
THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

Christ's Eternal Sonship

W FOREWORD W

It was specifically a father's trial in [Genesis 22](#) , and by that symbolic act God instructed Abraham in His ways and showed how only by the severest trial and suffering to the Father could the promised blessing come. Was the infinite love of God to men such as could ever lead Him to yield up His own beloved Son? It was, and amidst all the groans and anguish brought in on account of sin, infinitely the greatest sufferer was God Himself.

We do not confuse the persons when we say that the Father suffered equally with the Son, for the suffering, though equal in degree, was different in kind. Who can tell what it cost the Father to give up His only begotten Son for us? How much would have been lost in the history of Abraham and Isaac if Abraham had had no son until he began the three days' journey? It was the relationship in which they stood to each other that gives the real significance to the scene.

The practical force, too, of [1 John 4:7–11](#) depends upon the existence of that relationship antecedently to the gift. It is this that constitutes the transcendent way in which God's love was manifested—in sending “His Son, His Only Begotten, into the world that we might live through Him.” It was a love that went out in sacrifice, imparting and communicating itself, and this is the supreme example placed before those who are begotten of God and know God.

We may be thankful for all helps toward the understanding of this great mystery,
and heartily commend the following pages to this end.

W. R. Lewis.



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W CHAPTER ONE W

Parallel Lines of Doctrine

Parallel lines meet at infinity. That is a fact demonstrable by a geometric proof. It serves as an illustration of the lines of doctrine which set forth the glories of the Son of God. Nowhere does this receive a more striking exposition than in the opening chapter of the Gospel of John. We are at once introduced to this blessed Person as the Eternal Word. The initial declarations concerning Him in this respect lead up to the statement in verse [14](#) , “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” That leads us along one line of the doctrine.

After an intimation of His divine relationship, He is brought before us distinctively as the Son of God, and this leads on to His presentation as the Lamb of God. That is the other line of the doctrine, and it runs parallel to the first. Along each our thoughts are taken from heaven to earth, from eternity into time. Each line takes us to the days of His flesh and to His death. The two lines meet in Him, and so in infinity: for infinite He is, infinite in His person and in His work. We will consider these two parallels of revelation somewhat more closely.

The Eternal Word

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” ([John 1:1](#)). The first of these three statements declares His preexistence. In whatever way the phrase “In the beginning” may be understood (it probably refers to the creation of the universe), the paramount fact is that He, the Word, was preexistent to it. Whensoever creation had a beginning He was already there. There was no beginning to His being.

The second statement declares the distinctiveness of His person. He was “with God.” The preposition is not *sun*, which signifies “accompaniment,” nor *meta*, which suggests accompaniment with mutual interest, but *pros*, which is expressive of a personal attitude toward and occupation with the One whose presence is being experienced.

The third statement predicates His Deity, His oneness in Godhood with Him whom the second statement spoke of as God. The three declarations stress the personal nature of Him who is the Word. That this bears the implication of the existence of two Gods is refuted by this very Gospel, which declares that the Father and the Son are one, and by other Scriptures which predicate that there is one God. *

The Significance of Repetitions

These initial statements are followed by a repetition of the first and second, with emphasis on the demonstrative pronoun: “The same (or rather, “This One”) was in the beginning with God.” But why this repetition? There are no mere repetitions in the Scriptures. Sometimes a reiterated statement is confirmatory of what has been stated; sometimes it is also introductory to what immediately follows. This is the case here; for, immediately after the repeated statement that the Word was in the beginning with God, the existence of the universe is attributed to Him. “All things were made by Him.”

This again is reiterated and expanded: “And without Him was not anything made that hath been made.”

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This also is not simply a repetition. It is preparatory to a declaration that He is the Author of life: life, which exists in Him essentially, is bestowed through Him upon His creatures. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Upon the fact that in Him life is unoriginated and essential rests the dependence of His creatures upon Him for it. The order of life and light is significant. In nature, life in its full activity depends upon light; light is the life of the animate physical creation. In spiritual matters the position is reversed. The Life is the light. We do not receive spiritual life simply because Christ is the light. He brings light into our darkness because He brings life, the life that becomes ours when we are born of God, that is to say, when we receive Christ by faith (v. 12). These subjects, the Word, the Life, and the Light, as set forth in verses 4–13 , lead to a resumption of the title “The Word” in verse 14 , and to the statement, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Revisers have rightly rendered by “became” instead of “was made.” * The statement that He “became flesh” declares the voluntariness, on the part of Him who is the Word, of the act of His Incarnation. Further on in the Gospel, as also in the first Epistle of John, we learn that this voluntary act was likewise the sending by the Father. The counsels of grace were mutually designed and carried out; this is true in respect also of the Holy Spirit, whose part in the Incarnation is declared in [Matthew 1:18–20](#) and [Luke 1:35](#) .

The Omission of the Definite Article

The apostle bears witness for himself and his fellow-apostles that they “beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.” There are certain facts to be noted in this phraseology. The definite article is absent in the original before both “only begotten” and “Father.” According to a well-known principle in regard to the Greek definite article, its omission before certain descriptions of persons or objects serves to stress the particular feature or character mentioned in the description; whereas, on the other hand, the insertion of the definite article simply

points the reader to the person or object as one well-known, or one to be recognized. Thus, had the definite articles been used here, the apostle would simply have been pointing out (as is frequently the case) that the two persons whom he was mentioning were those well-known to his readers as “the only begotten Son” and “the Father.” But that is not the case, for he is giving a description of the particular kind of glory which he and his fellow-apostles had seen. The nature of the description, then, shows that the definite articles were purposely omitted in order to lay stress upon the particular characteristics, of the One as an Only Begotten, and of the Other as a Father.

The Meaning of “Glory”

We may here notice the significance in Scripture of the word “glory,” as used of God and of Christ. From what is said in the passages where this word is found, we learn that glory, in this respect, is the manifestation of characteristics or character, and of power. For instance, when in the second chapter we read: “This beginning of His signs [a sign is a miracle with a meaning or message] did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory,” the glory which He revealed in His kindly act at the wedding feast was the expression both of His power and His character.

So, then, the glory which the apostles witnessed in Christ was the visible expression of what is indicated in the relationship of “an only begotten from a Father.”

Further, the Revisers have rightly rendered the preposition by “from” and not “of.” The word in the original is “*para*,” which signifies, in this construction, “from the presence of,” “from with [a person].” The same preposition is used in the Lord’s own words in [7:29](#), “I am from Him, and He sent Me.”

This preposition “from,” together with what has already been set forth concerning the glory as that of a

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Father's Only Begotten, indicates that He Who became flesh, was Himself, in virtue of the previously existing relationship, the unique and perfect representative and manifestation of the being and character of the Father from whose presence He came. In other words, the glory to which John refers was the outshining of a unique, eternal only begotten sonship. *

The Parallel Line

Thus far, then, with regard to the first of the two parallel lines of doctrines in this chapter relating to Christ. Now as to the other line, which, as we have mentioned, extends beyond the prologue into the narrative relating to John the Baptist, while continuing the unfolding of the glory and grace of the Lord Jesus.

In verse 18 , He who was introduced as “the Word” is now spoken of as “the only begotten Son.” * For this designation verse 14 has prepared. It was not given as a designation in that verse; for there, as we have observed, the article is omitted.

The Term “Only Begotten”

The term “only begotten,” used in verse 18 in connection with the definite article, is one which, with reference to Christ, is found only in the writings of the apostle John, and, as we have seen in the former instance in verse 14 , the term does not refer to generation in respect of His humanity. There are other statements relative to His Sonship which do not contain the title “only begotten,” and which do refer to His Incarnation; but that is not the case with *monogeneus* , “only begotten.” This speaks of that relationship as Son in which He stands alone, coequal and eternal with the Father, yet distinct in personality as the Son.

Again, the term as used of the Son's relationship to the Father in the ideal and

intimate affections involved therein must be distinguished from generation as applied to human beings. The phrase “eternal generation” finds nothing to correspond to it in Scripture. It does not serve to explain the doctrine of the eternal relationships in the Godhead. Human limitations prevent a full comprehension of the eternal. Yet God has in grace conveyed the facts relating to Himself in language the phraseology of which we can understand, though the facts themselves lie beyond the range of human conception.

The term here, as frequently in Scripture, signifies both uniqueness and endearment. Thus of Isaac in [Hebrews 11:17](#) , the writer, quoting from the Septuagint of [Genesis 22:2](#) , instead of from the Hebrew which, translated, reads, “Thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac,” says that Abraham offered up ([lit.](#) , “was offering”) “his only begotten son.”

Plainly therefore only begotten is in that passage the equivalent of “only.” Now, by actual relationship Isaac was not Abraham’s only son. Ishmael had been born before, but Isaac stood in unique relation to Abraham, and in a place of special endearment.

The significance of the word “only begotten,” in a sense altogether apart from birth, is strikingly exemplified in two passages in the Psalms. In that part of [Psalm 22](#) which is anticipatory of the Lord’s utterances on the cross, the appeal is made, “Deliver My soul from the sword, My darling from the power of the dog.” According both to the Hebrew and the Greek, the word for “darling” is “only begotten.” The same is the case in [Psalm 35:17](#) , where the English translation gives “rescue My soul from their destructions, My darling from the lions.” Plainly there can be no connection here with natural relationship of father and son; what is intimated is that that part of the being which is referred to holds the position of preciousness and uniqueness. So with the use of the term in regard to the infinite and unoriginated relationship between Father and Son.

In addition to the thought of uniqueness and endearment, the term when coupled with the word “Son” conveys the idea of complete representation, the Son manifesting in full expression the characteristics of the

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Father. This is borne out by what is further said in [John 1:18](#) .

In the Bosom of the Father

The plain implication of the preexistent sonship of Christ given in verse [14](#) is confirmed in verse [18](#) by the description of the Son as the One who is “in the bosom of the Father.” The phraseology employed is that of the definite article with the present participle of the verb “to be,” [lit.](#) , “the [one] being in the bosom ...” This form of phrase provides what is virtually a titular description, and is to be distinguished from the use of the relative pronoun with the present tense of the verb to be (“who is”). Had it been the intention of the writer to state that the Son is at the present time in the bosom of the Father, in contrast to a time in the past when He was not in that position and relationship, the relative clause, that is to say, the relative pronoun with the present tense, would have been used (i.e., *hos esti* , “who is”). The participial construction (the definite article with the present participle “being”) is not thus limited in point of time. Here the construction conveys a timeless description, expressing a condition and relationship characteristic, essential and unoriginated.

The phrase “in the bosom of the Father” conveys the thought of affection, and is indicative of the ineffable intimacy and love essentially existent between the Father and the Son, the Son sharing all the Father’s counsels, and ever being the object of His love.

The preposition *eis* (“in”) expresses something more than the similar preposition *en* . * What is suggested is not only “in” as indicating the essential union of the Son with the Father, but the further thought of His absolute competency to respond to the Father’s love. Of none other could the phrase be used. Nothing is to be gained by rendering the preposition by “into,” as if in a more literal sense.

The use of the definite article in this construction points, then, to the uniqueness and the essential nature both of the position and the relationship of Christ.

As in verses [1–14](#) , the doctrines relating to Him as the Word culminate in the statement of His Incarnation, “the Word became flesh,” so now verse [18](#) , recalling the description “only begotten” from verse [14](#) , and distinguishing the Son by that designation, leads on, while terminating the prologue, to the witness of John the Baptist. This is introduced by the particle “and” connecting verse [19](#) with verse [18](#) , and this witness brings before us the culminating truth of Christ as the Lamb of God (v. [29](#)).

The Parallels Reviewed

There are, on each parallel line of truth relating to the person, firstly, a designation which carries our thoughts back into the past eternity; and, secondly, a statement relating to His earthly circumstances. Thus the lines run, as we have pointed out, from eternity into time, from heaven to earth. At the beginning of the one line He is made known as “the Word”; at the beginning of the other as “the only begotten Son.” These are eternal titles. Along the first line we are brought to His Incarnation, with a mention of His grace, which necessarily includes His death. Along the second line we are also brought to the Cross; He who is “the only begotten Son” is likewise “the Lamb of God.” That these two designations are purposively associated is confirmed from [Genesis 22](#) , where Isaac is spoken of as Abraham’s “only son,” and where Abraham in the course of his obedience says, “God will provide Himself the Lamb” (v. [8](#)). The typical association is very well-known.

On each parallel line, after the essential, unoriginated glories of the person, as “the Word” and “the only begotten Son,” the glories of His grace are revealed. He (“the Word”) deigned to become flesh and dwell among us ... full of grace and truth. He (“the only begotten Son”) stooped, as the Lamb of God, to the death of the Cross. Thus “the Word” (v. [1](#) , preexistent, originated as such, becomes

Incarnate, v. [14](#)). The only begotten Son (v. [18](#)), preexistent, unoriginated as such, is made known as the Lamb of God (v. [29](#)). True, He

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was foreknown as the Lamb before the foundation of the world ([1 Pet. 1:19](#) , [20](#)); but the fact now before us is that He was thus pointed out in the days of His flesh by John the Baptist.

There is another parallel between verses [1](#) and [18](#) . The significance of the designation “the Word,” though an eternal title, finds a correspondence in the statement that the Son “hath declared Him,” the Father. The very significance of His title “the Word” lies in His being the means of the communication of divine thought, the revelation of the mind of God. Similar to this is the fact that, as the Son, He has “declared,” has adequately represented Him. As “the Word” He is the revealer of the divine counsels; as the Son He is the revealer of the person of the Father.

There is a further parallel. In verse [14](#) John the apostle, speaking for himself and his fellow-apostles, says, “We beheld His glory”; in verse [29](#) John the Baptist, seeing Jesus coming to him, says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”; and again, “Looking upon Jesus as He walked, he says, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’” It was initially through John the Baptist’s introduction of Christ to the disciples, of whom John, the associate of Peter, was one, that the apostle could afterwards say, “We beheld His glory.”

W CHAPTER TWO W

The Stressing of the Relationships

Further Illustrations of the Omitted Article

The principle of the stressing of the character or description of a person by means of the omission of the article, as exemplified in the clause “an only begotten from a Father,” is well illustrated in certain passages in the epistle to the Hebrews in

connection with the sonship of Christ.

Hebrews 1:1, 2

In the opening words of the Epistle, “God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in *His* Son, Whom He appointed Heir of all things, through Whom also He made the worlds,” the insertion of the word “*His*” in italics is sufficient indication that there is no definite article in the original. Literally, therefore, the statement reads “hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son.” The stress is put upon the relationship. He in whom God has spoken to us is marked out as One standing in relation to Him as Son to Father. In verse 8, in contrast to this, the article is used: “Of the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.” The use of the definite article here marks the Son as the person who has already been spoken of in this respect.

The design in the stress on the word “Son” in verse 2 is not to convey the idea that God has spoken to us in one who became His Son, but that he has done so in one whose relationship to Him as Son stands in antecedent existence both to creation and to His Incarnation. The appointment of Christ as heir was a matter of the divine counsels in Eternity.

The passage is itself a testimony to the preexistent Sonship of Christ; for not only has God spoken to us in Him who is His Son, but by Him, “the Heir of all things,” he “made the worlds” (the ages). The plain implication is that He by whom God made the worlds stood in relationship to Him in this respect as His Son. If

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there was no such relationship before the Incarnation, the conclusion seems unavoidable that one God made use of another God to make the worlds. There are not two Gods, nor are there three acting together. Deity is monotheistic. He by whom all things were created ([Col. 1:16](#)), was the Son of the Father's love (v. [13](#)), and one with Him in Godhood as Creator as in all other attributes of Deity. See further in chapter [5](#) .

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were never three separate beings each possessed of the attributes of Deity, each self-existent, and possessed of similar character and power. That there is only one God remains an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. That there are three distinct persons in the Godhead is consistent with the foundation truth of the unity of the Godhead. The very titles given in Scripture are evidences of this. Yet each is God, that is to say, possessed of Godhood, and all subsist together as the One God. Denial of the eternal Sonship of Christ lays one open to the Tritheistic idea that, as to presence, place, and glory, divine persons were together, coequal and coeternal, and yet that the Father and the Son were not related as Father and Son. It leads also to the erroneous view that the relationships of the Father and the Son belong simply to the sphere of revelation.

It will be helpful here to quote Liddon's remarks on the use of the word *persons* in reference to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Speaking of the truth relating to the Godhead, he says: "It postulates the existence in God of certain real distinctions having their necessary basis in the essence of the Godhead. That such distinctions exist is a matter of Revelation.... These distinct forms of being are named persons. Yet that term cannot be employed to denote them, without considerable intellectual caution. As applied to men, persons implies the antecedent conception of a species, which is determined for the moment, and by the force of the expression, into a single, incommunicable modification of being. But the conception of species is utterly inapplicable to That One Supreme Essence which we name God; the same essence belongs to each of the divine persons. Not, however, that we are therefore to suppose nothing more to be

intended by the revealed doctrine than three varying relations of God in His dealings with the world. On the contrary, His self-revelation has for its basis certain eternal distinctions in His nature, which are themselves altogether anterior to and independent of any relation to created life. Apart from these distinctions, the Christian Revelation of an Eternal Fatherhood, of a true incarnation of God, and of a real communication of His Spirit, is but the baseless fabric of a dream. These three distinct “Subsistences,” which we name Father, Son, and Spirit, while they enable us the better to understand the mystery of the self-sufficing and blessed life of God before He surrounded Himself with created beings, are also strictly compatible with the truth of the divine unity. And when we say that Jesus Christ is God, we mean that in the Man Christ Jesus the second of these persons or subsistences, one in essence with the first and with the third, vouchsafed to become Incarnate.”

The Omitted Definite Article in Hebrews 1:5

Again, in [Hebrews 1:5](#) , in the quotation, “I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son,” the omission of the definite article places the emphasis upon the relationship expressed in the terms “Father” and “Son.” This statement is not a prediction about a time when the relationship would begin. The beginning of the relationship is not in view. What is set forth is, firstly, its distinct character in contrast to its nonexistence in the case of the angels; and secondly, the adequate realization of it in His life of entire obedience to the Father’s will; and not only then, but its continuance ever afterwards. The relationship which had eternally existed found a new expression in the Son Incarnate.

There is a love which had no beginning involved in the relationship. Never would the love of the Father to the Son and that of the Son to the Father have become known and adoringly apprehended by the redeemed, had it not been for the Incarnation of the Son. The manifestation of the relationship gives us to appreciate in measure what the Father is to the Son and what the Son is to the Father. In the statement, then, “I will be to

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