the words, "as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight". His disciples were looking on while Jesus was ascending to heaven, until they could see him no longer because of the cloud that was taking him up. But all along, Jesus remained visible to the human eye. It is never said that the disciples were having some kind of spiritual vision, for they were looking at him with their physical eyes. Jesus clearly entered heaven not as a spirit but as the same Jesus whom the disciples were able to touch and who ate with them. Even if there was a change in quantum frequency (which in any case would remain in the realm of natural phenomena), his body remained a physical body that can be touched. There is a "flesh and bones" man in heaven!

Most appropriately, Luke's Gospel ends with the words, "they stayed continually at the temple, praising God" (Lk. 24:53).

The conclusion is inescapable that the body of Jesus which could eat fish and which his disciples could touch was the same body that was taken up into heaven where he is right now. There is a real man in heaven! The man who walked on earth is now among the multitudes of heavenly beings above. This is undoubtedly the message that Luke wants to convey to us.

Christ is now seated in his "glorious body" (Phil.3:21) at the right hand of the Father. It is in this body that Jesus will return to earth in the same way he left earth (Acts 1:11).

"Flesh and blood" points to the impermanent elements of the human body. The term is sometimes reduced to one word "flesh": "All flesh is like grass" (Isa.40:6; 1Pet.1:24). Bone, on the other hand, is the most enduring component of the human body. Archaeologists often find bones dating back thousands of years. This may be the reason Jesus used the unusual term "flesh and bones" in referring to his body. Another reason could be that he had already poured out all his blood for the forgiveness of sins (Mt.26:28), so what remained in him after his blood had been poured out was "flesh and bones".

The Bible proclaims Jesus the man. There is no biblical support for saying that he is God, contrary to the bold but baseless assertion of his deity by the Gentiles from about the

middle of the second century, more than a hundred years after the time of Jesus.

A vivid portrayal of Jesus' humanity was made at a climactic moment at his trial: "Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. The Roman governor Pilate said to them, 'Behold the man!'" (John 19:5). Pilate's words are better translated, "Look! The man!" Whatever Pilate may have meant by these words, he probably said more than he understood. In the New Testament, it is the *man* Jesus whom humanity must look to for salvation. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given [by God] among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

The usual response to the assertion that Jesus is not God is: So Jesus is "just" a man? Or "What then would be special about him beyond his being the Messiah, a prophet, and a teacher?" This way of thinking shows what little value that we, even as Christians, place on man, and how shallow is our understanding of how much a human being is worth to God.

We evaluate a person's worth in various ways. Many evaluate a person's worth by the level of friendship with him. If he is not our friend or good friend, he is worth little in our eyes. Some evaluate people according to their income. And to some, a human life is not worth the price of a bullet.

Every Christian is familiar with the truth that "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son". Doesn't that tell us something about man's worth in God's eyes? God values man in a way that we don't understand. We do not see man

the way God sees man. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares Yahweh (Isa.55:8).

"Just a man"? What is that supposed to mean? That he is nothing more than a real man? That he didn't come from an otherworldly realm like outer space? What is wrong with his being a real human? Are we not all human beings? Is there a problem with his being one of us? In the New Testament, "the man Christ Jesus" (1Tim.2:5) is one of us, and he is not "ashamed" to call us his brothers even though we are far from being perfect like him.

This issue is problematic only to trinitarians because they don't think of Jesus as wholly one of us, for according to their doctrine, Jesus is composed of two natures, divine and human. It is clear that anyone who has a divine nature is not human as we are. None of us has two natures in us, or else we would be considered schizophrenic, to put it mildly!

A person's nature is not equal to the person himself, but is only an essential element of the person. This is implicitly acknowledged by trinitarians when they say that Jesus has two natures, divine and human, yet is one person, not two.

What kind of person is Jesus if he is a composite of the divine and the human? This is an inherently difficult and intractable issue that raged on for years in what is known as the Christological controversies. In the end, all that trinitarianism could say about Jesus is that he is a God-man by virtue of the union of the two natures. But a God-man is obviously not

a person like any of us. Since the God-man constitution doesn't make Jesus true man, wouldn't it also prevent him from being true God?

God by definition possesses a divine nature, not a human nature. But trinitarians will argue that Jesus' divine nature is that of the second person of the Trinity incarnate as Jesus. But why stop at his divine nature which only confuses the issue? If the entire second person of the Trinity is in Jesus, what do we make of Jesus' human nature? Is Jesus still a whole human person? Are there two persons in Jesus? The idea of two persons is rightly abhorrent to trinitarians, so they say that Jesus is a divine person to whom is added a human nature, not a human person. But how is this still-divine person a true man?

The biblical Jesus, on the other hand, is true man like any of us. Most significantly, Yahweh, the only true God, has chosen to dwell in this man. God's entire "fullness" lives in Jesus "bodily" (Col.2:9), with the two united in "one spirit" (1Cor.6:17). This is the correct New Testament picture of the union of true God and true man.

The trinitarian error has conditioned us to think that if Jesus is not God, then the New Testament has no message about him that is worth proclaiming. To the trinitarian, the value of Christ lies in his being God or God-man, not mere man. But the plain truth is that the glory of the biblical Christ far outshines the glory we ascribed to the trinitarian God-man. We have been misled into believing that the New Testa-

ment is centered on Christ the God-man when in fact we could not demonstrate that such a person even exists in the New Testament. It is a plain fact, verifiable by a computer search, that the central trinitarian term "God the Son" does not exist in the Bible.

"He who has seen me has seen the Father"

Paul speaks of "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor.4:6). God's glory is revealed in Jesus; even Jesus' words and deeds originate from the Father who lives in him. Jesus is like a transparent window to God: "he who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

But this statement would mean something different if Jesus is coequal with the Father in every respect and is of one substance with Him. Since Jesus is God in trinitarianism, to see Jesus is to see God the Son, not God the Father. In trinitarianism, it is not necessary for us to see the Father because the equivalent of God the Father is seen in God the Son. In this subtle way, the Father is eliminated in trinitarianism for all intents and purposes. For most trinitarians, Jesus is the only God they worship and pray to, though Christians from charismatic groups put the Holy Spirit, the third person, at the center of their faith. God the Father is of no real interest to most trinitarians. Apart from sending His Son into the world and raising him from the dead, what has He done? As a song sums it up, "Jesus did it all"!

Jesus did not say, "He who has seen me has seen God," a statement that some might take as an equation of identity, Jesus = God. What Jesus actually said was, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." We cannot take this statement as an equation of identity (Son = Father) unless we are willing to understand it modalistically (which trinitarians would not do). Hence, when we see Jesus, we do not literally see the person of the Father in front of us (this would be modalism). What we do see is the Father's fullness dwelling in Jesus bodily (Col.2:9); this is what makes Jesus the image of God. Jesus reveals the Father transparently because he is "the image of the invisible God" (Col.1:15).

The virgin birth of Jesus and the new creation

The virgin birth of Jesus is recorded in Matthew and Luke (Mt.1:18-25; Lk.1:26-38; 2:1-38), but neither gospel explains its meaning. The lack of explanation is surprising given that the virgin birth was no ordinary event. How ought we to understand it if no explanation is given for it? In Luke's account of the virgin birth, one verse stands out, however:

> **Luke 1:35** And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God" (ESV).

> **Genesis 1:2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering [or brooding] over the face of the waters. (ESV)

The Holy Spirit's overshadowing of Mary in Luke 1:35 has a parallel in Genesis 1:2 which says that at the creation of the world, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters". Many OT scholars [117] point out that in the Hebrew text, "hovering over" literally means "brooding over" (the word "brooding" refers to a bird's sitting on eggs to hatch them).

The two parallels between Luke 1:35 and Genesis 1:2 (Holy Spirit ←→ Spirit of God, and overshadowing ←→ hovering/brooding) bring out a vital truth: The overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit has to do with the new creation whereas the Spirit's brooding over the yet unformed earth has to do with the "old" (physical or material) creation. The

[117] Keil and Delitzsch (Gen.1:2): "רחף in the *Piel* is applied to the hovering and brooding of a bird over its young, to warm them, and develop their vital powers (Dt.32:11). In such a way as this the Spirit of God moved upon the deep, which had received at its creation the germs of all life, to fill them with vital energy by His breath of life." Also John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, pp.17-18 ("… the divine Spirit, figured as a bird brooding over its nest, and perhaps symbolizing an immanent principle of life and order in the as yet undeveloped chaos"); also Farrar and Cotterill, *The Pulpit Commentary: Genesis* ("the Spirit of God moved (literally, brooding) upon the face of the waters").

overshadowing of Mary by God's Spirit indicates that the new creation is primarily a spiritual creation brought into being by being "born of the Spirit."

The meaning of the virgin birth is brought out not only in Jesus' teaching of being "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5) but also in Paul's teaching of the "new creation" (2Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15), a term that, like the virgin birth, would be unintelligible if it were given "out of the blue" without explanation or precedent.

There is no doubt that the word "overshadow" (*episkiazō*) in the account of the virgin birth points back to the Spirit's involvement in the Genesis creation ("the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters," Gen.1:2). Here the word "hovering" (Hebrew *rachaph*, used elsewhere only in Dt.32:11) brings out the idea of "overshadowing". [118]

The Spirit of God brought into being a new creation in Mary, replacing a sperm from Adam's descendants. In this way Jesus is a descendant of Adam via Mary but also the beginning of a *new creation* by the creative power of the Spirit of Yahweh. This would explain Paul's teaching of the "new creation" in Christ (2Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15; cf. Rev.21:5) and of

[118] *Pulpit Commentary* says that Luke 1:35 "reminds us of the opening words of Genesis, where the writer describes the dawn of life in creation in the words, 'The Spirit of God moved (or brooded) over the face of the deep.'" Also H.A.W. Meyer's commentary on Luke 1:35.

Jesus as "the man from heaven" or "the spiritual man" (1Cor. 15:45-49).

Jesus came into being by the creative power of God's Spirit; hence in Christ believers are incorporated into the new creation, becoming new persons through God's transforming power. Just as Jesus was born of the Spirit at his birth, so everyone needs to be born of the Spirit, as is stated in the well-known words to Nicodemus: "You (plural) must be born again" (Jn.3:7), and "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (3:3)—that is, he cannot inherit eternal life.

What God has accomplished in Jesus, He intends to reproduce in every human being such that he or she becomes a new creation or a new creature by being born of the Spirit into a new life that is lived by the power of God's indwelling Spirit (1Cor.3:16; 2Cor.6:16). God has in view that we grow into a "mature manhood, to the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph.4:13). In the New Testament, being a Christian is not just a matter of believing in Jesus or believing that he died for us, but is crucially a matter of becoming a new person who is like Jesus in the way he lives and thinks. This is what constitutes true believing or what Paul calls "the obedience of faith" (Rom.1:5; 16:26). True faith includes an obedience to the Father that mirrors the way Jesus lived in perfect obedience to Him. In the New Testament, any claim to faith is spurious if it is not accompanied by wholehearted obedience.

The gospels speak of our being disciples of Jesus. But Jesus is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father, so how do we follow him? In this age, to follow Jesus means to live in relation to the Father as Jesus lived in relation to the Father: "as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

As trinitarians we thought of Jesus as God who attached to himself a human nature. We humans cannot identify with this divine Jesus as being one of us. If Jesus is the divine "God the Son," not only would we be unable to identify with him as being one of us, it wouldn't even be permissible to do so when he is God and we are not. Identifying ourselves with a divine person would practically amount to the blasphemy of equating ourselves with God, since God is not to be counted as one of us but as the object of our worship.

As trinitarians we failed to see the connection between Jesus' being born of the Spirit at the virgin birth and our need to be born of the Spirit. We also failed to see the connection between Jesus' being the head of the new creation and our being partakers of the new creation. Likewise, we failed to see the connection between Jesus' being indwelled by the "whole fullness of God" (Col.1:19) and our being indwelled by the Spirit such that we are "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph.3:19).

As a result we failed to see that God intends that our spiritual lives be a reproduction of Jesus' life. We similarly failed to see that the goal of the believer's life is to be an image of the living God as Jesus is the image of God, in order that

God's life may be manifested through us in fundamentally the same way it is manifested through Jesus. It is a failure to see that it is in the Father's eternal plan that we "be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom.8:29).

Our failure to see these vital realities has resulted in a Christianity that is defined more in terms of creedal assent, giving rise to a hollow faith that does not see the necessity of living our lives as Jesus lived his life. Today it is hard to find a wholehearted follower of Jesus who is filled with dynamic power and spirit. Yet Paul says, "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1Th.4:3). And what is this sanctification but the whole process of becoming like Jesus—the biblical Jesus—by being "born of the Spirit" and then being perfected by Yahweh's indwelling Spirit?

Accounts of the virgin birth are given by Matthew and Luke, but for an event that is of considerable importance for understanding the person of Jesus Christ, it is remarkable that it is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament. In an important statement in Gal.4:4 where Paul could have mentioned the virgin birth, he does not. He simply says that Jesus was "born of a woman" using the common Greek word for "woman" (*gynē*, cf. gynecology). Paul evidently does not consider it necessary to say "born of a virgin".

But the fact that the virgin birth appears in two of the gospels means that it cannot be ignored. It undoubtedly underlies Paul's teaching of Jesus as the last Adam (1Cor.15:45)

and of the new creation in Christ (2Cor.5:17). To see what the new creation is about, we take a look at the accounts of the virgin birth. Matthew's account is concise:

> This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. (Mt.1:18, NIV)

Mary became pregnant through (Greek *ek*) the Holy Spirit and not through Joseph, for Joseph and Mary had not yet "come together". In v.20 is an elaboration: "she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit" (NJB). Here "conceived" is to be understood as biological conception. In fact the word "womb" appears in v.18, but is not translated in most English Bibles because it would make for unnatural English if translated literally.[119]

Mary conceived in her womb as women do, to begin the process of giving birth (cf. Gal.4:4, "born of a woman"). In Mary's case, the Holy Spirit is the source of the conception. Some elaboration is given in Luke 1:35 (ESV):

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[119] Mt.1:18 has ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου; word for word this is "in womb she had out of Spirit Holy". Here the Greek for "womb" (*gastēr*) is also found in Luke 1:31 ("you will conceive in your womb and bear a son") where the sentence structure allows for a natural translation into English, with "womb" appearing in most English translations.

> The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon (*epeleusetai epi*) you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow (*episkiasei*) you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

The Bible speaks of the Spirit coming upon God's people in phrases such as "the Spirit of God came upon" (Num.24:2; 1Sam.19:20,23; 2Chr.15:1); or "the Spirit of Yahweh came upon" (2Chr.20:14); or "the Holy Spirit came upon" (Acts 19:6). God's Spirit came upon people to empower them to complete a task that God had assigned them. The Greek for "come upon" is used also in Acts 1:8 of the Spirit's coming upon the disciples at Pentecost, empowering them to fulfill the epoch-making mission of bringing salvation to the world.

The "overshadowing" (*episkiazō*) in Luke 1:35 brings out God's presence. The same word is used in Ex.40:35 (LXX) of the cloud of God's presence that overshadowed the tent of meeting, the tabernacle. The word "overshadow" is used elsewhere of the cloud that overshadowed Peter, James and John at the transfiguration of Jesus (Mk.9:7; Mt.17:5; Lk.9:34). It is used in Ps.91:4 (90:4 LXX) of Yahweh who will, like an eagle, "cover" and protect His people.

The virgin birth and the genealogies

Geza Vermes [120] points out that the crucial problem of the two genealogies of Jesus as given in Matthew and Luke (Mt. 1:1-17; Lk.3:23-38) is the fact that both these genealogies are based on Joseph's lineage, not Mary's. But if Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus, these genealogies would not be a basis for Jesus' descent from David. What then is the point of these lengthy genealogies?

If the genealogies are to have any meaning at all, the virgin birth cannot be simply understood in a way that excludes Joseph from being Jesus' father in some significant way. Suggestions such as that Joseph was the adoptive father of Jesus, i.e., father in a legal but not biological sense, are unconvincing. Vermes points out that this kind of "fatherhood" is not recognized in Jewish laws on lineage. Such a recognition would be crucial in the case of Matthew's gospel because it was written to demonstrate to its Jewish readers the Davidic credentials of Jesus the Messiah.

If the virgin birth is to have any significant meaning, it must first be understood in spiritual terms. God's intention for the virgin birth is to bring about a new creation in which Jesus is the firstborn (cf. "the firstborn of all creation," Col.1:15) to mark him as the eldest son of the new creation. The new creation stands in contrast to the old creation which

[120] *The Nativity: History and Legend*, pp.26-47. Vermes is an eminent authority on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Jesus' Jewish background.

culminated in the creation of Adam, the first man, the counterpart of whom is Jesus the last Adam (1Cor.15:45).

Adam was not created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) but out of dust. Or rather, he was made, formed and shaped out of the dust of the earth. On the other hand, Eve was not created out of dust in the same manner as Adam, but was created from Adam's rib. Here are two human beings who were formed in different ways, yet both are fully and equally human.

The point of saying this is to show that the birth of Jesus, insofar as he is related to Joseph (assuming there is a relation), raises the possibility that in the new creation in Mary's womb, some element of Joseph was "extracted" which formed a basis for Jesus' physical body in a manner similar to the creation of Eve from Adam's rib.

We present this as a possibility without being dogmatic about it, and welcome other explanations that may deepen our understanding of the virgin birth. But this explanation seems to align with the biblical data without violating any biblical principle. It immediately solves the conundrum of Jesus' descent via Joseph and gives rationale to the lengthy genealogies. This is all the more so because to my knowledge, no better or more cogent alignment of the facts has been found so far.

This thesis resolves the question: If there is no relation between Jesus and Joseph, how can Jesus the "Son of David" (Mt.1:1) be said to have descended from the royal line of

David? Any alternative explanation of the virgin birth will have to address this question of Davidic descent.

But in trinitarianism how can the divine God the Son, the one who descended from heaven and is the prime mover in Jesus the God-man, possibly have an earthly genealogy that can be traced back to Adam or even the royal line of David? Genealogies trace the line of descent to human descendants rather than to the eternal God of heavenly origin. If Jesus Christ is "God the Son" of trinitarianism, he cannot have a genealogy.

The fact that the two genealogies are given to us in a manner that is plain and matter-of-fact, as well as human and down-to-earth, is further indication that the biblical Jesus is unlike the trinitarian Jesus. Moreover, a genealogy cannot be established just for the "human nature" of Christ because a nature does not represent the whole person.

The genealogies in Matthew and Luke declare that the biblical Jesus is truly human in every sense of the word. At the same time, they rule out the trinitarian Christ as being a true human, for God the Son even with a human nature cannot possibly have a human genealogy. So right from the start of the New Testament, the trinitarian Jesus is demonstrably not a true human being.

Luke's genealogy concludes with Adam who is called "the son of God" (Lk.3:38). This is the only place in the four gospels where Adam is called by this title. Yet it is in Luke's gospel (1:35) that Jesus is also called "son of God" by virtue of

his being born of the Spirit. Luke evidently sees no problem in calling both Adam and Christ by the same title "son of God". Believers who are born of the Spirit are also sons of God (Gal.4:6; Rom.8:14). Hence there is no New Testament basis for inverting "Son of God" to "God the Son" as a title of Jesus Christ. Not all trinitarians are so bold as to say that "God the Son" is a valid reformulation of "Son of God," yet their silence on the issue is a tacit admission that the inversion is doctrinally motivated.

Adam's sharing of the title "son of God" with Jesus does not make Adam equal to Jesus. Jesus is far greater than Adam because he alone is perfect man, yet they do share something in common: both are truly human and both are in God's image. But whereas Adam is the head of humanity in the physical sphere, Jesus is the head of the new humanity—the new creation—in which God's people participate in Jesus Christ by faith and by being born of the same Spirit of Yahweh as was Jesus.

Mary's song: The Magnificat

> **Luke 1:46-55 (The Magnificat, ESV)**
>
> 46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,
> 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
> 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
> 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
> 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
> 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
> 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;
> 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.
> 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
> 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Mary's well-known song begins with the words, "My soul magnifies the Lord." Several points emerge from a consideration of this song, the most important of which is that Yahweh "the Most High" (as He is called in the song, vv.32,35; cf.v.76) is the absolute center of Mary's praises. Secondly, the song overflows with gratitude to Yahweh, the God of Israel, the

Most High, for the fact that an omnipotent God had taken notice of Mary, a lowly woman with no social standing. Thirdly, what is remarkable for an expectant mother is that nowhere in her song does she refer to the baby who is to be born to her. A pregnant woman would usually focus her attention on her baby to come, yet her song makes no explicit reference to Jesus. Instead the song is focused on Yahweh. What an amazingly God-centered woman Mary is, and this goes some way in explaining Yahweh's choice of her as Jesus' mother in the flesh. We see that Yahweh's choice of Mary is not random or arbitrary.

What emerges from these observations is Mary's remarkable understanding of Yahweh's character that draws her into a profound devotion to Him. She knows Yahweh as the living God who relates to human life in a most practical manner.

When theologians speak theoretically of God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, what do these divine attributes mean in real life? To Mary, God's omniscience means that amid the multitudes who inhabit the earth and in particular Israel, He takes notice of a young woman who is a nobody in society. That He takes notice of the nobodies of the world, Mary among them, is for her the real meaning of God's omniscience. Not just omniscience but also omnipresence: God reaches out to Mary not from a remote place in heaven but down below in Israel where she is. That she speaks directly to God in her prayer-song indicates that she is

aware of His presence and is confident that He inclines His ear to her.

In Mary's song, God's omnipotence is seen in His power to bring about the birth of a human being through a virgin, and in so doing is fulfilling His promises made long ago to Abraham, whom she mentions by name. Her experiential knowledge of Yahweh's love is far greater than the theoretical grasp of God's attributes by theologians who have no experiential knowledge of Him.

There are other statements in Mary's short but profound song that reveal her insight into Yahweh's omnipotence such as His bringing down the mighty and the exalted of the world, and raising up the poor and the lowly. Who but the Spirit of Yahweh could have taught her such truths and given her such an excellent understanding of the one true God?

Though Jesus is not given so much as a mention in her song, it is clear from the context that the orientation of the song is towards Jesus as Yahweh's chosen instrument. Yet all the while, it is Yahweh and not Jesus who remains central in Mary's song of devotion. But trinitarians have gone in an opposite direction by sidelining Yahweh and exalting Jesus to coequality with Him. Mary would surely have found this to be abhorrent and it shows how far Christianity has diverged from the faith of God's people such as Mary's.

The devotion that is given to Mary in the Catholic church, even naming her the mother of God, would be even more ab-

horrent to this godly and humble woman, who is "blessed among women" (vv.42,48).

Today's "Christ-centered" Christians do not belong to the same spiritual family as Mary—the family of those who are Yahweh-centered, while giving Jesus his due honor.

Mary's "exposition" of Yahweh's attributes which reach out in practical ways to the situations of the world, even by exalting the poor and bringing down the proud, is reflected in the Sermon on the Mount which Jesus would later give at the start of his ministry.

Mary's upbringing of Jesus

In Judaism it is the mother who is responsible for bringing up the children in her family. And because of the importance placed on the *religious* upbringing of a child in Judaism, a child is considered to be Jewish if his or her mother is Jewish, whereas the ethnicity, nationality, race, etc. of the father do not count.

Here is where Mary's extraordinary spirituality is of vital importance in Jesus' upbringing. But this is rendered meaningless in trinitarianism because if Jesus is indeed the God-man of trinitarianism, he wouldn't need to be taught by his mother, and Mary would have been made redundant in a matter of such importance as the upbringing of children in Judaism.

The early church had apocryphal tales of Jesus' childhood such as the one about how he made birds from mud, breathed life into them, and released them to fly away. This is the kind of fanciful narrative that some Gentile believers delighted in, reducing the idea of creation to the level of childish playfulness.

But if we grasp the scriptural concept of the family, we would appreciate Mary's important role in the early life of Jesus, that is, up to the time he was 13 years old, the age from which he would be regarded as an adult. In the incident of twelve-year-old Jesus at the temple (Lk.2:41-52), his discussions with the learned men trained in the Scriptures owed a lot to his mother's influence, for Jesus could hardly have interacted meaningfully with the learned men in the temple if he didn't have an excellent grasp of the Scriptures. But in trinitarian doctrine, Jesus already possessed a perfect knowledge of the Scriptures from the very start by virtue of his God-man constitution, making the whole incident in the temple so inevitable, pointless, and frankly boring, since it would prove nothing beyond the all-too-obvious point that a divine Jesus would know everything.

The fact that a twelve-year-old boy could discuss deep biblical questions would prove, at the very least, that he is of above average intelligence for a boy of his age, though he is not necessarily unique in that respect.

Jesus our brother

To gain a deeper understanding of Jesus the man, a study of his titles in the New Testament would be helpful, but one title is likely to stand out by its absence: *brother*. Not absence in the New Testament but absence in books on the titles of Christ. I have in my possession a book called *The Titles of Jesus* written by the scholar Vincent Taylor. In fact there are many books with the same title which in most cases are devotional books and not scholarly works. But whether scholarly or devotional, you will have a hard time finding a book on the titles of Jesus that includes the title "brother".

The reason is obvious: As trinitarians we shied away from thinking of Jesus the God-man as our brother. Trinitarianism has blinded us to the wonderful privilege of relating to Jesus as our brother, and robbed us of the intimacy of our relationship with him. Taylor's book meticulously lists some 42 titles of Jesus in the New Testament, but "brother" is not one of them. We would have thought that "brother" is one of the most precious titles that would endear him to us, yet the doctrine of God the Son has hindered us from thinking of Jesus as our brother except in theory, robbing us of the realization of the relationship with Jesus that Yahweh has established for us. We become spiritually impoverished by this loss of proximity. It is true that Jesus is our Head and Master, but if we stress these titles to the exclusion of other important ones, we will set up a distance between Jesus and ourselves, to our great spiritual loss. Most Christians have never been taught

the biblical basis for Jesus as our brother, so what is the biblical evidence for it?

We are explicitly called the brothers of Jesus. It is said of believers that Jesus "is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Heb.2:11); this is despite Jesus' being the perfect man in contrast to the imperfection of his believers, including Paul. This reveals Jesus' magnanimity which is yet another element of his perfection. Jesus is the only begotten or unique Son of God because he alone is perfect. Yet we too are sons of God, and are therefore brothers of Jesus, as seen in the following verses (all ESV unless otherwise indicated):

> **Romans 8:29** those whom he (God) knew in advance, he also determined in advance would be conformed to the pattern of his Son, so that he (Jesus) might be the firstborn among many brothers (CJB)
>
> **Matthew 25:40** "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me"
>
> **Matthew 28:10** "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee"
>
> **John 20:17** Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Even after his resurrection and after he had acquired a glorified body that could pass through walls and closed doors, Jesus still spoke of his disciples as his brothers. I previously did not realize how often Jesus referred to his disciples—and those who do God's will—as brothers, either Jesus' brothers (Mt.12:49,50; 25:40; 28:10; Mk.3:33,34,35; Lk.8:21; Jn.20:17) or brothers to one another (Mt.5:47; 7:3,4,5; 18:15,35; 23:8; Lk.6:41,42; 17:3; 22:32). Jesus speaks of older women as his "mothers" and younger ones as his "sisters":

> But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Mt.12:48-50)

There is a hymn that beautifully affirms Christ as our brother. The famous hymn, "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," with lyrics by Henry van Dyke and music by Beethoven, says in the third stanza:

Thou our Father, Christ our Brother,
All who live in love are Thine.

Filled with the Spirit from birth

Jesus was conceived in Mary through the Holy Spirit, and was filled with the Spirit from his birth. Does it mean that it was easier for Jesus to be sinless than for the rest of humanity who have no such advantage? But there was one person, John the Baptist, who was also filled with the Spirit from birth:

> … for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. (Luke 1:15, ESV)

John the Baptist pointed the people of Israel to Jesus, proclaiming him "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.1:29). But later, when he was languishing in prison for denouncing Herod Antipas's sin, John was so bold as to question whether Jesus was the Messiah. Having been filled with the Spirit from birth did not give him any apparent advantage in regard to being sinless or perfect.

Being filled with the Spirit is not a once and for all experience but is ongoing; we need to keep on being filled: "Don't get drunk with wine, because it makes you lose control. Instead, keep on being filled with the Spirit" (Eph.5:18). This rendering by CJB brings out the present continuous of "filled" in the Greek; most other translations simply render the phrase as, "be filled with the Spirit".

The Spirit of Jesus

Many are confused by the equation, Holy Spirit = Spirit of Jesus = Spirit of Christ = Spirit of Jesus Christ. Some trinitarians take this equivalence to mean that Jesus is God, but is this a valid conclusion?

These are rare terms. "Spirit of Jesus" occurs only in Acts 16:7; "Spirit of Christ" only in Rom.8:9 and 1Pet.1:11; "Spirit of Jesus Christ" only in Phil.1:19; "Spirit of His Son" only in Gal.4:6. These combine for a total of five occurrences in the whole Bible.

In Acts 16:6-7 is a parallel between the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus: Paul was "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (v.6) and similarly "the Spirit of Jesus did not allow" Paul to go to Bithynia (v.7).

Similarly, "the Spirit of Jesus" has an exact parallel in "the Spirit of Elijah" (2 Kings 2:15) in that both refer unquestionably to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Yahweh. Hence it comes as no surprise that an angel of the Lord ascribes "the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk.1:17) to John the Baptist, the one who was "filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb" (v.15).

In his day, Elijah was well known in Israel as a man in whom the Spirit of Yahweh worked powerfully. That power is seen, for example, in the parting of the river Jordan [121]

[121] We won't discuss the spiritual meaning of the parting of the Jordan. A similar parting took place earlier in history when the Israelites crossed the Jordan into the Land of Promise (Josh.3:13-17).

when Elijah struck its waters with his cloak (2Ki.2:8). His disciple Elisha knew that the parting was done by Yahweh's Spirit and not by Elijah's own human spirit, as seen in the fact that Elisha, soon after Elijah's departure, duplicated the parting of the Jordan by calling on "Yahweh, the God of Elijah" (2Ki.2:14).

Before Elijah was taken up to heaven by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1), Elisha, his most outstanding disciple, asked him for a double portion of his spirit:

> Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied. "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not." (2 Kings 2:8-10, NIV)

A double portion is what the eldest son receives as his share of the inheritance (Dt.21:17). What was Elisha asking for when he requested a "double portion of your spirit"? Elijah's human spirit? Scripture nowhere allows for the possibility of a man giving his own spirit to someone else. The context indicates that Elisha was focused on the Spirit of Yahweh (e.g. 2 Kings 2:14, "Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?"). What he requested from Elijah was that he may inherit the portion given to the eldest son among "the sons of

the prophets" (a familiar term in 2 Kings) so that he may serve as Elijah's successor.

Shortly before he was taken up by a whirlwind, Elijah struck the Jordan with his cloak, and the river parted, so Elijah and Elisha crossed over on dry land. Later on, after Elijah's departure, Elisha had to confirm whether his request for a double portion of the Spirit of Elijah had been granted, so he struck the Jordan with the cloak as he spoke the words, "Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?" (2Ki.2:14). His focus was on Yahweh, not Elijah. In the next two verses (vv.15,16), the sons of the prophets spoke of "the Spirit of Elijah" in connection with "the Spirit of Yahweh".

If we insist that Jesus is God by the equation "Holy Spirit = Spirit of Jesus," would we likewise accept that Elijah is God by the equation "Spirit of Yahweh = Spirit of Elijah"?

When Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, he was not asking for Elijah's human spirit but for the Spirit of Yahweh that empowered Elijah. In the end, Elisha was granted his request, and from then on people recognized him as a man who functioned in the same power of Yahweh that had earlier worked in his master Elijah (2Ki.2:15; 3:11-12). As a result, Elisha's ministry mirrored Elijah's. Both raised the dead (1Ki.17:21-22; 2Ki.4:33-34), and both functioned under Yahweh's power ("as Yahweh lives, before whom I stand," 1Ki.17:1; 18:15; 2Ki.3:14; 5:16).

Paul probably had Elijah and Elisha in mind when he said that if we are God's children, then we are "heirs of God and

fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom.8:17). As the firstborn of creation (Col.1:15), Christ has the double portion; but we as God's children also have a portion. Christ's double portion of glory and preeminence doesn't mean that we get only half the fullness of the Spirit. The Spirit of God that dwells in Christ is the undivided Spirit that dwells in us and empowers us to live a victorious life.

Miracles

Yahweh, the central figure of the Bible, has displayed His power of miracles in countless events right from the start of Bible history (in Genesis, Abraham and Sarah had a child in their old age; in Exodus, God delivered Israel out of Egypt with mighty acts), and this will continue to Revelation, the last book of the Bible, in which are seen God's mighty acts at the conclusion of the present phase of human history.

It is often supposed that a person who performs miracles must be divine or superhuman; and many trinitarians have pointed to Jesus' miracles as evidence of his deity. Yet Elijah and Elisha performed miracles similar to those Jesus did, including raising the dead and causing food to multiply. In all these incidents, the power to perform miracles came from Yahweh even in the case of Jesus: "The Son can do nothing by himself" (Jn.5:19), and "the Father who dwells in me does His works" (Jn.14:10).

Likewise, Peter says that God performed miracles *through* the man Jesus: "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him" (Acts 2:22, NIV).

Not all miracles are done by Yahweh' power. Evil beings also have the power of miracles: "For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Mt.24:24).

In the book of Exodus, the magicians of Egypt duplicated some of the miracles done by Moses and Aaron (Ex.7:9-13). Fast forward to the future, to the time of the Antichrist who is called the "beast" in Revelation, notably in chapters 13 to 17. The beast will imitate what Elijah did on Mount Carmel: "It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people" (Rev.13:13; cf. 1Ki.18:38). His Satanic activity is described further: "The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed" (Rev.13:15, NIV).

Scripture tells us that the power of miracles comes either from Yahweh, the Creator of heaven and earth, or from the Evil One, namely the devil or Satan (a name which means "adversary" or "enemy"). In the end, Yahweh's adversary will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev.20:10). Because Satan's miracles tend to imitate those of Yahweh, it takes spiritual discernment to tell which miracles are from Yahweh and which are from Satan.

The Bible knows of no one called "God the Son" or "the second person of the Trinity," much less any such person who did miracles. But Yahweh did wonderful miracles through the biblical Jesus, not just acts of mighty power but also deeds of compassion expressed in: feeding the people in the wilderness where food was hard to obtain; healing those afflicted with disease; setting free the demon-possessed; and raising the dead as in the case of a young man who had died, leaving a grieving mother with no financial means (Lk.7:12-15). Compassion is fundamental to Yahweh's character and it shone beautifully in Jesus. Yet the Pharisees brazenly said that Jesus performed miracles by the power of Satan whom they called Beelzebul, the prince of demons:

> 22 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. 23 And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." 25 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. 26 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Matthew 12:22-28, ESV)

There are several points to observe from this passage:

1. A miracle is a sign that proclaims a spiritual message. In the casting of demons, the message is that God has sent Jesus to release prisoners from the powers of darkness. Jesus' ministry is to proclaim a message of liberty to mankind: "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Lk.4:18).
2. When the people, in awe and wonderment, saw the miracle Jesus had done, their reaction was not to exclaim that he is God or God the Son, but to ask whether he might be "the Son of David" (Mt.12:23), that is, the Messiah, the promised King of Israel and Savior of the world. It demonstrates how starkly different is Jewish thinking from Gentile thinking. That is why trinitarianism could not have come from the Jews, but was the product of the Gentile mindset.
3. The passage speaks of two kingdoms opposed to each other: Satan's and Yahweh's (vv.26,28). Jesus was intensely committed to establishing God's kingdom on earth, so he taught his disciples to pray to the Father, "Your kingdom come" (Mt.6:10). But in the present passage, Mt.12:28, Jesus says something more: the miracles he performs reveal that "the kingdom of God has come upon you". The coming of the kingdom has already begun. God's kingship on earth is already seen in the mighty works that Jesus did by the Spirit of Yahweh.

When some of the Jews attributed Jesus' miracles to Satan whom they called Beelzebul (Mt.12:24,31,32 = Mk.3:22f, 28,29), Jesus told them that whereas speaking against Jesus is pardonable (e.g. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Jn.1:46), attributing to Satan what the Spirit of God had done through Jesus is unpardonable, for that is surely the worst blasphemy.

The important subject of Jesus' miracles is beyond the scope of our book. There are many works on this subject, one of which is the careful study by Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker,* which has an extensive bibliography. I quote two of his many perceptive comments (italics mine):

> … any critical reconstruction of the historical Jesus must not only include but also, indeed, emphasize that he was a most powerful and prolific wonder worker, considering that in his miracles *God was powerfully present* ushering in the first stage of the longed-for eschaton of *the experience of his powerful presence*. (p.358)
>
> What is now seen as Christianity, at least in Western traditional churches, as primarily words and propositions requiring assent and further propagation will have to be replaced by a Christianity that involves and is dominated by understanding *God's numinous power to be borne uniquely in Jesus* and also in his followers in the working of miracles. (p.359)

"Greater than"

As trinitarians we thought that Jesus' claim to be "greater than" a specified person or thing amounts to a claim to deity. An example is Jesus' statement about himself, "I tell you that something greater than the temple is here" (Mt.12:6). So the reasoning goes like this: Who can be greater than God's temple but God Himself?

The earthly temple was where atonement for sin took place. But being a temple made by human hands, it could not provide the true and necessary atonement but foreshadowed another temple—Jesus Christ, the temple of God (Jn.2:21)—in which mankind's vast spiritual need can be met. The letter to the Hebrews explains in detail why Jesus is greater than the earthly temple and its priesthood. Neither the earthly temple, nor the high priesthood, nor the blood of sacrificial bulls and goats, can truly atone for man's sins. Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus the perfect man can achieve eternal salvation. Hence there is no salvation in any name under heaven among men but that of Jesus (Acts 4:12,10). Salvation is the central concern of Jesus' "greater than" declarations.

The focus on salvation is seen again in the very same chapter, Matthew 12, where Jesus says that he is greater than Jonah and Solomon:

> The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. (Mt.12:41-42, NIV 1984; cf. Lk. 11:31-32)

Jonah was not a significant Old Testament prophet. He didn't even want the Ninevites, the enemies of Israel, to come to repentance, but wished that they would perish by Yahweh's judgment. He couldn't endure the thought of Yahweh's forgiving them, or their eventual repentance that moved God to spare them from destruction. The Ninevites had the good sense to repent at the preaching of a minor prophet who didn't even want them to be saved.

King Solomon prayed for wisdom rather than riches or long life, and God was pleased to grant him incomparable wisdom (1Ki.3:5-15). Many had traveled from afar, notably the Queen of the South with her royal retinue, to listen to Solomon's priceless wisdom. But later, in the time of Jesus, some rejected the wisdom of someone greater than Solomon. By rejecting Jesus and his message, they rejected the life-giving wisdom in his life and teachings, and turned away from the path of eternal life; hence Jesus' pain-laden lament over Jerusalem (Mt.23.37).

The examples of Jonah and Solomon show that the "greater than" statements have to do with salvation. In these statements, Jesus is not elevating his own greatness as an end in itself, for that would be self-exaltation. But Jesus has to be greater than all mankind, even reaching the level of absolute perfection, to achieve mankind's salvation as no one else can. But Jesus does not glorify himself: "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me" (Jn.8:54).

Does Jesus have anything he did not receive from God?

As trinitarians we elevated Jesus to deity, but didn't realize that if he is both God and man, he could not be properly classified as a human being. Just as our humanity prevents us from being divine, so Jesus' supposed deity will prevent him from being true man.

What is the definition of being human? It is not relevant to our discussion to define man in physiological terms, so our definition must be couched in spiritual terms. An important aspect of being human is seen in Paul's words, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1Cor.4:7) The Greek word for "receive" (*lambanō*) occurs three times in this verse.

What characterizes man is that he possesses nothing that has not been given to him by God. The only one who is different in this respect is God Himself, the giver of every-

thing we have, the one from whom we receive "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17).

In this light we ask: Does the New Testament ever say that Jesus possesses something that he had not received from God? Jesus himself says, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father" (Mt.11:27; cf. Jn.17:7). Even his own life was granted to him by the Father (Jn.5:26; 6:57), as also his supreme authority in heaven and on earth (Mt.28:18).

The Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:13

Daniel 7 is the only place in the Bible in which God is called "the Ancient of Days" (three times, vv.9,13,22). He is also called "the Most High" 14 times in Daniel, far more frequently than in any other book of the Bible except the much longer Psalms (17 times). Then in verse 13 we see someone "like a son of man" who appears before the Ancient of Days:

> I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. (Daniel 7:13, ESV)

What would be the purpose of depicting God as the Ancient of Days but to show that the Son of Man is, by contrast, a much younger person? The title Ancient of Days also means that God is qualitatively different from the Son of Man: the Son of Man is mortal, not immortal; human, not divine. The

Hebrew idiom "son of man" means "man" in Israel even to this day.

Why is the difference in age between the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man put so picturesquely? Was it not in God's wisdom that this may counter the teaching of the deity of Jesus Christ? If the Son of Man is divine as he is in trinitarianism, then the contrast in Daniel 7:13 would be an improbable one: that between a young God and an ancient God, the Ancient of Days.

The scene in Daniel 7:13 is that of the Son of Man, who is not called by this title anywhere else in Daniel, being received into the presence of the Ancient of Days. When Daniel saw this in heaven, it hadn't yet taken place because it was given to him in "a dream and visions" (v.1). Since Daniel is an important prophet, his vision would be a messianic prophecy of Jesus, the Son of Man, who one day will be taken into the presence of Yahweh, the Ancient of Days. It is a prophecy of Jesus' ascent into heaven, to be received into the Father's presence and to be seated at His right hand. This event hadn't yet happened during Jesus' earthly ministry ("I have not yet ascended to the Father," Jn.20:17), but came shortly afterwards (Acts 1:9-11).

Without following a strict chronology, the vision in Daniel 7:13 has parallels that go beyond Jesus' ascension into heaven. The words "with the clouds of heaven" are alluded to by Mt.26:64 and Mk.14:62 in which Jesus says, "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and

coming with the clouds of heaven" (cf. Mt.24:30; Mk.13:26). This will take place at the second coming of Jesus.

In any case, we see nothing in Daniel 7 that suggests that the Son of Man is a divine being or a "second god" unless one reads divinity into it. In his book, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ,* Daniel Boyarin argues on dubious grounds that the person described in Daniel 7:13 as "one like a son of man" is, by that description, a divine being and a second god. Yet Boyarin fails to mention that in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel, a true human being, is addressed over 90 times as "son of man," a striking omission in an academic work that talks a lot about "son of man". In the book of Daniel, "son of man" occurs twice, in 7:13 ("one like a son of man") and in 8:17 where "son of man" refers to the thoroughly human Daniel, another fact that Boyarin fails to mention.

Daniel 7:13 is central to Boyarin's thesis that the "son of man" is a divine being and a second god. The conclusion is based mainly on the one statement in this verse that the son of man came to the Ancient of Days "with the clouds of heaven," which according to Boyarin is the usual means of conveyance by God or gods. On Boyarin's logic, Joseph would be another Pharaoh in Egypt because he rode on Pharaoh's second chariot (Gen.41:43).

Boyarin says that the idea of two gods (binitarianism) is Jewish, going as far back as almost two centuries before

Christ when the book of Daniel was written (c. 161 BC). Boyarin even says that the idea of the Trinity originated from within the orbit of Jewish ideas!

But after having said all this, Boyarin effectively nullifies his own thesis by saying that he does not really mean that the "son of man" is ontologically divine but only *functionally* divine, presumably as the Ancient of Days' regent or viceroy! This important caveat or proviso is placed in a footnote on p.55! The reader who doesn't read the footnotes wouldn't know of this limitation of intent. But if it is an intended limitation, surely it ought to be placed in the introduction of the book or some other prominent place rather than in a footnote one third of the way through the book.

The two parties mentioned in Daniel 7:13—"one like the son of man" and the Ancient of Days—show no evidence of prior familiarity with each other on their first encounter, contrary to what might be expected if they were indeed "of the same substance" (*homoousios*) or if they were Father and Son in the triune Godhead. The Son of Man was formally "presented before Him" (NASB), that is, taken into the presence of the Ancient of Days, or "was led into his presence" (NIV). The picture is not that of the Son of Man presenting himself in Yahweh's presence, but that of his being brought into Yahweh's presence. This scenario would make sense if the Son of Man is a true and perfect man, who in the hour of his triumph is led into the presence of his God and Father, coming before Him in humility and thanks-

giving, and accompanied by a host of heavenly beings. It is the Father who exalts him, for the Son of Man does not exalt himself.

Central to Boyarin's thesis is the assertion that the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is a divine being, a "second god" (but not ontological god), a younger god relative to the Ancient of Days. Boyarin says that because "thrones" (plural) are mentioned in Daniel 7:9, there must have been a throne for the Son of Man and another for the Ancient of Days. For Boyarin, this implies that both are God or god. Yet there are many thrones in Revelation (24 thrones in Rev.4:4), so the presence of thrones does not in itself mean a multiplicity of divine beings. Human kings also sit on thrones.

Since great authority is granted to the Son of Man at the end of Daniel 7, there is no doubt that he too has a throne, but this is not a proof of his ontological deity. If all that Boyarin wanted to say was that the Son of Man functions as God's regent, his conclusion would be valid (Dan.7:14), but it is far from being a proof of a "second god," much less a proof of trinitarianism.

That this Son of Man is a true man and not God is confirmed by the remarkable parallel between his being granted (by the Ancient of Days) "dominion and glory and a kingdom" which is everlasting (7:14) and the fact that the "saints of the Most High" are similarly exalted as to "possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever" (7:18,22,27). In fact, verse 27 describes the saints in lofty, almost-divine terms:

> And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them. (Daniel 7:27, ESV)

Hence a near-identical attribution of glory and power and dominion is given to the Son of Man and to the saints. Most significantly, the word "given" is used of both the Son of Man and the saints alike: Just as the Son of Man is "given" dominion and glory and a kingdom (Dan.7:14), so the saints are given "the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven" (v.27). This parallel undermines trinitarianism not only because it makes the Son of Man thoroughly human but also because it cannot possibly apply to the trinitarian Christ who as God Almighty cannot be "given" what he already possesses from eternity past.

Since both the Son of Man and the saints are given power and glory and the kingdom, it is clear that he is the head and representative of the saints. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christ is the head of his body, the church, which is composed of the saints.

The nature of Jesus' "blasphemy"

Trinitarians argue that Jesus did in fact claim to be God because the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court, condemned him to death on the charge of blasphemy, specifically the blasphemy of claiming to be God. It is evident that they have not looked carefully at the accounts of Jesus' trial as given in the gospels. It also shows that they don't know the full range of the meaning of the word "blasphemy," for they limit its meaning to the act of claiming to be God. It can be easily verified that in the New Testament, the Greek word for "blasphemy" is almost *never* used in this sense of claiming to be God. It more frequently means an act of reviling, sometimes against humans.[122]

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[122] The term "blasphemy" is not limited to claiming to be God or equal with God. In fact it is almost *never* used in this sense, but is more commonly used of insulting or reviling God or people. In the Greek of Mt.26:65, the high priest uses both the verb *blasphēmeō* and the noun *blasphēmia* of Jesus ("He has uttered blasphemy" and "You have now heard his blasphemy"). BDAG defines the first of these two words as "to speak in a disrespectful way that demeans, denigrates, maligns"; and the second as "speech that denigrates or defames, *reviling*, *denigration*, *disrespect*, *slander*". To our surprise, BDAG never uses the word "God" in any of its definition glosses, but only in citations. That is because blasphemy can be used against all categories of beings, e.g., against Paul (Acts 13:45; 18:6; Rom.3:8; 1Cor.10:30); against people in general (Titus 3:2); against Christians (1Pet.4:4); against angels (2Pet.2:10; Jude 1:8); and against God (many references). The word *blasphēmeō* is used in all these verses.

In the gospel accounts of Jesus' trial, Jesus never claimed to be God nor did the court ever accuse him of making such a claim. Here is the account in Mark chapter 14:

> 60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" 61 But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" 62 And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." 63 And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? 64 You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. 65 And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophesy!" (Mark 14:60-65, ESV)

In v.62, Jesus acknowledged to the high priest that he is the Christ who will be seated at the right hand of "Power" (a metonym of God). He then declared himself to be "the Son of Man" prophesied in Daniel 7:13.

But in this account of Jesus' trial that ended in a death sentence, where exactly did Jesus claim to be God, and where was he accused of making such a claim? Since such a claim is found nowhere in the account, what then was the nature of his blasphemy, as understood by his accusers?

If we stop reading things into the text, we would see that he was charged with blasphemy as soon as he admitted to being the Christ or Messiah (vv.61-64). His admission was

compounded by his description of himself as the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven, which was understood as a claim to be God's anointed King, the Messiah. *His claim to be the Messiah was the direct reason he was charged with blasphemy.* We seem to forget that he was answering the question, "Are you the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the Blessed?" He answered in the affirmative, declaring himself to be the Christ, Yahweh's appointed King of Israel and ruler of the world, the son of God mentioned in Psalm 2. To the high priest and the Sanhedrin, this was an outrageous claim that, if true, would make them subject to him!

The accounts of Jesus' trial in the three synoptic gospels closely parallel each other, notably in sharing a common perspective of Jesus as the Son of Man. In all three synoptics, it is precisely at the point where Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13 that he was charged with blasphemy (Mt.26:64; Mk.14:62; Lk.22:69). Jesus never claimed equality with God; in fact the word "blasphemy" almost *never* carries this meaning in the Bible (see the previous footnote).

Finally, what is the significance of the hostile taunt "Prophesy!" at the conclusion of his trial? This is recorded in all three synoptics (Mt.26:68; Mk.14:65; Lk.22:64), and has an important OT connection. The Jews understood that the coming Messiah will be the prophet foretold by Moses: "Yahweh your God will raise up a prophet like me" (Dt.18:15)—that is, a prophet like Moses, who is human and

not divine. This prophet is mentioned by the Jewish people in several places in John's Gospel:

> **John 1:21,25** "Are you the Prophet?" And (John the Baptist) answered, "No" … "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"
>
> **John 6:14** When the people saw the sign that (Jesus) had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"
>
> **John 7:40** When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." (cf. 4:19 and 9:17)

Accusation by a mob: Is Jesus making himself God?

Recorded in John's Gospel is a very public accusation of blasphemy hurled at Jesus (Jn.10:33): "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." This is the only place in John's Gospel where Jesus was accused of blasphemy by a mob. The accusation was made on the "street level" and not in a court of law:

> **John 10:30-38** [30] "I and the Father are one." [31] The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. [32] Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" [33] The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself

> God." [34] Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? [35] If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken— [36] do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? [37] If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; [38] but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." (ESV)

To understand this incident, we note its highly public nature: The crowd consisted of "Jews" (plural, v.31) who were gathered at the most important site in Jerusalem (the Temple, v.23) during an important Jewish feast (of Dedication, v.22). This would more than qualify the crowd to meet the minimum requirement of two or three witnesses to establish an accusation. If Jesus really did claim to be God in their presence, there would have been far more than two or three witnesses, easily dozens of witnesses, who could have *truthfully* confirmed this in a court of law.

More significantly, if Jesus is really claiming to be God in their presence, he would have *truthfully and joyfully and fervently* concurred with them since his deity was precisely what he wanted to tell them, according to trinitarians. Yet Jesus was never charged with claiming to be God at his trial!

In the street mob incident, the violent hostility to Jesus (they were ready to stone him, v.31) meant that it would have been easy for the Sanhedrin to gather hostile witnesses to

accuse Jesus of the specific blasphemy of claiming to be God. Yet this never happened even though the trial was elaborately set up with many false witnesses (Mt.26:60). In fact, no false witnesses would have been necessary if Jesus had actually told the street mob that he is God; in this case, he would have declared his deity openly to the Sanhedrin!

Why was Jesus never accused of claiming to be God at his trial? Was it another instance of the witnesses failing to agree, or was it because Jesus' reply at the mob incident was so cogent that no case could be built against him? In the end no formal charge was ever levelled against him for claiming to be God.

Strangely enough, trinitarians agree with the mob accusers that Jesus had made such a claim and was therefore guilty of blasphemy according to Jewish law! And this is despite the fact that the high priest and the Sanhedrin did not bring such a charge against him!

Some church fathers taught that Christ's deification has man's deification as its objective

For some early binitarians and trinitarians, including some well-known church fathers, the deification of Christ has as its objective the deification of believers as gods. Here are some examples:

- **Augustine:** "If we have been made sons of God, we have also been made gods."
- **Athanasius:** "Therefore He was not man, and then became God, but He was God, and then became man, and that to deify us."
- **Justin Martyr:** "Let the interpretation of the Psalm [82] be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming gods."
- **Irenaeus:** "We have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods."
- **Clement of Alexandria** (three separate quotations): "The Word of God became man, that you may learn from man how man may become God"; "For if one knows himself, he will know God; and knowing God, he will be made like God"; "man becomes God, since God so wills."

These quotations are from the Wikipedia article, "Divinization (Christian)," as it was on April 9, 2013. I have confirmed that these quotations are accurate word for word, and have not been pulled out of context, by consulting *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (10 volumes) and *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (28 volumes).[123]

What can we conclude from these enigmatic statements? There are probably three things we can take away from them.

Firstly, these statements reveal the Gentile propensity for the deification of man and supremely the man Christ Jesus. Even if the church fathers whom we quoted (Augustine, Athanasius, Justin, Irenaeus, Clement) did not mean what they seem to mean, the fact that such statements could be made uncontroversially in their time, indicates a general tolerance, even within the church, for the language of the deification of man, all the more so of Christ.

Secondly, even if these church fathers did not intend to deify man in their statements, the fact remains that their

[123] Here are the references: Augustine (NPNF1, vol.8, *Psalm L*, para.2); Athanasius (NPNF2, vol.4, *Texts Explained*, chap.XI, para. 39); Justin Martyr (ANF, vol.1, chap. CXXIV, *Christians are the Sons of God*); Irenaeus (ANF, vol.1, chap. XXXVIII, *Why Man was not Made Perfect From the Beginning*, para.4); Clement of Alexandria (ANF, vol.2, *Exhortation to Abandon the Impious Mysteries of Idolatry*, chap.I; *On the True Beauty*, chap.I). ANF denotes *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (10 volumes), NPNF1 denotes *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Series 1, 14 volumes), and NPNF2 denotes *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Series 2, 14 volumes).

statements do *literally* speak of the deification of man. In fact, the language of deification that they used is only slightly weaker than the language of deification that many use to deify Jesus.

Thirdly, even if these church fathers did not intend to deify man, the fact that they nonetheless used the language of deification will serve to moderate the standard trinitarian interpretation of John 10:33-36 (the mob incident previously discussed) which is taken (incorrectly) by some trinitarians to say that Jesus equated himself with God:

> The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? [Psalm 82:6] If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" (John 10:33-36, ESV)

John MacArthur, trinitarian, says regarding this passage:

> Jesus' argument is that [Ps.82:6] proves that the word "god" can be legitimately used to refer to others than God Himself. His reasoning is that if there are others whom God can address as "god" or "sons of the Most High," why then should the Jews object to Jesus' statement that He is "the Son of God" (v.36)?' (*MacArthur Study Bible*, p.1571, on Jn.10:34-36).

Chapter 10

Philippians 2: The Name Above Every Name

Two of the major New Testament passages that trinitarians use for constructing the God-man constitution of Jesus are recognized by scholars to be poems or hymns. Most people are unfamiliar with poetry, much less poetry of a biblical and spiritual character. This unfamiliarity gives trinitarians an opportunity to interpret poetic words and expressions in a way that suits their doctrines.

Besides John's Prologue (John 1:1-18), the other poetic passage that trinitarians appeal to is Philippians 2:6-11. They seize upon the poetic expression that Jesus was "in the form of God" as evidence that Jesus is God, ignoring the fact that any Greek-English lexicon will tell us that "form" has to do with external shape, and that God being spirit has no such form. Hence Paul is using the word "form" not in a literal

sense but as a metaphor. Later we will see that the word "form" in this hymn is a poetic synonym of "image". Jesus the last man, like Adam the first man, was made in the image or the form of God, a truth that makes perfect sense in Philippians 2. But trinitarians are keen to extract their God-man notion from this passage. Their persistence is understandable given that there is little else in the New Testament that they can use to prove their point. Here is Philippians 2:5-11:

> **Philippians 2:5-11**
>
> 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,
> 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
> 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
> 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
> 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,
> 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (ESV)

There is general agreement that Philippians 2:6-11 is a hymn or a part of a hymn that was used in the early church and written in poetic language. New Jerusalem Bible says in a note that this is "probably an early Christian hymn quoted by Paul". Many single-column Bibles arrange this passage in stanza format. The hymnic nature of this passage is noted by many scholars, e.g. the ten contributors to *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*. In fact Philippians 2:6-11 is often called "Carmen Christi" (Latin, "Christ Hymn").

Paul is describing how Jesus became the perfect man

As I reflect on my half century as a trinitarian, and on my ardent devotion to Christ, I now realize ever more clearly that the Christ I was devoted to was not someone I had truly regarded as a human being. In reality I saw him as "God the Son," the second person of the Godhead. In trinitarianism, the preexistent God the Son acquired a human nature through incarnation, and gained a human body. But to trinitarians there is never any doubt that the real person in the human body of Jesus is the divine "God the Son". Trying to see Jesus as both God and man is like trying to see something with double vision, so we resolved the problem by thinking of Jesus primarily as God and secondarily as man.

Despite our ardent trinitarian belief, we still felt it necessary to prove from Scripture that Jesus is God. For some reason we could never conclusively prove that he is God, so

we constantly returned to the same few Bible texts such as John 1 and Philippians 2 to "prove" that Jesus is God. The issue never seems to be concluded, so books and articles continue to be written on these same texts again and again over the centuries. Yet there is no similar need or effort to prove that Yahweh is God.

Recently it came to me as a flash of insight that the very verses that we put into service for proving Jesus' deity actually proved something different: how Jesus became the only perfect man. And because of this magnificent attainment, he was exalted by God. When Philippians 2:6-11 is read anew from this angle, fresh insights into the truth begin to emerge, illuminating what trinitarianism has obscured, hidden, and sidetracked over the years.

Here is a summary of how Jesus became the perfect man as seen in Philippians 2:6-11:

1. Jesus, like Adam, was in the form of God (the image of God, the likeness of God)
2. Jesus, unlike Adam, did not seek to grasp at equality with God by force (that is, by disobedience, which is an act of rebellion)
3. Jesus humbled himself, embracing his humanity rather than seeking the glory of deity
4. Jesus sought servitude rather than dominance among his fellow men
5. Jesus determined to be faithful to God in every aspect of his life

6. Jesus was faithful unto death
7. … even death of the most ignominious type: death on a cross.

If anyone could follow this path of life without committing a single sin ("without sin," Heb.4:15) starting from the age of responsibility (which the Jews set as 13 years and one day), empowered by the ever-present indwelling of Yahweh, such a person could also attain perfection. But anyone who has ever tried to live for one day without committing one sin in deed or thought would know that this is practically impossible even though believers are also the temple of God's Spirit (1Cor.6:19). From one's own effort to live without sin, one comes to appreciate the matchless wonder of Jesus the perfect man, and to realize that God's bringing into being a new man is a miracle beyond imagination, a feat of creation that is far more impressive than the magnificence of the physical universe.

We cannot, however, discount the voluntary side of Jesus' becoming the perfect man even though we know that the miracle could not have been achieved apart from God's sustaining power in him. Jesus' self-giving love, though inspired and empowered by God who is love, had nonetheless, by Jesus' own choice, become truly and fully his own. "He loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal.2:20) is one of the most precious statements about Jesus in the New Testament. Without this deep genuine love, Jesus could never have become the perfect man.

But the situation is different with the trinitarian Jesus, God the Son. Since God is love in His very nature (1Jn. 4:8,16), it would be impossible for the divine Jesus, God the Son, not to love. This significantly diminishes the stupendous wonder of God's achievement in "the man Christ Jesus".

Anyone who has ever tried to love others continuously and in every situation, especially those who are hard to love, would appreciate the unspeakable magnificence of Jesus' love, for he perfectly embodied God's love as expressed in the well-known statement, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn.3:16).

Because of Jesus' perfect sinlessness, and because he loved us to the utmost in his self-giving death, God exalted him to the highest conceivable position in all of creation: the place at His right hand (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Eph.1:20). In this glorious exaltation, vividly described in Phil.2:8-11, Jesus was given the most exalted name in the universe, at which name every knee shall bow to him and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the Father's glory. But how can bowing the knee to Jesus be to the Father's glory? It can be so because "the glory of God was made visible in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor.4:6).

The "form of God"

Trinitarianism clutches at every straw to find proof texts in the Bible for the deity of Christ which is central to trinitarian dogma. A prime example of this is taking the words "he was in the form of God" (Phil.2:6) as evidence of his deity. To see what Paul means when he says that Christ "was in the form of God," we briefly consider the matter in four points.

Point #1: God is invisible

The New Testament consistently says that God is invisible. He is "immortal, invisible, the only God" (1Tim.1:17). God is inherently invisible also for the reason that "God is spirit" (Jn.4:24). But the same cannot be said of Christ, for he is eminently visible and is the "image of the invisible God" (Col.1:15). Christ has fulfilled the purpose that man was created to fulfill—making visible the invisible God—but man has failed for the most part.

John hints at God's invisibility in one sense or another when he says that "no one has ever seen God" yet Jesus "has made Him known" (Jn.1:18). Because Jesus has made God known, there is a qualified sense in which we see God: by spiritual perception and not by physical sight. It is said of Moses that he, with eyes of faith, "saw Him who is invisible" (Heb.11:27).

Although Yahweh is invisible, at times He makes Himself visible as in the cases of divine epiphany in the Old Testament, or by showing His glory to His people: the Israelites

saw "the glory of Yahweh" in a cloud (Ex.16:10), and Ezekiel saw "the likeness of the glory of Yahweh" (Ezek.1:28).

God's invisibility is noted by trinitarian references, e.g. *New Dictionary of Theology*, article "Anthropomorphism":

> God is invisible, infinite and without a body, but human characteristics are frequently ascribed to God in order to communicate information about his nature or acts. Illustrations abound in Scripture. Though God is without a body, his acts are said to be the result of 'his mighty arm' (Ex 15:16).

Point #2: "Form" in Philippians 2:6 means external, visible form

In Philippians 2:6 ("though he was in the form of God"), the Greek word for "form" is *morphē* (cf. the English word *morphology*, the study of the form of words or of organisms; or *morph*, to change shape in a smooth and gradual manner). *Morphē* is consistently defined by Greek-English lexicons as outward, external, and visible form or appearance. For example, Thayer's Greek-English lexicon defines *morphē* as "the form by which a person or thing strikes the vision; external appearance".

The word *morphē* doesn't have many meanings, and is given only one definition in BDAG: "*form, outward appearance, shape* generally of bodily form". BDAG explains the use of *morphē* in Phil.2:6 as follows: "this is in contrast to expression of divinity in the preëxistent Christ". This is a most remarkable statement. Despite BDAG's trinitarian presup-

positions which underlie this statement, it correctly assigns a non-divine, non-trinitarian, and implicitly human meaning to *morphē* in "the form of God"!

Point #3: "Form of God" means "image of God"

But there is a problem. Since God is invisible (1Tim.1:17) and is spirit (Jn.4:24), therefore God cannot have external shape or form. This is confirmed by Moses' warning to the Israelites: "Watch yourselves carefully since you saw no form on the day that Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire." (Dt.4:15) If God has no form, how can Paul speak of "the form of God" in Phil.2:6?

Since *morphē* ("form") has to do with external appearance, and since God being spirit has no such form (at Horeb He was not seen with the eye), Paul is obviously using the word "form" not literally but as a metaphor.

The problem is resolved when we understand that "form of God" means "image of God". Just as our being in the "image of God" doesn't mean that God is visible, so Jesus' being in the "form of God" doesn't mean that God is visible. Just as Christ is the "image of the invisible God" (Col.1:15), so Christ is in the "form of God" who is invisible. God is invisible, yet is made visible through Christ who is the image of God and in the form of God.

The equivalence of "form of God" and "image of God" can be established both biblically and lexically.

Biblically, "form" and "image" are used synonymously in the OT, notably of idols. For example, the three words "image" and "form" and "likeness" are used synonymously in Dt.4:16: "Beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved **image** for yourselves, in the **form** of any figure, the **likeness** of male or female" (ESV; cf. vv.23,25). The functional equivalence of the three words in boldface—*image*, *form*, *likeness*—brings out the functional equivalence of "image of God," "form of God," and "likeness of God".

When God created man, He said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen.1:26). Because we were created in the "likeness" of God, we bear the image of God just as Christ is the image of God. This tells us that Genesis 1:26 is the basis for understanding "form of God" in Philippians 2:6.

Lexically, the equivalence of "form of God" and "image of God" is seen in HALOT (Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT), the foremost Hebrew lexicon for biblical studies. The two key words in Genesis 1:26 are "image" (*tselem*, צֶלֶם) and "likeness" (*dmut*, דְּמוּת). HALOT defines the former as "likeness, shape, representation," and the latter as "likeness, form, shape" (note the word "form" in both definitions); hence the two words are basically synonymous. This is the lexical basis for taking "form of God" to mean "likeness of God" or "image of God". In Genesis 1:26, the use of "image" and "likeness" within the same sentence gives double emphasis to the fact that God made man to be the visible image of

the invisible God, that is, to be the "likeness, shape, representation" (HALOT) of God.

Not only in Hebrew but also in Greek there is strong lexical affinity between "form" and "image," as seen in BDAG's three definitions of *eikōn* (which is the standard Greek word for "image," as in "the image of God"):

> 1. an object shaped to resemble the form or appearance of something, *likeness*, *portrait*
>
> 2. that which has the same form as something else, *living image*
>
> 3. that which represents something else in terms of basic form and features, *form*, *appearance*

The crucial thing to notice is that the word "form" appears in all three definitions of *eikōn* ("image"). In other words, BDAG has no definition of *eikōn* that does not involve *form*. Moreover, *likeness*, *portrait*, *appearance* are fundamentally interchangeable concepts with *form* or *image*.

From the lexical equivalence, in both the Hebrew and the Greek, it is clear that since Jesus Christ is in the "form of God" (Phil.2:6), he is also the "image of God" (2Cor.4:4) and the "image of the invisible God" (Col.1:15).

Many trinitarians agree that "image" and "likeness" are synonymous in Gen.1:26 ("Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"). One of them says that "image" and "likeness" are "essentially synonymous terms" in this verse

(*Constable's Expository Notes*). NIV Study Bible, on Gen.1:26, says,

> No distinction should be made between "image" and "likeness," which are synonyms in both the OT (5:1; 9:6) and the NT (1Cor.11:7; Col.3:10; James 3:9), as well as in a ninth-century BC Aramaic inscription found in 1979 on a life-size statue of a local ruler at Tell Fekheriyeh in Syria.

The word "likeness" in Genesis 1:26 doesn't mean that when God created man, He made a physical copy of Himself. On the contrary, man is more properly understood as a *representation* of the invisible God ("representation" is one of HALOT's definitions of *tselem*). Man is a representation of God, but not in physical shape or external form. In creating man with eyes, God indicates that God sees; man's ears indicate that God hears; the arms indicate that He acts, and so on. To properly represent God, man is given a will, emotions, and the capacity to think.

The ancient Near East was populated with idols and statues of gods (cf. "gods many," 1Cor.8:5). Those who worshipped these idols were not so naïve as to think that the spirits they were worshipping actually looked like the statues of wood or stone. Some idols have multiple heads and arms, symbolizing the power and intelligence of the spirits being worshipped.

It is clear that "form of God" in Phil.2:6 is derived from the concept of Adam as the "image of God" in Gen.1:26,27.

In fact, Jesus is called the last Adam and the second man (1Cor. 15:45,47, "adam" is Hebrew for "man"), and shares the same "form of God" as the first Adam. This is a poetic way of describing the image and likeness of God (Gen.1:26-27) in which Adam was created.

The remarkable fact that "form of God" is found nowhere in the Bible outside Phil.2:6 makes it likely that it is just a poetic expression of a concept already well established in Scripture such as the concept of man being in the image of God or the likeness of God. This is reinforced by the fact that Philippians 2:6-11 is regarded as poetry even by trinitarians.

Poetic language is rich in symbolism and allusion, so the hymn's use of a different metaphor—the form of God for the image of God—is hardly anything remarkable. In fact the word "formed" is used of the creation of man in Gen.2:7: "Yahweh God formed the man from the dust of the earth". In other words, when man was created in the image of God, he was at the same time "formed" by God. The Hebrew word for "formed" (*yatsar*) is elsewhere used of a potter who forms a vessel out of clay (Isa.29:16).

Just as image and likeness are equated in Gen.1:26 ("let us make man in our image, after our likeness"), and just as image, form, and likeness are equated in Dt.4:16 ("a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female"), so form and likeness are synonyms in Phil. 2:7: "taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men". All these terms are synonymous and interchange-

able, both in the Old Testament and New Testament, linking Phil.2:6-11 firmly with Gen.1:26-27 and Gen.2:7. The use of interchangeable synonyms is natural in hymns such as the one in Phil.2:6-11 because of their poetic and metaphorical character.

There is no biblical basis for the trinitarian use of "form of God" (image of God or likeness of God) as an argument for Jesus' deity. Any attempt to go in this direction should be tempered with Yahweh's words in Isa.43:10: "Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me" (ESV).

Yahweh is saying that no god has ever been "formed" or ever will be. Hence no one who is in "the form of God" can be Deity. Jesus is in the form of God in the same sense as Adam was created or "formed" (Gen.2:7) in the "image" or "likeness" of God (Gen.1:26).

For a theological discussion on this topic, see Appendix 6 ("Karl-Josef Kuschel on Christ and Adam") of the present book.

Point #4: Worshipping an image is idolatry

Christ is the "image of God" (2Cor.4:4; Col.1:15). We too are in the image of God, but Christ is the image of God *par excellence* because he is the only perfect man who has ever lived. When we see Jesus the perfect image of God, we see Yahweh in all His glory, beauty, and magnificence.

In point #3, we looked at BDAG's three definitions of *eikōn* ("image"), all of which contain the key word "form,"

giving further lexical evidence that "the form of God" really means "the image of God". This goes a long way in explaining the meaning of "though he was in the form of God".

From *eikōn* we get the English word "icon". The use of this word in computers is impressive for its insight into the fundamental meaning of an icon. The Microsoft Excel 2010 program is an executable file of 20,000,000 bytes whereas its icon is a tiny file of 3,000 bytes. The program is distinct from the icon that points to it, yet the icon is so representative of the program that we click on it as if it were the program itself, and it is through the icon that we gain access to the program.

The word *eikōn* is used of the image stamped on a coin, e.g. the portrait of Caesar stamped on a coin that Jesus showed the Pharisees, as recorded in Mt.22:20 where *eikōn* is rendered "likeness" (ESV) or "image" (NIV) or "portrait" (NJB). This *eikōn* is an image or portrait of Caesar that bears his likeness. What we see on the coin is not literally the person of Caesar but an image of Caesar. In the same way, Christ as the image of God is not God Himself. But as trinitarians we couldn't even tell an image from the person represented by the image, so we didn't hesitate to worship Jesus, the image of God, as God.

But Scripture strictly forbids the worship of images. Moses warned the Israelites: "Since you saw no form on the day that Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of

male or female." (Dt.4:15-16; cf. Ezek.16:17). Here the prohibition against worshipping an image is all-encompassing, covering everything related to "image" or "form" or "figure" or "likeness".

Despite the prohibition against the worship of images, trinitarians have no hesitations about worshipping the man Christ Jesus (as he is called in 1Tim.2:5), who is the visible and human image of God. That being so, on what grounds do we prohibit the worship of an ordinary man, who is also in the image of God? (*New Bible Dictionary*, article "Image," citing Gen.9:6 and James 3:9, says correctly that "man is still spoken of as the image of God after the Fall".)

In the first of the Ten Commandments, Yahweh strictly prohibits the worship of anyone (this would include Jesus) besides or before Yahweh, and the worship of any image (including Jesus the image of God):

> You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I Yahweh your God am a jealous God. (Dt.5:7-9, ESV, "Yahweh" in the Hebrew restored)

We close this section with a statement by James D.G. Dunn against worshipping Jesus the image of God:

> It is this danger [of worshipping Jesus instead of God] that helps explain why the New Testament refers to Jesus by the word 'icon' (*eikōn*)—the icon of the invisible God. For, as the lengthy debate in Eastern Christianity made clear, the distinction between an idol and an icon is crucial at this point. An *idol* is a depiction on which the eye fixes, a solid wall at which the worship stops. An *icon* on the other hand is a window through which the eye passes, through which the beyond can be seen, through which divine reality can be witnessed. So the danger with a worship that has become too predominantly the worship of Jesus is that the worship due to God is stopping at Jesus, and that the revelation of God through Jesus and the worship of God through Jesus is being stifled and short-circuited." (*Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, p.147)

Trinitarian idolatry and the golden calf

The trinitarian fabrication and worship of a divine Jesus has several parallels with the fashioning and the worship of the golden calf by the Israelites:

> **Exodus 32:3-4** So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." (NIV)
>
> **Acts 7:41** "And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands." (ESV)

There are several parallels between the worship of Jesus and the worship of the golden calf: Both were the products of foreign polytheistic influences, Egyptian in one case, Greek in the other. One was established after Moses had gone up to meet with Yahweh on Mount Sinai; the other was established after Jesus had ascended to the Father. Just as the golden calf displaced Yahweh as the object of worship, so God the Son of trinitarianism displaced Yahweh in trinitarian Christianity. The fury of Moses at his descent from the mountain will be more than matched by the wrath of Jesus at his second coming.

A consequence of Nicaea is that trinitarianism morphed into "Jesusism" because the other two persons, God the Father and God the Spirit, have been given a lesser place in the Gentile church. This is similar to what James D.G. Dunn calls "Jesus-olatry" though he applies that term to the modern church rather than the early church: "I use the term 'Jesus-olatry' in an important sense as parallel or even close to 'idolatry'" (*Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*, p.147).

The approximately 300 bishops who convened at Nicaea under the direction and auspices of the as yet non-Christian emperor Constantine, had exalted the man Jesus to coequality with God, after which Jesus became the central object of worship in the church, with little notice paid to the Father and the Spirit. This situation remains to this day in the Catholic church and the Protestant churches.

In the Catholic church, another development followed on the heels of the deification of Jesus, namely, the exaltation of Mary who had been given the title *theotokos* or "God bearer," that is, mother of God. Hence one idolatrous step was soon followed by another, in this case towards Mariolatry, the idolatrous cult of Mary. It is in human nature to feel that Mary has a mother's power of persuasion over her son such that our prayers stand a better chance of being answered if they are addressed to Mary rather than to Jesus. What was being done to the Father by the deification of Jesus was now being done to Jesus by the elevation of Mary as an object of worship in the Catholic church.

As we shall see, Jesus certainly has a most exalted place in the Bible, but not in a way that eclipses the glory of the Father, Yahweh. On the contrary, all that Jesus is and does is "to the glory of the Father" (Phil.2:11, etc.).

Christ did not strive for equality with God

Paul draws a connection between Jesus' being in the form of God and his not striving for equality with God: "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil.2:6). What is the logical connection between the two? There seems to be no inherent or causal link, for why would anyone who is in the form or image of God contemplate grasping at equality with God? Every human being is already in the image of God and has never lost that image. This is taught by Paul (1Cor.11:7) and James

(3:9), and affirmed in the Old Testament even *after* Adam had sinned (Gen.9:6). It also remains the theological position of Judaism. Our own experience as human beings made in the image of God tells us that we don't have any particular desire or innate reason to claim equality with God unless we are deranged or do so for political reasons as in the case of the Roman Caesars.

If there is no obvious connection between these two things in Philippians 2:6 (having the form of God and grasping at equality with God), why does Paul link them? It is because Philippians 2:6ff is a deep spiritual echo of the Genesis creation of man.

As we have seen, "form of God" already has a Genesis connection (the image and likeness of God, and the fact that Adam was "formed" by God's own hands). The connection is deepened when we bring in the element of grasping at equality with God: Philippians 2:6 takes us back to the Genesis account of the temptation, which is the momentous event in Adam's spiritual life and by parallel also in Jesus' (though in a different time and place, and with a different outcome).[124]

[124] The connection between Philippians 2 and Genesis is not lost on some trinitarians. The trinitarian reference, *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT*, on Phil.2:6-8, says "there is an undeniable network of associations between Philippians 2 and Genesis 1 to 3". *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, in "Philippians," says, "The claim that Christ Jesus did not grasp after equality with God (Phil.2:6) may even be an allusion to the sin of Adam, who did make a grab for deity (Gen.3:4-6)."

In the similarity but also the contrast between Adam and Christ, we see a sharp delineation: one is the first man, the other the second man; one is the first Adam, the other the last Adam (1Cor.15:47,45). Yet they both started out as sinless men. Unique in human history, Adam and Jesus both faced the ultimate temptation to grasp at equality with God. Though we human beings face various temptations along the path of life, these are unlike the kind that Adam and Jesus faced as *sinless* men. Because we have sinned, we do not think of grasping at equality with God. We have not experienced and can never experience temptation on the same level as Adam and Jesus in their encounters with temptation.

Adam was initially sinless by the mere fact of not having sinned, but he was not morally perfect because moral perfection cannot in its nature be created by divine fiat, but must be attained through the test of faith. Adam was sinless in much the same way an infant is sinless, in that the infant has not yet committed sin, being incapable of discerning right from wrong. In this last respect, Adam and Eve are different from an infant, for they fully understood that they are to obey God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit. Hence their sin amounts to willful disobedience and is not like an ignorant act of a child. Adam's disobedience and Jesus' obedience are the crucial elements pertaining to mankind's salvation: "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Rom.5:19)

The stark contrast between Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience is brought out in their respective encounters with Satan's temptations. In the case of Jesus, the importance of the temptation (Mt.4:1-11; Lk.4:1-13) lies in the fact that it took place at the commencement of his ministry, which is parallel to the fact that Adam and Eve were tempted soon after their introduction into the Garden.

Philippians 2:6-9 is a portrait of Jesus Christ the perfect man who did not grasp at equality with God. His obedience to God is a resolute rejection of sin just as sin is, in turn, a rejection of God's lordship and an assertion of equality with God. Adam's sin constitutes "transgression" (Rom.5:14), which is the "disregarding, violating" of God's command (Thayer, *parabasis*), and is rooted in disobedience ("every transgression or disobedience," Heb.2:2).

But unlike Adam, Jesus "humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil.2:7). His perfection lies in his steadfast obedience to the Father all through his life, remaining faithful right up to an excruciating and humiliating death on the cross. His refusal to grasp at equality with God was not a one-time struggle but something that went on all through his earthy life as he was being confronted by one temptation after another, even from the start of his ministry.

Whereas the first man clutched for equality with God (Gen.3:5, "you will be like God"), the second man, Jesus Christ, rejected any such thought.

Trinitarians read Philippians 2:6ff to mean that Christ was already the divine "God the Son" at the time he refused to grasp at equality with God. But if Jesus was already God, why would he need to grasp at equality with God if he was already God's coequal in every respect according to trinitarianism? Arguing that he was *willing* to give up his coequality with God is unconvincing because it is impossible for anyone to discard his own essential nature. For example no man can humble himself to become a dog. He can imitate a dog by barking like one but no man can ever become a dog. And since God cannot stop being God, the trinitarian interpretation of Philippians 2:6 does not make sense.

ESV's translation of this verse ("who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped") is representative of English Bibles, but NIV abandons translation and ventures into theological interpretation when it says: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped". The words "in very nature God" are simply not found in the Greek text of Philippians 2:6. It shows that the NIV translators probably did not think that Paul's original wording is sufficient to establish Christ's deity.

Has it not occurred to trinitarians that if Jesus is already God, why would he even need to "consider equality with God something to be grasped"? The trinitarian interpretation of Philippians 2:6 violates good sense, insults our intelligence, and attributes to Scripture a nonsensical statement.

In the past, our minds were so attuned to trinitarian error that this interpretation didn't seem nonsensical to us. In retrospect I now see that one of the frightening aspects of habituation to error is the inability to see the obvious. This is what Scripture calls blindness, since it robs us of the ability to see the simple truth. As a result of trinitarian blindness, the beauty of this verse and of the whole passage, Philippians 2:6-11—in which Paul recounts Jesus' humility and obedience to God, and his consequent glorification by the Father—is destroyed. This is the kind of thing that trinitarianism has done to many passages in the Bible.

The trinitarian interpretation runs into a similar problem at the end of the hymn (verses 8 to 11) which says that God exalted Jesus to the highest place among all living beings, such that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

But how can this statement apply to the trinitarian God the Son? If Jesus is already God, then every knee would already bow to him and every tongue confess that he is Lord. Exactly how does Philippians 2 enhance the divine glory that Jesus, as the eternal God, had already had in trinitarianism? Can anyone be more highly exalted than by the mere fact of being Almighty God? In Paul's teaching, the exaltation of Jesus was something that God had conferred on him, yet no such conferring would have been needed if Jesus had already possessed innate divine glory. The trinitarian interpretation simply does not make sense.

New Jerusalem Bible, the official English-language Catholic Bible outside the United States, says something that is impressive for its deep insight but even more impressive for its willingness to discard the standard trinitarian interpretation of Philippians 2:6-11. In the following excerpt from NJB, the word *kenosis* means the act of emptying oneself:

> [Philippians 2:6-11] has been understood as Christ's *kenosis* in emptying himself of his divine glory in order to live a human life and undergo suffering. More probably Jesus is here contrasted as the second with the first Adam. The first Adam, being in the form or image of God, attempted to grasp equality with God and, by this pride, fell. By contrast, Jesus, through his humility, was raised up by God to the divine glory. In the traditional but less probable interpretation, this emptying or *kenosis* expressed Jesus' voluntary self-deprivation, during his earthly life, of the divine glory. But this interpretation is not only less scriptural but also anachronistic for the development of christology at this moment of Paul's thinking. (NJB, footnotes Phil.2:5d and Phil.2:7g)

The king of Tyre boasted of being a god

Yahweh's judgment against the king of Tyre gives us an idea of what it means for a person to desire to be like God. The following passage may be hard to follow because it uses four levels of quotation. To grasp the general idea, it is sufficient to read the three clauses shown in italics:

> The word of Yahweh came to me: "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: 'Because your heart is proud, and you have said, "*I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas," yet you are but a man, and no god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god* … you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth—therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: *Because you make your heart like the heart of a god*, therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you, the most ruthless of the nations; and they shall draw their swords … They shall thrust you down into the pit, and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas. *Will you still say, "I am a god," in the presence of those who kill you, though you are but a man, and no god*, in the hands of those who slay you?'" (Ezek.28:1-9, ESV, "Yahweh" in the original Hebrew restored)

The king of Tyre is described poetically as a quasi-divine being, yet he is only a man presuming to be a god. This is similar to the boasting in Isa.14:13-14 ("I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high … I will make myself like the Most High") and the idolatry seen in Acts 12:22-23 (Herod Agrippa I was struck down by an angel for accepting idolatrous adulation from the crowd who declared him a god).

From these examples we see that man, especially in situations of earthly power, aspires to be like God. This was Adam and Eve's ambition. Despite being made in the likeness of God, they wanted to gain the knowledge—and knowledge is

power—to be "like God" (Gen.3:5). It is always man who wants to be equal with God.

Taking the form of a servant

The events in Jesus' life as outlined in Philippians 2 took place on earth and not in some preexistent (pre-human or pre-birth) realm imagined by trinitarians. Jesus' being in the form or image of God is something that every human being experiences as he or she enters into the world at birth (or, in the case of Adam and Eve, at their creation). Like us human beings, Jesus was "born of a woman" (Gal.4:4). Though he was also "born of the Spirit" at his birth (Lk.1:35; cf. Jn.3:5,6, 8), he was no less human because of that. Likewise, when we are born of the Spirit, we do not become less human. Nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus' virgin birth used as an argument for his alleged deity. It is interesting that the Qur'an of Islam has a large portion devoted to the topic of Jesus' virgin birth but without ever taking this as evidence of his deity.

That the other events in the hymn of Philippians 2 took place on earth is obvious enough, such as Jesus' death on the cross. The poetic language of this hymn, reflected in words such as "form" and "likeness," recurs in verse 7: "taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." The language of "form" appears in yet the next verse: "And being found in human form" (v.8). The repeated use of "form" has

a purpose beyond mere repetition, for the language of "form" or "human form" is meant to resonate with the Genesis account of Adam's creation (he was "formed" by God).

Jesus' willingness to be a lowly servant is the key to his whole ministry. The decision to be a lowly servant is a decision to be obedient to God. The highest expression of Jesus' obedience brings this section of the hymn to a climax: "he was obedient unto death, even death on a cross". He was willing to suffer and to die as a common criminal without a vestige of honor. "No one takes my life from me but I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn.10:18).

By his total obedience, Jesus left Adam so far behind languishing in disobedience that Adam would scarcely have caught a glimpse of the cloud of Jesus' victory chariot mounting into heaven (to use the picture of Elisha watching Elijah taken up into heaven).

What Adam failed to attain—to become "like God"—is now granted to Jesus by God the Father. What does it mean to become like God? It would certainly include "participating in the divine nature" (cf. 2Pet.1:4). It would also include being given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt.28:18).

Jesus' humility mirrors God's willingness to humbly serve His people. How many of us can envisage God doing the work of a servant or laborer? I have described this aspect of God in some detail in TOTG chapter 5, pointing to the menial work He was willing to do for man: God planted a garden in Eden for man, prepared animal skins to clothe Adam and

Eve after they had sinned, and even buried the lifeless body of Moses on Mount Pisgah! These menial chores, notably the burial of Moses, are regarded as unbecoming of God by many religious thinkers whose hearts and minds are not big enough to accommodate the idea that a "transcendent" God would be willing to "dirty His hands" with menial jobs, even unclean jobs such as burying Moses. Though angels do not appear in the accounts of God's menial work from Genesis to Deuteronomy, some commentators have speculated that God had in fact commanded the angels to perform these tasks. From all this, we see that Yahweh God is more magnificent in His matchless glory and humility than our puny minds could ever imagine.

Isn't this the same wonderful servant's attitude that we see in the risen Jesus, when he sat by a fire which he had started in order to cook breakfast for his disciples at Galilee (Jn.21:9-13)? How true is Paul's statement that Jesus makes visible the invisible God. Would those who downplay the Old Testament accounts of Yahweh doing menial work also downplay the cooking of breakfast at Galilee or the events outlined in Philippians 2 of Jesus' life by which he makes visible the invisible God? If we remove the events in Philippians 2 from his life, what would be left of it? Is Philippians 2 not a summation of Jesus' whole life and ministry? Are not all aspects of his life and his death perfectly summed up in this wonderful hymn, in which Jesus manifests Yahweh's glory such

that we see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (the subtitle of this book)?

The Lord of glory

Philippians 2 tells of the exaltation of Jesus as being the result of his absolute obedience. God the Father elevates him to a place alongside Himself such that Jesus shares His glory at His right hand. And since it is Yahweh's own glory that is beamed forth from Christ, all this is "to the glory of the Father" (v.11).

The title "Lord" has been given specially to Jesus the Messiah: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36). "Lord" as applied to Jesus is not a divine title but a title of exaltation specially given to him by the Father. "Lord" as applied to Jesus must not be confused with LORD in small capitals which is used in place of YHWH in most Bibles. In many Bibles, the OT passages quoted in the NT often have "LORD" in the OT and "Lord" in the NT, a confusion that suits trinitarianism. Falsehood thrives on conflation and ambiguity, but the truth does not.

Jesus is called "the Lord of glory" (1Cor.2:8; James 2:1) because of his exaltation by the Father. This title is not used of Yahweh in the Old Testament and does not even appear in the Old Testament. Although Yahweh is not called "the Lord of glory," He is called "the King of Glory" in these beautiful lines of Psalm 24:7-10:

> Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up,
> O ancient doors that the King of glory may come in.
>
> Who is this King of glory?
> Yahweh, strong and mighty, Yahweh, mighty in battle!
>
> Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up,
> O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
>
> Who is this King of glory?
> Yahweh of hosts, he is the King of glory!

Jesus, on the other hand, is called the Lord of glory who was crucified: "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1Cor.2:8). In our trinitarian days, we saw no problem in believing that it was God who was crucified, not realizing that since God is immortal and is "from everlasting to everlasting," He could not possibly have died by crucifixion or by any other means of execution.

Trinitarians are in line with Scripture when they say that Jesus was given honor and glory because he had been obedient unto death. But they seem to have overlooked a fundamental tenet of trinitarian dogma: the preexistence of Christ. If Christ is a preexistent divine figure as trinitarians purport him to be in Philippians 2:6 ("though he was in the form of God"), then this person must, by reason of his deity, be immortal, and therefore could not have died on the cross. Continuing this line of reasoning, the exaltation that was a

consequence of his obedience unto death could not have been awarded him if he could not die. Then there are two possibilities before us: Either Jesus is a true man (and not merely God with a physical body) and was able to die on the cross, or Jesus is God as trinitarians say he is, in which case Jesus could not have been crucified or depicted as being obedient "unto death". We cannot have it both ways.

If we say that it was only Jesus' physical body that died, that doesn't solve the problem, for his physical body was not preexistent, not even in trinitarianism, in which case the one who died on the cross is not the supposedly preexistent person of Phil.2:6. If it was only the human nature that died, whom will Yahweh glorify such that every knee will bow to him or "it"? Will God glorify the body of Jesus that actually died or the divine person living in that body, namely, the preexistent God the Son who became incarnate in Jesus? Here trinitarianism is caught in a conundrum of its own making, with its falsity exposed to all who are open to the truth.

The name above every name

The magnificent poem in Philippians 2 is concluded with the words, "to the glory of God the Father" (v.11). But how does the exaltation of Jesus bring glory to God the Father rather than divert our attention to Jesus, as has happened in trinitarianism?

A conclusive answer to this question lies in the fact that, as we have seen in chapter 7, there are many doxologies to

God in the New Testament, but at most one or two to Jesus (e.g. the debated Romans 9:5). Jesus is not worshipped as God in the New Testament (though he is highly honored), not even after he had been resurrected and given "the name above every name" (Phil.2:9). But in giving Jesus the name above every name, Yahweh has made Jesus' name the highest in the universe after His own name, such that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. Let us now look at the latter part of the hymn in Philippians 2.

> **Philippians 2:9-11**
>
> 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,
> 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (ESV)

Paul says that God has given Jesus "the name that is above every name" (v.9). [125] What is this name that God has given him? Is it God's own name Yahweh? If so, there would be two persons called Yahweh. But Phil.2:9 does not say that God gave His own name Yahweh to Jesus. A name identifies a specific person and cannot be given to someone else.

[125] The Majority Text lacks the definite article in "*the* name that is above every name". Hence KJV, which is based on this text, has "a name which is above every name …"

"Yahweh" is a personal name as well as a titular name, so it is not merely a title like "Lord" or "King" which can be bestowed on multiple persons. A personal name, when it is meant to function referentially, identifies a specific person. In this case, a name is also an identity. A person cannot give his own identity to someone else, or else there would be two persons referred to by the same name, when in fact there is only one who is rightly the referred person (the referent). Moreover, whereas there are many Davids and Peters and Matthews in human society, there is only one Yahweh (Dt.6:4).

Yahweh's name cannot be given or transferred to someone else because a name refers to a particular individual. I cannot bestow my name Eric Chang on someone else (who in any case already has his own name), not even if his name happens to be Eric Chang by coincidence. In other words, I cannot bestow on someone else my own name *that is meant to function as a reference to me*. My name is the means by which I am identified, so how can it be given to someone else? More importantly, Yahweh is a name with a unique meaning that applies only to Him and no one else, so it is not transferable.

All living beings have names by which they are identified whether they are human beings on earth or spiritual beings in the heavenly realm. Scripture mentions, for example, the names of the archangels Michael and Gabriel (Jude 1:9; Luke 1:19). Jesus even asked a demon its name (Mk.5:9).

We ask again: When Yahweh gave Jesus "the name that is above every name," what was that name? In grappling with this question, we are confronted with the fact that, strictly speaking, the divine name "Yahweh" is the only name that could be said to be "above every name". Do we then try to get around this by saying that the name given to Jesus was indeed "Yahweh," but embedded in the name "Jesus"? The problem with this explanation is that the name "Jesus" ("Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation") was given to Jesus at his birth, not at his exaltation in Philippians.

We have been asking, What name besides "Yahweh" is above every other name? That is perhaps the wrong question to ask because the passage is really about the exaltation of the person of Jesus himself, and thereby also the exaltation of his name. The exaltation of Jesus' name above every other name means that the very person of Jesus is exalted above all of creation such that all creation will "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (cf. Acts 10:36, "Lord of all").

Philippians 2:10-11 is an echo of Isa.45:23 which speaks of Yahweh: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance". Does it mean that Jesus has been given the name "Yahweh"? If so, it would mean that Jesus has somehow become Yahweh. But this is impossible for it would mean either that Yahweh has lost His identity or that there are two Yahwehs whereas Scripture says there is only one Yahweh (Dt.6:4). Again we are forgetting that Phil.2:6-11 is poetry. Paul is merely affirming in poetic language that God

has exalted Jesus and Jesus' name above all living beings to the extent that Jesus exercises Yahweh's authority as His representative. In fact, Paul explicitly says it is "at the name of Jesus" that every knee will bow; Jesus therefore retains his own name "Jesus" but that name has now been exalted above all names.

In Jesus' time, "Jesus" was a common name equivalent to Joshua. Even though it was a common name in Israel, God bestowed it on Jesus at his birth because its meaning—"Yahweh is salvation"—reveals what Yahweh will accomplish through him. And because Jesus remained "obedient unto death, even death on a cross," Yahweh soon exalted his name "Jesus" above every other name such that at his name every knee shall bow, to Yahweh's glory. Yahweh is glorified because, among other reasons, it is through Jesus' death and resurrection that God has become our salvation ("Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid," Isaiah 12:2).

Jesus as the exalted Lord

The bestowing of the name above every name in Philippians is an event that took place *after* Jesus' death and resurrection. That is why prior to his death and resurrection, Jesus was not called "Lord" except in the following three senses:

1. A polite and respectful way of addressing Jesus, equivalent to "Sir" or "Mister" (Mt.8:6,8,21; 15:22,25,27; Jn.4:11,15,19,49; etc.)
2. Jesus as teacher or rabbi, with disciples and followers under him (Jn.6:68; 13:13,14).
3. Indirect reference to Jesus as Lord by way of a NT quotation of the OT such as, "The LORD said to my Lord" (Mt.22:44, a quotation of Psalm 110:1; the first "Lord" refers to Yahweh, the second to Christ).

The title "Lord" applied to Jesus prior to his death and resurrection does not carry the same exalted sense as "Lord" applied to him after his resurrection, as can be confirmed by checking the word *kyrios* (Lord) in a concordance or a Bible program. It will soon be apparent that the title "Lord" as applied to Jesus before his resurrection is fundamentally different from that after.

In Acts, Jesus is called "Lord" in the exalted sense of Phil.2:9 ("the name that is above every name"). Peter is so ecstatic about this in his preaching that he bursts out with the declaration "he is Lord of all" in the middle of a sentence (Acts 10:36). Because this joyous outburst disrupts the flow of the sentence, it is enclosed in parentheses in most translations. In the New Testament after the book of Acts, Jesus is spoken of as Lord in this exalted sense.

Surprisingly, "Lord" in the exalted sense of Phil.2:9 is never applied to Jesus in John's Gospel, and only once in the

entire corpus of John's writings (Rev.17:14). But in the ordinary sense of "Sir," the word *kyrios* (Lord) is used of Jesus in John's Gospel by: the Samaritan woman (Jn.4:11,15,19); an official whose son was sick (4:49); a lame man by the Sheep Gate (5:7); an adulterous woman (8:11); Mary (11:32); and Martha (11:27). Jesus' disciples addressed him as "Lord" in the sense of "teacher" (Jn.6:68; 13:13,14).

The fact that in John's writings Jesus is almost never addressed as "Lord" in the exalted sense of Phil.2:9, is all the more remarkable because the Johannine writings make up a significant proportion of the NT. By contrast, a short letter like Jude, which has only 25 verses, refers to Jesus as "Lord" four times in the exalted sense. One can only wonder why John avoids applying to Jesus the title "Lord" in the exalted sense, this being all the more puzzling because the Johannine literature is regarded by trinitarians as espousing a high Christology. This surprising fact should determine our understanding of John 20:28.

The title "Lord God" is not found in John's Gospel or letters, yet it occurs eight times in Revelation, all referring instead to the "LORD God" (Yahweh God) of the Old Testament (Rev.1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 18:8; 21:22; 22:5).

An example of "Lord" referring to Yahweh is Revelation 11:15: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." Here "Lord" clearly refers to Yahweh (LORD), not to Christ, and the same could be said of "he" in "he will reign

forever and ever". Not only is Yahweh the subject of this verse and of the remaining verses in the chapter, a clear distinction of persons is being made between God on the one hand and Christ on the other.

As trinitarians we overlooked the distinction between the ordinary and the exalted senses of "Lord" because we regarded Jesus as God the Son, and took any reference to Jesus as "Lord" in the divine sense. This prevented us from seeing that if Jesus is indeed God, he would already have "a name that is above every name". What sort of glorification could the Father have given him by bestowing on him something that he had already had as God?

The man Christ Jesus was elevated not to coequality with Yahweh but to sit at His right hand, a position second only to Yahweh's in the universe. Yet we felt that this wasn't good enough for "God the Son" whom we regarded as coequal with the Father in every respect even prior to his exaltation. The fact is that trinitarians have already exalted Jesus to so high a position that no further elevation is possible! To be granted a place at the Father's right hand is actually a *demotion* from Jesus' position of trinitarian coequality. The king's right hand is the highest place of honor and a place where a queen would sit (Psalm 45:9; 1Ki.2:19), but it is not a place equal to that of the king himself. The position at his left hand is accorded less honor than that at his right hand, but it is still a seat of great honor because of its proximity to the king (Mt. 20:21,23).

That Jesus is seated at God's right hand is a prominent theme in the New Testament. This is seen in the following verses among many other verses [126] (all quoted from ESV):

> **Romans 8:34** Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
>
> **Colossians 3:1** If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
>
> **Hebrews 8:1** we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.
>
> **Hebrews 10:12** But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God
>
> **1 Peter 3:22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

The exaltation of Jesus has already taken place in history (the words "exalted" and "bestowed" in Phil.2:9 are in the aorist). In his exalted position over the world, Jesus must reign until he has put all God's enemies under subjection (1Cor.15:25-28). We join this battle by bringing every lofty thing into subjection to Christ (2Cor.10:4-5). Christ functions as God's

[126] Mt.22:44; 26:64; Mk.12:36; 14:62; Lk.20:42; 22:69; Acts 2:33,34; 5:31; 7:55,56; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20; Col.3:1; Heb.1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1Pet.3:22.

visible representative, hence the subtitle of this book: "The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor.4:6). This helps us to understand the following passage:

> … he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he (God) put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:20-23)

Yahweh has placed a man—a true human being—at the pinnacle of all creation by seating him at His own right hand. He has bestowed on Jesus, the only perfect man, a position above all created beings at the apex of the universe. It reminds us of the wonderful words, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1Cor.2:9, a quotation of Isa.64:4).

Jesus, God's plenipotentiary

The elevation of Jesus to a position over everyone else, even lords and kings, means that God has made him "Lord of lords". Revelation 17:14 says, "They will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings." The title "Lord of lords" is also applied to Yahweh (1Tim.6:15; cf. v.16; Psa.136:3; Dt.10:17).

Yahweh has made Christ His plenipotentiary and representative invested with His supreme and universal authority, and has put everything in subjection to him (the following verses are from ESV):

> **Psalm 8:6** You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet
>
> **Matthew 11:27** "All things have been handed over to me by my Father"
>
> **Matthew 28:18** "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."
>
> **John 3:35** "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand" (also 13:3)
>
> **Hebrews 2:5-8** Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere (Psalm 8:4-6), "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.

It was not to angels but to man (also called "son of man") that God subjected all things. As trinitarians we didn't see the wonderful extent of God's love for a man, so we ascribed the rule over all things to a non-existent person called "God the Son" who is found nowhere in the Bible. Ironically, the rule

and authority that we trinitarians ascribed to the non-existent trinitarian Jesus is, in Scripture, conferred on the biblical Jesus (all verses quoted from ESV):

> **Colossians 2:10** [Christ] is the head of all rule and authority
>
> **1 Peter 3:22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.
>
> **1 Corinthians 15:27-28** For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.
>
> **Daniel 7:13-14** I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Jesus Comes in Yahweh's Name

The following verses, one from the OT and five from the NT, contain the well-known words, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh (or the LORD)," an exclamation of praise that originally appeared in Psalm 118:26. In the following

verses, we replace "the Lord" with "Yahweh" to conform to the Hebrew of Psalm 118:26, in which are rooted the five New Testament verses:

> **Psalm 118:26** Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh! We bless you from the house of Yahweh.
>
> **Matthew 21:9** And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh! Hosanna in the highest!"
>
> **Mark 11:9** Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh!
>
> **John 12:13** So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh, even the King of Israel!"
>
> **Matthew 23:39** For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh."
>
> **Luke 13:35** Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh!"

In John's Gospel, Jesus repeatedly says that he comes not according to his own initiative but because he had been sent by the Father ("I came not of my own accord, but he sent me," Jn.8:42; cf. 5:36-38; 8:16-18; 10:36; 12:49). He comes in Yahweh's name, not in his own name, which is to say that he

does not act on his own authority but does all things as Yahweh's representative.

The authority of the Name

What is the link between Jesus' coming in his Father's name and the Father's bestowing on him the name above every name (Phil.2:9)? As we have seen, Jesus' name has not been changed to "Yahweh" which in any case cannot be given to someone else insofar as a name identifies a person and insofar as there is only one Yahweh (Dt.6:4). Jesus retains his own name "Jesus" but it is now invested with the authority of Yahweh's Name. As Yahweh's representative, Jesus is the bearer of Yahweh's Name even though he keeps his own identity as Jesus.

There is an Old Testament parallel to this: the angel who was appointed by Yahweh to lead the Israelites through the wilderness to the land of promise. Yahweh says of this angel that "My Name is in him":

> Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him." (Exodus 23:20-21, ESV)

This angel has the authority to pardon or not to pardon, and therefore has the power of life and death, for he is the bearer

of Yahweh's Name. Although he bears Yahweh's Name and is invested with His authority, the angel was not worshipped by the Israelites.

Another parallel is seen in the story of Pharaoh and Joseph. Pharaoh, by placing his signet ring (which bore his name and emblem) on Joseph's hand, made Joseph the bearer of his name and authority. It does not mean that Joseph could now be called Pharaoh (he is still called Joseph) but that he could now act with Pharaoh's full authority:

> 38 And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" 39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. 40 You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you." 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." 42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. 43 And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 41:38-44, ESV)

The similarities between this story and Philippians 2:9-11 are striking, even down to the command that everyone shall "bow the knee" when Joseph rides in a chariot called Pharaoh's "second chariot" (v.43). By Pharaoh's command, everyone in Egypt must submit to Joseph's authority (vv.40, 44). But the throne, the emblem of supreme authority over all Egypt, remained with Pharaoh: "Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you" (v.40; cf. Jn.14:28, "the Father is greater than I"). Joseph was second only to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt, which was a great country at that time.

To obey Jesus is to obey Yahweh, not because Jesus (or the angel in Ex.23:20) is God, but because Jesus is the bearer of Yahweh's Name. Likewise, to love Jesus is to love Yahweh. The more we love Jesus (not the Jesus of trinitarianism but Yahweh's Christ, the anointed man), the more we will love Yahweh. To live for Christ the bearer of Yahweh's Name is to live for Yahweh. To receive Jesus is to receive Yahweh who sent him (Mt.10:40; Jn.13:20). To reject Jesus is to reject Yahweh (Lk.10:16). If we are Jesus' disciples who follow his teaching, notably his explicit monotheism (Mk.12:28-29; Jn.5:44; 17:3) which is enshrined in the first commandment, then those who reject us reject Jesus and ultimately reject Yahweh.

Yahweh raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to His right hand. Jesus was given a position in heaven and on earth second only to Yahweh Himself. God has made a human

being—the second man and the last Adam (1Cor.15:47,45)—second to Himself in the whole universe!

Yahweh will rule the universe through Jesus Christ. He has empowered Jesus to rule in His Name, giving him all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt.28:18). "All things have been committed to me by my Father" (Lk.10:22, cf. Mt. 11:27); "He has put everything under his feet" (1Cor.15:27).

Jesus has nothing that came from himself, for everything that he possesses had been given to him by God his Father. God has given Jesus everything that Jesus needs to rule as the Messiah-King over all the kingdoms of the earth, and to reign until he has put under subjection every power opposed to God. When all that has been done, Jesus himself will be subject to Yahweh so that "God will be all in all":

> When all things are subjected to him (Jesus), then the Son himself will also be subjected to him (God) who put all things in subjection under him (Jesus), that God may be all in all. (1Corinthians 15:28, ESV)

The word "subjected" is a passive of *hupotassō*, which BDAG defines as "to be in a submissive relationship, *to subject, to subordinate*". Here we see the subordination of the Son to the Father, which is a common teaching in the New Testament, including Jesus' own teaching and the teaching of the early church prior to Nicaea. Jesus' whole life was governed by the desire to do the Father's will, not his own (Jn.5:30; 6:38; 4:34; Rom.15:3; Heb.10:7,9, cf. Ps.40:7,8).

Chapter 11

Further Reflections on Trinitarianism

My earlier book, *The Only True God*, dealt with the subject of biblical monotheism, and for the most part in contradistinction to trinitarianism. Much of what I have to say about trinitarianism has already been covered in that book and in the earlier chapters of the present book, notably those on the four pillars of trinitarianism. In this chapter, I reflect on a few more things about trinitarian teaching.

How long did it take for the church to move from true monotheism to pagan polytheism?

Scholars speak of the "parting of the ways" between the church and Judaism as being around A.D.135, that is, around the time of Bar Kochba's failed revolt against Roman rule, a

tragic uprising that had received the blessing of the famous rabbi Akiba. But this "parting of the ways" is basically a historically convenient way of referring to the separation of the church from Judaism, the tragic result of which was that the church would soon lose its connection to its Jewish roots, notably the Jewish commitment to monotheism.

But well before that separation, pagan polytheism had already begun to influence the message of the gospel almost as soon as the gospel had landed on pagan soil. Early signs of this process is seen in the book of Acts. In the early stages of their gospel ministry, Paul and Barnabas were adhering to the principle of "to the Jews first". But when the Jews rejected their message, they declared to them that from then on, they will proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (13:46). Yet in 14:1 we find them preaching to the Jews again, this time in a synagogue in Iconium. Their preaching elicited such hostility from both Jews and Gentiles that Paul and Barnabas had to flee to Lystra (14:5-6). There in Lystra, Paul healed a man who had been lame from birth (v.10). The healing drew the attention of the people but not the kind that Paul welcomed, for they were soon rushing out to worship Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes (v.12).

Zeus was no minor god. The Greeks revered him as the father of gods whereas Hermes was believed to have healing powers.[127] Barnabas was evidently the older looking of the

[127] See Wikipedia articles "Zeus" and "Hermes" for masterly discussions on these two well-known Greek gods.

two and probably wore a full beard that made him look like the Zeus portrayed on coins and statues. Hermes, on the other hand, was usually pictured as beardless, and this evidently matched Paul's appearance. Even the priest of the temple of Zeus believed that Barnabas was Zeus, and came out to offer him a sacrifice (v.13)!

The point is this: The Gentiles of the city of Lystra, located in modern-day southern Turkey, were more than willing to deify Barnabas and Paul, and to worship them as gods. We can now see why Gentiles would later in history so readily deify Jesus and believe in him as God. The events in Lystra took place even before the council of the apostles (Acts 15) held in Jerusalem around the year 60, some 30 years after Jesus' earthly ministry. It therefore comes as no surprise that by the end of the second century, the leaders of the western church were already preaching Jesus as God.[128]

The official deification of Jesus did not come until the fourth century, probably because for a long time the Jews were still a considerable force in the churches of the major cities such as Rome, and were still a strong voice for monotheism. They were a declining majority and later minority in

[128] Examples of the early deification of Jesus in the second century: "Yet, nevertheless, He is God, in that He is the First-Begotten of all creatures" (Justin Martyr, c.160); "God was put to death" (Melito, c.170); "He is God, for the name Emmanuel indicates this" (Irenaeus, c.180). *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, pp.94,95, ed. David W. Bercot.

the churches, yet they could not be ignored. By the end of the third or the start of the fourth century, the Jews were no longer a voice for monotheism in the western churches, hence the bold assertions of Christian pagan polytheism as represented in the Nicene creed of 325 and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed of 381. While holding to a token and nominal monotheism, these creeds were in reality promulgating a distortion of Biblical monotheism.

Anachronistic use of "God the Son"

It was not until the Council of Nicaea of 325 that Jesus was officially declared to be coequal with God the Father. Hence it was only after Nicaea that Jesus could be spoken formally as "God the Son," a reversal of the biblical "Son of God". Therefore applying the term "God the Son" to any period before Nicaea would be anachronistic. Furthermore, it was not until half a century later, in 381, that the Holy Spirit was declared as being coequal with the Father and the Son by the bishops at the Council of Constantinople summoned by another Roman emperor, Theodosius I, who in addition decreed that trinitarian Christianity be the sole religion of the Roman Empire. Since trinitarianism was not formally and officially established until 381, applying the term "trinity" to the New Testament is likewise anachronistic.

What does this mean for our study of the New Testament Jesus? Any attempt to do a comparative study of the biblical

Christ vis-à-vis the trinitarian Christ who wasn't even heard of in the time of the New Testament, having come into official existence some 300 years later, would be an absurd exercise in anachronism. What is the basis for comparing the Christ of the NT with the deified Christ of the western Hellenistic church some 300 years later? How can a Christ who was fabricated centuries after the NT be legitimately compared with the wonderful and unique Christ revealed in the NT?

What we did as trinitarians, including myself for many decades, was to search for some legitimation or justification for the trinitarian Christ of a later century, *in the New Testament*. But the New Testament "evidence" that we pressed into service for supporting the much later trinitarian model of Christ proved to be so meager and exegetically untenable that I now feel conscience-bound to declare publicly that the trinitarian Christ is biblically false. Trinitarians constantly harp on the same few proof texts such as John 1:1-18, Philippians 2:6-11, and what little else in the New Testament they can fall back on.

It is time that we recognize, though this may be hard for those of us who have zealously promoted trinitarianism for much of our lives, that trinitarian doctrine is simply false and, even worse, has concealed the glory of the biblical Christ in such a way that it could put our salvation at risk.

Another injurious effect of trinitarian dogma is that it has sidelined, marginalized, and practically eliminated the one

true God of the Bible to the extent that most Christians don't know who Yahweh is. By contrast, when a Jew speaks of God as *Adonai,* he is aware that he is referring to YHWH. He may be unsure of the exact pronunciation of YHWH but he knows that the four letters of the Tetragrammaton represent the name of the one true God. But the Christian has no idea of who the Father is, for in trinitarianism, God the Father is not the one and only God, but is one of three persons in the Godhead, and therefore has a vague and largely unknown identity.

Why a triplicate God?

What sense does it make to have God in triplicate? The God revealed in the Bible is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and eternal. Then trinitarians came along and declared that there are three such persons. No, they declared two, then three. This took place early in church history because of the polytheistic influence of the Greeks and Romans who worshipped many gods. By their polytheistic standards, Jesus is eminently qualified to be a god. So at Nicaea in 325, they officially deified him. Up to that point in time, the church as a whole had managed with having one divine person—God—but now they had two. A few decades later, they realized that they had omitted "God the Spirit," so at Constantinople they included the Spirit as a third divine person. Notice that it was

a decision made by a council! So we are talking about *man-made* gods who are not gods in Scripture.

What is the point of deifying the one called the "man Christ Jesus" (1Tim.2:5)? If God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and eternal, what difference does it make to have two such persons, much less three? If one is omnipotent, God is already omnipotent. If one is omniscient, the other two won't know anything beyond what the first already knows. If one is omnipresent, the other two cannot be at a place where the first is not. As for omnipotence, what difference does it make to have one or two or three? Multiplying omnipotence by three equals omnipotence; multiplying infinity by three equals infinity.

That the church had managed without an official second or third person until the 4th century raises a few questions. If the church had been managing without the two additional persons, why were they added in the first place? And if the church could add a person to the Godhead as it wishes by decree, what in principle would prevent another from being added in the future? The one who comes to mind is the Virgin Mary who in Catholicism is worshipped by many and is known as the Mediatrix just as Christ is the Mediator.[129]

[129] Most non-Catholics are unaware of the high status of the title Mediatrix which is competently explained in the Wikipedia article "Mediatrix": "The title Mediatrix is used in Roman Catholic Mariology to refer to the intercessory role of the Virgin Mary as a mediator in the salvific redemption by her son Jesus Christ, and that he be-

With the rising status of women in modern society, the clamoring for the inclusion of a woman in the Godhead might not be farfetched.

The theological basis for adding a female divine person might be found in James D.G. Dunn's comment (NIGTC, Col.1:16) that *Sophia* (wisdom) is a principle equivalent to *Logos* (word) insofar as they are the means by which the universe came into being (cf. Proverbs 8 and Philo's *De Cherubim*). If the Logos could be deified, and indeed has been deified, why not Sophia? Could she not also be of the substance of God? If trinitarians see no problems with having two gods and later three gods called *persons*, why should there be a problem with having a fourth? In any case, many Catholics already worship Mary. Already since ancient times, churches have been built for her. If she is *de facto* an object of worship, the next "logical" step would be to deify her, which is in fact what many Catholics have done even if official Catholic doctrine has not gone that far. Thus trinitarianism moves inexorably from one error to another. It has eliminated the one true God, Yahweh, and replaced Him in stages by other gods who are called "persons".

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stows graces through her." The same article cites a statement on the "Mediatrix of Mercy" made by Pope John Paul II: "Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. She puts herself in the middle, that is to say she acts as a mediatrix, not as an outsider, but in her position as mother."

The trinitarian brand of "monotheism" has one God in triplicate. But if the one and the three are coequal, there would be no real difference between them except in name and function. To have one is to have all. Giving a different name to each person changes nothing in reality. What advantage do trinitarians have with their three gods, or three who are each fully God, over the one true God of the Bible? None whatsoever! Worse, they have misrepresented the glorious God as revealed in the Scriptures. What they teach is a lie about the living God, the creator of all things, and they will have to answer for it on the day of judgment.

But the situation is even more dire in terms of mankind's salvation. Trinitarianism has three persons in one God, the three being coequally God and co-eternal and immortal. How then can "God the Son" die for our sins? In trinitarian dogma, God the Son took on the human body of Jesus by incarnation, yet according to the teaching that prevailed at early trinitarian councils, the human spirit of Jesus was replaced with the spirit of "God the Son," supposedly resulting in a person who is true God and true man. But a true man cannot be simply a human body without a human spirit. The trinitarian reason for rejecting the existence of a human spirit in Jesus is that if it were included, there would be two persons in Jesus, a notion that even trinitarians agree is untenable. (It is also an admission that Jesus' body alone or Jesus' human nature alone does not make a person, otherwise Christ's two natures would mean two persons in Christ.) Hence trinitar-

ianism does not allow the human part of Jesus to have a human spirit. But a human body without a human spirit cannot atone for man's sins. Adam and Eve's sin was not committed primarily by the body but by the heart and mind.

Since the trinitarian Jesus is not a true man but is "God the Son" who, being God, is immortal, how could he die for man's sins? Thus trinitarianism leaves man without salvation, without the forgiveness of sin, without the hope of eternal life. This is the wretched truth about trinitarianism. The issue that confronts us is not just a debate over doctrine but a matter of eternal life and eternal death.

If there is any trinity in the New Testament, it would be the unholy trinity of the dragon (Satan), the beast, and the false prophet (Rev.16:13; 20:10). Coming out of the mouths of the unholy trinity are three unclean spirits (Rev.16:13) who form their own unholy trinity. These spirits are described as "demonic spirits" who have the power to perform impressive signs. Their power is so great that they are able to convince the world leaders to fight the Almighty God at Armageddon (16:14,16). United in force and purpose, they wage war against the one true God Yahweh. The fact that the only trinity in the Bible is the unholy trinity, reveals the depth and scale of the trinitarian deception.

Trinitarians constantly search for any scrap of evidence for the deity of Christ, yet all they really need is one or preferably two incontrovertible and unambiguous statements from the Bible such as "Jesus Christ is God from everlasting

to everlasting" or "Jesus is the only true God" or "Jesus is the eternal God of Israel" or "Jesus is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" or "Christ Jesus is Yahweh God" or "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the second divine person of the triune Godhead," and that would have settled the matter. But the solid fact is that there are no such statements about Jesus, yet there are hundreds and hundreds of such statements about Yahweh God (except, of course, the last statement about the triune Godhead). Why can't we accept this fact? If facts don't matter, then something else must be motivating trinitarian doctrine. What is it that causes us to reject the plain teaching of Scripture? Perhaps it is spiritual blindness, or a blind loyalty to a tradition which we have been taught and which we uphold even at the cost of nullifying God's word (cf. Mt.15:3,6; Mk.7:9,13).

Trinitarian errors in regard to the Holy Spirit

From what Father John L. McKenzie, a trinitarian, admits about trinitarianism—namely, that the trinitarian terms used of God are Greek philosophical terms rather than biblical terms, and that terms such as "essence" and "substance" were "erroneously" applied to God by the early theologians—it is clear that the God of trinitarianism is not the God of the Bible. When trinitarians speak of God, they are not talking about the one true God of the Bible but a trinity of three coequal persons whose existence cannot be found in the Old or New Testament except by twisting a few Scripture verses.

In trinitarianism, God the Father is the first person of the Trinity whereas in the Bible, He is the one and only God whose name is Yahweh (rendered LORD in most Bibles). The only person in the Trinity who has a name is the second person, Jesus Christ, also called "God the Son" (an inversion of the biblical "Son of God"). The name "Jesus" in Hebrew means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation," yet the biblical Yahweh has no place in trinitarianism! Who is Yahweh? Some have gone so far as to say that Jesus is Yahweh. But this would mean that Jesus is God to the exclusion of the Father, for there is no God besides Yahweh: "I am Yahweh, and there is no other, besides me there is no God" (Isa.45:5).

The trinitarian distortion of words extends to the word "spirit". In trinitarianism, the Holy Spirit is the third person. But since "God is spirit" (John 4:24), where is the necessity of positing a third person called "God the Spirit" (yet another term not found in Scripture)? Paul doesn't think of the Spirit of God as a separate divine person but as the very spirit of God Himself:

> For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (1Cor.2:11, ESV)

Paul is saying that "the Spirit of God" relates to the person of God in the way that the human spirit relates to the human person. Here most Bibles (ESV, NASB, NIV, NJB, HCSB) capitalize "Spirit" in "Spirit of God," indicating that they take

this as a reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. If this is the case, then God's thoughts would be hidden from the other two persons in the Trinity—God the Father and God the Son—for Paul specifically says that no one knows God's thoughts except the Spirit of God! But the problem disappears once we understand that the Holy Spirit is the very spirit of God, just as the human spirit is the very spirit of a human being.

The Bible uses the word "spirit" in several related senses. But when portrayed in personal terms, the Holy Spirit is not a third person distinct from God the Father, but is the Spirit of the Father, as seen in the following parallel (highlighted in boldface):

> … do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but **the Holy Spirit**. (Mk.13:11, ESV)
>
> … do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but **the Spirit of your Father** speaking through you. (Mt.10:19-20, ESV)

This vital connection between the Father and the Spirit is also brought out in an important verse, John 15:26, in which Jesus speaks of "the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father" (or "goes out from the Father," NIV). In the Greek text, "proceeds" is in the present continuous tense, a nuance that is

captured in the Complete Jewish Bible ("the Spirit of Truth, who keeps going out from the Father"). Hence the Father is the constant source of the Spirit much like a fountain is a constant source of water (cf. Jn.7:38-39, which speaks of the Spirit as "rivers of living water"). It means that the Spirit has no independent existence apart from the Father who is constantly sending forth the Spirit. Jesus doesn't say that the Spirit goes out from "God" but from "the Father". Hence there is no biblical basis for the trinitarian assertion that "God the Spirit" is ontologically a separate person from God the Father.

The Old Testament often depicts the Spirit as God's power in action, e.g., Zech.4:6 ("not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says Yahweh of hosts") and Micah 3:8 ("I am filled with power, with the Spirit of Yahweh"). This fact is known to many trinitarian scholars.[130] The New Testament often portrays the Holy Spirit in terms of God's power.[131] Jesus himself functioned "in the power of the Spirit" (Lk. 4:14).

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[130] *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (1984), article *Holy Spirit*, says: "In the OT the spirit of the Lord (*ruach yhwh*; LXX, *to pneuma kyriou*) is generally an expression for God's power, the extension of himself whereby he carries out many of his mighty deeds."

[131] Lk.1:35; 4:14; Acts 1:8; 10:38; Rom.15:13,19; 1Cor.2:4; Eph.3:16; 1Th.1:5.

The trinitarian Jesus is "another Jesus"

Trinitarianism distorts biblical terms (e.g. by inverting the biblical "Son of God" into the unbiblical "God the Son") and borrows terms from philosophy and theosophy (e.g. *homo-ousios* from Gnosticism). It is not surprising, therefore, that trinitarian teaching is of *a different spirit* from Biblical teaching, and that the trinitarian Jesus is of a *different spirit* from the NT Jesus.

Having a "different spirit" is something that the Bible attaches great importance to, and it can be a good thing or a bad thing. It is a good thing if the different spirit is different from the ways of the world, and a bad thing if it is different from the ways of God. In the positive sense of the term, Yahweh says, "But my servant Caleb … has a different spirit and has followed me fully" (Num.14:24). In the negative sense, Paul speaks of a "different spirit" in connection with "a different gospel" and "another Jesus":

> For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2Cor.11:4, ESV)

Why were the Corinthians so susceptible to accepting "another Jesus" that they would put up with the deception so "readily"? Here the Greek for "another" means "different in kind" (BDAG, *allos*).

We see a worse situation in the Galatian church—worse because what was dangerously imminent among the Corinthians had already become a reality among the Galatians (Gal.1:6-9). They were deserting God and turning to a different gospel: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (v.6). Evidently this hadn't yet happened in Corinth but only in Galatia, hence the triple *if* in 2Cor.11:4. But Paul foresaw that if and when a different Christ is preached among the Corinthians, they would accept him as readily as had the Galatians. It is something that could happen to any church over time. Paul's concern over this is expressed in the word "afraid" in verse 3:

> **2 Corinthians 11:2-3** [2] For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. [3] But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." (ESV)

Paul sees the Corinthians as a church betrothed to Christ that is on the brink of turning away from him. It is a warning that applies not only to the church in Corinth but to the universal church of God, for it too is betrothed to Christ. The church in Corinth, like the seven churches in Revelation, is a representative church in the Bible. In Paul's analogy, Eve is parallel to the church, the bride of Christ, and Adam is parallel to

Jesus, whom Paul calls the last Adam a few chapters later (1Cor.15:45).

Paul's dire statement about the church in Corinth was eventually fulfilled in Christendom as a whole. As might be foreseen in the statement, "you put up with it easily," the serpent's deception eventually became a reality among the Gentile believers in Christendom. Paul's fear that what had happened to Eve might also happen to the church at large was prophetic. The final outcome was inescapable given that the Corinthians were so inclined to put up with a different Christ, a different spirit, and a different gospel. If that was already true in Paul's time, how much more so a century later when Gentile believers began to outnumber Jewish believers (the true monotheists), reducing them to a small minority?

Why did the Corinthians and the Galatians so easily accept a different Christ, a different gospel, and a different spirit (that is, different from the Spirit of Yahweh) from those Paul had preached to them? Was it not because they, like Eve, had allowed themselves to be deceived by the cunning of "the serpent" (Satan) and to be led "astray" (v.3)?

Something must have convinced them that the different Jesus was better than the one Paul had preached to them. Given the pagan background of most Gentile believers (who were a sizable minority in the churches outside Palestine, e.g., Corinth in Greece and Galatia in Asia), this could prove to be easier than expected. As for the Galatians, Paul was "astonished" at how quickly they were deserting God who had

called them, and were turning to another gospel—a gospel that, like the different Jesus, is different in essence. Paul saw that the Galatians had apostatized and the Corinthians were going the same way. Apostasy is principally a sign of the last days, yet it was a reality as early as 30 years after Jesus' earthly life (cf. Heb.6:4-6; 10:26-31).

Many equate the act of deserting God with abandoning the Christian faith to become an atheist or agnostic, but that is not what we see here. In Galatians 1:6, "deserting him who called you" is defined as "turning to a different gospel" and accepting "another Jesus" (2Cor.11:4). It shows that those who desert God would usually remain religious and not become atheists.

We don't know the specifics of this different Jesus apart from his being the central figure of a different gospel. Since the Galatians had turned to this other Jesus, they would have some idea of what he was. The same could be said of the Corinthians who found this different Jesus more appealing than the one whom Paul had preached to them. In the case of the Corinthians, from hindsight and looking back at church history, we can surmise that this different Jesus, in contrast to the biblical Jesus, was probably a divine being because the divinity of persons was something that appealed strongly to the Gentile mindset. If the Roman emperors could be worshipped as gods, why not Jesus? In fact, within a hundred years after Paul, a divine Jesus was being boldly preached in the Gentile world.

Putting one's faith in a different Jesus means a change of allegiance, commitment, and loyalty. Paul was astonished that the Galatians were "deserting" God who had called them in the grace of Christ (Gal.1:6). The Greek word for "deserting," *metatithēmi*, is defined by BDAG as "to have a change of mind in allegiance, change one's mind, turn away, desert".

Paul feared that just as Eve was deceived by Satan, so the church will be led away from a pure and sincere devotion to Christ. To grasp the deception, we need to see its content. What is the nature of the deception of Eve by Satan the "serpent"? To answer this question, we look at the Genesis account of the temptation. Here is Yahweh's command to Adam:

> And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, "You are free to eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17)

In the next chapter is Eve's recounting of what God had said about the fruit of the tree, and the serpent's reply to her:

> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die." (Genesis 3:2-4, ESV)

Satan flatly contradicted God's declaration "you will surely die" with the counter-declaration "you will not surely die," forcing Eve to choose between two conflicting statements, and between believing God and believing Satan. In the end she chose to believe Satan!

More than that, in choosing to believe Satan, Eve was implying that God was withholding something good from her that Satan wanted her to have. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen.3:5). The serpent switched between the physical and the spiritual, knowing that Adam and Eve will not die physically, at least not right away.

What was Satan's bait? "You will be like God". But weren't Adam and Eve already created in God's image? Yes, but Eve wanted to "grasp" for something greater: equality with God. By contrast, it is said of Jesus in Philippians 2:6 that he did not consider equality with God a thing to be "grasped," an action word that might describe the plucking of fruit from a tree. Equality with God is much more than having the "form of God" (Jesus) or being created in the "image of God" (Adam). Adam and Eve wanted to gain the knowledge ("the tree of the knowledge of good and evil") that would make them "like God" at a deeper level. Hence the fundamental allure of the temptation is *the deification of man*, and this gives us some idea of the nature of "another Jesus".

Adam, unlike Eve, was not deceived (1Tim.2:14). What would this mean but that Adam *deliberately* grasped for

equality with God? In contrast to this rebellious act is Christ's attitude described in Phil.2:6 ("did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped"), which means that Philippians 2 cannot be understood in isolation from the events in Genesis 2 and 3. But whether deceived or not, Adam and Eve had taken a significant step towards deifying themselves by disobedience. God Himself says that they had indeed acquired the knowledge of good and evil (Gen.3:22).

Barabbas at the trial of Jesus

When Paul told the Galatians that they were deserting God, he didn't mean that they had stopped believing in God to become atheists or agnostics, but that they were following a different Jesus and believing a different gospel. In the case of the Corinthians, this gospel was preached by "false apostles" who were not appointed by God (2Cor.11:13). Apostasy is seldom the outright rejection of belief and religion, but is often a rejection of the biblical Jesus.

Something of a parallel nature took place at Jesus' trial at which the Roman governor Pontius Pilate did not find Jesus guilty of any indictable offence, much less an offence worthy of crucifixion. Barabbas, a violent criminal, was also at the trial (Mt.27:16). The crowds, stirred up by the religious leaders, demanded that Jesus be crucified even if it meant the release of Barabbas.

It is noteworthy that Barabbas is called "Jesus Barabbas" according to an ancient textual tradition of Mt.27:16,17, as noted in ISBE.[132] Attributing the words "Jesus Barabbas" to scribal or copying error is unconvincing. It is more likely that the word "Jesus" was struck out.

The textual evidence for "Jesus Barabbas" in Mt.27:16 is strong enough for the name to be included in a few modern Bibles such as NRSV ("Jesus Barabbas"), NET ("Jesus Barabbas"), Complete Jewish Bible ("Yeshua Bar-Abba"), and NIV 2011 ("Jesus Barabbas," but not NIV 1984).

When Jesus was put on trial before Pontius Pilate, the Jews had chosen "another Jesus" though for reasons different from those for the Gentile choice of another Jesus. It seems that everyone, Jew or Gentile, wants a Jesus other than the one Yahweh God has provided. The rejection of Jesus in favor of Barabbas is recorded in all four gospels, indicating its spiritual importance, and is condemned by Peter (Acts 3:14).

But the comparison doesn't stop there. "Barabbas" comes from Aramaic "Bar-abba" which means "son of the father". Irrespective of who the "father" may be in the case of "Barabbas" (the aforementioned ISBE article suggests "master or teacher"), the parallel between "son of the father" and Jesus

[132] ISBE, article "Barabbas," says: "Origen [the greatest textual critic of the early church] knew and does not absolutely condemn a reading of Mt 27:16,17, which gave the name 'Jesus Barabbas' … it is also found in a few cursives and in the Aramaic and the Jerusalem Syriac versions."

"Son of God" is unmistakable. Is this pure coincidence? There are no coincidences in God's word. Through Jesus' trial at which the Jews chose another "son of the father" over the one divinely appointed, Yahweh God had foretold that the church will one day choose a different Jesus from the one He had chosen to be His Christ, the Savior-King of the world.

Antichrists in John's letters; the Gnosticism factor

It is not only in Paul's letters that we see references to enemies of the church who operate within the church such as those who teach another Jesus or a different gospel. John too had to confront a different Christ who functioned as "antichrist," a term that also includes those who proclaim the antichrist and his different gospel (the following verses are from ESV):

> **1 John 2:18** Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.
>
> **1 John 2:22** Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.
>
> **1 John 4:2-3** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

> **2 John 1:7** For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

A generation ago, some scholars believed that these "deceivers" came from the ranks of Jewish and non-Jewish Gnostics who were active before, during, and after the time of the apostolic church. Gnosticism—which is theosophical speculation driven by Greek philosophy, and teaches a gospel based on secret "knowledge" (*gnōsis*)—attracted a large following and became a threat to the church.

The so-called "super apostles" at Corinth (2Cor.11:5; 12:11) were challenging the authority of the apostle Paul, and gained the support of many. The German scholar Walter Schmithals wrote, "There can be hardly any doubt that the Gnostic opponents and the 'superlative apostles' are identical" (*The Office of Apostle in the Early Church*, p.178). But scholars today are less confident about the exact nature of Gnosticism during the time of the apostolic church.

Many commentators say that those who deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1John 4:2-3) are the "docetists," that is, those who teach that Jesus only had the appearance of being a human but was not human. But the word "docetist" is just a descriptive term that does not name or identify any specific group. Who exactly were these alleged "docetists" in John's day? The Gnostics? Who was John describing with such strong words as "deceivers" and "antichrist"?

But did the Jesus of trinitarian dogma really "come in the flesh"? In other words, is he a true human being? How can he be a true man if he is "God the Son" who is coequal with God the Father? How can a preexistent Christ be a true human being? That is possible only by reincarnation. The only fundamental difference between preexistence in reincarnation and preexistence in trinitarianism is that of hope and purpose: In the case of reincarnation, one hopes to go from lower to higher in the ladder of existence; in the case of trinitarianism, the purpose is to go from higher to lower in order to be a servant.

Gnosticism's later connection with trinitarianism lies not only in the fact that the originally Gnostic term *homoousios* (one in substance) had become the pivotal word of Nicaea over the objections of some bishops, but also in the Gnostic denial that Christ is a true human being who had come "in the flesh". Gnosticism, like what is called docetism, teaches that Jesus' body had the illusion of being flesh, but was not flesh. For this reason, Gnosticism had little use for the teaching of the cross.

But Paul says, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1Cor.1:23), indicating that those who preach a "different gospel" do not preach the message of the cross, in contrast to Paul's emphatic teaching on the cross: "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal.6:14).

Gnosticism's appeal in the early church lies in the fact that although its teaching is fundamentally in conflict with New Testament teaching, it uses terms which come directly from the vocabulary of the New Testament: knowledge (*gnōsis*, 1Cor.8:1,7), wisdom (*sophia*, 1Cor.2:7), fullness (*plērōma*, Eph.1:23), philosophy (*philosophia*, Col.2:8, a verse that according to ISBE article *Philosophy* indicates "the first beginnings of Gnosticism in the Christian church"; cf. 1Tim.1:4).

The infamous name of Simon Magus is historically associated with Gnosticism. A Bible reference says, "The name of Simon Magus occurs frequently in the early history of 'Christian' Gnosticism, and there has been much debate as to whether the Simoniani, a sect that lasted well into the 3rd century, had its origins in the magician of Acts 8." [133] Simon Magus, who associated himself with the apostolic church and even got baptized in it, was a miracle worker or "magician" who is mentioned in early extra-biblical documents. His prominence in his day can be seen in the book of Acts:

[133] *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, article "Simon Magus". For Simon Magus as a prominent Gnostic in early church tradition, see Wikipedia articles "Simon Magus" and "Gnosticism and the New Testament".

> [9] Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; [10] and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." [11] And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. [12] But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. [13] Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. (Acts 8:9-13, NASB)

Here Simon is called the "Power of God" (v.10) which in Luke 22:69 is a metonym of God. This is probably because of the signs and wonders that Simon performed through "magic" (v.9) and "magic arts" (v.11), by which he was regarded as a manifestation of God. This shows how easily a human being can be deified or seen as an epiphany of a god.

The trinitarian Jesus is different from the biblical Jesus

Nicaea, the crowning triumph of Gentile polytheism, was a radical departure from the spirit and character of the New Testament, and culminated in the deification of Christ. In stark contrast, the Jesus of the New Testament does not seek equality with God. But the Gentiles, in defiance of the mind

of Christ, triumphantly declared him to be coequal with God. It was a direct defiance of the spirit of the biblical Jesus, who at no time ever claimed equality with his Father, but said to the contrary that "the Father is greater than I" (Jn.14:28). This is a statement that I, in my trinitarian days, was anxious to explain away despite several other NT passages that express the same truth. But because the Gentile Christians were so keen to make Jesus the central object of worship, they were driven in their idolatrous zeal to exalt "the man Christ Jesus" (1Tim.2:5) to the level of deity.

Jesus even rejected for himself any attribution of good: "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." (Mk.10:18; Lk.18:19; cf. Mt.19:17). Jesus bluntly told the rich young ruler that "good" is an attribution that belongs only to God, and can be used of others only in a diminished and non-absolute sense. From this we see that Jesus would never accept an attribution that rightly belongs to God alone ("No one is good except God alone").

Trinitarians cannot and do not deny that Jesus is a man, so what is their problem? Their problem is that they want to say that Jesus is "not just" a man but is "God the Son," the second person of the Godhead who became incarnate in Jesus. That is because in trinitarianism, the real person functioning in Jesus is "God the Son" (the reversal of "Son of God") whereas the man Jesus is just the human nature that was attached to God the Son by incarnation. This is one of the reasons why, as trinitarians, we didn't really care much

about Jesus as man. To our minds, God the Son—the real person in Jesus—is everything that we needed or wanted Jesus to be.

But we overlooked something fundamentally important: a God who can die is not the God of the Bible, for Yahweh God is immortal and can never die. This means that the God of trinitarianism cannot possibly be Yahweh, the God of the Bible. A God who dies and rises again has more in common with the dying-and-rising gods of the pagan beliefs that were prevalent in the world of the early church.

Nicaean formulations such as "God of God, Light of Light" and other lofty descriptions are nothing more than direct echoes of Greek philosophy and religion. A central concept in Gnosticism is the emanation of divine beings, usually of the lesser from the greater. Yet at Nicaea it was decreed on pain of anathema that the Second Person emanates from the First Person, much as light emanates from a source of light. This teaching comes directly from Greek philosophy.

If "God the Son" of trinitarianism is to have a plausible connection to "God the Father" within the framework of eternity, the conclusion cannot be avoided that the Son derives his existence from the Father in some way or else there would be no reason for him to be called the Son. This genuine difficulty, acknowledged by some trinitarians, has led to the concept of *eternal generation*, by which the Son eternally proceeds from the Father, much as light is emitted

continuously by the sun. But this philosophical concept doesn't solve the problem because it still doesn't explain the use of the word "son". The fact remains that the Son derives his existence from the Father in some significant way, and this is true even if we bring in eternal generation. Therefore, in this important sense, the Son is not equal to the Father.

According to scientific cosmology, in the distant future the sun will collapse and no longer emit light as it does now. Hence it is possible for the sun to exist as a singularity [134] without emitting light. In view of the finite life of the sun, the analogy of the sun is inadequate to establish the doctrine of "eternal generation" or the concept of Jesus as "Light of Light" especially in this age of scientific knowledge but also in the time of the early church (in view of 2Pet.3:10, "the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved"). God is certainly light, but that is principally in terms of moral purity and spiritual enlightenment. God's moral character is not something that can be properly compared to the light that radiates from a burning object such as the sun. But in the end, what really matters is that the doctrine of eternal generation is based on concepts that are not found in Scripture.

[134] Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (p.66) and *The Universe in a Nutshell* (pp.23-23), two-in-one edition, Bantam Books, New York, 2010.

Christ's subjection to God

Jesus says, "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all" (John 10:29). Here he specifically says that God the Father is "greater than all" (cf. "greater than all gods," Ps.95:3). This would mean that the Father is greater than Jesus, for the word "all" would include Jesus who is a distinct person from the Father even in trinitarianism (cf. Athanasian Creed). This is not an isolated statement but is confirmed by other statements such as "the Father is greater than I" (Jn. 14:28). God is greater than Jesus for the fundamental reason that God is greater than man.

"A slave is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent greater than the one who sent him" (Jn.13:16). In speaking of himself as slave and messenger, Jesus is explaining how he functions in relation to the Father, for he repeatedly speaks of himself as his Father's slave (*doulos*) but also as the one sent by the Father. [135] Jesus uses the word "greater" to explain both connections to the Father.

What does Jesus mean when he says, "the Father is greater than I"? That statement cannot possibly be true in trinitarianism in which "God the Son" is coequal in every respect with God the Father. Jesus' statement, together with similar statements such as "the head of Christ is God" (1Cor.11:3), was an embarrassment to me as a trinitarian because it

[135] The declaration "he who sent me" occurs many times in John's gospel, including 10 times in chapters 6 to 8 alone: 6:38,39,44; 7:16, 28,33; 8:16,18,26,29.

directly contradicts the central tenet of trinitarianism: the coequality of the Son with the Father. But the doctrine of coequality is patently false according to the statement, "the Father is greater than I". Jesus refused to grasp at or seize equality with God (Phil.2:6), yet we trinitarians are spiritually deaf in our determination to crown Jesus as Almighty God.[136]

Elihu's reminder to Job that "God is greater than man" (Job 33:12) is so obvious that it is just a platitude. Yet this platitude seems to be the only reasonable way of understanding Jesus' statement, "the Father is greater than I". It amounts to an assertion that Jesus is man and not God. The trinitarian argument that Jesus' divine side is greater than Jesus' human side entirely misses the point because the comparison is not between the alleged "two natures" of Jesus but between Jesus and "the Father"!

The statement "the Father is greater than I" is a clear rejection of the coequality of the Son and the Father. Against the trinitarian claim that Christ is God and coequal with the Father, the New Testament affirms that the head of the *post-resurrection* Christ is God: "the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1Cor.11:3, ESV). There is no mention whatsoever of any coequality of the three persons of the Trinity. Paul says that Christ is subject to God (Yahweh) just as believers are

[136] Compare John 6:15, "perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain".

subject to Christ. Paul doesn't simply say that the head of Christ is "God the Father" but that the head of Christ is "God".

In saying that Christ is subject to God, we are not denying Christ's supreme and universal authority. Indeed he himself says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt.28:18). But note the tiny but mighty word "given". Someone had given him his supreme authority in the first place. Hence there is one exception to his supreme authority, and it lies in the fact that Christ has no authority over God:

> For he has put everything in subjection under his feet. But when it says "everything" has been put in subjection, it is clear that this does not include the one who put everything in subjection to him. (1Cor.15:27, NET)

Trinitarians and non-trinitarians agree on what Paul is saying here, that God is the exception to Christ's authority over all things. This is not debated and is even made explicit by NIV's rendering of this verse, "it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ".

From the immediate context of this verse, we know that Paul is speaking of two persons: "God the Father" (v.24) and "the Son" (v.28). Hence it is specifically God the Father who has put everything (except God himself) under the feet of the Son.

We note three things from this verse (15:27). Firstly, Christ's authority is not an innate authority but is something

that was conferred on him, that is, "given" to him by God (Mt.28:18). Secondly, Paul uses language that makes a clear distinction of persons, God on the one hand and Christ on the other, indicating that God and Christ are two different persons. Thirdly, the word "everything" which occurs twice in this verse, 1Cor.15:27, goes a long way towards explaining the meaning of the word "all" in "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt.28:18), namely, by qualifying that the "all authority" given to Jesus does not include authority over God. In other words, what is implicit in Matthew 28:18—that Christ is subject to the Father because of the word "given"—is made explicit in 1Cor.15:27, as also made explicit by the risen Jesus in Rev.2:27: "I myself have received authority from my Father".

In the next verse, Paul says again that Christ will be subject to God:

> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him (God) who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1Cor. 15:28, ESV)

Paul is not merely saying that Christ has no authority over God (a statement that could theoretically allow for coequality), but more forcefully that Christ will be subject to God, which is a clear rejection of the supposed coequality of Jesus and his Father.

Finally, a striking conclusion can be derived from v. 24:

> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. (1Cor.15:24)

Here "the end" is an eschatological reference to a future point in time. When in the future? The context (vv.21-23) makes it clear that "the end" (v.24) will come only after "the resurrection of the dead" (v.21), a glorious event that has not yet taken place in our time. But when the end comes, Christ will hand the kingdom over to his God and Father (v.24), to be followed by the subjection of the Son to the Father (v.27). The chronology is crucial because it tells us that the end will inaugurate a permanent state of affairs in which the subjection of the Son to God (v.27) will continue for all eternity! Even the fervently trinitarian *ESV Study Bible* concedes that "this verse (1Cor.15:28) shows that his subjection to the Father will continue for all eternity."

Frédéric Louis Godet, Swiss theologian and trinitarian, rebukes those who use "ingenious methods" to evade Paul's plain teaching of the subjection of the Son to the Father:

> "Then shall the Son also himself be subject," etc. The words can only be taken as they stand. The attempts to explain them have usually been nothing but ingenious methods of explaining them away. Of these the one usually adopted by the Fathers is limiting the statement to Christ's human nature (Jn.5:26,27,30) and mediatorial kingdom (1Cor.11:3, "the

> head of Christ is God"). In dealing with this subject, we can easily "darken counsel by words without knowledge," and hide an absolute ignorance under a semblance of knowledge; but everything we can say in "explanation" of this self subjection of the Son to the Father is simply involved in the words that follow, "that God may be all in all". All things … shall be subordinated to the Son, and the Son to the Father. (*Corinthians*, vol.1, on 1Cor.15:28, from the French).

The rise of trinitarianism and the confusion in "Lord"

In New Testament times, the Jews living in Palestine spoke mainly Aramaic along with Hebrew. There were also Jews who spoke mostly or even exclusively Greek; these Greek-speaking Jews are called "Hellenists" in Acts 6:1; 9:29; 11:20. Many of them used the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Most of the quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament are taken from the LXX, the main Scripture of the Greek-speaking believers of the early church. A result of this development, along with the LXX's suppression of the name Yahweh, is the eventual disappearance of Yahweh's name in the church.

Fortunately, the Aramaic-speaking and Hebrew-speaking Jews who were acquainted with the Hebrew Bible were aware of the name YHWH. But this was not necessarily the case with the Greek-speaking believers. Even so, this was not yet a serious problem because the church was still rooted in biblical monotheism, notwithstanding the replacement of

"Yahweh" with "the Lord" in the LXX. Most Jewish believers, whether they were Aramaic-speaking or Greek-speaking, knew that "the Lord" in the New Testament writings would sometimes refer to Yahweh, notably in quotations from the Old Testament, but also in many other contexts. They also knew that Jesus was "Lord" in a different sense after he had been raised from the dead by God's power. Peter proclaimed in his Pentecost message: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). Since it was God who made Jesus "Lord," Jesus is Lord indeed.

A serious problem arose in the mid-second century when the deification of Jesus began to take root in the Gentile churches, as reflected in statements by Melito of Sardis, and not long afterwards in the better known figure of Tertullian from the start of the 3rd century. Once Jesus had been deified, some Gentile believers started putting their faith in two Gods (ditheism) or two divine persons in one God (binitarianism), these being intrinsically the same. This created much confusion in the use of the word "Lord," which was applied indiscriminately to Yahweh and to Jesus. Ironically, later trinitarians would use the title "Lord" as applied to Jesus to prove that he is God! By circular reasoning, trinitarians are using the trinitarian error they created in the first place to prove the same trinitarian error.

The Gentile church eliminated the name "Yahweh" because the name does not fit into the trinitarian scheme of

things. In trinitarianism, God the Father is one of three persons whereas in the Bible there is no God besides Yahweh (Isa.45:5). The trinitarian elevation of Jesus to Almighty God has eliminated any practical need for a God other than Jesus. Moreover, Jesus has a name, but God the Father and God the Spirit do not. God the Father is simply the Father of Jesus Christ, and His role is defined by his relationship to God the Son. And since the Son is said to be coequal with the Father in every respect, if we already have the Son why do we need the Father? As trinitarians, we paid our respects to the Father but did not really need Him, for Jesus is all-sufficient. In English-language Bibles, with a few exceptions such as NJB, Yahweh's name has disappeared altogether.

Given the confusion in the church over the conflating use of "Lord," it is best to return to speaking of God as Yahweh instead of simply Lord. There is no prohibition in the Bible against speaking of the one true God as Yahweh.

That Jesus has a Father already rules him out as God

The New Testament speaks of Yahweh as the Lord, the God, and the Father of believers. Significantly, Yahweh is all of these things to Jesus, e.g., "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17). There is no biblical problem in referring to Yahweh by these three titles (Lord, God, Father) even in relation to Jesus.

Paul likewise speaks of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom.15:6; 2Cor.1:3; 11:31; Eph.1:3; cf. 1Pet. 1:3). If Jesus is really God, then God would be the God of God.

The very fact that Jesus has a Father already rules him out as God. That is because Paul speaks of "one God and Father of all" (Eph.4:6). In other words, there is only one God, and that God is the Father of all. Therefore anyone who is not the Father of all is not God. But Jesus is certainly not the Father (not even in trinitarianism), much less the Father of all. God's people are not called "sons of Jesus" or "children of Christ," nor do they cry out, "Abba Christ!" On the contrary, 1John 5:18 says that we are "born of God" and that Jesus was "born of God"—in the same sentence.

Melito of Sardis, early precursor of trinitarianism

Only a hundred years after Barnabas and Paul were worshipped as gods in Gentile country (Acts 14:12), Melito of Sardis was already halfway to trinitarianism. Given the pagan polytheistic culture in which he grew up, Melito could talk of "God put to death" without the slightest realization that to speak of the death of the one true God is to commit blasphemy.

Melito of Sardis was not a trinitarian but a binitarian (one who believes that there are two persons in one God), for he did not view the Holy Spirit as a third person. Melito also

taught that there are two "natures" in Jesus, the human and the divine. This makes Melito one of the early forerunners of the trinitarian creeds of the 4th and 5th centuries.

Melito lived around mid-second century and died c.190. He was the bishop of Sardis in the Greek-speaking province of Asia, located in today's Turkey. His voluminous writings, most of them lost, are clear evidence that the deification of Jesus had already started by the 2nd century, indeed only slightly more than a hundred years after the death of Christ, and certainly well before the Council of Nicaea in 325.

The following two excerpts from the writings of Melito, as compiled at http://www.cogwriter.com/melito.htm, are taken from *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (vol.8). In the following excerpt, Melito teaches the deity of Christ, and that Christ was God put to death:

> God who is from God; the Son who is from the Father; Jesus Christ the King for evermore… He that bore up the earth was borne up on a tree. The Lord was subjected to ignominy with naked body—God put to death, the King of Israel slain! (*The Discourse on the Cross*, verses IV, VI)

In the next excerpt, Melito says that Jesus is true God, that Jesus is at once God and perfect man, and that his deity is hidden in his flesh of humanity:

> For the deeds done by Christ after His baptism, and especially His miracles, gave indication and assurance to the world of

> the Deity hidden in His flesh. For, being at once both God and perfect man likewise, He gave us sure indications of His two natures: of His Deity, by His miracles during the three years that elapsed after His baptism; of His humanity, during the thirty similar periods which preceded His baptism, in which, by reason of His low estate as regards the flesh, He concealed the signs of His Deity, although He was the true God existing before all ages. (*The Nature of Christ*, 760)

Bob Theil, the one who compiled the above information, says:

> Melito was not a unitarian. He considered that Jesus was God (though a God who hid some signs of His deity) and the Father was God—this is a binitarian view. It should be noted that Melito never referred to the Holy Spirit as God … Since all legitimate scholars recognize that early Christian leaders did not support modern trinitarianism, those interested in *the faith that was once for all delivered for the saints*, would not accept the idea of that the true faith was *gradually revealed*. (italics Theil's)

Bart Ehrman, in the eighth of his *Great Courses* lectures, refers to Melito of Sardis and his Easter homily. The deification of Christ was fully established in Melito's teaching, indicating that by the mid-second century, the deified Jesus had become entrenched in the Gentile church. Thus "the parting of the ways" must have begun earlier than had previously been supposed.

The deification of Jesus and anti-Semitism

A fearful consequence of Jesus' deification is a rabidly anti-Semitic charge that Melito of Sardis had hurled against the Jews: that of the murder of God. It is not hard for us to imagine the consequences of this accusation made by Melito and some other early church fathers, notably the hatred and violence against the Jews that it later incited in Europe. The deification of Christ with its radical departure from Jewish monotheism had became a breeding ground for anti-Semitism. Surely the early roots of the Holocaust are to be found here.

Some have observed that anti-Semitism among the early church fathers grew markedly more hostile starting from the 4th century. [137] This was the century in which took place the Council of Nicaea of 325 (which decreed binitarianism) and the Council of Constantinople of 381 (which decreed trinitarianism, the first time in history that such a thing had ever happened). Whether there were other reasons for the increase in anti-Semitism can only be surmised, but there is nothing else of historical or religious import in the 4th century that could easily or plausibly account for the marked rise in anti-Semitism.

[137] David Rokeah's *Antisemitism Through the Ages* (p.57) and Robert Michel's *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (p.19).

Some early trinitarians and church fathers, both Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene ("Ante-Nicene" means before Nicaea), made strongly anti-Semitic statements in their writings and public declarations. An important work on the anti-Semitism of the early church fathers is Robert Michel's *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust*. Here are a few excerpts from the book regarding some of the prominent church fathers of that period:

> … [to most early church fathers] all Jews were forever responsible for murdering God. And so the Jewish people were abhorrent and any injustice done to them, short of murder, according to Augustine, was justified—and even murder was sometimes justified. (p.2)
>
> Jerome claimed that all Jews were Judas and were innately evil creatures who betrayed the Lord for money. John Chrysostom called Jews deicides [murderers of God] with no chance for "atonement, excuse, or defense." (p.5)
>
> The fourth-century theologian Ephraem of Syria called the Jews circumcised dogs; John Chrysostom called them circumcised beasts… Tertullian suggested that God intended that the circumcision would identify the Jews so that they could never reenter Jerusalem. (p.22)
>
> Like most of the fathers, Tertullian's anti-Jewish conclusions were often both emotional and cruel. In his *De Spectaculis*, he gloated and exulted, imagining how Jesus would punish the Jews. (p.26)

> [Jerome] argued that God had given the Jews their Law deliberately to deceive them and lead them to their destruction. (p.26)
>
> One Sunday, Ambrose [4th century archbishop of Milan, one of the four original doctors of the Catholic Church] preached a sermon on the Church and Synagogue attended by Emperor Theodosius, who had recently been excommunicated by him and was now repentant and very much open to his influence. Face to face with the emperor, Ambrose reproached him for his action in support of the Jewish claims, arguing that it was a moral act to burn synagogues and if the laws forbade it, then the laws were wrong. Refusing him communion, he threatened that the emperor and his sons would be excommunicated again unless he rescinded his penalties against the incendiary bishop. In the end, Theodosius promised to do what Ambrose demanded. (p.33)
>
> John Chrysostom was an enormously influential preacher. Hitler expressed his admiration for the anti-Jewish ideas of "all genuine Christians of outstanding calibre," among whom he counted John Chrysostom. (p.35)
>
> Chrysostom wanted these useless Jews killed. Just as animals that refuse to pull the plow are slaughtered, so Jews "grew fit for slaughter. This is why Christ said: 'As for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.'" Lest we miss his point about murdering the "useless" Jews, Chrysostom repeats it, adding a reference to Luke 19:27, which, he claims, refers specifically to a command of Jesus that the Jews be murdered. Chrysostom later justified such an atrocity by arguing that "what is done in

> accordance with God's will is the best of all things even if it seems bad… Suppose someone slays another in accordance with God's will. This slaying is better than any lovingkindness." (p.35)

It should be noted that the author of this book, Robert Michel, bears no hostility to Jesus Christ, and in fact speaks positively of him, expressing high admiration for his teaching of the cross, self-denial, and love for fellow man:

> … the theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*) is based on Jesus' statement in the Gospel of Matthew (16:24–5): "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." This belief required the Christian faithful to follow the moral teachings of Jesus concerning all human beings even at the risk of their own lives … the theology of the cross underscores the solidarity of suffering among all human beings, Gentile and Jew. Analysis of Christians who helped Jews during the Holocaust, for instance, reveals many different motivations for their behavior, but most of these motives derive from the model of human behavior found in the Judeo-Christian morality of Jesus of Nazareth.

The anti-Semitic statements of the early church fathers can be found in scattered places in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (10 volumes) and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (28 volumes). A few anti-Semitic statements, expressing mainly theological hostility, are included on pages 375-378 of David Bercot's

Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs; here are a few statements by the early church fathers (with volume and page numbers from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*):

> The Jews had formerly been in covenant with God. But being afterwards cast off on account of their sins, they began to be without God. *Tertullian* (c.197), 3.247
>
> A sign that she [Israel] has received the bill of divorcement [from God] is this: that Jerusalem was destroyed along with her what they called the sanctuary. *Origen* (c.245), 9.507
>
> Since the coming of Christ, no prophets have arisen among the Jews. For they have confessedly been abandoned by the Holy Spirit. *Origen* (c.248) 4.614
>
> The wicked synagogue is now cast off by the Lord God. He has rejected His own house. As He says: "I have forsaken my house; I have left my inheritance." *Apostolic Constitutions* (c.390), 7.451

The temptation of Jesus

As regards the crucial topic of temptation, trinitarianism reduces it to meaninglessness in the case of Jesus because Jesus, who is supposedly God, cannot be tempted to sin at all. As James 1:13 states unequivocally, "God cannot be tempted by evil". The trinitarian understanding of the temptation of Jesus collides with the biblical fact that he was "tempted in all respects as we are" (Heb.4:15). In making the temptation of

Jesus meaningless, even farcical, we were so blinded by trinitarianism that we could not see the obvious.

But the New Testament declares that Jesus is a man, a true human being who was tempted like us in every respect. That being so, how could Jesus have faced every temptation in life without having once failed? The trinitarian's answer to this question has the effect of reducing it—and the central struggle of human life—to meaninglessness, for if Jesus is God, then he cannot be tempted, much less succumb to sin. It would be unconvincing to say that Jesus empathizes with our moral and spiritual struggles, or with our painful defeats in these struggles, when he himself can never fall and doesn't even need to struggle, since no temptation can ever bring down God. This makes Jesus' humanity irrelevant for us.

The protestations of trinitarians notwithstanding, their Jesus is really nothing more than a human body taken over by the second person of the Trinity. The Jesus of trinitarianism has no human will, but even if he did, it would have been so dominated by the will of "God the Son" that the human will can only operate within the divine will. So even if Jesus had an independent human will (which in any case is denied in trinitarianism), it would make no difference because it is impossible, within the same person, for the human will to operate independently of the divine will of the second person of the Trinity. In church history, theological problems such as this one arose from the supposed God-man constitution of Jesus, and led to bitter conflicts *within* trinitarianism, notably

over Nestorius' teaching of two persons, human and divine, in Christ.

But temptation—a life and death struggle with sin—is an inescapable part of the believer's daily life. It is when we triumph over sin by the power of God's indwelling Spirit that we move towards the perfection to which we have been called. And Jesus is the perfect man precisely because of his total victory over sin.

But this powerful truth is reduced to shambles in trinitarianism. If the Christian is asked why Jesus is perfect and sinless, the usual answer would be, "Because he is God, and God is perfect". No matter how hard trinitarians try to decorate Jesus' humanity to make it look more like ours, the fact remains that in trinitarian dogma, the human Jesus is really just the human body of the incarnate God the Son. If asked whether this sinless Jesus could in theory have sinned as a human being, trinitarians would have to answer "no" because it is impossible for God to be tempted, much less to sin. In any case, Jesus is already perfect in both his natures because of his God-man union, so any attempt to spoil his perfection by tempting him to sin would be futile and pointless. Satan must have been stupid even to try! That is why we say that trinitarianism reduces the temptation account into something farcical.

But the real Jesus—the biblical Jesus—is very different because he battled sin to the point of sweat and tears, which

wouldn't have been necessary if he were the God-man of trinitarianism.

The biblical Jesus, in his pleas to his Father Yahweh, "was heard in that he feared" (Heb.5:7, KJV). What did he fear? Physical death? Certainly not, for Jesus was the one who said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Mt.10:28) What Jesus feared was not death but the mortal danger of succumbing to sin and thus failing the mission of redeeming mankind from sin. I am confident that whatever fear Jesus had, it was not for himself, just as Paul (who had the mind of Christ, 1Cor.2:16) was willing to be accursed for the sake of his fellow Jews, exchanging his soul for theirs (Rom.9:3).

But with the weight of mankind's redemption resting on his shoulders, Jesus could still fail on his part, notwithstanding the benefit of Yahweh's indwelling presence in him. We might not be able to understand the weight of responsibility that rested on his soul, but we are fully aware of the frightening possibility of moral failure even in the case of one who is indwelt by Yahweh's Spirit and can therefore avail of God's power for victory over sin. We thus have a glimpse of the wonder and magnificence of Jesus' triumph over sin. It was through the sufferings from many trials and temptations over the years that he attained perfection to become the Perfect Man.

Jesus is the victorious Last Adam in contrast to the First Adam. His victory over sin secured the redemption of mankind, hence the resurrected Jesus became a "life-giving spirit" (1Cor.15:45).

Finally, to appreciate the confusion typical of the trinitarian understanding of the temptation of Jesus, here is an eye-opening excerpt from Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (which has the distinction of being the top selling systematic theology in the world today).

> [Start of excerpt from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology, chapter 26, section A4:]
>
> We also must affirm with Scripture that "God cannot be tempted with evil" (James 1:13). But here the question becomes difficult: if Jesus was fully God as well as fully man … then must we not also affirm that (in some sense) Jesus also "could not be tempted with evil"?
>
> … At this point we are faced with a dilemma similar to a number of other doctrinal dilemmas where Scripture seems to be teaching things that are, if not directly contradictory, at least very difficult to combine together in our understanding. For example, with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, we affirmed that God exists in three persons, and each is fully God, and there is one God … The Bible tells us that "Jesus was tempted" and "Jesus was fully man" and "Jesus was fully God" and "God cannot be tempted."

> … the following solution is more in the nature of a suggested means of combining various biblical teachings and is not directly supported by explicit statements of Scripture. With this in mind, it is appropriate for us to say: (1) If Jesus' human nature had existed by itself, independent of his divine nature, then it would have been a human nature just like that which God gave Adam and Eve. It would have been free from sin but nonetheless able to sin. Therefore, if Jesus' human nature had existed by itself, there was the abstract or theoretical possibility that Jesus could have sinned, just as Adam and Eve's human natures were able to sin. (2) But Jesus' human nature never existed apart from union with his divine nature. From the moment of his conception, he existed as truly God and truly man as well. Both his human nature and his divine nature existed united in one person. (3) Although there were some things (such as being hungry or thirsty or weak) that Jesus experienced in his human nature alone and were not experienced in his divine nature (see below), nonetheless, an act of sin would have been a moral act that would apparently have involved the whole person of Christ. Therefore, if he had sinned, it would have involved both his human and divine natures. (4) But if Jesus as a person had sinned, involving both his human and divine natures in sin, then God himself would have sinned, and he would have ceased to be God. Yet that is clearly impossible because of the infinite holiness of God's nature. (5) Therefore, if we are asking if it was actually possible for Jesus to have sinned, it seems that we must conclude that it was not possible. The union of his human and divine natures in one person prevented it.
>
> But the question remains, "How then could Jesus' temptations be real?" The example of the temptation to change the

stones into bread is helpful in this regard. Jesus had the ability, by virtue of his divine nature, to perform this miracle, but if he had done it, he would no longer have been obeying in the strength of his human nature alone, he would have failed the test that Adam also failed, and he would not have earned our salvation for us. Therefore, Jesus refused to rely on his divine nature to make obedience easier for him. In like manner, it seems appropriate to conclude that Jesus met every temptation to sin, not by his divine power, but on the strength of his human nature alone (though, of course, it was not "alone" because Jesus, in exercising the kind of faith that humans should exercise, was perfectly depending on God the Father and the Holy Spirit at every moment). The moral strength of his divine nature was there as a sort of "backstop" that would have prevented him from sinning in any case (and therefore we can say that it was not possible for him to sin), but he did not rely on the strength of his divine nature to make it easier for him to face temptations, and his refusal to turn the stones into bread at the beginning of his ministry is a clear indication of this …

What then do we say about the fact that "God cannot be tempted with evil" (James 1:13)? It seems that this is one of a number of things that we must affirm to be true of Jesus' divine nature but not of his human nature. His divine nature could not be tempted with evil, but his human nature could be tempted and was clearly tempted. How these two natures united in one person in facing temptations, Scripture does not clearly explain to us.

[End of excerpt from Grudem's Systematic Theology]

What more can we say? In the final analysis, Grudem's attempt to arrive at a solution to the problem that he himself raises is not really a solution at all but merely an extended delineation of the nature of the problem itself. The illustrations that he uses, such as that of the *human* Jesus struggling by himself with some assistance from the *divine* Jesus who serves as a backstop, still portray Jesus as two persons, human and divine, even if Grudem uses the language of "two natures" rather than "two persons".

The Son does not know the time of his coming

What about Jesus' supposed omniscience? As God the Son, does he know everything? Questions have actually been raised in Bible studies as to how Jesus might sit for a university exam on physics or chemistry without studying (to use a modern-day scenario) or whether an omniscient Jesus would need to learn anything at all. Did the infant Jesus know Sanskrit, Ugaritic and ancient Chinese? Or a future language such as English? We must bear in mind that in trinitarian dogma, the infant Jesus was fully God and fully man. But how can one who knows everything be a true human being when it is impossible for any man to know everything? Jesus himself provides a clear answer to our question:

> "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matthew 24:36, NIV, also Mk.13:32)

The Son doesn't even know the time of his own coming! If Jesus is indeed "God the Son" who is coequal in every respect to the Father and is therefore omniscient, this verse would be inexplicable.

Only the Father knows the day and the hour because He is the one who determines Jesus' coming. This fact presents no difficulty to those who understand that Jesus is true man, but is problematic to those who insist that Jesus is God. If there is just one detail that Jesus doesn't know, then he is not omniscient and not God. The trinitarian argument that this is some kind of internal arrangement within the Godhead for the passing of knowledge does not make sense. It also makes no sense to say that Jesus' human nature does not know everything his divine nature knows, within the same person! This explanation is common in trinitarianism. For example, Wayne Grudem in *Systematic Theology* (section 26C3a) says:

> On the one hand, with respect to his human nature, he had limited knowledge (Mark 13:32; Luke 2:52). On the other hand, Jesus clearly knew all things (John 2:25; 16:30; 21:17). Now this is only understandable if Jesus learned things and had limited knowledge with respect to his human nature but was always omniscient with respect to his divine nature, and therefore he was able any time to "call to mind" whatever information would be needed for his ministry. In this way we can understand Jesus' statement concerning the time of his return: "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). This ignorance of the time of his return was true of

> Jesus' human nature and human consciousness only, for in his divine nature he was certainly omniscient and certainly knew the time when he would return to the earth.

The fatal problem with Grudem's explanation is that Jesus specifically said "only the Father" knows. Jesus wasn't talking about his own divine nature versus his human nature. His declaration that he does not know the day or the hour would, in trinitarianism, be true of both his natures—divine and human—since "only" the Father knows. The word "only" is problematic to trinitarians for yet another reason: It rules out the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, as one who knows the day and the hour.

We are then left with two possibilities: either Jesus is not God, or God is not omniscient! The former is biblically correct but unacceptable to trinitarians, whereas the latter is blasphemous.

In the way Grudem depicts Jesus' two natures, the human and the divine, they are functionally two separate persons, even two separate spirits, within the one Christ. Although Grudem speaks of two natures, the more accurate term for his depiction of Christ is "two persons". The manner in which trinitarians switch back and forth so glibly between Jesus' human nature (which can be tempted and does not know the hour) and his divine nature (which cannot be tempted and knows the hour) is clear proof that Jesus cannot be both God and man simultaneously. But in trinitarianism,

the two natures coexist in Jesus continuously without interruption.

If the Father knows the hour, why shouldn't the Son also know? It is not just a question of why Jesus functionally doesn't know, but why he shouldn't know. But the biblical picture clarifies everything. Just as the Father determined when Jesus will be born into the world in "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4) and in accordance with God's promise (v.23), so Jesus' return will be at a time the Father determines according to His own eternal purposes; it is not a matter of the Son coming to earth whenever he chooses.

Communicatio idiomatum: an attempt to explain the God-Man

To understand the trinitarian idea of the incarnation by which the second person became the God-man, we need to give a brief account of the trinitarian attempt to explain how a person who is both God and man at the same time can even be functional. This question had led to much debate and controversy, even violence, in the early days of the church. The history of this conflict is not directly relevant to our discussion; we will only say that in the end, one side defeated the other, but not without entailing considerable conflict. [138]

[138] For an account of this protracted conflict, see Philip Jenkin's *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years*. The

We now briefly examine the idea, proposed by some early church leaders, of *communicatio idiomatum*, a Latin term which means "the communication of idioms," with "idioms" meaning the innate or essential characteristics of a person.[139]

How do God and man relate to each other within the God-man Jesus Christ? How do they identify with each other if they are different in essence or substance or nature, since one of them is divine and the other is human, the two united as one person? The idea has been proposed that the characteristics of the one nature are transferred or "communicated" to the other nature in this union, reciprocally.

It is hard to arrive at a precise definition of *communicatio idiomatum* because the ancient writings which originally proposed the concept gave little explanation of it beyond the bare statement that the divine attributes of God the Son are communicated to the human Jesus in whom he is incarnate, and also in the reverse direction from the man Jesus to the divine Christ. If one is pressed for the specifics of the communication of attributes, one can say at most that the qualities ("idioms") of the second person of the Trinity are

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book's long subtitle is not meant to be facetious or comical but factual; the author holds professorships at two American universities.

[139] Some define *communicatio idiomatum* as "the communication of the properties or predicates" (e.g. *Westminster Dictionary of Theologians*, ed. Justo L. González, p.256), which is equivalent to "the communication of idioms".

transferred to the human Jesus, including qualities such as God's power, wisdom, justice, and so on.

But one of the inalienable attributes of the divine essence is immortality. This fundamental attribute would have to be transferred to the man Jesus, for is it possible to communicate only some of the divine qualities and not the others? From what is known of the communication of idioms, there is no suggestion that only some of the qualities are transferred while the others are not, if this is even possible.

We see ever more clearly the problems of the idea of the communication of idioms. For example, if the man in whom the second person is incarnate was made immortal by that union, then obviously he could not have died for our sins, in which case God's plan of salvation would have been subverted. In the attempt to resolve the contradiction of death and immortality in the same person, the Gentile church leaders went so far as to say that the second person of the Trinity, who is fully God, died for our sins in any case. It turns out that to these Christians, the immortal God is not so immortal after all!

Another example: Since God Almighty is omnipotent, would it not be blasphemous to speak of Him as weak? If God the Son is of the same substance as God the Father, he would also be omnipotent and could not in any sense be described as weak. The point is simple: If he is weak, he is not God. If he is Almighty, he is not man. If he is mortal, he is not God. If he is immortal, he is not man.

In the skewed logic of trinitarianism, God the Son is really two incompatible opposites thrown together into a bipolar Jesus who is both mortal and immortal, both man and God, and therefore both mortal man and immortal God. Anyone who can believe this twisted and contradictory doctrine will not find it hard to believe any error that comes along his way. It must have taken an impressive power of persuasion to pull off this deception, not just on a few individuals but on great multitudes throughout church history. This causes one to wonder if the persuasiveness of the deception comes from some supernatural force. We are reminded of the words in Revelation: "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev.12:9). What it means is that no one, no matter how intelligent or educated, can escape from the paralyzing grip of spiritual deception. Spiritual perception, on the other hand, involves "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened" by God (Eph.1:18), enabling the heart to see the liberating light of His truth.

The second person of the Trinity—the one who supposedly died on the cross—clearly cannot be Yahweh who in Scripture is most definitely immortal. That being the case, *who exactly is this God called the second person of the Trinity?* And whom have trinitarians been worshipping ever since their dogma became the official doctrine of the church in the fourth century? This question is becoming ever more frightening.

Few Christians know anything about the frightening theology that undergirds trinitarianism. There are other aspects of this theology that make little or no sense, but I won't go into them at this time except to ask: In the exchange or intercommunication of qualities, what human attributes can be transferred from man and added to God? Does man have any quality in his essence and nature to communicate to the essence and nature of God? Can anything be added to God in any way? How can man's weakness, for example, be transferred to an omnipotent God whose very omnipotence would, in any case, neutralize the weakness? This is an example of what I mean by the absurd nature of the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*.

The idea of the God-man was frankly unintelligible even to the trinitarians who proposed it, and who then tried to explain the relationship of Jesus' two natures with concepts such as *hypostatic union* and *communicatio idiomatum* to make sense of the contradiction. This is the sort of thing that we trinitarians vainly expended much time and effort in.

But the nature of the biblical Jesus makes perfect sense. He is someone we can identify with and look up to as our triumphant example who inspires us. Weak though we are, God will strengthen us in the inner man, and empower us to triumph over all obstacles through Jesus Christ even though given our many weaknesses, we will not attain perfection in this life as Jesus had. Even the great apostle Paul acknowledges, "Not that I am already perfect … but I press on

toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ" (Phil.3:12,14).

From all this, we can only stand in awe at the magnificent triumph of Yahweh in Christ, who attained what was hitherto impossible to any human. While all believers, through God's mercy, have been given the privilege in Christ of becoming the sons and daughters of God, only Jesus can be rightly called "the only Son of God."

The distinction of wills within the Trinity

Whereas the self-giving love of the biblical Jesus is straightforward and easy to understand in terms of his voluntary act of the will, the same cannot be said of the trinitarian Jesus. It would, for example, be problematic if it is the trinitarian Jesus who says in Gethsemane, "Not my will but yours be done." Who is the one uttering the words? Is it God the Son who is speaking to God the Father? If so, this would create the problem of a distinction of wills within the Trinity, in which the second person submits to the will of the first person after an intense struggle. With such a sharp distinction of wills within the Trinity, how can we still speak of the three as being of one essence when there are three distinct wills that are not necessarily in perfect alignment until an inner struggle unites them as in the case of Gethsemane? By contrast, the statement "Not my will but yours be done" would be easy to understand if it had come from the man Christ Jesus in

speaking to his Father who had sent him to accomplish the salvation of mankind.

The problem doesn't stop there because in trinitarianism, the obedience of "God the Son" to God the Father is strictly internal to the one-essence God, and cannot be properly described as "obedience to God". This internal obedience has no bearing on the important statement in Romans 5:18-19 that what is crucial for man's salvation is an obedience in terms of man's relationship to God rather than an internal relationship within the Trinity.

If trinitarians say that the one speaking at Gethsemane is the human Jesus in whom "God the Son" is incarnate, the result is equally disastrous: Who is Jesus speaking to when he says "Your will be done," God the Son or God the Father? In either case, there are two distinct wills within Jesus: the will of the man who said "Your will be done," and the will of God representing Jesus' divine nature, leading to the impossible situation of two wills within the God-man. And since the will cannot exist without a person, this would mean that Jesus is not one person but two!

This is precisely one of the intractable problems that the early trinitarians got entangled in and tried to get out of. To avoid the unacceptable idea of two wills and therefore two persons in the God-man, which would create a schizophrenic Jesus, it was decreed that it is the divine God the Son rather than the man Jesus who is central to the God-man constitution and whose will acted solely in Jesus at Gethsemane. This

doesn't solve the dilemma because it would mean that Jesus' human nature lacks an operative will, in which case he (or it) would not be a complete human being since every human being has an independent human will. (Trinitarians say that Jesus is *fully* man, an assertion that requires Jesus to have a human body, a human spirit, and a human will.) This illustrates what we have been saying all along, that the trinitarian Jesus is not a human being as we know human beings to be. This takes us back to our observation that the obedience of "God the Son" to God the Father is internal to the Trinity, and has no bearing on the crucial matter of man's salvation that is said in Romans 5:18-19 to hinge on man's obedience to God, the biblical Yahweh.

According to the Alexandrian theology which triumphed over the Antiochene theology in the early church, there is no separation within the God-man between the divine God the Son and the human Jesus. Yet it is God the Son who constitutes the real person in the God-man whereas the man does not represent the will of the God-man. As a fervent trinitarian puts it, "He had the appearance and flesh of a man, but the characteristics, power and nature of God."[140]

[140] Clarence M. Beard, *The Only True God*, p.179, 1956. This book, written from a trinitarian perspective, is largely concerned with the issues of science and religion that were current more than half a century ago.

But if trinitarianism gives Jesus a human spirit in order to resolve this dilemma, there would be two spirits in him, divine and human, and therefore two persons in Jesus! [141]

Again trinitarianism is caught on the horns of a dilemma for which there is no resolution, thereby exposing the falsity of the doctrine, for all falsehood contains within itself the inevitable self-contradiction that becomes the seed of its own destruction once it is examined.

The tragedy is that most Christians don't know that the trinitarian Jesus, the God-man, is a man-made fabrication constructed from bits and pieces of the New Testament, creating a divine person who does not exist in the Bible, namely, God the Son which is "Son of God" violently turned upside down or the wrong way around. In short, trinitarians have constructed a theological idol that they bow to in worship, and demand that others do the same.

Dear trinitarians, if Jesus Christ is God as you say he is, then you and I are still in our sins without the hope of salvation, for an essential attribute of God is immortality, which means that he cannot die for our sins. But if God could die, he would not be God. Yet he cannot be true man because you say he is also God. The human part of Jesus has no human soul or spirit because you have replaced it with the spirit of

[141] The idea that Jesus has a human spirit was proposed by the bishop Nestorius who was later condemned as a heretic by Cyril of Alexandria and others at the First Council of Ephesus in 431. See *The Jesus Wars*.

God the Son. In this case, Jesus' death cannot atone for your sins or mine.

Why are so few saved?

After having taught the Bible for several decades, one day it came to me as a shock to realize that neither I nor any other trinitarian could quote one verse from the New Testament or the Bible as a whole, in which the central trinitarian title of Jesus, "God the Son," is found—not one verse! The same is true of the other major trinitarian title of Jesus: the second person of the Trinity. That this title is not found in the Bible is to be expected since the word "Trinity" itself does not exist in the Bible. In short, the very existence of "God the Son" cannot be demonstrated from the pages of the Bible. Yet the amazing thing is that we could talk about, preach about, teach about, think about, and write volumes about, a person whose very existence in the pages of Scripture we could not demonstrate!

How had this come about? I was wondering about this when I looked back at a long career of preaching and teaching and writing. It is said that hindsight is 20/20, and this particular instance of hindsight sends a chill down one's spine when one looks at the pages of history. Looking at the early centuries of the church, we see a faith being built on a Jesus who exists nowhere in the Bible and who was subtly fabricated in a manner that steadily strips him of his Jewish

monotheistic roots. It reminds us of what Jesus said about the last days, that believers must be on their guard because even the elect, the chosen ones, will be deceived (Mt.24:24).

There are approximately two billion Christians in the world today, and they make up one third of the world's population. [142] Given the triumph of Christianity in the world, at least in terms of the number of adherents, why does Jesus say that only a "few" will be saved (Lk.13:23-24)? How do we understand his statement? For all the talk of the dominance of trinitarian Christianity, I have never heard any trinitarian address this spine-chilling question: Why of all the billions will only a "few" be saved?

The question is not hard to answer if we grasp the appalling fact that the vast majority of believers in the world today

[142] This number comes from two encyclopedias of religion, both dated 2007. *The Encyclopedia of World Religions* (p.87) says: "At the beginning of the 21st century, Christianity was the world's largest religion. Some 2 billion people, about a third of the world's population, were at least nominally Christian or of Christian cultural background." *World Religions: Almanac* (vol.1, p.119) says: "In addition to being possibly the most divided religion in the world, Christianity is the world's largest religion, with 2.1 billion followers. Believers live around the globe, but the heaviest concentration of Christians is in Europe and North and South America. The United States contains the most number of Christians, with 85 percent of the population, or 225 million people, who claim to be Christians. Other major areas of Christian population include Europe, with about 550 million; Latin America, with about 450 million; Africa, with about 350 million; and Asia, with about 310 million."

have been deceived in a most tragic way. Is there any other answer to this dreadful question that aligns with Jesus' statement that only a few will be saved? How can the multitudes be saved or go through the narrow gate of life if they place their faith, their trust, their hope, on a trinitarian Jesus, God the Son, whose existence cannot be found in the Scriptures of life?

Faith in the trinitarian Jesus will nullify the hope of salvation. This is not to be taken as a blanket statement that all trinitarians will be condemned and all non-trinitarians will be saved, for there are other spiritual principles in divine judgment (such as one's level of the knowledge of the truth). Yet it is hard to evade the biblical fact that idolatry—whether trinitarian idolatry or any other—will have eternal consequences.

Our present discussion is not just an academic debate over doctrines that have no bearing on our eternal welfare; we are dealing with a vital spiritual matter in which one small error will have eternal consequences. The fearful truth about trinitarian error, properly called heresy, is that it diverges completely from the biblical truth.

All the fullness of the deity

In trinitarianism, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, became incarnate as Jesus Christ. But God the Son is only one of three persons and therefore cannot embody "all

the fullness of the Deity" which is mentioned in Colossians 2:9: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (NIV).

Only the biblical Yahweh, the one true God, has "all the fullness of the Deity". And only the indwelling of Yahweh in the man Christ Jesus correctly explains Colossians 2:9. Once again the trinitarian error is exposed.

Paul's statement that the fullness of God—indeed all the fullness of the Deity—dwells in Christ bodily, is paralleled in the fact that God's people are also filled with God's entire fullness: "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph.3:19).

God's dwelling or indwelling in Christ is "in bodily form," a remarkable truth that comes out also in Colossians 1:19 ("For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell"). The "bodily" indwelling of God in Christ is totally different from the trinitarian union of the two natures of Christ, the divine and the human, in one person. This concept has led to the problem of how a God-man can even be functional, a difficulty that in turn led to the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, a highly philosophical concept that attempts to explain how the two natures interrelate with each other. This doctrine is not based on anything in the Bible but is a man-made concept invented to solve a man-made dilemma.

Scripture offers no support for the doctrine of the two natures, the divine and the human, united inseparably in Christ, by which Jesus is true God and true man. In 451, this unbibli-

cal doctrine was promulgated by the creed of the Council of Chalcedon (the town of Chalcedon was located in Bithynia, in today's Turkey). The attempt to prove this idea using John 1:14 ("the Word became flesh") is erroneous because trinitarians assume without basis that the Word (*logos*) refers to the supposedly preexistent Christ. The fact is that *logos* is never identified with Jesus in either John's Prologue or the rest of the New Testament. [143] The supposed equivalence of the *logos* and Jesus is simply forced on the word of God.

The concept of the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures, the divine and the human, is not only unbiblical but

[143] Not even in Rev.19:13 where the "Word of God" refers not to Christ but to God in the familiar OT picture of God as the "Lord of Hosts" or "Lord of Armies". The word "blood" in the same verse refers not to Christ's blood but the blood of God's vanquished enemies. In fact, the next two verses (14,15) portray the Word of God as the One who leads "the armies of heaven" and whose sword is used to "strike down the nations," culminating in the corpses of kings, captains, mighty men, and horses (v.18). The title "Lord of Hosts" (literally "Yahweh of Armies") occurs about 240 times in the OT, and in each case "the Lord" is literally "Yahweh". (On Rev.19:13, see TOTG, Appendix 6.)

I.H. Marshall, trinitarian, suggests that "the Word of God" in Rev.19:13 does not refer to Christ: "After [John's] prologue, Jesus is no longer referred to as 'the Word'" (*A Concise New Testament Theology*, p.187). On p.220, Marshall says: "The unique use of the title *the Word of God* (Rev 19:13) reminds us of John 1:1-14 and 1 John 1:1-4, but it is not clear whether the rich background of these two verses is needed to understand the usage in Revelation."

also unintelligible. Wikipedia article "Hypostatic Union" puts it politely: "this union is held to defy finite human comprehension". But nonsense in its formal sense also defies comprehension, for if something makes logical sense, it can be comprehended. But the incomprehensibility of the hypostatic union is not something that would seriously trouble trinitarians because they would usually shunt the issue into the realm of "mystery" despite the fact that unintelligibility is not the biblical meaning of mystery. Paul uses the term "mystery" to speak of things hidden in the past but which are now revealed by God.

Only two types of union of persons are found in the Bible: the marriage union of man and woman by which they become one flesh, and the spiritual union of God and man by which they become one spirit (1Cor.6:17). The Bible never speaks of a hypostatic union, a trinitarian invention that in itself created much bitter conflict in the early church over what it means.

Scripture, on the other hand, gives us a wonderful vision of God dwelling in His people, whose bodies serve as His temple on earth. God is found in His people, for the fullness of Yahweh that indwells Jesus also indwells His people: "to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph.3:19). As is often the case in Paul's teaching, what is true of Jesus is also true of God's children.

"I am"

In our trinitarian days, when we saw Jesus' "I am" sayings in John's Gospel, we immediately assumed that Jesus was declaring himself God. In our minds there is no need to prove that Jesus is God, for Jesus declared it himself. Of course none of us thought that the blind man healed by Jesus was claiming to be God when he said "I am" to those who asked him if he was the blind man they had known all along (John 9:9). The most discussed "I am" statement in John's Gospel is the one in the last verse of the following passage:

> 51 "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." 52 The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.' 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" 54 Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' 55 But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." 57 So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:51-58, ESV)

The disputation with the Jews [144] started with Jesus' declaration, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death" (v.51). The key statement is, "if anyone keeps my word". The word which Jesus spoke, as he pointed out many times, was not his own but the Father's. To obey God's word is life, to disobey it is death, as the Jews would know from their own Law. In Jesus' discussion with the Jews, the key message was the keeping of God's word. Jesus had the authority to proclaim God's word because he kept it: "I do know Him and I keep His word" (v.55). Like Moses, Jesus proclaimed God's word, but at a higher level than Moses. Jesus' age, which the Jews overestimated to be nearly fifty, was irrelevant to the issue; Moses was around eighty when he confronted Pharaoh at God's command (Ex.7:7).

[144] Thayer's Greek-English lexicon, *Ioudaios* (Jewish, Judean), says that John "ascribes to Jesus and his apostles language in which they distinguish themselves from the Jews, as though the latter sprang from an alien race". We need to be careful about making excessive statements of this kind which can have undesirable and even dangerous ethnic and religious implications. We should bear in mind something that Jesus said about the Jews: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (Jn.4:22)—hardly a statement that is hostile to the Jews. Paul evidently did not see anything in Jesus' teaching that was hostile to the Jews, for in Paul's thinking it is always "the Jews first" (Rom.1:16; 2:9,10), both in reward and in punishment.

The main theme of this incident is God's word delivered to the Jews through Jesus. Yet trinitarians are interested only in what they suppose are the key words, "Before Abraham was, I am".

A proper reading of John 8:58 would take into consideration the fact that the standalone "I am" in John 8:58 (i.e., without an explicit predicate nominative) is also found in verses 24 and 28 of the same chapter (all verses from ESV):

> **Verse 24:** I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that **I am <u>he</u>** you will die in your sins
>
> **Verse 28:** When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that **I am <u>he</u>**, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me
>
> **Verse 58:** Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I am**.

In verses 24 and 28, the word "he" (see the underlined) is not in the Greek. Hence all three verses have the standalone "I am" in the Greek. Most Bibles (ESV, KJV, NET, NIV, NRSV) legitimately and plausibly add "he" to verses 24 and 28 to complete the intended meaning of the "I am" statements ("I am he"). Yet these Bibles don't do the same for verse 58.

What is Jesus saying about himself when he says "I am he" in verses 24 and 28? Some trinitarians take it to mean "I am God," but others are aware that this reading would be problematic in v.28 because it would make the "I AM" function under the authority of another person, which can hardly be

true of the Almighty "I AM". Hence some trinitarians (plausibly) read verses 24 and 28 to mean, "I am the Messiah," which would align with the explicitly stated objective of John's Gospel, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ" (Jn.20:31). Even John Calvin, a trinitarian, says that it would be a "mistake" to take "I am" in v.24 as a reference to "the divine essence of Christ"; Calvin emphatically takes it as "I am the Messiah".

If in fact verses 24 and 28 declare Jesus to be the Messiah, what about verse 58 ("before Abraham was, I am")? Could it likewise be a declaration that Jesus is the Messiah? This is reinforced by v.56, "your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day," which most trinitarians understand to mean that Abraham had a vision of the *future* Messiah.

But if we take John 8:58 as a reference to Yahweh, namely, the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14, then there would be two main ways of understanding this.

One way is to say that Jesus is identical with Yahweh the "I AM". But this would be problematic to those trinitarians who rightly see Yahweh as being God the Father and not God the Son. If Jesus is Yahweh, that would exclude the Father as Yahweh (in view of Dt.6:4, which says there is only one Yahweh) and even as God (in view of Isa.45:5-5, which says there is no God besides Yahweh).

"I AM" is not a general name of God but the specific name of Yahweh ("I AM has sent me to you," Ex.3:14). If

Jesus claimed to be the I AM, he would be claiming to be Yahweh God. Jesus who did not grasp at equality with God (Phil.2:6) would now be publicly declaring himself the only true God of Israel. Any such intention on the part of Jesus can be ruled out by Phil.2:6, but equally by the fact that only Yahweh is God (Isa.45:5).

The other way of explaining John 8:58 is the one that harmonizes with the entire John's Gospel: In John 8:58, Yahweh is speaking directly through Jesus, saying to the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I AM".

Earlier in history, Yahweh similarly revealed Himself to Israel as the "I AM," through Moses:

> God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Ex.3:14)

But in John 8:58, Yahweh spoke His own Name to Israel, not from a burning bush but through Jesus the one sent by God. This is strengthened by v.28 of the same chapter in which Jesus says that he "speaks just as the Father taught me" (Jn. 8:28). This is similar to the earlier case of John 2:19 in which God spoke directly through Jesus: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (this special case will be discussed in the next chapter).

All this harmonizes with the fact, repeated many times in John's Gospel, that Jesus speaks the very words of the Father:

> "The word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." (John 14:24, ESV)
>
> "For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me." (John 12:49-50, ESV)

The Jews misunderstood the Lord Jesus when he said to them, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." (Jn.8:56) So they asked him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" (v.57)

But Jesus did not say he had seen Abraham, but that "Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day"—namely, the day of Jesus' exaltation as God's Messiah (a view which is held by many trinitarians). Abraham was given a glimpse of the future Messiah and rejoiced at what he saw. Abraham was, after all, a man who looked "to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb.11:10). This is the heavenly city from which Christ will reign over the universe as Yahweh's regent.

Jesus never said that Abraham had seen him with his physical eyes but that Abraham saw "my day," which is taken uncontroversially by trinitarians and non-trinitarians alike to

mean that Abraham, by faith, caught a glorious vision of the coming Messiah's ministry of salvation.[145]

A comparison of "before Abraham was, I am" with the other "I am" sayings in John's Gospel [146] shows that the former is fundamentally different from the latter. The general "I am" sayings are portraits of Jesus as the light, the door, the resurrection, and so on, but the "I AM" statement in John 8:58 is unique and stands on its own.

[145] Most trinitarians hold this view of John 8:56. *NIV Study Bible* says, "Jesus probably was not referring to any one occasion but to Abraham's general joy in the fulfilling of God's purposes in the Messiah, by which all nations on earth would receive blessing." Thomas Constable says that Jesus "fulfilled what Abraham looked forward to" and that Abraham's vision was a "prediction that God would bless the whole world through Abraham". *Expositor's Bible Commentary* says, "Abraham had a preview of Jesus' ministry and rejoiced in it."

[146] I am the bread of life (John 6:35), the light of the world (8:12), the door of the sheep (10:7), the good shepherd (10:11), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way and the truth and the life (14:6), the true vine (15:1).

Supplementary comment (optional reading)

Many take Jesus' "I am" declaration in John 8:58 as a claim to deity because of its similarity to the words, "I am who I am," spoken by Yahweh in Exodus 3:14. If we limit our analysis to the Greek text (the NT and LXX) and not the Hebrew (the MT), then the equating of the "I am" of John 8:58 ("before Abraham was, I am") with the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14 cannot be sustained purely on the basis of similar vocabulary.

Among the many instances of "I am" in John's Gospel, one was spoken by the blind man who had been healed by Jesus. When the people asked him if he was the blind man they had known all along, he answered, "I am" (John 9:9). Most English translations expand this into something like "I am he" or "I am the one" or "I am the man". In the Greek, *egō eimi* (ἐγώ εἰμι) which the man spoke is the same as the "I am" spoken by Jesus in John 8:58. In the LXX, a similar use of the standalone *egō eimi* is found in 2Sam.2:20 (Asahel said "I am" to Abner).

But there is another Greek construction for "I am"—*ho ōn* (ὁ ὤν)—which is different from the *egō eimi* spoken by Jesus. In Ex.3:14 of the LXX when Yahweh said "I am who I am," the first "I am" is *egō eimi* whereas the second "I am" is *ho ōn*. Yahweh did not simply say *egō eimi* ("I am"), He said *egō eimi ho ōn*, usually translated as "I am that I am" or "I am who I am". In other words, Yahweh's "I am who I am" in Ex.3:14 is longer than Jesus' "I am" in Jn.8:58. In the "I am who I am" of Ex.3:14, the first "I am" (*egō eimi*) merely introduces the second and definitive "I am" (*ho ōn*). Historically it is the second "I am" (*ho ōn*) and not the first (*egō eimi*) that was apparently a byword for "God" among some Greek-speaking Jews (e.g. Philo's *Life of Moses*, and *Cambridge Companion to Philo*, p.198).

Similarly, in Exodus 3:14, when Yahweh instructed Moses to say to the Israelites, "I AM has sent me to you," the "I AM" is the definitive *ho ōn* rather than the *egō eimi* that Jesus spoke in John 8:58.

Since our distinction between *egō eimi* and *ho ōn* is based on the Greek and not the Hebrew, does it have any relevance for Exodus 3:14 ("I am who I am")? Perhaps, and for an unexpected reason. In Revelation 1:4 ("who is and who was and who is to come," which is uttered by God and not by Jesus), John appends *ho ōn* in the nominative to the preposition *apo* even though *apo* calls for the genitive. This striking grammatical anomaly may be an intended allusion to Exodus 3:14. The possibility that John is making a heightened distinction between the common *egō eimi* and the (possibly) theologically significant *ho ōn* in Revelation 1:4 means that Jesus' use of *egō eimi* rather than *ho ōn* in John 8:58 may be significant, and may give less support to the trinitarian view of this verse than is supposed by trinitarians.

Chapter 12

Yahweh and His Relationship to Jesus

The beauty of Yahweh: A meditation

The first part of this chapter is meditative. Let us begin with the beauty and splendor of Yahweh our God:

> One thing I ask of Yahweh, one thing I seek:
> to dwell in Yahweh's house all the days of my life,
> to enjoy the sweetness of Yahweh, to seek out his temple.
> (Psalm 27:4, NJB)

The Psalmist speaks of "the sweetness of Yahweh" (NJB) or "the beauty of the LORD" (ESV). And where is His beauty seen? Most wonderfully in His love and concern for His people, notably the afflicted and the destitute, as seen in His taking care of their physical and spiritual needs:

> **Isaiah 63:9** In all their affliction He was afflicted. (ESV)
>
> **Exodus 3:7-8** Yahweh said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them." (KJV, "Yahweh" in the Hebrew restored)
>
> **Titus 3:4-6** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. (ESV)
>
> **1 John 4:9-10** This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (ESV)

The Old Testament portrays Yahweh as the perfect embodiment of goodness, lovingkindness, and compassion. This picture is carried over into the New Testament in which it is said of Him: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (Jn.3:16).

Yahweh's lovingkindness is exemplified in Jesus in an encounter with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn.4:7ff). Jesus was a total stranger to her, yet she wasn't intimidated by his presence. He confronted her about her sins, yet without humiliating her or driving her away, but in a way that liber-

ated her from her sins. That is the kind of spiritual help that she, a sinner, would welcome.

One of the verses just quoted, 1 John 4:9-10, brings out the vastness of God's love for us in His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. But just a few verses later, John reverses the matter and talks about our love for God and His people:

> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 John 4:20)

The one who is loved by God must love His children. But how do we apply this teaching? It is familiar enough to us, yet many are troubled by it, for the faults and failings of some brothers and sisters are all too obvious. They are hard to love, yet God has no problem loving them. He dwells in believers, the temple of God (1Cor.3:16), and that would include the brother or sister we find hard to love. We are happy to love God whom we don't see, and Jesus Christ whom we also don't see because he is at the right hand of God.

Yet many believers love God and Christ more than themselves and their loved ones even though they cannot see God. Although unbelievers generally pay no attention to God because they don't see Him, yet all believers were at one time unbelievers. What had caused them to change their attitude towards God whom they cannot see? How can God who was not real to them suddenly become real? Is this a shift in intellectual belief or is it a spiritual transformation that had

caused them to echo with Paul, "I know whom I have believed" (2Tim.1:12)?

True believers experience God's transforming work in their hearts and minds, the radicalness of which is expressed in the words, "Formerly you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord" (Eph.5:8). His transforming power gives us life, and changes the world around us.

Salvation is from Yahweh, the Rock of my salvation

The foundation stone on which to build a comprehensive understanding of salvation is the truth that *salvation is from Yahweh*. It runs through the Bible and is seen in the following Old Testament statements (all from NJB):

> **Psalm 27:1** Yahweh is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?
>
> **Psalm 68:20** This God of ours is a God who saves; from Lord Yahweh comes escape from death.
>
> **Jonah 2:9** Salvation comes from Yahweh!

Salvation, like truth and light, is embodied in Yahweh. He saves us because He is salvation and He is love. He alone is our Savior: "There is no other god except me, no saving God, no Saviour except me!" (Isaiah 45:21, NJB) "You know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior" (Hosea 13:4).

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb.13:8). The word "yesterday" does not refer to eternal preexistence but is a temporal reference to a point in time past. This statement is meaningful in the context of Jesus' perfection which mirrors the Father's unchanging perfection. God's perfection is constant because He is "the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17), as also seen in the Old Testament: "I Yahweh do not change" (Mal.3:6), and "you are the same, and your years will have no end" (Psalm 102:27, quoted in Heb.1:12).

The meaning of "Yahweh" has been the topic of much scholarly discussion (see Appendix 3) and is well expressed in the description, "He who is, who was, and who is to come" (Rev.1:4,8; 11:17; 16:5), and "from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psa.90:2), and "the living God" (Josh.3:10; Psa.42:2; Jer.10:10; Mt.16:16; Rom.9:26; 1Tim.4:10).

To the eternal God, there is neither past nor future. He always is. By contrast, we finite beings perceive time as past and future. In the blink of an eye, one second in the future is one second in the past. The present is the constant flux of the future moving to the past, and we are like fish swimming in a stream. We live in the flow of time and aim to make the most of it.

Because a rock symbolizes stability and unchangeableness, God is described as our Rock and our Savior:

> **2 Samuel 22:2-4** Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. I call upon Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. (ESV, "Yahweh" in the Hebrew restored)
>
> **Verse 47** Yahweh lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation.

Yahweh is called the Rock some 30 times in the Psalms. To rest upon the Rock is to take shelter in it. Yahweh saves those who put their trust in Him, "the rock of my salvation" (Ps.89:26; 95:1). The Rock is not a static object but the living God: "Yahweh lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation" (Ps.18:46; 2Sam.22:47). This is the basis of the oath "as Yahweh lives" which occurs some 28 times in the OT. Yahweh would often make an oath or declaration on the basis of His being alive: "As I live, declares Yahweh," a declaration that occurs 14 times in Ezekiel alone.

Because of God's rock-like, unchanging quality, He doesn't change His mind about the promises He has made:

> **Numbers 23:19** God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? (ESV)
>
> **Psalm 110:4** Yahweh has sworn and will not change his mind (cf. Heb.7:21)

The gospel of God

Yahweh is the center of the Old and New Testaments. Hence Paul speaks of the gospel as "the gospel of God" (Rom.1:1; 15:16; 2Cor.11:7; 1Th.2:2,8,9) or "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). Jesus likewise preached the "gospel of God" (Mk.1:14), the good news of Yahweh.

But Yahweh's gospel focuses on Jesus the Messiah (the Christ), for God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2Cor.5:19). Hence the New Testament also proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ the perfect man, for it is through this perfect man that God reconciles the world to Himself. It is as perfect man that Jesus Christ is the savior of the world.

Mark speaks of "the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mk.1:1). Paul speaks of "the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2Th.1:8); in the next chapter Paul says that God "called you through our gospel so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:14). God's intention is that through the gospel, the believer may participate in Jesus' glory. God does not glorify Jesus only for Jesus' sake but for ours as well.

The spiritual union of Yahweh and Jesus

It is crucial for us to understand the nature of the spiritual union of Yahweh and Jesus, the unique Son and perfect man. Jesus speaks of this union when he says, "Just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" (John 17:21). The last clause, "that they also may be in us," indicates

that this union is meant to include believers. This is seen in Paul's statement, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (1Cor.6:17).

But in reality, because of our imperfection, our union with God is less intimate than the union of God and Jesus which is expressed as "you in me, I in you" rather than in terms of a common substance within the Trinity, a quasi-material concept that was fabricated by the Gentile church but is found nowhere in the Bible. The spiritual union of Yahweh and Jesus means that they cannot be separated in God's plan of salvation. In the work of salvation, Jesus' role as the Lamb of God is crucial, for by it he becomes the expiation that atones for man's sins.[147]

Through atonement in Christ, God reconciles man to Himself and gives him the priceless gift of eternal life by which redeemed man becomes a new creation in Christ. The sacrifice of Jesus negates the death-dealing effects of sin, and gives life to all who believe. Christ is a life-giving spirit (1Cor. 15:45) to those who have faith and have become members of his body, the church, of which he is the head. They partake of

[147] As seen in: "whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood" (Rom. 3:25); "to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb.2:17); "he is the propitiation for our sins" (1Jn.2:2); "he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for your sins" (1Jn.4:10). The Greek for "propitiation" (more accurately "expiation") is *hilastērion* in the first verse, *hilaskomai* in the second, and *hilasmos* in the last two.

God's divine nature (2Pet.1:4) and become His people and special possession. Such are the rich blessings that Yahweh has bestowed on believers through Christ.

Yahweh as Father

In the New Testament, Yahweh is spoken of as "Father". This was how Jesus addressed God in prayer, and he would sometimes use a more intimate term of address, "Abba," which is the Aramaic equivalent of Papa or Daddy.

The Greek for "father" (*patēr*) occurs 413 times in the New Testament. About 60% of the occurrences refer to God as Father, with 136 of these found in John's Gospel.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites addressed Yahweh as Father ("You, Yahweh, are our Father," Isa.63:16) but more often in a formal manner, e.g., to say that Yahweh is our Father on account of His being our Creator: "Is He not your Father who created you, who made and established you?" (Dt.32:6); "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" (Mal.2:10). This formality is bridged over in the New Testament yet without diminishing our reverence for God. The essence of New Testament spirituality lies in a new way of relating to Yahweh as our Father, who loves and cares for His people.

The intimacy with God our Father is the dynamic force in the believer's life in Christ, and is achieved through mutual indwelling: "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you"

(Jn.14:20). Since we are in Christ and Christ is in the Father, we are in the Father ("that they also may be in us," Jn.17:21). For this to be a reality, we must experience it and not merely analyze it intellectually. This intimacy is made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit who moves God's people to cry out "Abba" (Rom.8:15; Gal.4:6). If anyone does not relate to God as Abba, he is not one of God's people.

It is our relationship with Yahweh the living God that makes the gospel the good news it really is. Neither Judaism nor Islam speaks of a relationship with God in a way that is as intimate, yet the sad truth is that even among Christians, few experience this kind of intimacy. For most Christians, the religion called Christianity is as formal and external as any other, sometimes more so. Worse yet, the heresy of trinitarianism has removed Yahweh, whom Jesus calls the only true God, from our focus and line of sight.

But if we are united with God, what is amazing, even sublime, is the conjoining of the majestic name of Yahweh with the loving respect we show Him by calling Him "Abba" or "Papa". It is a remarkable juxtaposition of opposites: the omnipotent God and a helpless child; the Almighty and the weak; the Most High and the most lowly; the infinite and the finite; the Everlasting God and one whose "days are like grass and the flower of the field" (Ps.103:15).

This gives new perspective to the words: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt.18:3). It is young children who

call their fathers "Papa" or "Daddy" or, in Aramaic, "Abba". Anyone who thinks he has been a Christian long enough to outgrow addressing Yahweh as "Papa" has not yet understood the intimacy of this living relationship. In the final days of Jesus, in the crisis in which he found himself, Jesus still addressed Yahweh as "Abba, Father" (Mk.14:36). We likewise call God "Abba" because of the deep work of the Spirit within us:

> **Romans 8:15** You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (ESV)
>
> **Galatians 4:6** Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." (NIV)

God wants us to call Him "Abba" and to have a close and living relationship with Him. This is established when Yahweh reaches out to us in love, and we respond to Him with all our heart, soul, and strength (Dt.6:5; Mt.22:37).

Jewish piety has moved towards a less intimate relationship with God by adopting a degree of formality in relating to Him even to the extent of not pronouncing the name Yahweh. This name has been replaced with *Adonai*, a formal and distant form of address equivalent to "Lord" or "Sir". It is only natural to have hesitations about addressing one's Lord and Master by his personal name. So over time it was taught that the name Yahweh must never be uttered even though the

Bible encourages God's people to proclaim the name and to make an oath by it (Dt.10:20; Jer.12:16). The prohibition of uttering the name Yahweh was a later, post-exilic development in Judaism. In early Jewish history, Yahweh's name was "regularly pronounced with its proper vowels," according to the Jewish work, *Encyclopedia Judaica* (see Appendix 1 of the present book). But irrespective of what we have done to God's name, the fact remains that Jesus taught his disciples a new way of relating to God, namely, addressing Him as Abba, Daddy.

I am the way, the truth, and the life

> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Trinitarians view John 14:6 as providing evidence for the deity of Jesus. But the meaning of these words is already explained by Jesus himself, and we don't need to make them mean what they don't mean. Nothing in this verse says that Jesus is God. What Jesus does instead is to declare that the threefold function of his work—as the way, the truth, and the life—is summed up in the concluding words, "No one comes to the Father except through me". Our final destination and objective is not Jesus Christ but God the Father, and we come to Him through Jesus who is "the way"—thus ruling out any other way.

Truth and life are also mentioned because they are linked to the way: Jesus is the true and living way. The words "truth" and "life" cannot be plucked out of this context to make the claim that since Jesus is the truth and the life, he is God.

The fact that "truth" and "life" are vital concepts in John's Gospel can be seen in the following statistics. John's Gospel has 20 instances of the Greek word *alētheia* ("truth"), the highest in the New Testament, the next highest being Romans and First John (8 times each). The word *zōē* ("life") in decreasing order of frequency: 32 times in John's Gospel, 17 times in Revelation, 14 times in Romans, 10 times in 1 John. These are from John's writings except those in Romans.

These statistics confirm what we have just said, that truth and life are fundamental concepts in John's Gospel. Hence their appearance in John 14:6 is not something that can be torn out of the broader context and made to prove Jesus' deity. A look at the other instances of "truth" and "life" in the Bible will negate the misuse of these two important and ubiquitous words. Yahweh's truth and life—which are embodied in Jesus—will bring the one who believes in Jesus into a dynamic faith that includes truth and life. The believer participates in these spiritual realities that are ultimately found in Yahweh, the "living and true God" (1Thess.1:9).

John the Baptist draws from Isaiah 40:3 ("the way of Yahweh") his proclamation of "the way of the Lord" in John 1:23. Jesus later speaks of "the way" to his disciples: "You know the way to where I am going" (Jn.14:4). Then Thomas

says, "We do not know where you are going," and this leads to John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." To know Jesus is to know him who is the way. The "way" is not a teaching derived from the various sects in the time of Jesus but something embodied in the person of Jesus, who is the way, and in whom the truth and the life will empower with new life those who believe in him.

The three principles—the way, the truth, and the life—are inseparably linked. It is the integration of the three that takes us to the Father, who is the source of all three. Truth and life are not independent of each other, but are integral elements of the way. Yet trinitarians pull this verse apart, out of context, and make it mean "I am the truth and the life" in some absolute divine sense. But Jesus cannot possibly be "the life" in the absolute sense because his own life depends on the Father's: "I live because of the Father" (Jn.6:57); "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (5:26).

When we see that the theme of John 14:6 is our coming to the Father, we are left wondering why this verse is even taken as a proof text of Jesus' deity. Jesus is not the final destination but the way to the destination.

But for us to go to the Father, it is not enough to know what is our destination. We must first deal with the sin that is impeding our progress. Sin is a fearful reality both in the world around us and within our hearts. All around us is a famine of spiritual truth, and within us is the lack of life, for

man is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph.2:1). But Jesus draws us into God's truth and life, for Jesus the perfect man embodies these qualities in himself even if his own life is derived from the Father's ("I live because of the Father," Jn.6:57). Jesus is the way to the Father for his life is wholly focused on God and he is the only mediator between God and man (1Tim.2:5).

The three elements in "I am the way, the truth, and the life" are prominent in Psalms and Proverbs. In the LXX (the Greek Old Testament), "way" (*hodos*, ὁδός) occurs 94 times in Proverbs and 79 times in Psalms, more than in any other book; "truth" (*alētheia*, ἀλήθεια) occurs 59 times in Psalms, more than in any other book; "life" (*zōē*, ζωή) occurs 38 times in Proverbs and 25 times in Psalms, more than in any other OT book. Hence the way, the truth, and the life are three key concepts in the wisdom books of Psalms and Proverbs, as also in John's Gospel. These three principles (the way, the truth, the life) link the three books—Psalms, Proverbs, John —together, giving us new insight into Jesus' statement that the Scriptures testify about him (Jn.5:39). Vincent Taylor makes a helpful comment on John 14:6:

> The full force of these names is perceived only when they are taken together, as the Evangelist (John) uses them … Jesus is "the Way," through whom, as "the Truth," we receive the knowledge of God, and in whom, as "the Life," we have here and now eternal life. The words which follow the three names,

> "no one comes to the Father, but by me" (14:6b), refer, not only to the first, but to all. Christ is "the Way" to the Father because he is also "the Truth" and "the Life" … for of whom else can it be said that he is the way to the Father, the perfect revelation of God, and the giver of fullness of life? (*Names of Jesus*, p.145f.)

No one knows the Son except the Father, and the Father except the Son

> No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matthew 11:27, parallel Luke 10:22)

When we look at the union of the Father and the Son, we cannot help but reflect on our own situation and confess that sin does indeed separate the sinner from God: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2, NIV). But Jesus who is perfectly sinless and obedient to the Father is able to have unhindered fellowship with Him as no one else can. Jesus is the only person in humanity who through perfect sinlessness and doing the things pleasing to God (Jn.8:29) has this unique communion with Yahweh.

The wonderful message of the closeness between God the Father and the man Christ Jesus is lost to the trinitarian for whom such intimacy is thought to be possible only between two divine persons and not between God and man. In

trinitarianism, the intimacy between God the Father and God the Son is taken for granted because it is internal to the triune Godhead. The wonderful truth that God and man can have a relationship as deep as that between God and Christ is rejected by trinitarians at an enormous spiritual loss. The sweetness of the communion between Yahweh and the man Christ Jesus ought to inspire every believer to a closer walk with God. Yet trinitarianism robs the believer of that inspiration by suppressing the wonderful truth that we can enter into the same communion with the Father if we follow in Jesus' steps.

The closeness between God and Jesus, and that between Jesus and his disciples, are expressed in the Greek word *kolpos*:

> **John 1:18** No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom (*kolpos*) of the Father, he has made him known. (RSV)
>
> **John 13:23** One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast (*kolpos*) of Jesus. (RSV)

On *kolpos* BDAG says, "apart from the idea of dining together on the same couch [Jn.13:23], 'being in someone's bosom' denotes *the closest association*" (italics mine).

Inner communication between the Father and the Son

To appreciate Jesus as the only perfect man, we need to understand his inner communication with Yahweh his Father. To our surprise, God intends that the same kind of intercommunication be established between God and us, made possible through the work of Jesus Christ. The failure to see this will rob us of the riches of the good news of Jesus Christ and what he came to accomplish for us. What is the purpose of the death of the Lamb of God if not to open a new and living way to Yahweh our Father?

But the problem for the Bible scholar is that the intercommunication between Yahweh and Jesus and the believer is not amenable to the type of analysis demanded by "scientific theology". If anyone tries to learn more about this intercommunication by consulting the Bible commentaries, he or she will soon be disappointed. That is because the commentator who doesn't communicate with God in daily life won't be able to give much illumination on this vital subject. Inner communication with God has to do with life, spiritual life, eternal life. Life has to be lived, not talked about or analyzed. Those who don't live this kind of life won't know much about it except by hearsay or intellectual analysis. The highest academic qualifications do not qualify anyone to speak on the topic of intercommunication with "the Living God" (Heb. 9:14). In theological institutes today, there are academics who are teaching a subject—knowing God—which in terms of

their life experience they are not qualified to teach. How can anyone lecture on the spiritual dynamics of Jesus' life if his own life is not driven by the same dynamics? The only things that academics can discuss are the external issues of the gospels: date, author, theme, etc.

Theological colleges generally don't ask their academic staff about their spiritual lives, much less whether they communicate with God. The most important requirements for employment are their academic credentials and doctrinal position. It seems that everyone has forgotten that neither Jesus nor the apostles had any academic credentials. What God looks for in a person is not his academic qualifications but whether he knows the living God.

The problem surfaces again when we come to the subject of the present book: Jesus the Only Perfect Man. Anyone who doesn't have a living relationship with God won't be able to understand this topic, for he won't be able to identify with Jesus who maintains a continuous inner communication with the Father, as expressed in, "You, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" (John 17:21).

The mutual indwelling, whether between God and Jesus or between God and His people, is ultimately between God and man, not between God and God, that is, not between "God the Father" and "God the Son" as in trinitarianism. The Bible nowhere speaks of a mutual indwelling of God in God. Just as Jesus is God's temple (John 2:19), so believers are a temple of God (1Cor.3:16).

The failure to see that intercommunication with the Father is possible not only for Jesus but also for us, is a failure to see that many statements about Jesus in the Bible have parallel statements about believers. "As he is, so are we in the world" (1Jn.4:17; NIV 2011 has, "in this world we are like Jesus"). Jesus repeatedly says that his Father lives in him, as seen in the following verses from John's Gospel (both ESV).

> **John 14:20** "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (also John 10:38; 14:10-11)
>
> **John 17:21** "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

The latter verse, John 17:21, reveals an additional principle: we are in God and in Christ. Conversely, God is in us because the believer's body is the temple of God:

> **1 Corinthians 3:16-17** Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (ESV)
>
> **1 Corinthians 6:19** Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? (ESV)

Jesus also speaks of his body as the temple of God:

> **John 2:19-22** [19] Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." [20] The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" [21] But he was speaking about the temple of his body. [22] When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this … (ESV)

Here Jesus refers to his coming death ("destroy this temple," v.19) and resurrection ("raised from the dead," v.22). But here we see something anomalous in the words, "In three days I will raise it up," for they seem to contradict the consistent NT teaching that it is God the Father who raises Jesus from the dead. In fact, apart from John 2:19, every reference to Jesus' resurrection in the NT speaks of God the Father as the one who raises Jesus from the dead, *without exception.*[148] But here in John 2:19, Jesus says, "I will raise it up"; it is not the Father who raises Jesus from the dead but Jesus who raises himself.

How do we handle this sole exception to the consistent New Testament teaching that it is the Father who raises Jesus? Sweep it under the carpet by letting it go? The key to a resolution lies in Jesus' repeated declaration in the very same gospel (of John) that he does everything, says everything, and teaches everything as commanded by the Father. When we realize that Jesus speaks only what the Father commands him

[148] Acts 2:24,32; 3:15,26; 13:30; Rom.4:24; 6:4; 8:11; 1Cor.15:4,12 (divine passive, as in Jn.2:22); Gal.1:1; Eph.1:20; Col.2:12; 1Pet.1:21.

to speak, we will see that it must have been the Father Himself who is speaking through Jesus in John 2:19 ("I will raise it up"). This conclusion is strengthened by the words that appear just three verses later: "when therefore he was raised from the dead". The words "he was raised" are translated from the Greek *ēgerthē*, the aorist passive of *egeirō*, confirming that Jesus did not raise himself up.

God works and speaks through Jesus

Before we can identify with Jesus our Lord, we need to see that he is like us, the people of the world. Trinitarianism got us started on the wrong foot by describing Jesus as "God-man" or "God incarnate," making him a person we cannot understand, let alone identify with. Trinitarianism has placed Jesus, right from his birth, on a different level from us such that he could only be regarded as an object of worship and not as a human like us, which puts the reality of his humanity in question. So we read about Jesus in the gospels with tinted glasses, and view his activities as being those of a God-man and not a human being like us. As a result we cannot relate to the gospel narratives about Jesus in the important sense of emulating his life, which is what we are called to do.

It is crucial to keep in mind that the works Jesus does are done by the Father through him, and that the words Jesus speaks are the words of the Father, the One who sent him and dwells in him. The following are from John's Gospel (ESV unless otherwise noted):

> **John 14:10** "The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works."
>
> **John 3:34** "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God."
>
> **John 7:16** "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."
>
> **John 8:28** "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me."
>
> **John 5:19** "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (NIV)
>
> **John 12:49-50** "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life, so whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." (NIV 1984)

In the last of these verses, Jesus says that the Father "commanded me what to say and how to say it". [149] So complete is

[149] NIV 1984 and CJB have "what to say and how to say it". In the Greek, "what" and "how" are translated from the same interrogative pronoun "tis" (τίς, not to be confused with τὶς). A common meaning of "tis" is the interrogative "what" though the exclamatory "how" is also possible (BDAG). By rendering the two instances of "tis" differently as "what" and "how," both of which are lexically valid, NIV 1984 and CJB avoid the repetitious and redundant "what to say and

Jesus' submission to the Father that he says exactly what his Father wants him to say, even in the tone and manner intended by God.

In John's Gospel, Jesus repeatedly says that his Father works and speaks through him in everything he does and says. This is linked to the fact that the Father has given His works to Jesus to complete and to perfect:

> For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish (*teleioō*, to complete, perfect), the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. (John 5:36, ESV)

Jesus' perfect completion of the works that the Father had sent him to do is crucial for mankind's salvation, for these works include the teaching of God's life-giving word and the sacrificial giving of himself on the cross as a "ransom for many" (Mt.20:28; Mk.10:45).

Yet we are to do greater works than Jesus! "Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father" (Jn.14:12, ESV). This creates a conundrum unique to trinitarianism: If we argue for Jesus' deity on account of the works that he does, how shall we regard those who do even greater works by the same power of God that worked through Jesus and is available to all who believe in him? Trinitarianism attributes Jesus' miracles such as healing the sick

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what to speak" found in other translations.

and raising the dead to his divinity. If that were so, why would Jesus tell his followers, none of whom is divine, that they will do greater works than he, or replicate what he has done but with greater power?

It is by God's indwelling that Jesus functions moment by moment in all that he does, and this ought to be the life principle for his disciples. The logic underlying this connection is uncomplicated, yet has vital spiritual consequences, for if the Father does all these things through Jesus, would He not do the same through those who respond to Jesus' call to follow him? This line of spiritual logic would be broken if Jesus is utterly different from his disciples as is in trinitarian dogma. Trinitarianism thus destroys a vital principle which Jesus taught in John's Gospel, suppressing the truth that the believer will do greater works than Jesus (with the important exception of being an atonement for sin) by God's power that is available to those who have faith in Jesus.

When we read the New Testament without the distorting trinitarian concepts of a later era, we will look to Jesus as one we can emulate and identify with, and from whom we can learn to let Yahweh dwell in us as He dwelled in Jesus. When Yahweh lives in us day by day, we will know the truth of what Jesus said about Yahweh's power working in the believer, whether it is in our preaching or teaching, or in acts of healing and casting out demons.

Jesus and the Old Testament prophets

Jesus describes himself as "a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God" (Jn.8:40). Note the sharp distinction between "man" and "God," and how Jesus puts himself squarely on the side of humanity. The fact that Jesus is a man who is given the truth by God collides with the trinitarian notion of the God-man. The words "I heard from God" mirror what every prophet in Israel experienced in their declaration, "Thus says the LORD" (literally, "Thus says Yahweh").

The Old Testament prophets did not speak their own thoughts but would speak forth whatever Yahweh told them to say. Hence they would usually preface their pronouncements with, "Thus says Yahweh" (or in most Bibles, "thus says the LORD"). Similarly, the things that Jesus said were not his own words but those of his Father (John 12:49). Jesus did not use the prefatory words, "Thus says the Lord," because Yahweh by His dwelling in Jesus would simply speak through Jesus either directly (e.g. "destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," Jn.2:19) or indirectly (e.g. where Jesus speaks of the Father in the third person).

False prophets in the Old Testament also prefaced their pronouncements with "Thus says Yahweh". So how are they to be identified? Jesus says, "Beware of false prophets … by their fruits you will know them" (Mt.7:15-16). We discern their falsehood if holiness, a vital element of perfection, is lacking in their lives.

In his time Jesus was recognized as a prophet of Israel, and some have compared him to Elijah (Mt.16:14). Prophets not only foretold the future but were also teachers of the nation. Jesus himself was called "teacher" (in Matthew alone: 8:19; 12:38; 19:16; 22:16,24,36), and his wisdom was admired even by his enemies (they marveled at his answer to the question of paying taxes to Caesar, Mt.22:17-22). But unlike the prophets of old, Jesus doesn't just speak the truth, his life perfectly embodies it. He doesn't just say "I live the truth" but says, "I am the truth." That is the beauty and power of Jesus, the only perfect man.

Jesus, sent by the Father

Reflected in John's vocabulary is the emphatic teaching—in terms of preponderance and in terms of strong statements by Jesus—that Jesus is sent by God. For example, *pempō* (πέμπω, send) occurs 79 times in the New Testament, with 32 of the occurrences in John's Gospel and 5 in Revelation. No other NT book comes close to John in terms of frequency. The three synoptics—Matthew, Mark, Luke—have only 15 occurrences combined. Acts, with 11 occurrences, comes in at a distant second after John.

A study of how *pempō* is used in John's Gospel will lead to the discovery that it is often used in the statement "the One who sent me" or equivalent statements such as "the Father who sent me" or "He who sent me". Of the 32 instances of

pempō in John, a surprisingly large majority, 26 to be exact, are found in such phrases.[150] This practically makes "the Father who sent me" a title of God in John's Gospel!

Another word, *apostellō* (ἀποστέλλω, send), with 132 occurrences in the NT, is evenly distributed among the four gospels and Acts: Matthew 22 times, Mark 20 times, Luke 26 times, John 28 times, Acts 24 times, and the rest of the New Testament 12 times.

Of the 28 occurrences in John's Gospel, 17 refer to God the Father as the one who sent Jesus into the world.[151] Combining these 17 instances of *apostellō* and the 26 instances of *pempō* which carry this meaning, we have a total of 43 statements about Jesus as the one sent by the Father—in John's Gospel alone! This works out to an average of two such statements per chapter. There are in addition three instances of *apostellō* in First John (4:9,10,14) which speak of the Father sending the Son. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Hebrews 3:1 speaks of Jesus as the "apostle (*apostolos*) and high priest of our confession".

The chief mission of the one who is sent is to do the will of the one who sent him. In the case of Jesus, this is stated in

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[150] The remaining six instances of *pempō* in John's Gospel are used in the following ways: the sending of the Spirit (14:26; 15:26; 16:7); some priests and Levites were sent by the Jews (Jn.1:22); Jesus sent the disciples (13:20; 20:21).

[151] The 17 occurrences are John 3:17,34; 5:36,38; 6:29,57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3,8,18,21,23,25; 20:21.

John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me." It would therefore be expected that *thelēma* (θέλημα, the will) is a significant word in John. A quick check confirms that *thelēma*, when referring to God's will, occurs in Matthew 5 times, Mark once, and Luke once. It occurs 8 times in John's Gospel which is 20% shorter than Matthew.

As the one sent by the Father, Jesus comes in his Father's name (John 5:43; 10:25), acts as his Father's representative, and does everything on God's behalf as the one authorized to act in His name. Only the one who has been sent by another can act in that person's name. We may legitimately baptize a person in accordance with Mt.28:19 only if we ourselves have been sent by God as His servants.

The trinitarian Jesus makes every God-appointed ministry redundant, including that of being the Messiah

In John's Gospel, the way Jesus functioned is similar to the way the Old Testament prophets functioned. The Jews who spoke with Jesus immediately saw the striking similarities between him and the prophets of old, notably Elijah, who is mentioned many times in the gospels (Matthew 9 times, Mark 9 times, Luke 8 times, John twice).

There was nothing that Jesus did in his earthly ministry, with the crucial exception of being an atonement for sin, that was not paralleled by the prophets. The main difference

between Jesus and the prophets lies in the unsurpassed level of Jesus' communion with the Father (Yahweh), which was made possible by his being sinless all his life. Even Isaiah, the greatest of the OT prophets, confessed his sinfulness: "I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa.6:5). There is hardly a person who has not sinned in this way ("if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man," James 3:2). It doesn't mean that God didn't communicate with Isaiah, otherwise, with no one perfect in the world, there would be no one with whom God could communicate! In fact the vision granted to Isaiah, that of God in His glory, is perhaps the most magnificent in the Old Testament.

"The Son can do nothing of his own but only what he sees the Father doing" (Jn.5:19). The words "sees the Father" indicate that visions of God are a common experience for Jesus. Jesus "is in the bosom of the Father" (Jn.1:18), living in the closest possible communion with God. In a statement famously known as "a bolt from the Johannine blue," Jesus says: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Mt.11:27, parallel Lk.10:22) The intimacy between Jesus and his Father is so deep that Jesus is handed all things by the Father, whom Jesus addresses as "Lord of heaven and earth" (Mt.11:25).

But trinitarianism makes all this superfluous, for if Jesus is God the Son, he would "automatically" have the closest poss-

ible relationship with God the Father by virtue of a common divine substance. The beauty of the intimate relationship between God and man, expressing the heights of what is possible for man by God's love, is simply wiped out by the trinitarian teaching of Jesus as the God-man. Is there anything impressive about a communion between "God the Father" and "God the Son," two consubstantial persons?

The problem goes beyond that, for trinitarian doctrine makes redundant every God-appointed ministry and office bestowed on man such as the office of priest or king, since it would be God (as Jesus) who takes up the work that God has assigned man to do.

In trinitarianism, it is the God-man rather than man who says, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Lk.4:18). This goes against the principle that the preaching of the gospel is a task assigned to human preachers and evangelists. What happens in trinitarianism is that God the Son is anointed with God the Spirit to be the Messiah, the Anointed One, whom God the Father sends into the world. Why does God the Father have to send a divine person as the Messiah? Is it because no human Messiah is allowed? Why does God as God the Son do the work that God has appointed man to do? The whole matter is becoming incomprehensible. In biblical teaching, God came into the world to dwell in the man Jesus, not a divine Jesus. Does God dispense with man in the ministry of salvation? Can God who is immortal die for man's sins?

If there is nothing else that man can do, at the very least he can die! And dying on the cross for man's sin was indeed what Jesus did.

Jesus' chief earthly ministry at the present time

After Jesus had been taken up into heaven, he was seated at the right hand of the Father. Since he is now in heaven, what is his present earthly ministry? One of the chief of his ministries is that of intercession for God's people:

> **Romans 8:34** Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
>
> **Hebrews 7:25** He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (cf. Isa.53:12)
>
> **Hebrews 9:24** For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.
>
> **1 John 2:1** My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who intercedes before the Father —Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Interceding for God's people seems to be Christ's chief ministry, or one of his chief ministries, at the present time. But if he has authority over the church as the head of the

body of Christ, why would he need to plead with the Father on behalf of the church? It is because the church is not the church of Christ but the "church of God" (Acts 20:28; 1Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2Cor.1:1; Gal.1:13; 1Tim.3:5,15). God by His Spirit indwells, empowers, and leads the church. We are reminded of Moses who repeatedly interceded for Israel. Although Moses was appointed the head of Israel by God, it was God who dwelled in the midst of Israel, in tent or temple, and who led Israel to the land of promise.

If Jesus must dedicate himself wholly to the work of interceding for the church, this would indicate how precarious and imperiled is the survival of the church in the world. The fact that the church, in spite of Jesus' intercession for it, could have strayed by its own choice into serious error over the past 1,800 years, is cause for dismay. Yahweh has allowed this to happen for some purpose we don't understand. Yet through these centuries of darkness, thanks to Jesus' intercession, there has always been a faithful remnant, just as there is a faithful remnant among the Jews (Romans 9 to 11). While Jesus' intercession for God's people has not been in vain, few Christians are even dimly aware of the enormity and intensity of the spiritual battle that rages in and around the church of God.

That Jesus is now in heaven and not on earth raises the question of who is directing the church on earth, and whose presence is it that sustains the faithful remnant—who are called the "few" in Mt.7:14 (cf. Lk.13:23) and who by

Yahweh's grace gain entrance into life. It is undoubtedly the Spirit of Yahweh who upholds God's people every day in the spiritual battle against the evil one, the ruler of the world (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). But the majority of Christians in the world today are so engaged in their own lives and earthly affairs that they, sadly, are lovers of self rather than lovers of God (2Tim.3:2-4). The importance of Jesus' unceasing intercession for the members of his body, the church, again impresses itself upon our hearts and minds.

What was Jesus' earthly ministry two millennia ago?

If intercession is one of Jesus' chief ministries at the right hand of the Father in the present age, what was his earthly ministry two thousand years ago and what meaning does it have for us today? From the portrait of Jesus given in the gospels, his earthly ministry had two central elements.

One element was the teaching of God's word, the word of Yahweh, with particular focus on the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven), a key concept that few Christians are familiar with. To most people, "kingdom" implies a territory ruled by a monarch (e.g. "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," the official name of Saudi Arabia) or a country with a constitutional monarchy (e.g. "The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland," the official name of the United Kingdom).

But the Greek word for "kingdom" (*basileia*) has the primary meaning of the kingship and the royal rule of a king rather than the territory he rules over, though the latter sense is not excluded. BDAG gives two main definitions of this word: (1) the act of ruling; a. *kingship, royal power, royal rule*; b. *the royal reign*; (2) territory ruled by a king, *kingdom*. The sense of territory is listed as the second rather than the first definition, but more telling is that BDAG gives ten times as many biblical and extra-biblical citations for the first definition (kingship and royal rule) than for the second definition (a king's territory). The kingdom of God is first and foremost God's rule in the lives of His people.

The kingdom of God is also called "the kingdom of heaven," a term that is used only in Matthew's Gospel.[152] The equivalence of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven is seen in the fact that in Mt.19:23-24, Jesus uses both terms to refer to the same thing. To the Jews, heaven is a metonym of God in much the same way that to the Chinese, heaven (天) is a metonym of God (神 or 上帝).

[152] Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven" 32 times and "kingdom of God" 4 times (or 5 times, cf. manuscript variation in 6:33). By contrast, the rest of the NT uses "kingdom of God" 62 times and never "kingdom of heaven". The 62 occurrences are distributed as follows: Mark 14x, Luke 32x, John 2x, Acts 6x, Paul's letters 8x. These numbers do not include the shorter term "the kingdom" found in phrases such as "the gospel of the kingdom" (Mt.4:23) or "the sons of the kingdom" (8:12).

Besides the kingdom, the other central element in Jesus' earthly ministry is his atoning death which is mentioned many times in the synoptic gospels using language similar to that of plain-facts reporting. The most explicit statement about his death and its purpose is found in Mark 10:45 (and its parallel Mt.20:28) in which Jesus says that he came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." In the parables, Jesus gives broad hints of his death, but there is nothing as explicit as in the verse we just quoted.

It is in John's Gospel that we see particularly deep emphasis on Jesus' death, beginning with John the Baptist's declaration that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.1:29). No statement about the purpose of his death can be more explicit than that. The rest of John's Gospel elaborates on that crucial declaration about the Lamb of God. The passion narrative, which covers the final week of Jesus' earthly life, takes up about a third of John's Gospel versus one quarter in the synoptics.

Thus the four gospels, as a unity, delineate the two focal points of Jesus' earthly ministry: In the synoptic gospels, the focal point is his teaching ministry and its principal content, the kingdom of God, which is also an important theme in the Old Testament prophets. The other focal point, prominent in all four gospels but especially in John, is the redemptive or atoning work of Jesus' life and death.

In the New Testament letters we find both these elements. The principle of the kingdom is now operating in the life of the church, hence the explicit term "the kingdom" appears less frequently in the NT letters. The Sermon on the Mount, which is central to life in the kingdom of God, is now implemented in the spiritual life of the church of God, the body of Christ.

Jesus' earthly ministry has crucial meaning for us today. His redeeming death and his resurrection are depicted as having a powerful life-changing effect on believers:

> **Romans 9:26** And in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they will be called "sons of the living God."
>
> **Ephesians 5:8** For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

No greater or more startling transformation can be imagined than what is described in these statements.

The time-limited nature of Jesus' work

Having been nurtured in trinitarianism with its divine Jesus, we read the Bible without realizing that his ministry in God's plan of salvation *is time limited*. Jesus' work is not eternally ongoing and interminable, but concludes with its successful and triumphant completion. Jesus says it is not the healthy

but the sick who need a doctor. So what happens when the doctor has successfully healed a sick person? The patient is now one of the healthy ones who no longer need a doctor. In other words, a good doctor is one who puts himself out of business! It is the bad doctors who consume all the money of the sick without healing them, as in the case of a woman with an issue of blood for twelve years who "had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse" (Mk.5:25-26).

At the cross, Jesus completed his work as the sacrificial Lamb of God when he declared, "It is finished" (Jn.19:30). He later ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God; his act of sitting down signified that he had completed the work of atonement entrusted to him by the Father. This point comes out strongly in the letter to the Hebrews ("once for all," 7:27; 9:12,26; 10:10). The sacrifice of Jesus is "once for all" in contrast to the never-ending sacrifices offered in the Jerusalem temple which could never satisfactorily atone for sin and had to be repeated perpetually. But the sacrifice of Jesus is forever effective for the remission of the sins of those who put their trust in him, the Lamb of God slain for their salvation.

Jesus' mission is to bring us to God, and once that has been achieved, his mission has fulfilled its purpose. What happens after Jesus has brought us to God? Does it not mean that we can now fellowship directly with God? Once Jesus has brought us into communion with Yahweh, his work is done, and like the good doctor, his intervention is no longer

needed—unless, of course, we sin and need an advocate (1Jn.1:9; 2:1).

Is it not the same with mediation? What is a mediator's role but to reconcile two parties? And what happens after reconciliation has been achieved? The services of the mediator are no longer needed. Paul says, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1Tim.2:5). The error of trinitarianism is to portray Christ Jesus as the one who, instead of reconciling God and man once and for all, is made the center of the whole affair by reconciling man to himself, even standing in the middle between God and man!

In the verse just quoted, 1Timothy 2:5, Paul upholds biblical monotheism in his affirmation that "there is one God" as a clear contrast to the humanity expressed in the words "the man Christ Jesus". The only mediator between God and man is not God or God-man but "the man Christ Jesus" (a literal word-for-word translation of the Greek). Some Bibles (NET, HCSB, NAB, NRSV) severely weaken it to "Christ Jesus, himself human". The Chinese Union Bible even manages to misrender "the man Christ Jesus" as "Christ Jesus, the one who came down into the world to become man" (降世为人的基督耶稣)! Just as puzzling, *Dr. Constable's Expository Notes* replaces "man" with "God-man" in the statement, "the God-man is the only mediator of the New Covenant between God and man"!

As in the case of the competent doctor, when a mediator's work has been completed once and for all, he has no further mediating function to fulfill. Is he then sad about losing his job (or the doctor his patient's business) on account of his competent and successful work? Certainly not. Why would anyone think that Jesus has suffered some kind of loss for having reconciled us to God so successfully and triumphantly that he no longer needs to stand between God and us as a mediator? Much less is it conceivable, except in the trinitarian mindset, that Jesus would use the situation to make himself the center of attention and devotion.

The same can be said of Jesus' commission of subduing God's enemies. In the eschatological future, after his work has been done victoriously and triumphantly, Jesus will hand his kingship back to the Father and take a position that is subordinate to Him for all eternity (1Cor.15:24-28).

Chapter 13

Jesus the Only Perfect Man

This final chapter, "Jesus the Only Perfect Man," takes as its title the main title of the book, plus one word. Its subject-matter has been touched on in the previous chapters and interwoven here and there with our earlier discussions on the humanity of Jesus, the exaltation of Jesus, and God's work in Jesus. This final chapter serves as a continuation of what we have already said about Jesus the only Perfect Man. It is part continuation of, part summary of, and part conclusion of the theme "Jesus the only Perfect Man," the complement of "Yahweh the only true God."

Ever since the Genesis creation and the fall of Adam and Eve, there has been "none righteous, not even one" among all the human beings who have ever lived on the face of the earth (Rom.3:10). Eliphaz invoked this truth to reject

Job's claim to innocence: "What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?" (Job 15:14) Jesus was of course the sole exception to this general statement.

In the Old Testament of some Bibles, a few people are said to be perfect, but in these cases, the Hebrew word rendered "perfect" is more appropriately understood as "blameless," a rendering that is seen in some other Bibles. In the Old Testament, the term "perfect" or "blameless" or "wholly committed" is used of a few rare individuals (e.g. Noah in Genesis 6:9 or Asa in 1Kings 15:14). But the perfection they achieved falls well short of God's absolute standards. No human being apart from Jesus has ever attained to absolute perfection, yet we could still say that these blameless men and women have attained to a relative perfection or a relative blamelessness in comparison to mankind in general.

But when we speak of Jesus as the only perfect man, we are talking about absolute sinlessness, absolute love, absolute righteousness—an absolute perfection with no ifs or buts. This amazing achievement is the greatest miracle Yahweh God has ever done, for no one can ever attain to absolute perfection unless Yahweh empowers him every moment of his life. The other side of the coin is that Jesus lived every moment of his earthly life in total obedience to his Father.

The Scriptures mention a few outstanding men of God. Moses came closer to perfection than have most of the godly people in the OT, yet he still failed grievously on one occa-

sion (Num.20:7-12). The great prophet Isaiah, when granted a vision of Yahweh, confessed that he was a man of "unclean lips" (Isa.6:5).

There is "none righteous, not even one" (Rom.3:10). But not being righteous is not the same as being wicked, so Paul is not saying that all humanity is wicked as we understand that term, but that no one has ever attained to absolute righteousness and an unbroken record of obedience to God.

Can man arrive at perfect righteousness in his own strength and will power? The Bible's dire record of human history shows that this is impossible. Hence Jesus' being the perfect man is a most astonishing and unprecedented miracle. But as trinitarians, we weren't really interested in his humanity or perfection, for our dogmatic interests were focused on proving that he is God. In theory we accepted the idea of Jesus' perfection, but in practice we didn't give it much thought, for we simply assumed that Jesus is perfect by his deity, not realizing that the divine God-man of trinitarianism is not human in the way that every human being is human.

Obeying God: The Garden of Eden

Let's begin with Genesis. What did God require of Adam in terms of obedience? Why was it even necessary to impose requirements in the first place? And wasn't there only one requirement for Adam and Eve, namely, that they shall not eat the fruit of a tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and

evil, located in the middle of the Garden of Eden (Gen.2:8,9, 17)?

We are not told how big the garden was, but we can surmise that it was not like the average home garden that we see in places like North America. It was evidently an immense garden because the Bible says that it was situated between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates.

Why are we talking about the size of the garden? Because if it was a small garden containing a few dozen or even a few hundred trees, that forbidden tree would be in regular view of those who walked around in the garden. But that would not be so if the garden was a vast stretch of land planted with thousands and thousands of trees, and populated with every species of animal that God had created and brought to Adam to name.

In a vast forested land containing thousands of trees and thousands of animals, we might think that the power of temptation posed by this lone forbidden tree would be proportionally reduced by the vastness of the garden. The point is that in this test of obedience, God had made it as easy as possible for Adam and Eve to stay away from temptation. Yet it was also necessary that man's obedience be tested in order that he may learn to obey God. In placing Adam in the garden, Yahweh in His mercy did what He had to do in order to teach him obedience and moral responsibility, yet at the same time He made it as easy as possible for him. In this

thoughtful arrangement for Adam, Yahweh's wisdom and compassion are clearly displayed.

But the problem of sin and evil existed long before Adam, as seen in the fact that the serpent (the devil, Rev.12:9; 20:2) was already present in the garden (Gen.3:1,2,3). Paul speaks of creation's bondage to corruption (decay), yet also of the future glorious hope of emancipation: "Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom.8:21, ESV).

Obeying God: The Law given to Israel

The next time in the Bible we see Yahweh imposing commands is in relation to a nation of slaves that had been held captive in Egypt for four centuries. They had been living under constant oppression, and were groaning for freedom. In an act of grace, Yahweh chose the people of this slave nation, who had by then experienced much suffering, to make them His own people and "special possession" (Ex.19:5; Dt.7:6).

In Egypt and other ancient civilizations, slaves were at the bottom rung of society. They had no social standing and enjoyed no rights or special protection; they could be bought and sold like livestock. Yet it was this very nation of slaves, the "non-entities" of society, that Yahweh had chosen from among all the peoples of the earth to be His own people. He established a covenant with them and gave them the Ten Commandments as the moral basis of the covenant.

Whereas Adam had only one command to obey, the standard was raised to ten for Israel. But it is important to see what these commandments have in common: With one or two exceptions, they are all of a negative character and begin with the words, "You shall not". An exception to this is the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," which does not contain a negative. Although the fourth commandment, "Keep the Sabbath day holy," does not conform to the negative formulation of the other commandments, it is still essentially a negative commandment because it prohibits all regular work on the day of rest; the Sabbath was a prescribed holiday for the people to rest from the work of their regular occupations.

It is in the Sabbath commandment that the word "holy" appears for the first time in the Ten Commandments. But how does one become holy by not doing any work? The point, of course, is that on the day of rest, everyone is to turn his or her attention wholly to Yahweh. With this comes the call to "be holy as I am holy" (Lev.11:44).

This people—an erstwhile nation of slaves whom God had called out of slavery, a people with no earthly piece of land to call their own—God had called to become a holy people wholly dedicated to Himself. Yahweh called to Himself the nobodies of the world to become His special people.

In view of the laws that Yahweh had given the people of Israel, but also in view of the largely negative formulation of these laws, it would seem that as in the case of Adam,

Yahweh had made it as easy as possible for the Israelites to be holy, because what was required of them was not the attainment of high and lofty moral goals but merely abstaining from doing certain things. Even so, like Adam they failed. They could not even keep the negative laws, that is, they could not refrain from doing the things they were forbidden to do. It would appear that the things prohibited or forbidden by God are precisely the things that man wants to do.

We cannot simplistically assume that the commandments given in negative form, such as the one given to Adam or some of the Ten Commandments given to Israel, are any easier to obey than those stated in positive form. A command that forbids one from doing what one desires is not any easier to keep than a command to do what one doesn't want to do. Eve looked at the forbidden fruit and found it irresistibly attractive, and this led to an act of disobedience that proved fatal for her, for Adam, and for mankind.

Is the commandment, "You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Dt.6:5; Mk.12:30), any easier to keep? When we reflect on it, we will see that in practice, this commandment is no easier to keep than the others, as seen in the tragic fact that Israel and all mankind in general have found themselves unable to keep both the positive and the negative commandments. Given the mostly negative formulation of the Ten Commandments, it would seem that it should not be very difficult to be blameless. Yet it is also evident that it is impos-

sible for man to be perfect, and this is because of his human nature.

The immense challenges that Jesus faced

It is against this backdrop of Israel's and mankind's long history of spiritual failure that we strive to understand the challenges Jesus faced when Yahweh sent him into the world to become the perfect man and the perfect sacrifice for mankind's salvation. The more we think about his mission in the context of mankind's moral failure as reflected in the words "there is none righteous, not even one" (Ps.14:3; Rom.3:10), the more we will wonder how it was even possible that Jesus could have triumphed when no one else could.

Not even the great prophets of old could claim perfection. Probably no Old Testament prophet is more esteemed than Isaiah. Yet when he received a vision of Yahweh, he contritely confessed, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips." (Isa.6:5) What Isaiah meant by "unclean lips" is not explained, but anyone who has ever tried to live a holy life would have an idea of what he meant. One wrong or inappropriate word makes us unclean and negates perfection. If we imagine perfection as a spotless white sheet, that sheet would become imperfect as soon as a tiny speck lands on it.

The one who bridles his tongue is a perfect man (James 3:2). Few can bridle their tongues for a day, refraining from saying a wrong word for 24 hours, much less a stretch of 30

years as in the case of Jesus. The amazing fact that Jesus attained perfection—even allowing for Yahweh's sustaining power in him (which is also available to all believers through God's indwelling presence)—is beyond the powers of our imagination to envisage.

The perfecting of Jesus is Yahweh's greatest miracle, exceeding the splendor of the creation of the universe. Dealing with inanimate things such as quarks and neutrinos cannot compare with relating to a living being who has his own will and the freedom of choice.

Jesus' perfection was attained *after* the Fall which had brought sin and death into the world, creating a hostile spiritual environment inimical to righteousness and perfection. What Adam and Eve failed to attain in a favorable environment, Jesus attained in a hostile one. Not surprisingly, from the time of Adam to the time of Jesus, no one had ever attained perfection. The stupendous fact that Jesus became the perfect man for the salvation of the world makes the trinitarian Jesus, the God-man, pale by comparison.

Apart from Jesus there has been no perfect man among the billions who have passed through the world, not even among the great servants of God. Abraham, despite his outstanding qualities and his standing as "God's friend" (2Chr.20:7; Isa.41:8; James 2:23), was not an exception (cf. the conflict surrounding Sarah and Hagar). Moses, regarded by many as the greatest of God's servants, was not allowed to

enter the land of promise because of an outburst of anger (Num.20:7-12).

How difficult is perfection? That is not even the right question to ask, for it is simply impossible to attain to perfection in this life. Yet that was what Jesus achieved through a mutual indwelling with Yahweh: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn.14:10). This relationship with the Father is meant to be inclusive, not exclusive, for we are to live in the world as Jesus lived ("as he is, so also are we in this world," 1Jn.4:17).

Jesus' perfection: a model for God's people

The picture of a lifelong and arduous process of attaining perfection—to which every believer born of the Spirit is called—is drawn out in great detail in the New Testament. On the other hand, the Jesus of trinitarianism, who is intrinsically perfect because he is God, is not a model that we can follow in our striving for the perfection to which we have been called: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt.5:48).

What does Jesus mean by "be perfect"? It is explained in the Sermon on the Mount and illustrated in Jesus' teaching. He is the very example and model of the perfection of which he speaks. And has he ever told us how he attained perfection? Yes he has, and in detail! But blinded by trinitarian dogma, we failed to see the spiritual dynamics of how Jesus

functioned in relation to the Father all through his life in the attainment of perfection. The fact is that Jesus has already told us how he lived in relation to the Father, and in such a way that we can follow in his steps and live as he lived.

Jesus has made many statements to the effect that the things that are true of him are also true of his followers. Just as he was born of the Spirit of God (Lk.1:35; Acts 10:38), so everyone must be born of the Spirit (Jn.3:5,6,8) and of God (1Jn.3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18); hence Paul's constant emphasis on life in the Spirit (Rom.8:9; Eph.6:18; Phil.2:1; Col.1:8). Just as Jesus did nothing of his own will (Jn.4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28), so every believer is to do God's will (Mt.7:21; Jn.8:51; 14:21; 1Jn.5:3). Believers are to abide in Jesus and in the Father in the way that Jesus abides in the Father and in believers (Jn.15:1-10; 1Jn.2:24,27; 4:13). Just as the world hated and rejected Jesus, so the world will hate and reject us his followers (Jn.15:18-19). Just as Jesus will be glorified, so those in Christ will be glorified with him (Jn.17:1,5,10; Rom.8:17).

These spiritual dynamics come from the spiritual union that Jesus repeatedly speaks of: the Father is "in me" (Jn.10:38; 14:10,11; 17:21), that is, the Father lives in him and does His works through him (Jn.14:10). Jesus is Yahweh's temple (Jn.2:19) as are his believers (1Cor.3:16-17; 6:19). The way Jesus lives in relation to the Father is exactly how the believer is to live.

A thought exercise: a sinless and perfect society

Because there has never been a sinless person in humanity apart from Jesus, it would be hard for us to understand what is sinlessness. We know that it is by definition the absence of sin, but that is a negative definition. What then are the positive qualities of a sinless character? It would certainly include purity and perfection, but these are also abstract concepts to us.

It may help to think of a country in which there is no crime, no discord, and no corruption. It would be an ideal country, a utopian state. But how would such a country be established and governed? A crime-free country would probably have an economic system in which there is near equality of wealth and in which no one is compelled to steal out of the distress of poverty. But stealing and robbery are not always motivated by poverty, but often by the desire to possess something that is obtainable only by crime, perhaps a work of art that is not for sale. The root problem is not poverty but greed and selfishness.

A perfect country cannot be established merely with a good economic system in which there is near-equal distribution of wealth because such a society would still require in each citizen an excellence of character that would eliminate the common malaise of selfishness, greed, and lust. In short, nothing less than the inner moral purity of each citizen is required. A perfect crime-free country would require that each citizen be sinless. Thus it comes back full circle from the

external conditions of a nation to the moral state of the individual.

This thought exercise shows that establishing a sinless society takes more than the containment or elimination of what is negative; it requires a range of positive qualities needed for establishing sinlessness: the wisdom to discern right from wrong, the courage to do what is right in the face of what is wrong, and adhering to righteousness when the pull or attraction of unrighteousness is strong.

All these qualities are found in Yahweh and ultimately in Him alone. Yet He generously makes them available to all who would obey and follow Him. This has been *fully* realized in Jesus Christ, and so far in him alone. When it is said that Jesus is without sin, the absence of sin is not something stated in negative form, but signifies that every positive spiritual quality exists in him in perfect completeness.

In the New Testament, the hope of a perfect, crime-free country is not a pipe dream but a reality that Jesus proclaimed as the kingdom of God. The kingdom is a central theme of Jesus' teaching in the synoptic gospels. The proclamation by both Jesus and John the Baptist is, "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mt.3:2; 4:17), that is, God's kingdom is about to be established. It is this high goal that Jesus has in view, notably in the call, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt.5:48). A perfect kingdom, preeminently God's kingdom, can be established only if every one of its citizens is perfect.

In God's plan, Jesus' becoming the perfect man is not the end of the matter but only the start, in order "that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom.8:29). The brothers coming after him are to be perfected just as he had been perfected. The same verse says that all believers are to be "conformed to the image of His Son." This is another way of saying that they are to attain to the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph.4:13). To make this a reality, Yahweh appointed Jesus the Messiah to be the king of His kingdom. That Jesus is king in God's Kingdom is seen for example in Mt.25:34: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

The deceitfulness of sin

To appreciate the magnitude of Jesus' attainment of sinlessness, we notice that not even the mighty angels are immune to sin. Jude 1:6 speaks of angels who had left their proper station, and are now kept in eternal chains awaiting judgment. The meaning of "left their proper station" is not explained, but it is clear that the angels had encroached on, or attempted to take possession of, something they were not entitled to.

The most shocking display of this is seen in Revelation 12 which says that as many as one third of the angels in heaven will be enticed by that old enemy of God—the dragon or Satan, the "deceiver of the whole world" (v.9)—into fighting

Yahweh the Most High (Rev.12:4,7-9). The consequences of their madness could only be imagined or perhaps not imagined.

It is baffling that one would choose to sin even when he is aware of the terrifying consequences. Why does he do it? Is it because there is something reckless in the psyche of every person? Or the misguided belief that one might just get away with it? Did the angels who rebelled against God believe that they could defeat Him because of their strength in numbers? Or were they bewitched by Satan's enchanting powers as in the case of the Galatians (Gal.3:1)? These are the questions that come to mind when we read news reports of mindless deeds of violence for which there is no rational explanation.

We are baffled that a cultured and generally well-intentioned people like the Germans could have been enticed by Adolf Hitler, a charismatic madman, into committing themselves inextricably to a course of action that proved fatal to themselves and the countless victims of their dreadful deeds. As human beings, we know full well that this kind of irrationality could happen to any people and not just the German people.

The Scriptures speak of "the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13) which can entrap anyone who is not alert. Not even the mighty angels, great in knowledge and power, are immune to the deceitfulness of sin. Paul probably had in mind this frightening aspect of sin when he wrote, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil.2:12). But the popu-

lar teaching of "eternal security" in the church will only encourage believers to throw all caution to the wind, believing that once they have become Christians, they are eternally secure no matter how they live.

To attain sinless perfection, Jesus had to battle the many fearsome aspects of sin and above all its deceitful aspects which have caused the downfall of many Christians. And because of its deceitfulness, sin has been given a free run in ensnaring its victims long before they realize what has happened to them. We now see ever more clearly the need for wisdom and discernment in the battle against sin. The magnificence of Jesus' triumph over this multifaceted enemy now stands out, bringing salvation to mankind.

Sin is not confined to humanity but is something that operates in the entire cosmos of living beings, human and angelic. Jesus' triumph over sin has immense consequences not only for mankind but the entire cosmos. With anticipation and groaning, the whole creation awaits the salvation to come (Rom.8:22).

The root cause of sin, as Paul points out, is not God's commandments but man himself. Man acknowledges that God's commandments are good but our fundamental problem is the one portrayed in Paul's poignant words: "the good I want to do, I don't do; the evil I don't want to do, I do" (Romans 7:19). Paul teaches that the root of sin lies in man's "flesh". This does not imply any intrinsic sinfulness of the physical body but that our thinking is influenced by desires,

which in turn are controlled by "bodily lusts". These cover many elements of the human psyche, starting with needs and appetites, whether for food or sexual gratification, and then moving on to a greed for power as a means of gratifying these desires, which often begin as something legitimate but is pushed to depraved extremes. When a desire reaches this state, it can grow into a greed or covetousness that compels man to get what he wants by robbery or murder and, on a wider social scale, by wars and acts of aggression, many of which fill the pages of history.

If man is enslaved to his flesh, how will he ever attain to the good, let alone the perfect? But there is hope.

Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel

The concept of holiness runs through the Old and New Testaments, and is seen in the repeated affirmation that Yahweh is holy. He is called "the Holy One of Israel" 25 times in Isaiah alone. The shorter form, "the Holy One," is used of Yahweh in verses such as Isa.40:25; Hab.1:12; 3:3; Prov.9:10 (cf. 1Jn.2:20). In fact, only Yahweh is holy in the absolute sense: "For you alone are holy" (Rev.15:4).

Yahweh's holiness is also derived from His uniqueness as God: "There is none holy like Yahweh; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God" (1Sam.2:2; cf. Isa.40:25). Verses such as Dt.4:35 and Isa.45:21-22; 46:9 similarly bring out Yahweh's uniqueness that sets Him apart from false gods.

Jesus is called "the holy one of God" (Mk.1:24; Lk.4:34; Jn.6:69) and the "holy and righteous one" (Acts 3:14).

Jesus' perfection and sinlessness

> **Hebrews 4:15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

The reality of sin and temptation that confronts us every day is brought out in the book of Hebrews in the striking statement that Jesus is a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses, for he too had been tempted in every respect as we, yet without having ever sinned. His sympathetic understanding stands in sharp contrast to the condemning attitude of the religious leaders towards an adulterous woman, and is summed up in a statement about the pervasiveness of sin: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7).

Jesus' sympathetic understanding is all the more admirable in view of the contrast between his sinlessness and our sinfulness, the latter of which is brought out in Romans 3:10, a verse derived from Psalm 14:1-3:

> **Romans 3:10** "None is righteous, not even one."
>
> **Psalm 14:1-3** They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. (ESV)

In contrast to our sinfulness is Jesus' sinlessness, righteousness, and innocence, as seen in the following verses (all ESV):

> **John 8:46** Which one of you convicts me of sin?
>
> **John 14:30** the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me.
>
> **2 Corinthians 5:21** … he made him to be sin who knew no sin
>
> **Hebrews 4:15** (quoted)
>
> **Hebrews 7:26** … a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.
>
> **Hebrews 9:14** … the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God
>
> **1 Peter 1:19** … with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.
>
> **1 Peter 2:22** He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

Jesus is called "holy" or "the holy one" in Acts 2:27 and 13:35, both of which are quotations of Psalm 16:10:

> **Acts 2:27** For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.
>
> **Acts 13:35** Therefore he says also in another psalm, "You will not let your Holy One see corruption."
>
> **Psalm 16:10** For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

Jesus, who is perfect and sinless, will bear the sins of many and make them righteous:

> **Isaiah 53:9-12** ... he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush him; he has put him to grief … Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities … he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (ESV, "Yahweh" in the original Hebrew restored)

Jesus' attainment of perfection through suffering is crucial for our salvation because the atonement requires that he be the perfect sacrifice and the perfect high priest. In the Law, no sacrifice is acceptable to God unless it is perfect and without defect or blemish:

> Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it will not be acceptable for you. And when a man offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to Yahweh … it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it. (Lev.22:20-21; cf. Dt.15:19,21; 17:1)

Christ is the perfect and sinless sacrifice: "you were redeemed … with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1Pet.1:18-19). He is not only a perfect sacrifice but "a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb.5:10). In the Law, the high priest, too, has to be perfect: "No man of the descendants of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the LORD's food offering" (Lev.21:21, ESV).

Perfection in reality

We sinners can hardly fathom what it is like to be sinless. It might help if we could try for one day! Then imagine what it would be like to be sinless for some 20 years of adulthood (from the ages of 13 to 33, in Jesus' case). Little wonder that at the age of thirty, Jesus looked like a man approaching fifty (Jn.8:57). Although he maintained communion with God every moment of every day, the mere thought that the salvation of the world could be lost in one careless second must have been heavy to bear. It is this suffering above all else, even the relatively brief suffering on the cross, that constitutes the true suffering he took up for the sake of our salvation.

The perfection of Jesus is the greatest miracle Yahweh has ever done. Jesus Christ is Yahweh's new creation, the pinnacle of God's glorious work from all eternity, the likes of which has never been seen and will never be surpassed in all eternity. For this reason God has exalted Jesus "above the heavens" (Heb.7:26) to a position at His right hand.

By comparison, the trinitarian fiction of Jesus the God-man is unmarvellous. The Jesus of trinitarianism is God Almighty who created all things whereas the Jesus of the New Testament possesses nothing that came from himself. Even his name "Jesus" was given to him by Yahweh. If the key word for the trinitarian Jesus is *homoousios*, the key word for the biblical Jesus is *obedience*.

The Jesus of trinitarianism, with his supposed coequality with God, cannot secure mankind's salvation; only the obedience of the biblical Jesus, the Lamb of God, can secure it. It is "the obedience of the one man" that makes the many righteous (Rom.5:19).

That obedience must be perfect, not partial. James expresses it from another angle: "For whoever keeps the whole law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all" (James 2:10). The one who has broken one commandment has broken all ten.

Jesus the perfect man fulfilled the law perfectly, notably the law of love, for "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10). He did not abolish the law or teach anyone to do so, but in fact said that "not one jot or tittle of the law shall pass

away until all is fulfilled" (Mt.5:18). He came to fulfill the law, and as perfect man "gave his life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45).

In our trinitarian days, we thought of Jesus' perfection as a byproduct of his deity. But the notion that one can be perfect or sinless by a hypostatic union—a concept found in some forms of mysticism—is a myth that even few practicing mystics would believe. In real life there is no shortcut to perfection. Just as Jesus was perfected through suffering all his life and not just in the final week, so perfection for the believer is a life-long process. Not even Paul saw himself as having attained perfection (Phil.3:12). He wrestled with pride to the extent that the Lord had to place a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him from being proud (2Cor.12:7).

We now appreciate the immense achievement of Jesus the perfect man. His final three years were the most difficult. The 40 days of temptation in the wilderness without food, intensified by Satan's relentless attacks, would exceed what most people can endure for one day. This was followed by two or three years of slandering by the religious leaders who accused him of just about everything. He was labelled a rabble-rouser, a false messiah, a blasphemer, and a man who functioned by the power of the chief of demons. It seems that no one is more adept at slander and character assassination than the religious people, especially religious leaders whom the people learn from by emulation. Little wonder that many turn away from religion. We need only go to the Internet to see the

slandering that some religious people excel in. Jesus warned his disciples about such zealots, who will kill you for what they think will glorify God.

Jesus' attainment of perfection is beyond imagination even given God's indwelling presence in him. And God has made that indwelling available to all believers! It is those who have tried with all their hearts to live righteously who understand how amazing is Jesus' attainment of perfection. Such people will grow in their love and devotion to him, acknowledging him as their Lord and Savior.

The crime of trinitarianism is the obscuring of the marvel of Jesus the sinless and perfect man, reducing this wonderful truth to the superficial and trite notion that since Jesus is God, he is automatically sinless, his perfection being a result of his deity.

Instead of marvelling at the stupendous wonder of the perfect man, trinitarians sidetrack the issue with lengthy discussions on whether the divine Jesus is capable of sinning. It is hard to understand why this question is even raised, for if Jesus is God, then obviously he cannot sin. In fact he cannot even be tempted ("God cannot be tempted by evil," James 1:13). The real reason for their question is that they cannot deny that Jesus wrestled with sin to the point of appearing to sweat drops of blood (Lk.22:44). This has caused some trinitarians to hold back from concluding that Jesus could not

have sinned. But this is a contradictory position to take, for a God who can be tempted to sin is not the God of the Bible.

In trinitarianism, Jesus' perfection comes packaged with his deity. Since Jesus is God, and God is perfect, therefore Jesus' human nature is perfect through the hypostatic union with his divine nature. But can divine qualities such as holiness and wisdom be transferred? Can anyone be perfected in the blink of an eye, bypassing a long and arduous process of spiritual growth and learning?

No one, not even Jesus, is born or created perfect, for we are talking about *moral* perfection. Hebrews says that Jesus became perfect through suffering (2:10), learned obedience through suffering (5:8), and was made perfect (5:9). When Adam was created by God, he was perfect in every sense physical and mental. He was sinless in the sense that he, like an infant, hadn't yet had occasion to sin. But the fact that Adam soon failed is clear evidence that he was not created *morally* perfect.

When did Jesus begin walking on the road to perfection?

When did Jesus begin to live a life of obedience to the Father? We don't have a precise answer to the question because the Bible provides no record—apart from one incident—of his "hidden years," that is, the period from his infancy to the

time he burst onto the scene in Israel at around the age of thirty.

There is one notable exception to the silence of those years: the account in Luke 2:41-50 of 12-year-old Jesus who visited Jerusalem with his family for the Passover. At the conclusion of the feast, his family started returning home only to discover, after having travelled some distance, that Jesus was not with them. So they returned to Jerusalem to look for him, and eventually found him in the temple engaging in deep discussions with the learned men there.

Asked to account for what he had done, Jesus simply said, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Lk.2:49). Most modern Bibles (ESV, NASB, NIV) have "my Father's house" rather than "my Father's business" (KJV, NKJV), but this would make his statement superfluous, for was it not precisely the temple ("my Father's house") to which his parents returned in searching for him? With neither "house" nor "business" appearing in the Greek text, the statement is translated more literally as: "Did you not know that I must be in those (things) of my Father?"

After this incident, the Bible is silent on the next 18 years of Jesus' life. So why was this solitary event recorded in Luke's Gospel? Because it reveals not only Jesus' precociousness in his understanding of the Scriptures at a young age, but also that he had already seen himself as being involved in, and committed to, his Father's work. This was undoubtedly part of the whole process of his being perfected.

In Judaism, a boy is not considered accountable before the Law until he becomes Bar Mitzvah [153] ("son of commandment") on his 13th birthday plus one day. From then on, he is morally responsible to keep the commandments.

When we grasp the significance of Jesus' visit to Jerusalem at the age of 12, we can give a more precise answer to the question, When did Jesus begin his life of obedience to his Father? Before he reached the age of 13, he had already been engaged in his "Father's business." How much earlier he had been doing this is not recorded for us; he may have started earlier. But one thing is clear: From the moment Jesus was capable of responsible obedience to the Father, he had always lived to please Him. This carried on to the end when he hung on the cross and said with his last breath, "It is finished" (accomplished).

[153] Article "Bar Mitzvah, Bat Mitzvah" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol.3, p.164: "term denoting both the attainment of religious and legal maturity as well as the occasion at which this status is formally assumed for boys at the age of 13 plus one day… Upon reaching this age a Jew is obliged to fulfill all the commandments… According to Eleazar b. Simeon (second century C.E.), a father was responsible for the deeds of his son until the age of 13. For example the vows of a boy 13 and a day old are considered valid vows (Nid.5:6). From then on a person can perform acts having legal implications, such as… buying and selling property."

Jesus, made perfect

Jesus' perfection was not derived from his supposed deity but something he had learned through suffering:

> [7] In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. [8] Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. [9] And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, [10] being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:7-10, ESV)

Jesus attained perfection by Yahweh's indwelling presence, but not without "loud cries and tears" (v.7). Scripture does not teach an inherent or automatic perfection, or that Jesus was born perfect. It was with loud cries and tears that he offered up prayers and supplications to God. His fragile humanity is displayed for all to see. As trinitarians we ignored this verse because we found it problematic, yet it cannot be swept under the carpet so easily because it is located in the middle of a crucial discussion on God's appointment of Jesus as high priest.

Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, not the priestly tribe of Levi, so how could he have been appointed a high priest? It is crucial to note that it was only after Jesus had "learned obedience through what he suffered" (v.8) and only after he had been "made perfect" (v.9) that he was "designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (v.10). Little is

known of Melchizedek beyond that he was "king of Salem, priest of the Most High God" (Heb.7:1; Gen.14:18). Because Melchizedek's priesthood answers directly to Yahweh the Most High God, it is a *spiritual* priesthood. Similarly, Jesus "has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible (perfect) life" (Heb.7:16).

With loud cries and tears, Jesus prayed to God to save him from death. It was not physical death that he feared, for his aim was to "give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt.20:28). We can be sure that he would never pray for the nullification of this glorious mission. What he truly feared was the death that comes from disobedience, for that would nullify and destroy God's plan of salvation for mankind. Hence he prayed to God with such intensity that it was expressed in loud cries and tears.

Obedience to God must be voluntary, for what is coerced or compelled is not obedience. True obedience comes from the moral decisions made by one's own free will, as was the case with Jesus when he said, "I lay down my life of my own accord and nobody takes it from me" (Jn.10:18). His commitment was powerfully expressed at Gethsemane when he was facing suffering and death. There he said to his Father, "Not my will but yours be done" (Lk.22:42), even as he was pondering the horrific things that lay ahead of him, and his heart shuddered at what he saw. But he voluntarily offered himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God for the blood atonement that

secures mankind's salvation. So it could truly be said that this was done out of love: "The Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal.2:20).

Jesus was "made perfect" (Heb.5:9), indicating that his perfection was acquired. This cannot be true of the trinitarian Jesus who, as God the Son, is inherently perfect and doesn't have to be "made perfect" or "become perfect" (both meanings are valid in the Greek text of v.9).

Jesus' prayers and supplications were "heard because of his reverence" (v.7). Here the Greek for "reverence" is *eulabeia*, defined by BDAG as "reverent awe in the presence of God, *awe, fear of God"*. [154] Because reverence is something expressed to God, it is a human rather than a divine quality. KJV gives an alternative rendering of *eulabeia* in Heb.5:7:

> Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared. (Heb.5:7)

Here the word "feared" (*eulabeia*) means reverent fear and awe in God's presence. *Exegetical Dictionary of the NT* explains the meaning of this word in Hebrews 5:7 (Greek transliterated):

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[154] The word is used in Heb.12:28 and Prov.28:14 of the believer's reverence. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom."

> Thus *eulabeia* (fear) in v.7 involves a "once-for-all" (cf. 4:15) *devotion to God* or *piety*. Because of this he was heard by God and as *teleiōtheis* (perfection) was made the basis of salvation and true high priest for all obedient persons (vv.9f.).

EDNT is saying that Jesus, with a perfection derived from his piety and fear of God, was "made the basis of salvation".

Whereas Jesus' perfection includes the fear or reverence of Yahweh, this attitude is woefully rare in North American society today. "God!" or "O my God!" or worse exclamations and expletives are often heard in restaurants, schools, and television programs. It is not hard to see their corrupting effect on children who grow up in this ungodly environment. "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom.3:18; Psa. 36:1).

What is the fear of God? "To fear Yahweh is to hate evil" (Prov.8:13). It doesn't mean that we hate evil people. Jesus hates evil yet gave his life to save every evildoer who repents and trusts in him for salvation.

Jesus' prayers were heard because of his fear and reverence. If our prayers are not heard, we do well to ask ourselves whether we have an attitude of reverence to God. I have heard many "prayers" that make me shudder. I recently heard a pastor "pray" with loud demands to God to do this and do that, treating God as his servant and not his Master!

Perfection is stressed in the Scriptures

Perfection is a completeness beyond which there is nothing more to attain because nothing is lacking. It is the end (*telos*) of attainment, the pinnacle of achievement; beyond this one cannot go because there is nothing beyond it.

1 Corinthians 13:10 draws a contrast between the perfect and the partial: "When the perfect (*teleios*) comes, the partial (*meros*) will pass away." Verse 9 says, "We know in part (*meros*)"—that is, our knowledge at this time is incomplete.

Among believers there are spiritual infants who, being spiritually immature, need to grow up to maturity and to Christ's perfection:

> … until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

Here the term "perfect man" (*andra teleion*) refers to Christ because of the reference to "Son of God" and "Christ" in the same sentence. Here the word is not *anthrōpos*, the general word for a human being, but *anēr*, the word for a *male* human being. Hence it is invalid to render "perfect man" in a generalized way as "mature manhood" as is done in ESV and RSV (but not HCSB, NASB, NIV). It is lexically invalid to reduce *anēr* to the abstract concept of "manhood," a rendering that has no lexical support in any of the standard Greek-English lexicons. Believers are not called to an abstract man-

hood but specifically to the "perfect man" who is Jesus Christ. This is stated two verses later: "we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph.4:15). Paul reiterates this vital truth in Col.1:28: "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." (NIV)

The perfection of the believer is an unfamiliar concept to most Christians. Could this be the result of the church's unbalanced emphasis on grace? The average church minister doesn't know what he needs to do to "present everyone perfect in Christ". Yet this is the *supreme* goal of Paul's ministry, as seen in the next verse: "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me" (Col.1:29).

The church is not on the same wavelength as Paul. Have we ever heard a sermon on perfection in Christ? The lopsided stress on being saved by the death of Christ has made our perfection in Christ redundant. But the stress in Paul's teaching and the New Testament is different: Christ's death is meant to cleanse us from sin and to "purchase" (redeem) us for God so that we may be holy. "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb.12:14). Yet we are taught in much of Protestantism that we need only believe that Jesus died for us and we will be saved; and once we are saved, we are always saved. With this kind of teaching, who needs perfection or holiness?

Paul's intense concern that Christ's perfection should take shape in the believer's life is expressed by the imagery of the pain of childbirth: "My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" (Gal.4:19) The parallel between this verse and Col.1:28-29 is seen in the correspondence between "Christ in you" and "Christ is formed in you".

"Perfect" in the Old and New Testaments

> **Genesis 17:1** When Abram was ninety-nine years old Yahweh appeared to him and said, "I am El Shaddai (Almighty God). Live in my presence, be perfect" (NJB)
>
> **Deut.18:13** "Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God." (KJV)

In the latter verse, KJV preserves the word "perfect" whereas most other Bibles use the weaker word "blameless," revealing a reluctance in modern Bibles to use the word "perfect". This makes it harder for the reader to know what the text is saying. There are 99 occurrences of "perfect" in KJV and only 41 in ESV. There are 36 in NIV, about one-third the number in KJV; of these 36 occurrences, only a few refer to the perfection of people, yet these few instances are significant (the following are from NIV 1984):

> **Colossians 1:28** … that we may present everyone *perfect* in Christ.
>
> **Hebrews 2:10** …it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation *perfect* through suffering.
>
> **Hebrews 5:9** and, once made *perfect*, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.
>
> **Hebrews 7:28** … the Son, who has been made *perfect* forever.
>
> **Hebrews 10:14** because by one sacrifice he has made *perfect* forever those who are being made holy.

The familiar statement, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) is not found in the Old Testament. Instead there is the parallel command, "Be holy for I am holy":

> **Leviticus 11:44-45** I am Yahweh your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy … I am Yahweh who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. (ESV, "Yahweh" in the Hebrew restored; also Lev.20:26)

Similarly, the New Testament calls us to be holy and blameless (all ESV):

> **Ephesians 1:4** … that we should be holy and blameless
>
> **Ephesians 5:27** So that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.
>
> **1Peter 1:15-16** But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

These verses, notably in the light of Hebrews 10:14, show that "perfect" and "holy" share common meaning.[155]

The parallel between "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" and "be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Mt. 5:48; Lk.6:36) shows that perfection also includes mercy and compassion (cf. Ex.34:6, Yahweh is merciful and gracious). These are the constituents of love, and God in His nature is love (1Jn.4:8; 2Cor.13:11; Eph.2:4).

The following verses show what perfection is like and therefore what Jesus is like:

[155] BDAG defines *hagios* (holy) as: "of human beings *consecrated to God, holy, pure, reverent*"; BDAG explains that consecrated to God means "*dedicated to God, holy, sacred*, i.e. reserved for God and God's service".

> **Perfection as endurance**: "And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:4)
>
> **Perfection as spiritual perception**: "But solid food is for the mature (perfect), for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." (Heb.5:14)
>
> **Perfection as self-control and control of the tongue**: "And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body." (James 3:2)
>
> **Perfection as being meek and lowly in heart**: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Mt.11:29)

Jesus' weakness exposes the falsity of trinitarianism

The Bible characterizes man as weak. Paul speaks of "the weakness of the flesh" (Rom.6:19), a statement that "denotes the weakness of human nature" (Thayer, *astheneia*) and "the frailty to which all human flesh is heir" (BDAG, *astheneia* 2b).

Jesus himself "was crucified in weakness" (2Cor.13:4). On this statement, BDAG says that "he was crucified as a result of his weakness (his vulnerability as a human being)". Like all human beings, Jesus has no inherent power of life but depends on his Father for his existence: "I live because of the

Father" (Jn.6:57); "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (Jn.5:26). On John 6:57, C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, says, "he has no independent life".

Because the Bible depicts man as innately weak, the elevation of Jesus to God Almighty is a denial of this fundamental attribute of his humanity. If Jesus is God, how could any weakness be ascribed to him?

Human beings don't have a choice as to be weak or strong despite the delusion of strength that one may have when he is tall, or healthy, or intelligent, or rich, or esteemed in society. Human weakness and helplessness is the reality of human existence in the present age though the situation will change in the age to come when we will be "clothed" with a new body in such a way that the "body of our humiliation" (Phil. 3:21, NRSV) will be changed into an immortal body.

How can a divine Jesus be weak? If he is God, he is strong and omnipotent. If he is weak, he is not God, for God cannot dispose of His attributes. They are inherent to His very person as God; they define what He is. If He lacks even one of His attributes, He would not be God. Again the falsity of the trinitarian doctrine of Jesus' deity is exposed.

Trinitarians argue that Jesus as God has chosen to put on a human body with its limitations. That he had such an choice in the first place shows that he was not a human being. In deifying Jesus, trinitarians have put him outside the pale of humanity, being neither God nor man.

The argument of Jesus' voluntary self-limitation doesn't make sense because God is not like a boxer who has one hand tied behind his back as a handicap against a weaker opponent. The argument that Jesus put aside his divine power in order to depend on God's power doesn't make sense either, for how can one who is innately omnipotent and infinitely powerful, but then suppresses his own divine power, be called weak in any real sense? If I refrain from exercising my great power, does that make me weak? No, I am still strong and powerful—actually and inherently.

In trinitarianism, Jesus is the omnipotent second person of the Godhead who is coequal with the Father. His acquiring a human body does not reduce his omnipotence by one iota, for how can flesh suppress omnipotence if omnipotence is by definition infinite power? In trinitarianism, Jesus is not just God but "fully God" even while he was on earth.

The Jesus of the 4th-century trinitarian creeds does not match Yahweh's signature and is therefore false. The biblical Jesus, on the other hand, is weak and can do nothing of his own. He carries Yahweh's signature that marks him as one who is wholly dependent on God and has no extraordinary human abilities that are not already available to other human beings.

The Bible does not say that Jesus was a different kind of man from other human beings. He was born into an ordinary Jewish family. Some scholars think that his family may have been among the poorest of the Jews because artisans such as

carpenters generally owned no land, and were financially worse off than those who owned land. (In general, landowners would not take up carpentry as a trade, but would derive their livelihood from agriculture which has the dual advantage of ensuring their own food supply and, in a good season, of having a surplus crop that could be sold or traded.)

Paul says of believers that not many are wise by human standards, or powerful, or of noble birth, for God has chosen the foolish in the world to shame the wise, and the weak to shame the strong (1Cor.1:26-27). The most significant of Paul's statements that express this truth is 2Cor.12:9 in which he recounts what the Lord had said to him: "My power is made perfect in weakness".

This statement calls for deep reflection. It plainly says that, contrary to human thinking, any strength in man will hinder God's power from manifesting itself in perfection. A moment of reflection tells us that if Jesus is the perfect man as Scripture declares him to be, how could his total perfection have been attained except through total weakness? We now understand what Jesus meant when he said, "The Son can do nothing by himself" (Jn.5:19). This is not a statement of modesty but a declaration of solid fact, that without Yahweh's power Jesus would not be able to function at all.

This brings us to the crucial event of Gethsemane [156] where Jesus' heart-wrenching struggle exposed his utter weakness and anguish as the gripping reality of his imminent

[156] Mt.26:36-45; Mark 14:32-41; Luke 22:39-44 (cf. Jn.18:1-12).

death on the cross loomed before him. He did not face the cross like a heroic warrior rushing headlong into the thick of battle. There are many heroes in the history of empires and civilizations, but Jesus was not empowered by human courage or driven by a desire for earthly acclaim. He did not seek out death, much less engineer his own death as some scholars believe, suggesting that he was motivated by the figure of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 whose death brought atonement to God's people. The plan to redeem the "many" (Mt. 20:28; Mk.10:45) came originally from Yahweh and not from Jesus. In the following verses, we see the intensity of the Gethsemane event:

> **Luke 22:44** And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (ESV)
>
> **Hebrews 5:7** In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. (ESV)

The intensity of Jesus' anguish shortly before his death for mankind could hardly be more poignantly displayed. Surely this is not the way a hero is portrayed in biographies. A hero is supposed to stand tall and meet death head-on, but Jesus is presented as utterly weak. Paul's enigmatic statement that Jesus "was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God" (2Cor.13:4) makes sense only in the light of a funda-

mental principle that the Lord had given to Paul: "My power is made perfect in weakness" (2Cor.12:9). This is the principle by which all believers are to live. Paul himself says, "For when I am weak, I am strong" (v.10; cf. v.9b).

The words "my power is made perfect in weakness" cannot be true of the trinitarian Jesus because as God he cannot be weak. How can God Almighty be weak? To argue that Jesus made himself weak is a case of special pleading. We are talking about true and actual weakness, not the appearance of weakness. At Gethsemane, did the trinitarian Jesus only appear to be weak when in fact he was infinite and omnipotent? Are we dealing with make-belief acting? If not, then a vital element in the perfection of Jesus is his utter human weakness by which God's power was made perfect in him.

Jesus' utter weakness is seen in details such as that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Lk.22:44), and that he was so weakened that he had to be strengthened by an angel (v.43). Just how utterly human Jesus can be is seen in his blood, sweat, and tears ("loud cries and tears," Heb.5:7). Jesus' greatness lies not in his supposed deity but in his weakness and helplessness of such a degree that it took nothing less than God's power to carry him through to victory just when he was in danger of collapsing.

All in all, the Gethsemane portrayal of Jesus collides with the trinitarian portrayal of Jesus as God omnipotent and Almighty.

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46; Mk.15:34) is another statement I wrestled with in my trinitarian days but without arriving at a resolution. It is impossible for God to forsake God (in trinitarianism this can only be done by dividing their essence), so why did Jesus shout out the words of anguish found in Psalm 22:1? Whereas the words of Psalm 22:1 ("My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?") cannot apply to a divine Jesus, they are eminently applicable to the man Jesus in his utter weakness on the cross. At the cross, Yahweh's power sustained Jesus' spirit and upheld him through this dangerous crisis, to achieve the victory by which Jesus could declare that his work is "finished"—successfully completed.

God's signature by which God's works are recognized as His

God's way of doing things in the human world is stated in 1Cor.1:27: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong". This principle runs through what is called salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) which spans the Old and New Testaments. Instance of this principle are too numerous to cite exhaustively, but we can mention a few.

God the creator of heaven and earth, in His plan of salvation, chose a particular nation for the redemption of mankind that had fallen into sin and death through the failure of

Adam and Eve. Yahweh did not choose a world power such as the culturally advanced nation of Egypt that by comparison made Israel look like a nation of primitive tribes, nor did He choose the great empires of Mesopotamia. The relics of these ancient civilizations now on display in the great museums still kindle awe and admiration.

Yet none of these great and advanced nations was chosen by Yahweh. Instead He chose an obscure nation of twelve tribes that were in frequent conflict with one another. The nation of Israel did not originally have the advanced weaponry such as war chariots that their formidable neighbors to the southwest, the Egyptians, wielded in vast numbers, nor did Israel attain to anything like Egypt's cultural and organizational achievements. It comes as no surprise that this tiny nation of relatively primitive hill tribes ended up being enslaved in Egypt for some 430 years (Ex.12:40-41). In the end, how did God rescue Israel, a nation enslaved by a great world power for so many generations?

The story of Moses is well known and will not be repeated here except in outline. Moses, whose mother was an Israelite slave woman, was providentially plucked out of the Nile and adopted by one of Pharaoh's daughters (Ex.2:1-10). Years later, Moses saw an Israelite being beaten by an Egyptian guard; he impulsively killed the guard and had to flee from Pharaoh as a fugitive (2:11-15). He took refuge in the desert mountains of Midian where he married a daughter of Jethro, the local priest and tribal chief, and became a sheep herder (2:16-

21). He lived many years in the wilderness and became acquainted with the ways of the desert, accumulating knowledge and experience that would later prove valuable for leading the Israelites out of Egypt. During the long preparatory years in the desert, Yahweh was building up his character and preparing this otherwise ordinary man (who had not attained to any distinction in Egypt apart from acquiring some education) to become someone with whom Yahweh could communicate, starting from their encounter at the burning bush (Exodus 3).

Here we see God's signature in His choosing an insignificant and enslaved people, and then choosing from them a leader in the person of Moses who apart from having a meek and righteous character is not portrayed as having any outstanding ability or characteristic.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the strong. In this world, meekness is not regarded as a trait of the strong but of the weak. Do slaves have a choice other than to be meek before their masters, as any display of assertiveness could cost them their lives?

The way God chooses people is seen again and again at significant moments in biblical history. When Yahweh sent Samuel the prophet to Jesse to appoint one of Jesse's sons king of Israel, Yahweh had in mind an unlikely candidate, a young David who was overlooked even by his own parents (1Sam.16:1-13). Yet David was chosen by Yahweh in a choice

that is consistent with His way of doing things, indeed consistent with God's signature.

Perfection and suffering

The New Testament teaches a lot about suffering, not only that of Christ but also of believers in Christ, and imbues it with spiritual meaning. Just as Jesus was made "perfect through suffering" (Heb.2:10), so those in Christ who have suffered in the flesh have "ceased from sin" (1Pet.4:1).

The gospels seldom mention Jesus' age, but when they do, they offer insight into his life and even his sufferings. Jesus began his ministry at around the age of thirty (Lk.3:23), yet some Jews estimated his age to be nearly fifty (Jn.8:57). In an era in which the male life expectancy was around 35 years, a man approaching 50 would be considered old. Why did the Jews think that Jesus was close to 50 when he was about 30? He obviously looked older than his age. The gospels nowhere suggest that he was in poor health or had a disease that made him look older than normal for his age.

Jesus' aged appearance may reveal something about the years prior to his public ministry. We know that suffering, especially inner suffering, can age a person rapidly. The intensity of his suffering at Gethsemane was of a depth that is hard for us to fathom, yet this was surely not his only occasion of suffering. The life-and-death issue that confronted him at Gethsemane was not a new or unfamiliar one, but was the

culmination of his lifelong struggles; and now he was about to "drink of the cup" (Mt.20:22; Jn.18:11).

Jesus had earlier said, "For this purpose I have come to this hour" (Jn.12:27). The mission to be the sacrificial Lamb of God must have been on his mind ever since John the Baptist announced it at the start of Jesus' ministry. Jesus probably knew about his role even earlier, though we don't know how much earlier. So he must have struggled with his will for a considerable time until his final declaration of assent: "Not my will but Yours be done". The intense suffering in his heart and mind shortly before his being "made sin who knew no sin" (2Cor.5:21) can hardly be imagined. It would be incorrect to suppose that his suffering for the salvation of humankind was confined to the few hours on the cross, or the few days preceding it. On the contrary, Jesus went through a lifetime of suffering, excluding perhaps the years prior to his attaining adulthood at the age of 13.

Do we likewise have a role in the work of salvation by following in his steps and enduring sufferings to "make up what is lacking in Christ's sufferings for the sake of his body" (Col.1:24)? This is not to suggest anything inadequate in the atoning efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. Yet that doesn't rule out further sufferings for the body of Christ, the church, to bear. Whereas Paul says that Christ "our Passover lamb has been sacrificed" (1Cor.5:7), he also says of himself that he has been "poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice of your faith" (Phil.2:17). One chapter earlier, Paul says:

> For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. (Phil.1:29-30)

Jesus' call to us to take up our cross and follow him (Mt. 16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23) is a call to suffer for the sake of God's kingdom.

Most Bibles do not convey God's perfecting work in Luke 13:32

> And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.'" (Luke 13:32, NKJV)

KJV and NKJV correctly translate the last words of this verse as, "I shall be perfected". Here "perfected" (a passive form of *teleioō*, to perfect) is a divine passive: It is implicitly God who brought to completion His perfecting work in Jesus at the cross.

Modern Bibles render "I shall be perfected" as something else, usually by changing the passive into an active: "I finish my course" (ESV), "I reach my goal" (NASB), or "I attain my end" (NJB). These fail to convey Yahweh's perfecting of Jesus through suffering (Heb.2:10), an unfortunate omission given that Jesus' death on the cross was the climax and completion

of his sufferings, the event where his perfection was achieved and completed.

"Faith in Jesus Christ" or "Faith of Jesus Christ"?

In our search for a deeper understanding of Jesus' perfection, sooner or later we will have to confront the striking fact that Paul would sometimes speak of "the faith of Jesus Christ"—that is, the faith exercised by Jesus Christ. This unusual wording collides with trinitarian dogma by implying that Jesus put his faith in God. This would be inconceivable if Jesus is himself God as he is in trinitarianism. This would explain why trinitarian Bibles such as ESV have chosen to render the phrase as "faith in Jesus Christ" rather than "faith of Jesus Christ".

Already in my student days when I was a trinitarian, I noticed an unusual translation in several verses in KJV: "the faith of Jesus Christ" (Rom.3:22; 3:26; Gal.2:16a; 3:22) or "the faith of Christ" (Gal.2:16b; Phil.3:9) or "the faith of the Son of God" (Gal.2:20); Gal.2:16 is listed twice here because it has two such occurrences. These unusual KJV renderings are in fact correct and literal translations of the Greek. These verses are also translated correctly in the NET Bible, the Complete Jewish Bible, and the International Standard Version. Here are the relevant verses from KJV/NET/CJB:

Rom.3:22	by faith of Jesus Christ (KJV) through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ (NET) through the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah (CJB)
Rom.3:26	the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness righteous on the ground of Yeshua's faithfulness
Gal.2:16a	by the faith of Jesus Christ by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ through the Messiah Yeshua's trusting faithfulness
Gal.2:16b	by the faith of Christ by the faithfulness of Christ on the ground of the Messiah's trusting faithfulness
Gal.2:20	I live by the faith of the Son of God I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God I live by the same trusting faithfulness that the Son of God had
Gal.3:22	by faith of Jesus Christ because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ Yeshua the Messiah's trusting faithfulness
Eph.3:12	by the faith of him because of Christ's faithfulness through his faithfulness
Phil.3:9	through the faith of Christ by way of Christ's faithfulness through the Messiah's faithfulness

The literal rendering—"faith of Christ"—is called the subjective genitive (Christ is the subject who exercises faith) whereas "faith in Christ" is called the objective genitive (Christ is the object of faith). The NET Bible, in a footnote on Romans

3:22, offers a strong reason for choosing "faith of Jesus Christ" over "faith in Jesus Christ". The following quotation may be skipped on a first reading:

> Noteworthy among the arguments for the subjective genitive view is that when πίστις (*pistis*, "faith") takes a personal genitive it is almost never an objective genitive (cf. Mt.9:2,22,29; Mk.2:5; 5:34; 10:52; Lk.5:20; 7:50; 8:25,48; 17:19; 18:42; 22:32; Rom.1:8;12; 3:3; 4:5,12,16; 1Cor.2:5; 15:14,17; 2Cor. 10:15; Phil.2:17; Col.1:4; 2:5; 1Thess.1:8; 3:2,5,10; 2Thess.1:3; Titus 1:1; Phlm 6; 1Pet.1:9,21; 2Pet.1:5).

This explanation may seem technical but its point is straightforward. Take the case of Matthew 9:29, one of the verses listed here. In Mt.9:29, Jesus says to some blind men who were about to be healed: "It shall be done to you according to your faith" ("faith of you"; *pistin humōn*, personal genitive). What is this faith? It is obviously the faith that the blind men had exercised (subjective genitive), not the faith that others had put in the blind men (objective genitive). In other words, the blind men were healed because they trusted in Jesus, not because the onlookers trusted in the blind men!

For a discussion on this issue from a grammatical perspective, see Daniel Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp.115-116, which says that "the grammatical argument for the objective genitive, then, has little to commend it," and that "grammatical considerations seem to be in favor of the subjective genitive".

In my student days, the unusual words "the faith of Jesus Christ" in KJV left a question in my mind, but being extremely busy at the time, I could only leave it to a later date to examine the question. Some years later, a book appeared with the title *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, by Richard B. Hays, an eminent NT scholar at Duke Divinity School. His work, which argues for the faith of Jesus Christ, immediately caught my attention.[157]

It has been noted that prior to the 1970s, *pistis Iēsou Christou* was almost universally understood to mean "faith in Jesus Christ" (objective genitive), but in recent decades many scholars have argued that it should be rendered literally as "faith/faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (subjective genitive).[158] A scholar who himself prefers the objective genitive admits that the subjective genitive (the faith of Jesus Christ) has become the majority view among NT scholars.[159]

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[157] See also *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Pistis Christou Debate*, Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, ed. The 17 essays in this book represent both sides of the debate. See also "2 Corinthians 4:13: Evidence in Paul that Christ Believes," Douglas A. Campbell, JBL, vol.128, no.2, 2009, pp.337–356.

[158] *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT*, on Galatians 2:16.

[159] *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Pistis Christou Debate*, p.34. Also *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p.115: "more and more scholars are embracing these texts as involving a subjective genitive (thus, either 'Christ's faith' or 'Christ's faithfulness')".

The issue is not over whether Jesus is the *object* of saving faith (this is not denied) but whether Jesus himself also exercised faith in God in his salvific work. If the answer is *yes*, then the believer's exercise of faith would be a most significant act of following in the steps of Jesus, who himself also exercised faith. What is crucial here is that faith is not just a believing *in* Jesus but also a believing *with* Jesus; it is a vital step of identifying with Jesus in our relationship with God and the pursuit of perfection. The exercise of faith then binds us into a deeper fellowship with Jesus when we follow him as his disciples. Salvation is not just creedal belief in Christ but participation with Christ, both in his faith and in his sufferings, for we are called not just to believe in Christ but also to "suffer for his sake" (Phil.1:29) and to participate in the "fellowship of his sufferings" (3:10).

But the problem for me when I was a trinitarian was that if Jesus is God, then Jesus wouldn't need to have faith, for he himself is the object of faith. Was Jesus so utterly human that he needed to have faith? Why would the human part of "God the Son" need to have faith in God when his divine part does not? It was a hopeless contradiction as is the case with many other things in trinitarianism. Many of these issues are addressed in Hays's detailed work but those without basic theological training may find his book difficult to read.

Because the Jesus of trinitarianism doesn't need to have faith as humans do, he is denied a most vital element of the spiritual life. How then could Jesus have been tested "in every

respect" as other humans when our most severe trials are precisely the test of our faith? What then was the test that Jesus endured in Gethsemane if not the test of faith and obedience? What were the loud cries to God that were heard because of his fear of God? What about the impending death that caused him to cling to God in faith—the faith of Jesus Christ?

In discussing faith, we need to see its inner connection to obedience. This is brought out in the account of Adam's disobedience. If death is the outcome of disobeying Yahweh, why did Adam and Eve disobey God despite having been told of the consequences (Gen.3:3, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die")? What could account for their actions but that they did not believe God's word? Had they believed God, they would not have taken the forbidden fruit. But in ignoring God's warning, they showed contempt for Him and regarded Him as a liar and a weakling. How could they not have believed God given that they were not stupid or irrational? Obviously someone was clever enough to convince them that God didn't mean what He said. They not only thought that they won't die, but that they would become like God, knowing good and evil (Gen.3:4-5). Adam and Eve believed the serpent (the devil) and disobeyed God.

This shows the nexus or inner connection between obedience and belief, and similarly between disobedience and unbelief. Adam did not believe what God had told him but believed the devil, hence the fatal consequences. Adam's death was not immediately apparent because it was not primarily on the physical level.

But Jesus obeyed God with an absolute obedience rooted in faith. In our trinitarian days, the faith of Jesus was not something that crossed our minds, for if Jesus is God, why would he need to have faith? Or submit to anyone? But if he is man, he would certainly need to believe in God and obey Him. If it was by Adam's unbelief and disobedience that all men died, then it was by Jesus' faith and obedience that "the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). Here we see the crucial importance of the faith of Jesus Christ, but trinitarianism has suppressed this truth.

EPILOGUE

The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ

The unparalleled event of the transfiguration of Jesus is recorded for us in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but its meaning is not explained in these gospels. The following is Matthew's account of the transfiguration, followed by a brief excerpt from Luke's account:

> **Matthew 17:1-12** [1] And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. [2] And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. [3] And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. [4] And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." [5] He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed

> them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." [6] When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. [7] But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." [8] And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. [9] And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." [10] And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" [11] He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. [12] But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." (ESV)
>
> **Luke 9:30-32** [30] And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, [31] who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. [32] Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. (ESV)

The transfiguration of Jesus is an event unprecedented in Israel despite its similarity to what took place when Moses came down from Mount Sinai after meeting with God: Moses's face shone so brightly that the people could not bear to look at him, so a veil was put over his face (Ex.34:29-35). Yet a greater display of glory took place at the transfiguration, with Jesus' face shining like the sun and his clothes becoming luminous. The glory shining through Jesus was far

greater than that through Moses on Sinai, though in both cases it was undoubtedly Yahweh's glory that was shining forth.

It is gratuitous and without scriptural basis for BDAG, under *metamorphoō* (be transfigured), to make the trinitarian comment that the transfigured Jesus was manifesting his own preexistent glory. The fact is that the "glory" (*doxa*, Lk.9:32) manifested in Jesus at the transfiguration was not his alleged preexistent glory, just as the "glory" (*doxa*, v.31) manifested in Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration was not a preexistent glory. Jesus repeatedly says that he has nothing except what has been given to him by the Father, and this would certainly include Jesus' glory which had all along been Yahweh's glory shining through him in his words and deeds.

Years later, Peter, an eyewitness of the transfiguration, explicitly says that Jesus' glory at the transfiguration "came from God the Father":

> … we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (2 Peter 1:16-17, NIV)

At the transfiguration, Yahweh's glory shone also through Moses and Elijah. Moses was the one through whom Yahweh had given His word as the Law, and Elijah was the one who raised the dead and thus revealed Yahweh's glory as the Life-giver.

Although God's glory shone more powerfully in Jesus than in Moses and Elijah, it did not occur to Peter to set up just one tent for Jesus only, but to set up three tents for the three. Though Jesus was his teacher and master, there was no "Jesusism" in Peter's mind! Moses as the law giver and Elijah as the representative prophet of Israel were accorded the same honor as Jesus in terms of being offered tents. This is not to deny that God's glory shining through Jesus was greater than that through the other two, but it is to deny that Jesus is to be exalted as the sole object of veneration by his disciples.

The brilliance of Jesus' face, shining like the sun with God's glory, left the disciples overwhelmed and prostrate on the mountain. If they ever had doubts about Yahweh's indwelling presence in Jesus, these would have evaporated at the sight of the brilliance of God's divine light.

The transfiguration was not the only time that Jesus' face shone like the sun in John's presence. Later on, in the Revelation, Jesus appeared to John in a manner similar to his transfiguration:

> In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (Rev.1:16, ESV)

In the Revelation, John saw a similar manifestation of glory in a mighty angel with his face shining with the intensity of the sun.

> Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. (Rev.10:1, ESV)

No one who reads this verse would for a moment think that this angel is a divine being coequal with God the Father. Hence there is no Scriptural basis for making Jesus divine on the basis of his transfigured appearance.

Jesus took only three disciples with him to the transfiguration. Why were the other nine excluded from this remarkable revelation? The gospels give no clues beyond the fact that the three formed Jesus' inner circle of disciples. But we can consider one or two possibilities without arriving at any dogmatic conclusions.

One possible reason is that Judas, the one who was to betray Jesus, was one of the Twelve. So if the other eleven were included in the event of the transfiguration, there would be no way of excluding Judas without drawing attention to him. Moreover, since the transfiguration was a secret that Jesus instructed the three not to share with the others, it is clear that Judas, the disciple who was about to betray him, should hardly be given this secret revelation. Peter, James and John formed Jesus' inner circle of disciples, so in this momentous event of the transfiguration, they were granted to witness an extraordinary revelation about him.

But even if we don't take Judas into account, why restrict the number to three? One possible reason is that God's revelations are granted to those who have an attitude of heart and mind that is rare even among the chosen ones. This is something that experienced teachers of the Scriptures, the word of God, would have firsthand knowledge of. In the course of my teaching and preaching ministry, I have not infrequently seen how some can understand a spiritual truth almost immediately upon hearing it, while others who hear the same truth at the same time and at same place either struggle for a long time to perceive it or never at all. From the gospel accounts, it would seem that John was exceptionally perceptive in spiritual matters. As for Peter, even if he was slightly slower than John, it would seem that his level of spiritual perception was well above average (e.g. Mt.16:15-17). As for James, we know little about him from the gospel accounts, but his inclusion in the inner circle would indicate that he was probably around the level of Peter.

Paul speaks of "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor.4:6). This profound statement says everything there is to be said about the person, life, and ministry of Jesus Christ. God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ is perfectly mirrored in the extraordinary event of the transfiguration.

What is the "secret" of the transfiguration that the three are to keep for a time? There is the significant reference to Jesus' death and resurrection: "Tell no one the vision until

the Son of Man is raised from the dead" (Mt.17:9), and "the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands" (v.12). In Lk.9:31, Moses and Elijah speak of Jesus' "departure" (NIV) or "death" (HCSB).

Years later, Jesus appeared to John at the Revelation and said to him, "I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever" (Rev.1:18), a striking commentary on what he had said on the mount of transfiguration. The dual themes of Jesus' death and Jesus' resurrection form the foundational message of "the gospel of God" (Mk.1:14; Rom.1:1; 15:16; 1Th.2:2,8,9; 1Pet.4:17), so called because through Jesus' death and resurrection, Yahweh reconciled the world to Himself (2Cor.5:19-20). Jesus is the Lord of glory (1Cor.2:8) not because of his supposed preexistence but because by his blood at the cross, mankind was redeemed for God. It was because of his obedience unto death at the cross that he was exalted to receive the glory of God:

> Therefore God has highly exalted him and
> bestowed on him the name that is above every name,
> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
> in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father.

— End —

Appendixes

APPENDIX 1

Encyclopaedia Judaica on YHWH

The following extract is the entire section "YHWH" of the article "Names of God" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2nd ed., vol.7, p.675). This extract, from an esteemed 22-volume authority on Judaism, makes some important points: (i) the name YHWH was regularly pronounced with its proper vowels before 586 BCE; (ii) the proper pronunciation of YHWH is "Yahweh"; (iii) the true pronunciation of YHWH has never been lost; (iv) the rendering "Jehovah" in contrast to "Yahweh" arose from a misunderstanding of the reasons behind the insertion of the vowels in YHWH; (v) the prohibition against uttering the name YHWH was the result of a misunderstanding of the Third Commandment.

[Start of extract]

The personal name of the God of Israel is written in the Hebrew Bible with the four consonants YHWH and is referred to as the "Tetragrammaton." At least until the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. this name was

regularly pronounced with its proper vowels, as is clear from the *Lachish Letters, written shortly before that date. But at least by the third century B.C.E. the pronunciation of the name YHWH was avoided, and Adonai, "the Lord," was substituted for it, as evidenced by the use of the Greek word *Kyrios*, "Lord," for YHWH in the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that was begun by Greek-speaking Jews in that century. Where the combined form Adonai YHWH occurs in the Bible, this was read as Adonai Elohim, "Lord God." In the early Middle Ages, when the consonantal text of the Bible was supplied with vowel points to facilitate its correct traditional reading, the vowel points for ʾAdonai with one variation—a *sheva* with the initial *yod* of YHWH instead of the *ḥataf-pataḥ* under the aleph of ʾAdonai—were used for YHWH, thus producing the form YeHoWaH. When Christian scholars of Europe first began to study Hebrew, they did not understand what this really meant, and they introduced the hybrid name "Jehovah." In order to avoid pronouncing even the sacred name ʾAdonai for YHWH, the custom was later introduced of saying simply in Hebrew *ha-Shem* (or Aramaic *Shemā*ʾ, "the Name") even in such an expression as "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of YHWH" (Ps.118:26). The avoidance of pronouncing the name YHWH is generally ascribed to a sense of reverence. More precisely, it was caused by a misunderstanding of the Third Commandment (Ex.20:7; Deut. 5:11) as meaning "Thou shalt not take the name of YHWH thy God in vain,"

whereas it really means either "You shall not swear falsely by the name of YHWH your God" (JPS) or more likely, "Do not speak the name of YHWH your god, to that which is false," i.e., do not identify YHWH with any other god.

The true pronunciation of the name YHWH was never lost. Several early Greek writers of the Christian Church testify that the name was pronounced "Yahweh." This is confirmed, at least for the vowel of the first syllable of the name, by the shorter form Yah, which is sometimes used in poetry (e.g., Ex.15:2) and the *-yahu* or *-yah* that serves as the final syllable in very many Hebrew names. In the opinion of many scholars, YHWH is a verbal form of the root *hwh*, which is an older variant of the root *hyh* "to be." The vowel of the first syllable shows that the verb is used in the form of a future-present causative *hiphʿil*, and must therefore mean "He causes to be, He brings into existence." The explanation of the name as given in Exodus 3:14, *Eheyeh-Asher-Eheyeh*, "I-Am-Who-I-Am," offers a folk etymology, common in biblical explanation of names, rather than a strictly scientific one. Like many other Hebrew names in the Bible, the name Yahweh is no doubt a shortened form of what was originally a longer name. It has been suggested that the original, full form of the name was something like *Yahweh-Asher-Yihweh*, "He brings into existence whatever exists"; or *Yahweh Ẓeva'ot* (1Sam.1:3,11), which really means "He brings the hosts [of heaven—or of Israel?] into existence." "The Lord of

Hosts," the traditional translation of the latter name, is doubtful.

According to the documentary hypothesis, the literary sources in the Pentateuch known as the Elohist and the Priestly Document never use the name Yahweh for God until it is revealed to Moses (Ex.3:13; 6:2-3); but the Yahwist source uses it from Genesis 2:4 on and puts the name in Eve's declaration, "I along with Yahweh have made a man," thus implying that it was known to the first human generation (Gen.4:1; cf. 4:26). The apparent purpose of Exodus 6:2-3 is to glorify Moses at the expense of the patriarchal traditions.

Appendix 2

Jewish Encyclopedia on Yahweh

The following extract is from the article "Names of God" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Isidore Singer (ed.), volume IX, pages 160-161.

[Start of extract]

Of the names of God in the Old Testament, that which occurs most frequently (6,823 times) is the so-called Tetragrammaton, YHWH (יהוה), the distinctive personal name of the God of Israel. This name is commonly represented in modern translations by the form "Jehovah," which, however, is a philological impossibility (see Jehovah). This form has arisen through attempting to pronounce the consonants of the name with the vowels of Adonai (אדני = "Lord"), which the Masorites have inserted in the text, indicating thereby that Adonai was to be read (as a "ḳeri perpetuum") instead of YHWH. When the name Adonai itself precedes, to

avoid repetition of this name, YHWH is written by the Masorites with the vowels of Elohim, in which case Elohim is read instead of YHWH. In consequence of this Masoretic reading the authorized and revised English versions (though not the American edition of the revised version) render YHWH by the word "Lord" in the great majority of cases.

This name, according to the narrative in Ex. iii. (E), was made known to Moses in a vision at Horeb. In another, parallel narrative (Ex. vi. 2, 3, P) it is stated that the name was not known to the Patriarchs. It is used by one of the documentary sources of Genesis (J), but scarcely if at all by the others. Its use is avoided by some later writers also. It does not occur in Ecclesiastes, and in Daniel is found only in ch. ix. The writer of Chronicles shows a preference for the form Elohim, and in Ps. xlii.-lxxxiii. Elohim occurs much more frequently than YHWH, probably having been substituted in some places for the latter name, as in Ps. liii. (comp. Ps. xiv.).

In appearance, YHWH (יהוה) is the third person singular imperfect "ḳal" of the verb הוה ("to be"), meaning, therefore, "He is," or "He will be," or, perhaps, "He lives," the root idea of the word being, probably, "to blow," "to breathe," and hence, "to live." With this explanation agrees the meaning of the name given in Ex.iii.14, where God is represented as speaking, and hence as using the first person—"I am" (אהיה, from היה, the later equivalent of the archaic stem הוה). The meaning would, therefore, be "He who is self-existing, self-sufficient," or, more concretely, "He who lives," the abstract

conception of pure existence being foreign to Hebrew thought. There is no doubt that the idea of life was intimately connected with the name YHWH from early times. He is the living God, as contrasted with the lifeless gods of the heathen, and He is the source and author of life (comp. I Kings xviii.; Isa. xli. 26-29, xliv. 6-20; Jer. x. 10, 14; Gen. ii. 7; etc.). So familiar is this conception of God to the Hebrew mind that it appears in the common formula of an oath, "ḥai YHWH" (= "as YHWH lives"; Ruth iii.13; I Sam.xiv.45; etc.).

If the explanation of the form above given be the true one, the original pronunciation must have been Yahweh (יַהְוֶה) or Yahaweh (יַהֲוֶה). From this the contracted form Jah or Yah (יָהּ) is most readily explained, and also the forms Jeho or Yeho (יְהוֹ = יְהַו = יַהְוֶ), and Jo or Yo (יוֹ, contracted from יְהוֹ), which the word assumes in combination in the first part of compound proper names, and Yahu or Yah (יָהוּ = וַהְוֶ) in the second part of such names. The fact may also be mentioned that in Samaritan poetry יהוה rimes with words similar in ending to Yahweh, and Theodoret ("Quæst. 15 in Exodum") states that the Samaritans pronounced the name ʾΙαβέ. Epiphanius ascribes the same pronunciation to an early Christian sect. Clement of Alexandria, still more exactly, pronounces ʾΙαουέ or ʾΙαουαί, and Origen, ʻΙαη. Aquila wrote the name in archaic Hebrew letters. In the Jewish-Egyptian magic-papyri it appears as Ιαωουηε. At least as early as the third century B.C. the name seems to have been regarded by the Jews as a "nomen ineffabile," on the basis of a somewhat

extreme interpretation of Ex. xx. 7 and Lev. xxiv. 11 (see Philo, "De Vita Mosis," iii. 519, 529). Written only in consonants, the true pronunciation was forgotten by them.

APPENDIX 3

The Meaning of "I am who I am"

The following extract is from the article "Calling God names: an inner-biblical approach to the Tetragrammaton," William M. Schniedewind, in *Scriptural Exegesis: The Shapes of Culture and the Religious Imagination: Essays in Honour of Michael Fishbane*, Oxford, 2009. When the author mentions the Hebrew phrase *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*, he is referring to the declaration, "I am who I am" (Ex.3:14), Yahweh's famous self-description revealed to Moses.

[Start of extract]

Second, it has been pointed out by many that *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh* [Exodus 3.14,15] seems to be connected with verse 12, in which God promises 'I shall be with you' (אהיה עמד). The connection with verse 12 was already recognized by ancient Jewish interpreters. Independently, many modern readers have seen the same connection. A later interpreter may be playing on the promise, 'I shall be with you'. We do well to remember that this connection does not

merely derive from the immediate context, though that might have been the trigger. The promise 'I shall be with you' (אהיה עמד) is found frequently in the Hebrew Bible; God promises that He will be with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, with Moses, with Joshua, with Gideon, with David, with the people of Israel, and so on. Thus, the exegetical rumination would result not only from the immediate context, but also from the broader cultural and religious horizon of ancient Israel. We arrive at interpretations of the name of God based on the LORD's presence—some have suggested translating *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh* as something like 'I am the one who shall surely be with you'. While there may be an intuitive connection here, the problem with this interpretation is that it is not what the text literally says. *Ehyeh* is an imperfect, or a future; it should mean something like 'I shall be whom I shall be'—but that does not suit our religious sensibilities. 'I shall be whom I shall be' makes the LORD seem capricious, whereas (paradoxically) 'I am who I am' can assert God's unchanging nature. Perhaps both seemed like good answers during the Babylonian exile or in the postexilic community, as well as at other times of crisis.

Although the proximity of *Ehyeh-'Immakh* and *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh* almost demands some relationship between the two, the meanings of the two are not naturally connected. We must assume that *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh* (אהיה אשר אהיה) is an interpretation of אהיה עמד, 'I shall be with you', in order to make the connection. And, we may ask, why stress that God's

name—His very essence—points to God's presence? Perhaps because God's presence was challenged and questioned—as it was by the exile and during the postexilic period. Certainly, there was a need to reassert God's presence in the Jerusalem temple, especially in the postexilic period when the former symbol of God's presence—the ark—was absent. The divine name could serve as a new symbol of God's physical presence in Jerusalem and in the temple.

In sum, the early history of the ineffable name of God seems to be closely associated with the Jerusalem temple. References to the building of a temple 'for the name' can be compared with the rather mundane Near Eastern parallels in which such statements merely indicate exclusivity of ownership. In the exilic period, however, the fact that the temple was 'for the name of God' could be understood to mean that only the name of God, and not God himself, resided in the temple. When the temple was rebuilt in the postexilic period, the fact that the name of God resided in the temple increasingly was understood literally to imply God's physical presence with his people and in the temple. *Ehyeh*, for example, was an interpretation of the Tetragrammaton that played on the promise of God's presence and reassured the people of His immanence. When the former symbol of God's physical presence on earth, the ark of the covenant, had disappeared, the name became a convenient surrogate as a symbol of God's presence with His people, and especially in the Jerusalem temple.

Appendix 4

Jewish Encyclopedia on Memra

The following is the entire article "Memra" from *Jewish Encyclopedia* as it was found at

http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10618-memra

This article is technical, so most readers may wish to skip it. Those who take the time to read it will discover that the equation Memra = Yahweh is beyond doubt.

Everything in the original article has been preserved except for two typographical changes: (i) The verse numbering format has been modernized (e.g. Ps.xxxiii.6 is now Ps.33:6); (ii) the Hebrew letter "het" is transliterated as "ch" rather than "h"+underdot, for font reasons.

Some of the Bible verse numbers in this article are incorrect, possibly the result of typing errors in the original article, but more likely because of errors in the OCR conversion from the print edition to the web edition.

[Start of article]

MEMRA (= "Ma'amar" or "Dibbur," "Logos")

"The Word," in the sense of the creative or directive word or speech of God manifesting His power in the world of matter or mind; a term used especially in the Targum as a substitute for "the Lord" when an anthropomorphic expression is to be avoided.

—Biblical Data:

In Scripture "the word of the Lord" commonly denotes the speech addressed to patriarch or prophet (Gen.15:1; Num. 12:6, 23:5; 1Sam.3:21; Amos 5:1-8); but frequently it denotes also the creative word: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (Ps.33:6; comp. "For He spake, and it was done"; "He sendeth his word, and melteth them [the ice]"; "Fire and hail; snow, and vapors; stormy wind fulfilling his word"; Ps.33:9, 147:18, 148:8). In this sense it is said, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" (Ps.119:89). "The Word," heard and announced by the prophet, often became, in the conception of the seer, an efficacious power apart from God, as was the angel or messenger of God: "The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel" (Isa.9:7 [A.V. 8], 55:11); "He sent his word, and healed them" (Ps.107:20); and comp. "his word runneth very swiftly" (Ps. 147:15).

Personification of the Word.

—In Apocryphal and Rabbinical Literature:

While in the Book of Jubilees, 12:22, the word of God is sent through the angel to Abraham, in other cases it becomes more and more a personified agency: "By the word of God exist His works" (Ecclus. [Sirach] 42:15); "The Holy One, blessed be He, created the world by the 'Ma'amar'" (Mek., Beshallach, 10, with reference to Ps.33:6). Quite frequent is the expression, especially in the liturgy, "Thou who hast made the universe with Thy word and ordained man through Thy wisdom to rule over the creatures made by Thee" (Wisdom 9:1; comp. "Who by Thy words causest the evenings to bring darkness, who openest the gates of the sky by Thy wisdom"; … "who by His speech created the heavens, and by the breath of His mouth all their hosts"; through whose "words all things were created"; see Singer's "Daily Prayer-Book," pp. 96, 290, 292). So also in IV Esdras 6:38 ("Lord, Thou spakest on the first day of Creation: 'Let there be heaven and earth,' and Thy word hath accomplished the work"). "Thy word, O Lord, healeth all things" (Wisdom 16:12); "Thy word preserveth them that put their trust in Thee" (l.c. 16:26). Especially strong is the personification of the word in Wisdom 18:15: "Thine Almighty Word leaped down from heaven out of Thy royal throne as a fierce man of war." The Mishnah, with reference to the ten passages in Genesis (ch.1) beginning with "And God said," speaks of the ten "ma'amar-

ot" (= "speeches") by which the world was created (Abot 5:1; comp. Gen. R. 4:2: "The upper heavens are held in suspense by the creative Ma'amar"). Out of every speech ["dibbur"] which emanated from God an angel was created (Hag. 14a). "The Word ["dibbur"] called none but Moses" (Lev. R. 1:4,5). "The Word ["dibbur"] went forth from the right hand of God and made a circuit around the camp of Israel" (Cant. R. 1:13).

—In the Targum:

In the Targum the Memra figures constantly as the manifestation of the divine power, or as God's messenger in place of God Himself, wherever the predicate is not in conformity with the dignity or the spirituality of the Deity.

Instead of the Scriptural "You have not believed in the Lord," Targ. Deut.1:32 has "You have not believed in the word of the Lord"; instead of "I shall require it [vengeance] from him," Targ. Deut.18:19 has "My word shall require it." "The Memra," instead of "the Lord," is "the consuming fire" (Targ. Deut.9:3; comp. Targ. Isa.30:27). The Memra "plagued the people" (Targ. Yer. to Ex.32:35). "The Memra smote him" (2Sam.6:7; comp. Targ. 1Kings 18:24; Hos.13:14; et al.). Not "God," but "the Memra," is met with in Targ. Ex.19:17 (Targ. Yer. "the Shekinah"; comp. Targ. Ex.25:22: "I will order My Memra to be there"). "I will cover thee with My Memra," instead of "My hand" (Targ. Ex.33:22). Instead of "My soul," "My Memra shall reject you" (Targ. Lev.26:30; comp. Isa.1:14, 42:1; Jer.6:8; Ezek.23:18). "The voice of the Memra,"

instead of "God," is heard (Gen.3:8; Deut.4:33,36; 5:21; Isa. 6:8; et al.). Where Moses says, "I stood between the Lord and you" (Deut. 5:5), the Targum has, "between the Memra of the Lord and you"; and the "sign between Me and you" becomes a "sign between My Memra and you" (Ex. 31:13,17; comp. Lev.26:46; Gen.9:12; 17:2,7,10; Ezek.20:12). Instead of God, the Memra comes to Abimelek (Gen.20:3), and to Balaam (Num.23:4). His Memra aids and accompanies Israel, performing wonders for them (Targ. Num.23:21; Deut.1:30, 33:3; Targ. Isa.63:14; Jer.31:1; Hos.9:10 [comp. 11:3, "the messenger-angel"]). The Memra goes before Cyrus (Isa. 45:12). The Lord swears by His Memra (Gen.21:23, 22:16, 24:3; Ex.32:13; Num.14:30; Isa.45:23; Ezek.20:5; et al.). It is His Memra that repents (Targ. Gen.6:6, 8:21; 1Sam.15:11, 35). Not His "hand," but His "Memra has laid the foundation of the earth" (Targ. Isa.48:13); for His Memra's or Name's sake does He act (l.c. 48:11; 2Kings 19:34). Through the Memra God turns to His people (Targ. Lev.26:90; 2Kings 13:23), becomes the shield of Abraham (Gen.15:1), and is with Moses (Ex.3:12; 4:12,15) and with Israel (Targ. Yer. to Num.10:35,36; Isa.63:14). It is the Memra, not God Himself, against whom man offends (Ex.16:8; Num.14:5; 1Kings 8:50; 2Kings 19:28; Isa. 1:2,16; 45:3,20; Hos.5:7, 6:7; Targ. Yer. to Lev.5:21; 6:2; Deut.5:11); through His Memra Israel shall be justified (Targ. Isa.45:25); with the Memra Israel stands in communion (Targ. Josh.22:24,27); in the Memra man puts

his trust (Targ. Gen.15:6; Targ. Yer. to Ex.14:31; Jer.39:18, 49:11).

Mediatorship

Like the Shekinah (comp. Targ. Num.23:21), the Memra is accordingly the manifestation of God. "The Memra brings Israel nigh unto God and sits on His throne receiving the prayers of Israel" (Targ. Yer. to Deut.4:7). It shielded Noah from the flood (Targ. Yer. to Gen.7:16) and brought about the dispersion of the seventy nations (l.c. 11:8); it is the guardian of Jacob (Gen.28:20-21; 35:3) and of Israel (Targ. Yer. to Ex.12:23,29); it works all the wonders in Egypt (l.c. 13:8, 14:25); hardens the heart of Pharaoh (l.c. 13:15); goes before Israel in the wilderness (Targ. Yer. to Ex.20:1); blesses Israel (Targ. Yer. to Num.23:8); battles for the people (Targ. Josh.3:7, 10:14, 23:3). As in ruling over the destiny of man the Memra is the agent of God (Targ. Yer. to Num. 27:16), so also is it in the creation of the earth (Isa.45:12) and in the execution of justice (Targ. Yer. to Num.33:4). So, in the future, shall the Memra be the comforter (Targ. Isa.66:13): "My Shekinah I shall put among you, My Memra shall be unto you for a redeeming deity, and you shall be unto My Name a holy people" (Targ. Yer. to Lev.22:12). "My Memra shall be unto you like a good plowman who takes off the yoke from the shoulder of the oxen"; "the Memra will roar to gather the exiled" (Targ. Hos.11:5,10). The Memra is "the

witness" (Targ. Yer.29:23); it will be to Israel like a father (l.c. 31:9) and "will rejoice over them to do them good" (l.c. 32:41). "In the Memra the redemption will be found" (Targ. Zech.12:5). "The holy Word" was the subject of the hymns of Job (Test. of Job, 12:3, ed. Kohler).

The Logos

It is difficult to say how far the rabbinical concept of the Memra, which is used now as a parallel to the divine Wisdom and again as a parallel to the Shekinah, had come under the influence of the Greek term "Logos," which denotes both word and reason, and, perhaps owing to Egyptian mythological notions, assumed in the philosophical system of Heraclitos, of Plato, and of the Stoa the metaphysical meaning of world-constructive and world-permeating intelligence (see Reizenstein, "Zwei Religionsgeschichtliche Fragen," 1901, pp. 83-111; comp. Aall, "Der Logos," and the Logos literature given by Schürer, "Gesch." i. 3, 542-544). The Memra as a cosmic power furnished Philo the corner-stone upon which he built his peculiar semi-Jewish philosophy. Philo's "divine thought," "the image" and "first-born son" of God, "the archpriest," "intercessor," and "paraclete" of humanity, the "arch type of man" (see Philo), paved the way for the Christian conceptions of the Incarnation ("the Word become flesh") and the Trinity. The Word which "the unoriginated Father created in His own likeness as a manifest-

ation of His own power" appears in the Gnostic system of Marcus (Irenæus, "Adversus Hæreses," i. 14). In the ancient Church liturgy, adopted from the Synagogue, it is especially interesting to notice how often the term "Logos," in the sense of "the Word by which God made the world, or made His Law or Himself known to man," was changed into "Christ" (see "Apostolic Constitutions," vii. 25-26, 34-38, et al.). Possibly on account of the Christian dogma, rabbinic theology, outside of the Targum literature, made little use of the term "Memra."

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Appendix 5

Jesus' Sinless Perfection is Rejected by Many Scholars as Impossible

The following extract is from *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, article "Jesus Christ," by John J. Maclaren. It gives helpful insight into the supremely miraculous nature of Christ's perfection and sinlessness, and how it is regarded as impossible by many scholars (but not by Maclaren).

[Start of extract]

IV. The Character and Claims.

1. Denial of Christ's Moral Perfection:

Where the Gospels present us in Jesus with the image of a flawless character—in the words of the writer to the Hebrews, "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners" (Heb 7:26)—modern criticism is driven by an inexorable necessity

to deprive Jesus of His sinless perfection, and to impute to Him the error, frailty, and moral infirmity that belong to ordinary mortals. In Schweitzer's portraiture (compare op. cit.), He is an apocalyptic enthusiastic, ruled by illusory ideals, deceiving Himself and others as to who He was, and as to the impending end of the world. Those who show a more adequate appreciation of Christ's spiritual greatness are still prevented by their humanitarian estimate of His person and their denial of the supernatural in history from recognizing the possibility of His sinlessness. It may confidently be said that there is hardly a single writer of the modern school who grants Christ's moral perfection. To do so would be to admit a miracle in humanity, and we have heard that miracle is by the highest rational necessity excluded. This, however, is precisely the point on which the modern so-called "historical-critical" mode of presentation most obviously breaks down. The ideal of perfect holiness in the Gospels which has fascinated the conscience of Christendom for 18 centuries, and attests itself anew to every candid reader, is not thus lightly to be got rid of, or explained away as the invention of a church gathered out (without the help of the ideal) promiscuously from Jews and Gentiles. It was not the church—least of all such a church—that created Christ, but Christ that created the church.

(1) The Sinlessness Assured

The sinlessness of Jesus is a *datum* in the Gospels. Over against a sinful world He stands as a Savior who is Himself without sin. His is the one life in humanity in which is presented a perfect knowledge and unbroken fellowship with the Father, undeviating obedience to His will, unswerving devotion under the severest strain of temptation and suffering to the highest ideal of goodness. The ethical ideal was never raised to so absolute a height as it is in the teaching of Jesus, and the miracle is that, high as it is in its unsullied purity, the character of Jesus corresponds with it, and realizes it. Word and life for once in history perfectly agree. Jesus, with the keenest sensitiveness to sin in thought and feeling as in deed, is conscious of no sin in Himself, confesses no sin, disclaims the presence of it, speaks and acts continually on the assumption that He is without it. Those who knew Him best declared Him to be without sin (1 Pet 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5; compare 2Cor 5:21). The Gospels must be rent in pieces before this image of a perfect holiness can be effaced from them.

(2) What This Implies

How is this phenomenon of a sinless personality in Jesus to be explained? It is itself a miracle, and can only be made credible by a creative miracle in Christ's origin. It may be argued that a Virgin Birth does not of itself secure sinlessness, but it will hardly be disputed that at least a sinless

personality implies miracle in its production. It is precisely because of this that the modern spirit feels bound to reject it. In the Gospels it is not the Virgin Birth by itself which is invoked to explain Christ's sinlessness, but the supernatural conception by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35). It is because of this conception that the birth is a virgin one. No explanation of the supernatural element in Christ's Person is more rational or credible (see below on "Nativity").

2. Sinlessness and the Messianic Claim

If Jesus from the first was conscious of Himself as without sin and if, as the converse of this, He knew Himself as standing in an unbroken filial fellowship with the Father, He must early have become conscious of His special vocation, and learnt to distinguish Himself from others as one called to bless and save them. Here is the true germ of His Messianic consciousness, from which everything subsequently is unfolded. He stood in a *rapport* with the Father which opened His spirit to a full, clear revelation of the Father's will regarding Himself, His mission, the kingdom He came to found, His sufferings as the means of salvation to the world, the glory that awaited Him when His earthly work was done. In the light of this revelation He read the Old Testament Scriptures and saw His course there made plain. When the hour had come He went to John for baptism, and His brief, eventful ministry, which should end in the cross, began. This is the

reading of events which introduces consistency and purpose into the life of Jesus, and it is this we mean to follow in the sketch now to be given.

Appendix 6

Karl-Josef Kuschel on Christ and Adam

The following extract is from pp.251-252 of Karl-Josef Kuschel's *Born Before All Time? The Dispute Over Christ's Origin* (Crossroad, NY, 1992, translated from the German). It touches on several related topics: Christ and Adam; Christ as "the form of God"; and Christ's preexistence. The value of Kuschel's book is evident from its high scholarship and the fact that its Foreword was written by Hans Küng.

[Start of extract]

Already in the 1960s and 1970s Anglo-Saxon exegetes had paid more attention than representatives of German exegesis to the basic alternative that in this text Christ is not celebrated as a pre-existent heavenly being, but in good Jewish fashion as a human counterpart to Adam.[29] That view cannot be completely false, simply because in other passages in his correspondence Paul also compares Christ with Adam (Rom.5:12-21; I Cor.15:21f., 45-47). In fact we can ask: is not

Adam, the first, original man, here replaced and surpassed by Jesus as the definitive, ultimately valid man? In that case we should regard Gen.1-3, the creation and fall of the first man, as the traditio-historical background.

Linguistically, this seems to be supported simply by the fact that one can virtually identify 'form of God' (*morphē theou*)—thus literally, and better than 'he was like God'—with *doxa* (glory) or *eikōn* (image) of God.[30] The same holds for the Greek word *homoioma* ('and in the likeness of men') of v.7, which, moreover, is occasionally translated 'in form like a man'.[31] So the first line of the hymn would speak of Christ, who like Adam was created 'in the image' of God and like Adam participated in the 'glory' of God before his fall. The contrasting term to 'form of God' would further confirm this derivation: 'form of a slave' is evidently an allusion to Adam's fate after the fall. The second contrasting pair at the beginning of the text would point in the same direction: 'likeness of God' probably alludes to Adam's temptation (he wanted to be like God, Gen.3:5) and 'likeness of men' in turn to Adam's state after succumbing to sin.

The phrase 'being like God' (Greek *isa theou),* too, may not simply be translated with terms like 'equality to God', 'being like God', as often happens. That would require the form *isos theos.* What we have in the text is the adverb *isa,* and that merely means 'as God', 'like God'. So there is no statement about Christ *being* equal to God, and this in turn tells against an interpretation in terms of pre-existence. So on

both traditio-historical and linguistic grounds, according to the Catholic exegete and Jerusalem Dominican Jerome Murphy-O'Connor there is 'no justification for interpreting the phrase of the hymn in terms of being of Christ'.[32]

So this text would be a piece of Adam christology, of the kind that also emerges in other contexts in the New Testament. It would be a further example of the widespread two-stage christology of the earliest Jewish-Christian communities (life-death/resurrection-exaltation of Jesus Christ) which we have already analyzed, and thus would not be in the context of mythical tradition, but of Old Testament tradition. So there is no question here of a pre-existent heavenly figure. Rather, Christ is the great contrasting figure to Adam. To be specific, was it not Adam who wanted to become even more like God and thus succumbed to hubris and the primal sin? Was it not Adam who then as punishment had to live a kind of slave's existence? And is not the Christ of this hymn precisely the opposite? Did he not give up his being in the image of God voluntarily? Did he not take on the form of a slave, not as a punishment, but voluntarily and obediently, so that he was then appointed by God to his heavenly dignity? That, then, would be the contrast, the great antithesis in this hymn: Adam the audacious man—Christ the man who humbled himself; Adam the one who was humbled forcibly by God—Christ the man who voluntarily humbled himself before God; Adam the rebellious man—Christ the man who was utterly obedient; Adam the one who was ultimately cursed—Christ

the one who was ultimately exalted; Adam who wanted to be like God—and in the end became dust; Christ, who was in the dust and indeed went to the cross—and is in the end the Lord over the cosmos?

Thus in this hymn Christ seems to be the new Adam who has finally overcome the old Adam. There is no question of a pre-existence of Christ with the scheme of a three-stage christology: pre-existence, humiliation, post-existence. Instead of this, the author celebrates the whole earthly-human life of Christ as a life of voluntary self-surrender to lowliness, as obedience which extends to the existence of a slave and a shameful death. In so doing he makes two things clear. It is only because of, only through lowliness that Jesus could also become the pantocrator; and conversely, the pantocrator bears for ever the features of the humbled man, indeed the crucified slave.

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor can therefore draw the basic conclusion:

> *'Strophe 1:* As the Righteous Man par excellence Christ was the perfect image (*eikon*) of God. He was totally what God intended man to be. His sinless condition gave him the right to be treated as if he were God, that is, to enjoy the incorruptibility in which Adam was created. This right, however, he did not use to his own advantage, but he gave himself over to the consequences of a mode of existence that was not his by accepting the condition of a slave which involved suffering and death.

> *Strophe 2* : Though in his human nature Christ was identical with other men, he in fact differed from them because, unlike them, he had no need to be reconciled with God. Nonetheless, he humbled himself in obedience and accepted death.
>
> *Strophe* 3: Therefore, God exalted him above all the just who were promised a kingdom, and transferred to him the title and the authority that had hitherto been God's alone. He is the *Kyrios* whom every voice must confess and to whom every knee must bow.
>
> Thus understood, the original hymn represents an attempt to define the uniqueness of Christ considered precisely as man. This is what one would expect at the beginning of Christian theology.'[33]

[The following are endnotes 29 to 33 in Kuschel's book]

29. This position is represented by J. Harvey, 'A New Look at the Christ Hymn in Phil.2.6-11', *Expository Times* 76, 1964/65, 337-9; C.H. Talbert, 'The Problem of Pre-existence in Phil.2.6-11', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, 1967, 141-53; J.M. Furness, 'Behind the Philippian Hymn', *Expository Times* 79, 1967/68, 178-82; Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 114-21; R. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple. The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times*, New York 1979, 45f. Among the German exegetes is H.-W. Bartsch, *Die konkrete Wahrheit und die Lüge der Spekulation. Untersuchung über den vor-paulinischen Christushymnus und seine gnostische Mythisierung*, Frankfurt am Main 1974. More recently in Catholic American theology, T.N. Hart, *To Know and Follow Jesus*, New York 1984, 93-100; L.Swidler, *Yeshua. A Model for Moderns*, Kansas City 1988, 23-6.

30. Cf. F.-W. Eltester, *Eikon im Neuen Testament*, Berlin 1958, who draws the parallel to II Cor.4.4 (133). Cf. similarly J. Behm, '*morphe*', *TDNT* IV, Grand

Rapids 1967, 742-52, esp.751 : 'The *morphe theou* in which the pre-existent Christ is simply the divine *doxa*: Paul's *en morphe theou hyparchon* corresponds exactly to John 17.5.'

31. Thus e.g., *Neues Testament*, translated U. Wilckens, Hamburg, Cologne and Zurich 1970, 1971

32. J.Murphy-O'Connor OP, 'Christological Anthropology in Phil.2.6-11', *Revue Biblique* 93, 1976, 25-50: 39.

33. Ibid, 49f. Against the theses of Murphy-O'Connor: G. Howard, 'Phil.2.6-11 and the Human Christ', CBQ 40, 1978, 356-76; I.H. Marshall, 'Incarnational Christology in the NT', in *Christ the Lord. Studies in Christology presented to D. Guthrie*, ed. H.H. Rowdon, Leicester 1982,1-16; L.D. Hurst, 'Re-enter the Pre-existent Christ in Phil. 2.5-11', *NTS* 32, 1986, 449-57; C.A. Wanamaker, Phil.2.6-11: Son of God or Adamic Christology?', *NTS* 33, 1987, 179-93.

APPENDIX 7

The Gnostic Origins of "Homoousios"

Hundreds, possibly thousands, of academic works have been written on the subject of Gnosticism, an esoteric movement that was a threat to the early church. It suffices for our purposes to give two brief explanations of Gnosticism from two references:

> **Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)**: "GNOSTICISM, a prominent heretical movement of the 2nd-century Christian Church, partly of pre-Christian origin. Gnostic doctrine taught that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (*gnosis*) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit."
>
> **Encarta 2007 Encyclopedia**: "GNOSTICISM, esoteric religious movement that flourished during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD and presented a major challenge to orthodox Christianity. Most Gnostic sects professed Christianity, but their beliefs sharply diverged from those of the majority of Christians in

> the early church (see Heresy). The term *gnosticism* is derived from the Greek word *gnosis* ('revealed knowledge'). To its adherents, Gnosticism promised a secret knowledge of the divine realm. Sparks or seeds of the Divine Being fell from this transcendent realm into the material universe, which is wholly evil, and were imprisoned in human bodies. Reawakened by knowledge, the divine element in humanity can return to its proper home in the transcendent spiritual realm." ("Gnosticism," paragraph 1, Encarta 2007)

Various sources, ancient and modern, have touched on the Gnostic origins of the word *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος, one in substance) that was controversially adopted by the Council of Nicaea to assert that the Father and the Son are of "one substance" or the "same essence". Its Gnostic origins was one of the reasons that made the word suspect and the target of criticism, even by some who later acceded to the Nicene creed, in the debates leading up to the Nicene formulation.[160]

A masterly and meticulously documented discussion of the Gnostic origins of *homoousios* is found in a paragraph of the Wikipedia article *Homoousian* under the heading "Pre-Nicene use of the term": [161]

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[160] *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381*, R.P.C. Hanson, chapter 7, pp.190-202.

[161] We quote the second paragraph of Wikipedia article "Homoousian" as it was on February 20, 2013 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homoousian. The four footnotes in this excerpt are here included in their entirety and without alteration

Pre-Nicene use of the term

The term ὁμοούσιος (*homoousios*) had been used before its adoption by the Nicene theology. The Gnostics were the first theologians to use the word *homoousios*, while before the Gnostics there is no trace at all of its existence.[162] The early church theologians were probably made aware of this concept, and thus of the doctrine of emanation, by the Gnostics.[163] In Gnostic texts the word *homoousios* is used with

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except for a change in footnote numbers, originally 1 to 4, but changed to higher footnote numbers to conform to the footnote numbering sequence of the present book.

[162] Adolf von Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, 1:284-85, n.3; 2:232-34, n.4. Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, "L'homoousios preniceno," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 8 (1942): 194-209; Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, *El Simbolo Niceno* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1947), 183-202. Luis M. Mendizabal, "El Homoousios Preniceno Extraeclesiastico," *Esthdios Eclesiasticos* 30 (1956): 147-96. George Leonard Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1936; 2d ed., 1952), 197-218. Peter Gerlitz, *Aufierchristliche Einflilsse auf die Entwicklung des christlichen. Trinitatsdogmas, zugleich ein religions- und dogmengeschichtlicher Versuch zur Erklarung der Herkunft der Homousie* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 193-221. Ephrem Boularand, *L'heresie d'Arius et la "foi" de Nicke*, vol. 2, "La "foi" de Nicee" (Paris: Letouzey & Ane, 1972), 331-53. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3d ed. (London: Longman, 1972), 245. Frauke Dinsen, *Homoousios. Die Geschichte des Begriffs bis zum Konzil von Konstantinopel* (381), Diss. Kiel 1976, 4-11. Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance*, 190-202.

[163] Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition, vol. 1, From the*

> these meanings: (1) identity of substance between generating and generated; (2) identity of substance between things generated of the same substance; (3) identity of substance between the partners of a syzygy. For example, Basilides, the first known Gnostic thinker to use *homoousios* in the first half of the 2nd century, speaks of a threefold sonship consubstantial with the god who is not. [164] The Valentinian Gnostic Ptolemy claims in his letter to Flora that it is the nature of the good God to beget and bring forth only beings similar to, and consubstantial with himself. [165] *Homoousios* was already in current use by the 2nd-century Gnostics, and through their works it became known to the orthodox heresiologists, though this Gnostic use of the term had no reference to the specific relationship between Father and Son, as is the case in the Nicene Creed.

Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451) (London: Mowbrays, 1975), p.109.

[164] According to Hippolytus: "Υἱότης τριμερής, κατὰ πάντα τῷ οὐκ ὄντι θεῷ ὁμοούσιος". (*Refutatio omnium haeresium* 7:22) See also, for the Gnostic use of the term, Miroslav Marcovich in *Patristische Texte und Studien*, 25 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1986), 290f. V,8,10 (156); V,17,6.10 (186 f.).

[165] According to Epiphanius: "Τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φύσιν ἔχοντος τὰ ὅμοια ἑαυτῷ καὶ ὁμοούσια γεννᾶν τε καὶ προφέρειν". (*Panarion* 33:7,8)

Appendix 8

The Irresolvable Problems of Trinitarian Christology

In his manuscript notes, Eric Chang included an article, "Was Jesus Perfect God and Perfect Man at the Same Time?" which he said was taken from the Internet. A subsequent Internet search found the article at
http://www3.sympatico.ca/shabir.ally/new_page_26

The following is quoted word for word from the article as it was on March 26, 2013, though the extremely low resolution diagram that came with the original article has been redone (by us) at higher resolution.

We won't express agreement or disagreement with the article, leaving it to the reader to come to his or her conclusion about its correctness. It is included here solely for the purpose of seeing a Muslim's informed perspective on the issue.

[Start of the Internet article, as it was on March 26, 2013]

Was Jesus Perfect God and Perfect Man at the Same Time?

According to Orthodox Christian belief, Jesus was perfect man and perfect God at the same time. This belief is necessary for salvation according to the Athanasian creed held dear by most Christians. Modern Christian scholars reject this idea not because it is difficult to understand but because it cannot be meaningfully expressed. The doctrine cannot be stated in any way that is free from contradictions. It is impossible for Jesus to have been perfect man and perfect God at the same time, for this would mean that he was finite and infinite at the same time, and that he was fallible and infallible at the same time. This cannot be.

What the creed denies is also quite significant. The creed was formulated in response to the claims of various early Christian groups, and so includes clauses that deny the beliefs of those groups. In response to the Arians who believed that Jesus was not God, the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) decreed that he was fully God. In response to the Apollinarians who believed Jesus was God but not fully human, the council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) decreed that Jesus was fully human.

Then there was Nestorianism, the belief that started when Nestorius denied that Mary could be called "Mother of God."

To him, Mary was mother of the human Jesus only. This implied that there were two Christs: one divine, the other human. Against Nestorius, the council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) decreed that the two natures of Jesus cannot be separated. Everything Jesus does is done by both the humanity and divinity in him. Likewise, everything that happened to him happened to both the man and God that he is. Therefore Mary gave birth to both, both died on the cross, etc.

At yet another council, the council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), the creed received some finishing touches and the Athanasian creed was declared official church teaching. Most Christians are not familiar with the detailed implications of the creed, and in their own minds conceive of Jesus in the very ways the creed was formulated to deny. This tendency results from the fact that the creed's definition of Jesus is impossible for any human mind to comprehend. One can only repeat the words, but cannot grasp the meaning of the required belief. Therefore most just repeat the creed with their lips but in their minds turn to views of Jesus that are less taxing on the intellect, even though those views were declared by the Church to be heretical.

The orthodox doctrine is logically impossible. As Huston Smith, scholar of comparative religion, points out, it would not have been logically impossible if the creed had only said that Jesus was somewhat divine and somewhat human. But this is expressly what the creed denies. For orthodox Christians, Jesus cannot possess only some human qualities; he

must possess all. He must be fully human. At the same time, he cannot possess only some divine qualities; he must have all. He must be fully divine. This is impossible because to be fully divine means one has to be free of human limitations. If he has only one human limitation then he is not God. But according to the creed he has every human limitation. How, then, can he be God? Huston Smith calls this a blatant contradiction. In his book *The World's Religions*, he writes:

> We may begin with the doctrine of the Incarnation, which took several centuries to fix into place. Holding as it does that in Christ God assumed a human body, it affirms that Christ was God-Man; simultaneously both fully God and fully man. To say that such a contention is paradoxical seems a charitable way to put the matter—it looks more like a blatant contradiction. If the doctrine held that Christ was half human and half divine, or that he was divine in certain respects, while being human in others, our minds would not balk. (*The World's Religions*, p. 340).

If it was said that Jesus was partly human and partly divine that would not be logically impossible but only scripturally impossible. The Bible nowhere teaches that Jesus was divine in any way. Furthermore, if he was only partly divine then he was not the One True God of the Old and New Testaments. God is All-Powerful, not somewhat all-powerful; God is All-Knowing, not somewhat all-knowing.

C. Randolph Ross is a Christian. In his book *Common Sense Christianity* he debunks the orthodox view "not because it is difficult to understand," he says, but because "it cannot meaningfully be said." He rejects it because "it is impossible," he says. *(Common Sense Christianity, p.79)*. His arguments are so persuasive that I can do little better than just repeat them. To be human means to be limited, lacking in knowledge, prone to mistakes, imperfect. To be God means just the opposite: unlimited, complete in knowledge, infallible, perfect. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say of one person that he was both. Either he was one or the other.

This is no Paradox

To those who say this is a paradox, Ross answers nicely. It is important to understand first of all what is a paradox. A paradox is something that seems impossible but can be demonstrated to be true. On the other hand, the creedal statement may seem true to some people but logic demonstrates it to be false. Ross argues with an example that makes the point succinct:

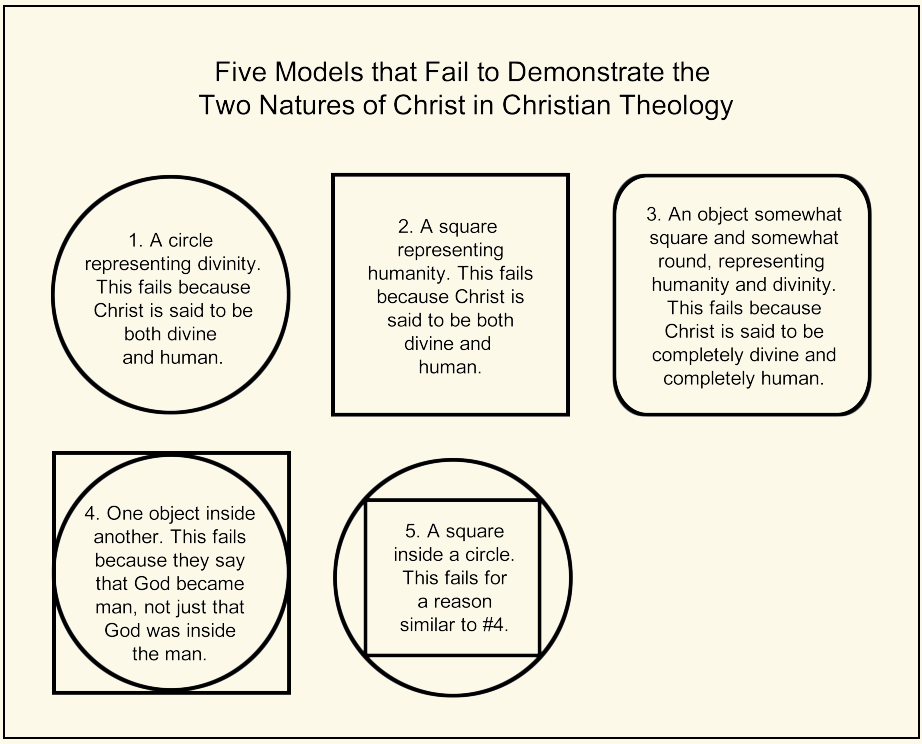
> "Ah!" some will say. "That's the paradox!" No, it isn't a paradox. This is a very important point, so please take special note: a paradox is something which seems impossible but which is demonstrably true. Thus, it was a paradox when some scientist carefully analyzed bumblebees and concluded

> that according to the laws of physics they couldn't fly. There was contradiction and apparent impossibility, but bumblebees kept on flying. However, for an individual to be both perfect and imperfect is the reverse of this: it may seem true to some, but it is demonstrably impossible. And not just impossible according to our understanding of the laws of nature, which can be wrong (as with the bumblebee), but impossible according to the rules of logic upon which all our reasoning is based. (p.82)

Let me elaborate this last point. Human observation and analysis can turn out to be incorrect. This was the case with the scientist who figured that according to the laws of Physics bumblebees could not fly. The flaw in his procedure is that our understanding of the laws of nature is always improving. New knowledge often declare old to be false. But with the rules of logic things are different. What is true by definition will always remain true unless we start redefining things. For example, 2+2=4. This equation will always remain true. The only way this can ever become false is if we decide to change the definitions of the component parts. Now, by definition, a thing cannot be the opposite of itself. A thing cannot be perfect and imperfect at the same time. The presence of one of these qualities implies the absence of the other. Jesus was either one or the other. He cannot logically be both. Ross is very eloquent on this:

> To say someone is perfect and imperfect is like saying that you saw a square circle. This is an impossibility. Are you saying the circle was not round, in which case it was not a circle? Or are you saying the square was circular? This is not a paradox; this is meaningless nonsense, however imaginative it might be. (p. 82)

To develop this point further, I tried to relate it to what can and cannot be said about Jesus according to the creed. In the diagram below, we see a figure that is somewhat round and somewhat square. It is unorthodox to say that Jesus was somewhat man and somewhat God. Even the models that combine a circle and a square one inside the other do not work, for in each case you have two objects clearly separable. Orthodoxy does not allow this for the two natures of Jesus. To satisfy the requirements of orthodoxy we must find an object which is at once a circle and a square. By definition, such an object cannot exist (see accompanying diagram).



The difficulty is not with believing what the creed says. The problem is that the creed in effect says nothing. When we are told two opposites what then are we to believe? Ross puts it nicely:

> To say that someone is perfect and imperfect at the same time is to say that "X" and "not-X" can both be true. This is either to abandon the meaning of these words or else to abandon logic, and in either case this means we are speaking nonsense that can have no meaning for us. (p.82)

The orthodox say that Jesus was imperfect with regards to his human nature but perfect with regards to his divine nature. The problem with this position is that it implies the existence of two persons occupying the one body of Jesus: one perfect, the other imperfect. You need for this two minds, two wills, two characters. But the creed does not allow this necessary conclusion and insists that Jesus was not two persons but one only. Now, this one person had to be either perfect or not, infallible or not, unlimited in knowledge or not. You cannot say of the same person that he was both.

When Jesus faced death on the cross according to Christian belief, either he faced it with the human belief that he would be raised on the third day, or he faced death with the infallible knowledge that he would be so raised. If he believed with human faith in God's power to raise him then he himself was not God. If, on the other hand, he faced death with infallible divine knowledge that he would be resurrected, then he was not taking any real risk in letting himself die. If the divine nature in him knew he would be raised, but he did not know this, then it was not his divine nature. If the divine nature knew something he did not, we are back to two persons.

This could get more difficult to explain as we look at the deeds reported of Jesus in the gospels and ask whether the divine or human nature or both performed those deeds. Let us consider the episode where Jesus curses the fig tree. First, the account as it appears in Mark:

> Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." (Mark 11:12-14, NIV)

As a result, the tree withered from the roots (v.20). Now, a few things are clear from this episode.

1. Jesus did not know the tree had no fruit until he went up to the tree and found nothing but leaves.
2. When Jesus saw leaves from a distance he hoped to find fruit on the tree.
3. It was not fig season, and this is why the tree had no figs. This comment from Mark clearly implies that it was a perfectly good tree. If the tree was barren, Mark's comment about the season would have been pointless and misleading.
4. Jesus did not know it was not fig season. If he had known this, he would not have expected the tree to have fruit, and he would not have cursed the tree for having no fruit.
5. The whole thing began when Jesus felt hungry.

Now it is easy to understand that the human Jesus felt hunger, and that the human Jesus did not know it was not fig season and so mistakenly expected the tree to have fruit. A divine Jesus would have known all these, and would not have to go to the tree to discover it had no fruit; he would not have been hungry in the first place.

Now the cursing of the tree is a little more difficult for those who assert the divinity of Jesus. His miracles, they say, are performed by his divine nature. Okay, so the divine Jesus cursed the tree. But why? Why ruin a tree which in Mark's view was a perfectly good tree? Come fig season this tree would have had fruit and others could have eaten from it. The reason was that the human Jesus made a mistake. But why did the divine Jesus act upon the mistake of the human Jesus? Does the human mind in Jesus guide the divine nature in him? Actually, there is no warrant for all this speculation, for scripture nowhere says that Jesus has two natures. Those who want to believe contrary to scripture that Jesus was fully human yet fully divine can go on speculating.

Some will say that everything is possible with God, and that we are using words here with their human meanings. This is true. Everything is possible with God. We believe that. If you tell me God did such and such and He is such and such I cannot say it is impossible. But what if you say "God did and did not," or "He is and is not?" Your statements are meaningless. When you say that Jesus is perfect God and perfect man at the same time you are saying two opposite things. Therefore, I reply, "Impossible!"

So what we need here is to hear it said with meaning. If you think that the words have a different or deeper meaning, when applied to God I cannot help agreeing with you. But I would like to know with what meaning you are using those words. Ross explains:

> If you wish to redefine some of these words, that's fine, as long as you can tell us the new meanings that you are using. The usual practice, however, seems to be to say that while one cannot say precisely what these new meanings are, one is nevertheless sure that they fit together in a way that makes sense. This, of course, is simply an effort to duck the requirements of logic. But if you do not know the meanings of the words which you are applying to Jesus, then you are simply saying "Jesus is X" and "Jesus is Y," X and Y being unknowns. This, of course, is to say nothing at all. (p. 83)

As a result of this confusion, many Christians revert to the idea that Jesus had two natures that are separable. Sometimes he acts as a human and sometimes he acts as God. This, of course, is not supported by scripture, and it would have been wiser to move to the scriptural position that Jesus was a man and a servant of God (See Matthew 12:18, Acts 3:13, Acts 4:27 in the Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version).]

[End of excerpt from the Internet article]

Appendix 9

What Philo Teaches, and Why He cannot be used in Support of Trinitarianism

This appendix continues our discussion, started in chapter 3, on Philo and his teachings. It is somewhat detailed, so most readers may wish to skip it. It consists of two parts. The first part points to the fact that scholars who specialize in Philo are aware that Philo's *logos* is not a real person, much less a divine person; hence there is no basis for the trinitarian use of Philo's *logos* for interpreting "the Word" in John's Prologue.

The second part is a compilation of Philo's own statements on the *logos* ("the Word"). These statements show us what Philo really means by *logos*, and demonstrate that his *logos*, which he sometimes calls "the second god," is not really a person, much less a divine person. Hence Philo's *logos* offers no help to the trinitarian interpretation of "the Word" in John's Prologue.

What Philo means by *logos*

Earlier we mentioned Kenneth Schenck's *A Brief Guide to Philo*. On pages 58-62, Schenck explains in seven points, under seven headings, what Philo means by the *logos*. Here are the seven headings, quoted verbatim:

1. The *logos* as God's directive force in the world
2. The *logos* as the image of God
3. The *logos* as the instrument of creation
4. The *logos* as the container of the world of ideas
5. The *logos* as the glue/prop of creation
6. The *logos* as the soul's guide to God
7. The *logos*: A second god?

The first six points are not directly useful for the trinitarian interpretation of John 1:1 despite some tangential relevance. Only point #7 offers something that may be useful. The question mark in point #7 is Schenck's. So what does he say in point #7 regarding the "second god"? We now quote in full his discussion on point #7 (omitting a few sentences near the end, due to their technical nature). From Schenck's explanation of what Philo means by the *logos*, we see that Philo offers nothing that is useful for trinitarianism but in fact offers much that can be used *against* the trinitarian appropriation of Philo.

[Start of Schenck's seventh point (pp.61-62)]

Philo somewhat startlingly could refer to the logos as a "second God":

"I am the God who appeared to you in the place of god" [Gen.31:13] … Inquire carefully if there are two gods in what it says … For in truth God is one, even if there are many whom people improperly call "gods". Therefore, the sacred word [logos] in this case has revealed who is truly God by way of the articles. It states in the one place, "I am the God." But in the other instance it indicates the one we should not call god by omitting the article: "the one who appeared to you in the place" not "of the God" but only "of god." Here it calls God's oldest Word [logos] "god." (Somn. 1:227-230)

In this passage, Philo speaks of how many mistake God's governor and representative, the logos, for him. Those without wisdom cannot understand God without some sense of him having a body and being like humans. These understand God by way of him having a body and being like humans. These understand God by way of his angel or messenger, his Word (logos).

The distinction between God, whose essence is unknowable, and the logos is significant for Philo. When he is speaking imprecisely, he can speak of the logos as if it were simply God's reason in action (e.g. Opif. 36). But when he is in technical philosophy mode, he draws an important distinction between God and his reason (logos):

To his chief messenger [=archangel] and oldest word [logos] the father who gave birth to everything gave a special gift to stand on the boundary and separate what has come into existence from the one who has created. And this same logos is a constant suppliant to the immortal for the disturbed mortal and an ambassador of the ruler to the subject. And he rejoices in the

> gift and tells us the whole story with pride as he says, "I stood in the middle between the Lord and you," neither being uncreated like God nor created like you. I was between the extremes. (Her. 205-206)
>
> In this passage Philo puts the logos on the created side of the creation. In the end, a comparison of Philo with the philosophical traditions he utilizes points us toward seeing the logos as something with independent existence from God. But we probably should not understand it to be a person either.
>
> [7 sentences omitted]
>
> Because the Monad was a distinct entity from God for Philo, it would appear that we must consider the logos a hypostasis, although not a personal one.

[End of Schenck's discussion]

The scholarly ISBE article "Philo, Judaeus" says that the fluidness of Philo's language has given rise to terms such as "second God" which are often misunderstood:

> While, therefore, Philo thinks in a cultural perspective akin to that characteristic of the author of the Fourth Gospel, two vast differences sway his doctrine. On the one hand, it is speculative, not ethically personal. On the other hand, it fails completely to determine the nature of his mediator [the Logos] in itself, vacillating in a manner which shows how vague and fluid the conception really was …

> [Philo's thought is] a strange mixture of philosophy and religion, of rationalism and piety, of clear Greek intellectualism and hazy oriental [middle-eastern] mysticism.

The following is a statement on Philo by Eusebius of Caesarea, with my explanations enclosed in brackets. It is included here to show that even in the early church, Philo was known as a pious Jewish monotheist:

> I will produce a man [Philo] who is a Hebrew, as the interpreter for you of the meaning of the Scripture; a man who inherited from his father a most accurate knowledge of his national customs and laws, and who had learnt the doctrines contained in them from learned teachers; for such a man was Philo. Listen then, to him, and hear how he interprets the words of God.
>
> Why, then, does he use the expression, "In the image of God I made man," as if he were speaking of [the image of] some other God, and not [speaking] of having made [man] in the likeness of himself? This expression is used with great beauty and wisdom. For it was impossible that anything mortal [i.e. man] should be made in the likeness of the most high God the Father of the universe; but it could only be made in the likeness of the second God, who is the Word of the other [i.e. the Word of God]…
>
> This is what I wish to quote from the first book of the questions and answers of Philo. (Eusebius, *On Providence*, Fragment I, P.E. 7.21.336b -337a, translated by C.D. Yonge)

Scholarship is aware that Philo's Logos is not a person

The following excerpt from *Catholic Encyclopedia* says that: (i) Philo's Logos is an intermediary between God and the world; (ii) Philo calls the Logos "God" in three places; (iii) Philo says that the word "God" as applied to the Logos is often misunderstood; (iv) Philo does not regard the Logos as a person, but as a concept and a power.

> … the Logos is an intermediary between God and the world; through it God created the world and governs it; through it also men know God and pray to Him ("De Cherub.", 125; "Quis rerum divin. haeres sit", 205-06.) In three passages the Logos is called God ("Leg. Alleg.", III, 207; "De Somniis", I, 229; "In Gen.", II, 62, cited by Eusebius, "Praep. Ev.", VII, 13); but, as Philo himself explains in one of these texts (De Somniis), it is an improper appellation and wrongly employed, and he uses it only because he is led into it by the Sacred Text which he comments upon. Moreover, Philo does not regard the Logos as a person; it is an idea, a power, and, though occasionally identified with the angels of the Bible, this is by symbolic personification. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, "The Logos")

Two other authorities, ISBE and *Encyclopedia Judaica*, agree with *Catholic Encyclopedia* that Philo's *logos* is not a person. See the following four excerpts, the last of which shows that Philo's *logos* is not a person despite early Gnostic depictions

of *logos* as a "hypostasis" (an approximate equivalent of "person"). In the following excerpts, the italics are mine:

> Philo applies the term logos, or the holy logos, to Scripture itself, i.e., the Law. *It is not a person, according to Philo, nor is it an intermediary between God and man,* although it is identified with the biblical angel of the Lord (Mig. 174, etc.). Rather, it is sometimes the same as wisdom (I LA 65, etc.), because it is the most inclusive expression of the thoughts and ideas of God, which in turn are identified with the Law, or the Torah. (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol.13, p.174-175)
>
> Concerned with the problem of the relation of a perfect God to an imperfect world, Philo proposed a series of intermediate causes, of which the main one is the Logos, described variously as the word of God, the supreme manifestation of divine activity, and as moral law. (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. vol. 13, p.88)
>
> After all has been said, his Logos really resolves itself into a group of Divine ideas, and is *conceived, not as a distinct person, but as the thought of God* which is expressed in the rational order of the visible universe. (ISBE, "Logos," section 3, subheading "Philo")
>
> Some accounts of Gnosticism, *whose doctrine implies a logos-hypostasis*, would even date gnostic sources before John. (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol.13, p.175)

Philo's own words

The remainder of this appendix contains direct quotations of Philo on various topics, as taken from *The Works of Philo,* a translation of Philo's works by C.D. Yonge. The text of this book, which is in the public domain, was republished in 1993 by Hendrickson Publishers. The Scripture verses in brackets were inserted by Yonge, and are not part of the original words of Philo.

The quotations are grouped under three headings to show that Philo: (i) believes in one and only God; (ii) does not believe that the Logos of God is a real divine person; (iii) speaks of the "second deity" as the words, thoughts, or intentions emanating from a divine Being. For those who do not wish to read all the quotations, here are three representative quotations illustrating points (i), (ii), and (iii), respectively (note the boldface):

> "so there must also be a ruler and lord in the universe, and he must be **the true real ruler and lord, the one God**, to whom it was becoming to say, that 'All things belong to him.'" *Of Cain and his Birth*, Part 2, XXIV (77)
>
> "God is represented in another passage as saying, 'Abraham has kept all my law.' [Gen.26:5] And law is nothing else but the word of God, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is not right, as he bears witness, where he says, 'He received the law from his words.' [Dt.33:4] If, then, **the divine word [Logos] is the law**, and if the righteous man does the law,

> then by all means he also performs the word of God." *On the Migration of Abraham*, XXIII (130)
>
> "Why is it that he speaks as if of **some other god**, saying that he made man after the image of God, and not that he made him after his own image? (Genesis 9:6). Very appropriately and without any falsehood was this oracular sentence uttered by God, for no mortal thing could have been formed on the similitude of the supreme Father of the universe, but only after the pattern of **the second deity, who is the Word of the supreme Being**; since it is fitting that the rational soul of man should bear it **the type of the divine Word**; since in his first Word God is superior to the most rational possible nature. But **he who is superior to the Word** holds his rank in a better and most singular pre-eminence, and how could the creature possibly exhibit a likeness of him in himself?" *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, II (62)

These three quotations show that trinitarianism has no basis for the view that John was inspired by Philo's *logos* to use the *logos* ("the Word") in John 1:1 as a reference to a second divine person, namely, Jesus Christ. On the contrary, when Philo speaks of the "divine word," it often means the word or teaching that proceeds from God. For example, the second of the above quotations says that "the divine word is the law"; it does not refer to a divine person called "the Word".

For those who want to read Philo further, we include additional statements from Philo in the following three sections which correspond to the same three categories (i), (ii), (iii), already mentioned.

1. Philo's monotheism and belief in God as the only creator

> "Therefore God exists according to oneness and unity; or we should rather say, that oneness exists according to the one God, for all number is more recent than the world, as is also time. But God is older than the world, and is its Creator." *Allegorical Interpretation*, II, I (3) (p.63)
>
> "It told me that in the one living and true God there were two supreme and primary powers—goodness and authority; and that by his goodness he had created every thing, and by his authority he governed all that he had created." *The Cherubim*, Part 1, IX (27) (p.120)
>
> "so there must also be a ruler and lord in the universe, and he must be the true real ruler and lord, the one God, to whom it was becoming to say, that 'All things belong to him.'" *Of Cain and his Birth*, Part 2, XXIV (77) (p.129)
>
> "When, therefore, the soul that loves God seeks to know what the one living God is according to his essence, it is entertaining upon an obscure and dark subject of investigation, from which the greatest benefit that arises to it is to comprehend that God, as to his essence, is utterly incomprehensible

to any being, and also to be aware that he is invisible." *On the Posterity of Cain and his Exile*, V (14) (p.186)

"he [Abraham] is assigned to the one only God, whose minister he becomes, and so makes the path of his whole life straight, using in real truth the royal road, the road of the only king who governs all things" *On the Giants*, XIV (64) (p.216)

"… the one wise God" *Concerning Noah's Work as a Planter*, IX (38) (p.264)

"for it is not becoming for hearing to have leisure to attend to anything except to that speech alone which sets forth in a suitable manner the virtues of the one and only God" *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies*, XX (113) (p.419)

"On this account, I imagine it is, that when Moses was speaking philosophically of the creation of the world, while he described everything else as having been created by God alone, he mentions man alone as having been made by him in conjunction with other assistants; for, says Moses, 'God said, Let us make man in our image.' The expression, 'let us make,' indicating a plurality of makers.

"Here, therefore, the Father is conversing with his own powers, to whom he has assigned the task of making the mortal part of our soul, acting in imitation of his own skill while he was fashioning the rational part within us, thinking it right that the dominant part within the soul should be the work of the Ruler of all things, but that the part which is to be kept in subjection should be made by those who are subject to him.

"And he made us of the powers which were subordinate to him, not only for the reason which has been mentioned, but

also because the soul of man alone was destined to receive notions of good and evil, and to choose one of the two, since it could not adopt both. Therefore, he thought it necessary to assign the origin of evil to other workmen than himself,—but to retain the generation of good for himself alone.

"On which account, after Moses had already put in God's mouth this expression, 'Let us make man,' as if speaking to several persons, as if he were speaking only of one, 'God made man.' For, in fact, the one God alone is the sole Creator of the real man, who is the purest mind; but a plurality of workmen are the makers of that which is called man, the being compounded of external senses; for which reason the especial real man is spoken of with the article; for the words of Moses are, 'The God made the man;' that is to say, he made that reason destitute of species and free from all admixture. But he speaks of man in general without the addition of the article; for the expression, 'Let us make man,' shows that he means the being compounded of irrational and rational nature." *On Flight and Flying*, XIII (68) to XIV (72) (p.435)

"[God, in 'his sacred legislation', i.e., the law] has invited men to the honour of the one true and living God; not indeed that he has any need himself to be honoured; for being all-sufficient for himself, he has no need of any one else; but he has done so, because he wished to lead the race of mankind, hitherto wandering about in trackless deserts, into a road from which they should not stray, that so by following nature it might find the best and end of all things, namely, the knowledge of the true and living God, who is the first and most perfect of all good things; from whom, as from a fount-

ain, all particular blessings are showered upon the world." *The Decalogue*, XVI (81) (p.692)

"And there are some of the Gentiles, who, not attending to the honour due to the one God alone, deserve to be punished with extreme severity of punishment, as having forsaken the most important classification of piety and holiness, and as having chosen darkness in preference to the most brilliant light" *The Special Laws*, I, IX (54) (p.710)

"… the one sole Governor of the world alone" *On the Life of Moses*, I, LI (284) (p.641)

"the one only and truly living God" *The Special Laws*, I, LVII (313) (p.743)

"the one and truly living God" *The Special Laws*, I, LX (331) (p.745)

"the one only true and living God" *The Special Laws*, II, XLVI (255) (p.780)

"the one true and living God" *The Special Laws*, III, XXII (125) (p.798)

"the one true and living God, who is the Creator and the father of the universe?" *On the Virtues*, X (64) (p.850)

"the one only and true ruler, the Holy One of holies" *On the Virtues*, XX (123) (p.888)

"to look upon the nature of the One as the only supreme God" *On the Virtues*, XXVII (162) (p.893)

> "the one real creator of the whole world" *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, I (34) (p.1082)
>
> "There is no existing thing equal in honour to God, but he is the one Ruler, and Governor, and King." *A Treatise Concerning the World*, I (p.1132)
>
> "the one first cause, the uncreated God, the Creator of the universe" *A Treatise Concerning the World*, I (p.1132)
>
> "God is both the Father, and the Creator, and the Governor, in reality and truth, of all the things that are in heaven and in the whole world" *A Treatise Concerning the World*, VII (p.1136)

2. The Word of God in Philo's teachings

> "for you will find that God is the cause of it [the world], by whom it was made. That the materials are the four elements, of which it is composed; that the instrument is the word of God, by means of which it was made; and the object of the building you will find to be the display of the goodness of the Creator." *Of Cain and his Birth*, Part 2, XXXV (127) (p.134)
>
> "the law calls the word and reason of God; for it is written, 'Thou shalt not turn aside from the word which I command thee this day, to the right hand nor to the left,' So that it is shown most manifestly that the word of God is identical with the royal road." *On the Posterity of Cain and his Exile*, XXX (102) (p.197)

"At all events, God is represented in another passage as saying, 'Abraham has kept all my law.' [Gen.26:5] And law is nothing else but the word of God, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is not right, as he bears witness, where he says, 'He received the law from his words.' [Dt.33:4] If, then, *the divine word is the law*, and if the righteous man does the law, then by all means he also performs the word of God." *On the Migration of Abraham*, XXIII (130) (357)

[NOTE: Philo equates "law" = "the word of God"= "the divine word"; there is no suggestion that any of these is a divine entity or being.]

"the powers of Him who utters the word, the chief of which is his creative power, according to which the Creator made the world with a word." *On Flight and Flying*, XVIII (95) (p.438)

"for there is a passage in the word of God [Lev.26:3], that, on those who observe the sacred commands of God, the heaven will shower down seasonable rains, and the earth will bring forth for them abundance of all kinds of fruits." *On Rewards and Punishments*, XVII (101) (p.885)

"As therefore the uncreated God outstrips all creation, so also does the word of the uncreated God outrun the word of creation, and is borne on with exceeding swiftness in the clouds. On which account God speaks freely, saying, 'Now you shall see, because my word shall overtake you.' [Num.11:23, LXX]" *On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by Him and His Brother Cain*, XVIII (66) (p.147)

"for the one raises his eyes to the sky, beholding the manna, the divine word, the heavenly, incorruptible food of the soul,

which is food of contemplation: but the others fix the eye on garlic and onions, food which causes pain to the eyes, and troubles the sight, and makes men wink." *Who is the Heir of Divine Things?* XV (79) (p.378)

"the merciful power of God is the covering of the ark, and he calls it the mercy-seat. The images of the creative power and of the kingly power are the winged cherubim which are placed upon it." *On Flight and Flying*, XIX (100) (p.438)

"But the divine word which is above these does not come into any visible appearance, inasmuch as it is not like to any of the things that come under the external senses, but is itself an image of God, the most ancient of all the objects of intellect in the whole world, and that which is placed in the closest proximity to the only truly existing God, without any partition or distance being interposed between them: for it is said, 'I will speak unto thee from above the mercy seat, in the midst, between the two cherubim.' [Ex.25:22] So that the word is, as it were, the charioteer of the powers, and he who utters it is the rider, who directs the charioteer how to proceed with a view to the proper guidance of the universe." *On Flight and Flying*, XIX (101) (p.438)

"they have abandoned all connections with pride, and having connected themselves with lawful persuasion, choosing to become a portion of the sacred flock, of which the divine word is the leader, as his name shows, for it signifies the pastoral care of God." *On the Change of Names*, XIX (114) (p.464)

"But while he is taking care of his own flock, all kinds of good things are given all at once to those of the sheep who are

obedient, and who do not resist his will; and in the Psalms we find a song in these words, 'The Lord is my shepherd, therefore shall I lack nothing' [Ps.23:1]." *On the Change of Names*, XX (115)

"therefore the mind which has had the royal shepherd, the divine word, for its instructor." *On the Change of Names*, XX (116) (p.464)

"But he who was conducted by wisdom comes to the former place, having found that the main part and end of propitiation is the divine word, in which he who is fixed does not as yet attain to such a height as to penetrate to the essence of God, but sees him afar off; or, rather, I should say, he is not able even to behold him afar off, but he only discerns this fact, that God is at a distance from every creature, and that any comprehension of him is removed to a great distance from all human intellect … he came to the place, and looking up with his eyes he saw the very place to which he had come, which was a very long way from the God who may not be named nor spoken of, and who is in every way incomprehensible." *On Dreams, that They are God-Sent*, XI (1.66 and 1.67) (p.491)

[NOTE: Here Philo says that the function of the divine word (God's self-revelation, God's image) is to impart a glimpse of God who is a "very long way" away, who is "at a great distance from every creature" and "who is in every way incomprehensible".]

"the intermediate divine word… For God, not condescending to come down to the external senses, sends his own words or angels for the sake of giving assistance to those who love virtue. But they attend like physicians to the disease of the soul,

and apply themselves to heal them, offering sacred recommendations like sacred laws, and inviting men to practice the duties inculcated by them, and, like the trainers of wrestlers, implanting in their pupils strength, and power, and irresistible vigour. Very properly, therefore, when he has arrived at the external sense, he is represented no longer as meeting God, but only the divine word." *On Dreams, that They are God-Sent*, XII (1.68 to 1.70) (p.491)

"For there are, as it seems, two temples belonging to God; one being this world, in which the high priest is the divine word, his own firstborn son. The other is the rational soul, the priest of which is the real true man …" *On Dreams, that They are God-Sent*, XXXVII (1.215) (p.508)

"And the divine word, like a river, flows forth from wisdom as from a spring, in order to irrigate and fertilize the celestial and heavenly shoots and plants of such souls as love virtue, as if they were a paradise." *On Dreams, that They are God-Sent*, XXXVI (2.243) (p.536)

"'The river of God was filled with water;' [Ps.65:10] and it is absurd to give such a title to any of the rivers which flow upon the earth. But as it seems the psalmist is here speaking of the divine word…" *On Dreams, that They are God-Sent*, XXXVII (2.245) (p.536)

"For, in good truth, the continual stream of the divine word, being borne on incessantly with rapidity and regularity, is diffused universally over everything, giving joy to all." *On Dreams, that They are God-Sent*, XXXVII (2.247) (p.537)

3. "The second deity"

> "Why is it that he speaks as if of some other god, saying that he made man after the image of God, and not that he made him after his own image? (Genesis 9:6). Very appropriately and without any falsehood was this oracular sentence uttered by God, for no mortal thing could have been formed on the similitude of the supreme Father of the universe, but only after the pattern of the second deity, who is the Word of the supreme Being; since it is fitting that the rational soul of man should bear it the type of the divine Word; since in his first Word God is superior to the most rational possible nature. But he who is superior to the Word holds his rank in a better and most singular pre-eminence, and how could the creature possibly exhibit a likeness of him in himself?" *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, II (62) (p.1095)

Note: Philo is saying that man is the image of the image of the "pattern" or "type," that is, the image of the divine word. Compare:

> "And the invisible divine reason, perceptible only by intellect, he calls the image of God. And the image of this image is that light, perceptible only by the intellect, which is the image of the divine reason…" *On the Creation*, VIII (30) (p.20)
>
> "the divine word is full of instruction, and is a physician of the infirmity of the soul." *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, III (28) (p.1116)

> "God is willing to do good, not only to the man who is endued with virtue, but he wishes that the divine word should regulate not only his soul but his body also, as if it had become its physician." *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, III (51) (p.1127)

Appendix 10

All Instances of "In Christ" in Paul's Letters

In this appendix we tabulate all instances in Paul's letters of the term "in Christ" and variations such as "in the Lord Jesus". Also included are equivalent pronominal references to Christ such as "in him" or "in whom".

To be precise, the following table includes every instance of the ἐν+dative (*en*+dative) construction in the NA27 Greek text which refers to Christ by name or pronominal reference. Verses are quoted in full from the NA27 Greek text and NASB, the most literal of mainstream English translations.

The data was compiled by Agnes Lim and Lee Sen Siow at the request of Eric Chang. He requested their help probably because of the quality of their earlier work for a study included in TOTG. Many thanks to Agnes and Lee Sen for their work, the value of which lies in two areas.

Firstly, in the New Testament, the term "in Christ" is uniquely Pauline (apart from 1Peter 3:16; 5:10; 5:14, where "in Christ" nonetheless has the Pauline meaning), and carries

a meaning not found in the other NT writings: "in Christ" is the specific sphere of God's work of salvation and the new creation. When we examine the table entries, we will see the rich expressions and diverse aspects of "in Christ".

Secondly, the data show that in no instance of "in Christ" and its variations is it ever necessary—grammatically, semantically, or lexically—to render "in Christ" as "by Christ". Therefore any attempt to render "in Christ" as "by Christ" may be influenced by doctrine. This is clearly seen in the case of Colossians 1:16 which is rendered in some Bibles as "by him all things were created …" in order to assert that Jesus is the Creator of the universe.

In fact NASB *never* uses the English preposition "by" to translate any *en*+dative construction that refers to Christ ("in Christ")—with the sole exception of Colossians 1:16!

Explanation of Table

- Each entry is displayed in English (NASB) and Greek (NA27).
- The term "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ) and its variations are shown in boldface, both in NASB and NA27.
- In NASB, the words enclosed in curly brackets { } point to what is "in Christ". These words are repeated in the third column, sometimes verbatim, sometimes in summary. For example, in the first entry, "redemption" is enclosed in curly brackets because Paul is here talking about redemption *in Christ*.
- The symbol ❐ in the third column indicates a reference to Christ that does not name "Christ" explicitly (e.g. "in the Lord").
- The symbol ⁎ in the third column indicates that "in Christ" contains the Greek article ("in the Christ").
- The Majority Text was also consulted. No semantic difference between NA27 and the Majority Text was found for the *en*+dative construction except in Phil.4:13.

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Romans 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the {redemption} which is **in Christ Jesus**;	**Romans 3:24** δικαιούμενοι δωρεὰν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ·**	Redemption
Romans 6:11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but {alive to God} **in Christ Jesus**.	**Romans 6:11** οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἑαυτοὺς [εἶναι] νεκροὺς μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	Alive to God
Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is {eternal life} **in Christ Jesus** our Lord.	**Romans 6:23** τὰ γὰρ ὀψώνια τῆς ἁμαρτίας θάνατος, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ ζωὴ αἰώνιος **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.	Eternal life
Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for {those who are} **in Christ Jesus**.	**Romans 8:1** Οὐδὲν ἄρα νῦν κατάκριμα τοῖς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	Those who are
Romans 8:2 For the {law of the Spirit of life} **in Christ Jesus** has set you free from the law of sin and of death.	**Romans 8:2** ὁ γὰρ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** ἠλευθέρωσέν σε ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου.	Law of the Spirit of life
Romans 8:39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the {love of God}, which is **in Christ Jesus** our Lord.	**Romans 8:39** οὔτε ὕψωμα οὔτε βάθος οὔτε τις κτίσις ἑτέρα δυνήσεται ἡμᾶς χωρίσαι ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.	Love of God
Romans 9:1 I am {telling the truth} **in Christ**, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,	**Romans 9:1** Ἀλήθειαν λέγω **ἐν Χριστῷ**, οὐ ψεύδομαι, συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεώς μου ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ,	Telling the truth

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Romans 12:5 so we, who are many, are {one body} **in Christ**, and individually members one of another.	**Romans 12:5** οὕτως οἱ πολλοὶ ἓν σῶμά ἐσμεν **ἐν Χριστῷ**, τὸ δὲ καθ᾽ εἷς ἀλλήλων μέλη.	One body
Romans 14:14 I know and am {convinced} **in the Lord Jesus** that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.	**Romans 14:14** οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι **ἐν κυρίῳ᾽Ιησοῦ** ὅτι οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι᾽ ἑαυτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκείνῳ κοινόν.	Convinced ☐
Romans 15:17 Therefore **in Christ Jesus** I have {found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God}.	**Romans 15:17** ἔχω οὖν [τὴν] καύχησιν **ἐν Χριστῷ᾽Ιησοῦ** τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν·	Found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God
Romans 16:2 that you {receive her} **in the Lord** in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.	**Romans 16:2** ἵνα αὐτὴν προσδέξησθε **ἐν κυρίῳ** ἀξίως τῶν ἁγίων καὶ παραστῆτε αὐτῇ ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὑμῶν χρήζῃ πράγματι· καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ προστάτις πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ.	Receive her ☐
Romans 16:3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my {fellow workers} **in Christ Jesus**,	**Romans 16:3** Ἀσπάσασθε Πρίσκαν καὶ Ἀκύλαν τοὺς συνεργούς μου **ἐν Χριστῷ᾽Ιησοῦ**,	Fellow workers
Romans 16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, {who also were} **in Christ** before me.	**Romans 16:7** ἀσπάσασθε Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ᾽Ιουνιᾶν τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου καὶ συναιχμαλώτους μου, οἵτινές εἰσιν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, οἳ καὶ πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν **ἐν Χριστῷ**.	Who also were

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Romans 16:8 Greet Ampliatus, {my beloved} **in the Lord**.	**Romans 16:8** ἀσπάσασθε Ἀμπλιᾶτον τὸν ἀγαπητόν μου **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	My beloved ☐
Romans 16:9 Greet Urbanus, our {fellow worker} **in Christ**, and Stachys my beloved.	**Romans 16:9** ἀσπάσασθε Οὐρβανὸν τὸν συνεργὸν ἡμῶν **ἐν Χριστῷ** καὶ Στάχυν τὸν ἀγαπητόν μου.	Fellow worker
Romans 16:10 Greet Apelles, {the approved} **in Christ**. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.	**Romans 16:10** ἀσπάσασθε Ἀπελλῆν τὸν δόκιμον **ἐν Χριστῷ**. ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου.	The approved
Romans 16:11 Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, {who are} **in the Lord**.	**Romans 16:11** ἀσπάσασθε Ἡρῳδίωνα τὸν συγγενῆ μου. ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ναρκίσσου τοὺς ὄντας **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	Who are ☐
Romans 16:12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis {the beloved, who has worked hard} **in the Lord**.	**Romans 16:12** ἀσπάσασθε Τρύφαιναν καὶ Τρυφῶσαν τὰς κοπιώσας ἐν κυρίῳ. ἀσπάσασθε Περσίδα τὴν ἀγαπητήν, ἥτις πολλὰ ἐκοπίασεν **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	The beloved, who has worked hard ☐
Romans 16:13 Greet Rufus, {a choice man} **in the Lord**, also his mother and mine.	**Romans 16:13** ἀσπάσασθε Ῥοῦφον τὸν ἐκλεκτὸν **ἐν κυρίῳ** καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐμοῦ.	A choice man ☐
Romans 16:22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, {greet you} **in the Lord**.	**Romans 16:22** ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ Τέρτιος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	Greet you ☐
1Cor.1:2 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 our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:	**1Cor.1:2** τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὔσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ, ἡγιασμένοις **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν·	Sanctified

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1Cor.1:4 I thank my God always concerning you, for the {grace of God which was given} you **in Christ Jesus**,	**1Cor.1:4** Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ δοθείσῃ ὑμῖν **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**,	Grace of God which was given
1Cor.1:5 that in everything you were {enriched} **in Him**, in all speech and all knowledge,	**1Cor.1:5** ὅτι ἐν παντὶ ἐπλουτίσθητε **ἐν αὐτῷ**, ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ καὶ πάσῃ γνώσει,	Enriched ☐
1Cor.1:30 But by His doing {you are} **in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,	**1Cor.1:30** ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ ὑμεῖς ἐστε **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**, ὃς ἐγενήθη σοφία ἡμῖν ἀπὸ θεοῦ, δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμὸς καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις,	You are
1Cor.3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to {babes} **in Christ**.	**1Cor.3:1** Κἀγώ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἠδυνήθην λαλῆσαι ὑμῖν ὡς πνευματικοῖς ἀλλ᾽ ὡς σαρκίνοις, ὡς νηπίοις **ἐν Χριστῷ**.	Babes
1Cor.4:10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are {prudent} **in Christ**; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.	**1Cor.4:10** ἡμεῖς μωροὶ διὰ Χριστόν, ὑμεῖς δὲ φρόνιμοι **ἐν Χριστῷ**· ἡμεῖς ἀσθενεῖς, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰσχυροί· ὑμεῖς ἔνδοξοι, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἄτιμοι.	Prudent
1Cor.4:15 For if you were to have countless {tutors} **in Christ**, yet you would not have many fathers; for **in Christ Jesus** {I became your father through the gospel}.	**1Cor.4:15** ἐὰν γὰρ μυρίους παιδαγωγοὺς ἔχητε **ἐν Χριστῷ** ἀλλ᾽ οὐ πολλοὺς πατέρας· **ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἐγέννησα.	Tutors; I became your father through the gospel

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1Cor.4:17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and {faithful child} **in the Lord**, and he will remind you of {my ways} which are **in Christ**, just as I teach everywhere in every church.	**1Cor.4:17** Διὰ τοῦτο ἔπεμψα ὑμῖν Τιμόθεον, ὅς ἐστίν μου τέκνον ἀγαπητὸν καὶ πιστὸν **ἐν κυρίῳ**, ὃς ὑμᾶς ἀναμνήσει τὰς ὁδούς μου τὰς **ἐν Χριστῷ** [Ἰησοῦ], καθὼς πανταχοῦ ἐν πάσῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ διδάσκω.	Faithful child; ☐ My ways
1Cor.7:22 For {he who was called} **in the Lord** while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.	**1Cor.7:22** ὁ γὰρ **ἐν κυρίῳ** κληθεὶς δοῦλος ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου ἐστίν, ὁμοίως ὁ ἐλεύθερος κληθεὶς δοῦλός ἐστιν Χριστοῦ.	He who was called ☐
1Cor.7:39 {A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes}, only **in the Lord**.	**1Cor.7:39** Γυνὴ δέδεται ἐφ' ὅσον χρόνον ζῇ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς· ἐὰν δὲ κοιμηθῇ ὁ ἀνήρ, ἐλευθέρα ἐστὶν ᾧ θέλει γαμηθῆναι, μόνον **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	A wife is bound as long as her husband lives... ☐
1Cor.9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? {Are you not my work} **in the Lord**?	**1Cor.9:1** Οὐκ εἰμὶ ἐλεύθερος; οὐκ εἰμὶ ἀπόστολος; οὐχὶ Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἑόρακα; οὐ τὸ ἔργον μου ὑμεῖς ἐστε **ἐν κυρίῳ**;	Are you not my work ☐
1Cor.9:2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are {the seal of my apostleship} **in the Lord**.	**1Cor.9:2** εἰ ἄλλοις οὐκ εἰμὶ ἀπόστολος, ἀλλά γε ὑμῖν εἰμι· ἡ γὰρ σφραγίς μου τῆς ἀποστολῆς ὑμεῖς ἐστε **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	The seal of my apostleship ☐
1Cor.11:11 However, **in the Lord**, {neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman}.	**1Cor.11:11** πλὴν οὔτε γυνὴ χωρὶς ἀνδρὸς οὔτε ἀνὴρ χωρὶς γυναικὸς **ἐν κυρίῳ**·	Man and woman are not independent of each other ☐

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1Cor.15:18 Then those also who have {fallen asleep} **in Christ** have perished.	**1Cor.15:18** ἄρα καὶ οἱ κοιμηθέντες **ἐν Χριστῷ** ἀπώλοντο.	Fallen asleep
1Cor.15:19 If we have {hoped} **in Christ** in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.	**1Cor.15:19** εἰ ἐν τῇ ζωῇ ταύτῃ **ἐν Χριστῷ** ἠλπικότες ἐσμὲν μόνον, ἐλεεινότεροι πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἐσμέν.	Hoped
1Cor.15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ** all shall be {made alive}.	**1Cor.15:22** ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνῄσκουσιν, οὕτως καὶ **ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ** πάντες ζῳοποιηθήσονται.	Made alive ⁕
1Cor.15:31 I protest, brethren, by the {boasting in you}, which I have **in Christ Jesus** our Lord, I die daily.	**1Cor.15:31** καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἀποθνῄσκω, νὴ τὴν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν, [ἀδελφοί,] ἣν ἔχω **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.	Boasting in you
1Cor.15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that {your toil is not in vain} **in the Lord**.	**1Cor.15:58** Ὥστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί, ἑδραῖοι γίνεσθε, ἀμετακίνητοι, περισσεύοντες ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ τοῦ κυρίου πάντοτε, εἰδότες ὅτι ὁ κόπος ὑμῶν οὐκ ἔστιν κενὸς **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	Your toil is not in vain ☐
1Cor.16:19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca {greet you heartily} **in the Lord**, with the church that is in their house.	**1Cor.16:19** Ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τῆς Ἀσίας. ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς **ἐν κυρίῳ** πολλὰ Ἀκύλας καὶ Πρίσκα σὺν τῇ κατ᾽ οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίᾳ.	Greet you heartily ☐
1Cor.16:24 {My love be with you all} **in Christ Jesus**. Amen.	**1Cor.16:24** ἡ ἀγάπη μου μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	My love be with you all

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2Cor.1:19 For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is {yes} **in Him**.	**2Cor.1:19** ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ γὰρ υἱὸς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν δι᾽ ἡμῶν κηρυχθείς, δι᾽ ἐμοῦ καὶ Σιλουανοῦ καὶ Τιμοθέου, οὐκ ἐγένετο ναὶ καὶ οὒ ἀλλὰ ναὶ **ἐν αὐτῷ** γέγονεν.	Yes ☐
2Cor.1:20 For as many as may be the promises of God, **in Him** {they are yes}; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.	**2Cor.1:20** ὅσαι γὰρ ἐπαγγελίαι θεοῦ, **ἐν αὐτῷ** τὸ ναί· διὸ καὶ δι᾽ αὐτοῦ τὸ ἀμὴν τῷ θεῷ πρὸς δόξαν δι᾽ ἡμῶν.	They are yes ☐
2Cor.2:12 Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when {a door was opened for me} **in the Lord**,	**2Cor.2:12** Ἐλθὼν δὲ εἰς τὴν Τρῳάδα εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θύρας μοι ἀνεῳγμένης **ἐν κυρίῳ**,	A door was opened for me ☐
2Cor.2:14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in {His triumph} **in Christ**, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.	**2Cor.2:14** Τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ πάντοτε θριαμβεύοντι ἡμᾶς **ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ** καὶ τὴν ὀσμὴν τῆς γνώσεως αὐτοῦ φανεροῦντι δι᾽ ἡμῶν ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ·	God's triumph *
2Cor.2:17 For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we {speak} **in Christ** in the sight of God.	**2Cor.2:17** οὐ γάρ ἐσμεν ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ καπηλεύοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ἐξ εἰλικρινείας, ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ἐκ θεοῦ κατέναντι θεοῦ **ἐν Χριστῷ** λαλοῦμεν.	Speak
2Cor.3:14 But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same {veil} remains unlifted, because it {is removed} **in Christ**.	**2Cor.3:14** ἀλλὰ ἐπωρώθη τὰ νοήματα αὐτῶν. ἄχρι γὰρ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας τὸ αὐτὸ κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης μένει, μὴ ἀνακαλυπτόμενον ὅτι **ἐν Χριστῷ** καταργεῖται·	Veil is removed

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2Cor.5:17 Therefore if {any man} is **in Christ**, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.	**2Cor.5:17** ὥστε εἴ τις **ἐν Χριστῷ**, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά·	Any man
2Cor.5:19 namely, that {God} was **in Christ** {reconciling the world to Himself}, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.	**2Cor.5:19** ὡς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν **ἐν Χριστῷ** κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ, μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν καὶ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς.	God, reconciling the world to Himself
2Cor.5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the {righteousness of God} **in Him**.	**2Cor.5:21** τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ **ἐν αὐτῷ**.	Righteous-ness of God ☐
2Cor.12:2 I know {a man} **in Christ** who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- such a man was caught up to the third heaven.	**2Cor.12:2** οἶδα ἄνθρωπον **ἐν Χριστῷ** πρὸ ἐτῶν δεκατεσσάρων, εἴτε ἐν σώματι οὐκ οἶδα, εἴτε ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν, ἁρπαγέντα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ.	A man
2Cor.12:19 All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been {speaking} **in Christ**; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.	**2Cor.12:19** Πάλαι δοκεῖτε ὅτι ὑμῖν ἀπολογούμεθα. κατέναντι θεοῦ **ἐν Χριστῷ** λαλοῦμεν· τὰ δὲ πάντα, ἀγαπητοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν οἰκοδομῆς.	Speaking

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2Cor.13:4 For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are {weak} **in Him**, yet we shall live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.	**2Cor.13:4** καὶ γὰρ ἐσταυρώθη ἐξ ἀσθενείας, ἀλλὰ ζῇ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ. καὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἀσθενοῦμεν **ἐν αὐτῷ**, ἀλλὰ ζήσομεν σὺν αὐτῷ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς.	Weak ☐
Gal.1:22 And I was still unknown by sight to the {churches of Judea} which were **in Christ**;	**Gal.1:22** ἤμην δὲ ἀγνοούμενος τῷ προσώπῳ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Ἰουδαίας ταῖς **ἐν Χριστῷ**.	Churches of Judea
Gal.2:4 But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our {liberty which we have} **in Christ Jesus**, in order to bring us into bondage.	**Gal.2:4** διὰ δὲ τοὺς παρεισάκτους ψευδαδέλφους, οἵτινες παρεισῆλθον κατασκοπῆσαι τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἡμῶν ἣν ἔχομεν **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**, ἵνα ἡμᾶς καταδουλώσουσιν,	Liberty which we have
Gal.2:17 But if, while seeking to be {justified} **in Christ**, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!	**Gal.2:17** εἰ δὲ ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι **ἐν Χριστῷ** εὑρέθημεν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἁμαρτωλοί, ἆρα Χριστὸς ἁμαρτίας διάκονος; μὴ γένοιτο.	Justified
Gal.3:14 in order that **in Christ Jesus** {the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles}, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.	**Gal.3:14** ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ γένηται **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**, ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως.	The blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles
Gal.3:26 For you are all sons of God through {faith} **in Christ Jesus**.	**Gal.3:26** Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**·	Faith

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Gal.3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all {one} **in Christ Jesus**.	**Gal.3:28** οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλλην, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	One
Gal.5:6 For **in Christ Jesus** neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.	**Gal.5:6 ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ πίστις δι᾽ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη.	In Christ
Gal.5:10 I {have confidence in you} **in the Lord**, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.	**Gal.5:10** ἐγὼ πέποιθα εἰς ὑμᾶς **ἐν κυρίῳ** ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο φρονήσετε· ὁ δὲ ταράσσων ὑμᾶς βαστάσει τὸ κρίμα, ὅστις ἐὰν ᾖ.	Have confidence in you ☐
Eph.1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are {faithful} **in Christ Jesus**:	**Eph.1:1** Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ] καὶ πιστοῖς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**,	Faithful
Eph.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** Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις **ἐν Χριστῷ**,	Blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places
Eph.1:4 just as He {chose us} **in Him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love	**Eph.1:4** καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς **ἐν αὐτῷ** πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ,	Chose us ☐

NASB 1977 Edition	Nestle-Aland 27th Ed.	… in Christ
Eph.1:7 In Him we have {redemption} through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,	**Eph.1:7** Ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων, κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ	Redemption ☐
Eph.1:9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to {His kind intention which He purposed} **in Him**	**Eph.1:9** γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο **ἐν αὐτῷ**	His kind intention which He purposed ☐
Eph.1:10-11 with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, {the summing up of all things} **in Christ**, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. **In Him** also {we have obtained an inheritance}, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things dafter the counsel of His will,	**Eph.1:10-11** εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα **ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ**, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς **ἐν αὐτῷ**. Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργοῦντος κατὰ τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ	The summing up of all things; ✳ We have obtained an inheritance ☐
Eph.1:12 to the end that we who were the first to {hope} **in Christ** should be to the praise of His glory.	**Eph.1:12** εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ τοὺς προηλπικότας **ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ**.	Hope ✳
Eph.1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, {you were sealed} **in Him** with the Holy Spirit of promise,	**Eph.1:13** Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, **ἐν ᾧ** καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ,	In him; ☐ You were sealed ☐

NASB 1977 Edition	Nestle-Aland 27th Ed.	… in Christ
Eph.1:15 For this reason I too, having heard of {the faith} **in the Lord Jesus** which exists among you, and your love for all the saints,	**Eph.1:15** Διὰ τοῦτο κἀγὼ ἀκούσας τὴν καθ᾽ ὑμᾶς πίστιν **ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ** καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην τὴν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους	The faith ☐
Eph.1:20 {which He brought about} **in Christ**, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,	**Eph.1:20** Ἣν ἐνήργησεν **ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ** ἐγείρας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ καθίσας ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις	[The strength] which He brought about *
Eph.2:6 and raised us up with Him, and {seated us with Him in the heavenly places], **in Christ Jesus**,	**Eph.2:6** καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**,	Seated us with him in the heavenly places
Eph.2:7 in order that in the ages to come He might {show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us} **in Christ Jesus**.	**Eph.2:7** ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ᾽ ἡμᾶς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	Show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us
Eph.2:10 For we are His workmanship, {created} **in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.	**Eph.2:10** αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεὸς, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.	Created
Eph.2:13 But now **in Christ Jesus** you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.	**Eph.2:13** νυνὶ δὲ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** ὑμεῖς οἵ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγενήθητε ἐγγὺς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ.	In Christ

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Eph.2:15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that **in Himself** He might {make the two into one new man}, thus establishing peace,	**Eph.2:14-15** Αὐτὸς γάρ ἐστιν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἓν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ, τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ **ἐν αὐτῷ** εἰς ἕνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην	Make the two into one new man ☐
Eph.2:21 in whom {the whole building}, being fitted together {is growing into a holy temple in the Lord};	**Eph.2:21 ἐν ᾧ** πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὔξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ	The whole building is growing into a holy temple in the Lord ☐
Eph.2:22 in whom {you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit}.	**Eph.2:22 ἐν ᾧ** καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.	You also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit ☐
Eph.3:6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and {fellow partakers of the promise} **in Christ Jesus** through the gospel,	**Eph.3:6** εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμέτοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου,	Fellow partakers of the promise
Eph.3:11 This was in accordance with the {eternal purpose which He carried out} **in Christ Jesus our Lord**,	**Eph.3:11** κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων ἣν ἐποίησεν **ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν**,	Eternal purpose which He carried out ✳

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Eph.3:12 in whom {we have boldness and confident access} through faith in Him.	**Eph.3:12 ἐν ᾧ** ἔχομεν τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ προσαγωγὴν ἐν πεποιθήσει διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ.	We have boldness and confident access ☐
Eph.3:21 {to Him be the glory} in the church and **in Christ Jesus** to all generations forever and ever. Amen.	**Eph.3:21** αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.	To him be the glory
Eph.4:1 I, therefore, the {prisoner} **of the Lord**, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,	**Eph.4:1** Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ ὁ δέσμιος **ἐν κυρίῳ** ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε,	Prisoner ☐
Eph.4:17 This I say therefore, and {affirm together} **with the Lord**, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,	**Eph.4:17** Τοῦτο οὖν λέγω καὶ μαρτύρομαι **ἐν κυρίῳ**, μηκέτι ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν, καθὼς καὶ τὰ ἔθνη περιπατεῖ ἐν ματαιότητι τοῦ νοὸς αὐτῶν,	Affirm together ☐
Eph.4:21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been {taught} **in Him**, just as {truth is} **in Jesus**,	**Eph.4:21** εἴ γε αὐτὸν ἠκούσατε καὶ **ἐν αὐτῷ** ἐδιδάχθητε, καθώς ἐστιν ἀλήθεια **ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ**,	Taught; ☐ Truth is ☐
Eph.4:32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as {God} **in Christ** {also has forgiven you}.	**Eph.4:32** γίνεσθε [δὲ] εἰς ἀλλήλους χρηστοί, εὔσπλαγχνοι, χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς, καθὼς καὶ ὁ θεὸς **ἐν Χριστῷ** ἐχαρίσατο ὑμῖν.	God also has forgiven you
Eph.5:8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are {light} **in the Lord**; walk as children of light	**Eph.5:8** ἦτε γάρ ποτε σκότος, νῦν δὲ φῶς **ἐν κυρίῳ**· ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατεῖτε	Light ☐

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Eph.6:1 Children, {obey your parents} **in the Lord**, for this is right.	**Eph.6:1** Τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν ὑμῶν [**ἐν κυρίῳ**]· τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν δίκαιον.	Obey your parents ☐
Eph.6:10 Finally, {be strong} **in the Lord**, and in the strength of His might.	**Eph.6:10** Τοῦ λοιποῦ, ἐνδυναμοῦσθε **ἐν κυρίῳ** καὶ ἐν τῷ κράτει τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ.	Be strong ☐
Eph.6:21 But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the {beloved brother and faithful minister} **in the Lord**, will make everything known to you.	**Eph.6:21** Ἵνα δὲ εἰδῆτε καὶ ὑμεῖς τὰ κατ᾽ ἐμέ, τί πράσσω, πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῖν Τύχικος ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος **ἐν κυρίῳ**,	Beloved brother and faithful minister ☐
Phil.1:1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the {saints} **in Christ Jesus** who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:	**Phil.1:1** Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις,	Saints
Phil.1:13 so that my {imprisonment} **in** the cause of **Christ** has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,	**Phil.1:13** ὥστε τοὺς δεσμούς μου φανεροὺς **ἐν Χριστῷ** γενέσθαι ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πάσιν,	Imprisonment
Phil.1:14 and that most of the brethren, {trusting} **in the Lord** because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.	**Phil.1:14** καὶ τοὺς πλείονας τῶν ἀδελφῶν **ἐν κυρίῳ** πεποιθότας τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου περισσοτέρως τολμᾶν ἀφόβως τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν.	Trusting ☐

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Phil.1:26 so that {your proud confidence in me may abound} **in Christ Jesus** through my coming to you again.	**Phil.1:26** ἵνα τὸ καύχημα ὑμῶν περισσεύῃ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** ἐν ἐμοὶ διὰ τῆς ἐμῆς παρουσίας πάλιν πρὸς ὑμᾶς.	Your proud confidence in me may abound
Phil.2:1 If therefore there is any {encouragement} **in Christ**, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,	**Phil.2:1** Εἴ τις οὖν παράκλησις **ἐν Χριστῷ**, εἴ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης, εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος, εἴ τις σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί,	Encouragement
Phil.2:5 Have this {attitude} in yourselves {which was also} **in Christ Jesus**,	**Phil.2:5** Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**,	Attitude which was also
Phil.2:19 But I {hope} **in the Lord Jesus** to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.	**Phil.2:19** Ἐλπίζω δὲ **ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ** Τιμόθεον ταχέως πέμψαι ὑμῖν, ἵνα κἀγὼ εὐψυχῶ γνοὺς τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν.	Hope ☐
Phil.2:24 and I {trust} **in the Lord** that I myself also shall be coming shortly.	**Phil.2:24** πέποιθα δὲ **ἐν κυρίῳ** ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ταχέως ἐλεύσομαι.	Trust ☐
Phil.2:29 Therefore {receive him} **in the Lord** with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard;	**Phil.2:29** προσδέχεσθε οὖν αὐτὸν **ἐν κυρίῳ** μετὰ πάσης χαρᾶς καὶ τοὺς τοιούτους ἐντίμους ἔχετε,	Receive him ☐
Phil.3:1 Finally, my brethren, {rejoice} **in the Lord**. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.	**Phil.3:1** Τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί μου, χαίρετε **ἐν κυρίῳ**. τὰ αὐτὰ γράφειν ὑμῖν ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐκ ὀκνηρόν, ὑμῖν δὲ ἀσφαλές.	Rejoice ☐

NASB 1977 Edition	Nestle-Aland 27th Ed.	… in Christ
Phil.3:3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and {glory} **in Christ Jesus** and put no confidence in the flesh,	**Phil.3:3** ἡμεῖς γάρ ἐσμεν ἡ περιτομή, οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες καὶ καυχώμενοι **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες,	Glory
Phil.3:9 and may be {found} **in Him**, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,	**Phil.3:9** καὶ εὑρεθῶ **ἐν αὐτῷ**, μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει,	Found ☐
Phil.3:14 I press on toward the goal for {the prize of the upward call of God} **in Christ Jesus**.	**Phil.3:14** κατὰ σκοπὸν διώκω εἰς τὸ βραβεῖον τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	The prize of the upward call of God
Phil.4:1 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so {stand firm} **in the Lord**, my beloved.	**Phil.4:1** Ὥστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοὶ καὶ ἐπιπόθητοι, χαρὰ καὶ στέφανός μου, οὕτως στήκετε **ἐν κυρίῳ**, ἀγαπητοί.	Stand firm ☐
Phil.4:2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to {live in harmony} **in the Lord**.	**Phil.4:2** Εὐοδίαν παρακαλῶ καὶ Συντύχην παρακαλῶ τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	Live in harmony ☐
Phil.4:4 {Rejoice} **in the Lord** always; again I will say, rejoice!	**Phil.4:4** Χαίρετε **ἐν κυρίῳ** πάντοτε· πάλιν ἐρῶ, χαίρετε.	Rejoice ☐
Phil.4:7 And {the peace of God}, which surpasses all comprehension, {shall guard your hearts and your minds} **in Christ Jesus**.	**Phil.4:7** καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	The peace of God shall guard your hearts and minds

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Phil.4:10 But I {rejoiced} **in the Lord** greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.	**Phil.4:10** Ἐχάρην δὲ **ἐν κυρίῳ** μεγάλως ὅτι ἤδη ποτὲ ἀνεθάλετε τὸ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φρονεῖν, ἐφ᾽ ᾧ καὶ ἐφρονεῖτε, ἠκαιρεῖσθε δέ.	Rejoiced ☐
Phil.4:13 I {can do all things} **through Him** who strengthens me.	**NA27 Phil.4:13** πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με. **Majority Text:** Πάντα ἰσχύω **ἐν** τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με **χριστῷ**.	Can do all things
Phil.4:19 And my God shall {supply all your needs according to His riches in glory} **in Christ Jesus**.	**Phil.4:19** ὁ δὲ θεός μου πληρώσει πᾶσαν χρείαν ὑμῶν κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος αὐτοῦ ἐν δόξῃ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	Supply all your needs according to his riches in glory
Phil.4:21 Greet every {saint} **in Christ Jesus**. The brethren who are with me greet you.	**Phil.4:21** Ἀσπάσασθε πάντα ἅγιον **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**. ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ ἀδελφοί.	Saint
Col.1:2 to the {saints and faithful brethren} **in Christ** who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.	**Col.1:2** τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἁγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς **ἐν Χριστῷ**, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.	Saints and faithful brethren
Col.1:4 since we heard of your {faith} **in Christ Jesus** and the love which you have for all the saints;	**Col.1:4** ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους	Faith
Col.1:14 in whom we have {redemption}, the forgiveness of sins.	**Col.1:14 ἐν ᾧ** ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·	Redemption ☐

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Col.1:16 For **by Him** {all things were created}, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him.	**Col.1:16** ὅτι **ἐν αὐτῷ** ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα δι᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται·	All things were created ☐
Col.1:17 And He is before all things, and **in Him** {all things hold together}.	**Col.1:17** καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα **ἐν αὐτῷ** συνέστηκεν,	All things hold together ☐
Col.1:19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for {all the fulness to dwell} **in Him**,	**Col.1:19** ὅτι **ἐν αὐτῷ** εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι	All the fulness (of God) to dwell ☐
Col.1:28 And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may {present every man complete} **in Christ**.	**Col.1:28** ὃν ἡμεῖς καταγγέλλομεν νουθετοῦντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον καὶ διδάσκοντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ, ἵνα παραστήσωμεν πάντα ἄνθρωπον τέλειον **ἐν Χριστῷ**·	Present every man complete
Col.2:3 in whom {are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge}.	**Col.2:3 ἐν ᾧ** εἰσιν πάντες οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως ἀπόκρυφοι.	All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden ☐
Col.2:6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so {walk} **in Him**,	**Col.2:6** Ὡς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον, **ἐν αὐτῷ** περιπατεῖτε,	Walk ☐

NASB 1977 Edition	Nestle-Aland 27th Ed.	… in Christ
Col.2:7 having been firmly rooted and now {being built up} **in Him** and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.	**Col.2:7** ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι **ἐν αὐτῷ** καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ.	Being built up ☐
Col.2:9 For **in Him** {all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form},	**Col.2:9** ὅτι **ἐν αὐτῷ** κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς,	All the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form ☐
Col.2:10 and **in Him** {you have been made complete}, and He is the head over all rule and authority;	**Col.2:10** καὶ ἐστὲ **ἐν αὐτῷ** πεπληρωμένοι, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας.	You have been made complete ☐
Col.2:11 and **in Him** {you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands}, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;	**Col.2:11** Ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ,	You were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands ☐
Col.2:15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having {triumphed over them} **through Him**.	**Col.2:15** ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς **ἐν αὐτῷ**.	Triumphed over them ☐
Col.3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is {fitting} **in the Lord**.	**Col.3:18** Αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ὡς ἀνῆκεν **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	Fitting ☐
Col.3:20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is {well-pleasing} **to the Lord**.	**Col.3:20** Τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν κατὰ πάντα, τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	Well-pleasing ☐

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Col.4:7 As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and {fellow bond-servant} **in the Lord**, will bring you information.	**Col.4:7** Τὰ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῖν Τύχικος ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος καὶ σύνδουλος **ἐν κυρίῳ**,	Fellow bond-servant ☐
Col.4:17 And say to Archippus, "Take heed to {the ministry which you have received} **in the Lord**, that you may fulfill it."	**Col.4:17** καὶ εἴπατε Ἀρχίππῳ· Βλέπε τὴν διακονίαν ἣν παρέλαβες **ἐν κυρίῳ**, ἵνα αὐτὴν πληροῖς.	The ministry which you have received ☐
1Thess.2:14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the {churches of God} **in Christ Jesus** that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,	**1Thess.2:14** ὑμεῖς γὰρ μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε, ἀδελφοί, τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**, ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε καὶ ὑμεῖς ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν καθὼς καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων,	Churches of God
1Thess.3:8 for now we really live, if you {stand firm} **in the Lord**.	**1Thess.3:8** ὅτι νῦν ζῶμεν ἐὰν ὑμεῖς στήκετε **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	Stand firm ☐
1Thess.4:1 Finally then, brethren, {we request and exhort you} **in the Lord Jesus**, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more.	**1Thess.4:1** Λοιπὸν οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν **ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ**, ἵνα καθὼς παρελάβετε παρ᾽ ἡμῶν τὸ πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀρέσκειν θεῷ, καθὼς καὶ περιπατεῖτε, ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον.	We request and exhort you ☐

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1Thess.4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and {the dead} **in Christ** shall rise first.	**1Thess.4:16** ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ᾽ οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ **ἐν Χριστῷ** ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον,	The dead
1Thess.5:12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and {have charge over you} **in the Lord** and give you instruction,	**1Thess.5:12** Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, εἰδέναι τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν **ἐν κυρίῳ** καὶ νουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς	Have charge over you ☐
1Thess.5:18 in everything give thanks; for this is {God's will for you} **in Christ Jesus**.	**1Thess.5:18** ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖτε· τοῦτο γὰρ θέλημα θεοῦ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** εἰς ὑμᾶς.	God's will for you
2Thess.1:12 in order that the name of our Lord Jesus {may be glorified} in you, and {you} **in Him**, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.	**2Thess.1:12** ὅπως ἐνδοξασθῇ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν, καὶ ὑμεῖς **ἐν αὐτῷ**, κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.	You may be glorified ☐
2Thess.3:4 And we have {confidence} **in the Lord** concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.	**2Thess.3:4** πεποίθαμεν δὲ **ἐν κυρίῳ** ἐφ᾽ ὑμᾶς, ὅτι ἃ παραγγέλλομεν [καὶ] ποιεῖτε καὶ ποιήσετε.	Confidence ☐
2Thess.3:12 Now such persons {we command and exhort} **in the Lord Jesus Christ** to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.	**2Thess.3:12** τοῖς δὲ τοιούτοις παραγγέλλομεν καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν **ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ**, ἵνα μετὰ ἡσυχίας ἐργαζόμενοι τὸν ἑαυτῶν ἄρτον ἐσθίωσιν.	We command and exhort

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1Tim.1:14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the {faith and love} which are found **in Christ Jesus**.	**1Tim.1:1**4 ὑπερεπλεόνασεν δὲ ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν μετὰ πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης τῆς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	Faith and love
1Tim.3:13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the {faith} that is **in Christ Jesus**.	**1Tim.3:13** οἱ γὰρ καλῶς διακονήσαντες βαθμὸν ἑαυτοῖς καλὸν περιποιοῦνται καὶ πολλὴν παρρησίαν ἐν πίστει τῇ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	Faith
2Tim.1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the {promise of life} **in Christ Jesus**,	**2Tim.1:1** Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ κατ᾽ ἐπαγγελίαν ζωῆς τῆς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**	Promise of life
2Tim.1:9 who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and {grace which was granted us} **in Christ Jesus** from all eternity,	**2Tim.1:9** τοῦ σώσαντος ἡμᾶς καὶ καλέσαντος κλήσει ἁγίᾳ, οὐ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ἡμῶν ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἰδίαν πρόθεσιν καὶ χάριν, τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων,	Grace which was granted us
2Tim.1:13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the {faith and love} which are **in Christ Jesus**.	**2Tim.1:13** Ὑποτύπωσιν ἔχε ὑγιαινόντων λόγων ὧν παρ᾽ ἐμοῦ ἤκουσας ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ τῇ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**·	Faith and love
2Tim.2:1 You therefore, my son, be strong in {the grace that is} **in Christ Jesus**.	**2Tim.2:1** Σὺ οὖν, τέκνον μου, ἐνδυναμοῦ ἐν τῇ χάριτι τῇ **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**,	The grace that is in

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2Tim.2:10 For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain {the salvation} which is **in Christ Jesus** and with it eternal glory.	**2Tim.2:10** διὰ τοῦτο πάντα ὑπομένω διὰ τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ σωτηρίας τύχωσιν τῆς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** μετὰ δόξης αἰωνίου.	The salvation
2Tim.3:12 And indeed, all who desire {to live godly} **in Christ Jesus** will be persecuted.	**2Tim.3:12** καὶ πάντες δὲ οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** διωχθήσονται.	Live godly
2Tim.3:15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through {faith which is} **in Christ Jesus**.	**2Tim.3:15** καὶ ὅτι ἀπὸ βρέφους [τὰ] ἱερὰ γράμματα οἶδας, τὰ δυνάμενά σε σοφίσαι εἰς σωτηρίαν διὰ πίστεως τῆς **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**.	Faith which is
Philemon 1:8 Therefore, though I have enough {confidence} **in Christ** to order you to do that which is proper,	**Philemon 1:**8 Διὸ πολλὴν **ἐν Χριστῷ** παρρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν σοι τὸ ἀνῆκον	Confidence
Philemon 1:16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a {beloved brother}, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and **in the Lord**.	**Philemon 1:16** οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν, μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσῳ δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ **ἐν κυρίῳ**.	Beloved brother ☐
Philemon 1:20 Yes, brother, {let me benefit from you} **in the Lord**; {refresh my heart} **in Christ**.	**Philemon 1:20** ναὶ ἀδελφέ, ἐγώ σου ὀναίμην **ἐν κυρίῳ**· ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα **ἐν Χριστῷ**.	Let me benefit from you; ☐ Refresh my heart

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Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my {fellow prisoner} **in Christ Jesus**, greets you,	**Philemon 1:23** Ἀσπάζεταί σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου **ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**,	Fellow prisoner

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