

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

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Straight and Narrow

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Sabbath School Lesson on John Muddies the Gospel Waters

By Allen Stump

A few weeks ago I received a call from a concerned brother asking me if I had seen the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide for January through March of 2004 entitled, *The Gospel of John*. I replied that I had not and he suggested that I might wish to see it. After receiving a copy from this brother, I could see why he was concerned.

Before I continue I want to make a few things very clear. Like the Apostle Paul, I have a great desire to see Israel saved. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." (Romans 10:1) I am not writing with any resentment or bones to pick. I love those who profess to be the people of God. I, like Paul, only want them saved. Like Paul, I could say, "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." (Romans 10:2, 3)

This article, and its follow up planned for next month concerning the lesson quarterly, is not in any manner, a personal attack upon its principal contributor or its editor. After reading and studying through the lessons, I believe that they were serious about their desire to present Christ in His loveliness. Sadly, I believe that while there are some gems of thought in the lessons, they have missed the mark on the most essential points that should have been expounded upon.

Due to the lateness of which I received a copy of the quarterly, this article is coming out after some of the most important Scriptural lessons have already been covered. However, I believe that if we take the time to go back and restudy these issues, the time will be well spent. Anything that prompts us to a deeper study of God's Word will be a blessing to us. Due to time and space constraints we will not attempt to cover each lesson or even every high point in the lessons. We will attempt to cover some of the most important, specific points, as well as cover some of the main themes

Main Theme of the Quarterly

The main theme throughout the lessons is "How can I have a relationship with Someone I cannot see, hear, or touch." (*The Gospel of John*, p. 3) Surely this is a worthy subject of consideration and as noted in the lesson's introduction, John does write with a "unique perspective on the life and teachings of Jesus."

Prayer Requests

Dearly beloved, I want to begin this column by first thanking you for the prayers that you have been sending to the Father in our behalf. Surely our prayers should be seasoned with more thanksgiving than ever as we see the message expanding all around us.

Jesus said, "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2) While there is still a great need for more workers, we can be thankful for the soldiers of the cross who have taken up the work in their respective areas. Please continue to lift up these brethren in such places as Africa, especially in Ghana. As this month's report from there reveals, God is working there in a mighty way. Also remember those working in eastern and western Europe as well.

During part of March and April of this year, Brother David Clayton of

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(*Ibid.*, p. 2) Studying from this unique perspective about having a relationship with Jesus, Whom we cannot have physical contact with is commendable. However, the quarterly misses the most important element of John's purpose in writing his gospel. It misses the point of identifying Jesus as the "only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18)

The Quarterly's Approach

The lesson's authors and editor approach John's gospel on Christ's life as "living parables." (*Ibid.*, p. 23) The lessons seek to find spiritual meaning in the events of Christ's life as well as His teachings and actions. Many of the lessons given are based on some Scripture. For example, lesson 3 makes a parallel between the water that was turned into wine at the wedding at Cana with the blood of Jesus. To help support this concept, Ellen White is quoted, "The gift of Christ to the marriage feast was a symbol. The water represented baptism into His death; the wine, the shedding of His blood for the sins of the world." (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 148, 149 quoted on page 28 of *The Gospel of John*)

However, sometimes some of the analogies appear to be taken from an imagination that has been stretched to find something beyond the clear meaning of the text. For example, on page 25 it is stated, "The wedding took place 'on the third day,' a reference to Jesus' resurrection." Even Samuele Bacchiocchi, takes exception:

"The attempt to interpret the chronological statement of the time of the wedding ("on the third day") as a veiled theological reference to the three days of Christ's entombment, reflects a sanctified imagination, that lacks contextual support. If John attributed Christological significance to the time of wedding on the third day, it is surprising that he never quotes Christ's statement regarding the three days in the heart of the earth. The statement is found in Mark (8:31; 9:31; 10:34), Matthew (16:31; 17:23; 20:19), and Luke (9:22, 18:33), but not in John.

"The attempt to give a theological interpretation to the time of the wedding on the third day, reminds me of Harold Camping's fanciful attempt to interpret the time reference to Christ's Resurrection found in Matthew 28:1 'At the end of the Sabbath,' as a theological statement of the termination of Sabbathkeeping and beginning of Sundaykeeping." (*ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER*, No. 109)

While we can not agree with all of Bacchiocchi's thoughts on this lesson, by his observations he illustrates the need we have to personally study and know what the Bible says for ourselves. How many times each Sabbath, are the thoughts of the quarterly writers repeated and restated without being weighed and judged by the Word of God? On the Sabbath of January 17, I was visiting a large SDA Church in the American southwest. After being kindly greeted by the usher, I asked where the Sabbath Schools were being conducted. I was informed that there were several and I could choose from any of them. I asked, "Where is the thinkers' class?" I was then directed to where the leading thinkers of the church usually met for the lesson. Sadly, there were hardly any thoughts expressed by the teacher or students that were not already directly stated in the lesson. After receiving the opportunity to speak once (not even on a greatly controversial point), I would not be acknowledged again when requesting the floor, even though I sat next to the teacher/moderator and those around spoke to him that I was requesting the floor! There seemed to be no interest to hear any thoughts that went beyond the boundaries of the quarterly.

The Purpose of John

John, as he finishes his record of the life of Jesus, states the real purpose for penning his gospel. He writes, "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 20:31) John specifically wants his readers to

o understand two things from what had been written.

- Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.
- Jesus is the Son of God

Having understood these two things, then the disciple may believe and receive life from the Saviour. According to John, understanding the identity of Jesus is the main focus of his gospel, for understanding Christ's identity, gaining a heart-felt appreciation for the Saviour, and accepting Him as your personal Saviour brings eternal life.

The first lesson of the quarterly is entitled, "The Unique Purpose of John's Gospel." It's "Key Thought" on page six is stated, "The Gospel of John tells us that the absence of physical contact with Jesus is no disadvantage to those seeking a relationship with Him today. Jesus' word is as powerful as His touch." It is true that physical absence is no deterrent to having a vibrant, living relationship with Jesus. However the issue of understanding Christ's identity is critical for this to become a reality. If we do not understand Jesus' true identity as the "only begotten Son of God," we will fail to be able to have the relationship with Him the book calls us to have.

Unquestionably, John was the last of the gospels written. Dating varies some, but most scholars believe that John's account of Christ's life as well as the epistles of John were written sometime near the end of the first century. In the first and second epistle, John is inspired to write against the spirit of anitchrist that was already entering the church. John stated that the real spirit of anitchrist was found in a denial of the Father and Son. (1 John 2:18-22, 2 John 7-11) To help correct the error that was rapidly coming into Christianity, John wrote his account of Christ's life to prove beyond any doubt, that Jesus was the true Son of God!

Confusion on the Identity of Jesus within Adventism

The subject of the second lesson is the identity of Christ. The lesson presents a confused picture. At times, it seems to say that Jesus is the Father or one person of the Being the Bible calls God. At other times it seems to speak of Jesus as a separate Being from the Father. While the Seventh-day Adventist Church has, according to its statement of beliefs, claimed to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity since 1931, the understanding of that teaching has been somewhat varied. Until recently, the concept of the majority of both laity and clergy alike was more akin to Tritheism than orthodox Trinitarianism. Orthodox Trinitarianism teaches that there is one God in the numerical sense. This one being is said to consist of three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each is said to be fully God, but at the same time, it is claimed that they are not three separate Gods or three separate beings. Tritheism teaches that there is one God in the sense of unity, but actually three different beings. They are not considered to be dependent upon one another for their relationship with each other. Their oneness is one of purpose, thought, and action. Tritheism is illustrated by the following statement written by Gordon Jensen in a special week of prayer issue of the *Adventist Review*:

“A plan of salvation was encompassed in the covenant made by the Three Persons of the Godhead, who possessed the attributes of Deity equally. In order to eradicate sin and rebellion from the universe and to restore harmony and peace, *one of the divine Beings accepted, and entered into, the role of the Father, another the role of the Son.* The remaining divine Being, the Holy Spirit, was also to participate in effecting the plan of salvation. All of this took place before sin and rebellion transpired in heaven.

“By accepting the roles that the plan entailed, the divine Beings lost none of

the powers of Deity. With regard to their eternal existence and other attributes, they were one and equal. But with regard to the plan of salvation, there was, in a sense, a submission on the part of the Son to the Father.” (Gordon Jensen—*Adventist Review*, October 31, 1996, p. 12. Week of Prayer readings. Emphasis supplied.)

Notice that this belief involves “Beings” plural! It also acknowledges that the “divine Beings accepted, and entered into ... roles!” The Father is only a father because He plays the role of the salvational script. The Son is only a son, not by being begotten of the Father, but by accepting a role in the script. The same is said for the Holy Spirit.

However, to the evangelicals that the SDA Church has been courting so long, this is anathema and equivalent to pagan polytheism. Perhaps sensing that she was soon to be reprimanded for such thinking, the church has, for the last few years, been changing her theology and has now moved, at least in the theological and ministerial circles, towards orthodox Trinitarianism. In 1980, at the General Conference Session in Dallas, Texas, the statement of beliefs was rewritten, in part, to parallel the constitution of the World Council of Churches and gain full acceptance with evangelicals. With the publication of volume 12 of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, called the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, the church has come as close to renouncing tritheism and accepting orthodox trinitarianism as it can outside of direct General Conference action. Yet the handbook carries a weighty mandate from the General Conference. Before we look at some statements from the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, we should note that according to the book’s forward, it was authorized by the General Conference meeting in Annual Council in 1988 when they were assembled in Nairobi, Kenya. (p. ix). The preface states the need for such a book had been

recognized for over twenty years prior to its publication. (p. x) Notice carefully some of the following statements which clearly denounce tritheism:

“The oneness of God plays a decisive, systematic role in determining the referent for the biblical revelations about God. In other words, since the God of the Bible is one and not many, all the various revelations about Him presented throughout the Bible refer to the same, *one divine reality and not to a plurality of divine beings.*” (*Ibid.*, p. 121—emphasis supplied)

“The personal complexity of the one divine *being* [singular] that is clearly articulated in the NT is already expressed by the OT in a less specific way.” (*Ibid.*, p. — emphasis supplied)

“In the *being* [singular] of God is an essential coprimordiality of three coequal, coeternal, nonoriginated persons.” (*Ibid.*, p. 150 – emphasis supplied)

These statements make it clear that the thrust of the theology is towards an orthodox, or as they call it, “classical” trinitarianism. Although no reason is given for calling the concept taught in the *Handbook* “classical,” it may be to separate it from the Catholic understanding of the doctrine of “eternal generation.” “To explain the divine ‘multiplicity’ of hypostases, Origen devised the idea of eternal generation, according to which the Son is timelessly generated by the Father.” (*Ibid.*, p. 142) However, the teaching is certainly in line with professed Protestants and in reality, with the principles of the orthodox trinity of Catholicism.

Confusion Continues within the Quarterly

In the Sabbath School lesson, *The Gospel of John*, there are several statements that speak of the Father and Jesus as being separate individuals, though not calling them separate beings. On page 20, Ellen White is quoted, “The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father,” On page 15 the lesson states

that the “Word, was distinct from the Father.” Yet on the same page, we also read, “The intimate relationship between the Word and the Father was an intimacy of equals. We are not dealing with ‘Gods’ [plural] here; there is full unity in the Godhead at the same time that there is intimate relationship among the personalities [plural] of the Godhead [singular].” No wonder one minister’s wife stated that we will never understand this till after the second coming of Jesus!

Further confusing the issue, Christ is referred to as, “The King of the universe” on pages 14 and 20 of lesson 2. This phrase is never found in Scripture, but is in the writings on Ellen White. There it never refers to Jesus, but only to the Father.

“God is our Father, who loves and cares for us as His children; He is also the great King of the universe.” (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, p. 107)

“The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth; for Christ is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8); yet it was a struggle, even with the King of the universe, to yield up His Son to die for the guilty race.” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63)

“The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son and show the relation He sustained to all created beings.” (*Ibid.*, p. 36)

Further Confusion

The quarterly states that we should, “Meditate on what the full deity of Christ means for us, that God Himself died for our sins.” (*The Gospel of John*, p. 16) Yet, the Bible teaches that God cannot die, that He alone has immortality. (1 Timothy 6:16) If Jesus is exactly like the Father then He cannot die for our sins.

On page 30, lesson 4, John 3:16 is quoted from the New International Version. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not

perish but have eternal life.” Here we truly are at the critical point. The lesson quoting the NIV declares Jesus to be God’s “one and only Son.” Sadly, no specific dialog on this verse follows. Jesus is called Gods “beloved Son,” (*The Gospel of John*, p. 30) but never God’s “only begotten son” as the Authorized Version states and as the Greek text bears out. To do so, would conflict with the identity of Jesus as portrayed in lesson 2. Further confusing thoughts on the death of Christ, His personal presence, and other issues will be dealt with next month. Let’s now look at the Biblical view of Jesus Christ and see if His identity and “eternal nature” match what is being taught.

The Biblical View of Christ

The Biblical view of Jesus is simple and direct. He is the “only begotten Son” of the Father. The testimony of the Bible is so abundant that Jesus is God’s Son that few people will challenge the terminology of the phrase, “Son of God.” (Inspiration never calls Him, “God the Son.”) For example; at the baptism of Jesus, the Father declares Jesus to be His Son: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17)

The apostles declared Jesus to be the Son of God. “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.” (Matthew 16:13-17) While Peter’s confession is known by many, it was actually Nathanael who first acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God. In John 1:49 we read: “Nathanael answered and

saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.”

The first truth that the apostle Paul preached after his conversion was that Jesus was the Son of God: “And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:19-20)

Many other references could be sighted to show that the Bible testimony is that Jesus is God’s Son. However, the most important testimony that we must yet consider is the testimony of Jesus Himself. Did He know His identity? I believe so. Jesus, in the most famous and most translated verse in the entire Bible declared Himself to be God’s “only begotten Son.” (John 3:16 KJV) To be begotten means to be born or brought forth. (*This is not the same thing as created.*) This concept runs squarely into a brick wall with most theologians and church beliefs. It is very different from the translation of the NIV which calls Jesus God’s “one and only Son.” Here the difference begins.

What does “Only Begotten” Mean

Several years ago during a Mountain View Conference camp meeting, a minister was preaching on Romans 8:3 which states that Jesus took upon Himself our sinful flesh. The preacher asked the question, “What does this mean?” A minister I knew and respected responded, perhaps with heavenly insight, “It doesn’t mean exactly the opposite of what is says!” Sadly after about ten minutes of human reasoning, the preacher stated that it meant the exact opposite of what it said! That is similar to what happens most of the time with John 3:16.

All Christians give “lip service” to the claim that Jesus is God’s Son. However, most theologians do not accept that Jesus is the literal begotten Son of God, but rather they believe that He is a co-equal and co-eternal “person” of the

Godhead, not the literal offspring of the Father. The term “son,” they say, is to be understood as a role or a symbolic position to help humanity, in their own language, understand the love and sacrifice of God for man.

What does the testimony of Jesus really say? Let’s look at the term “only begotten.” It is from the Greek term, *μονογενής* (*monogenes*). This is a compound word from two Greek words. The first is, *μονος* (*monos*), meaning “one” or “only one.” The second word is: *γενος* (*genos*) which means kindred or offspring. Together they mean only born.

Interestingly, *monogenes* is defined by the theologians to mean, “unique” or “special” without any basis in the original language. Why? Satan is behind this because he does not want you to believe God loves you so much that He made the great sacrifice of giving His only begotten Son to really die for your sins. Satan knows that the Bible says that we love God as a result of our understanding and appreciating God’s love for us. (1 John 4:19) He also knows what 1 John 4:9 says, “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.” Therefore, anything he can do to keep the truth of God’s great love from us, he will do and he has invented a false understanding of *monogenes* to keep us from understanding God’s love. If *monogenes* meant “unique” or “special” then the Bible writers did not understand it, nor do the people who speak Greek as their first language understand it.

A couple of years ago I was talking with a Christian sister, whose first language is Greek, and I asked her what *monogenes* meant to her and those who spoke Greek. She said, it meant one thing, and only one thing: “only born.” As I considered the matter it seemed very strange that the English and German theologians, who did not speak Greek as their first and primary language, should presume to tell the

Greek people what their own language means. If someone who only spoke English as a second language, or only studied it in part should begin to tell me that the English phrase, “only begotten” meant “unique” I would not put much stock or consideration into the rest of what they might say.

However, to be fair, let us look at how the term *monogenes* is used in the Bible. This term is used in reference to Jesus five times in the Bible, always by John. (John 1:14; 1:18; 3:16; 3:18; 1 John 4:9) Any honest reading of these texts, without a preconceived notion, would lead the reader to accept them at face value. Since we are looking for a usage to enlighten us on the passages from John, let’s examine the other four verse. Three usages are from Luke. The first is concerning the widow of Nain’s son.

“Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only (*monogenes*) [“only-begotten,” Rothrham, translation] son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.” (Luke 7:12) The No indication that *monogenes* means anything other than only born child here.

The second reference is Luke 8:42 concerning Jarius’s daughter. “For he had *one only* (*monogenes*) [“only begotten”—Rothrham translation] daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.” No indication that *monogenes* means anything other than only born child here.

The third usage is Luke 9:38 where a man’s son was possessed with an evil spirit “And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine *only child* (*monogenes*).” There is no indication that *monogenes* means anything other than only born child here. In each of these cases *monogenes* means makes reference to an only born child.

The last reference and the one that is used as a license for redefining *monogenes* is Hebrews 11:17 which

states, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten (*monogenes*) son.” It will be pointed out that Isaac was not Abraham’s only begotten son; he was not even Abraham’s first son. Ishmael was Abraham’s first son and Abraham also had sons by Keturah. However, we should be suspect of any interpretation that seems to run counter to eight other Bible texts, right? Well, the truth is, all we have to do is read the next verse in Hebrews 11 because verse 17 does not end with a period, but rather with a comma. Let’s read verses 17 and 18 together as a unit, as they were intended to be read: “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called.” Isaac was Abraham’s only born child of which the promise of the seed was made to! There was a condition given by Paul and *monogenes* fits that condition.

Clearly, the Greek word *monogenes* means only born. Christ is the literal offspring of the Father and this certainly agrees with Proverbs 8 where, speaking under the symbol of Wisdom, Christ declares:

“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 [Hebrew: born]; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth [Hebrew: born].” (Proverbs 8:22-25)

Before anything else was ever in existence, God, through Christ, brought into existence all things, both things “visible and invisible.” (Colossians 3:16) This included the concepts of “time” and “space.” (See *The Sabbath*, pp. 54, 55 – M. L. Andreasen) Therefore, in the sense that Christ is the author of time, Christ has

truly existed throughout all time with God.

Do the Scriptures Teach Jesus to be the Same Age as the Father?

Now what honest objections can be found for believing that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God? As we have noted, Satan is behind the evil lie that Jesus is not the only begotten Son of God. Why would theologians and church leaders unwittingly follow this thinking? Because they mistakenly tie Christ's divinity to an absolute eternal existence exactly as the Father has.

We have seen that Jesus declares Himself to be "begotten," or "brought forth" by the Father. What about some texts that are usually used to prove that Christ has existed from all eternity just as the Father? Micah 5:2 is usually one of the first texts that is mentioned. It says: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." This text speaks of everlasting or eternity. However, we must also note that the text speaks of a "goings forth" of this ruler of Judah. The expression "goings forth" in the Hebrew is מוצאה *mowtsa'ah*. It means "origin" and is so translated in the RSV and translated, "origins" in the NIV. Rather than stating that Christ does not have an origin, Micah 5:2 is stating that in the eternity of past, Christ does have an origin. E. J. Waggoner of 1888 notoriety stated it this way in his book, *Christ and His Righteousness*, a book based on part of his 1888 General Conference lectures:

"The Word was 'in the beginning.' The mind of man cannot grasp the ages that are spanned in this phrase. It is not given to men to know when or how the Son was begotten; but we know that he was the Divine Word, not simply before He came to this earth to die, but even before the world was created. Just before His crucifixion He prayed, 'And now, O Father, glorify thou Me

with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.' John 17:5. And more than seven hundred years before His first advent, His coming was thus foretold by the word of inspiration: 'But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.' Micah 5:2, margin. We know that Christ 'proceeded forth and came from God' (John 8:42), but it was so far back in the ages of eternity as to be far beyond the grasp of the mind of man." (*Christ and His Righteousness*, p. 9)

One writer recently published a "thought paper" attempting to discredit what Waggoner wrote on this matter, stating that it sounded like one of the Catholic creeds. I assure you that Waggoner's view is not Catholic. The Catholics believe in the eternal generation of the Son which claims that Jesus is the same age as the Father. However, even if it sounded like something in a Catholic creed, because at times the Catholics at least try to couch their teachings in the terminology of Scriptures, if that portion matches the Bible, should it be rejected? This is the same E. J. Waggoner of whose teachings Ellen White wrote:

"When Brother Waggoner brought out these ideas in Minneapolis, it was the first clear teaching on this subject from any human lips I had heard, excepting the conversations between myself and my husband. I have said to myself, It is because God has presented it to me in vision that I see it so clearly, and they cannot see it because they have never had it presented to them as I have. And when another presented it, every fiber of my heart said, Amen." (*The 1888 Materials*, p. 349)

Ellen White declared Waggoner to be a "messenger" called to give the message of righteousness by faith. I ask a simple question, yet one that most of those who currently speak about the "1888 message" fail to consider. How

could Waggoner supposedly have such a faulty concept of Christ and still have "a most precious message" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 92), one that "every fiber" of Ellen White's "heart said, Amen" to? Could Waggoner be preaching devilish error when Ellen White said that his message was like what had been revealed to her in vision?

Evidence is sighted in the Sabbath School lesson quarterly to state that the Greek of John 1:1, "In the beginning [*αρχη arche*] was [*ην* imperfect tense] the Word," contains a verb that is used in the imperfect tense which "expresses continuous existence in past time." (p. 15) The Greek verb *ην* translated "was" is in the imperfect tense which "generally represents continual or repeated action." (*Online Bible Greek Lexicon*.) In other words, Christ "was" continually from the beginning. However, the text does state that there is a "beginning" of something and that Christ has been in continuous existence since that "beginning." While the context goes on to speak of creation, the text does not specifically define what "beginning" this is describing.

Interestingly, this same verb, *ην* in the imperfect tense, along with the same Greek word for beginning, (*αρχη arche*), is also used in John 8:44 concerning Satan:

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was [*ην* in the imperfect tense] a murderer from the beginning [*αρχη arche*], and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him."

I do not know of anyone who would use this text to teach that Satan has always existed from all eternity or even that he has been evil from the beginning of his existence. That would contradict Ezekiel 28:15 and Colossians 1:16.

Implications

In Bible study and Bible interpretation, we must come to conclusions that fit all the Scriptures, not just some. We must not begin with man-made suppositions

but rather with an open mind to let the Bible speak to us. The issue for many comes down to either accepting the Bible statements that Jesus is the literal begotten Son of God, or accepting the supposition that He must have an absolute eternal nature as the Father or He can't be divine. However, let me share an illustration that I believe can make this clear. I am, of course, human. (No pun intended.) I have a son. His name is Hans. He also is human. Why? My very nature is human and the only nature I can pass on is human. I cannot procreate a cat or dog or anything else. (Again, no pun intended.) Is my son any less human than I am? No of course not. I will always be older than Hans and my authority will never be questioned by him, but now that he is an adult, we can work side by side as equals. The Father is divine. The very nature of His essence is pure divinity. His Son can be no less!

What are the implications of accepting that Jesus is the literal Son of God versus His not being the Son of God, but a co-eternal in every respect with the Father?

If I accept Jesus as the literal "only begotten Son of God" then I can see and understand the love God has for me. I understand that Calvary really meant something to the Father as well as Jesus. I can gain a heart-felt appreciation for God's goodness to me and as I see His great love for me, I will love Him in return and freely accept His offered salvation.

Further, I can trust the honesty of God that He speaks to me in language I can understand and not that of

mysteries. You see, the Trinity doctrine is often called a "mystery." The theologians don't think you can understand it, so they will do all the studying for you. (Of course nobody can find truth in a false doctrine of Satan.) One SDA Church theologian (PhD) recently wrote a response to a church member who sent a study to him concerning the Trinity. His response, in part, was:

"S____, do not waste your time writing on [a] subject that you have not had the opportunity to research. I stay away from writing on scientific subjects, because I know very little about it."

The theologian does not write on science since he knows little about it, but he knows theology so he writes on it. The implication is that S____ does not know theology, so S____ should be quiet and leave the theology to the theologians who do! This is quite to the contrary of what the Bible says. In light of the PhD's thoughts, consider the following Scriptures:

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." (1 Peter 3:15)

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." (1 John 2:27)

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

There is no mention of any theologian needed in these verses!

What are the implications of rejecting Jesus as the literal Son of God to believe a supposition? Since Jesus is the same as the Father, only in a different "role," He cannot truly and fully die for the sinner. That might sound strong to those who have never considered it before, but this is exactly what the theologians teach! They will tell you that only the human body of Jesus died for your sins, and that the spirit lived on to raise that body from the dead. But the Bible says that Jesus, "poured out his soul (body and spirit) unto death." (Isaiah 53:12.) In fact, the view that Jesus is not the literal Son of God totally does away with the divine sacrifice of the atonement and this is the major reason that all the early Adventist pioneers rejected the Trinitarian doctrine! The idea that Jesus is not the literal Son of God hides the Father's great love for me for He had no Son to give. Therefore, since my love to Him is based on my understanding and appreciation of His love to me, I can not love Him as it is my privilege to.

I pray that you will continue to study for yourself. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32) Next month we will continue to look at major issues in the Sabbath School lessons, especially those dealing with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Allen Stump

Ghana Camp Meeting Report

Three years ago, seventeen churches, comprising several hundred believers in the Berekum area of Ghana, were disfellowshipped from the main-line Seventh-day Adventist

Church for refusing to remain silent concerning open sins among some of their leaders.

Helping to lead out among the disfellowshipped groups is Evangelist

Paul Osei Agyeman. God has used Brother Paul to help organize the work among the brethren, as well as sending out teams of evangelists to spread the gospel around Ghana, and maintaining

a radio station and printing work. In October 2003, David Clayton and Howard Williams of Restoration Ministries in Jamaica visited several countries in Africa, including Ghana. While there they conducted meetings with Brother Paul and about ninety elders and leaders from the disfellowshipped churches.

For the past three years, these brethren have been holding a year-end camp meeting. This year they were expecting about 2,000 people to attend, and they were very eager for someone from the U.S.A. or Jamaica to come and share the truth about God to all of these brethren.

The Lord opened the doors, with little miracles here and there, to allow me to visit Ghana, so I was very confident that the Lord wanted me to go.

After a very long flight, I arrived in Accra, Ghana, and was greeted by Brother Paul and two other brothers. We stayed the night in Accra, and left very early the next morning for the six-hour drive to Berekum, where the camp meeting would be held.

On the first Sabbath, I was asked to speak at one of the disfellowshipped churches, where over 100 people were in attendance. Since the camp meeting was not going to begin until Tuesday, December 30, we decided to hold meetings with some of the brethren on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday afternoon at a local church. The brethren who attended were very excited to hear the truth about God presented. We took several hours for each meeting, so they had a lot of time to ask questions. We also had a large chalkboard, which allowed me to illustrate my points. The people were very interested, and everyone accepted the message.

The camp meeting began on Tuesday evening, with well over 600 in attendance from many parts of the country. Some brethren came from Togo and Nigeria. I had the first evening meeting on Tuesday. I was prepared to have the meeting at the church, as scheduled, but at the last minute, it was changed, to be held at

the camp meeting. The layout of the camp was a real challenge to me. I am used to being very close to the people, and having a chalkboard or white-dry board to illustrate my points. The meeting place was outdoors, with about twenty canopies set up to form a large square, with about a 100-foot square in the center with nothing but empty space. There were many benches set up for the people under the canopies. In the center of one side of the square was a canopy setup on a platform, which served as the podium for the speakers. When I got up to speak, it seemed like all the people were a mile away. Fortunately, we had a good public address system with loud speakers so everyone could hear well. Another challenge was that we had two translators on the podium, so the message was presented in three languages. There was a long break between each sentence, while I was waiting for the translations. In addition, I only had about 50 minutes to present a message that usually takes me an hour and a half without translators.

Needless to say, I had a difficult time condensing my material on the death of Christ, and making that first presentation. I prayed that at least a few of the people would gain benefit from it.

That night I fervently prayed that the Lord would give me the boldness, clearness of thought, and a heart overflowing with the message, so that it would go better the next day.

Wednesday, December 31, 2003

On Wednesday morning I continued praying. I was scheduled to share a message each day for one hour and forty minutes. I shared a message on God's love in giving His Son, and shared from the Bible that Jesus was the literal Son of God, born from His Father before anything was created. (See Proverbs 8:24-30; Micah 5:2; John 5:26; 8:42; Hebrews 1:5; etc.) The Lord richly blessed in every way, and I was very thankful for the answered prayers. After the first night, all the remaining messages were

translated into only one language, with the few people who spoke the other language having a personal translator to the side by themselves. There were well over 1,000 people in attendance, and they were very attentive and thankful for the message. There was no opposition at all. My prayers continued fervently throughout the rest of the camp meeting.

Thursday, January 1, 2004

On Thursday I shared a message from the Bible on the Father being the supreme Being of the Universe, that He is the "only true God." (See 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; Ephesians 4:6; Mark 12:32; John 17:3; etc.) Most of the people were very enthusiastic and appreciative to learn the truth about God. They were surprised to learn from the Bible that the Trinity doctrine cannot be found there. A few people asked questions at the end, some of which we decided to address the following day when we would look at the subject of the Holy Spirit. At the end of the meeting, it was very clear that the Trinity is a false doctrine, and one of the elders came up to the platform and spoke to the people very enthusiastically about the message.

Friday, January 2, 2004

On Friday we saw, from the Bible, that the Comforter Jesus promised to send is His own Spirit, along with His Father's Spirit, to comfort His people. (See John 14:15-23.) The Lord greatly blessed in all of the meetings, and the message was brought out so clearly from the Bible that it virtually eliminated anyone having questions.

On Friday evening, a long service was followed by communion, which ended at about 2:30 a.m. That evening they asked everyone to come up who wanted to give their lives to Christ. A few drunks came to the front as well as several others, about fifteen in all. One of them, named Eric, looked the worst. He was visibly drunk, and smelled very strongly of alcohol. We had prayer together, and they all asked Jesus to come into their hearts. I told

them about how the Lord delivered me from drugs and alcohol, and that He would do it for them also. The service was very nicely done, and it was a privilege to take part in it, even though most of us were very exhausted by the end of the service.

Sabbath, January 3, 2004

On Sabbath the attendance swelled a little, and some of the brethren estimated that there were over 2,000 people there. The subject I presented was "The Death of Christ." It took a little time to break through some of the barriers people had in regard to this subject. Some people thought that only the body of Jesus died for our sins, while His Spirit or soul remained alive, thus having only a created, human sacrifice for sins, since His human body was created. (Hebrews 10:5) We read Isaiah 53:10 where it says that His soul was made "an offering for sin." We also noticed that Jesus said we should not fear those who can kill the body, but rather we should fear the only One who has power to destroy both soul and body in hell fire. We saw that Jesus did not come to save us from the first death, when only the body is killed, while the spirit goes back to God in an unconscious condition. Instead, we recognized that Jesus came to save us from the second death, where both the soul and body are destroyed, never to be resurrected. Since Jesus came to save us from the second death, the *experience* of the death He suffered must have been an equivalent to the second death. We saw that when Christ died, He died completely for our sins, and no part of Him remained alive.

Several people came to me and expressed their joy in finally understanding the death of Christ and for the

rest of the message. There was virtually no opposition to the message because they read it for themselves in their Bibles. They knew that if they had a problem with the message, they would have a problem with the Bible, not me. All I was doing was pointing out Bible verses that teach the message. There were very few questions, but the few that did arise, I did not answer by giving an explanation, but rather by reading other Bible verses that explained the ones that were not clear. I found that this is the best way to answer questions. The Bible explains itself if it is allowed to do so.

Sunday, January 4, 2004

Sunday was the last day of camp meeting, and they had scheduled a march through the city. Over 400 youth dressed up in Pathfinder uniforms and marched through the city, accompanied by a marching band with many of the people at camp meeting following behind. It was quite a procession.

After the procession, I shared the final words of the camp meeting, encouraging everyone to take up the torch and preach the everlasting gospel to all nations. The camp meeting finished with over 1,500 people learning the truth about God for the first time. Many of them expressed their eagerness to share the message with others. I was happy to see the Lord blessing these people with a deeper appreciation of His love for them.

One of the former drunks, Eric, who had given his life to the Lord on Friday, came up to me on Sunday dressed very nicely, with clear eyes, and free from alcohol. He told me that alcohol was never going into his body again. I was overjoyed to see this. He came over to Paul's house the night before I left, still



Tent canopies set up to form a large square

having the victory over alcohol. Praise God for His mighty power to save!

Throughout the camp meeting, several singing groups shared special music. It was very nice. One of the groups said that they wanted to understand the message very well, because they are planning to put the message to music, and incorporate it in their songs.

Summary

In the short time I visited Ghana, I really came to appreciate the people. They will always be in my heart and prayers. I saw a lot of potential in Ghana. Brother Paul has a well-established evangelistic ministry, which is respected in their area, and it is sharing the good news about God's love to as many people as possible through radio, printed literature, and street evangelism. There are many capable evangelists who are working to spread this message.

When I came to Ghana a small group of people were well acquainted with the message of God's love in giving His Son to die for our sins. They had gained this knowledge through Brother Paul's efforts, and the visit of Brothers David Clayton and Howard Williams in October. However, the large majority did not understand the message, including many of the elders. After I saw the need for the message to be understood, and the way the Lord blessed in presenting it, I wrote home and said, "I am 100% sure that God wanted me to come to Ghana."

Please keep these brothers in your prayers. Ghana, just like most of the countries in Africa, suffers from poverty and a lack of resources to do the ministry work. God has provided the ministry there with a lot of things that are missing in the other African countries I visited, largely because of the supporters from Europe who have helped them to get established. Still, they are lacking in many ways. Please keep them in your prayers.

Lynnford Beachy

Youth's Corner - The Divine Teacher

For thousands of years, men had been in thralldom to a degenerating power. Satan had perverted their conceptions of God, and of the plan and work of salvation. He had brought their minds so fully under his control that every heavenly attribute had been well-nigh destroyed. Of himself, man had not one thought nor impulse of a spiritual nature. He could do nothing to save himself. Only as Christ should draw him, could he take one step in repentance or reform.



God saw that the world was destitute of true knowledge, and he sent Christ into the world to live the law, and thus represent him. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth." The Truth, the Life, and the Light of the world, was to find a place in the hearts of men. For this Christ clothed his divinity with humanity. This was the only means by which he could reach humanity. Christ became one with the human family. He spoke in the language of men. He ate with them at their tables. He bore with them their trials and poverty, and shared their toils. Thus he assured them of his complete identification with humanity.

It was necessary that he should do all this. Though he came in human form, his wonderful works and the mystery of his character inspired the people with awe, and tended to shut them away from him. But by himself coming in close contact and sympathy with man, Christ broke down the barriers.

In his teaching, Christ did not conform to the practices of the great men of the world, or of the rabbinical teachers. Their teaching made dark and intricate that which was plain. They made a show of possessing great knowledge, knowledge which the common people could not comprehend. But their wisdom was foolishness. Christ's knowledge was great, his wisdom deep; but it was without pretense. It found expression in words beautiful with the grace of simplicity, yet clothed with dignity and power.

Christ, the author of truth, did not disdain to present truths that were old and familiar. The great purpose of his mission was ever kept in view. When this purpose could be served by the repetition of familiar truths, he employed them. By unsanctified minds, many of these truths had been disconnected from their true position, and had been employed to strengthen error. Christ recovered and replaced them as links in the great chain of redemption.

Many precious gems of light had lost their luster; they were buried beneath a mass of tradition and superstition. As the author of truth, Christ was able to distinguish every precious gem. His hand removed the rubbish of false teaching, and recovered the lost treasures. He reset them in all their original freshness and beauty in the framework of the gospel, and commanded that they should stand fast forever.

In his teaching Christ reached the minds of men by the pathway of their familiar associations. He linked his lesson with their most hallowed recollections and their tenderest sympathies. His illustrations were drawn from the great book of nature and from the treasury of household ties and affections. The simple lily of the field in its freshness and beauty was presented to the people by the great

Master artist. With the common duties of life he bound up the most precious treasures of divine truth. The regenerating power of his grace was represented by figures that all could comprehend. Thus he made truth and light a part of the daily appointments. Everything connected with the common routine of life was invested with a solemn dignity, and shown to be related to eternal interests.



Christ taught the people that all true knowledge is divine, and that, acted upon, it will lead heavenward. In all his teachings he suggested to his hearers a new train of thought, in harmony with the transforming principles of truth. By meeting the people where they were, he carried them with him to a higher plane of thought and life. Their hearts were prepared to receive the rays of light shining from the Light of the world.

Though Christ had taken upon himself human nature, yet his divinity flashed through humanity. In all his education and discipline his superiority was revealed. In their simplicity the lessons which fell from his lips possessed a power and attractiveness which none of the teachings of the world's great men could equal. "The common people heard him gladly," and the testimony borne to his teaching was, "Never man spake like this man." (Ellen G. White—*Youth's Instructor*, March 19, 1903)

Letters:

Old Paths:

Thank you for sending *Old Paths*. **UT**

Please put me on the mailing list. **Internet**

Since receiving the first “news” from you, I’ve been confused regarding the Trinity. Your Vol. 13, No. 1 article “How Many Gods Are There?” makes sense. I need more. Please send me, “The Truth About God” [tract] and *The Formulation of the Doctrine of the Trinity*. I’m a SDA and need the whole truth. **MI**

“How Many Gods Are There” in *Old Paths*. An excellent rerun. Thanks much! **NC**

Miscellaneous:

I’m sending this as a donation. This is to cover for the books I received from you and to help you with sending this truth to others. Thanks so much. **IA**

We surely enjoyed the meeting in Pensacola, FL. They were well worth the trip. We learned quite a lot and met some wonderful people. The baptism in the Gulf was a great experience for the people at the mission. God blessed the meeting. Continue to spread the good news about God. **FL**

We pray daily for all of you there at Smyrna, especially for Charmaine that she will regain her health. God is good!! And it’s wonderful to know He is in control. **FL**

I am new to your ministry support group, introduced to you by _____ who knows your belief and work. She introduced me to the non-Trinitarian truth. I am no longer a Trinitarian. Have been an SDA all my life (almost 70 years) and I can’t believe how steeped I was in this concept that can’t be found in the Bible or Spirit of Prophecy. What a blessing to be growing in Bible truth! **TN**

Thank you so much for your timely response. As I was telling my wife the other day, the Lord is the Creator of our brains. Truly, what we come to learn about God is dependent upon Him allowing our brains, by increment, to digest the wisdom that is given to men. I believe that’s why the Bible is compiled in the manner which it is—not like a basic text-book, but like an archeological site, so to speak, wherein only serious and diligent (and prayerful) investigation will lead to any fruitful understanding. I believe the reason why so many un-biblical doctrines run rampant in the religious world is because people give the Bible about as much consideration as they would a comic book.

When Peter recognized Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus said that such recognition was because of God-sent wisdom, not Peter’s own intuition.

I’m very happy today because the Lord has given me a nugget of gold. He has allowed me to understand those verses which presented a real perplexity before, and thus, I feel peacefully settled. And now that I look back, I find that the answer was so simple, even a child can understand it.

The problem was with Hebrews 1:8, where we hear God the Father, addressing His Son by the title “God.” It’s really overwhelming how often the Bible declares the Father to be the single, almighty God. The Son constantly affirms that His Father is “the only true God.” This verse stood as a real mind-boggler for a while. But, praise the Lord, finally I comprehended just what this whole passage (pretty much the whole first chapter of Hebrews) is saying. This is heredity and, very importantly, INHERITANCE. What can the Son of God be (a Son who is the exact image of God’s person), except divine. Can He inherit anything less than deity? No.without wrapping my brain around a “mystery” and invoking the silly theme of “mystics,” it’s simple and logical why Jesus is here referred to as “God” in this context. It’s also just as simple and logical to understand how God the Father is still THE one true God. He is the most High, the Supreme, even “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I figure this has already been long understood by you. It just feels really refreshing to explain my newfound understanding to another Adventist. I’m really excited about it. The Trinity has been a serious black-hole, for ever since I started considering it! How good I feel to be untangled by it ever more. Thanks be to God! **Internet**

Last week we were very much blessed by a visit from a couple from Moshi in the North of the Country, who came in search of the truth about God. We knew each other since 1992 when we were having missionary campaigns in their areas. They are from Independent Adventists, but recently heard of our message and decided to travel to Dares Salaam to hear for themselves. After three days of studying together they are in agreement that this is the true message and are ready to join hands in finishing the work. They have a group of people with them in Moshi, who have been worshipping together and said they are taking the new light to all of them right away. While we are eagerly waiting to hear what transpired in Ghana, we thought you can rejoice with us for the blessings from above. **Tanzania–Africa**

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Florida Camp Meeting

The brethren from Florida will be hosting their annual camp meeting this month, February 18-22. It will be located, as it has the past few years, at the Forrest River Campground in the southeast corner of the Ocala National Forest, on the scenic St. Johns River. The Forest River Campground is 6.3 miles southwest of downtown Deland. It is located on River Forest Blvd., about 1/4 mile west of Crows Bluff, off of State Rt. 42.

The theme of the camp meeting will be “Christ in the Sanctuary.” Some of the speakers will be David Clayton, Ben Vela, Jim Pendley, Ken Corklin, and Allen Stump.

Meals will not be provided, but a nice kitchen is available. There are no RV hook ups, but plenty of room for RVs and tents. There is a main building for meetings, showers, rest rooms and, as mentioned earlier, a kitchen. If you can make it, please come. Mosquitos may be present, so be prepared. For more information, contact: Bill James, phone: 407-694-2156; email: abj2289@gte.net *Editor*

“Prayer Requests,” continued from page 1

Restoration Ministries and I will again be traveling to Australia to share the message and encourage the brethren in that great area. Please keep our mission in your prayers as well as those working in other areas. Lord willing, we can soon give an outline of some of the work going on around the world so you can best direct your prayers to our Father.

Allen Stump

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Editor Allen Stump—editor@smyrna.org
Associate Editor Lynnford Beachy—berean@smyrna.org