

The

FATHER / SON

Relationship

By Ronald E. Frye

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By Ronald E. Frye

Published by Christian Respondent, Inc.
42851 260th Lane
Aitkin, MN 56431

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New International Version (NIV)**

Other Bible translations used in this work and their abbreviations:

American Standard Version (ASV)
Jerusalem Bible (JB)
New American Standard Version (NASV)
New English Bible (NEB)
New International Version (NIV)
New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
Revised Standard Version (RSV)
Today's English Version (Good News Bible) (TEV)
Today's Living Bible (TLB)

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FORWARD

Over the years I have heard many Christians express frank confusion about the nature of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This state of affairs seems inappropriate for the worshipers of a God who withheld nothing, not even His beloved only-begotten Son, from us. Jesus prayed: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3 NIV) Jesus' statement suggests to me that neither God nor His Son should be mysterious to His children.

Some issues raised in this treatise may never have even occurred to most Christians associated with traditional or evangelical churches. But they are very important to Jehovah's Witnesses, and especially so for those who leave the Watchtower organization, long for Christian association and seek to find it in mainline Christian churches.

For nearly twenty years, Ron Frye and I have both been actively involved in helping such persons who are leaving the Watchtower organization to read the Bible and trust God to reveal His message to them. We encourage them to let the Scriptures themselves replace the teachings of the very authoritative religious structure upon which they once relied for spiritual guidance and Bible interpretation. We both also believe that Christians need other Christians, and we encourage former Jehovah's Witnesses to find a community of believers with which to associate. Unfortunately, however, too often they find that Christians in a wide variety of churches are just as dogmatic about doctrines which are not taught directly in Scripture but which developed within the post-apostolic Church as the Watchtower leaders are about their interpretations.

To Jehovah's Witnesses, who place very high importance on "correct teaching" (their form of orthodoxy), the Trinity doctrine is in error. The extent to which that is true is less important than the effect that perception has on Witnesses who leave the Watchtower Society, are sincerely seeking truth, who want and need association with a community of Christians, but hesitate because they feel that a community of believers which accepts and teaches error cannot be approved by God.

Their problem is complicated by the words and behavior of Christians who make acceptance of the Trinity doctrine a sort of touchstone by which to distinguish "true Christians" from "evil cult members." The net result is division. How important is this doctrine? How should we regard persons who reject traditional doctrines because they do not see adequate Scriptural support for them?

More importantly, do we feel it possible for a person to have a solidly Bible-based understanding of the nature and identity of the Father and Son while at the same time questioning the words and intent of creeds such as the Creed of Chalcedon and the Athanasian Creed? Can we accept as mature Christian brothers and sisters persons who question doctrines which developed after the death of the apostles?

One of the great milestones of the Reformation was the idea that individual Christians could read the Bible independently of Church leaders and have truth revealed to them directly by God. Belief in this concept gave Reformers the courage to question long-entrenched doctrines and Church policies. My liberation from a dominating religious organization came as a direct result of reading and trusting in God's self-revelation through his written Word, so I am a big believer in God's willingness to reward any and all earnest seekers. I encourage every Christian to find out for themselves what the Bible teaches and to put it to work in their lives.

For twenty years I have observed my friend Ron Frye's deep love for God's Word, and I have witnessed his willingness to obey its message even when doing so meant great personal sacrifice.

As a result, he has developed a close personal relationship with God which is easy to see in his life, conversation, writing and teaching. Over the years, Ron and I have discussed at length many of the issues considered in this treatise. Still, I was surprised at how much it stimulated my thinking.

This treatise is not meant to be a comprehensive consideration of this subject, but to encourage Christians on both sides of the issue to reexplore the relationship between the heavenly Father and His Son, with a focus on concepts and ideas expressed in the vocabulary and expressions of Scripture itself rather than through a detailed study of Biblical languages or technical terminology.

The Bible has much to say about the subject at hand, but we may have the impression that it is extremely difficult or complicated and best left to theologians. We may feel that this issue has been worked out, and need not be discussed any further. But should we not, as Christians, make sure of all things, read God's Word for ourselves and let it convince us of the truthfulness, solidity and validity of even the basic Christian doctrines? (Acts 17:11) We have much to gain and nothing to fear from such a pursuit. I firmly believe that the Bible's basic message and far, far more can be understood by any sincere believer, because God will take an active role in leading such a believer to a deeper understanding of His identity and the role He, His Son and the Holy Spirit play in our salvation.

Whatever your current convictions about this subject, you will likely be challenged by the information presented herein. Persons coming from the non-Trinitarian perspective may be surprised at the strength and clarity of Scriptural testimony about the deity of Christ. On the other hand, Trinitarians may be surprised at the lack of Scriptural support for some widely-held beliefs about the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Regardless of your starting point, any sincere study of God's Word can only yield good results. If new viewpoints or perspectives open, I urge you to prayerfully explore them. Perhaps you may begin to understand more clearly why those "on the other side" of the issue believe as they do. Ultimately, the goal is to break down barriers which needlessly divide Christians. My prayer would be "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."—Eph. 1:17 NIV

- **Thomas W. Cabeen**, April, 1999

THE FATHER/SON RELATIONSHIP

The inquiry regarding the relationship between the Father and the Son raises a number of difficult problems. Resolving these difficulties is not easy nor is there unanimity among those who have labored in this domain as to what constitute correct conclusions. Our task is further complicated by the presuppositions we bring to our investigation—suppositions that tax our ability to be objective. If we are not careful, we may inadvertently read *into* the Bible concepts that are not supported by Scripture. Also, when we open a modern English translation of the Bible we are already confronted with a certain measure of interpretation. As Gordon D. Fee, professor of New Testament Studies at Regent College, points out, “Your Bible, whatever translation you use, which is your *beginning* point, is in fact the *end result* of much scholarly work. Translators are regularly called upon to make choices regarding meanings and *their* choices are going to affect how *you* understand.”—*How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth* (2nd ed.), page 15 (italics in original).

Bible translators are faced with the problem of determining what a writer meant to say, that is, the shade of meaning he meant to set forth by a certain original Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek term. This form of interpretation on the part of the translator is necessary because of the nuances inherent in those original words. The Introduction of the *New English Bible* draws attention to this fact:

“A word, indeed, in one language is seldom the exact equivalent of a word in a different language. *Each word is the centre of a whole cluster of meanings and associations*, and in different languages these clusters overlap but do not often coincide. The place of a word in the clause or sentence, or even in a larger unit of thought, will determine what aspect of its total meaning is in the foreground. The translator can hardly hope to convey in another language *every shade of meaning* that attaches to the word in the original, but if he is free to exploit a wide range of English words covering a similar area of meaning and association he may hope to carry over the meaning of the sentence as a whole.”—*The New English Bible*, Introduction, by Dr. C. H. Dodd, Vice-Chairman and Director of translation committee, from *Eight Translation New Testament*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. (italics not in original)

While recognizing that there are some textual problems involved and differences in translations may color some passages differently, there is a clarity in Scripture regarding the Father/Son relationship. No doubt this is so because understanding this relationship has a profound affect on how we view our relationship to them. Church history tells us that there have been heated debates in this matter, and no doubt those debates will continue. This treatise on the subject is written because I feel a need to more clearly define my own understanding of the matter. I have found that writing helps me to order my thoughts and evaluate information on a given matter. It is for this reason that I’m attempting this paper. Like most Christians, I view the Bible as the ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice. While I respect those scholars, ancient and modern, for their labors and fine contributions they have made in the field of Christian theology, I do not equate their testimony and conclusions on the same level as the Bible itself. Yet, I have found various commentaries on the Bible, Bible dictionaries, church histories, word studies, encyclopedias and related books very helpful in providing a more informed approach to Bible study, and I’m very grateful for such help. But I would add this codicil regarding all such extra-biblical helps: they never provide the final answer. They provide additional data that can broaden our perspective and this supplementary help is very valuable. But, as valuable as it is, the final answer to defining matters of faith must come from what God has to say to us in the Bible alone. Some extra-biblical resources will be considered in this paper along with commentary from several theologians to acquaint the reader with differing points of view. These various perspectives prove helpful, I believe, in helping us make informed judgments. Obviously, this paper will not answer all questions, nor will everyone agree with the conclusions advanced. It is

hoped, however, that the perspective presented will provide some food for thought for those who want to better understand the Father/Son relationship. I have chosen to begin with the person of Jesus Christ as he is presented to us in Scripture nearly two thousand years ago. From that starting point we can move forward and backward scripturally, as need be, to glean information relevant to our consideration.

JESUS CHRIST: THE MAN LIKE NO OTHER MAN

Jesus' critics believed he deserved to be killed as punishment for the sin of blasphemy. In John's gospel we read about his encounter with certain Jews in the temple area known as Solomon's Colonnade during the Feast of Dedication. Certain ones gathered around him and asked:

"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'"—John 10:24-30.

On hearing this, they began picking up stones with the intent of killing him, to which Jesus responded:

"I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.'"—John 10:31-33.

On another occasion a group of Pharisees and teachers of the law were present among a crowd of people when a paralytic man was lowered into their midst from the roof. Jesus was moved by this display of faith and he said to the paralytic:

"Friend, your sins are forgiven.' The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, 'Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"—Luke 5:20, 21.

Healing people on the Sabbath was especially offensive to the Jewish religious community. On one occasion, in response to their objections Jesus said:

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.' For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.'"—John 5:16-18.

Another area of sharp criticism came upon Jesus for his authoritative manner of teaching. In the famous Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But *I tell you* that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.'"—Matthew 5:21, 22.

Time and again we have Jesus predicating his statements by saying: "*I tell you.*" On a visit to a synagogue in Capernaum Jesus began to teach with unusual authority:

"The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.'"—Mark 1:22.

Unlike the custom of appealing to rabbinical schools of thought and quibbling endlessly over

matters of minutiae, Jesus spoke clearly, simply and directly on his own authority. The scribes and Pharisees were also offended by the way Jesus presented himself because he claimed to be greater than past prophets and even king Solomon. On one occasion when he was asked to show a miraculous sign he replied:

“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.”—Matthew 12: 41, 42.

Jesus’ religious opponents were greatly offended by what appeared to be a cavalier attitude toward Sabbath day observance. On one occasion he and his disciples were observed walking through a grain field on the Sabbath, stripping the heads of grain and eating them. When confronted with the charge that his disciples were violating Sabbath law he concluded his rebuttal with the remarkable statement: “For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” (Matthew 12:1-8) It is little wonder that the religious leaders were greatly alarmed by this Galilean and concluded that killing him was the only choice they had. Within his own intimate group, Jesus often spoke about the importance of keeping, not God’s commandments, but *his* commandments:

“If you love me, you will obey what I command.” . . . “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” (John 14:15, 21) “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”—John 15:10.

Summing up this brief overview of how Jesus presented himself to his disciples and the larger Jewish community we find that **(1)** he claimed to be one with the Father—the very Son of God; **(2)** he claimed the authority to forgive sins; **(3)** he said that his commands had to be obeyed if one wanted life; **(4)** he declared that he would give people eternal life; **(5)** he claimed to be greater than Jonah and king Solomon; **(6)** he spoke authoritatively and not like a rabbi; **(7)** he declared himself Lord of the Sabbath! It is little wonder that the religious leaders concluded that he was a blasphemer and worthy of death. Even those who came to accept him as the promised messiah were often perplexed as to his person. After several of them had survived a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee that Jesus had miraculously quieted they exclaimed: “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.” (Luke 8:25) And to all of this we must add the matter of pre-existence.

THE PREHUMAN RELATIONSHIP

The gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, provide us with the human genealogy, conception and birth of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 1:1-25; Luke 1:26-2:20; 3:23-38) Clearly, the Lord is presented as a human descendant of both the patriarch Abraham and king David. The apostle Paul reminds us: “But when the time had fully come, God Sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.” (Galatians 4:4). But during his ministry Jesus made statements that pointed to a time before his humanity in which he had a relationship with his Father. A few of these are:

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.”—John 3:13

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”—John 6:38

“I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’—John 8:58.

“You are from below; I am from above.”—John 8:23.

“What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!”—John 6:62.

“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”—John 17:5.

Such statements as the above raise the question regarding the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son before his human life. What we have about that in the Bible is limited and creates as many questions as it answers. Three of the most specific statements in this regard are to be found in John’s gospel and the apostle Paul’s letters to the congregations in Philippi and Colossae:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men . . . No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”—John 1:1-4, 18.

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”—Phil. 2:5-8.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and 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. 1:15-20.

There has been endless discussion and debate about that pre-creation relationship between God and the one called the Word. Dr. Spiros Zodhiates, professor of New Testament studies at Trinity Theological Seminary, devoted an entire book to the prologue of John titled: *Was Christ God?* (1981 edition) in which he examines the Greek text and offers his assessment—his interpretation of what he finds there. As regarding the final clause in John 1:1: “and the Word was God,” he wrote:

“The Apostle John, in his declaration in the third clause of the first verse of his Gospel, does not speak merely of some of the visible attributes of Jesus Christ which would indicate that He is divine, that He attained divinity, but declares that He is God, that He is deity who became humanity *without ceasing to be deity*. Man by accepting God through Jesus Christ becomes divine, but He does not become God. He has within him divine nature, but he has not become God.

The word *theotes*, ‘deity,’ occurs in Col. 2:9, ‘For in him [Jesus Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.’ The word translated ‘Godhead’ here is *theotes*, ‘deity,’ and not ‘divinity.’ It refers, not to the manifestation of Christ in His external acts, but to His essential nature.

It would, therefore, be totally wrong to translate the statement which John makes in John 1:1 as ‘and the Word was divine.’ The word which is used in the original Greek is *theos* ‘God,’ not *theios*, ‘divine.’ Jesus Christ did not merely have divine

attributes, but He was God in His essence and nature. He was not a man who attained divinity, but God who humbled Himself to take upon Himself human nature *in addition to His deity.*"—*Was Christ God?*, by Spiros Zodhiates (1981 edition), page 102. (italics not in original)

It is true that John's Greek text reads, "and the Word was God." Taken at face value, we would naturally conclude that the Word was the God he was said to be with because the entire verse says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." To say the least, this is a difficult concept to grasp. Why have some English translators of the Bible rendered the verse differently? For example, Dr. James Moffatt translated it from the Greek into English as, "The Logos existed in the very beginning, the Logos was with God, the Logos was divine." Why say 'divine' when the original language word is *theos*—'God?' Is there a difference between being 'God' and being 'divine?' Another translation reads: "Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God." (*Today's English Version*) Why say, "he was the same as God," and not simply "the Word was God?" Another modern translation reads: "When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was." (*New English Bible*) Obviously, there must be something here that the ordinary English reader does not understand about the Greek in this sentence. However, most English Bibles read: "and the Word was God."

What does this tell us about the relationship between the Word and the God the Word is said to be with and, apparently, identical with? We are concerned not only with how John worded John 1:1 but also what he meant by what he wrote. Obviously, that is a grammatical question as well as a theological one. Dr. Zodhiates is certain that John was plainly saying that the Word was the God he was with. However, there are other theologians who basically agree with Dr. Zodhiates as to the trinity, but acknowledge that this particular verse presents certain difficulties. One of these is Dr. Millard J. Erickson, research professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, who says the following regarding John 1:1:

"The sentence: 'the Word was with God, and the Word was God,' has been the subject of a great deal of exegetical debate. Translated literally, it must be rendered in the above fashion. The real issue here, however, goes beyond mere translation to interpretation. To put it another way, *what it means versus what it says* may need to be determined on more broadly logical terms, rather than merely grammatical considerations. In the first clause, *qe'j*, God, has the definite article, while in the second the article is lacking. Several possibilities have been offered as to the meaning of this. Some have argued that this anarthrous construction means, 'of the quality of.' Others have appealed to Colwell's Rule, which says that in a predicate-first construction, the predicate ordinarily appears without the article, to distinguish it from the subject.

If we take this latter approach [Colwell's rule], then the actual reading, had not the writer put the predicate first, presumably for emphasis, would have been, " *l'goj hn ton qe'n*. That could then be interpreted in several ways.

. As a statement of identity. The Word is the same as the one who is God. The meaning would be something like this (to reverse the two clauses): 'the Word was God and the Word was with himself.'

. As a statement of inclusion. The Word is being described as being with God and being God himself. The rendering then would be something like, 'The Word was with God, and the Word was himself also God.' This would leave the door open to something like bitheism.

It seems better to take the statement as one of predication or quality. *The same quality of deity* is true of the Word as is true of the one, God, with whom he is present. The rendering would then be, 'The Word was with God, and the Word was

of the same quality of deity as is God.'" –*God in Three Persons—A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, pages 199, 200. (italics not in original.)

Those of us who are unschooled in biblical Greek grammar can take some comfort in knowing that even among those who are schooled there are differences of opinion. While Dr. Zodhiates is certain in his view that the third clause of John 1:1 points to *the identity* of the Word being the God he is said to be with, others conclude that it could mean the Word had *the quality* of God he is said to be with. The several English Bible translations quoted earlier, present the matter similarly. The highly respected biblical scholar, F. F. Bruce adds this to our inquiry regarding the third clause of the opening verse in John's Gospel:

"The structure of the third clause in verse 1, *theos en ho logos*, demands the translation 'The Word was God.' Since *logos* has the article preceding it, it is marked out as the subject. The fact that *theos* is the first word after the conjunction *kai* ('and') shows that the main emphasis of the clause lies on it. Had *theos* as well as *logos* been preceded by the article, the meaning would have been that the Word was completely identical with God, which is impossible if the Word was also 'with God.' What is meant is that *the Word shared the nature and being of God*, or (to use a piece of modern jargon) was an extension of the personality of God. The NEB [*New English Bible*] paraphrase 'what God was, the Word was', brings out the meaning of the clause as successfully as a paraphrase can. 'John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true, the book is blasphemous.'

So, when heaven and earth were created, there was the Word of God, already existing in the closest association with God and *partaking of the essence of God*. No matter how far back we may try to push our imagination, we can never reach a point at which we could say the Divine Word, as Arius did, 'there was once when he was not.'"–*The Gospel of John*, by F. F. Bruce, D.D., F.B.A. 1983, page 31 (some italics not in original).

What we appear to have in both what Jesus had to say about himself and what his disciples concluded is that there was a time when Jesus, as the Word (*logos*), existed alongside of God and shared his divine nature. Paul contrasts this nature or form of God with his nature or form of man:

"Have this mind among yourselves. which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 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."–Phil. 2:5-11 *Revised Standard Version*.

The word translated 'form' (*RSV*) or 'nature' (*NIV*) at Philippians 2:6, 7 is *morphe* and "denotes the special or characteristic form or feature of a person or thing."–*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, page 123. Another source commenting on these verses says:

"The renunciation of the pre-existent Lord finds expression in a **μορφη** [*morphe*: form] which is the absolute antithesis to His prior **μορφη** [*morphe*: form]. Thus the phrase **μορφη θεοῦ** [literally "form God"—form of God], which Paul coins in obvious antithesis to **μορφη δούλου** [literally "form slave"—the form of a slave], can be understood only in the light of the context. The appearance assumed by the incarnate Lord, the image of humiliation and obedient submission, stands in the

sharpest conceivable contrast to His former appearance, the image of sovereign divine majesty, whose restoration in a new and even more glorious form is depicted for the exalted κἔριος [Lord] at the conclusion of the hymn.”—*The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IV, pages 750, 751.

The apostle said that Christ Jesus, although sharing in God’s form, or nature, “did not consider equality with God something to be *grasped*.” (Phil. 2:6) The Greek word translated *grasped* in the NIV is *harpagmos*, and represents the only appearance of this verb in the New Testament. It has been treated differently by translators and several examples of these treatments are reproduced here:

“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”—*King James Version*

“He always had the very nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God.”—*Today’s English Version*

“His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God.”—*The Jerusalem Bible*

“Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”—*Revised Standard Version*

From these several examples it can be appreciated that translators vary as to how they understand *harpagmos* should be treated here. Like John 1:1, there are differences of viewpoint expressed in these and other English translations. On the one hand, some translations read as though the equality with God was already possessed; but other readings suggest that equality with God was something to be reached out for—*grasped* or *seized*. If we take the view that the Word shared the same nature or form with the Father but not equality with the Father as God, then we are given to understand that he did not attempt to grasp or seize that equality with the Father. If, however, one favors the view that he *already had* that positional equality with the Father then the idea conveyed would be that he did not cling to this equality, but willingly set it aside. The following commentary offers some further thoughts on Philippians 2:6:

“*Thought it not robbery* is one translation of the key-word *harpagmos* which may be taken actively as in AV or passively as in RV: ‘counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God.’ Both versions are linguistically possible. The real difficulty is encountered in the question: Does it mean that Christ enjoyed equality with God but surrendered it by becoming man, or that He could have grasped at equality with God by self-assertion, but declined to do so and embraced rather the will of God in the circumstances of the incarnation and the cross?

Here once more, if the key to the text lies in the intended parallel between the first Adam and the second Adam, the latter alternative is to be preferred; and this is the generally prevailing modern view which Stauffer believes has been definitely settled: ‘So the old contention about *harpagmos* is over: equality with God is not a *res rapta*. . . a position which the pre-existent Christ had and gave up, but it is a *res rapienda*, a possibility of advancement which he declined.’ There is, however, another possibility which may be briefly stated as follows. *Harpagmos* can have the meaning of ‘a piece of good fortune, a lucky find.’ Bonnard takes the illustration of a spring-board (*tremplin*) with the same essential thought of an opportunity which the pre-existent Christ had before Him. He existed in the divine ‘condition’ [*morphe*] as the unique image and glory of God, but refused to utilize this favoured position to exploit His privileges and assert Himself in opposition to His Father.—*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 11(Philippians/Ralph P. Martin), pages 97, 98.

"The status and privileges that inevitably follow from being in very nature God. *Something to be grasped*. Perhaps something to be forcibly retained—the glory Christ had with the Father before his incarnation. But he did not consider that high position to be something he could not give up. On the other, it may be something still to be attained, like a prize, as if he did not yet possess it."—*The NIV Study Bible*, footnote on Philippians 2:6. (Italics in original)

While *harpagmos* is found only at Philippians 2:6 in the New Testament, the verb from which it is derived occurs a number of times and about its sense Albert Barnes tells us: "The notion of *violence*, or *seizing*, or *carrying away*, enters into the meaning of the word in all these places." (*Barnes New Testament Notes*, Vol. 12, p 171, italics in original) The verb in question is *harpazo*, which occurs fourteen times in the New Testament and is variously rendered in the NIV as: "caught up" (3), "snatch" (3), "attacks" (1), "carry off" (1), "force" (1), "lay hold of" (1), "snatched up" (1), "snatches away" (1), "suddenly took away" (1), "take by force" (1). Regardless of how one views the scripture in question, the verb *harpagmos* carries the sense that an opportunity or advantage that existed was not seized upon for selfish gain. Rather, a self-effacing attitude was displayed and that seems to be what Paul was talking about here. It is this example that Jesus set that Paul uses to stress how important it is for those who claim to be Jesus' disciples to show this same self-effacing attitude. My own conclusion on this text is that the Word had an opportunity to reach out and seize something that was not rightly his, but declined to do so. Others may conclude differently.

The several scriptural difficulties presented in translation that have been presented thus far, illustrate some of the problems that translators are faced with and how their choices color what we read in our Bible. That is why it is good to compare translations in critical situations so as to take advantage of different possibilities of rendering. While some passages of Scripture are problematic, the overall sense of God's message to us in the Bible is clear and its meaning does not hinge on a few critical verses. One verse or section of verses may raise questions but other texts that bear on the same subject will often clarify it for us. So we should not get discouraged if, from time to time, we are puzzled by certain statements or concepts present in the Scriptures. Keep in mind that no scripture stands alone. A single text may *sum up* a teaching but there are other texts that help fill out that summary. We must avoid the temptation to proof-text the Bible and give fair consideration to the Bible as a whole. Only in this way can we hope to come to an accurate understanding of Scripture.

As to the subject at hand, we know there is such a thing as divine nature and human nature. Or, if you prefer, a divine form and a human form. The one John identifies as the Word shared the divine nature with God. He surrendered that nature and took on the nature of man. He surrendered the one for the other. He did not simply materialize as a man as some angels had done at various times. No, he underwent a profound transformation in nature. He "made himself nothing," or as *Today's English Version* puts it, "he gave it all up." There was a surrendering of the divine nature. In other words, the Word became flesh—completely and wholly—flesh. How was it possible for him to undergo this complete change in nature but remain the same personality? We are told that it happened but we are not told how it happened. But, as the angel told his mother to be, "nothing is impossible with God." (Luke 1:37). That sinless humanity was lived out and offered to God when he died a sacrificial death to atone for the sin of Adam. We are constantly reminded in Scripture that it was this precious offering of flesh and blood—the essence of human nature—that was surrendered. He died and had to be restored to life by a resurrection from death. Since his resurrection and glorification Jesus Christ has regained the divine nature or form he once set aside. The promised exaltation has been realized:

"And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 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.”–Philippians 2:8-11
Revised Standard Version

“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. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.”–Hebrews 1:3-5

What does this tell us about their present relationship? It seems clear enough, doesn’t it? The Son is the reflection–“the exact representation”–of his Father (a uniqueness not shared with any other) and has been exalted by the Father to the highest place–at his own right hand! And all of this is to the glory of God, the one who sent his Son into the world to accomplish his will. There is and always has been the matter of subordination in their relationship. As we read about that relationship in the Bible we can hardly miss it. Even now in his glorified estate he does not occupy the positional glory and excellence of his Father, the one called “the Majesty.” No, but he sits at the right hand of that Majesty. He has that unique position alongside the Majesty–God. That is what we visualize. That is how the relationship is presented to us.

In whatever context we see the one who existed before the world began, became man and later died, was resurrected and glorified, he is always compared with God and ranked alongside him. He was not the first of many of his kind, but truly unique in his person and his relationship with God at every point of engagement with the world of creation. Acting out of his love for God, he “made himself nothing,” (*NIV*) or “emptied himself,” (*RSV*) in order to be born as a sinless human and offer himself as the sacrifice that would lay the foundation for the redemption of the world. During his humanity he humbled himself still further. Paul wrote that Jesus, “humbled himself and became obedient to death.” (Phil. 2:8) And the writer of Hebrews says:

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.”–Hebrews 5:7-10, *New Revised Standard Version*

WAS JESUS CHRIST A GOD-MAN?

Earlier, we noted that Dr. Zodhates argued that in becoming man the Word did not leave his deity behind (see pages 9, 10). If true, this would mean that the one born to Mary was both Man as well as God. Does this concept blend well with what the Bible says about the person of Jesus? If John intended to teach that ‘the Word became flesh’ was saying the same thing as ‘God became flesh,’ why did he conclude his prologue with the following words: “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” (John 1:18) Obviously, those who saw Jesus in the flesh were not looking upon God in the flesh, according to John. The ‘Word made flesh’ is only said to have “made him [God] known.”

But why does this verse read, according to the *NIV*: “but God the One and Only,” has made God known? How are we to understand his being “the One and Only”, in this verse? Someone reading the *King James Version* will note that the verse reads: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Why does the *KJV* say “only-begotten son?” By way of answer, it proves helpful to look at the Greek texts which modern translators use to make their English translations.

The Greek manuscripts now available to translators are older and more reliable than those available to the translators of the *King James Version*. When those fifty-four scholars began their English translation near the start of the seventeenth century they used what was called the Received Text [*Textus Receptus*]. This Greek text was compiled from manuscripts dating from the twelfth through the fifteenth century A.D. That text contained the words *monogenes hyios*, which means only-begotten son. However, since the sixteenth century, textual critics have been able to make use of manuscripts which date much earlier than those available to the King James translators and the most ancient and most reliable of these read, *monogenes theos* "only-begotten god," at John 1:18. The value of these more ancient MSS is considered in the following quotation:

"The Greek text underlying the King James Version, popularly called the Textus Receptus, is a text which contains a vast culmination of textual corruption. (The Textus Receptus was compiled from manuscripts of the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries.) Although a minority of scholars have continued to defend the reliability of the Textus Receptus, most scholars (for the last 100 years) have been convinced, on the basis of both theory and praxis, that the Textus Receptus is corrupt—i.e., it does not adequately present the text written by the God-inspired, New Testament authors. By God's sovereignty, better and earlier manuscripts have been discovered since the time of the Textus Receptus (ca. 1600), and these manuscripts display a more accurate text. In the century prior to this one, Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and the Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (to name a few) provided scholars with a text of the New Testament dated between the fourth and the fifth centuries. As a result, textual critics like Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort were able to compile editions of the Greek New Testament which far exceed the reliability of the Textus Receptus.

The recovery has continued in this century. Nearly ninety papyrus manuscripts containing portions of the New Testament have been discovered in this century, and several of these manuscripts are dated between A.D. 200-350. The Chester Beatty Papyri, including some of the earliest witnesses to the Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles, and Revelation (namely P45, P46, P47), and the Martin Bodmer Papyri, containing some of the earliest extant copies of Luke, John, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude (namely P66, P72, and P75), furnish for these portions of the New Testament a text that is but one hundred to one hundred and fifty years removed from the autographs. These manuscripts have had great impact upon the formation of critical editions of the Greek New Testament in this century. The most useful, and probably the most accurate of these editions is the Nestle text (now called Nestle-Aland in the most recent edition, the 26th)."—*Guide to the Ancient Manuscripts*, Introduction by Philip W. Comfort (an appendix to the *Eight Translation New Testament*, published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois.)

The theory of textual criticism is not an exact science as many factors enter into the problem of determining the intent of the original writer and/or determining which manuscripts best represent most faithfully the original autograph document. Modern scholars are well aware of these problems but are equipped to make informed textual judgments. Sometimes there are variant readings that warrant consideration and some English translations draw attention to these in their footnotes. We must keep in mind that no original copy of any part of the Bible exists today. The ravages of time have destroyed all those originals. But thousands upon thousands of copies were painstakingly and faithfully made to preserve the contents of the originals. Over a broad area of the world those copies (MSS) were made and preserved. Textual criticism is well disciplined and textual scholars are able to date and compare these ancient MSS and weed out textual errors, obvious additions and grammatical errors. Generally, the older the text the more

reliable it is. For that reason texts that date back to the fourth and fifth centuries are considered more reliable than those of the twelfth and thirteenth century.

We need not fear that the original autographs, which no longer exist, have been seriously compromised by centuries of copying. Great care was always taken by those who copied these sacred texts. In a few instances, however, a scribe did make an error in copying and in rare instances a copyist might change a word or even add a word or words. If his manuscript was later copied those copies would include those errors and additions. But these corruptions would be readily discerned when compared to the many hundreds of other manuscripts that would not contain such errors or additions. It is that very process that has enabled modern scholars to discover and expunge the accumulation of such errors contained in the *King James Version* which was the product of the Textus Receptus.

Another important factor that makes modern English translations more accurate is that scholars have a better working knowledge of the *koine* (common) Greek used in writing the New Testament. Which brings us to the text under discussion: John 1:18. The Nestle-Aland Greek text (26th edition) mentioned above, does not have *monogenes hyios* (only-begotten son), but, rather, *monogenes theos* (only-begotten god) at John 1:18. *Monogenes theos* as the correct wording is supported by the earliest MSS evidence. According to *Guide to the Ancient Manuscripts*, quoted above, the reading *monogenes theos* is supported by MSS and papyrus evidence that dates back to A.D. 150-175, while the reading *monogenes hyios* MSS evidence dates no earlier than A.D. 370. F. F. Bruce comments on this matter as follows:

“The weight of the textual evidence here favours the reading *monogenes theos*, ‘God only-begotten’ or ‘the only begotten, (himself) God’. Not only is it attested by early authorities, including the two earliest known (the Bodmer papyri 66 and 75); the tendency would inevitably be to replace it by the commoner *monogenes hyios* (‘only-begotten son’), whereas, if the commoner reading were original, it is difficult to see what could have impelled any scribe or editor to replace it by the unparalleled *monogenes theos*. This unparalleled reading is supported both by the principle that the more difficult reading is to be preferred and by transcriptional probability.” –*The Gospel of John*, F.F. Bruce (1983), pages 44, 45

Monogenes is not an uncommon word in the New Testament. It means ‘only-born’ and is used to identify an only child in several gospel accounts. In Luke’s gospel we find the following: “Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son (*monogenes hyios*) of his mother, and she was a widow.” (Luke 7:11, 12) Another account says, “Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter (*monogenes ioustos*), a girl of about twelve, was dying.” (Luke 8:41, 42). And again at Luke 9:37, 38 we read, “The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, ‘Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only (*monogenes*) child.’” And we find the same word in the well known text of John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son (*monogenes hyios*) that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (*King James Version*).

It seems worth mentioning Abraham and Isaac in this matter of God offering his only-born: “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son (*monogenes hyios*), even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’” (Hebrews 11:17, 18) This last scripture seems especially relevant to our discussion because the attempted sacrifice of Abraham’s only-born parallels the fact that God offered up his only-born.

When Jesus is identified as the only-begotten God at John 1:18, how are we to understand

that? The question is complicated by the fact that in John's prologue (John 1:1-18), he traverses aeons of time (and *before* time) in the identity of the one who became flesh. He introduces this one as the Word in the beginning of his prologue, but by the end of it, only eighteen verses later, the one he is speaking about has finished his earthly mission and is at the right hand of God in heaven. To what point in time (or before time) is John referring when he speaks of this one as "the only-begotten God?" If John is pointing backward—before creation—it raises the question about God (identified as the Word) being *begotten*. What would it mean if we think of it as applying before creation? Was there a time when he was not? If he always was (never having had a beginning), as many argue, in what conceivable way could he be spoken of as *begotten*? By way of an answer, Dr. Zodhiates, offers the following:

"This expression, 'only begotten God,' is unique. It does not appear elsewhere as referring to Jesus Christ. It provides unquestionable proof of the deity of Jesus Christ. But why mention the word 'only begotten'? In English it would be very difficult to convey the meaning of the original Greek here. It is *monogenees*, which according to the *Great Lexicon of the Greek Language* has three meanings: (1) the only one born, i.e., the one who does not have brothers or sisters, as in Luke 5:42; (2) the only one of its kind, unique; and (3) of the same nature, related. (D. Deemeetrakou, *Lexicon Tees Hellinikis Gloossees* [Lexicon of the Greek Language from Greek into Greek], Vol.6, p.4741.)

We believe that, in the first 18 verses particularly, this word *monogenees*, 'only begotten,' has the third meaning above. It should therefore not be translated 'the only begotten' at all, but 'of the same nature.' . . . The word *monogenees* actually is a compound of the word *monos*, 'alone,' and the word *genos*. 'race, stock, family.' Here we are told that He who came to reveal God—Jesus Christ—is of the same family, of the same stock, of the same race as God. He is in no way less God than His Father." —*Was Christ God?*, p.20, 21.

The definitions supplied by Dr. Zodhiates regarding the meaning of "only begotten," would all seem applicable toward the Son of God. He is presented as an "only child—without brothers and sisters, he is unique—the only one so described, and that he shared the Father's divine nature in his pre-human existence. But this does not allow us to set aside the textual witness that he is the *only begotten*. In putting matters this way, John clearly distinguishes him from God, his Father, who is not *begotten*! The Father alone is presented as the supreme one—*the Almighty God*! And, regardless of his pre-human nature and dignity, the Word set that all aside to become the "last Adam." (1 Cor. 15:45) He was not God-Man in the sense that Dr. Zodhiates argues that he was—nor could he have been—because the one who became flesh had to be *mortal* and *die* as a human (blood and flesh) sacrifice. (Romans 5) The Almighty God could not be flesh and blood nor could the *immortal* God die. Moreover, a divine sacrifice would not cover human sinfulness. And, in addition to all this, we are reminded that no man has ever seen God. (John 1:18)

There is the possibility that John is not looking backward in time when he speaks of "the only-begotten God." It is contextually possible, and scripturally possible, to apply John's description to Jesus in the flesh. In fact John does this in verse 14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only [ftn. *the Only Begotten*], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." The uniqueness of his conception and birth allows (actually demands) the definition of an only-begotten son. When Mary was told she would conceive a child the angel explained: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35) Jesus is identified as "the Son of God," from his humanity forward. No text identifying him before creation speaks of him as "Son of God." As to his being "God" while in his human estate, we need to remind ourselves that the promised messiah was to be called, among other things, "mighty God." (Isaiah 9:6) The nuance of meanings attached to *theos* ('god') would allow for this title to be applied to the promised messiah without confusing him with the "Most

High" (God) whom Luke calls his Father. More on the matter of the range of meanings attached to words of dignity in the Bible will be considered later in this treatise.

Yet another possibility is that "only-begotten God," could apply to the resurrected and glorified Son of God. The apostle Paul associates Jesus' resurrection with Psalm 2:7. He says: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."—Romans 1:1-4. Such interpretation would not do violence to the Scriptures.

When the virgin Mary, of the tribe of Judah, was approach by God's angel she was told: "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.'" (Luke 1:30-35) The angel explained to Mary how it would be that her child would be called 'the Son of God.' It would be because the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her. What that meant in a practical way was that she would become pregnant miraculously and in due time give birth to a son, a descendant of king David.

Each Christmas season we have the birth of Jesus Christ retold. Joseph, to whom Mary was pledged to marry, and Mary travel south to the city of Bethlehem in the territory of Judah. "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:6, 7) Her child grew and from the meager amount of information available it appears that Jesus' early life and upbringing was normal. Luke says that when Jesus was twelve years old he separated himself from his parents and was later found sitting among the teachers of the law and asking them questions. Everyone was amazed at his precociousness. (Luke 2:41-47) His parents later reprovved him for this. (Luke 2:48) Luke concludes this brief episode by saying: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."—Luke 2:52.

Nothing more is said about Jesus' youth in the Gospels. The very next chapter of Luke leaps forward about eighteen years to when Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized. According to Luke, Jesus was about thirty years old. (Luke 3:23) This was when his remarkable ministry began. The gospels record his message and his testimony about himself and relate many signs he performed. There were times when even his disciples did not know what to make of him. The Bible says they worshiped him. We read about the occasion when Jesus came walking towards them over the water and Peter attempted to walk to him over the water also. Peter became fearful and began to sink. Jesus rescued him. And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down, Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "'Truly you are the Son of God.'"—Matt. 14:25-33.

Following his resurrection, "when he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." (Luke 24:50-52). On another post-resurrection appearance we read: "So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him." (Matthew 28:8, 9) Jesus apparently accepted this "worship" as he did not reprove those doing so. What do the actions of his disciples tell us about how they viewed him? Did they think he was God in the flesh? If he was only a man, albeit a sinless one, he would not be due any worship, would he? And what does this tell us about

the Father/Son relationship during his humanity? The constant witness in the gospel accounts is that the Son of God came to do the Father's will. He prayed to his Father and submitted to his will. His message was not his own but his Father's. He displayed all of the limitations that humans have. He grew tired and had to rest. He was hungry and had to eat. He showed human emotion. He could cry and he could become angry. In other words he was very human. And yet he could do such wonderful things. How was that possible if he weren't God? Yet, it was his humanity—his perfect, sinless humanity—that is presented to us as the valuable offering which he presented to God. He became like us in every way, according to the inspired letter to the Hebrews:

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 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. He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil. . . For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.'"—Hebrews 2:10-14, 17, 18.

THE "HOLY ROOT" FROM WHICH CHRIST EMERGED

How can all that we have considered thus far be put into an understandable framework? The answer lies in being able to step back, so to speak, and take in the broader picture. The life and ministry of Jesus Christ did not occur in a vacuum. Everything he taught and everything he claimed about himself must be viewed and evaluated within the context of Judaism and its biblical expectations regarding the promised messiah. As already noted, two of the synoptic gospels (Matthew and Luke) provide us with the Lord's authentic family tree that stretches back to the Hebrew patriarch Abraham and beyond. The obvious objective of that genealogical account is to establish, without a shadow of doubt, that Jesus was a true son of Abraham and of king David. Why was that important and how does it help us better understand Jesus' relationship with his Father?

The patriarch Abraham was the first to be spoken of as being credited with righteousness due to faith. God made a promise to Abraham. He said his children would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and by means of him all the nations would be blessed. "Abram [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (Gen. 15:6) The apostle Paul calls attention to this matter of Abraham's being declared righteous by faith to underscore the Christian concept of forgiveness due to grace and not due to works. "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" (Rom. 4:1-3) And a little later in the same chapter he writes: "Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all." (Rom. 4:16) It is clear from this and related texts that Christianity grew out of the root of the Abrahamic promises and Judaism. Non-Jewish believers (Gentiles) are said to have been *grafted* into a *holy root*. That holy root was Israel. Paul wrote:

"I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to

envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead. If the part of the dough offered as first-fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.”—Rom. 11: 13-18

The same apostle, in a letter to other non-Jewish Christians, reminds them that they were grafted into the holy root: “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.” (Eph. 2:11-13) The apostle again made application of Genesis 15:6 in his letter to the congregations in Galatia: “Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.” (Gal. 3:6, 7) These same sons of Abraham (due to faith) are also sons of God: “You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.”—Gal. 3:26.

The law covenant, received by Jesus’ ancestors, was put into force 430 years after God made that prophetic declaration and promise to Abraham. The law covenant served as a temporary provision to weld the children of Abraham together until the promised “seed of Abraham,” Jesus Christ, arrived. That temporary provision—the law—was in force during the life of Christ and as a Jew, ‘born under law,’ he was covenant-bound to observe it. Consider the following observation in this regard:

“It should not be surprising that the understructure and matrix of much of the New Testament is Hebraic. After all, Jesus was a Jew, not a Christian of gentile origin. His teachings, like those of his followers, reflect a distinct ethnicity and culture. The evidence found in the New Testament is abundantly clear: as a mother gives birth to and nourishes a child, so Hebrew culture and language gave birth to and nourished Christianity.”—*Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, by Dr. Marvin R. Wilson, Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Gordon College, Wenham, Mass., published by W.B.Eerdmans, page 12.

Jesus Christ did not come to establish a new religion. He came to confirm, clarify and crown with perfection, the promises given to Abraham. He would make known Yahweh’s eternal purpose which, until the coming of the messiah, would remain a divine secret. The paramount question to be answered was not, “Is Jesus God?” but “Is Jesus the Messiah?” The apostle John, near the conclusion of his gospel wrote: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written 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 20:30, 31)

The footnote on verse 31 in *The NIV Study Bible* reads in part: “This whole Gospel is written to show the truth of Jesus’ Messiahship and to present him as the Son of God, so that the readers may believe in him.”

THE CONTEXT OF MONOTHEISTIC WORSHIP

When Moses was first told that he must return to Egypt and bring the descendants of Abraham out of Egypt, God said: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” (Ex, 3:6) Shortly after that, during the same divine encounter, God said: “I Am who I Am. ‘This’ he added ‘is what you must say to the sons of Israel: ‘I Am has sent me to you.’

And God also said to Moses, 'You are to say to the sons 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 for all time; by this name I shall be invoked for all generations to come.'" -Ex. 3:14, 15 *The Jerusalem Bible*.

In time, the Israelites were freed from Egyptian slavery and found themselves assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai where Moses received the famous Ten Commandments. The first two of those commandments (as divided in the *NIV*) were: (1) "You shall have no other gods before me." (2) "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."-Ex. 20:3-6

The Israelites had been and would continue to be exposed to many different gods. In Egypt they were well acquainted with the pantheon of Egyptian gods and many Egyptians accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt. Later, in Canaan and surrounding territories, they would be exposed to numerous city-gods, local Baals and the spirit of pantheism. From the outset, they were put on notice that their God, their covenant God, would tolerate no rivals. Theirs was to be a strict monotheistic worship. In Deuteronomy we read: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD, is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Duet. 6:4, 5) When Jesus was asked which commandment in the law was the greatest in importance he quoted Deuteronomy 6:5: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."-Matt. 22:37, 38

In Jesus' day the book of Deuteronomy was the most widely circulated book of the Pentateuch and the text Jesus quoted from it may have been one of the very earliest of verses he would have been taught by his father, Joseph, and committed to memory. Deuteronomy 6:4, the verse preceding the one Jesus quoted, read: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God. the Lord is one." This text came to be called the Shema, taken from the name of the first Hebrew word in the verse: *Hear!* The significance of this text is commented on by Marvin R. Wilson:

"The Shema is not a prayer (rabbinic literature never refers to 'praying' the Shema) but a confession of faith or a creed. The practice of reciting the Shema daily is firmly established in the Mishnah (ca. A.D. 200). The important place of the Shema in Jewish religious experience is underscored by the fact that the entire Mishnah begins, 'From what time in the evening may the *Shema* be recited?'" (Berakhot 1:1)-*Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, page 123.

Not surprisingly, Satan attempted to corrupt Jesus' worship and get him to violate that greatest of commandments. Following his forty-day period of meditation in the wilderness, Jesus was put to the test by Satan. "The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" (Luke 4:5-8) Jesus quoted the text from Deuteronomy 6:13 in his response to the Devil. In this way the son of man upheld the Hebraic doctrine of one God alone. Consider, also, the fact that this Son of God is referred to as the "last Adam." (1 Cor. 15:45) The first Adam was also a son of God-made in God's image. (Luke 3:38) That first Adam failed in his test of faithfulness to his creator; the second Adam did not fail.

According to God's commandment, the Israelites were not to bow down to or worship, that is, serve, other gods. (Ex. 20:5) The original Hebrew words translated "bow down" and "worship" at Exodus 20:5, were *shâchâh* and *âbad*, according to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

The meaning of *shâchâh* is "bow down" and appears in the Old Testament many times. Regarding its usage there, Robert B. Girdlestone says:

Shachah originally signified prostration as a mark of respect, and is applied in Scripture *not only to God and to false gods, but also to men*, just as the English word 'worship' is used of the husband's reverence for his wife in the marriage service of the English Church, and is retained as a title of respect for a civil magistrate. **Shachah** is also rendered in the A.V. by the words bow, stoop, crouch, fall down, beseech humbly, make obeisance, and do reverence.—*Synonyms of the Old Testament*, R.B. Girdlestone, page 215, 216. (italics not in original)

The eastern custom of bowing down as a sign of respect was practiced by the patriarch Abraham. When Abraham's wife Sarah died, Abraham sought to buy a parcel of land from the Hittites in which to bury her. "Again Abraham bowed down [*shâchâh*] before the people of the land and he said to Ephron in their hearing, 'Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there.'" (Gen. 23:12, 13) Centuries later, when Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Naomi, first met her benefactor Boaz, "she bowed down [*shâchâh*] with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, 'Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?'" (Ruth 2:10) Other examples could be given to illustrate the fact that *shâchâh* sometimes defined the act of bowing down as a sign of respect or honor. God's commandment against bowing down to a false god would not be violated in such instances. It came down to what was in the mind of the one showing such respect.

The English translators, in these verses, use 'bow down' because that is what the original word *shâchâh* meant. However, the same word is translated 'worship' by the *KJV* and *NIV* translators at Exodus 34:14: "Do not worship [*shâchâh*] any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." The translators decided to use the word 'worship' here rather than 'bow down'. If they had consistently rendered it 'bow down', they would have rendered it as does *The Jerusalem Bible*, which translates the verse: "You shall bow down to no other god, for Yahweh's name is the Jealous One; he is a jealous God." This latter translation conveys the sense of the verse without introducing the word 'worship.'

The word *âbad* has the sense of 'serve.' And, like *shâchâh*, it is used in relation both to men as well as God, or gods. Sometimes it is simply translated as 'work.' For example, Jacob agreed to work for his uncle Laban seven years for his youngest daughter, Rachel. "Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, 'I'll work [*âbad*] for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.'" (Gen. 29:18) After the seven years of labor, Laban betrayed Jacob and gave him his oldest daughter Leah in marriage instead of Rachel. After that he had to agree to work another seven year for Laban in order to marry Rachel. "And he worked [*âbad*] for Laban another seven years." (Gen. 29:30) Jacob served Laban a total of fourteen years for his two wives. This service or work was ordinary and not worship. So when Yahweh God, the covenant God of Israel, said that they should not bow down [*shâchâh*] to other gods or serve [*âbad*] them he was not restricting ordinary acts of respect, such as bowing down, nor was he forbidding every form of service or work. Only when acts of service or bowing down involved showing reverence to a false god would such be wrong.

It is important to understand the shades of meaning incorporated in original Hebrew and Greek words as this enables us to better evaluate their usage in different circumstances, remembering that there were no distinctly religious or sacerdotal terminology used to define acts of worship in contradistinction to ordinary acts or functions of daily life. This will be enlarged upon later.

ISRAEL'S DISTINCTIVE GOD: THE ONE TRUE GOD

Israel's God is introduced to us in the opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning God

created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1) Thirty times in that opening chapter the word God appears. It may surprise some readers to learn that the derivation of the English word ‘God’ is uncertain. According to the *Dictionary of Word Origins*, by John Ayto: “It probably comes from an Indo-European *ghat-. This may be related to Sanskrit *havate* and Old Church Slavonic *zovetu*, both meaning ‘call,’ and if so the underlying etymological meaning of god would be ‘that which is invoked.’ The English word’s immediate ancestor was prehistoric Germanic *guth-, which also produced German *gott*, Dutch *god*, and Swedish and Danish *gud*.—page 258

The Hebrew word used in the original and translated ‘God’ in the thirty instances mentioned above is *elohim*, which is the plural form of *el*, which is also translated ‘God.’ Strictly speaking, these words are not names—they are titles. While *elohim* is plural in form it is nearly always accompanied by a singular verb. “In the beginning God [*elohim*-plural] created [*bara*-singular] the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1) Nor is it restricted to designating the one true God. While it is applied to the true God more than 2,300 times, it is also applied to other gods about 245 times. We find that *elohim* is sometimes used to identify individual gods such as Chemosh, Dagon, Milcom and others.

King Solomon built high places for the gods Chemosh and Molech on a hill east of Jerusalem. God’s anger was expressed through the prophet Ahijah, who declared God’s intention to divide the kingdom and give ten tribes to Jeroboam. Ahijah was wearing a new cloak which he tore into twelve pieces. “Then he said to Jeroboam, ‘take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the LORD, the God (*elohim*) of Israel, says: ‘See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes. But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe. I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god [*elohim*] of the Moabites, and Molech the god [*elohim*] of the Ammonites, and have not walked in my ways, nor done what is right in my eyes, not kept my statutes and laws as David, Solomon’s father, did.’” (1 Kings 11:31-33) You will note that the plural form of ‘God,’ (*elohim*) is used not only for the one true God but also the pagan gods named.

From its usage in the Hebrew text it becomes obvious that the title ‘God’ or ‘god,’ in either the single or plural form, is not exclusively used for the one true God. It is used in a generic sense to identify pagan gods as well as the God of Israel. That Hebrew writers could use *elohim* for both their God and the gods of the nations demonstrates how they viewed the title. It is worth noting here that how certain words are used in the Bible itself offers the best guide to understanding the nuances that are often present in those words. English translators may capitalize ‘God’ when the text is speaking about the true God and use lower case for ‘god’ when foreign or false gods are identified in the text, but the Hebrew original makes no such distinction. Still, some feel that special importance ought to be attached to the fact that *elohim* is the plural form for deity; notwithstanding, that the plural form is also used for *individual* pagan gods such as Molech and Chemosh. That it is most often used to identify Yahweh as God in the Hebrew text is not surprising. After all, the Scriptures are primarily focused on him—not Molech, Chemosh or any other pagan deity. It should also be pointed that the use of singular and plural forms of words in Hebrew is very common. About this we read the following:

“The use of the plural number in Hebrew seems often to denote not so much a plurality of individuals as fulness, vastness, majesty, or completeness of endowments. Thus the first word of the first Psalm, which we commonly render as an adjective—‘Blessed is the man,’ etc.—is a noun in the plural number; literally, *the blessedness of the man*. . . . The word for *life* is often plural, as in Gen. ii, 7, ‘breathed into his nostrils the breath of *lives*,’; verse 9 has ‘tree of *lives*,’ and chap. vii, 22, ‘breath of the spirit of *lives*.’ Here the meaning cannot be, as some have suggested, twofold life—animal and spiritual, for the plural is used alike of the life of tree, animal, and man. It seems rather to denote fulness and completeness of life. So the words for *water* and *heaven* are always used in the plural, probably from the

idea of vastness or majesty. This is also the best explanation of the plural form of the name of God; what the old grammarians called *the plural of excellency*, expressing the dignity and manifold power of the Creator of all things.”—*Biblical Hermeneutics*, by Milton S. Terry, second edition, page 86 (italics in original)

Concerning the plurality of *elohim* another source offers the following:

“El derives from a root indicating strength or might, and with this connotation it is applied in the Old Testament to men, and even abstractly to things, as well as to God. When applied to deity it is frequently coupled with some such epithet as ‘almighty’, e.g. El-Shaddai, God Almighty, or All-sufficient. Eloah (rarely used except in poetry) and Elohim are also used, *the plural form being the one in common use*. Some see in the use of the plural a remnant of polytheism, others an adumbration of the Trinity. It is more likely to be an instance of a usage common in Hebrew by which the plural serves to intensify or enlarge the idea expressed in the singular. It would thus draw attention to the inexhaustible fullness of the Godhead, to the plenitude of life in God.”—*The New Bible Dictionary*, J.D. Douglas, ed., pages 474, 475, 1962 edition (Italics not in original)

As indicated above, the word *El* (god) is sometimes used in compound words to describe the God of Israel: *el-etyon*: (God most high), *el-saddat*: (God almighty), *elvoi*: (God of seeing). In addition to these, Rock, Strong One, King and Lord are also used at times to define the various attributes or authorities of God. That the God of Israel is identified as ‘Most High’ (God), and ‘Almighty’ (God), should make it plain that the generic word for ‘God,’ either in the singular or plural form, does not carry a fixed value. The same word or words can be used to identify other gods or deities. That the one true God is often distinguished by qualifying adjectives attached to ‘God,’ demonstrates that he is superior to all other ‘gods.’ There are those who see a multiple of *persons* suggested in the plural form of the word ‘God’ (*elohim*). I see no textual evidence to support that suggestion. The use of the plural form was very common in Hebrews and , as we have seen, even individual pagan gods (Molech and Chemosh) were sometimes identified as *elohim*.

THE UNIQUE NAME OF ISRAEL’S GOD

If we keep in mind that the root from which the Hebrew word *El* is derived indicates “strength or might” we will not be aghast to see it sometimes used for men in the Old Testament. After all, there is the element of strength and might associated with human authority. The context in which either *El* or *Elohim* are used determines the value to be attached to those words. We make a mistake if we attach a fixed value to those words when the very source of our inquiry does not.

While the generic titles for deity in the Old Testament (*el*, *elohim*) are commonly used to include others aside from the one true God, there is a name that truly distinguished him and was never used for anyone else. That name in English, many scholars agree, is best transliterated as “Yahweh.” This unique name which God gave to himself, appears thousands of times in the Hebrew text. Because it is relevant to our present inquiry, information about Yahweh provided by the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, is enlisted here:

“C. *The Covenant Name: Yahweh*. Yahweh is the only truly personal name of God in Israel’s faith; the others are titular or descriptive expressions. References to ‘the name’ or ‘in the name’ of God indicate this name.”—*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, page 506

“3. *Personal*. In addition to the general names and qualifying names, God also bears a qualifying name that is His OT *name par excellence*, that characterizes Him as the

living God of revelation and reconciliation in a particular way, and that thus comes to have the nature of a proper name. This is the name Yahweh (Jehovah), which consists basically of the consonants *YHWH*, and which is connected in Ex. 3:13-15 with Heb. *hayâ* ('to be') to give the interpretation 'I am that I am,' or 'I will be that I will be.' Several questions arise in connection with this name. The linguistic derivation is undoubtedly obscure. The meaning given in Ex. 3:13-15 can hardly bear the metaphysical sense that has sometimes been read into it, namely, that of self-existence (cf. Aquinas *Summa Theol.* i.2.3), but seems to imply rather the abiding faithfulness of God. Whether the name was already known and used by other groups, e.g., the Kenites, cannot be determined. In any case, its distinctive significance for Israel is undoubtedly given with the theophany at the burning bush. Whether the name was really new to Israel (Ex. 3:13f.; 6:2f.) must also be a matter of conjecture in view of its earlier use in the patriarchal stories. Two possibilities are: (a) that the name had in fact been used but had dropped out during the period in Egypt, or (b) that it was given for the first time with the new step of the divine deliverance from Egypt, and was then quite correctly read back into the earlier stories in order to bring out the continuity of God's saving action through Israel. . . *God is named; this in itself is of the utmost significance.* God is not an abstraction; He is the living God. But this Yahweh, who is God, is *elohim*, the God of creation, the Lord of the cosmos. He is not just a tribal deity like the deities of the nations. Yet He is in fact the God of Israel. He is the God who works in history, the God who has chosen this people as both the first object and the agent of His revealing and reconciling action. As the God of this people He is the covenant God, the God of relationship, the God who establishes a relationship of faithfulness and obedience, the God of a mutual relationship of love. The whole of the OT revelation, and the whole of the NT revelation as well, is already implicit in these four simple letters which are so puzzling and yet also so luminous and revealing. To say Yahweh is to say God; to say God is to say Yahweh."—*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised Edition, Vol.2. pages 497, 498 (under *Names of God*) some italics not in original.

The first occurrence of the personal name of God is found in Genesis chapter two. "At the time when Yahweh God made earth and heaven there was as yet no wild bush on the earth nor had any wild plant yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not sent rain on the earth, nor was there any man to till the soil. However, a flood was rising from the earth and watering all the surface of the soil. Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being." (Genesis 2:4-7, *The Jerusalem Bible*, 1966 ed). Most modern English Bibles do not use a form of the name (Yahweh / Jehovah) but substitute the words LORD or GOD where the Hebrew text contains those four Hebrew consonants: *YHWH*. Typical of this substitution is the way the *New International Version* renders those verses:

"This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground—the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."—Genesis 2:4-7.

In a footnote on Genesis 2:4, *The NIV Study Bible* says:

"*LORD God*. 'LORD' (Hebrew *YHWH*, 'Yahweh') is the personal and covenant name of God (see note on Ex. 3:15), emphasizing his role as Israel's Redeemer and covenant Lord (see note on Ex. 6:6), while 'God' (Hebrew *Elohim*) is a general term.

Both names occur thousands of times in the OT, and often, as here, they appear together—clearly indicating that they refer to the same one and only God.”

While identifying *elohim* (God) and *YHWH* (Yahweh) both as names and that they often appear together, “clearly indicating that they refer to the same one and only God,” is misleading. As we have already considered, *elohim* does not always represent the true God. It is used hundreds of times when referring to false gods. Moreover, *elohim* is a *title*, not a *name*. That is why the tetragrammaton appears thousands of times in connection with *elohim* in the Hebrew text to identify and distinguish Israel’s unique God (and ours), as the one true *elohim*! By using the name God had given himself, the Israelites could identify their God as Yahweh God to distinguish him with a personal name and separate him from all other gods. The Preface of *The NIV Study Bible* offers these additional thoughts regarding the practice of substituting the Hebrew tetragrammaton *YHWH* with LORD or GOD rather than using the name Yahweh represented by those consonants:

“In regards to the divine name *YHWH*, commonly referred to as the *Tetragrammaton*, the translators adopted the device used in most English versions of rendering the name as ‘LORD’ in capital letters to distinguish it from *Adonai*, another Hebrew word rendered ‘Lord,’ for which small letters were used. Wherever the two names stand together in the Old Testament as a compound name of God, they are rendered ‘Sovereign LORD.’”—*The NIV Study Bible*, Preface, p. xii.

Why most English translators have “adopted the device” described above calls for more explanation. It, supposedly, finds its origin in a Jewish practice of vowel pointing *YHWH* with the vowels belonging to the Hebrew word *adonay* (plural form for ‘Lord’). Written Hebrew did not include the vowels as does English. Those scribes fluent in Hebrew would have no difficulty in supplying the appropriate vowel sounds when reading the text. We do something like that when we come across an abbreviated English word like ‘bldg’. We would simply sound out what ‘bldg’ represented because we know it stands for ‘building’. Knowing English, we can easily add the vowels to sound it out. Somewhat like that, the Hebrew scribe could easily add the appropriate vowel sounds to the consonantal Hebrew. According to historians, sometime after the Jews returned from their Babylonian captivity, Jewish scribes began to avoid uttering the divine name. To remind themselves and others not to pronounce the name aloud when they came to it in the sacred text they vowel pointed the tetragrammaton with those vowels belonging to the Hebrew word *adonay*. This would alert the reader not to pronounce the divine name but to say, instead, *adonay* (Lord). How the custom and tradition of this practice developed is explained in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

“The postexilic Jewish practice of substituting *adonay* (or *elohim*) for *Yahweh* in the public reading or reciting of the Scriptures may have arisen from Lev. 24:16, interpreted (erroneously) to mean that the simple utterance of the sacred tetragrammaton was a capital offense, or from the fear that to pronounce the divine name would be to reduce God to the status of a pagan deity who was addressed by a personal name.

This customary substitution of *adonay* (‘Lord’) for *Yahweh*, due to the reverential avoidance of the ineffable name of the God of Israel, explains: (1) why Greek-speaking Jews in the 1st cent. A.D. (and probably before) regularly used *Kyrios* (‘Lord’), the Greek equivalent of *adonay*, to refer to God; (2) why the Masoretes in the 7th cent. A.D. vocalized the consonants *YHWH* with the vowels of *adonay* (which in turn produced the hybrid English form ‘Jehovah’); (3) why English Bibles commonly use ‘LORD’ for *Yahweh* and Latin versions use *Dominus*. (Where the Hebrew is *adonay Yahweh* [e.g., Gen. 15:2, 8], the AV, RSV and NEB have ‘Lord GOD’ [the ASV has ‘Lord Jehovah’] to avoid the repetition of ‘Lord.’—*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised edition, Vol. 3, p. 157 (under *LORD*)).

The explanation and justification for removing God's personal name from the text in English Bibles is simply untenable. As already acknowledged, the name Yahweh (a transliteration of YHWH) occurs more than 6,000 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. It was not a cultist, tribal name given to Israel's God by the Israelites, but a name chosen by God himself that is rich in significance. It reveals him as creator and revealer. He was distinct, unique and superior to all other gods and his profound name, Yahweh, reflected all of that. Honoring the God represented by that name and avoiding the misuse of it required covenantal integrity—not a superstitious refusal to sound out the name. In fact, refusal to use the name would be an affront to the God it so uniquely identified and to the many Hebrew prophets who regularly and faithfully used it to validate their prophecies. That modern English translators feel bound to perpetuate a rabbinical superstition is curious, to say the least. I suspect that substituting LORD for the name is preferred because it tends to blur the distinction between the Father and the Son. As Jesus is commonly identified as Lord in the New Testament; using it to identify the God of Israel fits in nicely with blending the two identities. But this blending does not well serve the average Bible reader nor does it faithfully represent the Bible canon.

Apart from the Jewish tradition which explains the practices of the Masoretes, the question arises as to the role of the translator. A translation of the Bible should be faithful to the material being translated. As we have seen Yahweh is a *transliterated* word, not a *translated* word. A transliterated word appears and sounds more like it did in the original language; whereas a translated word represents the equivalent in another language. An example of transliteration in the New Testament is in connection with the words 'baptist,' 'baptize,' and 'baptizing,' which represent the Greek words *baptizo*, *baptismos* and *baptisma*. They are carried over into English very closely to the form in which they are found in the Greek.

A translator's responsibility is not to preserve traditional attitudes or prevailing customs. He is called upon to reproduce, as faithfully as language allows, the precise meaning or closest equivalent of the original in a different language. Sometimes a footnote may be necessary to further clarify a matter, but the text should faithfully represent the original. The text is no place for perpetuating tradition. And it is very misleading to suggest that *adonay* (Lord) is the equivalent of the tetragrammaton when the word *adon* (Lord: singular) is also commonly translated 'lord' in the Bible. *Adonay*, the plural form of *adon* is also translated 'Lord' when it is not representing YHWH. When it represents the tetragrammaton it is rendered 'LORD'. However, they look similar in the text and *sound the same when spoken*. This is also true of *el* 'God' and *elohim* 'GOD' when it is substituted for God's unique name. Again, *both look similar and sound the same when spoken*. How is the average reader to know the difference? There have been, and are, a few English translations that recognize the importance of retaining some form of the unique name of God in their translations. One of these, the *American Standard Version*, first printed in 1901, had this to say about using some form of the divine self-given name in English translations:

"The change first proposed in the Appendix—that which substitutes 'Jehovah' for 'LORD' and 'GOD' (printed in small capitals)—is one which will be unwelcome to many, because of the frequency and familiarity of the terms displaced. But the American Revisers, after a careful consideration, were brought to the unanimous conviction that a Jewish superstition, which regarded the Divine Name as too sacred to be uttered, ought no longer to dominate in the English or any other version of the Old Testament, as it fortunately does not in the numerous versions made by modern missionaries. This Memorial Name, explained in Ex. iii. 14, 15, and emphasized as such over and over in the original text of the Old Testament, designates God as the personal God, the God of revelation, the Deliverer, the Friend of his people;—not merely the abstractly 'Eternal One' of many French translations, but the ever living Helper of those who are in trouble. This personal name, with its wealth of sacred associations, is now restored to the place in the sacred text to

which it has an unquestionable claim.”—Preface, the *American Standard Version*, (1901 edition).

The *American Standard Version* (1901 ed.), regularly uses the transliteration ‘Jehovah’ to represent YHWH in the more than 6, 000 occurrences of the word in the Old Testament. This form of the divine name has been used for centuries but most modern scholars agree that ‘Yahweh’ better transliterates the original. In 1971, the editorial board of the *American Standard Version* translating committee produced a revised version called the *New American Standard Bible*. This new edition reverts to the practice of the *Authorized Version*, produced in 1611, of substituting ‘LORD’ and ‘GOD’ wherever the Hebrew text contains God’s personal name. Regarding their reverting back to the earlier traditional practice of substitution they say:

“The Proper Name of God in the Old Testament: In the Scriptures, the name of God is most significant and understandably so. It is inconceivable to think of spiritual matters without a proper designation for the Supreme Deity. Thus the most common name for deity is God, a translation of the original Elohim. The normal word for Master is Lord, a rendering of Adonai. There is yet another name which is particularly assigned to God as *His special or proper name*, that is, the four letters YHWH (Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 42:8) This name has not been pronounced by the Jews because of reverence for the great sacredness of the divine name. Therefore, it was consistently pronounced and translated LORD. The only exception to this tradition of YHWH is when it occurs in immediate proximity to the word Lord, that is, Adonai. In that case it is regularly translated GOD in order to avoid confusion. It is known that for many years YHWH has been transliterated as Yahweh; however, no complete certainty attaches to this pronunciation.”—Principles of Translation, *New American Standard Bible*, 1977 ed. (italics not in original)

While giving lip-service to God’s “special or proper name,” these translators decided that Jewish tradition was the course to follow and justifies their use of other common Hebrew words to substitute for the unique name of God. The justification for this is groundless. Ordinarily, one will find little sympathy or accommodation given to Jewish tradition within the Christian community of scholars. Why is it followed here? I believe it is followed because it lends itself to the blending together the persons of Father and Son in the Scriptures. As Jesus is commonly called ‘Lord,’ and the God of Israel is identified as ‘LORD,’ it is easy to conclude that they are one and the same. That there remains a need to distinguish the one true God and the one true Lord from one another, as well as other gods and other lords, is made clear by the apostle Paul when he wrote:

“So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”—1 Corinthians 8:4-6.

A translator does not have the freedom or latitude that the expositor or teacher does. The translator’s task is to render into another language the equivalent word or words that most faithfully represent the original. This requirement is clearly explained by Alexander Jones in the Editor’s Forward to *The Jerusalem Bible*, published in 1966, which specifically addresses the matter of using Yahweh where it appears in the Hebrew text, and which *The Jerusalem Bible* regularly does.

“The translator of the Bible into a vernacular may surely consider himself free to remove the purely linguistic archaisms of that vernacular, but here his freedom ends. He may not, for example, substitute his modern images for the old ones; the theologian and the preacher may be

encouraged to do this, but not the translator. Nor must he impose his own style on the originals: this would be to suppress the individuality of the several writers who responded, each in his own way, to the movement of the Spirit. Still less must it be supposed that there should be throughout a kind of hieratic language, a uniform 'biblical' English, dictated by a tradition however venerable. There is no doubt that in forfeiting this we lose something very precious, but one hopes that the gain outweighs the loss. It would be arrogant to claim that this present attempt to translate the Bible into 'contemporary' English cannot be improved upon, but at least (one believes) it is in this direction that translations will have to go if the Bible is not to lose its appeal for the mind of today.

The Psalms present a special problem for translators since, unlike other parts of the Bible, the psalter is not only a book to be read but a collection of verse which is sung or chanted. Moreover, many of them are so familiar in their sixteenth century form that any change may seem to be an impertinence. Nevertheless, here too the first duty of a translator is to convey as clearly as he can what the original author wrote. He should not try to inject a rhetorical quality and an orotundity of cadence which belong more truly to the first Elizabethan age in England than to the Hebrew originals. He must avoid the pure bathos of prosy flatness, of course, but he will be aware that there is no longer an accepted 'poetic language' which can be used to give artificial dignity to plain statements. It would certainly be dangerous to give the form of the translation precedence over the meaning.

It is in the Psalms especially that the use of the divine name *Yahweh* (accented on the second syllable) may seem unacceptable—though indeed the still stranger form *Yah* is in constant use in the acclamation *Hallelu-Yah* (Praise Yah!). It is not without hesitation that this accurate form has been used, and no doubt those who may care to use this translation of the Psalms can substitute the traditional 'the Lord'. On the other hand, this would be to lose much of the flavour and meaning of the originals. For example, to say, 'the Lord is God' is surely a tautology, as to say 'Yahweh is God' is not."—*The Jerusalem Bible*, Editor's Forward.

It is submitted here that some form of *YHWH* ought to be retained where it is known to have appeared thousands of times in the original text. While forwards in some English Bibles explain the rule of how the divine name ends up being LORD or GOD in the text, the average reader simply does not bother to acquaint himself with this information. I have taught adult Bible classes for a number of years and have found near total ignorance about this practice. As a result, people have no regard for the distinctive name of God and seldom use it. As Jesus is customarily addressed as Lord, the Old Testament LORD looks similar and *sounds* identical. This leads to an unfortunate co-mingling the Father and Son in Scripture.

Those English translators who attempt to give some special significance to the common word 'Lord' by using capitals (LORD) in the Old Testament, do not follow that practice in the New Testament. In the New Testament no distinction is made. For example, consider Psalm 110:1 which, according to the *NIV*, reads: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" In the book of Acts, the apostle Peter quotes that Psalm and applies it to Jesus' resurrection. Here the *NIV* reads: "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" (Acts 2:32-35) The reader sees no distinction between the first 'Lord' and the second 'Lord' in Acts. It is this unfortunate practice that has led many to conclude that Yahweh of the Old Testament is Jesus of the New Testament. This simply is not true. The original Old Testament text clearly distinguished Yahweh as addressing David's Lord. And the apostle Peter understood that. Following his quotation of Psalm 110:1, he said, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."—

Acts 2:36.

THE MESSIANIC RELATIONSHIP

We began our discussion with the person of Jesus Christ and what he had to say about himself and his relationship with his Father. He was both a prophet and teacher and his ministry was accompanied by an unparalleled display of power. All of these things created contradictory reactions and conclusions—many of which continue to this day. To attempt to sort these things out and come close to arriving at a scriptural perspective is not easy, but we must try. It makes no sense to conclude that Jesus' ministry should be anything less than a more complete revelation of God and his purposes. We should be able to come away from a fair consideration of all the evidence with sound scriptural conclusions. To that end we attempt to see matters as they are presented to us in the Hebraic context in which they took place and what his own disciples had to say about him. Most importantly, we have to listen carefully to what Jesus had to say about himself. His ministry can only be fully understood when viewed through the paradigm of the law covenant, the Hebraic language and culture and the Hebrew Scriptures which Jesus often appealed to. We cannot separate him from the Hebraic world in which he lived and fulfilled his ministry. Put another way, we approach his life and times as a continuation of the unfolding of Yahweh's revealed purpose. Jesus' life and ministry climaxed the revelatory history of God's dealings with humankind. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."—Heb. 1:1, 2.

The question that faced the Hebrew generation in which Jesus lived and died was, "Is Jesus the messiah?" The word 'messiah' is drawn from the Hebrew word *masiyah*, which means 'anointed'. The Greek word that corresponds to that is *christos*. To be anointed had the sense of official (divine) appointment. Ancient kings of Israel and its high priests were anointed with a special oil. This ritual demonstrated a sacred appointing by God. (Ex. 29:1-9; 1 Sam. 16:1-13) Only John uses the Greek word *messias* [a transliteration of the Hebrew word] which appears twice in his gospel (John 1:41 and John 4:25). It is, in this sense, a title of dignity and special appointment. It is often combined with the name Jesus, so when the familiar form 'Jesus Christ' is used we are really saying 'Jesus, the anointed'. Those who came to be his disciples were convinced that he was that specially anointed one—the Messiah.

On one occasion Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ [ftn: or Messiah], the Son of the living God.'" (Matt. 16:13-16) When the apostle Peter was bearing witness to the gentile convert Cornelius, he said: "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."—Acts 10:36-38.

Under what circumstances did this anointing with Holy Spirit take place? Jesus was introduced to the Jewish community by John the Baptist. It was to John that Jesus came to be baptized. It marked the beginning of his anointed ministry. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" (Matt. 3:16, 17) It was at this special moment in time that Jesus became the anointed one in a *de facto* way. It is true that at his birth he was identified as "Christ [*anointed*] the Lord," by the angelic witness, because the certainty of his future anointing was as good as

done from God's standpoint. (Luke 2:8-11)

Jesus' baptism marked the second time that he was specifically identified as God's Son. Immediately after his baptism the Spirit led Jesus "into the desert to be tempted by the devil." (Luke 4:1, 2) Luke's account of this event adds, "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." (Luke 4:13) It suggests to us that this preliminary encounter between the Devil and the Messiah was not the last of such encounters. Apparently the Devil saw the possibility of corrupting this Son of God. Why else would he make the attempt if that was not a possibility? Our father Adam succumbed to the evil one's temptations and doomed his children to sin and death. (Rom. 5:12) The 'last Adam' remained faithful through Satan's efforts to corrupt his integrity and was able, in the end, to surrender his holy personhood—his flesh and blood—as a sin-atonement sacrifice for the redemption of the human family. In this way, he became the life-giving, "Everlasting Father" foretold in Isaiah 9:6 (compare Romans 5:15-19). As Jesus told his disciples:

"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.'"—John 6:53-57

The Bible says that Adam was made from the elements of the earth and endowed with a quality of being that made him a son of God. (Gen. 2:7; Luke 3:38) The "second man" found his origin in heaven and became a son of God through the miraculous process explained to Mary, his biological mother. (Luke 1:35; 1 Cor. 15:47) It is little wonder that Jesus' favorite characterization of himself was "son of man," which occurs about eighty times in the four gospels. This terminology also identified him with the glorified "son of man" of Daniel's vision: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13, 14) Daniel's prophetic witness concerning the exalting of the "son of man" harmonizes well with what we read at Philippians 2:9-11.

However, before this promised glorification could be realized there was the need of fulfilling the Father's will and humbly submitting to that will. This faithful course was a costly one for the Word who had been made flesh. His endurance and suffering was not limited to his crucifixion, it included the suffering that enduring temptation brought to him. The writer of Hebrews tells us, "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering." (Heb. 2:10) Later in the same chapter he adds, "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Heb. 2:18) And again, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." (Heb. 4:15) And in chapter five we read: "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek."—Heb. 5: 7-10

'HEADSHIP' IN THE FATHER/SON RELATIONSHIP

The Bible clearly states that during Jesus' human life he displayed "reverent submission" to his

heavenly Father. This state of submission is repeatedly emphasized in the accounts of his life. I believe this submission really began in heaven when he willingly set aside his exalted place alongside God to become the needed sacrifice. His whole mission was to live out a life of submission to the will of his Father. Therefore, we have a clear picture of the Father/Son relationship during his humanity. It is one of submission and subordination. Jesus' willingness to submit himself to his Father's will, exemplifies the broad principle of headship. When explaining the universal nature of this principle and how it affects various relationships, the apostle Paul wrote, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor. 11:3) The Greek word translated "head" in this verse is *kephal*, and is found many times in the New Testament, usually referring to the literal human head. In 1 Corinthians 11, however, the word is used in a metaphorical sense to define the Father/Son relationship, the Christ/man relationship and the man/woman relationship.

Those who believe that the Word made flesh never surrendered his deity are confronted with the obvious problem of believing that Jesus Christ was both God and Man at the same time. Concerning that humanity professor Zodhiates writes:

"Hebrews 9:22 tells us that 'without shedding of blood is no remission.' In the purpose of God, it was the blood of Jesus Christ which would avail for the remission of the sins of the whole world. This had to be the blood of a perfect and sinless man, and Jesus Christ was the only one who could meet this requirement."—*Was Christ God?*, page 64

While acknowledging that the blood of a sinless man was required to reconcile mankind to God, professor Zodhiates also insists that this same sinless man was also the eternal God. He writes:

"We must say again, however, that He, the eternal *Logos*, even when He became flesh and walked the streets of this earth, continued at the same time to be God eternal. This is the inescapable conclusion we must reach as we read His life. His birth was contrary to the laws of life. His death was contrary to the laws of death. He had no cornfields or fisheries, but He could spread a table for five thousand and have bread and fish to spare. He walked on no beautiful carpets or velvet rugs, but he walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee and they supported Him. Three years He preached His Gospel. He wrote no book, built no church house, had no monetary backing. But after 2, 000 years, He is the one central character of human history, the pivot around which the events of the ages revolve, and the only Regenerator of the human race. Was it merely the Son of Joseph and Mary who crossed the world's horizon 2, 000 years ago? *Was it merely human blood that was spilled at Calvary's hill for the redemption of sinners?* What thinking man can keep from exclaiming, 'My Lord and my God!'"—*Was Christ God?*, page 67 (italics not in original.)

"Was it merely human blood that was spilled at Calvary's hill for the redemption of sinners?" professor Zodhiates asks? The scriptural evidence answers, Yes! To phrase the question as he does, professor Zodhiates seems to suggest that something more than human blood was shed. But we are repeatedly told that the flesh and blood of the *man* Jesus is the valuable sacrifice that redeems us from sin and death. We must be careful in our efforts to glorify the Son of God that we don't demean the sinless nature of his flesh and blood, for it is these components—and *these alone*—that are presented to us as the precious, foundational elements that cleanse us from sin. (1 Cor. 11:27) The eternal (immortal) God did not, *could not*, have died for the sins of the world. And as for the many signs Jesus performed to establish his being the Son of God that professor Zodhiates mentions above, they are all attributed in the Bible as being made possible because God was *with him*—not that he was God. His powers were not self-possessed. He was empowered by the Spirit of God, according to his own testimony. (Matt. 12:28)

Earlier in this treatise, Acts 10 was quoted, in which the apostle Peter testified, "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." (Acts 10:38) Jesus was empowered to do these things by the Spirit of God. "One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick." (Luke 5:17) At Pentecost, Peter exclaimed: "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know." (Acts 2:22) Repeatedly, the Scriptures state that God was doing these powerful things *through* the Son of Man. Nowhere do we read or is it even hinted at that this power was a self-contained, personal power. No, he was anointed with Spirit and power in a superlative way as the promised messiah. God's power manifested itself in the most dramatic way to establish the credentials of the Lord's messianic claim. But at the same time these powers from God manifested itself toward others, he himself, although sinless, struggled within his own human limitations.

Professor Zodhiates, like many other theologians, appeal to what Paul has to say in Philippians 2:6 as though this is some sort of irrefutable proof that being in the form (or nature) of God means that he was, in fact, God. The text does not say that. It only says they shared the same nature. In order to understand what a text means to us, we need to try and determine what it meant to those to whom it was initially sent. What was the thrust of Paul's thought in Philippians 2:5-11? It was our Lord's humble willingness to leave his place with the Father and take on the nature of man—to fulfill a noble cause. In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to what another scholar has to say about Philippians 2:6:

"It may be useful to note certain cautions which must be observed if the Apostle's thought is to be truly grasped. (a) This is not a discussion in technical theology. Paul does not speculate on the great problems of the nature of Christ. The elaborate theories reared on this passage and designated 'kenotic' would probably have surprised the Apostle. Paul is dealing with a question of practical ethics, the marvelous condescension and unselfishness of Christ, and he brings into view the several stages in this process as facts of history either presented to men's experience or else inferred from it ...Much trouble would be saved if interpreters, instead of minutely investigating the refinements of Greek metaphysics, on the assumption that they are present here, were to ask themselves, 'what other terms could the Apostle have used to express his conceptions?'"—*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Edited by W. Robertson Nicoll, M.A., LL. D., Volume III, page 435.

We need not be confused or discouraged by differing conclusions biblical scholars may advance on certain words or verses of Scripture. For the most part, the Bible presents an understandable revelation of God and his will. While there are a small number of what we might call problematic texts, these are few and far between and can be reasonably understood in the light of the Bible as a whole. We can approach the Bible with confidence that it will clearly teach us what we must believe in order to be put right with God and have a workable understanding of his will and purpose for us. Problematic texts must be fitted into the pattern of healthy teaching.

DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE GOD OR EQUAL TO GOD

On page seven of this treatise, under the heading: "Jesus Christ: The Man Like No Other Man," scriptures from John's gospel were quoted (John 5:16-18; 10:24-33) where certain ones concluded that Jesus claimed to be God because he identified himself as the Son of God. It is good to look at Jesus' response to their conclusion: "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very

own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.' Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp." (John 10:34-39) Jesus quoted from Psalm 82, which was initially addressed to certain leaders of Israel identified in the text as both gods and sons of the most high. It seems appropriate to quote that Psalm in its entirety;

"God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: 'How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.' They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I say, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like men, and fall like any prince.' Arise, O God, judge the earth; for to thee belong all the nations!"—Psalm 82:1-8 *Revised Standard Version*

Those men of prominence in ancient Israel were failing in their privileged positions to render justice and mercy. Jesus' point in drawing attention to this Psalm seems to be that he was not laying claim to an honor that had not been applied to others. Those men of ancient Israel were illustrious ones in their time. They had authority and power. The terms 'gods' and 'sons of God' used towards them merely underscored this power and authority. They represented Yahweh and could be called his sons. We know, of course, that the Lord was far superior to any of those former ones, but he reminded those who challenged him that he was not exceeding his authority in what he claimed about himself. He was God's Son in a unique way and his miracles validated his messianic claims. His being 'in' the Father and the Father being 'in' him emphasized the intimate nature of their relationship. Later he would use similar language to describe the unity he and his Father shared with the disciples. (John 17:20-23) The religious leaders put their own spin on what Jesus meant by what he said; we need to listen to Jesus' explanation, not theirs. Furthermore, if Jesus was really claiming to be equal to God, why didn't he simply acknowledge that and say to those men, "Yes, I am equal to God," or words to that effect?

On the evening prior to his crucifixion he met with his disciples and spoke at length to them about his leaving them for a time and then being with them again. "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.'" (John 14:28) Jesus went to the Father by means of the resurrection from the dead. That resurrection was by the Father. Jesus did not simply "rise from the dead," as some put it, which suggests that he raised himself. We are clearly told that Jesus was raised by the Father:

"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him . . . God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact."—Acts 2:23, 24, 32.

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.' The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.' So it is stated elsewhere: 'You will not let your Holy One see decay.'"—Acts 13:32-35.

"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."--Romans 8:11.

"Paul, an apostle--sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead."--Galatians 1:1.

"They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."--1 Thess. 1: 9, 10.

No doubt it was with this in mind that Jesus pointed out that the Father was greater than he was. Without the Father's power and subsequent action of resurrecting and exalting his Son, there would have been no future for Christ and that would have proved disastrous for us and him! Jesus knew that after suffering the promised messiah would receive his life back from what was prophetically written in Isaiah chapter 53. Concerning his imminent death and resurrection Jesus said, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (John 10:18) Jesus had the authority to offer his sinless humanity as a sin offering for the life of the human family, and he had the sure hope of his resurrection that would follow. Jesus' resurrection was the fourth time the Father declared him as his Son (the transfiguration marked the third time--Matt. 17:5) The apostle Paul wrote: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God--the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."--Romans 1:1-4

On the morning of Jesus' resurrection, Mary Magdalene recognized him and apparently hung on to him. In response, Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (John 20:17) Jesus had both a Father and a God. That Father is our Father; that God is our God! Jesus clearly separated himself from God. But someone will ask, "If Jesus was not God, why did the disciple Thomas call him God?" Thomas had disbelieved what he had been told about Jesus' appearing to different ones following his resurrection. This account is found in the same chapter as Mary Magdalene's experience with the resurrected Lord. Thomas said, "'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.' A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"--John 20:25-29.

Did Thomas believe that the resurrected Jesus Christ was the *almighty* God? This conclusion does not fit into the broader picture we are given in the Bible, or this chapter, for that matter. It is immediately after Thomas' declaration of faith that John wrote: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written 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 20:30, 31) We note that the miraculous signs were to establish that Jesus was the anointed (Messiah/Christ), and the Son of God. They were not given to prove that Jesus was Almighty God in the flesh. How then, are we to understand Thomas' declaration: "My Lord and my God!"?

We have already seen that Jesus pointed out that certain prominent leaders of Israel were spoken of as gods. (Psalm 82) The footnote in *The NIV Study Bible*, on Ps. 82:1 says, "In the language of the OT--and in accordance with the conceptual world of the ancient Near East--rulers

and judges, as deputies of the heavenly King, could be given the honorific title 'god' (see note on 45:6; see also NIV text notes on Ex 21:6; 22:8) or be called 'son of God' (see 2:7 and note)." From this we are reminded that the term 'God' does not have a rigidly fixed degree of dignity or power. The title is not limited in its biblical application to the *Almighty* God. We must keep this perspective in mind when making a judgment about what Thomas meant by what he said.

We are helped in this regard, I believe, by what is written in Psalm 45 and how it is applied in the New Testament. This Psalm is a wedding song composed for an unidentified king of Israel, no doubt of David's dynasty. As the song develops we read that the king has been blessed by God, and a few verses later the king is called God. "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." (Ps. 45:6, 7) Concerning this Psalm the footnote in *The NIV Study Bible* says:

"Ps 45 A song in praise of the king on his wedding day (see title). He undoubtedly belonged to David's dynasty, and the song was probably used at more than one royal wedding. Since the bride is a foreign princess (see vv.10, 12), the wedding reflects the king's standing as a figure of international significance (see note on v. 9). Accordingly he is addressed as one whose reign is to be characterized by victories over the nations (vv.3-5; cf. Ps 2;110). As a royal son of David, he is a type (foreshadowing) of Christ. After the exile this psalm was applied to the Messiah, the promised Son of David who would sit on David's throne (for the application of vv. 6-7 to Christ see Heb. 1:8-9)."

We are not left in doubt about the fulfillment of this psalm. The above quotation ends by pointing to Hebrews 1:8, 9, where the psalm is applied to Jesus Christ: "But about the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.'" (Hebrews 1: 8, 9) While the glorified Son of God is referred to as 'God' here, it is also pointed out that he has a God—*his God*—was the one who set him above all others. This reflects back on what Jesus had said earlier, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (John 20:17) Also, in Revelation we have the exalted Jesus Christ saying, "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and name of the city of my God; and I will also write on him my new name." (Rev. 3:11, 12) I submit that while the resurrected and glorified Son of God is a Mighty God—given all authority and power—this power and authority is given to him by—*his God*—the Almighty God.

Isaiah also spoke of this coming one and wrote: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this." (Isaiah 9:6, 7) In foretelling the glory and power of that coming son to be born and given to us, we are reminded that it is all made possible by the zeal of "the LORD (Yahweh) Almighty." So, here too, we are reminded of the source of the power and authority to be exercised by the coming Messiah. Naturally, we invest the fullest dignity and power in the word 'God' when we see it in the Bible, but we must remind ourselves that it doesn't always carry the same sense. The *degree* of power, honor and dignity assigned to it is relative and its sense must be determined by the way in which it is used, and against the context of the Scriptures as a whole. Because the Son of God is sometimes called God, does not prove he is God in the same sense as his Father who is presented to us in Scripture as the Almighty God. We must think of Jesus as God in the sense that it is presented to us in the Scriptures. Which brings us back to Thomas.

When Thomas called the resurrected Jesus "my Lord and my God," I believe it was said in the context of the power, honor and majesty that was to be accorded the messiah—especially the *resurrected* messiah. That would be in keeping with Isaiah's messianic prophecy. We know what Thomas said, but we do not know for a certainty what was in *his* mind when he said it. And we will read into his words a certain measure of our own theology. We need to be aware of that. There is no reason to doubt that Thomas understood the measure of deity that was to be granted the promised Messiah. He could call Jesus 'God' without confusing him with the God of the Messiah. It was entirely appropriate, therefore, for Thomas to call Jesus God and yet not intending to make him equal to the Messiah's God. That Thomas' spontaneous declaration was addressed to the *resurrected* Christ has not gone unnoticed by Christian scholars. Vincent Taylor, the renowned English theologian and New Testament scholar, offered the following observation about Thomas' exclamation:

"It might be thought that, in using restraint in speaking of the Deity of Christ:, we are robbing Him of His true dignity, but so far from doing this, we are enhancing it, since it is of the nature of Deity that it can stoop to the depth of man's need in a sacrifice to which there is no parallel. The one clear ascription of Deity to Christ, 'My Lord and my God', in the New Testament is addressed *to Him in His Risen and Exalted life* and breathes the atmosphere of worship. *This is the sphere to which it belongs*, but we are most likely to kneel in adoration if we have first entered into the truth of the words, 'For the divine nature was his from the first; yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross'" (Philippians 2:6-9 [NEB])."—*New Testament Essays*, pages 88, 89 by Vincent Taylor Ph. D, D.D., 1972 (some italics not in original.)

THE FATHER GLORIFIES HIS SON

I agree with professor Taylor's conclusion that the proper view of the resurrected Son of God "breathes the atmosphere of worship,"—another word which incorporates nuances of meaning. All of the limitations he had as a human were now gone. He had been given "all authority in heaven and on earth." (Matt. 28:18) In a matter of days he would ascend into the heavenly realm where "angels, authorities and powers," would be made subject to him. (1 Peter 3:21, 22) Now, the resurrected and glorified Son of God received that exalted name and place which demanded the "bending of the knee" by everyone "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" and who, in turn, would "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." And all of this homage and adoration is said to be "to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:9-11) It was in that context that Thomas made his confession: "my Lord and my God."

To further illustrate the matter of how identical words can convey different concepts, we have, in the same prophesy of Isaiah, the messiah being called "Everlasting Father." But even those who think in terms of a triune God do not conclude that he is "Father" in the same sense as the Almighty God is "Father." As the second or last Adam, he becomes our Father or life-giver. But that is different in meaning than God as Father—the one whom Jesus called his Father. The Father's ultimate objective in all of this is spelled out for us in Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he has lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us

the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ ... I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power for us is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”—Ephesians 1:4-10, 17-23

Is our glorified Lord a mighty God? (Isaiah 9:6) Indeed he is! Yet, it is possible to speak of him as God without confusing him with the *Almighty* God who makes it all possible and to whose glory it belongs. In the same way, his being called “Everlasting Father,” does not confuse him with *the* Father. (Isaiah 9:6) We are clearly taught that our life comes to us by Jesus Christ. The father has given him this life-giving power along with the other powers bestowed upon him. We are the ‘children’ whom the Father has given to him. (Heb. 2:13) To this truth Jesus testified:

“Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, 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. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. . . For as the Father has life in himself, so he has *granted the Son* to have life in himself.”—John 5:19-23, 26.

What an amazing relationship is presented to us in what Jesus says! What a loving relationship! Only a consummate love and trust—a profound interacting love and trust—between them could make all of this possible. It is little wonder that we are called upon to love and trust as they do. The glorious outworking of the Father’s will through our Lord Jesus Christ is clearly presented in Scripture. We are constantly reminded that everything flows from the Father. It always begins with him. His power and authority is self-possessed. Our Lord’s power and authority is a received power and authority.

DID THE DISCIPLES WORSHIP JESUS?

Earlier, scriptures were quoted that spoke of the disciples worshiping Jesus. How are we to understand that? You will recall that the English word ‘worship’, like many other words, can convey a wide range of meaning. And what about the original Greek word in those scriptures that some English versions of the Bible translate as ‘worship’, does it have a similar range of meaning? To answer these questions we need to look more closely at those accounts that discuss this matter. Only in this way can we evaluate the particular ‘worship’ Jesus is said to have received from his disciples.

One night the disciples were caught in a storm on the sea of Galilee, and Jesus came to them over the water. They thought they were seeing a ghostly apparition, but Jesus assured them it was he. Impetuously, Peter tried to come to Jesus across the water but began to sink. Jesus

reached out for him and they both got into the boat: "And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" (Matt. 14:32, 33) On another occasion, Jesus was speaking to a man he had healed and who, subsequently, was thrown out of the local synagogue. Jesus asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him."—John 9:35-38

The Greek word translated 'worship' in these verses is *proskyneō*, which has the meaning of 'bowing down.' Like its Hebrew counterpart (*shâchâh*), it describes a physical act or motion without regard for the reason for the action. For this reason, it is translated differently in some English Bibles. *The New English Bible* renders Matthew 14:32, 33: "They then climbed into the boat; and the wind dropped. And the men in the boat *fell at his feet*, exclaiming, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" *The Jerusalem Bible* says, "And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. The men in the boat *bowed down* before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.'" In Matthew's gospel we have the account of the Canaanite woman who cried out to Jesus to help her because her daughter was suffering from demon-possession. "He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.' The Woman came and knelt before [*proskyneō*] him. 'Lord, help me!' she said. He replied. 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.' 'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.' Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour."—Matt. 15:24-28.

As was seen in the Old Testament, the same word can be used in different ways with different shades of meaning. The Canaanite woman no doubt recognized that Jesus had great power and she believed he could save her daughter; but I don't think her kneeling before him was a form of worship. As for the disciples, we cannot know with any degree of certainty what was in their mind when they knelt before the Lord. But to say they worshiped him takes *proskyneō* beyond its ordinary sense and usage and conveys to the English reader—a concept quite different from what may have been originally intended. It would seem safer and more in keeping with the role of the translator, to convey in another language the action described in the original language. To decide that the action performed was an act of worship and put that in the text is to interpret what was in the mind of the one performing the action. Attempting to determine what was in the mind of the person performing the action should be left to the expositor; it is not the function of the translator. And while the English word 'worship' also has a range of meaning, it is not commonly used in human relationships.

As regards the matter of worship, we do well to listen carefully to what our Lord said about that matter when he was tempted by the wicked one: "The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship [*proskyneō*] me, it will all be yours. Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'worship [*proskyneō*] the Lord your God and serve [*latreuo*] him only.'" (Luke 4:5-8) In this context we find that *proskyneō* can be directed towards deity, just as we saw in the Old Testament that the Hebrew word *shâchâh* ('to bow down') could be performed toward men and deities. That common Oriental act of respect or honor was not a violation of Yahweh's command that he should be served and worshiped alone. (Compare page 23.) Therefore, it was not wrong for the disciples to honor Jesus in this fashion. It would be wrong, however, if directed towards a deity other than Yahweh under the Law Covenant.

When Jesus responded to the Devil he quoted Deuteronomy 6:13, which reads, "You must fear Yahweh your God, and you must serve [*adad*] him, by his name you must swear."—*The Jerusalem Bible*. *Adad* is the same word found in 2 Chronicles 10, where the Israelites sought relief from Solomon's son, Rehoboam, asking him to lighten their load. "Your father put a heavy yoke on us,

but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve [*adad*] you." (2 Chron. 10:4) As we can see, this matter of service could be toward God, and false gods, as well as toward men. (See page 23, 24.) However, the Greek word *latreuo* that Jesus used when answering the tempter (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8), is not used in that flexible fashion in the New Testament, as is the Greek word *proskyneo*. Concerning *latreuo* ('serve') and its unique usage in the New Testament the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says:

1. **λατρεῖν**

a. Occurrence. **λατρεῖν** occurs in the NT 21 times, of which 8 are in Luke (Lk. 1:74; 2:37; 4:8; Ac. 7:7, 42; 24:14; 26:7; 27:23), 6 in Hb, (8:5; 9:9, 14; 10:2; 12:28; 13:10), 4 in Paul (R.1:9, 25; Phil. 3:3; 2 Tm. 1:3), 2 in Rev. (7:15; 22:3) and 1 in Mt. (4:10). Three of these verses derive from the OT (Mt. 4:10; Lk. 4:8; Ac. 7:7). The particularly strong usage in Hb. corresponds to the significance of cultic ideas in this epistle.

b. The Purely Religious Character of the Word as Determined by the LXX. The influence of the LXX may be seen in the fact that *the word never refers to human relations, let alone secular services*. The ministry denoted by **λατρεῖν** is always offered to God (or to heathen gods...)”—*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Vol. IV, page 62. (Italics not in original)

All twenty-one occurrences of *latreuo* in the New Testament are in relation to worship—either of the Father or false deities—never to humans—never to Jesus Christ. The *NIV* translates this word as follows: (serve: 10); (worship: 5); (minister: 1); (serve at a sanctuary: 1); (served: 1); (worshiped: 1) (worshiper: 1) (worshippers: 1). Because both *proskyneo* and *latreuo* are sometimes translated by the word 'worship' in English translations of the Bible, the average reader may not realize that they conveyed very different meanings in the original language. Similarly, other texts speak of 'serving' others as well as 'serving' Christ. For example, Ephesians 6:7 says: "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men." And at Romans 14:17, 18 we read: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men." In these verses the matter of serving one another and Christ is brought to the fore. However, the Greek word translated 'serve' and 'serving' in these verses is *douleuo*, and does not attach itself to the basic meaning of *latreuo*. In this way, English translations often fail to convey the distinctive nature of *latreuo*. Unlike other words in the original Greek, *latreuo* is used exclusively in a sacred sense and ought to be distinguished in some way to separate it from the ordinary Greek words that are used in both a secular as well as a religious sense. One translation that does make a clear distinction between *proskyneo* and *latreuo* is *The New World Translation* which translates *proskyneo* variously as 'obedience' or 'worship' and *latreuo* as 'sacred service.' As we have seen, this distinction is appropriate.

Because *proskyneo* describes an action performed, it would seem best to translate it into English by the word or words that accurately describe the action depicted and allow the context in which it is used to determine the reason for the action. To say that kneeling before Christ was to 'worship' him assumes something that the context does not support. The scriptures would have to be much more explicit than they are to reach such a conclusion. We have seen that others, besides the disciples, bowed down or knelt before Jesus in what was an obvious gesture of respect and honor, but I would hesitate to say they worshiped him. Even in the Western world, we would not assume worship was intended if someone knelt before a dignitary (religious or political). Such action would be viewed more as a gesture of deep respect. In oriental cultures the matter of bowing down, kneeling and prostrating were and continue to be much more common, as noted in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

"1. Meaning. –Adoration is intense admiration culminating in reverence and worship, together with the outward acts and attitudes which accompany such reverence. It thus includes both the subjective sentiments, or feelings of the soul, in the presence of some superior object or person, and the appropriate physical expressions of such sentiments in outward acts of homage or of worship. In its widest sense it includes reverence to beings other than God, especially to monarchs, who in oriental countries were regarded with feelings of awe. But it finds its highest expression in religion."– Vol. I, page 55.

As noted above, the matter of adoration is not limited to deity, although it includes it as its highest form. Human dignitaries would also be accorded such honors by being bowed down to or knelt before. Even prostrating oneself before a king or representative of the king would not be viewed as worship in such cultures. And that was the culture in which Jesus lived out his earthly ministry. Concerning the various postures that might be assumed in relation or men as well as deities the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says:

"Outward Postures. –In the OT and NT, these are similar to those which prevailed in all oriental countries, as amply illustrated by the monuments of Egypt and Assyria, and by the customs still in use among the nations of the East. The chief attitudes referred to in the Bible are the following:

A. Prostration. Among the Orientals, especially Persians, prostration (i.e., falling upon the knees, then gradually inclining the body, until the forehead touched the ground) was common as an expression of profound reverence and humility before a superior or a benefactor. It was practiced in the worship of Yahweh (Gen. 17:3; Nu. 16:45; Mt. 26:39, Jesus in Gethsemane; Rev. 1:17), and of idols (2 K. 5:18; Dnl. 3:5f), but was by no means confined to religious exercises. It was the formal method of supplicating or doing obeisance to a superior (e.g., 1 S. 25:23; 2K. 4:37; Est. 8:3; Mk. 5:22; Jn. 11:32).

B. Kneeling. A substitution for prostration was kneeling, a common attitude of worship, frequently mentioned in the OT and NT (e.g., 1 K. 8:54; Ezr. 9:5; Ps. 95:6; Isa. 45:23; Lk. 22:41, Jesus in Gethsemane; Acts 7:60; Eph. 3:14). The same attitude was sometimes adopted in paying homage to a fellow creature as in 2K. 1:13. 'Sitting' as an attitude of prayer (only 2 S. 7:18; 1 Ch. 17:16) was probably a form of kneeling as in Moslem worship."–Vol. I, page 55

In answering the question: Did the disciples worship Jesus?, I believe the answer is No! While it is true that the bodily postures of kneeling or prostration were common in Jesus' day and continue to be in certain countries today, those of us who are viewing the Scriptures from our Western, twentieth-century culture, do not ordinarily perform such actions. Therefore, when we read that the disciples bowed down or knelt before the Lord, and we have that action defined as 'worship,' in our Bible, I believe it conveys to the average reader an entirely different concept—especially so, if you have been taught that Jesus was really God.

As Jews living under the Mosaic Law covenant, they would have restricted their 'worship' to God. They viewed Jesus as the Son of God, Son of Man and Messiah—all three terms identified the one man, Jesus Christ—but from different aspects. Jesus plainly states that God alone is to be worshiped and served. (Matt. 4:10) He even took issue with someone who called him good. "As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good—except God alone.'" (Mark 10:17, 18) It is that one, "God alone," that raised him

from the dead and of whom Jesus said: "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (John 20:17) What we have considered here in the matter of people bowing down before Jesus on various occasions underscores the importance of getting back to the *there and then*, when reading the Bible. Unless we enter into the culture and practices current in Jesus' day we will inadvertently read *into* the Bible our modern-day Western culture and attitudes. I may be applying a too restricted interpretation of the word 'worship,' as it has been pointed out that this English term varies in its sense, but I tend to limit its use to the one true God—the Father.

JESUS CHRIST AS LORD

Because the divine name, Yahweh, has been substituted in most English Bibles by the word LORD in the Old Testament, there is a tendency to view Jesus' lordship, as being identical to the LORD of the Old Testament. And, as noted earlier, by the time Hebrew Scriptures find their way into the New Testament as quotations, even the distinctive capitalization has been removed. This sad and misleading practice not only dishonors God but it is terribly misleading to the English reader. The Greek word rendered 'Lord' in the New Testament is *kyrios* and is sometimes used as a respectful salutation. It can carry the thought of 'master' or 'owner', and it can also include the idea of power and authority. What particular shade of meaning is intended in a given text must be determined by the context in which it is found. On page 34 of this treatise, John 9:35-38 was considered. In it we have Jesus asking the man he had previously healed if he believed in the Son of Man? He responded, 'Who is he, sir?' (v.36) The word translated 'sir' is *kyrios*. After Jesus identified himself, the man said: "'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him." (v.38) The word translated 'Lord' is also *kyrios*. The word translated 'worshiped' is *proskyneo*. Obviously, *kyrios*, like *proskyneo*, like many other Hebrew and Greek words, is a flexible term. We see comparative uses of such terms in other languages. The Spanish equivalent for the English word 'lord' word is *señor*, and is used for any man as well as Jesus. In Spanish *el señor de la casa* means "the man of the house," while *el Señor Jesucristo* means "the Lord Jesus Christ."

Another example can be taken from the encounter Mary Magdalene had with the risen Lord. She had gone to the tomb early only to find it empty. She was distressed and seeing a man she thought was the gardener or caretaker she said, "'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'" (John 20:15) Here again, the word translated 'Sir' is *kyrios*. Later, when reporting her experience to the disciples she said "'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her." (John 20:18) The word 'Lord' also translates *kyrios*. Other examples could be given, but I think the point is made that *kyrios* is basically a word denoting respect and can mean different things in different settings. We cannot know exactly what was in the mind of Mary when she used the word *kyrios* with respect to Jesus, but we do understand something of the cultural and religious setting in which she lived and what her view of Jesus was. She certainly had a reverent view of him and it would be fitting for her to call him her Lord. But being called 'Lord,' is no proof that he was worshiped as equal to the Father as Lord.

I believe the apostle Paul's confessions in these matters settles the them for us. He said, "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." (1 Cor. 8:4-6) He makes a similar confession in his letter to the Ephesians: "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Eph. 4:4-6). What could be more explicit? When asked to give our own confession of faith in this matter we would do well to use his words. We can safely do that and avoid distorting the truth. As explicit as Paul's confessions of faith are, there are those who see in his words evidence that he equated Christ with God.

"While he [Paul] refers to the one person as 'God,' the use of the term 'Lord' would, for Paul who had been reared as a strict Jew, be virtually an equivalent for 'God.' He was Paul's Lord, and this was really his favorite name for Jesus. It had become practically a proper name for Christ. It should be observed that Paul is dealing with these issues from the standpoint of a worshiper, not a theologian. His concern with the persons is in terms of his relationship to them, rather than their relationship to one another. Having said this about the perspective from which he writes, we must nonetheless attach considerable importance to this phenomenon. As Warfield put it, 'It remains remarkable, nevertheless, if the very essence of the Trinity were thought of by him as resident in the terms 'Father,' 'Son,' that in his numerous allusions to the Trinity in the Godhead, he never betrays any sense of this.'"—*God in Three Persons: A contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, Millard J. Erickson, page 300.

To say, as professor Erickson does, that the term 'Lord' used by Paul was "virtually an equivalent for 'God,'" is simply not true. As we have already considered, the word for Lord in the Greek is *kyrios*, and was commonly used as a title of respect. The Greek word for God is *theos*, and is not used as commonly as *kyrios*. Moreover, the apostle Paul is very careful in his use of these terms when describing the Father and the son. To suggest they were equivalent in Paul's mind appears, to me, a reading *into* his words, a concept he did not intend to teach.

Most Christians will agree that the Bible alone is inspired and is the only sure guide to healthy teaching. One of the widely-recognized characteristics of cults is that they usually have some authority other than the Bible for establishing their belief system. But many of these same people often argue that while the Bible alone is inspired, we must give attention to what the historical church has had to say about doctrine and include those conclusions along with the Bible in order to get the complete truth. Unfortunately, those who claim their doctrinal structure has roots in the early development of the Christian church do not always agree with one another. What may be viewed as orthodox in one community may be considered heterodox in another. It comes down to whose 'orthodoxy' you accept. So those who condemn certain other authorities may, in fact, have their own extra-biblical authority—orthodoxy!

THE EXALTED RELATIONSHIP

We are living in that particular period of time the Bible speaks of as "the present age," in which the glorified Son of Man stands at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. When the disciple Stephen was being killed he had a heavenly vision: "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" (Acts 7:55, 56) This Spirit-inspired vision confirms what we read elsewhere. On the historic day of Pentecost, Peter recounted the death and resurrection of God's holy one and then said, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."—Acts 2:32, 33.

This exaltation and empowerment positions the Son of Man to not only carry out his divine commission to reconcile the heavens and earth to God; it also places him in that position of honor, glory and majesty promised in Philippians 2:9-11. He has received that name which is above every other name and every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth must bend the knee in reverent subjection to him. In the book of Revelation the curtain of invisibility is pulled back and we are given a glimpse of what that means in the heavenly realm:

"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns

and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!' The four creatures said, 'Amen,' and the elders fell down and worshiped."—Rev. 5: 6-14

What a glorious moment of reunion! What a celebration of the triumph of the Son of Man! What a profound display of the adoration and glory bestowed upon the Lamb of God! All of this confirms the Father's promise regarding his Son! What joy it must have brought the Father to crown his Son with such honor! Never again would they be separated. We can only know in part what vast ocean of love that flooded their hearts and minds at that time and have continued to flow until now. Certainly, this glorification of the Son of God is the pinnacle of his exalted being—both as to his nature as well as his powers and authority. It is important to think on this because it should settle the question about his pre-human nature and power. Whatever glory and power he had alongside the Father before and during creation—powers and position he set aside—must be exceeded by what he now has in this regard. And the scriptures above reveal to us the seven-fold honors and dignities that have become his. Once made in a form or nature lower than angels, he now has received a glorified form or nature that befits his heavenly, spiritual identity and place. About this glorified nature, Hebrews 1: 3 says:

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."—*New International Version*.

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power."—*King James Version*.

"He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power." —*Revised Standard Version*

"The Son who is the effulgence of God's splendour and the stamp of God's very being, and sustains the universe by his word of power."—*New English Bible*

"He is the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature, sustaining the universe by his powerful command."—*The Jerusalem Bible*

Reading the various renderings of Hebrews 1: 3 helps us appreciate, to some degree, the fact that the Son is a reflection of the Father's image. He is not the Father but he is exactly like him in his nature and image. He is the mirror-image of his Father. No other personage shares this zenith of glory with the Father. The Son is truly unique. Now the exalted Lord has both the nature as well as the power and authority to fulfill his Father's universal will. (Eph. 1: 9, 10) First, however, the present age must come to its conclusion. Following that, the new age will see the completion of God's purpose in Jesus Christ fully realized. At present we do not see all things in subjection to him, but that time is coming. (Heb. 2: 5-9)

IS THE GLORIFIED SON OF MAN TO BE WORSHIPPED AS IS THE FATHER?

In the letter of Hebrews we read: "And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'" (Hebrews 1:6) The word translated 'worship' in this verse is *proskyneo*, which was discussed at length earlier. You will recall that it has a range of meaning and is sometimes used in relation to men as well as to God. While most English Bibles use the word 'worship' here, the *New English Bible* uses the word 'homage': "Again, when he presents the first-born to the world, he says 'Let all the angels of God pay him homage.'" We see a vivid example of that homage being given to him in Revelation 5. Are we to understand that the quality or degree of *proskyneo* rendered to the Son is identical to that accorded the Father? That, of course, is a very important question.

Most would agree that the book of Revelation presents the Son of Man in his most exalted position. For that reason we ought to be able to gain some insight on this important question and perhaps settle our minds on it once and for all. *Proskyneo* appears in Revelation 23 times and the *NIV*, translates it as 'worship' (11 times); 'worshipped' (9 times); 'worshippers' (1 time); 'worshiping' (1 time); 'worships' (1 time). Some of the applications of *proskyneo* are toward entities other than God; i.e., the beast, the image of the beast, demons, idols, etc. There are also two references of *proskyneo* directed toward an angel of God. (Rev. 19: 10; 22: 8, 9) These inappropriate exercises of *proskyneo* occupy 12 of the 23 occurrences of the word in the book of Revelation. The remaining ones are all directed toward God. There are no applications of the word directed toward the Son of God. The closest application toward the Son is found at Revelation 5:13, 14 which says, "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power!' The four living creatures said, 'Amen,' and the elders fell down and worshiped." We are not told to whom they direct their worship. Concerning this, note the following commentary:

14. The four living ones add their *Amen*. They began the chorus of praise (iv. 8) and it is fitting that they should close it. The twenty-four *elders*, as they have done before, prostrate themselves in worship. It is not said whether they worship God or the Lamb (the better MSS end the verse at *worshipped*), and there is no need to. In this passage the Two are not differentiated.—*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol.20, page 102 (italics in original)

The commentary above says that God and the Lamb are not differentiated here, and implies that both are worshiped equally. However, they are differentiated here as they are throughout the book of Revelation. In chapter four, which is an introduction to the vision continued into chapter five, we read: "Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.'" (Rev. 4: 9-11) Chapter five begins with God seen sitting on his throne holding a scroll in his right hand. (v.1) The Lamb approaches God and takes the scroll out of his hand. (v.6, 7) It is this action that prompts the doxology that follows. There is a clear distinction between "him who sits of the throne" and "the Lamb." (v.13) Whether one believes that both God and the Lamb are honored equally here and jointly worshiped will depend on the presuppositions brought to the passage. It is obvious that both God and the Lamb are being honored. However, the heavenly host performing this act of submission and worship are clearly distinguishing the One on the throne from the Lamb. I believe they are being honored from dissimilar perspectives. We must remember that what John was being shown was the fulfillment of what we read in Philippians: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that in 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.”–Phil. 2:9-11 By bowing before the Lamb the angelic hosts are showing obedience to God and glorifying the Lamb, Jesus Christ as Lord. I believe this is how we should understand Hebrews 1:6. I counted 87 occurrences of the title God (*theos*) in the book of Revelation but not one of which was applied to the glorified Son. However, we do find him using the title: “Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.”–Rev. 3: 12

The Apocalypse concludes with the triumphant results of Christ’s kingdom reign. The church has been glorified and reigns with him. Satan is destroyed as well as the corrupt system he spawned. Life is restored to those judged worthy of that life and a new heavens and a new earth have come into being. All that God purposed to do by means of his son has been accomplished. Then what? The apostle Paul explains:

“Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominions, 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 he ‘has put everything under his feet.’ Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.”–1 Cor. 15: 24-28.

There is no ambiguity here. Paul says it was God who put all things under Christ. The authority and power that the glorified Son uses was given to him by his Father. Moreover, when all things have been accomplished according to God’s will, the Son will then be made subject to the one who subjected all things to him in the first place. Having accomplished the grand design he steps aside, as it were, and joins with all others in a subjected position before God so that the Father can be all things to all creation. I believe the perspective set forth here by the apostle Paul is consistent with what we read elsewhere regarding the Father/Son relationship. All things proceed from the Father and ultimately return to him. There is an interesting footnote in the *The NIV Study Bible* on 1 Corinthians 15: 28:

15:28 *the Son himself will be made subject to him.* The Son will be made subject to the Father in the sense that administratively, after he subjects all things to his power, he will then turn it all over to God the Father, the administrative head. This is not to suggest that the Son is in any way inferior to the Father. All three persons of the Trinity are equal in deity and in dignity. The subordination referred to is one of function (see note on 11: 3). The Father is supreme in the Trinity; the Son carries out the Father’s will (e.g., in creation, redemption); the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to vitalize life, communicate God’s truth, apply his salvation to people and enable them to obey God’s will (or word). *so that God may be all in all.* The triune God will be shown to be supreme and sovereign in all things.–*The NIV Study Bible*, (underlining not in original)

I found it interesting that the above would speak of the Father as “supreme in the Trinity,” and “the administrative head,” while arguing that the Son and Holy Spirit “are equal in deity and dignity,” with the Father. Such remarks seem to be presented as a defense of sorts. Not a defense of what Paul is obviously saying, but a defense of a proposition his words seem to challenge. If the Father is supreme, and there is no doubt that he is, then all others must be viewed in relation to that supremacy. If the Father is the “administrative head,” in relation to the Son and Holy Spirit (Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the verse) , then they must function in relation to that ‘administrative’ headship. The conclusion seems to be that the Father is supreme–period! Earlier in his letter (1 Cor.

8: 4-6), the apostle explained that the Father was GOD! I don't think it would be consistent to conclude that seven chapters later he is saying something completely different? Paul, by saying that the Son will subject himself to God, "so that God may be all in all," is saying that the Father-GOD, will be all things to all creation. The idea that what Paul really means is that "The triune God will be shown to be supreme and sovereign in all things," is simply without foundation. The concept of threeness is not suggested.

The commentary above draws attention to 1 Corinthians 11: 3, as relating to what is being discussed in 1 Corinthians 15: 28. The text cited reads: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." We have here what is called the headship principle. That principle was not new in Paul's day. It represented a common concept in Hebrew culture and in the Old Testament it is often used to denote a position of leadership and authority. (Deut. 28: 13, 43, 44; Judges 10: 17, 18; 11: 8-11; Psalm 18: 43; Isaiah 7: 7-9) As a teacher, entrusted with declaring right doctrine, The apostle drew attention to that principle when discussing proper Christian decorum. He also discusses its relation to the marriage relationship. (Eph. 5: 22-24) In his letter to the Corinthians he uses that same principle of headship to set forth his understanding of how that principle affected public worship. It is in that context that his words at 1 Corinthians 11: 3 were said. He makes it clear that everyone is affected by this principle—even Jesus Christ—who has God as his head. This verse and its application is discussed below:

"11:3 Some understand the term "head" to refer primarily to the concept of honor, in that one's physical head is the seat of his honor (cf vv. 4-5). Thus as Christ honored God, man is to honor Christ, and woman is to honor her husband. Others see in the word "head" the idea of authority (which would also include the concept of honor). They point out that Paul clearly uses the term in the sense of authority in Eph. 1: 21-22 ('under his feet'; 'head over everything'), in Eph. 5: 22- 23 (where headship is seen in a context of submission) and in Col. 1: 18; 2:10. Thus as Christ is in authority over man and is therefore to be honored by man, so the husband is in a position of authority and is therefore to be honored by his wife.— *The NIV Study Bible*, footnote.

While the comments above make mention of Christ's authority over man and man's authority over woman, it remains silent as to God's authority over Christ , which is also presented here. Headship in the human realm has nothing to do with the nature of humans. Both men and women are flesh and blood creatures; they share a common human nature. While there are bodily differences and obvious differences in function, they share a common humanity. Similarly, the glorified Christ shares a nature like that of his Father, but he functions in that nature with God as his head—his authority. This concept is consistent with everything we read about that relationship in Scripture; it did not begin and end with Jesus' human life. When Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthian church Jesus had already been exalted for many years, yet he speaks of God as Jesus' head. God is the progenitor of all things. It was his love for the world of mankind that prompted him to send his only-begotten Son into the world to die for the sins of the world. (John 3: 16) He raised his Son to life and gave him all power and authority to rule as King-Priest. (Matt. 28: 18; Acts 2: 32, 33) Everything begins and ends with the Father! He works his purposes *through* his Son, who, in turn, will ultimately surrenders the restored creation back to the dominion of his Father. Until then, all creation must bend the knee in subjection to and in recognition of the Son's God-given authority; and every tongue must confess that Jesus is Lord. When we do this we glorify the one who has ordained it to be so. (Phil. 2: 9-11)

Let us focus, for a moment, on the matter of headship in relation to Christ and his congregation—his body. We are in subjection to the head of the congregation, Jesus Christ, he is our authority. We are called upon to keep his commands. We can do nothing apart from him. We honor him and serve him as our Lord and redeemer. So when we think of Jesus Christ as the head of the church, we understand that we are totally subordinate to him. As Paul wrote, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way.” (Eph. 1:22) Everyone is affected by some form of headship—even Jesus Christ. The only one that is excluded from some form of subordination is God himself, as Paul makes clear. I fail to see how recognizing that God is the head of Christ in anyway dishonors or diminishes him. Why try to minimize or explain away the fact that the head of Christ is God and always remains in relative subjection to the Father?

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON

Having a clear understanding of the Father/Son relationship enables us to have a better understanding of our relationship to them. No one better articulates those relationships than Jesus himself.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”—John 15: 1-8

What is said by our Lord, above, is consistent with what we read elsewhere in Scripture. Jesus is the vine in this illustration and the Father is the gardener. It is just another way of illustrating how the Father does things *through* the Son. The empowerment the Lord has to issue commands is due to the authority he has been given. It is not an authority presented to us in scripture as a *self-possessed authority*, as though he always had such authority by divine right. The only one presented in Scripture as possessing authority by *divine right* is God himself. Jesus clearly explains that his authority is a *received* authority. When his antagonists charged that he made himself equal to God,

“Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”—John 5: 19-27

Jesus clearly states that the authority he exercises is one entrusted to him by God. He has the power to judge because the Father has given him that power—not because he always possessed it by divine right and only momentarily set it aside when he became flesh. He has life in himself to

give others life because the Father has granted him this life-given power. Because Jesus' opposers misunderstood these things is no reason for us to do so. The context in which the above text is drawn clearly sets out why and how the Father bestowed all these powers and honors on him. It has pleased the Father to do so. Jesus always directed worship toward his Father as the one true God. He acknowledged his unique relationship with this God and constantly presented God as the source of his authority and power. On the eve of his death he prayed to his Father:

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; and you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they were yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you have given me—so that they may be one as we are one."—John 17: 1-11

To the end of his life, Jesus glorified his Father as the one true God. He willingly surrendered his will to that of his Father's in order to provide the human sacrifice that redeems believers from the consequences of sin. (Rom. 6:23) It is his blood and flesh that we must consume (through faith) in order to have life in ourselves. While this teaching shocked many of those who first heard Jesus articulate this profound truth, it is the central truth that binds the Scriptures together.

"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.' He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum."—John 6: 53-59.

Jesus paid the great price that needed to be paid for our redemption from sin and death. Through him—through our faith in him as the lamb of God—we are reconciled to God. (Rom 5:1, 2) We can lay claim to being a child of God because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. We have a relationship with God's Son as our Lord and savior. He not only died for us but he also lives for us. He is at God's right hand to intercede and mediate for us. (Rom. 5:10, 11; 8:34, 35; Heb. 7:25; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6) In our exalted condition as sons of God we share with the Son of God in a brotherhood unlike any other. This remarkable relationship is explained in the Letter of Hebrews:

"It was only right that God, who creates and preserves all things, should make Jesus perfect through suffering in order to bring many sons to share his glory. For Jesus is the one who leads them to salvation. He makes men pure from their sins, and both he and those who are made pure all have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers. As he says, 'God, I will speak about

you to my brothers; I will praise you before the whole gathering.' He also says, 'I will put my trust in God.' And he also says, 'Here I am with the children that God has given me.'"—Hebrews 2:10-13 *Today's English Version*

It can be appreciated that our relationship with the Father as sons is only possible through what Jesus has done for us. We have been given to Jesus and we become a part of the heavenly family as sons of God. (John 17:2) Jesus is many things to us: he is our Lord, redeemer, high priest, king, mediator, advocate, life-giver and judge. He is also, as we have seen, our brother. None of this would be possible were it not for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Belief in his resurrection was, from the beginning, an essential component of what made up the gospel. When the apostle Paul learned that certain ones in the church of Corinth were denying the resurrection teaching he responded with a vigorous defense:

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."—1 Cor.15:1-8

Christ was powerless in the grave because he was dead—completely dead! This point is drawn attention to because some have suggested that Christ came out of the tomb unaided. If true, that would have been a greater miracle than the resurrection itself! One reason for this suggestion is what Jesus is reported to have said earlier, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." (John 2:19) The Jews who heard this thought he was speaking about the literal temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem, but he was speaking about himself. "But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken"—John 2: 21, 22.

How are we to understand this? Note, the text says, "he was raised." There is no suggestion here or anywhere else that he raised himself from the dead. How then are we to understand Jesus' remarkable statement, "*I will raise it up*"? First of all, we have to remember that Jesus knew his Father's will and promise as regards his death and subsequent resurrection. He knew he was destined to die as the sin-atoning lamb of God and later be raised out of death and glorified alongside the Father. Concerning these things he said: "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (John 10:17, 18) Jesus' life was taken from him by others—Roman soldiers—who carried out his execution. Yet it could be said that no one took it from him; he willingly surrendered his life. In like manner, the Father gave him back his life by means of resurrection. Yet it could be said that he had authority to take it back. Both in laying down his life and taking it back again he was acted upon by others; Roman soldiers in the first instance—God in the last. He had the *authority* to lay down his life in sacrifice and he had authority to receive it back. His declaration that he would "raise it up," must be understood in the context of the events themselves.

We are called upon to put our trust in God and his Son. Jesus told his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." (John 14: 1) We can be confident that our Lord will shepherd us into his kingdom by means of the resurrection. Until then we can confidently approach our heavenly Father through him. On the night he instituted the Lord's

Supper he said, "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." (John 16: 24) Through Jesus we not only have access to God in prayer but we have empowerment. The Spirit that flows from the Father through the Son flows also to us and enlivens us to accomplish God's will in our lives. "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it." (John 14: 12-14) Remember Jesus' illustration of the Vine in John 15? That picture well illustrates the profound relationship we must have with the Father and the Son. Jesus is the way, the truth and life. Apart from him we can do nothing. (John 14: 6; 15: 5) In him we can do it all.

SUMMARY

What has been presented here is the substance of what I see in Scripture regarding the Father/Son relationship and our relationship with them. To be sure, it is a profound relationship—one that can only be fully understood by the parties themselves. In Scripture we are given a partial picture of that relationship—enough to establish a basic understanding of it—and what we must believe about it, if we are to be saved from sin and death. These essential things are all encompassed in what has come to be called the Gospel or Good News. The apostle Paul makes a summary statement about the essentials to Christian faith when he says, "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Eph. 4:4-6) "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and for whom we live." (1 Cor. 8:5, 6) The Father—God, is always presented as the one *from whom* all things flow; and the Lord Jesus Christ is always presented as the one *through whom* all things flow. This is what I see in Scripture. I come away from this endeavor with the same conviction I had when I began. That conviction is that we must limit ourselves to the images, language and vocabulary of Scripture if we are to faithfully reflect God's message to us in the Bible.

During the many months I spent researching material for the study of the Father/Son relationship, I was often confronted with the trinitarian concept in scholarly materials. Before commenting further on that, let me make it clear that I have great respect for scholarship. I thank God that there have been, and continue to be, men and women who have devoted themselves to those studies which enable people like myself to better understand the Bible, its people and the world it introduces to us. And, I am very grateful for the many modern English translations of the Bible which help us better understand what the original documents contained. But, in giving consideration to the arguments set forth in these scholarly materials which supported the Trinitarian concept, it became clear that religious tradition had been allowed to color the evidence presented. Because religious tradition weighs so heavily in the scale of doctrinal opinion, it seems appropriate to examine the historical development of this teaching to determine whether it warrants the degree of acceptance it has had for many centuries among many, but not all, Christians.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRINITARIAN CONCEPT OF GOD

To begin with, the most obvious objection to belief in the Trinity doctrine is that it is not taught in Scripture. This fact is readily agreed upon by scholars. Notwithstanding, these same scholars say that the Scriptures do provide the preliminary or basic evidence which, when fully understood, substantiates the formal conclusions eventually drawn in the centuries following the apostolic church. Characteristic of such arguments in this regard come from the revised edition of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

"Introduction. –Though 'trinity' is a second-century term found nowhere in the

Bible, and the Scriptures present no finished Trinitarian statement, the NT does contain most of the building materials for the later doctrine. In particular, while insisting on one God, it presents Jesus Christ as the divine Son in distinction from God the Father, and probably presents the Holy Spirit or Paraclete as a divine person distinct from both. Obvious problems admittedly attach to both claims; indeed, 'person' as a trinitarian (threeness) term has itself been controversial since Augustine, and especially in the modern period. Still, the doctrine of the trinity does lie in Scripture 'in solution' (B.B. Warfield, *ISBE* [1929], s.v.); i.e., the NT presents events, claims, practices, and problems from which church fathers crystallized the doctrine in succeeding centuries.

A classic statement emerges in Augustine (*De trin.* v. 8.9) and comes down the centuries as the 15th and 16th verses of the Athanasian Creed: (15) So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; (16) and yet there are not [or, there are not] three Gods, but one God."—*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, page 914.

The doctrine developed outside of and apart from the Bible. The concept developed over centuries of time and the Father/ Son relationship came to be interpreted from that perspective. Professor Erickson attempts to present this process in his book. He realizes the challenge the Bible presents in this matter and offers the following comment on the general objections to the doctrine:

"There is another, more general objection against the doctrine of the Trinity. It is essentially an argument from the apparent silence of the Bible on this important subject. This contention notes that there really is no explicit statement of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible, particularly since the revelation by textual criticism of the spurious nature of 1 John 5:7b. Other passages have, in many cases, been seen on closer study to be applicable only under the greatest strain. There are, to be sure, still a number of passages intimating something that contributes to the formulation of the doctrine. The question, however, is this. It is claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is a very important, crucial, and even basic doctrine. If that is indeed the case, should it not be somewhere more clearly, directly, and explicitly stated in the Bible? If this is the doctrine that especially constitutes Christianity's uniqueness, as over against Unitarian monotheism on the one hand, and polytheism on the other hand, how can it be only implied in the biblical revelation? In response to the complaint that a number of portions of the Bible are ambiguous or unclear, we often hear a statement something like, 'It is the peripheral matters that are hazy, or on which there seem to be conflicting biblical materials. The core beliefs are clearly and unequivocally revealed.' This argument would appear to fail us with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, however. For here is a seemingly crucial matter where the Scriptures do not speak loudly and clearly.

Little direct response can be made to this charge. It is unlikely that any text of Scripture can be shown to teach the doctrine of the Trinity in a clear, direct and unmistakable fashion. What we can do, however, is to look closely at the Bible and see if the witness to the Trinity there may not be clearer and more broadly based than may have been thought. It is this endeavor that will occupy our attention in chapters 8-10."—*God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, pages 108, 109.

While the doctrine of the trinity has been widely accepted for many centuries it has also been widely debated during those same centuries. As acknowledged above, the doctrine is not found in the Bible and presents certain difficulties that continue to be troublesome for the church. Addressing this matter in the introduction of his book, professor Erickson says the following:

"This doctrine in many ways presents strange paradoxes. It is very widely held. It is not simply the special view of a particular denomination or sect. It is part of the faith of the universal church. Yet it is a widely disputed doctrine, which has provoked discussion throughout all the centuries of the church's existence. It is held by many with great vehemence and vigor. These advocates are certain they believe the doctrine, and consider it crucial to the Christian faith. Yet many are unsure of the exact meaning of their belief. It was the very first doctrine dealt with systematically by the church, yet it is still one of the most misunderstood and disputed doctrines. Further, it 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*, by Millard J. Erickson, pages 11, 12.

From the outset, then, we are presented with a doctrine considered central to the Christian faith and yet not clearly articulated in Scripture. Those who hold to the '*Sola Scriptura*' (Scriptures only) position, while believing in the trinity doctrine, are forced to qualify their 'sufficiency of Scripture' belief by adding that we must go to the Bible with the 'church fathers' if we hope to really understand the Bible. It seems appropriate, then, that we look back to that post-apostolic period of church history to better understand the cross-currents of intellectual, philosophical, political and religious thought in which those 'fathers' live and in which the doctrine took root.

THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES

The nature of this treatise does not permit an in-depth examination of the dynamics of post-apostolic Bible interpretation, but it is hoped that it will be complete enough to present a fair overview of that period. Those interested in a more detailed examination would do well to obtain a copy of *Biblical Hermeneutics; A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, by Milton S. Terry, (Zondervan Publishing House). Terry takes the reader through the post-apostolic period century by century and patristic father by patristic father. He also provides valuable historical data regarding biblical exegesis during the Middle Ages, the Reformation and post-reformation period of the church. Also, Church histories and Bible dictionaries such as the four-volume *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* can be most helpful in better understanding the life and times of those who have come to be called "church fathers." For my purpose here I will simply quote his summary statement regarding the scholarship of the church fathers.

"As we review the history of patristic exegesis we notice the progress to two opposite tendencies operative from the beginning of the Christian era. The one was a speculative spirit, a habit of allegorizing, begotten of associated Judaism and Platonism; it received a mighty impulse in the Alexandrian school, and has maintained more or less influence even to this day. The other tendency was of a more practical character. It originated with our Lord and his apostles, who condemned the fanciful speculations and Hagadic traditions of their time, and *set the example of a sober and rational interpretation of the Scriptures*. It was the distinguishing feature of the school of Antioch, and exhibited some of its best results in the exegetical works of Chrysostom and Theodoret. *But this more grammatical and logical method of interpretation attained no complete development among the ancient fathers*. The prevalence of superstitions, the blind credulity of the masses, the strong tendencies to asceticism and mysticism, and the defective knowledge of the original languages of the Bible, gave, in the main, an advantage to the allegorists, and rendered a thorough grammatico-historical interpretation impossible. *Hence, we are not to look to the ancient fathers for models of exegesis*.

Their writings contain numerous imperishable gems of thought, and exhibit great intellectual acumen and logical subtlety, but as interpreters of the sacred volume they have been far surpassed by the moderns. Notwithstanding his extravagant allegorizing, Origen will ever be prized for his great learning and remarkable service in biblical criticism, and the works of Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Jerome, despite their frequent errors, will ever hold high rank in biblical literature; but the time is passed when an appeal to the opinions of the early fathers has any considerable weight with men of learning.”—*Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, by Milton S. Terry, page 660 (italics not in original).

Regardless of what one may think of the church fathers, it would seem prudent not to invest too much confidence in their evolving consensus of what constituted orthodoxy. The record is too complex and contradictory to make an appeal to such ‘fathers’ for determining present-day conclusions regarding the relationship between God and his Son. There was, among other things, disagreement about the meaning of certain terms such as ‘person’ ‘substance,’ and ‘essence.’ These terms meant different things to different people and their meanings were, and continue to be, debated. Even the word ‘trinity’ first coined in the latter part of the second century to define the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, was understood differently than it is today.

Added to this is the ancient understanding of the Greek word *logos*, commonly translated ‘word’ in modern English Bibles. While it appears hundreds of times in the New Testament in its ordinary sense, it has taken on special interest to Bible scholars due to its appearance in John 1:1. While *logos* was understood to mean ‘word,’ in apostolic and post-apostolic times, it could also mean ‘mind’ and ‘reason.’ As a consequence there were those Christians who thought of *logos* as the reasoning faculty of God and not a separate person as such. This view led to the conclusion that God was alone with himself—his own mind and reason in the beginning. There are those who continue to believe that the *logos* of John 1:1 does not refer to a separate person who was with God, but God alone with himself—his thoughts. It can be appreciated how difficult it was, and continues to be, to sort out all of the conflicting ideas of the Father and the Son relationship by examining the church fathers. The problem is illustrated in what is said about the famous Christian apologist, Origen, often referred to as the father of Christian theology:

“Origen’s thought—brilliant, fruitful, eccentric—is an amalgam of Christian and Platonist strains, whose influence for Eastern trinitarianism is hard to exaggerate. Many historians of doctrine find in Origen (*ca.* 182-251) the very fount of what is characteristically Greek: the use of *hypóstasis* for each of the three in God; the clear numerical distinction of Father, Son and Spirit as persons, yet united in will and love as one God; the eternal generation of the Son; and the strong hierarchicalism according to which only the Father can be called true God—Son and Spirit subordinated to the Father not only in function but also in nature. For the Father ontologically transcends the Son and Spirit as much as they, in turn, transcend the created world (*In Ioannem* xiii. 25.151; *In Matt.* xv. 10; *De prin.* 1.3.5.; cited in Kelly, p. 132). Thus, most remarkably, one finds in Origen’s trinitarianism the source of both orthodox Cappadocianism and heretical Arianism.”—*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, page 918 (Trinity)

THE POLITICAL CLIMATE INVOLVED

The developing theological thought regarding the nature of the Father/Son relationship did not take place in a political vacuum. When the church began to receive favorable consideration as a religion within the Roman empire in the early part of the fourth century, a new dynamic was forming that would exercise considerable influence on religious debate and orthodoxy. Emperor.

Constantine's edict of religious toleration in A.D. 313, bought the contemporary church a measure of political respectability and acceptance. We cannot know what motivated Constantine's action but it seems certain that he saw in organized Christianity a stabilizing force within the empire. As matters turned out, he was not willing to limit his influence to purely political functions—creating the climate in which the church, separate from imperial control, could work out its doctrinal differences—but, rather, sought to take an active role with the church in these matters. The effect on the church was considerable, and marked the beginning of the alliance between church and state; a relationship destined to determine the course of the church for more than a thousand years:

“Though it was not a case of the most positive union of Church and State, it was much more than a simple moral alliance between two independent factors which occurred under Constantine. He acknowledged, indeed, that it was no prerogative of his to determine the doctrinal standards of the Church; but he soon made it evident that he was not minded to assume a passive attitude toward the management of ecclesiastical interests. ‘He assumed,’ writes Eusebius, ‘as it were, the functions of a general bishop, constituted by God and convened synods of His ministers.’ The same author reports him as having said to a company of bishops: ‘You are bishops whose jurisdiction is within the Church; I, also, am a bishop, ordained by God to overlook whatever is external to the Church.’ If by things external he meant simply the temporalities of the Church, he much transcended the bounds here stated. He published decrees confirming the decisions of the bishops on questions of doctrine and worship, banished ecclesiastics who refused to subscribe the standard creed, ordered the restoration of excommunicated persons in the face of episcopal opposition, and prohibited the assemblies of various heretical and schismatic parties.

How far the Church was drawn into the circle of the State is also seen in some of the privileges and functions that were assigned to ecclesiastics. The clergy were made, if not as respects their appointments, as respects their support, officers of the State; at least, a part of their support was ordered by Constantine to be paid out of the public treasury.”—*History of the Christian Church*, Henry C. Sheldon, Vol.1, page 380, 381

It was Constantine who convened the Council of Nicea which debated the Arian issue in A.D. 325. Arius, while worshiping Christ, argued that if he was a ‘Son’ there must have been a time when he was not. This view was considered heretical by those who argued that while the pre-existent Word was a Son, he co-existed with the Father from eternity and therefore there was no time when he was not. It was Constantine who presided over this debate and regarding his influence we read the following:

“He [Constantine] was to be a mediator, a role he was good at and enjoyed. From Eusebius’ description of Constantine presiding at the council of Nicea in 325 and at other great ecclesiastical gatherings we see the emperor in his element, arranging elaborate ceremony, dramatic entrances and processions and splendid services. He brought his skill in public relations to the management of Church affairs. It was a far cry from the days of the ‘pillars’ and Council of Jerusalem, Constantine, in fact, may be said to have created the *décor* and ritual of Christian conciliar practice. He tried also to set the tone of debate: eirenic, conciliatory, urbane. It was he who insisted, as a formula for compromise, the insertion of the phrase ‘consubstantial with the father’ in the creedal agreement. ‘He advised all present to agree to it,’ says Eusebius, ‘and to subscribe its articles and assent to them, with the insertion of the single word ‘consubstantial’ which, moreover, he interpreted himself’”—*A History of Christianity*, Paul Johnson, page 88

We have no way of determining the spiritual qualifications of those 318 bishops who are reported to have taken part in the Nicean debate. That which is of the most importance to us today is the end result of their debate. Does the creedal statement that emerged from that meeting add greater clarity to what we see in Scripture?

A.D. 325: THE NICEAN CREED

"We believe in one God the Father All-sovereign, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, things in heaven and things on the earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and became man, suffered, and rose on the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge living and dead. And in the Holy Spirit. And those that say 'There was when he was not,' and that, 'He came into being from what-is-not,' and, 'Before he was begotten he was not,' and that, 'He came into being from what-is-not,' or those that allege, that the son of God is 'Of another substance or essence' or 'created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable,' these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes."—Translation according to Henry Bettenson in *Documents of the Christian Church*, second edition, page 25

In reading the creed, it becomes clear that it did not spell out a Trinitarian formula. It seems primarily designed to assert the proposition that the Son of God co-existed with the Father and never had a beginning. In the phrase, "of the substance of the Father," we have the Greek word alluded to earlier (*homooúsios*) which Constantine insisted upon (translated 'consubstantial' in the quotation) and for which he supplied the interpretation. Generally, *homooúsios* had the sense "of the same nature." Here, the word seems to have been taken as the exact same substance—God's substance—whatever that was. In the Son's having been "begotten, not made" (a statement incorporating its own ambiguity), the creed rejected the view that the Son was to be ranked in the created order of things. As for the Holy Spirit, all that was said, was: "And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit." No attempt was made to define what that meant in relation to the Father and the Son. As to the question of whether the creedal statement produced at Nicea added clarity to the pre-human nature of the Word, there will be different conclusions drawn by those with different perspectives. What can be said with historical accuracy is that it did little to clarify matters in the fourth century. In short, it created as many questions as it attempted to answer. These problems are outlined in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

"In a highly charged political atmosphere, Constantine's Synod of Nicea (325) dispatched Arius but puzzled generations to come. For apart from the anti-Arian phrases of the Nicene Creed, which derived in tone from the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel ('God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made'), the central Athanasian and Nicene code word for anti-Arianism turned out to be wonderfully ambiguous. Nicea said the Son was *homooúsios* with the Father, i.e., of one substance or being, but the term fostered as much debate as closure. For it might have meant that the Son and Father were precisely the same being, or else it might have meant that they were the same sort of being. Probably the latter was meant, since the former is modalist and the latter good enough to rout Arius. Nevertheless, as G. C. Stead remarked, the connotations of *homooúsios* were probably complicated by social and organic overtones. The church fathers' favorite images for the Son's relation to the Father were those of rays from sun, twigs from branch, streams from source—and children from parents." —Vol.4, page 918 (Trinity)

The relationship between God the Father and his Son continued to be discussed and debated throughout the fourth century. The Nicean council had laid the basis for further debate, elaboration and speculation on this matter which led to yet another such meeting in A.D. 381. Under the auspices of Emperor Theodosius, a second ecumenical council met at Constantinople, which about 150 bishops attended. The creed that emerged from this council supplemented the Nicene creed by spelling out a more complete Trinitarian formula:

A.D. 381: THE CREED OF CONSTANTINOPLE

"We believe in one God the Father All-sovereign, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all the ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and cometh again with glory to judge living and dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end: And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver, that proceedeth from the Father, who with Father and Son is worshipped together and glorified together, who spoke through the prophets: In one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church: We acknowledge one baptism unto remission of sins. We look for a resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come."—*Documents of the Christian Church*, Edited by Henry Bettenson, second edition, page 26

What is said about the Holy Spirit in the creed of Constantinople, goes far beyond what the Bible says about Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is never addressed as 'Lord' nor is it spoken of as 'life-giver' in the Scriptures. It appears that the progression of creedal statements opened the door for more and more theoretical speculation. A perusal of church history in this period demonstrates that there were many debates over words and their meanings. There was the blending of biblical thought with Greek philosophical thought. The former was more practical and earthy while the latter was given to flights of speculative, philosophical analysis. Also, the church was divided into Latin-speaking and Greek-speaking factions. Terms used in one language did not always have a corresponding equivalent in the other. This contributed to different schools of thought or shades of interpretation, and a fierce debating of minutiae. Commenting on this problem as it related to the person of Jesus Christ, church historian Paul Johnson writes:

"The intrinsic difficulty of the problem lay in the lack of room for manoeuvre for a middle course. A right-thinking theologian, anxious to remain orthodox, tended to smash his ship on Charybdis while trying to avoid Scylla. Thus Apollinaris, Bishop of Laodicea (d. 392), in his efforts to demonstrate his anti-Arianism, emphasized the divinity of the Lord at the expense of his manhood and ended up creating a heresy of his own which denied that Christ had a human mind. Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople 428-31, reacting from Apollinarianism, reasserted the manhood of Christ to the extent of questioning the divinity of the infant Jesus and thus denying Mary her title of *theotókos* or 'God-bearer'. He, too, found himself a reluctant heresiarch. In turn, Eutyches, a learned monk from Constantinople, in his anti-Nestorian fervour, swung too far in the direction of Apollinarianism and came to grief over Constantine's compulsory word 'consubstantial'. Summoned to recant before a council in 448, he gave up in despair: 'Hitherto I have always avoided the phrase 'consubstantial after the flesh' [as tending to confusion]. But I will use it now, since your holiness demands it.'"—*A History of Christianity*, page 90

The matter of orthodoxy had become, over time, an obsession within the church. Having fought against the earlier heresies which were more of an exterior threat, the church became, more and more, obsessed with threats of heterodoxy from within, and, therefore, the need for more rigid creeds.

"A false impetus was given to theological strife by a wide-spread failure properly to recognize the broad distinction which exists between faith and orthodoxy. The abhorrence of

heresy, which had been engendered by such gross aberrations from Christian truth as Gnosticism and Manichæism, conjoined with the unspiritual temper of numerous adherents of the victorious Church, led not a few to confound evangelical belief with allegiance to a creed. According to their superficial estimate, a zealous championship of the right articles of faith was a supreme evidence of Christian character.”—*History of the Christian Church*, Sheldon, Vol. I, pages 412, 413.

All of this was taking place within, not only an ecclesiastical arena, but a political one as well. Dramatic changes had been taking place since the start of the fourth century and these changes were impacting on a church rapidly crystalizing into an institutionalized church. The church was rapidly attaining what we moderns would call, ‘political clout.’ Concerning this new development we read:

“In the period upon which we now enter [313-590], the order of events is, in many respects, strongly contrasted with that just given. We are still confronted, it is true, with agitation and conflict. Christian history in no century has been free from such factors. But the agitation and the conflict are now carried forward under new conditions and in new directions . . . The old conditions are reversed. Instead of haughtily denying the right of Christianity to an existence, heathenism finds its own right to an existence questioned, and is obliged to turn suppliant. Instead of reviling Christians as a kind of secret, underground association, the heathen themselves are obliged to retire from the field, until their very name, as ‘pagans’ (villagers or countrymen), publishes their proscription and obscurity. In place of outward pressure, the Church has now to sustain the shock of violent controversies within. To the age of apology succeeds that of polemics. Instead of poverty and persecution to humble the Church, and to guard it from unworthy members, wealth and secular glory are found within its pale, with their temptations to corruption, and their tendencies to swell the list of merely nominal Christians. A far harder task is imposed than that of resisting an openly hostile world; namely, the task of subduing and sanctifying a world proffering a seductive alliance and friendship.

We have, then, the following as the distinguishing facts of the period: In the sphere of the State, the alliance of the secular government with the Church, to the great advantage of the latter in some respects, and to its equal detriment in others; *in the sphere of doctrine, a succession of heated controversies and the fixing of creeds*; in the sphere of ecclesiastical constitution, an increased centralization of power in the chief episcopal centres, an advance in the direction of papal pretensions and prerogatives, and in general, a continued development of the hierarchical system; in the sphere of morals and life, the growth of worldliness, *the increasing subordination of the spiritual to the dogmatic and the ceremonial*, the incorporation of heathen elements, –such, in particular, as the polytheistic tinge given to the worship, –and, finally, the spread and powerful influence of monasticism.”—*History of the Christian Church*, Sheldon, Vol.1, page 328, 329 (Italics added)

It seems clear that a *spiritual deterioration* was in progress at the same time doctrinal and creedal statements were being *officially* determined. The clergy-laity divisions which began to be advanced in the second century had, by the fourth century, blossomed into the creation of territorial princes of the church with all of the outward splendor, show and official sanction once accorded the pagan priests. Subsidized by the emperor, such positions were now eagerly sought, and not always with the best of motives. Forgotten in the flush of imperial favor and numerical growth were Jesus’ commanding words: “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” –Mark 10.42-45.

Friendship with the world and all of the “perks” that attended that friendship was attained by abandoning the Bible dictum that “friendship with the world is hatred toward God.” (James 4:4) This friendship was seen as a great advantage by both parties (empire and church), and each party had his own reasons for cultivating that friendship. To a large measure, that “friendship” helped crystallize orthodoxy in the church. How? By backing up councillor decisions with the sword of the state:

“The design of the emperors was indeed the promotion of peace and harmony in the Church, but their interference none the less bore the natural fruit of increased strife. What else could have been the result of the principle established under the administration of Constantine; namely, *that the minority of bishops, gathered or represented in a council, must submit their faith to the decision of the majority, and, in case of refusal, feel the force of civil as well as of ecclesiastical proscription?* The inevitable consequence was, that, when a doctrinal dispute arose, the partisans of either side were intent upon securing for themselves a majority in a council and the cooperation of the government. The government, thus flattered by the appeals of contending factions, was incited to make a full show of its power and importance. Emperors having least understanding of the subjects under debate were quite apt to be most zealous in their attempts to control doctrinal settlements. Hence full scope was given, in the treatment of theological questions, to all the expedients of the most violent political strife.”—*History of the Christian Church*, Sheldon, Vol.1, pages 413, 414 (italics not in original)

Another serious factor that should not be overlooked as we try to understand the thinking of church leaders in these centuries is the fact that the Hebraic context in which Jesus had been presented in the New Testament was virtually ignored. There was a definite anti-Semitic spirit that pervaded the church in these centuries. And, for the record, that anti-Semitic spirit has continued up to and including the twentieth century. The effect that had on the view of the Bible itself—especially the Old Testament—is commented on below:

“The early Church Fathers had to solve the problem of what to do with the Old Testament. Their anti-Judaic stance forced them to view the Jewish Scriptures with its many strange laws and customs as offensive at worst and a little more than antiquated at best. In addition, the position of the Church was that it had replaced Israel. No longer a remnant within Israel, it had become a separate gentile body. Accordingly, it proudly bore a new role, that of adversary to the parent that had given it birth. For the Church, therefore, to admit any real connection with the Old Testament as a propaedeutic to the gospel would be to grant a measure of legitimacy and historical validity to the Jewish people. Since the Church would not allow such a validation, it was caught in a bind.” —*Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, Marvin R. Wilson, page 96.

The ‘bind’ that Wilson speaks of was overcome, at least in part, by the extensive use of allegory—a method of biblical exposition in which the plain meaning and historical context was ignored and the text given a ‘spiritualized’ interpretation. In this way much of the Old Testament could be ‘Christianized.’ The scarlet cord that Rahab extended from her dwelling in Jericho became a sign of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ; the four headwaters of the river that flowed from Eden were said to be four different virtues. Even the New Testament was not spared the allegorical system of biblical interpretation. The noted scholar Augustine applied an allegorical interpretation of Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan. In doing so, the man who was left for dead was really Adam; the thieves who robbed and beat him were the devil and his angels; the Samaritan that helped the man was Jesus; and taking the man to an inn meant bringing him to the church. By the use of allegory, Augustine completely missed the point of the parable, which was in answer to the question: “who is my neighbor?” It can be appreciated that this approach to the Scriptures greatly distorted what was found therein. Commenting on this, Wilson added:

"In allegory, the Old Testament could be made a 'Christian' document. Through their efforts to spiritualize, typologize, and christologize the text, the early Church Fathers were able to find abundant Christian meaning in the Old Testament. Christ, or New Testament thought, was read *into*, rather than *out of*, the biblical text in some of the most obscure places. Accordingly, Irenaeus, Origin, Augustine, and others developed a system of allegorical exegesis that had the disastrous effect of wrenching the biblical text from its plain historical meaning. During the Reformation, Luther denounced Origin's allegories and called allegory 'the scum on Scripture,' 'a monkey-game,' and a 'nose of wax' (i.e., something which can be bent any way desired.)"—*Ibid*, page 97 (Italics in the original)

In view of the religious, political and philosophical milieu that existed in those early centuries and the pervasive rancor that marked doctrinal debate, one would do well to approach with caution conclusions reached in this period. It would be, in my opinion, a mistake to invest too much confidence in the process by assuming that the process was governed by God's Holy Spirit.

DEBATES CONCERNING THE NATURE OF JESUS CHRIST

Before leaving this historical period of doctrinal development it seems appropriate to look at one other aspect. In addition to the Arian, and semi-Arian questions there also arose debates over the nature of Jesus Christ. Was he exclusively human or was he composed of two natures—human and divine? If there were two natures, were they combined in some way or did they remain separate during his earthly life? These questions were also debated during this period. Such questions are collected under what has come to be called 'Christology,'— the doctrine of Christ. While this matter had been debated in the fourth century it became more intense in the fifth century. There were two general schools of thought involved:

"The strife which then arose, so far as it was not the product of mere personal rivalries and ambitions, had its source in the diverse spirit and tendencies of the Antiochian and the Alexandrian schools. The former, which counted among its exponents Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, was distinguished by its bent to sober and critical exegesis. This naturally made them observant of the extent to which the New Testament ascribes to the Redeemer the purely human as well as the divine. They accordingly gave emphasis to the human factor, and distinguished broadly between the two natures in Christ. The Alexandrian school, on the other hand, had a leaning toward mysticism, was disposed to emphasize the divine in Christ, and dwelt rather upon the thorough union of the human with the divine than upon the distinction between the two natures."—*History of the Christian Church*, Sheldon, Vol. 1, pages 428, 429.

One of the debates relating to this controversy had to do with the use of the term *theotokos* (Greek for "mother of God") as applied to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, was reluctant to use the term, while his opponent, Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, insisted upon it. This led to a council in Ephesus in A.D. 431, in which Cyril's position prevailed and Nestorius was condemned and exiled by the emperor. The dispute regarding Jesus' nature or natures, continued and was addressed in future councils. The Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, is considered the most important from this period in relation to Christology.

A.D. 451: THE CREED OF CHALCEDON

"Following the holy fathers, we all with one consent teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the

Mother of God, according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one substance, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, the only-begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us and the creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us.”—*History of the Christian Church*, Sheldon, Vol. 1, page 595 (*Appendix*).

The credal conclusion presented above continues to be the accepted view among many believers regarding the dual nature of Jesus Christ. To not accept Jesus Christ as both God and man is to deny the historical Jesus in the minds of many. The dual nature concept naturally raises other problems and issues which are not easily resolved. One such issue is the matter of his death. If he existed as both God and man during his human life, what happened to the God nature of his person when he died? Did this God nature also die? If it did not die, did it simply cease to be or did it continue in some way apart from the physical person who did die? Another question that suggests itself is: if the one person of Jesus was sacrificed for our sins and this one person was both God and man, does that mean that God died for us? Some, no doubt would answer “yes” to that question, but it raises serious contradictions to what we see in Scripture.

The matter of the Lord being of two natures is a corollary doctrine to the trinity doctrine and continues to be viewed as central to the gospel message. As formulated by the creed of Chalcedon, Jesus Christ was both God and man at the same time: “each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one substance.” Like the trinity doctrine, it is not taught in Scripture, yet it is viewed by many as being at the very core of Christian belief. To deny that Jesus was both God and man at the same time is to destroy the gospel of Jesus Christ. John R. W. Stott, the well-known English Bible Scholar, expresses the opinion of many when he writes:

“He [Jesus] was also very much a human being, whatever else may be said about him. He was born, he grew, he worked and sweated, rested and slept, he ate and drank, suffered and died like other men. He had a real human body and real human emotions.

But can we really believe that he was also in some sense ‘God’? Is not the deity of Jesus a rather picturesque Christian superstition? Is there any evidence for the amazing Christian assertion that the carpenter of Nazareth was the unique Son of God?

This question is fundamental. We cannot dodge it. We must be honest. If he was not God in human flesh, Christianity is exploded. We are left with just another religion with some beautiful ideas and noble ethics; its unique distinction has gone.”—*Basic Christianity*, John R. W. Stott, page 8

By putting matters as he does, theologian John R. W. Stott reminds us of how seriously the trinity doctrine impacts the gospel of Jesus Christ. In effect, it forces us to reinterpret the Bible’s message from the Trinitarian viewpoint. Rather than arguing for salvation doctrine as presented to us in the Scriptures only, he tells us, we must look at them through the lens of a doctrine not taught in the Bible—one that evolved over centuries of time and has always been controversial. Failing to do that, he says, is to explode (demolish or belie) Christianity’s uniqueness. And, by implication, to declare that not believing it means you do not understand the gospel of Jesus Christ and are excluded from its benefits. This, to be sure, makes it a matter of grave concern and well worth our investigation. But do the assertions made in this regard hold up under sound biblical exegesis? Before addressing this question it seems appropriate to give some attention to

the matter of orthodoxy.

ORTHODOXY

To be orthodox means to hold to right teaching in a matter. According to the *Dictionary of Word Origins*, the English word comes to us in the following way: "Greek *orthós* meant 'straight, correct' (it enters into numerous English compounds, including *orthography* 'correct spelling' and *orthopaedic*). Greek *dóxa* meant 'opinion'; it was derived from the verb *dokein* 'think..' Put them together and you got *orthódoxos* 'having the right opinion,' which passed into English via ecclesiastical Latin *orthodoxus*."—page 376. Accordingly, those who hold to what they consider true articles of Christian faith will, in the same breath, declare themselves orthodox. Those who disagree with them will be called unorthodox. In this way it takes on a quasi-legal sense in the minds of many Christians. To attach the term 'orthodox' to a specific thought or idea is to invest it with ecclesiastical authority and acceptance—at least in the minds of the group which holds to the thought or idea. Others may hold views contrary to this particular 'orthodoxy,' yet they will call their contrary views orthodox. How do we determine what deserves to be viewed as genuinely orthodox? What standard ought we to use if our articles of faith—our orthodoxy—is to approximate a fair measure of accuracy? It is submitted here that the only valid authority for establishing orthodoxy is the Bible alone—apart from *any* additional authority. Most Christians would agree that the Bible alone is the source of *inspired revelation from God*. In relation to this, I found the following pertinent to this matter:

"Paul, the apostle, declares that all Scripture which is divinely inspired is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. iii, 16). These various uses of the holy records may be distinguished as *doctrinal and practical*. The Christian teacher appeals to them as authoritative utterances of divine truth, and unfolds their lessons as theoretical and doctrinal statements of what their divine author would have men believe. Our fifth Article of Religion (the sixth of the Church of England) says: '*The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, or may not be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.*'"—*Biblical Hermeneutics*, Terry, page 582 (Italics not in original)

When we read the text enlarged upon above (2 Tim. 3:16), we should also consider what the apostle Paul had to say in his summary statement on this: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, (verse 16) so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (Verse 17) I believe the orthodox view of the Bible is summarized for us here. According to Paul, the Scriptures equip a person in a full and complete way to develop his belief structure and order his life as a Christian. While Paul may have had the Hebrew (Old Testament) Scriptures primarily in mind at the time he wrote this (the New Testament portion was added later), the principle remains the same. Already, in Paul's day, his letters were being circulated and held on an equal footing with the Old Testament writings. So much so that the apostle Peter could say: "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

In order to establish doctrine that goes beyond what is written and make such doctrine or doctrines binding upon the church, one has to establish an authority in addition to and outside of the "God-breathed" Scriptures. Roman Catholics have such an authority in the Pope of Rome and the College of Cardinals. There are a number of Protestant sects that have a self-appointed

prophet whose writings are viewed as authoritative in matters of doctrine and practice. Protestants, generally, reject such extra-biblical authorities but are greatly influenced by theologians associated with the Reformation and before them to the 'church fathers' and the councils mentioned before. Obviously, there are no ready answers to how much confidence anyone can invest in such human entities, but it would appear wise to be more than cautious about how much confidence one would invest in any of them. The basis for such caution is well explained in *Biblical Hermeneutics*:

The Romanist, therefore, finds in the Church and tradition an authority superior to the inspired Scripture. But when we find that the fathers notoriously disagree in the exposition of important passages, that popes have contradicted one another, and have condemned and annulled the acts of their predecessors, and that even great councils, like those of Nice (325), Laodicea (360), Constantinople (754), and Trent (1545) have enacted decrees utterly inconsistent with each other, we may safely reject the pretensions of the Romanists, and pronounce them absurd and preposterous."—*Biblical Hermeneutics*, Terry, page 582, 583.

While Milton S. Terry focuses primarily on the Roman Catholic Church in the above, the principle well applies to all those who appeal to the 'fathers' and the rulings of historical church councils in the matter of establishing Christian orthodoxy. This matter is commented on further by Terry in a subsequent paragraph:

"But while the Holy Scriptures contain all essential revelation of divine truth, 'so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith,' it is of fundamental importance that all formal statements of biblical doctrine, and the exposition, elaboration, or defense of the same, be made in accordance with correct hermeneutical principles. The systematic expounder of Scripture doctrine is expected to set forth, in clear outline and well-defined terms, such teachings as have certain warrant in the word of God. He must not import into the text of Scripture the ideas of later times, or build upon any words or passages a dogma which they do not legitimately teach. The apologetic and dogmatic methods of interpretation which proceed from the standpoint of a formulated creed, and appeal to all words and sentiments scattered here and there in the Scriptures, which may by any possibility lend support to a foregone conclusion, have been condemned already (see above, pp.171, 172). By such methods many false notions have been urged upon men as matters of faith. But no man has a right to foist into his expositions of Scripture his own dogmatic conceptions, or those of others, and then insist that these are an essential part of divine revelation. Only that which is clearly read therein, or legitimately proved thereby, can be properly held as scriptural doctrine."—*Ibid*, pages 583, 584.

Most Christians, I believe, would accept the above conclusions as correct, at least in *principle*. The Bible must hold the first place and have the final word as to the matter of healthy teaching and what a person must believe in order to be put right with God, that is, to be saved. The problem with extra-biblical doctrine is that once it is conceived, even in an unfinished form, it begins to color what is seen in Scripture. It reminds me of the story of the bedouin who was overtaken by a violent sand storm and his camel appealed to him to be allowed to just put his head in the tent. The Bedouin finally relented and allowed the camel to put his head in the tent. Little by little the camel worked his way into the tent until there was no room for the bedouin and he found himself outside the tent and his camel completely in it. It was then that he realized how unwise he had been. I see the same problem with extra-biblical concepts that develop into major doctrines which, in the end, crowd out sound biblical exegesis.

It is not difficult for unsound doctrine to develop and take on a venerable character simply

because it is traditionally believed and defended. For this reason alone, I believe we must limit our *explicit beliefs* to that which is *explicitly taught* in Scripture. Failing to do that results in endless confusion and destructive quarrels that fragment the church of Jesus Christ. Yet, someone may object to setting aside certain creeds and traditions because without them we are subjected to the tyranny of self. If each person who approaches the Bible is his own authority then there is no end to the conflicting interpretations that will be taught. For that reason, there are those who argue that we *must* take the church fathers and others with us to the Scriptures. In the book *Here We Stand!*, evangelical Michael S. Horton, explains why:

"We all take people with us to Scripture, guides who have so influenced our understanding of biblical teaching that we do not often realize the extent to which our reading of Scripture is informed and, perhaps, deformed by our dependence on them. Like the defendant who cannot afford a lawyer, the court of public opinion will provide us with our counsel unless we pay the price to find it elsewhere. Some of us go to Scripture with Irenaeus, Augustine, Anselm, Luther, Calvin, and Warfield. How can evangelicals attack the current president for ignoring *America's* heritage when they so often dismiss the wisdom of the *church's* founding fathers and reformers? C. S. Lewis called the modern attitude toward the past 'chronological snobbery.'

We have creeds, confessions, and catechisms not because we want to arrogantly assert ourselves above Scripture or other Christians, but for precisely the opposite reason: We are convinced that such self-assertion is actually easiest for us when we presume to be going to Scripture alone and directly, without any presuppositions or expectations. With Isaiah, I must confess, 'I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips.' As if my own ignorance and folly were not enough, I belong by divine providence to one of the most superficial, banal, and ungodly generations in history and am bound to be negatively shaped by my context in ways that are different from other saints in other times and places. Fearful of our own weaknesses in judgment and blind spots due to our own acculturation, we go to Scriptures with the wider church, with those who have confessed the same faith for centuries."—*Here We Stand!*, 1996, (Baker Books) page 107. (Italics in original)

I can empathize with the viewpoint presented by Mr. Horton, and I respect his humility. However, the very limitations he places upon himself ("I am a man of unclean lips"), was also true of the very men he points to as representing those we ought to take with us to Scripture! They were no different than himself in this respect; they, too, were men with "*unclean lips*". As for the influence of our contemporary culture, it should be noted that the Greek (intellectual) culture in which the church fathers lived was more influenced by Plato than by Christ. That much good was accomplished by the Reformers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in getting back to biblical Christianity cannot be denied, but they did not originate Christianity and their conclusions cannot be viewed as *authoritative*. They had to cut through many centuries of accumulated error in a power structure that grew out of the seeds sown by the church Fathers.

I agree that we all take certain presuppositions with us to the Scriptures. And it needs to be repeated here that Bible scholars and theologians are no exception to this rule. Should this cause us to throw up our hands and walk away from the Scriptures with the thought that it cannot be rightly understood by anyone? If the Bible is truly the *revealed* word of God, and I believe it is, then it should be understandable. The goal must be to determine what was originally said in a specific historical context and what it meant to those to whom it was written. The Bible is not a collection of riddles and dark sayings; it is basically clear and written in down-to-earth language. God reveals himself in history and explains himself through his encounters with individuals and people whose lives are woven into the tapestry of his unfolding word. *We must go to the Bible with the Bible*, that is, allow it to speak to use through its inspired writers, being confident that it

is consistent with itself and self-interpreting.

There are some matters not fully developed in Scripture; and we may come away sometimes puzzled or wondering about the full understanding of a matter. But, for the most part, the plain statements of Scripture are self-interpreting and obvious in their meaning. And, in relation to what we call salvation doctrine, I believe there is no ambiguity involved. The challenge presenting itself to us is not in *understanding what constitutes salvation doctrine*—the challenge lies in *putting faith in it and living a life consistent with it!*

It should help us put matters in perspective by remembering that every servant of God has served him with limited knowledge. There will always be questions that we cannot answer. After all, we are called to walk by faith and not sight. God reveals enough of himself and his purposes for us to respond to his love and have confidence in the hope he offers us. (1 John 4: 19) The faith journey is walked with confidence, not because we know everything, it is walked with confidence because we trust the one who has pointed us in the right direction. As for those matters that are not completely revealed to us we do well to reflect on what the apostle Paul had to say: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor, 13: 9-13) What Moses had to say to his fellow Israelites prior to their entering the promised land still applies: “Things hidden belong to Yahweh our God but things revealed are ours and our children’s for all time, so that we may observe all the words of this law.”—Deut, 29:29 *The Jerusalem Bible*.

MAKING USE OF VALUABLE RESOURCES

Before passing on to look at a few scriptures used to support the trinity doctrine and the two natures of Jesus Christ—teachings that radically affect the Father/Son relationship, I would briefly mention that following a few basic guidelines will greatly enhance our Bible study efforts. First, we need at least several different English translations that offer a good range of translation. Secondly, we should have a Bible or dictionary that provides good historical information about each Bible book. Reading this material helps us better understand the historical setting and specific purpose of each book. Knowing something about the situation that existed at the time and why and to whom the book was written helps us get a feel for the historical and religious moment involved. Keep in mind that the book had an original audience and they were intended to understand what was being written to them. To understand what it means to you and me, we first have to understand what it meant to them! We can’t just pick up the Bible and start with the *here and now*, and expect to understand what we are reading. If we do that, we will simply be looking at the Scriptures through our own twentieth century world view, together with our individual presuppositions. We must begin with the *there and then*, if we are to hope to reach the *here and now!* This *Historical-Grammatical* method (what does it say, to whom was it said, what does it mean) is essential to sound biblical exegesis.

We can and should take advantage of Bible study aids. A good Bible dictionary can help bring the world of the Bible alive by informing us about the prevailing cultures, languages, and history of those introduced to us in the Scriptures. This helps us get back to the *there and then*. The New Bible Dictionary, edited by J.D. Douglas, is an excellent resource in this regard. The four-volume International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, is a more comprehensive resource. A Bible concordance is another excellent tool to explore words and the nuances of meaning often attached to them in Scripture. A good set of Bible commentaries can also prove helpful—especially if the commentary offers several different possibilities of interpretation for difficult words or passages. I

have found a Greek-English translation of the Bible helpful in certain instances. Our aim should be to get as accurate a historical and textual perspective as we can. To this end we can take advantage of biblical scholarship and show respect for their findings without having scholarship determine what we ultimately believe. They may help shape our understanding of a matter and add food for thought, but we cannot rely on their conclusions. We must take responsibility for our own conclusions. In all that we do we must remember that God opposes those who are proud, but gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6) We must approach the Bible with a wholesome fear and reverence for the God it reveals. We must constantly petition him for his Spirit to nourish both our faith and understanding. We can have confidence that we can understand all that we need to understand in order to please our him and serve our Lord.

SCRIPTURES USED TO SUPPORT THE TRINITY

In the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, quoted earlier, (see p. 49) it was said that while the Bible did not explicitly teach the trinity it contained 'most of the building materials' for that teaching which came centuries later. It is appropriate that we examine some of those 'building materials' to see if their witness adds support to the trinity doctrine. Keep in mind that the doctrine teaches that there are three separate persons who are co-equally God, yet these three Gods are only one God. In the following section we will look at a number of those texts which are enlisted in the doctrine's support.

THE BAPTISM FORMULA: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."—Matthew 28:19

Many see this text as a clear witness for the trinity doctrine because Father, Son and Holy Spirit are mentioned in the same sentence in relation to baptism. Before proceeding let it be noted that the commission given to the disciples had to do with salvation and how it is appropriated by humans; it is not presented as a theological definition of who God is. Nevertheless, it is argued that this text must be viewed as a proof-text for the trinity doctrine. Albert Barnes, in his commentary on this verse is quite emphatic:

"The union of these three names in the form of baptism proves that the Son and Holy Ghost are *equal* with the Father. Nothing would be more absurd or blasphemous than to unite the name of a creature—a man or an angel—with the name of the ever-living God in this solemn rite."—*Notes on the New Testament*, by Albert Barnes, Vol.9, page 323. (Italics in the original)

With due respect for Mr. Barnes, the matter of equality is not addressed in this verse. Nothing here, or anywhere else in the Scriptures can be cited to add credibility to his assertion. As for the linking of a creature's name with the name of the ever-living God, that is not uncommon in the Bible. In this regard, please note the following:

"The religious character of the OT era is reflected in the frequency of names which mention God or a god. The most common divine element is Yahweh, which has four hypocoristica: *y hû* (from *yahw*) and *yâ* both of which are terminal elements; and *yehô* and *yô* (both from *yahw* by slightly different phonetic processes), which occur as initial elements. Yahweh, in some form, appears in over 10 percent of Israelite names."—*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, page 487 (Proper Names). (underlining not in original)

If men like Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah and many others could have the divine name, Yahweh, incorporated in their personal name, how can it be argued that God could only link his name with deity in the baptism formula? I believe Albert Barnes was reading *into* the text, rather than *out* of

it. However, someone may ask, why the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are linked together in this liturgical formula? I believe it is because of the respective roles played by the entities mentioned—all of which have to do with redemption and regeneration. First of all, salvation is offered by God the Father. It is offered through the sacrificial merits of his Son (redemption), and, lastly, the individual is renewed by the function of Holy Spirit (regeneration). It appears to me that the baptismal candidate would have to be properly instructed in these matters prior to baptism. He or she would have to understand what baptism signified in relation to their salvation.

The command to baptize, given by the resurrected Lord, comes after he informed his disciples that "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Again we are reminded that his authority and power was *given* to him by the Father. He used that *given* authority to command his disciples to go forth and make disciples of all nations. He had been given that authority by the Father. The world was to be reconciled to the Father through the Son and those who put faith in that provision were to publically acknowledge it by water baptism. Such ones, in turn, would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. (John 1:33) To the assembled people on the day of Pentecost, note what the apostle Peter had to say regarding what had now taken place:

"Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' 'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.' When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.'"—Acts 2:29-39.

We have the same entities mentioned in Peter's spirit-filled witness that are mentioned in Matthew 28:19: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What we have here is a *fleshing-out* of the salvation message, not supplied by Matthew 28:19, but *anticipating* it. What are we told here about how the salvation process work? Everything comes from the Father. Whatever our Lord has he *received* from the Father, *including* the Holy Spirit. The Son exercises his *received* lordship and authority by *pouring out* the Holy Spirit on his disciples. Where, in all of that, do we see an *equality* of power and authority held by the three entities? It is not there. It is nowhere to be found in Scripture. I submit that whatever is represented in the baptism formula as found in Matthew 28:19, it has nothing to do with co-equal power and authority. That concept has to be written into it. Because the Holy Spirit is presented as a person and co-equal with the Father and Son in the 'Godhead,' by Trinitarians, it seems appropriate to turn our attention to the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."—Eph. 4:30

This scripture is cited to prove that the Holy Spirit is a person. The argument being that only a person can be 'grieved.' It is significant, I believe, that commentaries usually draw attention to this when considering this text. In his book, *God in Three Persons*, Millard S.

Erickson, makes the following argument:

"We need to note that the Holy Spirit is a person, with all the qualities of a person. He exercises a personal ministry in the lives of people. He does the convicting or convincing of unbelievers—of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8-11). He regenerates or gives new life (John 3:5-8). He guides into truth (John 16:13). He inspired the Scripture writers to produce the books of the Bible as we have them. He sanctifies believers (Rom. 8:1-17). He empowers for service (Acts 1:8). We are not told that in any of these works he does what he does through the Father or the Son. These are direct ministries, involving a direct relationship.

As a person, the Spirit also should be capable of being related to personality. This we also find in the Scriptures. Ananias and Sapphira were told that they had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Paul commanded his readers not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). Surely, however, only a person can be grieved or lied to."—*God in Three Persons*, page 327

Why does professor Erickson go to such lengths to prove that the Holy Spirit is a person? Could we even imagine a similar treatment of a text involving the Father or his Son? Do we ever have a commentary labor the point that Jesus Christ is a person? Do we ever have a commentary labor the point that the Father is a person? To labor the point that the Bible teaches that the Father and Son are persons would be unthinkable because it is self-evident that they are persons. It is decidedly different, however, when we come to the Holy Spirit. When we come to the Holy Spirit we have a different situation because of the absence of the ordinary allusions to personhood in Scripture. All of the *functions* of the Holy Spirit that Erickson alludes to do not require that the Spirit be a person. All of the things he mentions are really *functions*, and can be accomplished by the extended energy, creative force, and enlightening-transforming power of God, influencing and activating the minds and hearts of people. The "direct relationship" that Erickson mentions is not the Holy Spirit's direct relationship but, rather, the Father's direct relationship *through* his Holy Spirit by means of Christ, *through whom* the Spirit is directed.

To say that because the Spirit of God can be grieved and lied to, he must be a person is to ignore the flexibility of language used in the Scriptures as well as the context in which such statements are made. Any number of non-living things are personified in Scripture. An outstanding example of this in the Bible is how *wisdom* is spoken of. *She cries out, makes her speech, rebukes, pours out her heart, laughs, and stretches out her hand.* (Prov. 1:20-30, chapters 8, 9) Because wisdom is called *she* we would not argue that she must be alive as a woman. Similarly, we find *love* personified in the New Testament as well as *sin* and *blood*. (1 Cor. 13:4-7; Rom. 7:11; Heb. 12:24) How different is it to speak of the Holy Spirit as being 'grieved' and to speak of love as *trusting, hoping, not easily angered, not proud, not boasting, rejoicing and not self-seeking?*

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God—not God, the Holy Spirit. It comes *from* God and can function in any manner or form God decides to have it function. It is *alive*, just as his word is *alive*, and can *judge*, because it actively impacts the purpose for which it is given. (Heb. 4:12) As respects Christians, the implanting of God's Holy Spirit in their hearts is designed to lead and transform their personality into the image (likeness) of Christ. That goal and purpose can be resisted by an individual and in that way defeat the purpose or "grieve" God's Spirit—obstruct or hinder its intended purpose. In this regard, consider what we read in Isaiah regarding Yahweh's dealings with his covenant people by means of his Spirit, and *their* grieving of it:

"In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence

saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them. Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people—where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in open country, they did not stumble; like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name."—Isaiah 63:9-14

The Spirit "grieved" by the behavior of his people, was God's personal Spirit, which is holy. In the Old Testament the spirit is virtually always spoken of as "the Spirit of God." In other words, it is something God possesses and uses in various ways. It is never presented as a separate entity. To resist, deny or otherwise rebel against that Spirit, in whatever form or nature it takes, is to resist, deny or rebel against its source—God. The dramatic effects of Moses' use of that Spirit referred to above as the "glorious arm of power," were convincing proof that God was acting in behalf of his people. Men can sin against this Spirit—this extension of God's power manifested in various ways. And, it would be a serious mistake to view the function and description of the Holy Spirit as *primitively* presented in the Old Testament. There was nothing primitive about it, and we have parallels in the New Testament.

When Jesus was doing powerful works of healing by "the Spirit of God" (Matt. 12:28), or "the finger of God" (Luke 11:20), it was unforgivable to attribute that manifestation of God's holy power to an evil source. Because the Pharisees did that, they were judged wicked by the Lord, and he could say, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."—Matt. 12:30-32.

The Pharisees directed their animosity toward Jesus. He was the one they were dealing with and they were unwilling to acknowledge "*the finger of God*," manifested in his ministry. They thought they were only dealing with Jesus, a man they both feared and hated. But, because Jesus was exercising the spirit's power, they were, in effect, sinning against the source of that power—God! They were eye-witnesses to the effects of that power (the healing of a demon-possessed man who had been both blind and mute) and labeling the source of that power as from Beelzebub, the prince of demons. This judgment by them was inexcusable and unforgivable. They were looking at the man, Jesus, and making a judgment of *him* from their biased perspective. They did not appreciate that they were really making a wicked judgment against God's "finger"—his holy spirit. I believe the same was true of Ananias and Sapphira. They lied *directly to men* (the apostles or their representatives) but, in effect, they were lying to the holy spirit of God which was working in and through these men in visible, powerful ways.

I deliberately avoided capitalizing "holy spirit" in the above paragraph. This is grammatically proper in English. Translators elect to capitalize it due to tradition—not English grammar nor the Greek text from which the English is translated. We must keep in mind that Bible scholars and translators bring to their writings and translations their own perspective. They have the editorial right to render the text in a style of English and capitalization that reflects that perspective. As we saw earlier in this treatise, these same

men have chosen to remove the divine name from its rightful place in the Bible text and substitute it with other common words. What motivates these choices is not mine to determine, but I mention that here because capitalizing "holy spirit" suggests to the average English reader the concept of a personality whose name happens to be "Holy Spirit." In reality, "holy" indicates the quality or nature of God's spirit. However, whether one decides that the Holy Spirit is an *agent* or an *agency* is irrelevant to our inquiry here. Even if one accepts the idea that the Holy Spirit is a person, that would not in itself prove the trinitarian view. The trinity doctrine asserts that the Holy Spirit is *God* and, as such, co-equal with the Father and the Son.

Professor Erickson says that the Spirit's ministries are "direct ministries," not performed "through the Father or the Son." That is misleading. The apostle Peter explained the remarkable display of God's Spirit at Pentecost as a fulfillment of Joel's prophesy in which God was pouring out his Spirit on all people. He went on to say, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." (Acts 2:17, 32, 33) By what stretch of the imagination can it be argued that the Holy Spirit acted independently? Jesus received it from God, after which he poured it out. The language and sense is that the Spirit was acted upon—it (or he) did not act independently of either the Father or the Son. The Father acted and the Son acted but the Holy Spirit functioned.

The Holy Spirit does not dialog with the Father or the Son in the Bible. We never read of the Holy Spirit's love for us as we read of the Father's love and the Son's love for us. While the Father expresses his love for his Son, he never expresses his love for the Holy Spirit. Nor do we ever read of the Holy Spirit expressing love for the Father or the Son. He is never seen in heavenly visions, as the Father and the Son are seen. Nor does he have a personal name as does the Father and the Son. He (or it) is not distinguished in the ultimate creation of a new heavens and a new earth. In the glorious heavenly scene of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21), and the climactic conclusion drawn in the final chapter (22), there is no mention of the Holy Spirit, but it does speak of God, the bride, and the Lamb. In short, the Holy Spirit is not presented in Scripture as a person, at least not in the same way as the Father and the Son are presented as persons. The difficulty this presents (in Scripture) to the Trinitarian concept is frankly acknowledged:

"B. Status of the Holy Spirit. The NT treatment of the Spirit is difficult, ambiguous, and sometimes even oblique to the interests of later trinitarianism."—*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, (Trinity), page 916

"2. Divinity of the Spirit. Evidence for the divinity of the Spirit is thinner and hazier than symmetrical fifth-century trinitarian statements suggest (cf. Athanasian Creed, above). 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."—*Ibid*, page 916

Finally, in John's gospel, we have the Holy Spirit identified as an advocate. The Greek word used to define this role is *parákletos*, a noun which is assigned a masculine gender in Greek. The word is translated variously as "Comforter," "Counselor," "Advocate" and "Helper." Jesus identified this counselor as "the Spirit of truth. (John 14:16, 17). This Spirit of truth would support, train, teach, encourage and strengthen the disciples in the Lord's physical absence. This Spirit of truth is also the "Spirit of Christ." (Rom. 8:9-11) Trinitarians are convinced that the paraclete is the third person of the triune God. All I can

say in response to that is that the Bible doesn't put matters that way. I agree with the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, that the New Testament does not lend itself to Trinitarianism. There are *functions* of the Spirit that *suggest* personality but those functions do not *insist* upon personality. And I definitely believe that without the overlay of the Trinitarian concept one would never equate the Spirit with the Father and the Son as part of a triune God. Once that concept was adopted, however, and declared "orthodox," the Scriptures could never again be allowed to make the final statement in this matter. The triune concept would be written into the Scriptures from that time forward. And I think that is most unfortunate.

THE ALPHA AND OMEGA: "'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

When we begin reading the book of Revelation, we are introduced to several personages: **(1)** God, **(2)** Jesus Christ, **(3)** an angel, and **(4)** John. (Rev. 1:1) After being told that what follows is a revelation about Jesus Christ given to Jesus Christ by God, to show to his servants and transmitted to the apostle John by an angel, we are provided with a greeting from John. "Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." (Rev. 1:4, 5) From the start we have the clear, defining descriptions of both the Father and the Son. Their identities are never mingled or blurred in the book of Revelation. It is the one sitting on the throne (God), who is spoken of as the one, "who is, and who was, and who is to come." A few verses later this one speaks: "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'" (1:8) The context clearly shows that it is the Father who is speaking and calling himself the "Alpha and the Omega." The *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, makes the following comment on Revelation 1:8:

"*The Lord* is most often used in the New Testament of Jesus, a usage which is found in Revelation (xi. 8, xxii.20, etc.). But more often it refers in this book to the Father, as it does here. Revelation is concerned with the problems of power and this verse gives expression early in the book to the conviction that God is sovereign. *Alpha and Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and mean much the same as the following *the beginning and the ending*. God was before all things, and nothing survives Him. His eternity is brought out also in *which is, and which was, and which is to come* (see on verse 4). The final expression, *the Almighty*, carries on the thought that none can resist the power of God, though we should bear in mind that the word denotes not so much the exercise of naked power as the all-embracing sovereignty which God exercises."—*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 20, p. 50, (Italics in original). **Note:** "*the beginning and the ending*," (Rev. 1:8, *King James Version*) is not present in the Greek text, and omitted in modern Bibles.

The next occurrence of the *Alpha and Omega* title is found in chapter 21, and again it is clear that the person speaking is the Father.

"He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.'" (21:5-7)

The *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, on this section of verses, agrees that the speaker is the Father.

"6. It appears that we have the words of God again. *It is done* should be read as a plural, 'they are done'. This probably refers to all the events that had to take place. To troubled Christians the future seemed problematical. The firm word of God reassures them. He is in command and in the end all things work out just as he wills. *I am Alpha and Omega* (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet) followed by *the beginning and the end* (cf. i. 8, xxii. 13) reveals God as the Originator and Completer of all things."—*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 20, p. 246 (Italics in original).

The third and last occurrence of the *Alpha and Omega* statement is found in the last chapter of Revelation, and it is in this occurrence, commentaries say, that Jesus Christ is identified as the *Alpha and Omega*. The setting is a vision of the heavenly New Jerusalem as shown to John by God's angel, and the grand benefits that will flow from the throne of God and the Lamb to the people of the nations by means of it. To get a feel for the final *Alpha and Omega* statement found in chapter 22:13, and who is speaking, the section from verse 3 through 15 is quoted below:

"Every accursed thing shall disappear. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see him face to face, and bear his name on their foreheads. There shall be no more night, nor will they need the light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will give them light; and they shall reign for evermore.

Then he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord God who inspires the prophets has sent his angel to show his servants what must shortly happen. And, remember, I am coming soon!'

Happy is the man who heeds the words of prophecy contained in this book! It is I, John, who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell in worship at the feet of the angel who had shown them to me. But he said to me, 'No, not that! I am but a fellow-servant with you and your brothers the prophets and those who heed the words of this book. It is God you must worship.' Then he told me, 'Do not seal up the words of prophecy in this book, for the hour of fulfillment is near. Meanwhile, let the evil-doer go on doing evil and the filthy-minded wallow in his filth, but let the good man persevere in his goodness and the dedicated man be true to his dedication.'

'Yes, I am coming soon, and bringing my recompense with me, to requite everyone according to his deeds! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.' Happy are those who wash their robes clean! They will have the right to the tree of life and will enter by the gates of the city. Outside are dogs, sorcerers and fornicators, murderers and idolaters, and all who love and practice deceit."—Revelation 22:3-15 *New English Bible*

It appears to be the Lord God who is speaking in the first paragraph of the quotation above which closes with the declaration, "*I am coming soon.*" In the third paragraph that declaration is repeated, "*Yes, I am coming soon.*" And the very next sentence identifies the speaker as the *Alpha and Omega*. I see no reason to conclude that the title *cannot* be attributed to the Father (the Lord God) here as it clearly is in the two other appearances. At the same time, I can appreciate the application to Jesus by the way the text is divided

into paragraphs and sub-headings by modern English Bibles. How the text is formatted has an impact on our understanding of it. For example, the *New International Version* adds a caption between verses six and seven which reads: "*Jesus Is Coming*" This suggests to the reader that everything said from verse seven onward, is being spoken by Jesus. If one understands matters that way, then it is easy to conclude that the *Alpha and Omega* title belongs to Jesus in verse thirteen. Verse seven, however, does not identify the speaker for us. The first *specific* identity of Jesus as the speaker does not come until ten verses later in verse sixteen which reads: "'I, Jesus, have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches, 'I am the Scion and offspring of David, the bright star of dawn.' I believe John consistently identifies the "Lord God" (the Father) as the *Alpha and Omega* in Revelation. However, the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, sees things differently. Leon Morris, who is the contributor to the Revelation portion, while acknowledging that the two previous occurrences applied to the Father, argues that the *Alpha and Omega* statement here, applies to Jesus:

"**13.** In i. 8 (where see note) and again in xxi. 6 the Lord God has said that He is *Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end*. Now the identical expression is applied by the risen Christ to Himself, with the addition *the first and the last*. All three expressions mean much the same and they set Christ apart from all created being. None other than God could share in these titles of God."—*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 20, p. 260 (Italics in original).

It is true that several verses *following* the last appearance of the *Alpha and Omega* title Jesus is the speaker, but this may be a summary statement of the book, as a whole, and not to the verses just preceding. In fact, *The Jerusalem Bible* heads the final verses in this chapter (16-21) as an *Epilogue*, which separates it from what has gone before and begins as shown below.

"Epilogue"

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to make these revelations to you for the sake of the churches. I am of David's line, the root of David and the bright star of the morning. The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' Let everyone who listens answer, 'Come.' *Then let all who are thirsty come:*" all who want it may *have the water of life, and have it free.*"—Rev. 22:16, 17, *The Jerusalem Bible*. (Italics in original).

Like the insertion of "*Jesus Is Coming*" before verse seven in the *NIV*, the word "*Epilogue*" is inserted by the *JB* before verse sixteen. How appropriate these are in these instances must be evaluated by the reader. I don't believe it strains credibility to assign the *Alpha and Omega* title to God in chapter 22. Doing so maintains a consistency of its use elsewhere in Revelation. And, I believe, the thought content of the verses leading up to it in the *Alpha and Omega* declaration of 22:13, clearly identify the Lord God as the main figure represented by the angel and the one who speaks in verse thirteen.

Some suggest that this use of *Alpha and Omega* must be applied to Jesus Christ, and it may indeed refer to him in this context. However, it must be remembered that the Father and Son share a number of titles, such as Lord, God, Savior, Judge, etc, but from different perspectives. For example, when Mary, pregnant with Jesus, visited Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist, Mary sang out: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1: 46, 47) Later, when Jesus was born, the angel of God exclaimed to the shepherds, "'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is

Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10, 11) The Father is our Savior because he loved us enough to provide a way to free us from sin and death. (John 3:16) Jesus is also our Savior because he was willing to surrender his sinless human life on behalf of the life of the world. (Matt 20:28) Both are our Savior, but from different perspectives.

The same reasoning can apply to the title *Alpha and Omega* (first and last). The Father is certainly ‘first and last.’ As the eternal, almighty God, his authority and will determines the beginning and ending of all things. From a slightly different perspective, the Son is also the ‘first and last’ because everything God has done has been through him. The Son is ‘first’ in relation to all others. He is ‘last’ in that he will crown with success all that the Father has authorized and empowered him to accomplish. He has no successors. Applying the same title to the Father and Son does not prove that they are the same person nor that there is no distinction between them. I believe the way each one is presented throughout the Scriptures makes this very clear.

THE GODHEAD: “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”—Colossians 2:9, King James Version.

This text is taken to mean, by some, that *the man*, Jesus Christ, is being spoken about. That is, while Jesus was born of a woman and lived as a human he was also, at one and the same time, the Almighty God! It is part of the dual-nature concept that Trinitarians see in Scripture. These sentiments are expressed by Albert Barnes, who offers his understanding of what we are being told in the above text:

“The language is such as would be obviously employed on the supposition that God became incarnate, and appeared in human form; and there is no other idea which it so naturally expresses, nor is there any other which it can be *made* to express without a forced construction. The meaning is, that it was not any *one* attribute of the Deity that became incarnate in the Saviour; that he was not merely endowed with the knowledge, *or* the power, *or* the wisdom of God; but that the whole Deity thus became incarnate, and appeared in human form; comp. John xiv. 9; i 18, . No language could, therefore, more clearly demonstrate the divinity of Christ. Of what mere man—of what angel, could it be used?”—*Notes on the New Testament*, Vol. 12, page 263 (Italics in original)

It is clear, from the reading of the apostle Paul’s letter to the Christian community in Colossae, that he is arguing for the superiority of Jesus Christ above any other spiritual power or dominion. Apparently, there was a heresy infecting or threatening the Colossian church that involved some form of angelic worship. This is at least suggested when he says, “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.” (Col. 2:18) Paul summarizes for them why they should focus on Christ and no one else.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have the first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.—Col. 1:15-20, *New Revised Standard Version*

In saying what he does, Paul is not limiting himself to the years of Jesus' humanity. Paul traverses his pre-existence as well as his post-resurrection (glorified) existence. It is neither necessary, nor accurate, to apply to the man Jesus Christ, all that is said about his pre-existence or post-resurrection existence. The preeminence he had as the firstborn of all creation was set aside when he became a man and lived a life of servitude and sacrifice. (Matt. 20:28) Once resurrected he was exalted to the right hand of God and all creation was placed under his lordship. (Phil. 2:9-11)

Paul begins by identifying the one now glorified as "the firstborn of all creation," and that "all things have been created through him and for him." He further distinguishes him by saying, "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" This is but another way of saying he was made in the image of the invisible God *before* he became flesh. In other words, it pleased God to *endow* him with his own nature. The meaning is well summarized by *Today's English Version*, which reads, "For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God."—Col. 1:19

The word "Godhead" doesn't, in itself, convey a precise meaning and can therefore mean different things to different people. The *King James Version* uses the term 'Godhead' in three places: Acts 17:29, Rom. 1:20 and Col. 2:9. In Acts 17:29 the Greek word *theiodes* is translated "Godhead." Modern English Bibles use words like "divine being" (*NIV*), "the deity" (*JB, NRSV*), "his nature" (*TEV*), and "Divine Nature" (*NASV*). In Romans 1:20, the Greek word *theotēs*, translated "Godhead" in the *King James Version*, is rendered "divine nature" (*NIV, TEV, NRSV, NASV*), and "deity" (*JB, RSV, NEB*). In Colossians 2:9 the same word is translated "divine nature" (*TEV*), "fulness of the Deity" (*NIV, RSV*), "fulness of divinity" (*JB*), "Godhead" (*NEB*), "fulness of Deity" (*NASV*), and "fulness of Deity" (*NRSV*). The only thing these words consistently confirm is that "it was God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God." (Col. 1:19 *TEV*). The conclusion to the matter is that the Word shared the Father's nature. This nature was singularly his and not shared by angels.

This does not insist that he retained that nature when becoming a human. In fact, it insists that he did not retain it. In becoming man he had to be like us in every way. John tells us the Word became flesh. (John 1:14). The way in which he became flesh is clearly described for us in the Gospels. A Jewish girl, named Mary, became pregnant in a miraculous way. The child she was to give birth to would be called God's Son because of the nature of her conception. (Luke 1:26-38) While Adam was a son of God, Jesus was uniquely so. (Luke 3:38, 1:31, 32) He laid aside a heavenly, spiritual nature with all the glory, power and majesty that nature held, to become one composed of human nature, with all the limitations that flesh and blood nature dictates. (Phil.2:5-11)

Rector John R. W. Stott says that if Jesus "was not God in human flesh, "Christianity is exploded." (See page 65.) Another Christian pastor recently wrote: "If Jesus were merely a creature, His death would not have been of sufficient value to atone for our sins." (Keith Plummer, pastor of Our Savior Evangelical Free Church, *Moody* magazine, Nov.-Dec., 1998, page 24.) And Albert Barnes dismisses the idea that Jesus was a mere man. These declarations pretty much represent the trinitarian view of matters. But, are they true? We must ask ourselves, according to the Scriptures, what validated Jesus' sacrifice? What made it of such great value that it could serve as a ransom to redeem the whole human family? What do the Scriptures say in this regard? It is appropriate that we allow God's Word to address this important salvation issue. And as we look at the evidence we should ask ourselves if the Scriptures suggest that something more than human nature was needed.

"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son

of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink...Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."—John 6:53-56

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. . . But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many...For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."—Romans 5:12, 15, 17-19.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations."—Ephesians 2:13-15

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death. . . For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."—Hebrews 2:14, 17

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."—1 John 1:7

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom.."—Ephesians 1:7

What Made Jesus' Flesh and Blood Sacrifice So Precious Was Its Sinless Nature.

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.'... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree—1 Peter 2:21, 22, 24

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."—2 Corinthians 5:21

"How much more, then, will the blood of the Christ, through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God."—Hebrews 9:14

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you

from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”–1 Peter 1:18, 19

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are–yet was without sin.”–Hebrews 4:15

A MERE MAN?

Who can read the above verses and say it means nothing unless he was also God? Where in the explanation of how we are put right with God are we told that only a God-man could die for our sins? Over and over again the scriptures clearly say that it was Jesus’ **FLESH and BLOOD–HIS HUMANITY** that was sacrificed for us. It was a flesh and blood man (Adam) who sinned and forfeited life for himself and his unborn children. It was the “last” Adam, the flesh and blood, sinless man, who died to redeem what Adam forfeited. (1 Cor. 15:45) What could be clearer? The sinless lamb of God offered a corresponding sacrifice to cover what had been lost. To say that if Jesus “were merely a creature, His death would not have been of sufficient value to atone for our sins,” is to denigrate and belittle that human sacrifice.

When we come together to memorialize that atoning sacrifice what elements do we use to remind us of the precious life that was surrendered for us? We use simple bread to represent his precious human body, and we drink the wine that represents the precious blood that gave life to that sinless body. When we do this we are focusing on **The Man!** Not a *mere* man—a mere creature, but the **sinless Son of Man.**

During the days of our Lord’s humanity he endured and suffered. He felt the limitations his humanity placed upon him and he constantly appealed to God in prayer. He was limited in strength and endurance. He learned powerful lessons in the process which makes him a more merciful high priest. This extraordinary man set aside every honorable desire that a perfect, sinless human being would naturally have. All his skills, abilities and interests were surrendered to his consummate desire to please his Father and finish the self-sacrificing mission set before him. His “food” was to do the will of him who sent him and in everything he did, he did with a heart full of compassion and affection for us—the sinful descendants of Adam. (John 4:34) Included in that human body that hung on the tree was this sterling quality of life. This is the man I see. A mere man?—by no means, but an unblemished, precious, loving, humble, tender, principled and courageous man. *It was this man,* together with his moral excellence and sinless human nature that was sacrificed for you and me!

For his willingness to set aside his unique place and spirit nature alongside God in order to become a flesh and blood man, he has been exalted to God’s right hand and given all authority and power. He now has regained all that he originally set aside and much, much more. Everyone in heaven and earth and under the earth must bend the knee in submission to him as Lord. This most worthy Lord will reign as “King of kings and Lord of lords,” until he has vanquished all of God’s enemies. (Rev. 17:14) His reign will see the restoration of all things according to the will and purpose of God. (Eph. 1:9, 10) When all of that is accomplished, he will willingly surrender it all to God and subject himself to God, so that God may be all in all. This is what we read in Scripture.

THE BEGINNING OF GOD’S CREATION: *“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.’”–Revelation 3:14 Revised Standard Version*

As we have seen, one of the great debates that occupied the church fathers was the matter of the Word's eternity. (John 1:1). You will also recall that Arius (and others), called attention to the Son being the "begotten," and that suggested a time when he was not. Subsequent councils decided that this was heretical because the Word, like God, did not have a beginning; he existed from all past eternity just as the Father had existed from all past eternity. The text above, and others that reflect the same idea, have been used by those who think of the Word as having a beginning. When they hear the Lord speaking of himself as, "the beginning of God's creation," they believe they are being told that he was the first one created by God. Those who cannot accept this say, "No, the Lord doesn't mean he was the first to be created, but the "origin" or "the source" of creation. In this way the Lord places himself outside of the created order of things here." How do we determine which point of view is the most probable? The word we are primarily concerned with here is the one translated "beginning" in the *Revised Standard Version*, quoted above. Before we look at the Greek word which it translates we can consider how several other modern English Bibles translate the word in question, which is the Greek word *arche* (The English word selected is in italics).

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the *ruler* of God's creation."—*New International Version*

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'This is the message from the Amen, the faithful and true witness, who is the *origin* of all that God has created.'"—*Today's English Version*

"Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea and say, 'Here is the message of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the *ultimate source* of God's creation.'"—*The Jerusalem Bible*

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the *Beginning* of the creation of God, says this:"—*New American Standard Bible* (Note: a footnote at the word "Beginning," reads: "origin or source.")

"Then write this to the angel of the Church in Laodicea: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the *beginning* of God's creation"—*Phillips Modern English*

These several translations give us a general idea of how *arche* is to be understood at Revelation 3:14, by modern translators. On the surface, it seems a stretch to go from 'beginning,' which was more commonly used in earlier translations of this century, to 'ruler' or 'ultimate source.' The word *arche* appears in the New Testament 56 times and the *New International Version* translates it "beginning" (31 times), "first" (5), "rulers" (5), "corners" (2), "power" (2), "all along" (1), "demons" (1), "dominion" (1), "early" (1), "elementary" (2), "elementary truths" (1), "powers" (1), "rule" (1) and "ruler" (1).

We see that the *NIV* usually translates *arche* as "beginning," but uses a number of other English words to translate it in other places. Revelation 3:14, is the only place "ruler" (singular) is used by the *NIV* translators to translate *arche*. Because this matter is important to our inquiry regarding the relationship between the Father and the Son, it is right to explore the matter further. The best way to do that is by looking at how the Bible writers used it.

Next to the number of times the *NIV* translates the word as "beginning," the most common thought represented by the word has to do with power, preeminence and authority of some sort. Why this is so can

be appreciated by what biblical lexicographers tell us about the nuances of the word. *Arche* is discussed to a considerable extent in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, which says the following:

A. The General and Philosophical Use of αρχη:

αρχη always signifies 'primacy,' whether in time: 'beginning,' *principium*, or in rank: 'power,' 'dominion,' 'office.'"—Vol. 1, page 479

By looking at a number of scriptures that contain the word in different settings we can better appreciate the range of thought invested in it. In the quotations below, the different English words used in the *New International Version* to translate the Greek word *arche* are in italics.

"And having disarmed the *powers* and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."—Colossians 2:15

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the *rulers* and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Ephesians 3:10, 11

"Therefore let us leave the *elementary* teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God."—Hebrews 6:1

"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all *dominion*, authority and power."—1 Corinthians 15:24

From the appearance of *arche* in the Greek text in the above verses, we can appreciate that constantly rendering it 'beginning' in English simply would not fit. Does that mean that 'ruler' is the better choice over 'beginning' at Revelation 3:14? Not necessarily. It is one of those situations, I believe, where one's theology weighs as heavily, if not more heavily, than grammar when approaching the text. If we keep in mind that the word carries with it the basic idea of *primacy*, it will help us make an informed judgment of how it ought to be viewed here. Regarding the use of *arche* at Revelation 3:14 the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, has a footnote offering two possibilities:

"The principle and origin of creation," (Had. Apk., *ad loc.*). Otherwise the usage reflects Rabbinic influence and the Messiah is before the world, yet Himself created ('481 on Jn. 1:1)."—*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, page 484.

If one decides that *ruler* best expresses the sense of what is presented in Revelation 3:14, he will probably conclude that the idea of supremacy over creation is meant. If one decides that Jesus is including himself in creation as the primary one—the *beginning* one—in that order, they will think of him as the first within creation. One has to decide what they think the apostle John meant to say. It would not be wise to completely trust the translator's choice of words as he brings his own presuppositions to the text. Because the nature of this question is critical to our investigation it would be wise to look at another section of scripture that addresses this matter, namely, Colossians 1:15-20.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers [*arche*] or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in

him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning [*arche*], the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”– Col. 1:15-20 *New Revised Standard Version*.

What are we being told here? That Jesus Christ is “the image of God,” which I believe to be just another way of saying he was endowed with “the fullness of God.” Other scriptures confirm his being the exact reflection of God in his nature and I believe that is what is being stressed here. (Heb. 1:3, 4) The primary thrust of Paul’s words seem to be that “he might come to have first place in everything.” The various matters that Paul touches on in this regard, underscore that. Among other things, he is called “the firstborn of all creation.” That could be taken to mean that he was the very first to be brought forth (begotten), and through him everything else was created. This understanding would not violate the Lord’s primacy nor would it violate Greek grammar here. While trinitarian scholars reject that conclusion they acknowledge that it is linguistically possible, according to Greek grammar:

“He is supreme, first of all, in creation, being described as ‘the firstborn of all creation’ (RV). This must not be twisted, as it often has been, to mean that Christ stands at the apex of creation, but is still a created being. On purely grammatical grounds it would be possible to take the phrase with this meaning. Thus ‘all creation’ would be the totality of which the Son is the firstborn, and the genitive would then be partitive or qualifying. But the context rules this out completely. We must therefore take the genitive as being qualified by the element ‘first’ in the compound ‘firstborn’. This then underlines the Son’s primacy. He is begotten of the Father, not created; and as *firstborn*, *prototokos*, He is before all creation.”–*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 12, page 42.

The great objection to the inclusion of Jesus Christ in the creative order is that it denies his being uniquely “begotten of the Father, not created.” Somehow, in the minds of trinitarians, being “begotten” gets around ever having a beginning at some point. Frankly, I don’t see the logic in that reasoning. If he was “begotten” then *something* happened! At what point was he begotten? How can it be said that he always was and yet say he was begotten? The very word suggests, at least, a generation of some sort—or coming into being. If it wasn’t creation, was it generation? Why speak of one you say eternally existed and then, in the next breath, insist that he was begotten? What Bible text explains to us or demonstrates that one begotten could also have also forever existed in the past without an origin of some kind at some point? I know of none. It comes down to fighting over the meaning of words—the definitions of which, become the prerogative of those who insist on using them.

I don’t believe the Bible was written to be interpreted in this way. (2 Tim. 2: 14) Frankly, whether you believe he was the firstborn of creation or think of him uniquely generated (begotten) before creation would not significantly change or do violence to the biblical truth that he is supreme over all others except God. Keep in mind that Paul is arguing for the glorified Lord’s supremacy and priority over all celestial beings and dominions in Colossians. Paul clearly establishes that here as well as elsewhere in his writings. The glorified Son of God does have primacy over all creation. But Paul is not arguing that he is equal to God! That is an entirely different matter. He is pointing out the various ways the Lord must be viewed as the “firstborn.” He is never, here or anywhere else, presented as equal to God in position or authority. I am content to accept that the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who existed as the Word, became flesh, lived and died a

sacrificial death, was resurrected and exalted to the right hand of God, is truly uniquely-one of a kind. But he is not God.

SUMMARY OF THE TRINITARIAN CONCEPT

What has been presented in the foregoing section on the development of the Trinitarian concept and the scriptures often used to support this doctrine has not been exhaustive, but I believe it has covered the typical arguments advanced by Trinitarians. There are basically three reasons why I reject this concept:

- 1 .** It is not taught in the Bible.
- 2.** Scriptures used to read the concept *into* the Bible are far too weak and often distort the plain statements of Scripture.
- 3.** It was conceived and given birth to in those centuries following the apostolic church that witnessed a progressive and pervasive deterioration of the apostolic church, both doctrinally and functionally. It makes no sense to me to conclude that during this degenerating period of the church that perfection in salvation doctrine was being finalized. I think it is both sad and tragic that modern Christian scholars find it necessary to defend and argue for Platonic concepts that were synthesized with biblical Christianity. This mixing of oil and water has resulted in great harm to both doctrinal matters and congregational function. The creation of classes or orders within the church destroyed the true nature of the leadership our Lord ordained for his church.

One of the most useful lessons this study has taught me is that words in the Bible do not have rigid, uniform meanings. There are shades of meanings or nuances present in many original language words. The word, "God" is used to identify powerful human dignitaries as well as the almighty God. The word, "Lord" can be used as nothing more than a title of respect or it can carry great dignity when applied to Jesus Christ and supreme honor when applied to the Father. A word meaning to "bow down" or "kneel" may indicate an act of worship, reverence or simply a gesture of respect. How these words are used and to be understood must be determined by the context in which they are found. Translators are called upon to make choices of English words to represent the meaning presented in the Hebrew or Greek text, and these choices are influenced by their own theology. They sometimes cross over from translator to expositor. Their scholarly bias can and does color what we read in the Bible.

Through it all, the Bible is clear enough to teach a message consistent with itself. This consistency becomes apparent when the whole Bible (Old Testament and New Testament) is viewed as a single unity and given equal authority. Irreparable harm was done to the Bible when the church fathers wrenched it away from its Hebraic roots. The relationship between the Father and the Son can only be understood when it is seen in relation to those roots. I am also convinced that salvation doctrines are clearly taught in Scripture. Any additional "authority," whether it be church fathers, popes, or other prophets or seers, raised up to further clarify scriptural truth only serves to muddy the clear waters of truth. I believe the light of truth shined brilliantly during the days of Jesus' ministry and the subsequent period in which the New Testament documents were created. If some matters were not dealt with as clearly or as completely as we would have liked them to be, we should not allow that to discomfort us in some way or seek to presumptuously fill in what we consider gaps in the divine record. Jude found it necessary, early on, to say: "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that God has once for all entrusted to the saints." (Jude 1:3) That need continues to be our need.

I see the Father and Son relationship basically as those terms suggest. They are given to us by God so we can grasp that relationship from a human point of view. The Father is the head of Jesus Christ, just as the Christ is the head of his church and as the man is head of the woman. (1 Cor. 11:3) This simple truth is repeatedly reinforced throughout the Bible in a variety of ways. Everything begins with the Father—everything *flows from* him. Everything *flows through* his Son. The authority and power that the Lord Jesus Christ now has and exercises has been *given* him by the Father. It has pleased the Father to do this and he wants all creation to serve his Son. Doing this glorifies the Father as well as the Son. (Phil. 2:9-11) The Son is the perfect representation of the Father—his *alter ego*, but is never presented as equal in position or power with the Father. (Heb. 1:8, 9)

In the immeasurable past was the 'Word' always there—without an origin of some nature? What we do know for a certainty is that "in the beginning" he was. If you carefully look at the Trinitarian confession you will find *the idea of generation* suggested in relation to God's Son. In any event, he is presented to us as superior to all created things. No doubt the best and safest way to address this matter is by limiting ourselves to the language of Scripture and avoid the temptation of reading *into* Scripture our particular slant on things. If we do offer an opinion, we should make sure that we present it as such.

Something we need to keep in mind when considering this matter is that time is a human measure. There was no such thing as time in the sense that we think of time before the creation of the heavens and the earth. It was first, then, when the "lights in the expanse of the sky" appeared to "mark seasons and days and years." (Gen. 1:14) When we get to talking about things that took place before creation—before time—we get into a sphere of reality we know absolutely nothing about. We run into the same trouble when we start talking about God's form or substance. Again, we haven't the slightest idea of what we are talking about. Our God is incomprehensible. When we start talking about what "stuff" God is composed of we are talking out of a profound ignorance. Men may invent words to describe what we cannot know and attach their own meanings to those words, but that doesn't change the reality that we simply do not know. Similarly, we cannot know when the one called the "Word" (*logos*) appeared or how he came to be, or if there was a time when he was not. In the unmeasured epoch which preceded creation, we are not told what happened or how it happened. Whether we place the pre-existent Word within creation or set him apart from it doesn't change the fact that he became flesh.

We know we must look to Christ for all things at this time because it has pleased the Father to submit all things and all creatures to him. He died for us and he now lives for us. He will judge us, he will resurrect us, he will give us immortal life, he is the head of his body, the church and we gladly bow down before him as our Lord and King. In doing this we know we please the Father who has ordained it to be so. In time, Christ's rule will accomplish the complete will of the Father.

THE CHALLENGE TO US

In time all of the unknowns will be made known. Until then we must be content with what God has been pleased to give us—and what a wonderfully full and enriching storehouse that is! We are fully informed about ourselves and our condition, our needs and what God has done to satisfy those needs. We are fully informed as to what lies ahead—beyond the horizon of this present age. I'm convinced that what we must know and believe is fully and completely presented to us in Scripture. The real challenge, as I see it, is not knowing what to believe or what God asks of us, but the spiritual strength to faithfully live out those things from moment-to-moment and from day-to-day. Jesus tells us, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:17) That is our

challenge.

We need to work for the advancement of the cause of God in Christ. In Christian community we have the opportunity to show a spirit of humble service towards others who make up Christ's body. We cannot control or dictate what others may believe or tell them how they ought to live their lives—that is their responsibility. We can only speak and act faithfully to God's revealed word and will as we understand it. And we can do that with a genuinely mild, humble and teachable spirit. We are called to worship one God and serve one Lord. The Scriptures clearly identify who they are, of their profound relationship to each another and of our profound relationship with them. This is what the good news is all about. As for the rest, we will just have to wait.

"Now we know only a little, and even the gift of prophecy reveals little! But when the end comes, these special gifts will all disappear. It's like this: When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now. There are three things that will endure—faith, hope and love—and the greatest of these is love."—1 Cor.13:9-13, *New Living Translation*.

— The End ---

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