

On the Unity of Scripture

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Introduction

One could assume that in the Old Testament we see the Father and in the New Testament we see the Son. Marcion certainly assumed this. Going further, he claimed that the Old and New Testaments cannot be reconciled with each other, that they are fundamentally antithetical.¹ Bear in mind that Marcion's ideas were heretical. The position espoused below is that in the Old Testament, as in the New – we never see the Father except as He is revealed to us through the Son. In the New Testament there are some exceptions which prove this rule. At Jesus' Baptism Matthew says,

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."
(Matt 3:17; see also Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22)²

On the mount of transfiguration the Father speaks to the disciples who are with Jesus to correct a mistaken idea of Jesus' status relative to that of Moses and Elijah.

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matt 17:5; see also Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35)

And toward the end of His public ministry Jesus prays,

"Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." (John 12:28)

These exceptions illustrate my point because, apart from them, everything else follows the proposed rule.

Two New Testament Passages

In Matt 22:45 Jesus points out that the Christ is simultaneously David's "Lord" (one who comes before) and his son, i.e., his descendant (one who comes after).

"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied.
⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, ⁴⁴ "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ⁴⁵ If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" (Matt 22:42-25)

¹ <http://www.ntcanon.org/Marcion.shtml>.

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When Isaiah says, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given," how can this "son" also be the "Everlasting Father"? Son, Father? There is a tension here.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isa 9:6)

Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" (Rev 19:5)

In Rev 19:5, how can one and the same voice come "from the throne" and call God "our God"? But that is what it says. The irony is not in the passage; the irony is in the unique nature of the Son. I have thought about and quoted a statement by the noted church historian, Philip Schaff, many times in private conversation. It resonates strongly with me. What Schaff wrote was that,

All turns at last on the answer to that fundamental question: "What think ye of Christ?" The true solution of this question is the radical refutation of every error.³

The reason why we're discussing this topic in the first place is to clarify who Christ is, i.e., to respond biblically to the question, What think ye of Christ? Two passages (John 1:1-3; Heb 1:1-3) go a long way toward answering this question. We quote and discuss them below.

Two New Testament Passages

John 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

The essential contrast in John 1:1 is between the twin facts that the Word both is "with God" and is Himself "God" (vs. 1). To human reasoning these statements sound contradictory, but in Christ they are not.

In vs. 3 notice the word "through." "Through him all things were made." What does this imply? Let us begin with what it does not imply. It does not imply that the Father had no part in the creation of our world. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Asserting that the Son is our Creator is not the same as asserting that the Father is not. The Father in union with the Son brought our world – and every other world – into existence. Or we could say, as John has already said, the Father created our world "through" His Son. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (vs. 3).

³ Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1910; Eerdmans reprint edition), 1:567.

What does it mean that the Father created our world "through" His Son, i.e., through the divine pre-existent Logos? What I draw from this is that the Father is the Author of our being. But in regard to the words, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3), there is a question who said them. If God created our world through His Son, would it not stand to reason that the words were pronounced by the One through whom this act of creation took place. Thus, if we could have been there listening, the voice we heard say the words would be that of the Son. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). The above passage is not the only one that speaks in this way.

Hebrews 1:1-3

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe [Greek *tous aiōnas*, lit. "the ages"]. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Heb 1:1-3)

Here we have an even bolder statement than the one we started with. It was not just our tiny world that the Father created in the above manner. It was every world, and the stars they revolve around – the entire visible universe. What the text says is, "and through whom [*di hou*] he made the universe" (vs. 2). Were the galaxies in space made? Can we see them? Then on biblical authority it was the Son through whom God made these things. In saying this we do not exclude the Father. But neither can we exclude the Son. "Through him (*di' autou*) all things were made" (John 1:3); "through whom (*di' hou*) he made the universe" (Heb 1:2).

The term "universe," as used in Heb 1:2, translates a Greek word, but it is a Greek word which conveys a Hebrew meaning. What the Greek says here is *di hou kai poiēsen tous aiōnas* (δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας). But Greek *tous aiōnas* "the universe" (lit. "the ages") is a transparent reflection of Hebrew *ōlāmîm* – a word that in the Old Testament refers to time (past or future) and by the first century refers to space as well. When Jesus speaks of "the age to come" (Matt 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30), He is saying the world during a future time after sin. When He says, "to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:20), He is saying to the very end of the world. And here, "through whom he made the ages" (literal gloss) means precisely, "through whom he made the universe" (Heb 1:3, NIV).

More is true. The Son – in union with the Father – is the One who sustains all things. Here the Greek says *pherōn te ta panta* "and bearing all things," i.e., carrying all things along. The word "sustain" captures this idea perfectly. Having called all things into existence, the Son – in union with the Father – ensures that they continue existing. He is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2), and also of our existence.

When Paul said, "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), he was quoting a pagan philosopher (either Cleanthes or Epimenides the Cretan) who

knew nothing of Paul's God,⁴ but to the extent these words have some truth (otherwise Paul would not have quoted them), their truth is ultimately found in Christ – in union with the Father. These facts have implications that many may not have considered.

Lord of the Sabbath

What was Jesus saying when He pointed out that "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28)? Some want Mark 2:28 to mean that Jesus even has authority to set the Sabbath aside. This was not His intent, but is a claim that we hear today. Far from setting the Sabbath aside, Jesus is telling us that He has authority to tell us how to keep it. Keeping is not the same as discarding. So no, the Sabbath remains. Why would Christ want to remove this memorial of His creative power? Does Christ's status as our Savior somehow displace His earlier status as our Creator? Now that He saves us, that means that He no longer made us? How does one go about changing history like this, and why would anyone want to? All right belief flows from remembering where we came from. This knowledge is the only protection we have against idolatry.

Think for a moment about the words Christ used in Mark 2:28. What is the Sabbath of which He is Lord? The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week (see Exod 20:8-11). On what basis could Christ claim to be Lord of the seventh day, though, if He were not also Lord of the first six? And how would one go about achieving this status? Well, what was happening on days one through six? In Gen 1 what was happening was the creation of our world and everything on it. Is the nature of Christ's statement becoming somewhat clearer now?

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod 20:11)

God commands us to remember these things, and it seems reasonable that He would do so, but there is one who wants us to forget. I'm going to say something now that will offend some, but I say it without malice. Let me merely point out that there are those who worship by saying things backwards. They do things like writing the Lord's prayer backwards and such. This practice does not come from God. When the weekly cycle was first established at creation, the working days came first and the day of rest followed. Moving our day of worship over by one, from the seventh day to the first (moving it to any other would not have the following effect), changes more than a day. It changes the nature of the cycle. What we have as a result is a cycle where the day of rest and worship comes first and the working days follow.

Let me try to illustrate what I'm saying. Look at your right hand, palm up. In this orientation it resembles the original weekly cycle, where thumb right = rest day last. If you then turn your hand over, the cycle is turned backwards, where thumb left = rest day first. That's what has happened to our weekly cycle. It has been not merely adjusted, but reversed. Christ is not the one who receives honor from doing such things. Reversing the weekly cycle does not come from God. We need to get back to what God has actually said. His words are a bastion of protection for us, if we will obey them.

⁴ See Frank Hardy, "On the Nature of Inspiration," *Historicism* No. 26/Apr 91, p. 4. This paper is available online at <http://www.historicism.org/Documents/Jrnl/Inspiration.pdf>.

Two Old Testament Passages

It is difficult to limit oneself to two passages only, but here we discuss the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel and the story of the bush.

Genesis 32:22-30

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. ²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." ²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." (Gen 32:22-30)

With whom does Jacob wrestle. Of course, he wrestles with "a man" (or "the man"; see vs. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28). But when "the man" changes Jacob's name to "Israel" in vs. 28 the explanation He gives is "because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (vs. 28). Notice that "men" is plural in vs. 28, while "man" is singular in vs. 25. This is a promise that his conflict with Esau and his 400 men would be successful, just as his conflict with Laban and his men had been in chap. 31, but as regards the identity of the One with whom he wrestled through the night in chap. 32, the term that describes that is not "men," but "God." Supporting this interpretation, notice that Jacob calls the place where these events occurred "Peniel," "because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (vs. 30).

The story does not end here. In Hos 12 we read that "[h]e struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there-- ⁵ the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name of renown!" (Hos 12:4-5). So who did Jacob wrestle with? "The man" (Gen 32:24-28), "the angel" (Hos 12:4), "God" (Gen 32:30), "the LORD God Almighty" (Hos 12:5)? Emphasizing the last term Hosea writes, "[T]he LORD" is his name of renown!" (Hos 12:5). The One Jacob wrestled with was in fact the preexistent Christ.

Exodus 3:1-6

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight-- why the bush does not burn up." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." ⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your

father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. (Exod 3:1-6)

In this passage, again, notice the terms used to describe the One Moses encounters. In vs. 2 He is "the angel of the Lord" (see Acts 7:30, 35); in vs. 3 He is "the LORD (YHWH)"; in vs. 4 He is "God." He is "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (vs. 6). "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (vs. 13). There is no more sacred verse in all Scripture. An angel? In the sense that the Father sent Him out into the world. God? Yes, one with the Father. The Lord (YHWH)? And Jesus applies this verse to Himself in John 8:58.

Discussion

I hope the reader can sense that we have not exhausted the present topic. Similar passages abound, as Christ Himself points out.

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24: 25).

In every page, whether history, or precept, or prophecy, the Old Testament Scriptures are irradiated with the glory of the Son of God. (DA 212)

"In all the Scriptures." "In every page." So we open our Bibles and say, On this page? I don't see Him here. If we don't, it's not because He isn't there. If Cleopas and the other disciple (probably his wife) in Luke 24 couldn't tell that Jesus was sitting across the table from them in their own house, that should teach us humility. It takes spiritual discernment to recognize Jesus for who He is. In *Desire of Ages*, the next sentence following the one quoted says, "So far as it was of divine institution, the entire system of Judaism was a compacted prophecy of the gospel" (ibid.). This is why it still makes sense for Christians today to study the Old Testament, i.e., because from beginning to end it tells us about Jesus – in epiphanies, prophecies, and providences. In poetry and praise. We see Him – when we know how to look – in all the Scriptures, in every page.

We're talking here about the One through whom God said, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3), the One who – in union with the Father – declared His law from Sinai. This is the One who saved Lot from Sodom, wrestled with Jacob, appeared to Moses in a bush, and announced the birth of Samson. He is also the One who tried on any number of occasions to rescue His people from military disaster and captivity, and sent some very forthright prophets to turn people's hearts back to Him so He would be able to do that. Examples where His loving plans had to take alternative forms include the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. and the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom in 605, 597, and 586 B.C.

Have I gone too far in building the present model? If so, what is Jesus telling us in the following passage?

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." (Matt 23:27)

These words fit perfectly in the context of Israel's history, and of earlier biblical history, but not at all in the context of Jesus' earthly ministry. Are there any occasions during Jesus' three and a half years on earth when He tried to shield Judea from national disaster? This statement has to apply to the past or risk being untrue. So what does this imply about who Jesus was and is? To me it implies that the pre-existent Son is the One to whom the Father entrusted the entire care of Israel – starting with the promises to Abraham (about Himself), the exodus from Egypt, the entrance into Canaan, events during the period of the judges, events during the period of the kings, and so on.

One might say that the Old Testament was written to tell Jesus about Himself. By this I mean that one useful way to view the Hebrew Bible is as an instruction manual for God's Son, against the time when He would eventually come into the world as a human Child and need to know what His mission among us should be. Jesus studied the Old Testament and came away with precisely this level of knowledge. Aided by the Holy Spirit, this was the only means God provided by which Jesus could understand what He was to accomplish. If we study these same Scriptures – aided by the same Holy Spirit, and read from the same perspective He brought to them – we also will come away understanding His mission. If we fail to study the Scriptures of the Old Testament as Jesus studied them, our knowledge of His mission will be commensurately diminished.

Conclusion

If we say we are going to be New Testament Christians by limiting ourselves to the New Testament, that's not what the New Testament church read. The only Bible they had was the Old Testament, and they saw Christ in it. If we don't see Christ there as well, we don't have the same perspective as the early church and can't claim with justification to be New Testament Christians. Real New Testament Christians study the Old Testament, as well as the New. And they study both testaments for the same reason – because on every page they behold Jesus.

The claim advanced here is not that the Father in the Old Testament somehow becomes the Son in the New Testament and then later becomes the Holy Spirit for the later church. That is patripassianism. Instead the claim is that the Father and the Son do their work together, in union both with each other and with the Holy Spirit. The Father working through the Son created the world, pronounced His law, led Israel, and stood by Him at the cross – at last veiling His presence and allowing Christ to die the death of complete separation that those must die who are eventually lost.

The bottom line is that there is no way to divide Scripture up so that one God presides over the Old Testament and another God presides over the New – with commensurately different standards for human behavior. God's standard for human behavior is Himself. The law given on Sinai is a transcript of God's character. The Son in turn embodies the law. All of this works together and the person who wishes to pick it apart is headed down a very rocky theological road.

The Son and the Father are inseparable. When a separation did occur, at the cross, it broke Jesus' heart hastening His death. The two are in some sense that we cannot fully understand one (where our English word "one" translates the Greek word *hen*, not *heis*; see John 17:30). The Son was "with God" in the beginning and was Himself "God" (John 1:1). In Mic 5:2 His "goings forth" (literal gloss) are "from of old, from ancient times" (NIV, text). This rendering is inadequate. Alternatively, they are "from days of eternity" (NIV, margin). But this doesn't fully translate the Hebrew either. What the Hebrew says is *môšā'ōtāw miqqédem mîmê 'ôlām*, i.e., His "goings forth" (*môšā'ōtāw*) are *miqqédem mîmê 'ôlām* "from *before* [the] days of eternity" (literal gloss, emphasis added). This in turn should give us insight into what "goings forth" means. What it does not mean is "origins" (NIV, text). What it does refer to is mature, intelligent activity.

What we cannot do with all of this is set these holy Beings on a collision course with each other, such that the One presides over the Old Testament in anger and the other presides over the New Testament in love – providing a way of escape, not from sin so much as from the angry God's law. In such a model, one becomes free from sin by removing the definition of what sin is. This is very much on the same order as cleaning one's face by breaking the mirror. When the mirror is gone it can no longer tell anyone their face is dirty.

Actually all such theological twisting and turning is unnecessary at the outset, because "the Father himself loves you" (John 16:27). In this, as in all other things, Father and Son are in complete and full agreement. There is no conflict between them.