

Old Paths

Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.
Jeremiah 6:16

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant.
Psalm 25:14

Vol. 11, No.4

Straight and Narrow

April 2002

Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement

By J. H. Waggoner

(For some time I have felt the need to reprint at least three chapters from J. H. Waggoner's book, The Atonement in the Light of Nature and Revelation. These chapters (4-6) deal with the death of Christ and how our view of the Godhead directly affects our understanding and appreciation of the atonement. In 1852, after working in the Baptist faith, Waggoner joined the advent movement and was an evangelist, author, and editor. In 1881 he succeeded James White as editor of Signs of the Times. The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia states that "Waggoner was an eloquent speaker, a good editor, and a most industrious worker. He wrote with clarity and precision." (p. 1564) A reading of this article will clearly attest to the last statement. The February issue of Old Paths began this reprint with chapter four. The March issue carried chapter five. This study is chapter six. Editor)

It will no doubt appear to many to be irreverent to speak thus of the doctrine of a trinity. But we think they must view the subject in a different light if they will calmly and candidly examine the arguments which we shall present. We know that we write with the deepest feelings of reverence for the Scriptures, and with the highest regard for every Scripture doctrine and Scripture fact. But reverence for the Scriptures does not necessarily embrace reverence for men's opinions of the Scriptures.

It is not our purpose to present any argument on the doctrine of the trinity, further than it has a bearing on the subject under consideration, namely, on the Atonement. And we are willing, confidently willing to leave the decision of the question with all who will carefully read our remarks, with an effort to divest themselves of prejudice, if they unfortunately possess it. The inconsistencies of Trinitarians, which must be pointed out to free the Scripture doctrine of the Atonement from reproaches under which it has too long lain, are the necessary outgrowth of their system of theology. No matter how able are the writers to whom we shall refer, they could never free themselves from inconsistencies without correcting their theology.

"The Spirit of Antichrist" Video

Another message has been completed in the "Good News About God" series. "The Spirit of Antichrist" message is now ready for distribution. This powerful message by Pastor David Clayton lays out the evil nature of the harlot's central doctrine, the Trinity. This message clearly shows how the Trinity doctrine is a denial that Jesus is the the Son of God; and a denial that Jesus Christ actually came in the flesh.

This message is available in both Adventist and non-Adventist formats. Copies may be requested from Smyrna and the suggested donation is \$7.00/video plus postage. The presentation is available in NTSC (U.S.) or PAL (Europe-Africa-Australia) formats. The suggested donation for audio cassettes is \$2.00/tape plus postage.

Allen Stump

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Many theologians really think that the Atonement, in respect to its dignity and efficacy, rests upon the doctrine of a trinity. But we fail to see any connection between the two. To the contrary, the advocates of that doctrine really fall into the difficulty which they seem anxious to avoid. Their difficulty consists in this: They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case. They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on *the dignity of the sacrifice* made for our redemption.

And here is shown how remarkably the widest extremes meet in theology. The highest Trinitarians and lowest Unitarians meet and are perfectly united on the death of Christ—the faith of both amounts to Socinianism. Unitarians believe that Christ was a prophet, an inspired teacher, but merely human; that his death was that of a human body only. Trinitarians hold that the term “Christ” comprehends two distinct and separate natures: one that was merely human; the other, the second person in the trinity, who dwelt in the flesh for a brief period, but could not possibly suffer, or die; that the Christ that died was only the human nature in which the divinity had dwelt. Both classes have a human offering, and nothing more. No matter how exalted the pre-existent Son was; no matter how glorious, how powerful, or even eternal; if the manhood only died, the sacrifice was only human. And so far as the vicarious death of Christ is concerned, this is Socinianism. Thus the

remark is just, that the doctrine of a trinity degrades the Atonement, resting it solely on a human offering as a basis. A few quotations will show the correctness of this assertion.

“*As God*, he obeyed all the requirements of the law, and made it honorable in the justification of sinners; as man, he bore its curse on the tree, and endured its penalty.”—*Manual of Atonement*, p. 25.

“The sufferings of Christ were endured in his human nature. Though possessing a divine nature, yet in that he could not suffer and die. His sufferings were endured in his human nature.” *Id.*, p. 88.

“It is no part of the doctrine of the Atonement that the divine nature, in the person of the Saviour, suffered.”—*Barnes on Atonement*, p. 224.

“It was meet that the mediator should be man, that he might be capable of suffering death; for, as God, he could not die.”—*Buck’s Theol. Dict., Art. Mediator*.

“Trinitarians do not hold to the sufferings or death of divinity.”—*Mattison on the Trin.*, p. 39.

“His mediation between God and man is chiefly in his human nature, in which alone he was capable of suffering and dying.”—*Scott on 1 Tim. 2:5*.

“I know not any scripture, fairly interpreted, that states the *divine nature* of our Lord to be *begotten* of God, or to be the *Son of God*.”—*Clarke on Heb. 1:8*.

“Is it to be wondered that the human body in which this fullness of the Godhead dwelt, and in which the punishment due to our sins was borne upon the tree, should be exalted above all human and all created things?”—*Id. on Phil. 2:9*.

Dr. Clarke says the apostle John doubtless directed his first letter

against the heretics then abounding. Of them he says:—

“The *Gnostics* even denied that Christ suffered; the AEon, or Divine Being that dwelt in the man Christ Jesus, according to them, left him when he was taken by the Jews,” &c.—*Note on 1 John 1:8*.

So far as that particular heresy of the Gnostics is concerned, it has become wide-spread and almost all-prevailing in the denominations of the present day. Indeed, we cannot see but Dr. Clarke himself was tinctured with it, according to the quotations given above.

We trust that we have shown to the full conviction of every one who “trembles at the word” of the Lord, that the Son of God, who was in the beginning, by whom the worlds were made, suffered death for us; the oft-repeated declarations of theological writers that a mere human body died are, by the Scriptures, proved untrue. These writers take the doctrine of a trinity for their basis, and assume that Christ is the second person in the trinity, and could not die. Again, they assume that death is not a cessation of life; and between the two unscriptural assumptions they involve themselves in numerous difficulties, and load the doctrine of the Atonement with unreasonable contradictions. We would not needlessly place ourselves in opposition to the religious feelings of any class, but in order to clear the doctrine of the Atonement from the consequences of these assumptions, we are compelled to notice some of the prominent arguments presented in favor of the doctrine of a trinity.

In the “*Manual of Atonement*,” 1 John 5:20 is quoted as containing most conclusive evidence of a trinity and of the Supreme Deity of Christ. It is there claimed that he is

called “the true God and eternal life.” The whole verse reads thus: “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” A person must be strongly wedded to a theory who can read this verse and not see the distinction therein contained between the true God and the Son of God. “We are in him that is true.” How? “In his Son Jesus Christ.” The distinction between Christ and the true God is most clearly shown by the Saviour’s own words in John 17:3: “That they might know *thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*”

Much stress is laid on Isa. 9:6, as proving a trinity, which we have before quoted, as referring to our High Priest who shed his blood for us. The advocates of that theory will say that it refers to a trinity because Christ is called the everlasting Father. But for this reason, with others, we affirm that it can have no reference to a trinity. Is Christ the Father in the trinity? If so, how is he the Son? or if he is both Father and Son, how can there be a trinity? for a *trinity* is *three* persons. To recognize a trinity, the distinction between the Father and Son must be preserved. Christ is called “the second person in the trinity;” but if this text proves a trinity, or refers to it at all, it proves that he is not the second, but the first. And if he is the first, who is the second? It is very plain that this text has no reference to such a doctrine.

In seeking an explanation of this text, we must bear in mind the work of Christ as brought to view in this and parallel passages. These words refer to the “child born,” the “son given,” who, as we have seen, bears

the title of God subordinate to his Father. And if an apostle could call himself the father of those whom he had begotten in the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4), how appropriately is this title applied to the Prince of Peace, who is, in a peculiar sense, the everlasting Father of all to whom he gives everlasting life. The New Jerusalem is called the Bride, the Lamb’s wife (Rev. 21); Christ of course is the Bridegroom, the husband. But Paul says Jerusalem above is our mother. Gal. 4:26. If so, why not her husband, the bridegroom, be our father? Surely there is nothing inappropriate in this. But, as the New Jerusalem is not the mother of the unregenerate, these being reckoned the children of the bondwoman, so Christ is not called their father. They are not his children, and he does not give them everlasting life. Therefore the title is applied to him in a subordinate and restricted sense. In its unrestricted and universal sense it applies only to the Supreme One, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Cor. 11:31; Eph. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3. [Editor’s note: Also see Isaiah 8:18 and Hebrews 2:13.]

John 12:40, 41, has been supposed to prove the Supreme Deity of Christ, and therefore a trinity. “These things said Esaias, when he saw his [Christ’s] glory, and spake of him.” This refers to Isa. 6, which chapter speaks of “the King, the Lord [Jehovah] of hosts;” and it is thence inferred that Christ is that Lord of hosts. But those who quote this in such a manner should know (and some of them do know) that there are two words in Isa. 6 rendered Lord, just as there are in Ps. 110:1, which says: “The LORD said unto my Lord.” The first is Jehovah; the second Adonai—the Father and Son. In Isa. 6:3, 5, 12, Jehovah is

used; in verses 1, 8, 11, Adonai is used. Now John 12:40 is a quotation from Isa. 6:10, which refers to Adonai, the Son, and not to Jehovah. Many have been misled by a wrong application of this text. Those who know the fact above stated cannot honestly use it as it has been used in theological controversies.

Jer. 23:5, 6 is supposed to afford decisive proof of a trinity, in that the “Branch” which is raised up unto David shall be called Jehovah. Clarke, in his commentary, gives the following rendering of this text, from Dr. Blayney: “And this is the name by which Jehovah shall call him, our righteousness.” He adds:—

“Dr. Blayney thus accounts for his translation: Literally, according to the Hebrew idiom,—and this is his name by which Jehovah shall call our righteousness; a phrase exactly the same as, ‘And Jehovah shall call him so,’ which implies that God would make him such as he called him, that is, our righteousness, or the Author and Means of our salvation and our acceptance. So that by the same metonymy Christ is said to ‘have been made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.’ 1 Cor. 1:30.

“I doubt not that some persons will be offended with me, for depriving them by this translation of a favorite argument for proving the Divinity of our Saviour from the Old Testament. But I cannot help it. I have done it with no ill design, but purely because I think, and am morally sure, that the text, as it stands, will not properly admit of any other construction. The *Septuagint* have so translated it before me in an age when there could not possibly be any bias or prejudice either *for* or *against* the forementioned doctrine—a doctrine which draws its

decisive proofs from the New Testament only.”

On this Dr. Clarke remarks: “I prefer the translation of Blayney to all others. . . . As to those who put the sense of their creed upon the words, they must be content to stand out of the list of Hebrew critics. I believe Jesus to be Jehovah, but I doubt much whether this text calls him so.”

We must be careful to distinguish between a *criticism* and an *opinion*. After clearly defining the doctrine of the text, Dr. Clarke tells us what he *believes*, which is not the doctrine of the text.

And we are constrained to question its being the doctrine of the Scriptures. There must be a distinction between the Father and the Son; and that must be precisely the distinction between Jehovah and his Anointed One, Jesus the Christ. We have recently read an argument by a man of undoubted ability, who endeavors to prove that Jesus is Jehovah, by comparing the words of the prophets with those of the New Testament. Thus, the prophets say that Jehovah is the Saviour of men, and the New Testament says that Jesus is the Saviour; therefore Jesus is Jehovah.

That is apparently, but not really, an argument. They who speak thus seem to forget the teachings of the New Testament, that *God was in Christ*, reconciling the world unto himself.” 2 Cor. 5:19. “For God so loved the world that *he gave* his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. And again Jesus said: “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.” “He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” “The words that I speak unto

you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” John 7:16; 8:29; 14:10. God hath indeed spoken unto us in these last days, but it is “by his Son.” Heb. 1:1, 2. It is very true, “that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” 1 John 5:11. The Son comes in the name of the Father; he represents the Father to the world; he accomplishes the will and purpose of the Father in redemption. As Christ is the Son of God, and the only representative of the Father, it could not be considered strange that he should bear the name and title of his father; “for it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.” Col. 1:19. But *the Son is not the Father*; and therefore it cannot be that Christ is Jehovah, but was sent of Jehovah to do his will and work, and to make known the counsels of his grace.

As before remarked, the great mistake of Trinitarians, in arguing this subject, is this: they make no distinction between a denial of a trinity and a denial of the divinity of Christ. They see only the two extremes, between which the truth lies; and take every expression referring to the pre-existence of Christ as evidence of a trinity. The Scriptures abundantly teach the pre-existence of Christ and his divinity; but they are entirely silent in regard to a trinity. The declaration, that the divine Son of God could not die, is as far from the teachings of the Bible as darkness is from light. And we would ask the Trinitarian, to which of the *two natures* are we indebted for redemption? The answer must, of course, be, To that one which died or shed his blood for us; for “we have redemption through his blood.” Then it is evident that if only the human nature died, our Redeemer is

only human, and that the divine Son of God took no part in the work of redemption, for he could neither suffer nor die. Surely, we say right, that the doctrine of a trinity degrades the Atonement, by bringing the sacrifice, the blood of our purchase, down to the standard of Socinianism.

But we are not the only ones who see this difficulty in the Trinitarian views of the atoning sacrifice. Their own expressions betray a sense of the weakness of their position, and of the necessity of something more than a human offering for the redemption of man. Dr. Barnes, as quoted, says that “the divine nature in the person of Christ” could not suffer, nor die; yet, in speaking of the nature of the Atonement, he says:—

“If it be a part of the doctrine of the Atonement, and essential to that doctrine, that the Redeemer was divine, that he was ‘God manifest in the flesh,’ that there was in a proper sense an incarnation of Deity, then it is clear that such an incarnation, and the sufferings of such an one on a cross, were events adapted to make an impression on the universe at large, deeper by far than would be done by the sufferings of the guilty themselves.” “All must feel that it was appropriate that the Eternal Father should command the sun to withdraw his beams, and the earth to tremble, and the rocks to rend—to spread a universal pall over the world—when his Son expired on the cross.” “He had descended from Heaven, and had taken upon himself the form of a servant. He had subjected himself voluntarily to poverty, shame, and contempt; he had been bound, and scourged, and publicly rejected; he had submitted to a mock trial and to an unjust condemnation; he had borne his own

cross to the place of crucifixion, and had voluntarily given himself up to be put to death in a form that involved the keenest torture that man could inflict." Pp. 255-7.

If it were true that the divine nature—that which "descended from Heaven"—could not suffer and die, such remarks as the above are only calculated to mislead; and it must appear to all that they betray a consciousness, on the part of the writer, that if the sacrifice was only human, as he had elsewhere said, the offering lacked in dignity, and the Atonement in efficacy.

The Manual of Atonement, as quoted, says he could only die as man; that in his divine nature he could neither suffer nor die; and yet uses the following words:—

"It was sin that drew Christ from the skies, and influenced him to lead a life of suffering in this world. It was sin that wounded his sacred head—that agonized his soul in the garden—that led him to Calvary—that nailed him to the cross, and drew out his heart's blood as a sin-atonement sacrifice." P. 138

Who would not suppose from the above that the very Christ that came "from the skies" died on the cross? Why is this language used? Evidently to make an impression of the enormity of the sin, and the value of the sacrifice, which could not be made by the death of a human being. That object might be accomplished without any contradiction, by allowing what the Scriptures plainly teach of the death of the Son of God.

Dr. Scott, who says his death was only in his human nature, further says:—

"'I am he that liveth;' the ever-living, self-existent God, to whom as mediator it was given to have life in himself, and to be the life of men; and who had also been

obedient to death for sinners; but behold he was alive as the first-fruits of the resurrection, to die no more."—*Note on Rev. 1:18.*

"This same person, who created and upholds all worlds, as the high priest of his people, purged away the guilt of their sins, *by himself*, and the sacrifice of his death upon the cross."—*Note on Heb. 1:3.*

If it was *given* to the "self-existent God" to have life in himself, *by whom was it given?* Here is a plain declaration that "the ever-living, self-existent God" died for sinners, which we *cannot* believe, and Dr. Scott did not believe, for he contradicted it elsewhere. The self-existent God could not purge away our sin "by himself," but the Son of God could "by himself" (as Paul says, Heb. 1:3), and the self-existent God could *by his Son*; for God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Dr. Clarke, in his Commentary, says:—

"Considering him (Paul) as writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, then we have from the plain, grammatical meaning of the words which he has used, the fullest demonstration (for the Spirit of God cannot lie) that He who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, and in whose blood we have redemption, was *God over all.*"—*Clarke on Col. 1.*

In view of the remark from the same author, which we before quoted, that the suffering or punishment due to our sins was borne in the human body, the above is a most remarkable statement. In the former quotations he said that the divine nature was not the Son of God; that the Godhead dwelt in a human body, and it was the human body that endured the punishment due to our sins; and in the latter quotation he

says that "he who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, and in whose blood we have redemption, was God over all." Can it be possible that he thought that the human nature, in distinction from the divine nature which dwelt therein, is God over all? We very well know that he thought the divine nature which dwelt in the human was God; and if the human nature, which died for us, was also God, then he certainly has presented to us two Gods, namely, a divine God and a human God! And each one is God over all. We think he has fallen into the same inconsistency which was manifested by the Manual of Atonement, by Dr. Scott, and by Dr. Barnes. Each said that divinity or the divine nature could not suffer nor die, and each said that the pre-existing divinity suffered and died. Dr. Scott even said that the self-existent God died as our mediator. We believe that the doctrine of the trinity lies at the foundation of these errors on the part of these able authors. The Bible is not, and should not be made, responsible for such inconsistencies. They are not at all necessary to an understanding of the Bible or the doctrine of the Atonement. On the contrary, they prevent an understanding of the truth, and cause the teachings of the Scriptures to appear confused and uncertain in the eyes of all who trust in the wisdom of the wise of this world.

Dr. John Harris, in his first volume on Theological Science—the Pre-Adamite Earth—has very forcibly stated the truth concerning the pre-existence and manifestation of the Redeemer. He says:—

"For *εν αρχη* [in the beginning] even then He already *ην* [was]. The assertion of his pre-existence is included alike in *εν αρχη* and in *ην*. For when every created thing had

yet to be, He already was. He comprehends every being in himself.” P. 31.


And of the manifestation of this pre-existent one he further says:—

“His disciples subsequently declared that the life had been manifested, and that they had seen it; that that which was from the beginning they had handled and seen, even the Word of Life.” P. 34.

Now, when the disciples also declare that that Word which they saw and handled was put to death on the cross, and rose from the dead, we cannot avoid the conclusion that that which was from the beginning, which was before all things, actually died for man. Of course we cannot believe what men say about his being co-equal with God in every respect, and that the divine Son of God could not suffer nor die. These are mere human words. But that the Word, or Logos, was the Son of God, that he was before all things, that he was made flesh, that he was seen and handled of men, that he was put to death, that he was raised from the dead—these are the words of inspiration. “What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.”



“The mystery of godliness,” the mystery of the incarnation, is great indeed. It is to be doubted whether a finite mind will ever be able to comprehend it. This does not speak against it as a fact; for we may accept a fact revealed, when we cannot comprehend the nature of the fact. We may believe that a certain star is thousands of millions of miles from the earth, but the human mind can have no just conception of such a distance. We believe in the being of the omnipotent God, but we cannot comprehend his being. We believe that he who was glorified with the Father before the world was, was made flesh, and dwelt among men; in whom, as the Methodist Discipline justly expressed it, were two natures joined together in one person, never to be divided; who truly suffered and died for us. What a sacrifice for guilty man! What an offering to the immutable law of Jehovah! What a vindication of the mercy and justice of the Father!


“Here’s love and grief beyond degree;
The Lord of glory dies for men!”

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” See 1 Cor. 2:8; Rom. 11:33. (J. H. Waggoner—*The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation*, 1884 Edition, pp. 164–179) 

Mailing List News

The Post Office sends us address corrections, but this process does not always work properly and sometimes it results in someone getting deleted from our mailing list without their request, even though their address is still valid. Here are some things you can do to help us avoid this problem:

-  If you move, please send us your new address.
-  If you inadvertently get deleted from our mailing list, please write us and verify your valid address.

We will do what we can to make sure you continue receiving *Old Paths*. We want you to know that if you get deleted from our mailing list without your request, it was not done intentionally, and we would like to continue sending you *Old Paths*. We are sorry for any inconvenience this may cause you. 



Camp Meeting News

WEST VIRGINIA CAMP MEETING: Smyrna would like to invite all who can, to attend our annual camp meeting, this year being held July 2–6.

We hope that holding the camp meeting during the 4th of July week\weekend, will assist those with difficult work schedules. However, for those not camping, it may make finding an available motel more difficult. The nearest motels that still have rooms available are: Woody’s Motel, (304) 732-6540; The Cow Shed, (304) 732-7000; and Twin Falls State Park Resort, (304) 294-4000. Twin Falls State Park also has an excellent camp ground for those needing RV hook ups.

Some of the speakers will be David Clayton, Lynnford Beachy, Willis Smith, Stephen Burks, and Howard Williams. We are planning on a vegan cooking seminar, as well as a seminar on the truth about God. Some events are still in the planning stage and will be announced as plans are finalized. Please mark your calendars now and plan to attend.

Allen Stump

Youth's Corner - Christ Declaring His Mission

Part 2

Jesus had spoken of the most distinguished and brightest intellects,—men who had longed to have the privilege of sitting at his feet and learning of him. Then turning to his disciples, he said, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”

There was a necessity for all these words, or the Son of God would never have spoken them. After his resurrection and ascension to heaven, his disciples were surprised and self-condemned that they had not better understood and appreciated them. And what remorse must have filled the hearts of his relatives as they reviewed their unbelief in Christ as the world's Redeemer, the Son of God! How must they have reproached themselves that they had laid any stumbling-block in the way, and that they had so often grieved his soul by their unbelief and harsh reproaches.

In the crowds that daily listened to the words of Jesus, many were ready to see in him the very Christ. Others who were convicted that he was the Son of God, and who had no disposition to persecute him, dared not acknowledge him; for the tide of prejudice ran high, and they themselves were leavened with this spirit. The claims of Jesus did not answer their proud expectations, and as though satisfied with the ground on which they stood, they said, “Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.” But Christ declared, “Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.” The spiritual and eternal things they did not discern; for spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

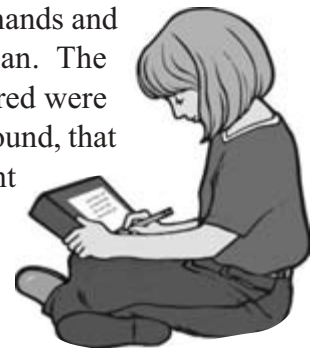
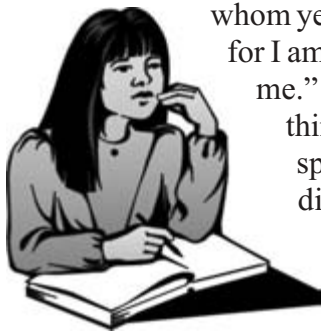
Christ's words, asserting his mission from the Father, and his claim

to have a knowledge of God, presenting in strong contrast the ignorance of the Jewish leaders, so madened the Pharisees and rulers that they determined to lay hold on him. But they could not accomplish their purpose, for his time to leave the world and go unto his Father had not yet come. There was a restraint upon these rulers. They did not dare to do the things they longed to do; for divinity flashed through humanity as he spoke to the people, giving to them the jewels of truth that had been hidden for ages. They were conscious of a fear, a reverence and awe, which they could not themselves define. “No man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.”

Many in that crowd called to mind the miracles of Christ which they themselves had witnessed, and one or two had the courage to express the feelings of the multitude, saying, “When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?”

Jealousy and prejudice raged in the hearts of the Pharisees when they heard the people speak thus openly in his favor, and they commissioned officers to arrest him. But Jesus knew the errand of these men, and in words of deep solemnity he declared that his movements were not under the control of men. He pointed to his work that was still in the future: “Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.”

As the officers listened to the words of Christ, they became intensely interested. In their eagerness to hear all he said, they pressed close within the circle that had gathered around him. They saw divinity flash through humanity, and their hearts were touched by the Spirit of God. They could not reach forth their hands and lay them upon such a man. The truths that Christ there uttered were as seed sown upon good ground, that brought forth an abundant harvest when he was no longer among them. (Mrs. E. G. White. *Youth's Instructor*, September 30, 1897)



The Personality and Character of God

By Lynnford Beachy and Allen Stump

The subject of the personality of God is, and always has been, a very delicate subject in Christianity. I have found personally that I can discuss almost any Bible doctrine with people outside my faith in a calm and thoughtful manner. Many people may not agree with the Sabbath or the sanctuary doctrine, but they usually will disagree in an agreeable manner. However, when one deals with the personality of God, the mood often is different. We are no longer talking about how we may worship *the same God*, but now we may be dealing with *a different God!* People, and even whole nations, have been destroyed because they differed in their beliefs concerning the personality of God. As foretold in Daniel 7:8, 24, the papacy uprooted three nations. These powers did not agree with her trinity doctrine.

The Position of the Pioneers on the Personality of God

The understanding of the personality of God within Adventism remained very consistent for the first 50 plus years of the movement. The earliest statement of belief, first published in 1872, noted their belief:

I. That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal, infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and everywhere present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139:7.

II. That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist; that he took on him the nature of the

seed of Abraham for the redemption of our fallen race; ..." (1872 Statement of Belief—A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists.)

The early pioneers of Adventism clearly believed and taught a non-Trinitarian position on the nature and personality of God. This contrasts the statement of belief from 1931 and 1980, which are clearly Trinitarian. This was not easily acknowledged by church historian and apologist LeRoy Froom and others, but due to the explosion of documentation in the last few decades, the corporate SDA Church now recognizes the 1872 statement as "distinctly non-Trinitarian." (*Issues*, p. 39)

Some today may look upon the 1872 statement and fail to comprehend the understanding and teachings of the early Adventists. However, by their writings it can be clearly seen what men such as James White, J. N. Andrews, Joseph Bates, Uriah Smith, J. H. Waggoner and other early Adventists believed. The scope of this article will not allow a detailed documentation of their beliefs. Anyone who would like such documentation may write and request a copy of the book, *What Did the Pioneers Believe?* which documents their beliefs in detail. However, let us note a few of the early pioneers' statements for the record.

He [Melchisedec] is said by Paul to have no beginning of days, nor end of life. This does not mean absolutely that there was **no beginning of existence with him, for it is only true of one being in the universe, viz., God the Father.** (J. N. Andrews—*Review & Herald*, September 7, 1869, also

found in the January 4, 1881 edition of the *Review & Herald*)

It is true that there are many sons of God, but Christ is the "only begotten Son of God," and therefore the Son of God in a sense in which no other being ever was or ever can be. The angels are sons of God, as was Adam (Job 38:7; Luke 3:38), by creation; Christians are the sons of God by adoption (Rom. 8:14, 15), **but Christ is the Son of God by birth.** The writer to the Hebrews further shows that the position of the Son of God is not one to which Christ has been elevated, but that it is one which He has by right. He says that Moses was faithful in all the house of God, as a servant, "but Christ as a Son over His own house." Heb. 3:6. And he also states that Christ is the Builder of the house. Verse 3. It is He that builds the temple of the Lord and bears the glory. Zech. 6:12, 13.

All things proceed ultimately from God, the Father; **even Christ Himself proceeded and came forth from the Father.** (E. J. Waggoner, 1890, *Christ and His Righteousness*, pages 12, 19)

Jesus prayed that his disciples might be one as he was one with his Father. This prayer did not contemplate one disciple with twelve heads, but twelve disciples, made one in object and effort in the cause of their master. Neither are the Father and the Son parts of the "three-one God." **They are two distinct beings, yet one in the design and accomplishment of redemption.** The redeemed, from the first who shares in the great redemption, to the last, all ascribe the honor, and glory, and praise, of their salvation, to both God and the Lamb. (James White, 1868—*Life Incidents*, p. 343)

Respecting the trinity, I concluded that *it was an impossibility for me to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was also the Almighty God, the Father, one and the same being.* I said to my father, “If you can convince me that we are one in this sense, that you are my father, and I your son; and also that I am your father, and you my son, then I can believe in the trinity. (Joseph Bates, 1868, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates*, page 204)

To assert that the sayings of the Son and his apostles are the commandments of the Father, is as wide from the truth as the old trinitarian *absurdity that Jesus Christ is the very and Eternal God.* (James White—*Review & Herald*, August 5, 1852)

The doctrine of the Trinity which was established in the church by the council of Nice, A. D. 325. *This doctrine destroys the personality of God, and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.* (J. N. Andrews—*Review & Herald*, March 6, 1855)

From this short sample of early Adventists’ thought, we can get a clear picture of the belief these men had concerning the personality of God and Christ. The Father alone was without a beginning. In the depths of eternity past, in some very real way that we do not understand, “Christ Himself proceeded and came forth from the Father,” He “is the Son of God by birth.” The Father and the Son “are two distinct beings,” and Jesus Christ is not the same person as the “Eternal God.” Further, the early Adventists believed that the trinity doctrine destroyed “the personality of God.” They did not believe in a concept of one God in three persons, nor in three gods. Neither did they believe in one God manifesting Himself in three different modes separately nor simultaneously.

There are questions raised from this type of investigation that do not have easy answers for those who believe that the early Adventists had it all wrong concerning God and Christ. The following are three questions of

more than 100 that one writer has proposed:

Would it not be a mystery, an impossible contradiction, if the last message of warning given to humanity to prepare for the second coming of Christ, to vindicate the character of God and to set forth a true knowledge of His nature and personality were at the same time to be accompanied by a rejection of the most fundamental truth about the same God?

Would it not have been a mystery that they could have rejected the Trinity through ignorance of the doctrine, when it was the most established doctrine in the church for over 1500 years and was known and accepted by the great majority of Christian congregations from which many of the pioneers came?

With an in-depth understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity (if it is truth), then a rejection of the Trinity would most definitely amount to unqualified apostasy. Would it not be a mystery if the birth of our church was accompanied by the greatest advance into light in modern times and the greatest apostasy at the same time? (Lloyd Martin, *One Hundred and More Mysteries of the Trinity*, pp. 18, 19) This 33-page booklet is available from Smyrna Gospel Ministries upon request.

Ellen White Supports the View of the Pioneers

I want to make some observations about these beliefs and Ellen White that are very important to understand. I believe that Ellen White agreed with these men. While quotation upon quotation is often used by different factions of belief, let us notice two very clear thoughts from the pen of Ellen White:

God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ has been given an exalted position. He has been made equal with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son. (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 268)

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

In the last statement Ellen White could not possibly have been referring to Christ’s birth in Bethlehem, for at that time He was begotten “in the form of a servant,” “in the likeness of men,” (Philippians 2:7) not in “the express image” of the Father. (Hebrews 1:3)

Ellen White worked in a very close relationship with the early pioneers and especially with her husband. Notice the following from *Selected Messages*:

Many of our people do not realize how firmly the foundation of our faith has been laid. My husband, Elder Joseph Bates, Father Pierce, Elder [Hiram] Edson, and others who were keen, noble, and true, were among those who, after the passing of the time in 1844, searched for the truth as for hidden treasure. I met with them, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible, in order that they might

know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power. When they came to the point in their study where they said, "We can do nothing more," the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. *Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood.* A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God, was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me. (*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 206, 207—emphasis supplied)

As Ellen White studied with her husband James, and other brethren, she says that light was given especially concerning, "Christ, His mission, and His priesthood." She never wrote a word of rebuke to her husband concerning their understanding of Christ. Her husband was a great help to her in her work:

While my husband lived, he acted as a helper and counselor in the sending out of the messages that were given to me. We traveled extensively. Sometimes light would be given to me in the night season, sometimes in the daytime before large congregations. The instruction I received in vision was faithfully written out by me, as I had time and strength for the work. Afterward we examined the matter together, my husband correcting grammatical errors and eliminating needless repetition. Then it was carefully copied for the persons addressed, or for the printer. (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 50)

Surely, if Elder White, as well as the other leading brethren, were confused on the nature of Christ and God, Ellen White would have corrected them. She was quick to appeal to D. M. Canright to return to the truth when he left and spoke against Adventism. Part of Canright's attack against Adventism

was the charge that Adventism did not accept the trinity doctrine. She was strong in her denunciations of A. F. Ballenger's sanctuary teachings. Why was she silent in regard to this most important matter if the brethren were teaching devilish error? Why did she, instead of reproofing them, encourage the reprinting of their works:

When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained. Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth. The truth for this time God has given us as a foundation for our faith. He Himself has taught us what is truth. One will arise, and still another, with new light, which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit. *A few are still alive who passed through the experience gained in the establishment of this truth.* God has graciously spared their lives to repeat, and repeat till the close of their lives, the experience through which they passed even as did John the apostle till the very close of his life. And the standard bearers who have fallen in death are to speak through the reprinting of their writings. I am instructed that thus their voices are to be heard. They are to bear their testimony as to what constitutes the truth for this time. (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 161—emphasis supplied)

Ellen White Speaks out Against False Theories

In 1891, when a man by the name of Chapman was teaching that the Holy Spirit was "the angel Gabriel," Ellen White counseled him to "seek to be in harmony with the body." (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14, pp. 175, 180) She wrote to Brother Chapman, "You need to come into harmony with your brethren." (*Ibid.*, p. 180) We have seen that the brethren did not believe in the trinity.

Later, when John Harvey Kellogg brought out the book *Living Temple*, with its pantheism, Ellen White spoke and wrote a great deal against its teachings. Ironically, Kellogg appealed to the writings of Ellen White to support his position. (See Letter of J. H. Kellogg to G. I. Butler, October 28, 1903.) However, Ellen White disavowed the claim Kellogg made that his writings and those of Sister White's were in agreement.

I am compelled to speak in denial of the claim that the teachings of *Living Temple* can be sustained by statements from my writings. There may be in this book expressions and sentiments that are in harmony with my writings. **And there may be in my writings many statements which, taken from their connection, and interpreted according to the mind of the writer of *Living Temple*, would seem to be in harmony with the teachings of this book.** This may give apparent support to the assertion that the sentiments in *Living Temple* are in harmony with my writings. But God forbid that this sentiment should prevail. (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 203—emphasis supplied)

Kellogg stated to Elder A. G. Daniels, then General Conference president, that the acceptance of the Trinity was critical to his theology. Writing to Ellen White's son Willie, Daniels stated:

He [Dr. Kellogg] then stated that his former views regarding the trinity had stood in his way of making a clear and absolutely correct statement; but that within a short time he had come to believe in the trinity, and could now see pretty clearly where all the difficulty was, and believed that he could clear up the matter satisfactorily. He told me that he now believed in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and his view was that it was God the Holy Ghost, and not God the Father, that filled all space, and every living thing. (Letter of A. G. Daniels to William C. White, October 29, 1903.)

Concerning Kellogg's teaching in *Living Temple*, Ellen White wrote:

The book, "Living Temple," contains specious, deceptive sentiments regarding the personality of God and of Christ. The Lord opened before me the true meaning of these sentiments, showing me that unless they were steadfastly repudiated, they would deceive the very elect. Precious truth and beautiful sentiments were woven in with false, misleading theories. Thus truth was used to substantiate the most dangerous errors. The precious representations of God are so misconstrued as to appear to uphold falsehoods originated by the great apostate. Sentiments that belong to the revealings of God are mingled with specious, deceptive theories of Satanic agencies. (*The Kress Collection*, p. 19)

In a personal letter to Kellogg, Ellen White stated, "You are not definitely clear on the personality of God, which is everything to us as a people. You have virtually destroyed the Lord God Himself." (Letter 300, 1903 quoted in *The Early Elmshaven Years*, p. 292) Ellen White stated that the personality of God "is everything to us as a people." The word "everything" means a lot. As used in this sense, it conveys the idea that all our faith is dependant upon the personality of God. This being the case, it makes the lack of Ellen White reproving her husband and others for their views on the personality of God even more striking!

Having a proper knowledge of God is extremely important. Jesus said, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3) Writing in *Ministry of Healing*, Sister White emphasized the importance of knowing God.

In order to be co-workers with God, in order to become like Him and to reveal His character, we must know Him aright. We must know Him as He reveals Himself. A knowledge of God is the foundation of all true education and of all true service. It is the only

real safeguard against temptation. It is this alone that can make us like God in character. This is the knowledge needed by all who are working for the uplifting of their fellow men. Transformation of character, purity of life, efficiency in service, adherence to correct principles, all depend upon a right knowledge of God. This knowledge is the essential preparation both for this life and for the life to come. (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 409)

We cannot properly worship and have fellowship with God if we do not have a proper knowledge of Him! Inseparably connected to the personality of God is His character. If I have a misunderstanding of God's character, it will affect the way I perceive Him, and my character development as well. The message of the first angel of Revelation 14 includes a proper knowledge of the nature and character of God. How can one fear or reverence God and give glory to Him with grave misunderstandings about Him? No wonder the early Adventists spoke against the Trinity doctrine and other false concepts of God.

The leading of God in the lives and teachings of the early Adventists is undeniable. Yet, their words and ideas are not our standard. They are not Adventist "church fathers" to be depended upon. They themselves believed "That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, were given by inspiration of God, [and] contain a full revelation of his will to man, and are the only infallible rule of faith and practice." (Belief #3, 1872 Statement of Belief)

The testimonies of Ellen White ring loud and clear. Yet her writings are not to be our standard for doctrine. As she herself said,

But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. (*The Great Controversy*, p. 595)

While she acknowledged inspiration for her writings, Sister White

never claimed they were to be considered a part of the canon in any manner.

The testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word. Great care should be exercised by all believers to advance these questions carefully, and always stop when you have said enough. Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God. (Letter 12, 1890—*Evangelism*, p. 256—emphasis supplied)

Sister White herself says that we are bound by God to examine His Word for an understanding concerning all truth, including the truth about God and His Son. Truly, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Therefore, with this admonition, let us proceed to the Word of God to see what it says first, about the personality of God, and then how this relates to His character.

The Person of God

The Bible portrays one supreme Being who is the author and source of all else. In the book of Revelation, John is granted a view into heaven and he sees an Individual of divine majesty sitting on a throne. "And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." (Revelation 4:2, 3) This Being is worshiped as the "Lord God Almighty." (v. 8) "The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O

Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” (vs. 10, 11)

The apostle Paul calls this Individual the Father: “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” (1 Corinthians 8:6) “All things” are of the Father and He is above all including Jesus Christ. “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” (1 Corinthians 11:30) “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:6) He is referred to by Jesus Christ as the “only true God.” (John 17:3)

The Person of Christ

Jesus Christ is described by John as the Son of God. “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” (1 John 4:15) John does not leave us in doubt concerning the relationship of Jesus to God. He tells us that “God sent his only begotten Son into the world.” (1 John 4:9) This is exactly what Jesus Himself says. In the most famous Bible verse, John 3:16, Jesus claims to be the “only begotten Son of God.” Jesus says that He was begotten, not created, of God.

Proverbs chapter 8 tells of Christ being begotten of God and of the relationship He enjoyed with God in the days before the world was made. In this chapter Christ is referred to as “wisdom,” yet the context of the passage is plain that it is speaking of the Son of God. In 1 Corinthians 1:24 we read: “Christ the power of God, and the *wisdom* of God.”

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When *there were* no depths, I was brought forth; when *there were* no fountains abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I *was* there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, *as* one brought up *with him*: and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him. (Proverbs 8:22-30 KJV)

Notice a portion of these verses from the Bible in Basic English: “When there was no deep I was given birth, when there were no fountains flowing with water. Before the mountains were put in their places, before the hills *was my birth*.” (Proverbs 8:24, 25)

God says Jesus is His Son. Jesus says He is the Son of God. God could not have sent a Son if He did not have a Son to send. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” (1 John 4:9) This beautiful text, proclaiming the manifestation of God’s love, confirms the fact that God has a Son who was begotten long before God sent Him into the world. Jesus said, “I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.” (John 8:42)

The terms Father and Son, by definition, indicate the existence of one before the other. This was the understanding of the Israelites. In the book of Proverbs we read: “Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in His fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is His name, and what is His son’s name, if thou canst tell?” (Proverbs 30:4)

The Bible refers to Christ as God’s Son at least 120 times. The Bible does this by using the phrase “Son of God” forty-seven times. Regarding the genuineness of Christ’s sonship, He is called “the only begotten” five times, “the firstborn” three times, “the firstbegotten” once, God’s “holy child” twice. Four verses say He was “begotten” prior to His incarnation. Four verses say that He proceeded forth from, “came out from” or “camest forth from” the Father. The evidence on this subject is overwhelming. Christ truly is the literal begotten Son of God, brought forth from the Father before all creation. If God expected us to believe anything different, He did a poor job of presenting it in the Bible. In fact, if God had wanted us to believe differently, He purposely confused us by making so many clear statements indicating that Christ is literally the begotten Son of God. Yet, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.” (1 Corinthians 14:33) When speaking of heavenly things, Jesus said, “... if it were not so, I would have told you.” (John 14:2) If Jesus is not literally the Son of God, or God is a triune being, Jesus would have plainly told us.

Christ’s Church is Built on the Sonship of Jesus

The fact that Jesus is the Son of God is so important that Jesus said He would build His church upon this truth.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and

upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:13-18)

The center of this conversation was, *who* is Jesus? When Jesus said, “upon this rock I will build my church,” He wasn’t referring to Peter as the rock, but to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Upon this truth, Jesus said, “I will build my church.” The truth upon which God’s church is built is a very important truth!

The fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is so important that at the close of John’s gospel he wrote, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” (John 20:30)

The disciples who lived with Jesus and heard His messages firsthand, including the many things He said that are not recorded, exclaimed, “we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” (John 6:69) They also exclaimed, “we believe that thou camest forth from God.” (John 16:30)

Right after Paul learned the gospel directly from Christ Himself, “straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:20)

Right after Philip preached the gospel to the eunuch, Philip said, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” (Acts 8:37)

Martha, a close friend of Jesus, who heard many of His teachings, said to Him, “I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” (John 11:27)

Nathaniel, of whom Christ said in him “is no guile” (John 1:47), said to Jesus, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” (John 1:49)

Christ said, “Among those that are born of women there is not a greater

prophet than John the Baptist.” (Luke 7:28) John the Baptist testified, “And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:34)

Of all the witnesses, the greatest is God the Father Himself. Two times He spoke from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son.” (Matthew 3:17; 17:5) And we know that God “cannot lie.” (Titus 1:2) Shall we not take our stand with the faithful witnesses in the Bible who all proclaimed that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God?

The Character of God

The Bible says that all men “have sinned,” (Romans 3:23) and that “the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) Man deserved to die; to perish. But “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) His great love compelled Him to take action. That action was to send His Son to do something He could not personally do for man: die in his place! God the Father is described in the Bible as having absolute immortality. “Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.” (1 Timothy 6:16)

In accepting humanity in the incarnation, Jesus accepted mortality. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of *death*, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste *death* for every man.” (Hebrews 2:9) The fact that Jesus is “the only begotten Son of God,” and that He truly died for our sins, is set forth in the Bible as the grand evidence of God’s love, and God’s character is based on His love.

God’s love in giving His Son for man is the great theme of the Scriptures. In this great gift, the love and character of God is plainly revealed. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” (1 John 4:9) The patriarchs spoke about this love, the prophets

prophesied of it, the apostles gained first-hand insights into it, and centered their gospels around it. Jesus lived God’s love and used many parables to explain and express it. The love of God is the heart of the gospel, and it is the motivating force that brings a sinner to repentance.

As we look at the Scriptures to gain insights into the love of God, there is one demonstration that stands out above all others. We see it expressed in the most well-known verse of the Bible, John 3:16. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” There is deep, rich meaning in this verse that God is longing to impart to us. Oh, what amazing love that the God of the universe, “the Most High,” who is “above all,” loves me, a lowly sinner, so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for me! The thought fills me with adoration and awe. It makes me realize that God loves me enough to give anything and everything, suffer any amount of pain and loss, to save me from the ruin I have chosen.

When Jesus said God “so loved the world,” He was saying, “This is how much God loves you, He loves you so much that He did something for you.” This is how the Most High God demonstrated His love for you. He gave up His most precious possession, His only begotten Son.

If God had loved the world so much that He gave a goat for you, you would seriously question God’s love for you, because a goat would be an almost meaningless gift for God to give up, because it is something He created. If God had loved the world so much that He gave a human, we might think, “Well, that is a little better than a goat, I’m worth more than a goat, but it is still a small gift, because humans were also created.” What if God had loved the world so much that He gave an angel? That is a better gift than a human, but it still falls far short of demonstrating how much God loves

us. Our understanding of God's love will be in direct proportion to our understanding of the value of the gift given for our redemption. The more valuable the gift He gave, the more we can understand and appreciate God's love for us.

God gave His only begotten Son for us. He has other sons, but He only has one *begotten* Son. Men and women can be "sons of God" by *adoption* (Romans 8:14); angels are "sons of God" by *creation* (Job 1:6; 2:1); but Jesus Christ is the only *begotten* Son of God. What sets Jesus Christ apart from everyone else in the universe, and by which we know God's love for us, is the fact that He was the *begotten* Son of God.

In Romans 8:32, Paul asked, if God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" When the Father gave up His only begotten Son it proved that He is willing to give up every possession, suffer any amount of pain, and endure any hardship in order to save those whom He loves.

The death of Christ proves the love of God. "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) That love is what motivates the Christian: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." (2 Corinthians 5:14) Christ is the perfect revelation of the character of God. God in His Son has declared that He will serve even the creatures He has made, no matter what the personal inconvenience, pain and suffering to Himself. He is willing to serve and save man at any cost to Himself.

God truly loves us, yet this love can only be comprehended by understanding that God gave His only begotten Son. Therefore, it is Satan's determined goal to destroy, obliterate, and completely eliminate this truth from the minds of men.

Most every religious faith, Christian and nonchristian alike, deny that Jesus is the *begotten* Son of God. Of course

the Hindus and Buddhists, along with the other eastern religions, deny that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. The Jewish faith strongly rejects Jesus as the Son of God. Islam, while acknowledging Jesus to be a prophet, even a great prophet, denies that He is God's only begotten Son. Most professed Christians believe the Trinitarian doctrine which has Jesus being a "person" of the Most High God, who plays the role of a son, but is not a literal son. Tritheists do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Their second god just plays a role or position of a son. Sabellianism or "Jesus only" proponents, do not believe that God had a son, but rather assumed the "role" of a son himself. The one thing that all these diverse religions have in common is that they deny that Jesus is the begotten Son of God.

By attacking this wonderful truth, the character and paternal love of God is attacked. For if Jesus is not the begotten Son of God, then the Father did not really have a son to give. It makes a mockery of John 3:16 and the plan of salvation! If Jesus and the Father are coequals, associates, partners, etc., then where is the love of God given in sending his coequal to die in my place? The denial of Jesus being the Son of God actually portrays the Father to be selfish; allowing another to suffer and sacrifice while He, in reality, does nothing. With this scenario, the one who manifests the most love is the one who died. But, when we understand that God really has a son, we can appreciate the love of the Father in giving His Son.

Remember, the great controversy between Christ and Satan is over the Father's character. Was God truly a God of love or did He just wish to receive service from others? The whole plan of salvation is misrepresented and distorted with the belief that Jesus is not the literal, begotten Son of God. No wonder John describes the teaching that would deny the Father and the Son, the spirit of

antichrist! "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." (1 John 2:22)

Prerequisite for Overcoming the World

"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5) Believing that Jesus is the begotten Son of God enables us to overcome the world. By elevating our perception of God's love and character, it enables us to love Him with all our hearts in return. John writes: "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

When God sent His only begotten Son into the world He took a tremendous risk. The Bible says, "The government shall be upon his shoulder." (Isaiah 9:6) The success or failure of God's government depended upon the Son of God. If He failed, God's government would fail. God had only one begotten Son, and His Son had only one chance to redeem mankind. The Son of God "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) The battle was fierce, but the Son of God was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:8) He "was made a little lower than the angels *for the suffering of death*, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Hebrews 2:9)

The two greatest truths of the Bible, that reveal, above all else, the wonderful love of God, are the facts that God has an only begotten Son, and that He gave His Son to die for our sins. The Sonship and the death of Christ are the most important truths of the Bible, because only through these truths can we understand God's love for us, thereby bringing us to repentance. Paul says that it is "the godness of God" that leads one "to repentance." (Romans 2:4)

This is the everlasting gospel that is to be preached to all the world before Christ will come the second time.

Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” (Matthew 24:14) John prophesied of this when he wrote, “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” (Revelation 14:6) This gospel is preached for a purpose. It is to prepare a people to stand during the most fearful struggle that has ever come upon the world. This gospel prepares people to fear God and keep His commandments amid the most trying circumstances. When this gospel does its work in the lives of God’s people, God will triumphantly proclaim, “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:12)

Surely you want to be one of those faithful ones over whom God will be delighted to make this declaration. The everlasting gospel of God’s love will have to be accepted by, and allowed to do its work in me, before this can take place.

While the richness and fullness of God’s love and character is deeper than the deepest sea and higher than the highest heavens, He has given to man a mind that can learn and appreciate enough of that love so as to be drawn into a loving relationship with Himself. In fact, God has revealed the plan of salvation in a manner that even a child can understand it. It is the selfish, confusing theories of Satan and men that cause confusion.

(Personal Testimony of Lynnford): Several years ago I was very confused about the love of God. I thought that God did not love me very much and therefore I didn’t want anything to do with Him. I was caught up in the world, addicted to drugs and ignorant of God and His love for me. One day God was able to break down the barriers between us and reach me with His love. I began to see that God really

does love me, and I finally had a desire to give my life to Him. I read John 3:16 where it says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The thought was overwhelming! I then knew that God loved me. I did not have to go to college or be trained by a theologian to understand the simple truth expressed in John 3:16. The thought that came to me was that there is a God in heaven who has a literal Son who was begotten by Him, and that He sent that Son into this world to completely die for my sins so that I could have eternal life. I am sure I am not the first, nor the last, to have come to this conclusion from John 3:16. Was I wrong in my thinking? Is that really what took place? If not, why did Jesus say it in that way?

Christ’s Sonship is the Key to Appreciating God’s Love

Understanding the truth that Jesus is the Son of God is the key to understanding and appreciating God’s love for us, because God gave no greater manifestation of His love than giving His only begotten Son to die for our sins. If we ever expect to love God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our strength, and all our minds, we must believe that Jesus is truly the Son of God. John claimed that this is the key to overcoming this world. He wrote, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5) There is no stronger motivating power than love. We love God because He loved us, and that love is demonstrated by the giving of His Son. There is something about believing that Jesus is the Son of God that enables us to overcome the world. Any deviation on this point is a deviation from our ability to overcome the world, because without this belief we can never understand the love of God enough to cause us to love God with all our hearts. “We love him, because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

Satan Attacks the Truth

Do you think Satan knows that if we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God we have the key to overcome the world? He certainly does! Do you think that Satan would try to confuse people on this issue? Certainly! Satan knows that if he can confuse people regarding the truth about Christ being the Son of God, then he will maintain some control in their lives. Therefore he has sought, and is seeking, to destroy this truth from this world.

In 325 A.D., about 300 years after Christ died, Satan convinced a group of men to assemble in a town called Nicea to discuss whether Christ was literally begotten or not. (See *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume. 9, chapter 2.*) The government forced the conclusion that Christ was not literally begotten before He came to this world, and the new idea that Christ is the same age as His Father arose upon the pages of Christian history. After the council, one man who attended wrote, “We have never heard, my Lord, of two beings unbegotten ... but that there is one unbegotten, and another truly from Him.” (Letter written by Eusebius of Nicomedia—*A Historical View of the Council of Nice*, by Isaac Boyle, p. 41) For a more thorough study on this council please contact us and request the booklet entitled, *The Formulation of the Doctrine of the Trinity*.

Satan is so dedicated to eradicating the wonderful truth that God really gave up His only begotten Son that he has convinced the translators of most of the new translations, including the NIV, RSV, NASB (1995 Edition), etc., to delete the word begotten from John 3:16.

My friends, God is a God of truth and He really means what He says. He says that He gave His only begotten Son, and that is exactly what He gave for us. Think about it! If Jesus Christ was not the begotten Son of God before God sent Him into the world,


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then what did the Most High God give up? The conclusion of the council of Nicea, and which nearly all Christians believe today, is that Jesus Christ is a coequal, coeternal companion of the Father. If this were true, then all the Father gave up was a friend or a companion. If this were true, then the One who loves us the most is Christ, because He is the one who willingly died for us. But this is not true. While Jesus greatly loves us, the love of the Father in giving His Son is the greatest demonstration the Bible gives that is to draw us to Him.

God the Father suffered tremendously when His Son was suffering under the weight of the sins of this world. In Abraham and Isaac's story it was obviously the father, Abraham, who suffered more than Isaac when he was asked to give up his beloved son. Jesus said, "the Father himself loveth you." (John 16:27) John wrote, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." (1 John 3:1) We cannot behold the love of the Father if we do not know what He gave up for us. John wrote, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we

might live through him." (1 John 4:9) God the Father has an only begotten Son whom He willingly gave up so that you could be forgiven of your sins and live for eternity. Praise God for such wonderful love! 

(This article was co-authored by the editors. It reflects a unified position that they and the brethren of the Smyrna Church stand upon.
Editor)

Old Paths is a free monthly newsletter/study-paper published by Smyrna Gospel Ministries, HC 64 Box 128-B, Welch, WV 24801-9606 U. S. A. The paper is dedicated to the propagation and restoration of the principles of truth that God gave to the early Seventh-day Adventist pioneers. *Duplication is not only permitted, but strongly encouraged.* This issue, with other gospel literature we publish, can be found at our web sites. The urls are: <http://www.smyrna.org> and <http://www.presenttruth.info>. Phone: (304) 732-9204. Fax: (304) 732-7322.

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