

The Two Comings of Christ

By

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"The Lord is the Spirit" (3 Cor. 3:17).

Who is the Holy Spirit?

By the title "The Two Comings of Christ", I'm not referring to the two comings of Christ as is traditionally understood: that is, His first coming in the flesh and His second coming as King of kings and the Lord of the church. That is true and scriptural.

Instead, I'm referring to two comings of Christ that would take place after His resurrection and ascension. And a secret appearance in the sky to cause a 'secret rapture' of the church is not one of them (see Matt. 24:29-31; Rev. 1:7).

What I mean by the 'two comings of Christ' scheduled to happen after His resurrection and ascension is that, first, Christ would return to His followers in spirit form and then later visibly to restore all things! This explains why God has sent Jesus to all truly repentant believers, but He still "must stay in heaven until the restoration of all things".

This is the truth the Apostle Peter addresses in his message in Acts 3:19-21:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

If "the times of refreshing" mean "times of spiritual strength" (*GNB*) from the Lord and that in causing these "times of spiritual strength" to come God will send Jesus, isn't Jesus, who following His bodily ascension is still in heaven till "the restoration of all things", the same as the Holy Spirit? That till His visible return He lives in all truly repentant, converted, pardoned believers as the Holy Spirit which is given as a matter of course to repentant believers (Acts 2:38)?

Indeed, He does since, according to John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, and no one else, is the baptizer with the Holy Ghost and fire (Matt. 3:11), a truth confirmed by Apostle Peter when He identified Him as the One who, with authorization from the Father, baptized

the early church on that momentous day of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost came upon them like a mighty rushing wind and came to rest on each one of them like tongues of fire. The church was born in the fire of Christ's Spirit:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.
And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.
And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.
Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.
And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?
And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?
Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia.
Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,
Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.
And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?
Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine (Acts 2:1-13).

It was an earth-shattering experience. Jewish celebrants at the feast of Pentecost who had converged on Jerusalem from all parts of Judea and the Diaspora were absolutely awestruck at what they were witnessing: A group of Spirit-filled men and women praising God, and each of the assembled identifiable groups of Jewish pilgrims, and even proselytes, simultaneously heard them in their own exilic native languages! This was mind-blowing; it was transcendental! Some mighty power of God was at work in these people. Like today, the sceptics were fully represented too, and these dismissively but irrationally derided the disciples as a bunch of inebriated odd fellows!

In a sermon delivered that same day, the Apostle Peter explained the phenomenon of the Spirit-inspired tongue-speaking of praises as fulfilling prophet Joel's prophecy of the mass outpouring of God's Spirit upon His people in the "last days", whereupon "... your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:17-21).

In His conclusion, the apostle impressed on his audience that Jesus, the crucified but resurrected Messiah, was the One who, having received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, had poured forth the Spirit - as they had just witnessed- as proof that God has made Him both Lord and Christ (the Anointed):

This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto My Lord, Sit thou on My right hand,

Until I make Thy foes Thy footstool.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32-36).

The Holy Spirit of Christ Proceeds from the Father through Christ

Jesus "shed forth this"--the Holy Ghost--Peter declared. And the outpouring was the fulfilment of the Father's promise to send forth the Spirit as already disclosed to the disciples by the Master:

Luke 24:49

And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Act 1:4-5

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

John 14:26

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 15:26

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me.

The truth of the mystery of the outpouring of the Spirit could not be plainer! The Spirit proceeds from the Father and He comes in fulfilment of the Father's promise, but the Father sends the Spirit in the name of Christ, His Son, who does the actually outpouring!

Now, where is the distinct divine status of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead who is supposedly co-equal with the Father and the Son and therefore doesn't have to be "sent" by the Father or "poured out" by the Son? The Trinitarian concept of the Holy Spirit as distinct from the Father and Christ does not come through. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is Christ's Spirit Himself, and He makes that plain in the very scriptures where He's misconstrued as teaching that the Holy Spirit is distinct and separate from Him.

As part of a long discourse delivered at the Last Supper, Christ told His disciples not to be worried at His departure, because He would certainly come back to take them to His Father's house prepared for them (John 14:1-3). Then to assure His sorrowful disciples of His continued presence with them--even after His departure to the Father until His return-- He said to them:

(John 14:16) And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

(17) Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

(18) I will not leave you comfortless: I WILL COME TO YOU.

(19) Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

(20) At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you.

(21) He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

(22) Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

(23) Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

(24) He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings: and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me.

(25) These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

(26) But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

(27) Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

(28) Ye have heard how I said unto you, I GO AWAY, AND COME AGAIN UNTO YOU. If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for My Father is greater than I.

The main message the Lord puts across to His disciples is verse 18: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you". It is for this reason that He prays the Father to send "another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (v. 16). In verse 17, He clarifies who this "Comforter" (or Advocate, 1 John 2:1, Grk *Parakletos* #3875) is: He is "the Spirit of Truth" who, though "another" (Grk "*allos*" 'else, other') and is not seen nor known nor acknowledged by the world, the disciples "KNOW HIM; FOR HE DWELLETH WITH YOU [presently], AND SHALL BE IN YOU"! In this context, "*allos*" ('another') can only mean that "the Spirit of Truth" (John 14:6) who already dwells with the disciples in the flesh shall be in

them in "ANOTHER" FORM, that is, in SPIRIT FORM. And it won't take long. The time before this indwelling by the physically present but departing "Spirit of Truth" takes place will be "a little while": "Yet a little while and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live" (v. 19 *ESV*).

The indwelling by "the Spirit of Truth", who is none other than Christ, the Truth (John 14:6), unleashes divine life and spiritual empowerment. It brings HEAVENLY LIFE to the body of Messiah who now truly put on His divine nature including His supernatural life of miracles! Hence "Because I live, you also will live." The Holy Spirit baptism is what brings real life to an otherwise dead race of Adam, and that life flows from Christ, the life-giving Spirit: "Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45 *ESV*).

Explaining further, Christ says, on being indwelt by His Spirit, His disciples will fully grasp and share in the spiritual fellowship that exists between Him and the Father. However, that rare privilege of sharing in the spiritual fellowship between the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3) is reserved for only those who demonstrate their love for God by keeping His commandments, as, Christ says, He and the Father will reciprocate that gesture of love by manifesting Themselves to and dwelling permanently in them (vv. 20-23). Again, by what means? Certainly by spiritually indwelling them via the baptism of the Holy Spirit of Christ! And once the Spirit of Christ is sent forth from the Father in the name of Christ He will teach the disciples and bring to their remembrance "all things" Christ has already taught them while on earth with them because it's the same Christ now spiritually dwelling in them as their "Comforter" in fulfilment of His promise not to leave them comfortless (v. 26)! Then He reassures them, "I go away, and come again to you" (v. 28).

The truth is as plain as daylight: The Holy Spirit is Christ's very own Spirit sent forth from the Father into our hearts to seal our adoption in Christ (Eph. 1:5-6) as the children of God:

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6).

We read in Rom. 8:15-17:

... ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.

As tripartite beings made up of body, soul and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23), the Spirit that assures our spirits that we are the children of God is distinct from our individual 'innate' spirits we are born with. This Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the Son of God. This is the Spirit that cries out "Abba Father" in affirmation of our divine son-ship in Christ. This is the Spirit who purchased us with His own blood so as to bring all of us Spirit-led children of God to "glory":

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

For it became Him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (Heb. 2:9-10).

In Acts 20:28, the Holy Spirit is clearly identified as the One who purchased the church of God with His own blood. Yet it's common knowledge that the only blood that ever redeemed the church was Christ's blood. So then, if both Christ and the Holy Ghost purchased the church with "His blood", the two must be one and the same! This is the wonderful truth brought to our attention in Heb. 9:12-14: Christ shed His blood for our "eternal redemption" but in offering Himself to God for this purpose He did so "through the eternal Spirit":

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (see Luke 23:46).

Thus the Spirit that purchased the Church with His blood is the Son who shed His blood. All the salvation work of God rests on Him; the Father has committed everything to Him (Matt. 11:27). Hence "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 *ESV*).

Yes, salvation is in Jesus only, and He is the Holy Spirit:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17 *ESV*).

So, how did the concept of a triune God, with the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead, come to be adopted as Christian doctrine?

The Doctrine of the Trinity is Unbiblical and Babylonian

The first strange fact about the doctrine of the trinity is that the very term is found nowhere in the Holy Scriptures and neither does the concept itself. Instead, it is a concept borrowed from pagan tritheism, a belief in three distinct, individually powerful gods who form a triad. Like all religious deceptions, it originated in Babylon, and the historical evidence is solid:

The trinity got its start in Ancient Babylon with Nimrod - Tammuz - and Semiramis. Semiramis demanded worship for both her husband and her son as well as herself. She claimed that her son, was both the

father and the son. Yes, he was "god the father" and "god the son" - The first divine incomprehensible trinity. (Alexander Hislop -- *The Two Babylons*, p.51).

Bel (Lord) was the oldest and mightiest of the gods of **Babylonia**, one of the earliest trinities. He was "Lord of the World. The **"doctrine of the Trinity"** is first met northeast of the Indus; and, tracing it to Asia Minor and Europe, one recognizes it among every people who had anything like an established religion. It was taught in the oldest Chaldean, Egyptian, and Mithraic schools. The Chaldean Sun-god, Mithra, was called "Triple" and the trinitarian idea of the Chaldeans was a doctrine of the Akkadians who, themselves, belonged to a race which was the first to conceive a metaphysical trinity. According to the archeologist Rawlinson, the Chaldeans were a tribe of the Akkadians who lived in **Babylonia** from earliest times... - *THEOSOPHY*, Vol. 52, No. 6, April, 1964 (Pages 175-182) THE CHALDEAN LEGEND.

As the de facto capital of the pagan world, Babylon only needed to come up with one religious practice or another, and the whole ancient Gentile world followed suit. Thus like sun worship, the worship of a triune god from its inception in ancient Babylon spread to all the Gentile nations and persists to this day in paganized Christian dogma as the holy trinity. The last route the old Babylonian mystery of the triune god took to reach its present destination was Rome, the last successor to the Babylonian world empire. During its heyday, Rome was not only the conqueror of the world but also something of a collector of world religions, all of which were essentially Babylonian, in preparation for her prophetic role as "the woman" [apostate 'mother church'] holding a "golden cup ... full of abominations and filthiness of her [spiritual] fornication", the woman who sits on the seven hills of Rome, the "great city" of Apostle John's time:

(Rev. 17:1) And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

(2) With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

(3) So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

(4) And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

(5) And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

(18) And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

[Accordingly], "Rome...assimilated religions from her many conquered territories. All these religions had commonalities, for they all came from Babylon. These practices infiltrated and overcame the professing Christian Church, which later came to be dominated by Rome itself. "This is the cup which the Babylonish system has made all the world to drink. It is not limited to the Roman Catholic Church of Rome, but she certainly plays a major role in today's religious deception" (Ralph Woodrow; *Babylon Mystery Religion*, 1966).

It's a matter of plain scriptural truth that the trinity doctrine is alien to the true Christian faith as taught by Christ and the apostles. The evidence history consistently presents is that it was brought into the church by Gentile converts who re-formulated it as a Christian doctrine and, backed with Roman imperial power, decreed it as 'orthodox' and foisted it on the Christian world under pain of death!

The doctrine of the Trinity was not a teaching of the original Christians, who were either with Jesus himself or taught directly by the surviving apostles. This explains why it is not found in the Bible. If it was a fundamental, core doctrine of such great importance, it would have been clearly and unmistakably stated in scripture. The fact that the vast majority of professed Christians and church doctrine today maintain a belief in the Trinity does not prove it is correct. Rather, it suggests that corruption of Christian doctrinal truths is widespread and deep. (*Is Jesus God Almighty? Is the Trinity Scriptural?* By Gordon Coulson).

"The pagan trinities had all the prestige of a vast antiquity and **universal adoption...** The Gentile converts therefore eagerly accepted the Trinity compromise, **and the Church baptized it.** Now at length we know its origin. --- John Newton (*Origin of Triads and Trinities*).

Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it. . . . From Egypt came the ideas of a divine trinity. (Historian Will Durant).

The Papacy has in some of its churches, an image of the Triune God, with three heads on one body. The Babylonians had something of the same. So utterly idolatrous was the Babylonian recognition of the (Triune) Divine unity, that Jehovah, the Living God, severely condemned his own people for giving any countenance to it" (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pp. 16-19).

Christianity's doctrine of a "holy Trinity" is simply NOT true. There is nothing in the scriptures which even suggests that it is, except to those who have already been taught to see it there. The doctrine of the Trinity is a heathen philosophical intrusion into the faith of Jesus... (*The Influence of Trinitarian Doctrine on Translations of the Bible* by John David Clark, Sr).

If, as history testifies, the trinity is a patently pagan import into Christianity, someone may ask, how is it that trinitarians are able to cite some Biblical support for their doctrine?

The answer is twofold: some attempt has been made by Trinitarian translators to read the doctrine into the text of scripture, but mostly trinitarians have twisted the plain words of scripture in an effort to lend biblical credence to their doctrine. Whatever the approach, the effort has been to graft an old pagan belief on to the Christian faith:

This TRINITY doctrine does not...belong to the fundamental articles of the Christian faith; as appears from the fact that it is NOT set forth in any passage of the New Testament; for the only one in which this is done, the passage relating to the three that bear record (1 John v.[7-8]), is undoubtedly spurious (false,

a forged later addition)...the preaching of Jesus Christ as the Messiah; and the foundation of His religion is designated by Christ, as faith in the only true God and also in Jesus Christ whom God hath sent (Dr. Neander, *History of Christian Religion and Church*, vol. ii., p. 286).

Any true scholar can surely see that these men did **NOT** use the "Entire" word of God to base their theology upon. Rather they chose specific passages to build on their theology, because, influence, **pagan tribute in a Roman Nation filled with paganism, and governing power was the mindset of Rome.** When she allowed these idolatries to be "engrafted" into her church, Rome re-established the teachings of Nimrod into the New Testament Age, and into church dogma (Thunder Ministries: *The Origin and Development of the Trinity according to Trinitarian Scholars*).

In the specific case of 1 John 5:7 scholars are agreed that it is an interpolation first found in the Roman Catholic Bible, the Latin Vulgate, and was not in any Greek manuscript until the 16th century when Erasmus published the third edition of his Greek New Testament. In the course of their work, the KJV translators would pick it up from this primary source:

Significantly, the German translation of Luther was based on Erasmus' second edition (1519) and lacked the [Trinitarian Formula known as the] *Comma [Johanneum]*. But the KJV translators, basing their work principally on Theodore Beza's 10th edition of the Greek NT (1598), a work which itself was fundamentally based on Erasmus' third and later editions (and Stephanus' editions), popularized the *Comma* for the English-speaking world. Thus, the *Comma Johanneum* has been a battleground for English-speaking Christians more than for others (Footnote on 1 John 5:7, *The NET Bible* First Edition).

Adam Clarke's Commentary explains more:

There are three that bear record - The Father, who bears testimony to his Son; the Word or **Λογος**, Logos, who bears testimony to the Father; and the Holy Ghost, which bears testimony to the Father and the Son. And these three are one in essence, and agree in the one testimony, that Jesus came to die for, and give life to, the world.

But it is likely THIS VERSE IS NOT GENUINE. IT IS WANTING IN EVERY MS. OF THIS EPISTLE WRITTEN BEFORE THE INVENTION OF PRINTING, one excepted, the Codex Montfortii, in Trinity College, Dublin: the others which omit this verse amount to one hundred and twelve.

IT IS WANTING IN BOTH THE SYRIAC, ALL THE ARABIC, ETHIOPIC, THE COPTIC, SAHIDIC, ARMENIAN, SLAVONIAN, etc., in a word, IN ALL THE ANCIENT VERSIONS BUT THE VULGATE; and even of this version many of the most ancient and correct MSS. have it not. It is WANTING ALSO IN ALL THE ANCIENT GREEK FATHERS; and in most even of the Latin.

The words, as they exist in all the Greek MSS. with the exception of the Codex Montfortii, are the following: -

1Jo 5:6. This is he that came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness because the Spirit is truth.

1Jo 5:7. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one.

1Jo 5:9. If we receive the witness of man, the witness of God is greater, etc.”

The words that are omitted by all the MSS., the above excepted, and all the versions, the Vulgate excepted, are these: - [In heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one, and there are three which bear witness in earth].

To make the whole more clear, that every reader may see what has been added, I shall set down these verses, with the inserted words in brackets.

1Jo 5:6. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

1Jo 5:7. For there are three that bear record [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one. 1Jo 5:8. And there are three that bear witness in earth], the Spirit, and the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one.

1Jo 5:9. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, etc.”

Any man may see, on examining the words, that if those included in brackets, which are wanting in the MSS. and versions, be omitted, there is no want of connection; and as to the sense, it is complete and perfect without them; and, indeed much more so than with them. I shall conclude this part of the note by observing, with Dr. Dodd, “that there are some internal and accidental marks which may render the passage suspected; for the sense is complete, and indeed more clear and better preserved, without it. Besides, the Spirit is mentioned, both as a witness in heaven and on earth; so that the six witnesses are thereby reduced to five, and the equality of number, or antithesis between the witnesses in heaven and on earth, is quite taken away. Besides, what need of witnesses in heaven? No one there doubts that Jesus is the Messiah; and if it be said that Father, Son, and Spirit are witnesses on earth, then there are five witnesses on earth, and none in heaven; not to say that there is a little difficulty in interpreting how the Word or the Son can be a witness to himself (*e-Sword* Emphasis mine).

The historical evidence is hard and irrefutable. 1 John 5:7 is spurious and is doubtless the handiwork of a Trinitarian copyist of the Dark Ages. That is why it so miserably fails to fit into the paragraph idea. This is clear internal evidence that a different mind and a foreign hand, rather than the Spirit of God, authored it. Although many modern translators frankly admit its falsity and accordingly omit it, 1 John 5:7 nevertheless remains a key proof text for trinitarians.

The battle over the nature of God has in no way ended; it rages on. As Bible believers point out the unbiblical pagan origins of the doctrine of the trinity on the basis of scriptural truth and history, trinitarians, on the other hand, continue to resort to the use of isolated proof texts to shore up their unbiblical doctrine. Regrettably, those texts are never used in the context of the whole revealed will of God, the Bible, or even in the context of the given

passage, but twisted and skewed to fit into their understanding of a triune Christian god. An example is John 14:16. Picking on the phrase ‘another Comforter’, they jump the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is that “another” and is a distinct divine entity from both the Father and the Son. But scripture was never meant to be interpreted this way; scripture interprets and clarifies itself. As already discussed, Christ identifies and clarifies who the Holy Spirit, “the another Comforter”, is in the succeeding verses. He names Him as “the Spirit of truth” who already dwelt with the disciples in person but would henceforth change His mode of stay with them and would live in them! Then in the very next verse 18 He assures them: “I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you”. If you were among the disciples as Christ spoke, would you think of another personality as being referred to by Christ? You would no doubt realize that Christ was speaking about Himself—the Master and Teacher who for three years or so had lived with you and taught you but who now says He would henceforth live in you. And it concurred with His parting message to the church in Matt. 28:20: “I am with you till the end of the world”.

The Titles Father, Son and Holy Ghost belong to Christ

Incidentally, it is in the same Matthew chapter 28 where the Lord Jesus pledges to be with His church forever that, it appears, trinitarians find their strongest Biblical support—the so-called Trinitarian Baptismal Formula in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The resurrected Lord had charged His disciples:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19).

But does this set out three divine entities who are united but distinct from each other? The plurality of the deities should have necessitated the use of the plural form NAMES OF instead of the singular “NAME OF” as the rules of grammar would dictate. So why use “name” to denote three distinct entities instead of names?

The truth of the matter is that only one personality is being referred to but by three different titles of His. So the use of the singular name is well and proper. The personality under reference is Jesus the Messiah, the Christ. Isaiah called Him “The everlasting Father” in prophecy (Isa. 9:6) and He Himself corroborated this when He said “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). It’s all because Christ is the exact image or imprint of the Father’s nature:

*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds;
Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-3).*

In other words, it is Christ who, being the exact copy or representation of the Father, reveals the glory of the otherwise invisible God (1 Tim. 1:17, cp 6:16) because He is composed of that same glory:

John 1:18

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.

John 5:37

And the Father Himself, which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape.

Col 1:15

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature (also 2 Cor. 4:4).

1 Tim 3:16

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

Christ as the exact representation and revealer of the Father's invisible glory qualifies to bear the title "the everlasting Father" or "Father".

Yet He is also the Son in so far as He derives His essence from the Father (John 7:28-29, 8:42, 16:28) and was conceived as such in the womb of Mary:

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name JESUS.

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David:

And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and THE POWER OF THE HIGHEST SHALL OVERSHADOW THEE: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:30-35).

Even back in the OT there was an allusion to this unique Son of God and, although unnamed, one of His titles, The Word, was mentioned:

Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in His fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what *is* His name, and what *is* His **son's** name, if thou canst tell?

Every **word** of God *is* pure: He *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in Him (Prov. 30:4-5).

This is the Son called the Word who became “flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Moreover, the term “Son” hints at the kind of relationship between the Father God and His Son Jesus. It is a relationship of perfect unity (John 10:30) yet one in which the Son acknowledges the seniority of the Father and submissively carries out His will:

John 8:29

And He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.

John 14:28

Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for MY FATHER IS GREATER THAN I.

John 12:50

And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak.

Heb. 5:8-9

Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.

The Apostle Paul sums it all up so movingly in Phil. 2:

- (5) Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,
- (6) who, though He was in the form of God, DID NOT COUNT EQUALITY A THING TO BE GRASPED,
- (7) but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
- (8) And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
- (9) Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name,
- (10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (*ESV*).

The Father has “highly exalted” His Son Jesus not only because of His humility but also because “it pleased the Father that in Him should all [the] fulness [or excellences of God] dwell” (Col. 1:19). And indeed in Christ “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Col. 2:9-10). Does this sound like there’s space for a third divine being who is equal to Christ in power and authority?

The reassuring piece of good news being announced to us is that we need not search for any 3rd entity; we are “complete” in Christ, “who is the head of all principality and power”. It’s in Him alone that we can find salvation; His “exalted” name is the only name that saves

(Acts 4:12). He is the life-giving Spirit: "Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45 *ESV*; cp John 6:63).

The titles Father, Son and the Holy Spirit speak to the three principal roles Christ plays in the life of the believer. "The Father" because He's the exact replica and revealer of the glory of the invisible God; "the Son" because He is not only the spitting image of the Father but also the obedient Son who came to do the will of the Father, including His sacrificial death on the tree; and the "Holy Spirit" because He is "the Spirit of truth" who lives in all truly repentant believers as the seal of their divine son-ship with Him.

Without His Spirit abiding in us we can only falsely claim to belong to Him:

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His (Rom. 8:9).

Here, "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ" are synonymous terms; they refer to one and the same Spirit—the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, the only accredited baptizer with the Holy Spirit and Fire, resident in believers, energizing and giving them power to live the spiritual life of righteousness, etc. The use of slightly different terms does not mean two or more different holy spirits from two or more divine entities in the Godhead are all dwelling together in believers at the same time. It will be such a laughable idea to the early apostles! An incident during Paul's second missionary journey illustrates how they considered "the Holy Spirit (of God)" and "the Spirit of Jesus" as one and the same:

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden of **the Holy Spirit** to speak the word in Asia;
and when they were come over against Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; and **the Spirit of Jesus** suffered them not (Acts 16:6-7 *ASV*, also *RV*, *ESV*, *NIV*, etc).

The "Holy Spirit" who forbad them at first, probably by prophecy, was the same "Spirit of Jesus" who forbad them in the second instance (see also Acts 13:2, 5:3-4). That was why the apostles were never in confusion as to what Christ meant when He instructed them to baptize converts "in the NAME of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". They recognized that all three titles belonged to Christ. Hence in the days following the feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell on the Church, the apostles simply baptized in the NAME OF JESUS CHRIST:

Acts 2:38

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 8:12, 16

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Acts 10:44-48

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days”.

Acts 19:4-5

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Surely, today’s trinitarians don’t know better than the Holy Spirit-filled Apostles of the first century who considered the titles Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as all referring to Christ, the Master. Indeed, they could have reached no other conclusion. It was He who had told them, ‘He who has seen Me has seen the Father’; it was He who had “breathed on them” after His resurrection, “and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). And three of them, Peter, James and John, had distinctly heard a voice from heaven booming through the cloud of the Transfiguration, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (Matt. 17:5; cp Matt. 16:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:16-18).

They apostles were firsthand receivers of God’s truth (1 John 1:2), and it is the standards they set that should guide all believers in every generation. They never recognized baptism in the names of a triune god but in the name of the one Messiah whose death and resurrection represent the believer’s rise to a new life of holiness from his old sinful past:

Rom 6:3-4

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (also Col. 2:12-13).

The point of baptism therefore is that, having buried the old sinful self in the watery grave with Christ, we now clothe ourselves anew with Him: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27).

Christ is our all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). It has pleased the Father in Him should dwell all His fulness—the fulness of His glory, power, salvation, love, grace, mercy, goodness and kindness. He is the exalted Lord of all, and the Father Himself eulogizes Him as sharing His own divine nature:

- (Heb. 1:1) God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.
- (2) Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *His* Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds;
- (3) Who being the brightness of *His* glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;
- (4) Being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.
- (5) For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?
- (6) And again, when He bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him.
- (7) And of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire.
- (8) But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of Thy kingdom.
- (9) Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, *even* Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.
- (10) And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands:
- (11) They shall perish; but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment;
- (12) And as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.
- (13) But to which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on My right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?
- (14) Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

The Son is a supra-angelic being; He's more than an angel. His attributes, rank and achievements make this all too apparent. Unlike the angels,

1. The Son has been "appointed the heir of all things" (v. 2).

In other words, He is ordained to rule over all things. When? In the end "when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; [and] when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24). This happens at the sounding of the seventh trumpet during which an announcement will go forth loud and clear to all the universe, "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned" (Rev. 11:15-17).

With the exception of the Father, every creature and every authority will be under Christ:

"For He hath put all things under His feet. But when he saith, all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:27-28).

To the eternal glory of the Father, this time of Christ's universal rule will also be our day—the saints will rule jointly with Him:

"For unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:5-11).

Our glorious destiny is bound up with Christ's, for both He and we are "all of one", and we are joint-heirs with Him (Rom. 8:17). When all things are put under Jesus, we will reign over all things too, but until such is fulfilled He must by death redeem us from condemnation under the law as sinners so "that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:5).

2. God created the whole universe by His Son (v. 2b).

He was the Father's instrument of creation—the Word who did actually bring the created order into being in accordance with the Father's will: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4).

3. The Son reflects the brightness of the Father's own glory and is the exact imprint of His nature (or "person", v. 3a).

In plain words, the Son is exactly like the Father—His exact duplicate. He shares full divinity with the Father and is "one" with Him in purpose, mind and will (John 10:30). He was clothed with the Father's glory in the ageless "beginning" before the world began (John 17:5). No angel has been described in such terms. Yes, "sons of God" and "stars of the morning" (Job 38:7) but never as sharing the Father's own divine nature and glory. Incredible as it sounds, the Father's glory which the Son bears is the glory true believers will be clothed in when the Son appears. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). We shall awake with His glorious likeness (Ps 17:15; 1 Cor. 15:49; Phil. 3:20-21).

4. The Son sustains the universe (“all things”, v. 3b) by His powerful Word.

Imagine that! The planets, the sun, the stars, humans, animals, and all other things survive and continue year after year and century after century on the say-so of the Son—He ordained them into that orderly, functional state by His word. Everything exists at His pleasure. The cosmos hasn’t gone haywire or suffered an implosion because He has given no command to that effect. The command He uttered in the beginning calling all things into being and in an orderly fashion still holds: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: He layeth up the depth in storehouses. For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps 33:6-7, 9).

Now, what can’t His powerful word do for you, considering that ‘He’s got the whole world in His hands’, as the song goes? The prophet says in Jer. 32:17: “Ah Lord GOD! Behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee” (also v. 27). The problems we present before God are comparatively a pushover. (See Isa. 51:12-13).

5. The Son sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven (“the Majesty on high”, v. 3c).

Yet at a point in time, He emptied Himself of His divinity so He could offer Himself up as a sacrifice for our sins in accordance with His Father’s will (Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 10:5-10). Jesus is the Father’s manifest love towards mankind aimed at reconciling us to Himself (John 3:16, 1 John 4:9; 2 Cor. 5:18-21). Since His ascension to the right hand of the Father, He has been occupied in the work of interceding for us, pleading our case with the Father and making impeccable representations to the Father on our behalf (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). The Lord Jesus Christ is our able Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1); no petition passed through Him will ever fail (1 John 5:14-15). In Him all the promises of God are “Yes” and “Amen” to the glory of the Father (2 Cor. 1:18-20).

6. The Son is vastly superior to the angels because He has inherited a more excellent Name (v. 4).

His greater excellence in name actually translates into superiority in rank and authority over the angels and that by right of inheritance! The inheritance of a Son—the Son of God “begotten” by and proclaimed so by God Himself; no angel was so proclaimed (v. 5; cp Ps 2:7). The Son was brought forth from the Father’s very being or essence, so the force of the word “begotten” conveys. The Son is therefore very God like His Father, not by adoption, neither by creation nor by office, but by nature. He’s the true, natural, eternal Son of God.

As God, the Lord Jesus, our Saviour, has all the competencies of the divine. Our salvation is not in the hands of a mere man who could fail us, get frustrated himself or grow plain tired. He that keepeth Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers (Ps 121:4). Rather, “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength” (Isa. 40:29). Nevertheless,

“our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13), as great and mighty as He is, is not far removed from our human plight. Because He became human (John 1:14; Rom. 1:3; 1 John 4:2) and lived like a man but without sin (1 Pet. 2:22), He intimately knows our human frailties, the agony of trials and slipperiness of temptations. He undoubtedly has what it takes to be “a merciful and faithful High Priest” to us: “For surely it is not angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb. 2:16-18 *ESV*). “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16 *ESV*).

7. God commands angels to worship the Son (v. 6).

The particular occasion under reference was when, He, as the Father’s “First-begotten”, was brought into the world. And angels did indeed adore the infant Christ the night of His birth in a burst of praise to the Father God, saying “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:8-14). Emmanuel had been born (Matt. 1:23). The divine promise to David to “make him my firstborn” which status will make him “higher than the kings of the earth” (Ps 89:27) is definitely transcendental and Messianic. It refers prophetically to David’s greater Son, “the Son of the highest” “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2) and yet will sit on the throne of His father David (Luke 1:32). This is the Son of David king David describes as “my Lord” (Adonai) whom the LORD (Yahweh) asks to sit on His right hand (Ps. 110:1). How could this personage whom David in spirit called “Lord” still be his son? This was the poser Christ put to the Pharisees silencing them (Matt. 22:41-46). Incredibly this personage is both the “root” (source/origin) and “offspring” (descendant) of David (Rev. 5:5, 22:16). That is, He is the Creator/Lord of David as well as his descendant according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8).

But above all, He is the firstborn of God in two ways: Christ is “the firstborn of every creature” because He was begotten from eternity before all creation (Col. 1:15). But He’s “firstborn” not only in the sense of primacy or first place but also in the sense of *origin* and continued *centrality* to creation, the church and the things of God, “For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col. 1:16-20).

The divine purpose is grand, and all of it centred in Christ—to reconcile all things both in heaven and on earth in Him (Eph. 1:9-10). Christ will resolve all the distortions and tension

Satan introduced into the creation with his rebellion and subsequent programme of deception and restore the heavenly Edenic ideal of peace and harmony rooted in the universal application of divine knowledge. Under His reign as the millennial King over all the earth, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:6-9). "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, saith the LORD" (Isa. 65:25).

Christ is also the firstborn in a related but narrower sense: God's purpose for every believer is to become like His Son so He will be "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11). Thus God has one overriding purpose for the rebirth—to reproduce Christ-like children, children who resemble Christ in character and ultimately in form (2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:1-4, Heb. 2:10). This new birth is a far cry from ordinary human procreation, in that the progenitor is not a human father but God who begets by His word and Spirit contrary to man's way (John 1:12-13; John 3:6; Rom. 8:14; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 John 3:9).

Then also Christ is acclaimed to be "the firstborn from the dead". That is, the first to be bodily resurrected from the dead never to die again (Rev. 1:5; Rom. 6:9)! This unique title of Christ celebrating His definitive conquest of death foreshadows the great mass victory over death that awaits believers as the younger brethren of Christ, who is God's "firstborn:

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law [because of the human tendency to break it]. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory [over sin and death] through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:50-57).

With all that His status as God's firstborn stands for, the Son is worthy of worship—the Father has no qualms sharing the adoration due Him with the Son. Indeed, it was He who said to His loyal angelic hosts of heaven, "Let all the angels of God worship Him".

Beloved brother and sister, how many times do you, who has been made "a little lower than the angels" (Ps 8:5), worship the divine Son? How often do you sing praises to His name and bow the knee in worship? Not the formal worship in church which may occasionally descend into a soulless ritual but spontaneous praise and worship from a grateful heart. If

you are a reluctant worshipper, be mindful of the stern warning given to the kings and judges of the earth:

“Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him” (Ps. 2:10-12).

The Son is worthy to receive honour and glory with the Father; this, all creation will eventually give from every corner of the universe:

“And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped Him that liveth for ever and ever” (Rev. 5:11-14; also Dan. 7:13-14).

If your citizenship is in heaven, you cannot afford to be out of step with heaven by not willingly and routinely worshipping the Son as the angels do in obedience to the Father (Phil. 3:20; Matt. 6:10; Ps 103:20-21). That the Father commands angels to worship the Son shows in and of itself that the Son has been highly exalted and that “angels and authorities and powers” have been made subject to Him (Phil. 2:9-11; 1Pet. 3:22). He’s worthy of worship!

8. In contrast to the angels, whom He describes as having made them “winds” (or spirits) and His ministers “a flame of fire” (v. 7), the Father calls the Son “God” whose throne is forever, a throne undergirded by justice or righteousness (v. 8).

This certainly puts paid to all arguments that the Son is not and cannot be God. If the Father Himself calls Him “God”, who are we to dispute it? The Father is “a God of truth” (Deut. 32:4) and there is no unrighteousness in Him (John 7:18). If He calls His Son God, He certainly is truly and fully God possessing the same attributes and nature of the Father.

The accompanying citation eulogizing the Son expands on His acclaimed righteousness and divinity: “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows. And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands: They shall perish; but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail” (vv. 9-12).

As all along the comparison is with angels in terms of the Son’s superiority to them, it follows that “Thy fellows” must primarily be angels who, though sometimes called sons of God, are far below Him in rank being created, not begotten, sons and made “winds”, not divine beings worthy of worship (Rev. 19:10, 22:8-9; cp 1:17-18).

Similarly, no angel was ever enthroned to rule forever in the kingdom of God.

Meanwhile, the Son is renowned for His love of righteousness. In heaven, He wouldn't countenance iniquity but fought the dragon when he wickedly attempted to overthrow the government of God—an iniquitous (or lawless) act of the highest degree (Isa. 14:12-15; Ez. 28:15-17; Rev. 12:7-10). Because of His love of righteousness, the Father warned the Israelites through Moses not to offend Him, then revealed as Angel Jehovah, by their obstinacy but to obey Him for His continual guidance right into the Promised Land:

"Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will not pardon your transgressions: for My name is in Him. But if thou shalt indeed obey His voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off" (Ex. 23:20-23).

He's "YAHWEH OUR RIGHTEOUSNES" (Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30). If we will take Him as our Lord, one non-negotiable condition is that we must depart from lawlessness; He hates it with a passion (2 Tim. 2:19; Jude 1:4). On His return in "power and great glory", He will take vengeance on all sinners including that "Wicked" one, the final end-time antichrist, whom He will "consume with the breath of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming" (1 Thess. 1:7-9, 2:8). He will spare none of the wicked; His anger shall burn unto "the lowest hell", leaving "neither root nor branch":

"For a fire is kindled in Mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains" (Deut. 32:22).

"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal. 4:1).

The Son hates wickedness!

The reference to His being "anointed" by the Father represents His high office and rank, His exaltation by the Father above His heavenly peers. And the same is true with regard to His earthly reborn "brethren". The Father anoints us with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22) just as He anointed the Son "with the Holy Spirit and power" (Acts 10:38), but His anointing was far superior—not in terms of quality—but in terms of volume, "for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him" (John 3:34; cp Rom. 12:3; Eph. 4:7).

As God He can only be eternal (1 John 1:2), and His eternity as God is set to outlast His created works. As Creator who not only created all things but continues to sustain all to date, He is set to dismantle the heaven and earth which He created from the scratch at a stroke someday, but He ever remains. (See Isa 34:1-4).

9. The unparalleled superiority of son is further attested to by fact that God never asked any angel to sit on right hand but the Son (v. 13).

The throne of God, the locus of His authority and power, is shared by His Son. The apostle John reports:

"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1).

Every knee will bow to this throne. Because the Father exercises rule through the son, submission to the throne is evidenced by submission to the Son (1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 11:15-18; Ps 110; Isa 45:23).

You had better be an ally or loyalist of the throne now. Soon all opposition will be made to make obeisance but not in a pleasant manner. They will be steamrollered into submission which will mean their destruction:

"I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Ps 2:7-12).

"The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, He shall fill the places with the dead bodies; He shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall He lift up the head" (Ps 110:5-7).

This is the Son destined to "rule the nations with a rod of iron" but has since been caught up to God and to His throne (Rev. 12:5), pending the time when all His enemies will be made His footstool upon His return in power at the end of the gospel age.

By contrast, the angels are only "ministering spirits" who serve the saints (v. 14). So don't direct worship at them (Col. 2:18-19); direct your requests for angelic help to the Son. They submit to His authority (see Mark 1:13, 13:27; Matt. 26:53; John 1:51). In Him all the fulness of God lives bodily. "And ye are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:9-10).

In conclusion, the Son can only be God, so named and exalted by the Father God Himself! He's the wonderful Saviour God who is seated on the right hand of the Father in heaven and yet is in us as the life-giving Spirit who abides with us forever. This is just one example of how wonderful Christ is. He is the Son and the Holy Spirit all rolled into one. He Himself is our Saviour and our Comforter. The salvation work is firmly in His hands. It is through Him that the Father is speaking to us today!

The Personality of the Holy Spirit and Christ

Trinitarians like to belabour the point that the use of the pronoun “he” in reference to the Holy Spirit, instead of the pronoun “it”, proves that the Holy Spirit is a “person”—and the third person of the Godhead at that. This also proves, they add, that the Holy Spirit is not merely an activity of God or His power but a separate divine entity of equal rank with the Father and the Son.

As any Greek scholar will confirm, the pronouns “he, she, it”, etc are no ‘big deal’ in the Greek language. Each can properly take the place of the other without changing the meaning or form of a sentence. In Greek, the pronouns “it”, “she” and “he” have no gender significance; they are neuter. Thus *Strong’s Exhaustive Greek Dictionary*, for example, will show that in every place where “he”, for instance, is used for the Holy Spirit, the pronoun “it” or “she” could equally be used. Take John 14:26. The Greek word for the third person English pronoun “he” used in reference to the Holy Spirit is “*ekeinos*” (1565 ‘that one’, neuter), and the dictionary’s range of possible meanings include “he, it, she, the other (same), selfsame, that (same, very), X their, X them, they, this, those” (Strong’s and Thayer’s Greek Dictionaries). The same applies to the use of the objective pronoun “him” for the Holy Spirit. In John 16:7, the Greek pronoun for ‘him’ is “*autos*” (846) and variously translates into English as “ her, it (-self), one, the other, (mine) own, said, ([self-], the) same, ([him-, my-, thy-]) self, [your-] selves, she, that, their (-s), them ([-selves]), there [-at, -by, -in, -into, -of, -on, -with], they, (these) things, this (man), those, together, very, which” (*Strong’s Greek Dictionary e-Sword*).

The English translator’s task then is to use his discretion to choose either “it, or he or she” in line with the rules of English grammar governed, of course, by the context of the text. The seeming unanimous judgment of the English translators was to use “he” for the Holy Spirit, and it has stuck to this day. In and of itself the use of “he” does not confer any special status on the Holy Spirit as far as the Greek, the original language in which God inspired the writing of the New Testament, is concerned. Nevertheless, with the understanding that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, it’s not out of place at all to refer to the Holy Spirit as “he” since he embodies all the personality of Christ and is in fact His spiritual presence.

As to the Holy Spirit functioning as the active power of God in the life of His people, it is also without dispute that the Lord Jesus’ Spirit brings power to God’s people. On more than two occasions the Lord by metonymy called “the promise of the Father”, the Holy Spirit, “power” which would come upon the disciples:

Luke 24:49

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Acts 1:8

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (cp Rom. 15:13).

In 1 Cor. 1:24 Christ is called “the power and wisdom of God”; and in Matt 26:64 the Son calls the Father “power”. If so, is it any wonder that the Holy Spirit which flows to us through Christ from both is also equated with power? Both God and His Son are embodiments of power:

Great is our Lord, and of great power: His understanding is infinite (Ps. 147:5).

God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God (Ps 62:11).

But God is not an inert power. Like man whom He created in His image, He has a personality; that is to say, He possesses intellect, emotions and will. In some Biblical passages, the Holy Spirit is likewise presented as having a personality. To Trinitarians, this is additional proof that the Holy Spirit is a separate divine entity from the Father and the Son complete with his own personality. But let’s consider, if the Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of Christ wouldn’t it reflect the characteristics of His divine personality?

To the extent that it flows from His being or essence, it stands to reason that it will. The Holy Spirit is Christ in us (Col. 1:27). And it will be quite illogical to say that Christ lives within us by His Spirit together with the Father (John 14:23; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 John 3:24) minus His personality! So then, where the Holy Spirit is said to issue commands (Acts 13:2; 16:6), said to be grieved (Eph. 4:30), or pleased (Acts 15:28), it’s Christ doing so by His Spirit. There’s absolutely no need to drive a wedge between Christ and His Spirit.

In the same way, it is pointless to differentiate between Christ and the Word just because the latter too exhibits personality traits. In Heb. 4:12, we read that the word of God is not only “living and powerful” but also possesses unmatched intelligence and abilities, even telepathic powers, in that it is “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”. Should we say, the word has a different personality from Christ when He Himself is the Word?

It is interesting to learn that what is here ascribed to the word was practised by Christ in person while on earth as “the Word made flesh”. In several instances in the Gospels when people thought within themselves in reaction to a saying or action by Christ, Jesus instantly perceived their thoughts:

Mark 2:5-9

When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,

Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

And immediately when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, He said unto them, ‘Why reason ye these things in your hearts?’

Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?”

Matt 12:24-25

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.

Luke 6:6-10

And it came to pass also on another Sabbath, that He entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered.

And the scribes and Pharisees watched Him, whether He would heal on the Sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against Him.

But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth.

Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?

And looking round about upon them all, He said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

Is not what the word does in Heb. 4 what Christ, the Word in the flesh (1 John 1:1), did during His earthly ministry? As God, Yeshua knows the thoughts of men, even those that are “afar off” (Ps 139:2). This is the Word that will judge men in the last day, including their secret sins (John 12:48; Isa. 29:15; Rom. 2:16; Rev. 19:15).

This same Word is “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). If this is the case, does this tell us that the Spirit and Christ, the Word, are two separate and distinct entities? Is the Word ‘merely’ a weapon of the Spirit if the Spirit is different from Christ, the Word?

The truth of scripture does not give us such a picture; Christ the Word wields “the sword of the Spirit”, the word:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon Him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war.

His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself.

And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God.

And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:11-16).

Notice what 1 Cor. 2:11 says:

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God (see also Ps 139:7-10).

Would you say the spirit of a man is different from himself? If not, how could we say so of God and His Spirit?

All this Trinitarian emphasis on the different personality of the Holy Spirit, which in reality is not different from Christ's, is actually a desperate attempt to find Christian explanation for an existing pagan doctrine. The doctrine of the Trinity is nothing but the adoption of an old pagan doctrine—tritheism, three distinctive but co-equal gods who form a triad in the pagan pantheon. No surprise then it bears not the validating stamp of Christ or the apostles but the apostate sanction of a lifelong sun-worshipper, Constantine. It all happened at the Council of Nicaea convened in 325 AD. That was when the Trinity made its formal entry into the dogma of the apostate mother church and was subsequently adopted by all her daughter churches.

Trinity Doctrine Formulated to Preserve the Unity of the Roman Empire, not to Promote the Truth of Christ

The doctrine of the Trinity did not appear in Christianity until some 400 years after Christ, the founder of the Church, had left the earthly scene and all the original apostles had long exited this life. Neither Christ nor any of His immediate followers taught this doctrine. The credit for the formulation and wide acceptance of the 'Christian' concept of a triune God largely belongs to one man, who remarkably was not a theologian or even properly speaking a Christian. But he was a shrewd, calculating politician keen to hold his faltering empire together.

This is the man known in history as Constantine the Great. Many historians hail him as the first Christian emperor of the Roman Empire. But who was really the man Constantine and how did he come to influence the formulation of so-called orthodox Christian doctrines?

Constantine was the son of one of the four rulers (tetrarchy) of the Roman Empire, Constantius. In 305 Diocletian, the head of the tetrarchy retired and retired his three co-rulers along with himself. Diocletian's plan for a smooth succession, however, failed and instead produced bitter and bloody rivalries between as many as five men all gunning for political supremacy over the empire. "Out of this chaos, Constantine, son of Constantius, produced order. In 324 he defeated his last opponent and made himself sole emperor, uniting the empire once again" (Donald Kagan, Steven Ozment, Frank M. Turner, *The Western Heritage*, Third Edition, p. 184).

Earlier in 312, Constantine had defeated his most formidable foe, Maxentius, in the battle of Milvian Bridge. It was this battle which marked a turning-point in the religious life of the Roman Empire. The victory of Constantine was not an ordinary one won by military might or prowess; it was won, he claimed, under a celestial sign—the Christian cross. On the eve of the battle, Constantine, who was greatly outnumbered by his opponent's army, saw a vision of a cross in the sky with the words "In Hoc Signo Crucis Vinces" circling it. The words meant

“In this Sign (the Cross) Conquer”. Constantine immediately adopted the cross as his emblem and ordered his troops to paint it on their shields. The following day, Constantine defeated his rival (emperor) Maxentius.

It was after the crushing victory he inflicted on his opponent against overwhelming odds that Constantine declared he owed his victory to the god of the Christians.

However, Constantine's claim to conversion is not without controversy. There are many who see in his conversion rather the political realization of the potential power of Christianity instead of any celestial vision” (“Roman Religion, <http://www.roman-empire.net/religion/religion.html>).

[Indeed], Until AD 324 Constantine appeared to purposely blur the distinction of which god it was he followed, the Christian god or pagan sun god Sol. Perhaps at this time he truly hadn't made up his mind yet.

Perhaps it was just that he felt his power was not yet established enough to confront the pagan majority of the empire with a Christian ruler.

However, substantial gestures were made toward the Christians very soon after the fateful Battle of the Milvian Bridge in AD 312. Already in AD 313 tax exemptions were granted to Christian clergy and money was granted to rebuild the major churches in Rome.

Also in AD 314 Constantine already engaged in a major meeting of bishops at Milan to deal with problems befalling the church in the 'Donatist schism' (ibid).

Christianity was effectively the state religion, and Constantine was clearly in charge. However, in acting as a patron of Christianity, whether out of political expediency or genuine interest, Constantine was *oddly* anti-Jewish. Oddly because the Christian faith which Constantine ostensibly made the state religion was founded by a Jew—the Son of God was born into the world as a Jew, an Israelite (Rom. 9:4-5).

But Constantine hated the Jews *ad infinitum* and would have nothing to do with them. This unremitting hatred of the Jews from whom Christ sprang and a desire to wed Christianity to paganism would colour the religious decrees and creeds Constantine and his ecclesiastical cohorts would introduce in their newfound religion. The result was a church fundamentally different from the original Church Jesus established in Jerusalem. Let's hear the authorities speak:

Constantine's reign as Roman emperor (A.D. 306-337) dramatically changed the direction of Christianity. This grew out of his strategy for unifying his empire by creating a "catholic"—meaning universal — church that would blend elements from many religions into one.

The 'Christianity' Constantine endorsed was different from that practiced by Christ and the apostles. The emperor accelerated the change by his own hatred of Jews.

Constantine himself said, '**Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd**' - (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3, 18-19, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1979, second series, Vol. 1, pp. 524-525).

Soon after the so-called conversion of Constantine...the Church entered on its Apostasy from the primitive simplicity and purity which marked its earlier history. Pagans in vast multitudes pressed into the Christian Fold, bringing with them old practices and customs, and filling the places of Christian worship with the pageantry and ornaments which characterized the worship of the gods in heathen temples. These unconverted millions became only nominally Christian, impressing the doctrines, rites, and forms of pagan religion upon the Christian Church. - *The Old Catholic Church* by W.D. Killen D.D.; pp.70-72 Edinburgh; 1871

From the time of Constantine onward, the worship of the Roman Catholic Church, in its forms and ceremonies, has been more clearly identified with the paganism of Ancient Rome, than with the religion of the New Testament. The customs of pagan religion were only baptized with Christian names." - *Paganism Surviving in Christianity* by Abram Herbert Lewis "The Control of Christianity by the State Under Constantine and his Successors Chapter X; pg. 210.

So far Constantine has succeeded in creating a world church, a "catholic" (universal) church, with its doors wide open for every pagan devotee and pagan practice to enter and feel welcome. But we are yet to look into the soul of the man Constantine. What was the temperament of this supposed Christian Roman Emperor?

Constantine had no respect for human life, and as emperor he executed his eldest son, his own second wife, his favorite sister's husband and 'many others' on doubtful charges. He was also responsible for wholesale massacres in north Africa. - *History of Christianity* Johnson; (p.68).

Constantine had a father-in-law, whom he commanded to be hung; he had a brother-in-law, whom he ordered to be strangled; he had a nephew twelve or thirteen years old, whose throat he ordered to be cut; he had an eldest son, whom he beheaded; he had a wife, whom he ordered to be suffocated in a bath. - *Voltaire Philosophical Dictionary*, article "Constantine".

Constantine pursued the great object of his ambition through the dark and bloody paths of war and policy; and, after the victory, he abandoned himself, without moderation, to the abuse of his fortune. He declined in the practice of virtue; and the same year of his reign in which he convened the Council of Nice was polluted by the execution, or rather murder, of his eldest son. - *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon, 1887, Chap. xx.

[The shocking aspect is that] these atrocious crimes were perpetrated after Constantine proclaimed himself a Christian. This is the man who became leader of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. This is the man who 'legalized' Christianity in the Roman Empire. This is the leader who voted for and established many of the doctrines taught in the churches today.

Constantine was a sadistic murderer! And it is no surprise. The so-called first Christian Roman emperor was living a lie:

Constantine never actually accepted Christianity...Constantine never totally abandoned Paganism...and was known to continue to worship pagan gods. Even after his conversion, Constantine was well known for his brutality." -Constantine - *The Making of a Saint* by Andras Nagy.

With the faithful church driven underground, this two-faced character was the leading force in the apostate world church in the fourth century. Sadly, his influence persists to this day. It's to him, and not the Lord Jesus Christ, that mainstream contemporary Christianity owes the bulk of its doctrines and practices. It was he who practically laid the foundation of the western church:

Christians claim to follow the teachings of the one they call Jesus Christ, but their traditions today are radically different than the original teachings of that man. The process of the development of Christianity is a long and complicated one, but there are a number of key influential figures who played a crucial role in it. While most are familiar with the names of the 12 apostles, they are usually unfamiliar with the one who claimed to be the 13th, Constantine the Great, the first Holy Roman Emperor. - *The Thirteenth Disciple Constantine and The Trinity* by Nozrem ha Brit.

It was Constantine who changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday, despite the fact that Jesus, and all of the apostles strictly observed the Sabbath on Saturday. His decision was influenced by the fact that Sun-Day was the Roman day of worship of the Sun-God, Apollo. - *The Thirteenth Disciple Constantine and The Trinity* by Nozrem ha Brit.

The effects of pagan influences on Christian traditions can most clearly be seen in its' celebrations, for every single one has a pagan celebration as its origin. One festivity that was personally initiated by Constantine was All Saint's Day, quite appropriate as the mythology of pagan traditions were transferred to the stories of the Saints. - *The Thirteenth Disciple Constantine and The Trinity* by Nozrem ha Brit.

Between Constantine and cohorts, the entire foundation of modern Christianity was developed. Yet perhaps we should ponder if it would have been better for Yeshua's (Jesus') teachings to have disappeared than to have them so utterly corrupted and perpetuated as his own. - *The Thirteenth Disciple Constantine and The Trinity* by Nozrem ha Brit.

Constantine corrupted and paganized Christianity the way he did, not only because he remained a pagan at heart, but also because he sought to enhance its mass appeal. His

foremost interest was not in the sound doctrine leading to salvation but in using Christianity as a political tool for socio-political stability. His intervention in the Arian controversy or 'heresy', as they labelled it, was a classic example.

[Arius (ca. 280-336), a priest of Alexandria, Egypt in his teachings] argued that Jesus was a created being, unlike the God the Father. He was, therefore, not made of the substance of the Father and was not eternal. 'The Son has a beginning,' he said, 'but God is without beginning.' For Arius, Jesus was neither fully man nor fully God but something in between. Arius' view did away with the mysterious concept of the Trinity, the difficult doctrine that God is three persons (The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and at the same time one in substance and essence. The Arian concept had the advantage of appearing simple, rational, and philosophically acceptable, but to its ablest opponent, Athanasius, it had serious shortcomings. Athanasius (ca. 293-373), later bishop of Alexandria, saw the view as an impediment to any acceptable theory of salvation, to him the most important religious question. ... [He believed that] Only if Jesus were both fully human and fully God could the transformation of humanity to divinity have taken place in him and be transmitted by him to his disciples. 'Christ was made man,' he said, 'that we might be made divine.'

To deal with the growing controversy, Constantine called a council of Christian bishops at Nicaea, not far from Constantinople, in 325. FOR THE EMPEROR THE QUESTION WAS ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL, but for the disputants salvation was at stake. At Nicaea, the view expounded by Athanasius won out, became orthodox, and was embodied in the Nicene Creed. But Arianism persisted and spread (*The Western Heritage*, Third Edition, p. 194 Emphasis mine).

For Constantine, the ecumenical council he convened at Nicaea was not to settle an issue of salvation but an issue that could potentially undermine the stability of his empire. The precedent set at Nicaea exemplified his zeal to ensure that a uniform set of doctrines was adhered to across his domain and that no dissenting theological opinions and doctrinal differences outside this definite set of core doctrines, defined and imposed on all Christians at his behest, were tolerated. The church was in bed with the state, and any division in the church would have repercussions on the state. This was the political rationale behind the Nicene Council convoked by Constantine:

... in the same year as Constantine achieved supremacy over the empire (and effectively over the Christian church) the Christian faith itself suffered a grave crisis. Arianism, a heresy which challenged the church's view of God (the father) and Jesus (the son), was creating a serious divide in the church. Constantine called the famous Council of Nicaea which decided the definition of the Christian deity as the Holy Trinity, God the father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit.

Had Christianity previously been unclear about its message then the Council of Nicaea (together with a later council at Constantinople in 381 AD) created a clearly defined core belief. However, the nature of its creation - a council - and the diplomatically sensitive way in defining the formula, to many suggests the

unknown process of beget-al and that He was with the Father before all creation as “the eternal life”:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life--

The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you **the eternal life, which was with the Father** and was made manifest to us” (1 John 1:1-2 *ESV*).

Here, Christ is called “eternal life” because He possesses eternity like the Father. If this is the case, Christ could not have had a beginning per se prior to which He *was not*. The testimony of scripture is that like the Father, the Son *is and was and is to come*; He fills all eternity as the “Alpha and Omega”, the Embodiment of all reality, the cause and the final authority in everything because the Father BEGOT Him from eternity to be exactly like Himself:

Rev. 1:4

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him [the Father God] WHO IS and WHO WAS and WHO IS TO COME, and from the seven spirits who are before His throne” (*ESV*).

Rev. 1:8

I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God [Messiah Jesus], "WHO IS and WHO WAS and WHO IS TO COME, the Almighty (*ESV*).

Rev 1:11

... I am ALPHA and OMEGA, THE FIRST AND THE LAST: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

Rev 1:17-18

And when I saw Him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I AM THE FIRST AND THE LAST:

I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Rev 22:12-13

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, THE BEGINNING AND THE END, THE FIRST AND THE LAST (cp. Isa. 41:4, 44:6, 48:12).

Adam Clarke’s Commentary states:

I am Alpha and Omega – I AM FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY. This mode of speech is borrowed from the Jews, who express the whole compass of things by א *aleph* and ת *tau*, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet; but as St. John was writing in Greek, he accommodates the whole to the Greek alphabet, of which Α alpha and Ω omega are the first and last letters. With the rabbins מא ועד ת

meeleph vead tau, "from aleph to tau," expressed the whole of a matter, from the beginning to the end. So in Yalcut Rubeni, fol. 17, 4: Adam transgressed the whole law from aleph to tau; i.e., from the beginning to the end.

Ibid., fol. 48, 4: Abraham observed the law, from aleph to tau; i.e., he kept it entirely, from beginning to end.

Ibid., fol. 128, 3: When the holy blessed God pronounced a blessing on the Israelites, he did it from aleph to tau; i.e., he did it perfectly (*e-Sword* Capitals mine).

By the very words "I am Alpha and Omega", Christ meant He had always existed and will always be and that all things will continue to revolve around Him as it has been from the beginning. It's a misrepresentation to say that Christ was created when the scriptures, in fact, teach that He was the divine instrument of creation who was with the Father in the measureless beginning (in which the everlasting Father also existed) as the Word (John 1:1-3). This same Word who became flesh (v. 14) is sometimes called the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24) and is similarly presented as BEGOTTEN OF the Father "in the beginning" before all creation. We read in Prov. 8:22-36:

The LORD possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old.
I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.
When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water.
Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:
While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.
When He prepared the heavens, I was there: when He set a compass upon the face of the depth:
When He established the clouds above: when He strengthened the fountains of the deep:
When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment: when He appointed the foundations of the earth:
Then I WAS BY HIM, AS ONE BROUGHT UP WITH HIM: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him;
Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and My delights were with the sons of men.
Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep My ways
Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not.
Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors.
For whoso findeth Me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD.
But he that sinneth against Me wrongeth His own soul: all they that hate Me love death.

The word "possessed" has historically been a subject of vexed controversy as far as the nature of God is concerned. The usual understanding is that "wisdom" as presented in the text is a metaphor for Christ, "the power and wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24) and therefore what the term "possessed" means in relation to how God came by it holds the key to the origins of Christ. The Hebrew for possess is "qânâh" (Strong's #7069) and its meanings include "to get, acquire, create, buy, possess, obtain; of God originating, creating, redeeming His people; possessor", etc (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon*).

So what does “possess” in the light of its range of meanings indicate as far as the origins of Christ, the Wisdom of God, is concerned? Was He acquired, created or obtained by the Father at certain point in time in the remotest, primordial past? The scripture itself answers the question: “I was set up from EVERLASTING” long before the earth was; that is “in the beginning” of God’s “way” (i.e. course of life) which is eternity.

The Hebrew word for “set up” equally throws up an interesting list of meanings. The Hebrew verb is “nâsak” (Strong’s # 5258), and it means “to pour out, offer, cast, to cast metal images; to anoint (a king); to be anointed; to pour out (as a libation); to pour out libations; to be poured out; to set; to install; to be installed” (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon*). So then, “set up” means Christ, the Wisdom of God, was “anointed” and “installed” (i.e. appointed) by the Father from EVERLASTING.

By what means and for what role?

Wisdom answers Himself: “I was BROUGHT FORTH” (v. 24)! But brought forth as what? Brought forth as the Eternal Son of God.

“Brought forth” emphasizes His intimate relationship with God as His natural divine Father from whom He proceeded, and “anointed and/or installed” His office as the functional Wisdom of God from the beginning to date (1 Cor. 1:24). Both happened from eternity. We read Ps 2:7:

I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee.

The words “this day” (Heb. “yom” which could mean a “day” or “year” or “ever [lasting]”) should not be seen as referencing a particular occasion or time when the Father beget the Son prior to which He did not exist. In the realm of the divine, time as it governs human life and activities does not apply. Although it’s stated that a single is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years as a single day (when it comes to a programme He’s executing here on earth, 2 Pet. 3:8), God is actually timeless. He “inhabits eternity” (Isa. 57:25), and it was in that state of eternity that He begot the Son who has always been with Him as “the eternal life”. It was only billions of years later (in human terms) that Father Yahweh revealed this truth to the Psalmist by His Spirit.

Since it’s incontrovertible that God has never been without His Word or His wisdom (Ps 119:89; Job 12:13), it stands to reason that if Christ is the embodiment of these divine attributes then there was never a time He was not. Both were with the Father “in the beginning”; in fact, “in the beginning of His way”—ETERNITY! And it’s in Christ that they find their functional expression: In Him is “hidden all the treasures of [divine] knowledge and wisdom” (Col. 2:2-3). The Son has always been in and with the Father (John 10:38; 14:10-11; 17:21). If not, where was God’s word of knowledge [Logos] and wisdom hidden before His beget-al or creation as the case may be?

Christ, the Son, is the Wisdom of God ordained before the world began: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7).

This is the Wisdom of God brought forth before all things—the creation of the universe et al (vv. 24-29). Christ, the Wisdom of God, was *brought forth* from eternity because “wisdom is the principal thing”—it is the key to all things:

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding (Prov. 4:7).

The *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* (LITV) renders “principal thing” as “the main thing”; *Young’s Literal Translation* (YLT) as “the first thing”, and *International Standard Version* (ISV) as “of utmost importance”. How then could the Father, with all His foreknowledge, ‘wait’ until later to bring forth Wisdom, “the principal thing”?

Nay, that couldn’t be. The Father anointed and installed Wisdom “from everlasting”. Indeed, from His timeless beginning Wisdom “was by Him [the Father], as One brought up with Him ... rejoicing always before Him” (v. 30).

But was Wisdom, Christ, by the side of the Father as merely His companion?

While it does paint an image of closeness to and intimacy with the Father as in Christ being “in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), the Hebrew word translated in the *KJV* as “brought up” suggests more than ‘mere’ companionship. It portrays Wisdom as an active participant in creation; in fact, the principal player therein. The Hebrew masculine noun 'âmôn (Strong’s #525) is defined as “artificer, architect, master workman, skilled workman” (*BDB Hebrew-English Lexicon*). It is derived from the Hebrew root word 'âman (539), and it is from this root that its sense or connotation of training or upbringing as used in the *KJV* is derived: “'âman - A primitive root; properly to *build up* or *support*; to *foster* as a parent or nurse; figuratively to *render* (or *be*) *firm* or *faithful*, to *trust* or *believe*, to be *permanent* or *quiet*; morally to *be true* or *certain*; ... - hence *assurance*, *believe*, *bring up*, *establish*, + *fail*, *be faithful* (of long continuance, *stedfast*, *sure*, *surely*, *trusty*, *verified*), *nurse*, (-ing father), (put), *trust*, *turn to the right*” (Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary).

So then Christ who was “brought forth and set up from everlasting” was beside the Father as the main architect of His creation; He was the creative wisdom of God in action. With this understanding, the following versions translate “'âmôn” as follows:

Then I was at His side, like A MASTER WORKMAN; and I was *His* delights day *by* day, rejoicing before Him at every time (LITV).

Even I was A WORKMAN at His side; and I was daily *His* delight, rejoicing always before Him (MKJV).

Then I was by Him, *as* A MASTER WORKMAN; and I was daily *His* delight, rejoicing always before Him (RV).

Then I was beside Him, like A MASTER WORKMAN, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing before Him always (ESV).

Then I was with Him, His MASTER CRAFTSMAN—I was His delight daily, continuously rejoicing in His presence (ISV).

Christ, the Wisdom of God, was the divine instrument used by the Father to create the universe:

The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath He established the heavens (Prov. 3:19).

O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches (Ps 104:24).

To Him that by wisdom made the heavens: for His mercy endureth for ever (Ps 136:5).

Considering that Christ is both the Word and Wisdom of God, it is not a contradiction at all for the scriptures to say that the Father created the universe by the Word in one place (Ps 33:6; Heb. 11:3; John 1:1-3; cp Job 26:13) and then say elsewhere that He created it by Wisdom.

Together with the Father, the Son, the Wisdom of God, rejoiced in their joint creative project (Prov. 8:31a) for its infinite perfection, mind-boggling complexity and sheer functionality at every stage of the creative process:

And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:10).

And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:12).

And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:18).

And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:21).

And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:25).

The creation sparkled with perfection—“it was good” and “it was good” throughout. What capped the shared joy between Father and Son, however, was God’s special creation fashioned in His own image and likeness (Prov. 8:31b; Gen. 1:26-27). It was the acme of His

creative works executed by Wisdom—the perfect complement to the created order making the overall creation “VERY GOOD”:

And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day (Gen. 1:31).

Like the Father, the Son’s greatest source of joy and pride was man created in His own image and likeness. His delight was in man, and His delight is still in us even in our fallen state:

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down His life for His friends (John 15:13).

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16).

Much as He loves and delights in us, we need to bear in mind one fact: As the Wisdom of God, Christ is of utmost importance, and we cannot do without Him (John 15:5). So we must necessarily heed His instruction zealously and continuously if we desire blessings and life (Prov. 8:32-35). In a final warning He tells us, “But he that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate Me love death” (Prov. 8:36).

The secret is, Wisdom is the only true source of life, wellbeing and success. Therefore, to hate Him is to harm our own souls; it’s a choice of death and ruin!

This wisdom is no ordinary wisdom. It is not earthly (Jam. 3:13-15); it cannot be found in the schools and universities and surprisingly not even in the majority of churches. This Wisdom ordained before the world began is heavenly; He is the Son of God who came down from heaven (Jam. 3:17; John 3:12-13).

He is “our life” (Col. 3:4). But how do we love Him to find life or hate Him out of love for death (of all things)? We love Him by keeping His commandments and we hate Him by disobeying them:

If ye love Me, keep My commandments (John 14:15).

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me;

And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments (Ex. 20:4-6).

... this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die (Prov. 19:16).

The truth we have learnt so far is that Christ as the Word and Wisdom of God was and is the Father's means of creation; He was not an object of creation Himself.

But doesn't Christ Himself raise an objection in Revelation 3:14? Does He not plainly state that He is "the beginning of the creation of God"? Surely, that should mean He was created at some point in time by Father, only that He was the first to be created before everything else.

Well, that's the conclusion a cursory reading of text is likely to yield. Rev. 3:14 reads in the *King James Version*:

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

An etymological analysis of the Greek word "arche" (746) translated "beginning" here yields a slew of meanings, namely: "a *commencement*, or (concrete) *chief* (in various applications of order, time, place or rank): - beginning, corner, (at the, the) first (estate), magistrate, power, principality, principle, rule" (Strong's). *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* similarly lists the following meanings for "arche": "beginning, origin, the person or thing that commences, the first person or thing in a series, the leader; that by which anything begins to be, the origin, the active cause; the extremity of a thing (of the corners of a sail); the first place, principality, rule, magistracy (of angels and demons)".

In its aggregate meaning therefore the English word "beginning" translated from "arche" does not simply mean the first in a series but also initiator or head. Hence many Bible versions translate Rev. 3:14 as follows:

And to the messenger of the assembly of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the witness--the faithful and true--the CHIEF of the creation of God" (*Young's Literal Translation YLT*).

And to the angel of the assembly of Laodicea, write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the HEAD of the creation of God" (*Literal Translation of the Holy Bible LITV*).

Write this to the angel of the church in Laodicea: "Here is a message from the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the RULER of all that God has made" (*Easy-to Read Version ERV*).

To the messenger of the church in Laodicea, write: "The Amen, the witness who is faithful and true, the ORIGINATOR of God's creation, says this" (*International Standard Version ISV*).

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write the following: "This is the solemn pronouncement of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ORIGINATOR of God's creation" (*New English Translation NET Bible*).

In Rev. 3:14 Christ reinforces the same truth He inspired Paul to write in Col. 1:15-18:

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.

And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* He might have the preeminence.

By the Father's own will, Christ is the originator and ruler of all His creation in the eternity past and eternity future. So then, He has had, still has, and will always have the pre-eminence over all creation because "it pleased *the Father* that in Him should all fulness dwell" (V. 19).

In accordance with the same desire that in the Son should be made manifest all the fulness of God, the Father sent the Son into the world as fully human so that in Him and through Him all the depth of the Father's love for the lost and perishing world could be revealed:

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9).

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

And deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

For surely it is not angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham.

Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:14-17 *ESV*).

In the light of the scripture of truth, Arius' ambivalence about whether Jesus was fully man while on earth is untenable. Christ was fully human while on earth as a descendant of David (Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8; also 1 John 4:2-3) but was "declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). The Lord's miraculous unprecedented resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23) put paid to all doubts about His divinity. For doubting Thomas, that was when the truth of His divine identity dawned on him. Overawed, he exclaimed, "my Lord and my God" (John 20:24-28).

This realization, this knowledge of Jesus' true identity as the divine Son of God in relation to the Father, is "eternal life":

And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent (John 17:3).

The designation "the only true God" has led some to argue that the Son could not be truly God. Yet if this were true, "eternal life" could not flow from Him the way it flows from the Father. Indeed, the truth is that Christ is also "true God" like the Father:

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him [the Father] that is true, and we are in Him [the Son] that is true, *even* in His Son Jesus Christ. THIS IS THE TRUE GOD, and ETERNAL LIFE (1 John 5:20; cp Rev. 3:7).

Thus “Eternal life” is acknowledging God and the divine mission of His Son as the anointed Saviour sent into the world, namely *Jesus* (“for He will save His people from their sins”, Matt. 1:21) *Christ* (Messiah, anointed One). It’s only the Father and the Son who inherently have eternal life in themselves; no creature has it this way (which is further proof that was Christ not created):

John 5:26

... as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself.

1 John 5:11

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

Notice what Christ says about this inherent LIFE SOURCE which is within Him as a vital part of His being and make-up:

Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.

No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father (John 10:17-18).

The life is in Him and He Himself is the life; because of this, He has absolute control over it. Not only to lay it down and to take it up again, but also to give it to all those who come to believe in Him:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me:

And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand (John 10:27-28).

As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him (John 17:2).

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:12-13).

In conclusion, then, Arius erred on major points of Bible doctrine on the nature of Christ and His relationship to the Father. But however flawed Arianism was, it had some truth. It acknowledged, at least, the Father and the Son without making a separate divine entity of Christ’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

The same could not be said of the opposing side, however. In denouncing Arius, Constantine and his band of obsequious bishops created a triune Christian God which was, scripturally speaking, way off the mark. In his book *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*, James Bonwick writes on the pagan antecedents of the trinity:

"Though it is usual to speak of the Semitic tribes as monotheistic; yet it is an undoubted fact that *more or less ALL OVER THE WORLD the deities are in TRIADS*. This rule applies to eastern and western hemispheres, to north and south. Further, it is observed that, in some mystical way, the triad of three persons is one. . . . The definition of Athanasius [Arius' opponent] who lived in Egypt, applied to the TRINITIES OF ALL HEATHEN RELIGIONS" (p.396).

Fifty-six years after the Nicene Council, where the seeds of the Trinity doctrine were sown for the first time in Christianity, the doctrine was further crystallized at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

THE SECOND ECUMENICAL COUNCIL
THE FIRST COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

A.D. 381

THE HOLY CREED WHICH THE 150 HOLY FATHERS SET FORTH, WHICH IS
CONSONANT WITH THE HOLY AND GREAT SYNOD OF NICE.(I)

(Found in all the Collections in the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon.)

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the Right Hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead. Whose kingdom shall have no end. (I)

And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver-of-Life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. And [we believe] in one, holy, (II) Catholic and Apostolic Church. We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, [and] we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Nicaea and its follow-up Constantinople were not an endorsement of Biblical truth. Both councils introduced a hitherto unknown concept in Christianity, borrowed from paganism—God in three persons, all coequal. In reality, the doctrine of the Trinity was simply the addition of one more pagan belief to a growing list of pagan beliefs adopted by the church in the guise of Christian doctrine by the incorporation of biblical elements. The Bible teaches us to worship only the Father and the Son—these two are the only Ones who occupy the divine throne of heaven:

Rev. 22:1

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB.

Ps 110:1

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool".

Heb 10:12-13

But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool.

The Father God and His Son are not two Gods as such but constitute One supreme divine authority who share *One Throne* and who are one in mind and purpose. They constitute "the true God" (1 John 5:20). They are essentially indivisible yet each is distinct. It's a wonderful truth, and this is eternal life!

The Father and the Son Encrypted in the name Elohim

The throne of heaven bears it out: there are only TWO MEMBERS of the Godhead, the Father and the Son. But how does it all bear on the scriptures which insist God is one?

The mystery of the unity between the Father and the Son lies in the Hebrew word "*echad*" and it goes all the way back to Genesis. In Deut. 6:4 we read:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is ONE LORD.

The word translated "one" in the text mostly means "one in number or single" but also denotes a "unified entity" or "compound unity" as in man and wife becoming "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) or the two sticks of the house of Israel becoming "one" stick (Ezek. 37:16-17). *The Companion Bible* comments on this word:

One. Heb. *'ehad* -- A COMPOUND UNITY (Lat. *unus*), one made up of others; Gen.1:5, one of seven; 1:11, one of four; 2:21, one of twenty-four; 2:24, one made up of two; 3:22, one of the three; 49:16, one of twelve; Num.13:23, one of a cluster. So Ps. 34:20, etc. It is not *yahid*, which is (Latin) *unicus*, unique -- a single or only one . . .

Given that the word translated as "LORD" is the Hebrew tetragrammaton YHWH, commonly pronounced as Yahweh (or Yehowah or Jehovah), the scripture basically says, "Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our Elohim (God) is one Yahweh". Yahweh, a name whose exact pronunciation is not for sure, "denotes specifically *the one true God*, whose people the Jews were, and who made them the guardians of his truth. The name is never applied to a false god, nor to any other being except one, the *Angel-Jehovah* who is, thereby, marked as one

with God, and who appears again, in the New Covenant, as "God manifested in the flesh." (*Smith's Bible Dictionary*, e-Sword).

In other words, Yahweh, which means the Self-existent One, is applied to just two Beings who are always "one" in essence: the heavenly Father and the special heavenly Personage known as "Angel-Yahweh"—the One revealed as the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament. *Echad* then means a "unity," "oneness," a "togetherness" - two individuals, or two parts, becoming an integrated, harmonious WHOLE ONE.

Sketches of the second heavenly Being who shares the name Yahweh with the Father (Ex. 3:14 & John 8:58; cp John 5:43) are scattered throughout the Old Testament scriptures. In Exodus 23, Father Yahweh warned the children of Israel not to provoke but obey this unique heavenly Being because "My name (Yahweh) is in Him":

Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.

Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will not pardon your transgressions: for MY NAME IS IN HIM.

But if thou shalt indeed obey His voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.

For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off (vv. 20-23).

This is the Angel who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and who is said to have been "the LORD" (Yahweh) (Ex. 3:2-4; Acts 7:30-33); this is "the Angel who redeemed Jacob from all evil" (Gen. 48:16); this is the Angel who was in the cloud of glory by day and the pillar of fire by night and who guided and protected Israel throughout their journeys (Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19); this is "the Angel of His presence" who led Israel through the wilderness (Isa. 63:9-10); the Angel which was with Moses and the church in the wilderness and who gave the fathers "the lively oracles to give unto us" (Acts 7:38; Ex. 24:9-11, 34:1-10, 28-34; cp 2 Cor. 3:13-18). This is the Angel who alone bears the name Yahweh besides the Father (Zech. 3:1-7). It's He whose "back parts" Moses saw (Ex. 33:18-23), whose "glory" Isaiah and Ezekiel saw in vision (Isa. 6:1-7, John 12:41; Ez. 1:25-28;), whose voice Israel heard at mount Sinai (Deut. 4:36), who spoke mouth to mouth with Moses (Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:8), and who as the LORD (Yahweh) will return and set His feet visibly on mount Olives from which He ascended after His resurrection (Acts 1:7-12; Zech. 14:1-4).

But why is it the special Angel designated by the name Yahweh and not the Father Himself? It's because none has heard the voice of the Father nor seen His shape "at any time" (John 5:37; 6:46; 1:18).

But the Son has been REVEALED in sketches in the Old Testament era and in bodily form in the New Testament:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14 ESV).

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

If the “echad” in the *Shema* “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD*” denotes the perfect unity of the Godhead, what about Elohim, the other Hebrew name for God?

A similar plurality applies to Elohim, the creative name of God. This is the divine name translated into English as “God” right from Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The name is a plural noun being the plural of Eloah. Together with Yahweh, they are the two chief names of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Hebrew Elohim means “mighty ones”, a uni-plural word, similar to such English words as “church,” “assembly,” “family,” etc. It means more than one, and yet one at the same time.

In its commentary on Gen. 1:1, the *Critical-Experimental Commentary* says of the word “Elohim”:

The Hebrew word Elohim, from its derivation and use, signifies 'strong, 'mighty'... A remarkable peculiarity, however, distinguishes this word; for it is A PLURAL NOUN accompanied with a SINGULAR VERB, which is the construction maintained for the most part throughout the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament, though it is also found in various passages associated with plural adjuncts, and in such a connection it irresistibly suggests the idea of more objects than one. This interchange of singular and plural forms, as well as the frequent combination of both in the same sentence, constitutes a peculiar idiom unparalleled in any other language, and it demands particular attention . . . The use of it originated from no imperative necessity. It arose from no grammatical defect; for the word existed in the singular form . . . Nor was it occasioned by any poverty of language; for the Hebrew vocabulary is richer and more copious in names for the Deity than any other cultivated language . . .

The choice of Elohim, therefore, in preference to all other names for the Divine Being, must have been dictated by some special reason of great utility and importance. Applied as it commonly was to false deities, and liable, from that constant and familiar use, to suggest or foster polytheistic ideas, the introduction of such a term as the designation of the true God into a book which was designed to give a death-blow to idolatry . . . seems altogether unaccountable except upon the ground that it was conducive to the promotion of the same high end; *and therefore we are led to conclude by its use here in the PLURAL FORM is obscurely taught, at the opening of the Bible, a doctrine clearly revealed in the later portions of it -- viz., that though God is one, there is a PLURALITY OF PERSONS IN THE GOD-HEAD, who were engaged in the creative work*"(p.1).

The Elohim of Genesis who conferred “Let us make man in our image and likeness” (Gen. 1:26) were the Father and the Son. They are the only two members of the Godhead. The

first chapter of John's Gospel absolutely confirms this in a revelation which similarly opens with "In the beginning ..."

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3).

This is plain truth in sight: In the beginning the Father God was with *another*, not two others, and that another was the Word who "became flesh"—Jesus Christ our Lord (v. 14). The Holy Spirit as a separate divine person is conspicuously missing! It doesn't seem heaven knows the doctrine of the trinity—it's always the Father and Son seated on the same heavenly throne!

Meanwhile, Christ, the Son, is the Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes being "the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" (Rev. 5:6). It appears He has also incorporated the Holy Spirit—that is, if He ever was separate! In heaven and among true believers on earth, the word of truth affirms, "The Lord is the Spirit".

The conspicuous absence of Holy Spirit in His supposed capacity as the Third Person of Godhead in the Johannine prologue has puzzled and befuddled generations of trinitarians no end. How could God be in three persons and yet the Holy Spirit, the supposed third Person, is completely left out—not so much as acknowledged in passing? *Prophecy Flash* publisher William Dankenbring comments in his article "The Trinity Doctrine – Is it Biblical?":

Theologians have long puzzled over the first few verses of the gospel of John. We read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . ." (John 1:1-3, 14).

This passage clearly delineates TWO Persons in the God-head -- the Word, or "Logos" of God, in the Greek language, and the One whom we refer to as the "Father." But *if the Holy Spirit is a Third Person of the Godhead, then WHY ISN'T HE MENTIONED in this verse?*

Says Dr. William Newton Clarke about this passage, "*There is no Trinity in this; but there is a distinction in the Godhead, a DUALITY in God*" (*Outline of Christian Theology*, p.167).

In all His sayings, Christ never interposes a third person between the Father and Himself; neither does He present Himself as separate from the Father in ideas and purposes but as always at the centre of His will, representing and fulfilling that will (John 5:36; 10:37-38; 14:10-11). He's "echad" in action!

Further on in his article Dankenbring uses a very germane and insightful analogy to explain 'the working relationship' between the Father and the Son. Although both are 'God' and of the same divine nature, he explains that the Father is higher in authority (John 14:28). One

abiding attribute of Christ is humility, and it's that quality of His that made Him not flaunt or insist on equality (of rank) with His Father (Phil. 2:5-8; Matt. 11:29). He writes:

Clearly, in the Godhead there is a distinction between the Father, who is Supreme, and Jesus Christ, who is lesser! Both are "God," as John wrote in John 1:1-3, but the *FATHER IS SUPREME!*

If we were to liken or compare God to a human corporation, we might say that the Father is the "Chairman of the Board of Directors," who has final authority in all things, and Jesus Christ is the "Executive Officer," or "Executive Vice-President"!

In even plainer language, Paul declared of the plan of God and the coming resurrection, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ Jesus shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the *firstfruits*; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. *Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom TO GOD, EVEN THE FATHER. . . .* And when all things shall be subdued unto him, *then shall the Son also himself be subject unto HIM THAT PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIM [that is, the FATHER!], that GOD may be all in all"* (1 Cor.15:22-28).

Isn't this plain? There is NO ROOM in these Scriptures for the so-called "TRINITY" doctrine, as it is taught by Protestants and Catholics, at all!

The Son is the 'right-hand man' of God; He is the executer His will and purposes (John 4:34) which He (the Father) also conceived in eternity in Him (Eph. 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9). This was how the Father and the Son as ONE GOD - Elohim - created all things. The Word, the Son, simply carried out the Father's will:

And God said, Let there be light: AND there was light (Gen. 1:3).

The executer was, of course, the Word:

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth (Ps 33:6).

How did He do it?

... He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast (Ps 33:9).

The *Elohim* of Genesis, who is the *Theos* of John 1, are the only members of the Godhead, and the bond of love and oneness between them (John 10:30) is so intense and intimate that no third person could ever know the extent and depth of it. The great truth surfaces again: the Father has delivered all things to the Son as it was in the beginning when He created all things by the Son, the Word. Christ tells us in Matt. 11:27:

All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.

Is this intimacy between the Father and the Son also shared by a Third being?

Christ says no way! No one can pry into their close relationship of oneness and togetherness. Besides, for anyone to truly know the Father, He the Son must do the revealing!

Yet Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2 that it's the Spirit of God that reveals to us the things of God (vv. 10-12). So the Son reveals and the Spirit also reveals—the same things!

Is there a duplication of roles here involving the Son and the Spirit, that is if the Holy Spirit is separate and distinct from Christ? Or is the Son and the Spirit one and the same?

“God is not the author of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33). “The Lord is that Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17), even He is “the Spirit of truth”. It's He whose spiritual presence abides with us and in us as the Holy Spirit till the end of time.

The Holy Spirit as Christ's Presence brings Fulness of Joy

In Psalm 16:11 David exults in His salvation: “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: IN THY PRESENCE IS FULNESS OF JOY; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”.

With His presence now indwelling the believer, the joy of His presence is in receiving His Spirit. And that is assured. The Master's promise to us is that we will see Him, even though He is gone back to the Father. He made the promise as part of His discourse at the Last Supper (a section of which we earlier looked at) when He explained to His disciples what He meant His cryptic statement that “In a little while you will see Me no longer; again after a little while, you will see Me... because I am going to the Father” (John 16: 16, 19 *NET Bible*). He continued with His talk:

John 16:13-27

Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14. He shall glorify Me: for he shall receive of Mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.

15. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.

16. A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father.

17. Then said *some* of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me: and, Because I go to the Father?

18. They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith.

19. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me?

20. Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

21. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.
22. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.
23. And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give *it* you.
24. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.
25. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.
26. At that day ye shall ask in My name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:
27. For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.

“A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father” is clearly connected with the coming of “the Spirit of truth”, which we understand way back in John 14:17 as referring to Christ Himself (cp 16:13-15 & 25), who as “the way, the truth and the life” is the only means of access to the Father, and whose words are “Spirit and life” (John 14:6, 6:63), but this time He comes to abide with the disciples as a Spirit—the Holy Spirit.

From the context, Christ didn’t mean just His three-day absence in the grave following His crucifixion but right from the time of His physical death through to His resurrection and ascension to the Father till His return to the disciples in spirit form after a space of 10 days on the day of Pentecost as the Holy Spirit. He says the disciples, during this period of His absence before His spiritual return, would weep and lament but the world would rejoice, “but your sorrow shall be turned into joy”. In effect, the sorrow-producing absence ends in joy, a situation comparable to birth pains—it’s a painful good because of the joy a newborn brings. But the joy the disciples experience when Jesus comes to see them again spiritually after going to His Father is an enduring joy: “And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you” (v. 22).

Why? Because although He is no more physically present with the disciples whereby they could make requests to Him as they used to do, they will now ask the Father for the supply of their needs “in His name” and they will receive them, making their joy complete (vv. 23-24). Remember this is a continuation of the same speech in which Jesus assures His disciples that He won’t leave them comfortless but will come to them for which reason He will pray the Father to send “another comforter” which turns out to be Himself in another (Spirit) form.

Loved one, once you have received His Spirit, don’t let grief overwhelm you; the Master is with you in spirit in His post-ascension spiritual presence ready to provide your needs, ready to turn your mourning into joy through all situations. You need not fear. He sent word to the

distressed Jewish returnees from Babylon through Haggai, the prophet: "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not" (Hag. 2:5).

Jesus neither fails nor disappoints. If you live in His spiritual presence, joyful expectancy is your lot through every tribulation and trial. No one will take away your joy. Certainly not the devil! Nor any circumstance for that matter. Know for sure that the night of sorrow and tribulation will not endure; "joy cometh in the morning" (Ps 30:5). The "bright and the morning star" (Rev. 22:16) will see you again! He will see you in spirit and by His Spirit. Just ask the Father for the things you need in prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus and you will receive. Christ has guaranteed it by His Spirit in you—your joy will be full! No lack will truncate your joy; nothing will shorten your joy in Him. He will provide your needs; He won't leave you comfortless.

The Spirit of the Son of God is the river whose streams "make glad the city of God" when all else is in tumult (Ps 46:1-5; John 7:37-39). Christ's Spirit gives us inner peace; it entrenches His peace within our hearts so that our hearts are not "troubled" or "afraid" when it should ordinarily be. And it's all because He has "come again" to us from the Almighty Father by His Spirit:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I (John 14:27-28).

This is the peace of which Isaiah wrote: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee" (Isa. 26:3). This peace is connected with the "mind"; it's a state of mind, namely inner peace. It's only the Lord who is able to give such peace by His Spirit to those who put their trust in Him. He strengthens us with might "by His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). This Spirit-strengthened inner man (i.e. the mind or heart) knows no fear and fears no trouble or circumstance. Christ is his inner strength!

But first things first. Receive His Spirit, live in His spiritual presence, and your joy will be complete. Halleluiah!

How to Receive the Holy Spirit of Christ and Keep it Aflame!

Bible plainly states that Holy Spirit of Christ is a free "gift" from the Father, but there are basic requirements to meet to qualify for it. Repentance is a key requirement, a *sine qua non*. John the Baptist, the harbinger of Christ, made a plain matter of this truth:

(Mat 3:1 KJV) In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

(Mat 3:2 KJV) And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

(Mat 3:3 KJV) For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

(Mat 3:4 KJV) And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

(Mat 3:5 KJV) Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

(Mat 3:6 KJV) And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

(Mat 3:7 KJV) But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, \emptyset generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

(Mat 3:8 KJV) Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

(Mat 3:9 KJV) And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

(Mat 3:10 KJV) And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

(Mat 3:11 KJV) I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire:

(Mat 3:12 KJV) Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

John the Baptist calls on the people to repent as a necessary response to the nearness of “the kingdom of heaven”, indeed as preparatory to the baptism of the Holy Spirit to be administered by One mightier than he—the Messiah. This makes the kingdom of heaven and the Messiah synonymous, for the phrase “the kingdom of heaven” (or of God) denotes the reign of the Messiah in the life of a repentant, redeemed people (Matt. 1:21) who live by the laws and values of heaven (Matt. 6:10, 33; Rom. 14:17). In short, it refers to the Gospel dispensation of grace—the true worship ushered in by the Messiah—when the called of God “shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). That is why it’s said to be movable and drawing near, a concept not commonly applied to a government or kingdom which though commences at a point in time is rarely said to be drawing near! And it draws near with its blessings of salvation and healing for those who welcome it but condemnation to those who reject it (See Matt. 10:7-8; Luke 10:8-14).

This was the “Kingdom” John meant, although it cannot be ruled out that ultimately it applies as well to the world-ruling visible Kingdom to come (see Luke 17:20-23 vs. Luke 17:24 & Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7). It’s self-evident that those who refuse the Messiah in their lives now cannot expect to be part of His Kingdom in the world to come. And so *Yochannan* thundered in the wilderness, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. The message of repentance burned in the hearts of the people and moved them to repentance in their numbers. The message, delivered in “the spirit and power” of a prophet—Elijah, the prophet (Luke 1:17)—was electrifying and the response massive. People from “Jerusalem and all Judaea and all the region about the Jordan river” went out to him to be “baptized of him, confessing their sins”. They felt the raw passion and earnestness of a messenger who by his very dressing and life of austerity (see Matt. 11:7-9; cp 2 Kings 1:8) abhorred the world and the flesh and lived the culture of the kingdom he preached. The people could not stand the piercing, convicting power of his message; spiritual brokenness took hold of them;

an overwhelming sense of guilt and remorse flooded their souls. They couldn't but surrender—give up their sins and turn to God, and they came en mass “confessing their sins”.

He was he who he said he was—“the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight” (John 1:23). He would not coddle sin; he would not toy with his mission. For the Lord to reign in the lives of the people, the people must repent and forsake their sins; that is how His “way” into their lives is prepared and His “paths” (bringing the riches of His grace) made “straight”. At his circumcision on the eighth day, at which he was also named “John”, his father Zechariah prophesied of his son:

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;
To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,
Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,
To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:76-79).

The message and the response proved the heavenly mandate of John. Nobody listening to his distinct prophetic voice of repentance and judgment would take refuge in his secret sins hidden under a veneer of religiosity. The message cut through the shell of outward religiosity and brought professing religious men (the Pharisees and Sadducees being the two major religious sects of the time) to true repentance. The irony of it!

Pedigree is no substitute for repentance, neither pretended spiritual honours. For their hypocrisy and self-righteousness (Luke 12:1; Matt. 23:25-28), John called the Pharisees and the Sadducees a “generation” or brood (offspring) of vipers being the descendants of an earlier “generation of vipers” who, like they, continually poisoned the spiritual life of the nation with their malignant influence of hypocrisy and error. Their only hope was in repentance: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance”. Short of this, God's wrath was certain to come upon them. The Lord put it in similar terms in Luke 13: “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (vv. 3, 5).

The outcome of a refusal to repent is ruin:

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your RUIN.
Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?
For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye (Ezek. 18:30-32).

Repentance brings life because it's what prepares the way of the Lord and makes His paths straight! It's after repentance has been effected that He baptizes people with the Holy

Ghost and with fire! Apart from the ones He *personally* baptizes with the Holy Ghost following repentance, all others are rejects! It is that serious.

Simply put, unless you have been baptized by Christ with His Holy Spirit, your salvation is not guaranteed. Therefore, you cannot look forward to a meaningful spiritual life in Him; you cannot look forward to the resurrection, or to ascension, neither to heaven nor to eternal life. You are only fit for “the unquenchable fire”. You are doomed forever!

That’s why the Lord attaches utmost importance to the Holy Spirit baptism, and He personally takes charge! That fact John had it dinned into all those who came to him, including those who came to him to make inquiries:

(John 1:19 KJV) And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

(John 1:20 KJV) And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.

(John 1:21 KJV) And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

(John 1:22 KJV) Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

(John 1:23 KJV) He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

(John 1:24 KJV) And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.

(John 1:25 KJV) And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

(John 1:26 KJV) John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

(John 1:27 KJV) He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

(John 1:28 KJV) These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

(John 1:29 KJV) The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

(John 1:30 KJV) This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

(John 1:31 KJV) And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

(John 1:32 KJV) And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

(John 1:33 KJV) And I knew him not: but HE THAT SENT ME TO BAPTIZE WITH WATER, THE SAME SAID UNTO ME, UPON WHOM THOU SHALT SEE THE SPIRIT DESCENDING, AND REMAINING ON HIM, THE SAME IS HE WHICH BAPTIZETH WITH THE HOLY GHOST

(John 1:34 KJV) And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

John stated forthrightly that the Messiah was the baptizer with the Holy Spirit. His “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) was, therefore, a means to an end. The purpose of it all is to create the right condition for the Lord to administer the baptism of His Spirit to people. The Holy Spirit is a divine gift in toto, but it’s a gift God gives to only the truly converted—that is what is used, in effect, to ‘purchase’ it (Acts 2:38; 8:13-23).

But why is the Holy Spirit baptism so important to Christ and to His work of salvation on earth?

Baptism with the Holy Spirit is vitally important, otherwise we will not live: “... because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19)—live His life of holiness, righteousness, grace, power and truth.

The administering of the Holy Spirit baptism then is a special office of Christ by which He makes people—weak carnal men of the sinful Adamic nature—live; it’s the means by which He gives us life and put us in His church, which is His body. Without His Spirit, we are not part of His church; we are “none of His”:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His (Rom. 8:9).

Just as the living will not join with the dead, so Christ will not join with persons who don’t have His Spirit. “The flesh profiteth nothing”, He says (John 6:63). In other words, people without His Spirit are spiritually good for nothing because they are spiritually dead (Rom. 8:13; 1 Tim. 5:6; Rev. 3:1). Thus they can’t exercise themselves in such things of the Spirit as righteousness, holiness, faith, prayer, fasting, etc. They are completely cut off from God and His life of the Spirit. They are totally valueless to Him; they are “chaff” bound for “the unquenchable fire”. Unless they repent and convert and turn over their lives to the Lord.

This explains why at this gospel age in which God is calling masses into His church, He has announced the outpouring of His Spirit upon “all flesh” (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16-18). This was not the case under the Old Covenant; it’s only under the Gospel dispensation of the New Covenant that “all flesh” qualify to receive the Spirit, of course, following repentance and faith in Christ. Under the Old Covenant, only a special class of people qualified for divine anointing: kings, priests and prophets. The bulk of the congregation remained excluded from the anointing of the Spirit of God. For Moses personally, this was a worry, and he wished the whole nation was as Spirit-filled as he was. It was wistful wish, though.

When Moses complained to the LORD that the responsibility of leading the Israelites (a people notorious for grumbling at the least opportunity) was too heavy for him to bear alone, God told him to assemble seventy men of the elders of Israel, “And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear

it yourself alone" (Num. 11:11-17). True to His word, "the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. (Num 11:26 ESV) Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. (Num 11:27 ESV) And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." (Num 11:28 ESV) And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them." (Num 11:29 ESV) But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!"

Moses was keenly aware of and saddened at it. The Spirit of God was not upon "all" the congregation of Israel. No wonder, they were so disobedient and given to fleshly pursuits (1 Cor. 10:5-10). Their lives and deeds showed they did not belong to Christ. They were "none of His" because they were in the flesh, not in the Spirit wherein is life, even life everlasting. What then does this say about the salvation of the 'Spirit-less' members of the Old Testament congregation who were in the vast majority? Were they saved? Is possible to be saved without the Spirit of Christ? (See Isa. 63:9-10).

"The flesh profiteth nothing" as far as the things of God are concerned. But the Lord wants you to live a profitable life in Him. He wants to come into your life and make you live. He can only do so by His Spirit living in you; it's by means of His Spirit that He unites with you and becomes "one spirit" with you: "But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him" (1 Cor. 6:17 ESV).

Your part is to repent sincerely and earnestly. That is all it takes. The Saviour is ready to baptize you with His Spirit if, through repentance, you indicate your readiness to let Him do it. The administering of the baptism of the Spirit is the means by which Christ has guaranteed our salvation in the New Testament:

And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us,
and who has also put his seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Cor. 1:21-22
ESV).

While the gift of the Holy Spirit is given 'automatically' as it were by God subsequent to repentance, it's important that we also specifically and routinely ask for it, especially as the need to be 'refilled' from time to time would definitely arise, even if one already has it. This is the subtle message God puts across to us in Ps 81:10:

I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

The people brought out of Egypt were a redeemed people—brought out from under the yoke of the Egyptians by the strong arm of Yahweh. But to live, they had to imbibe His words and Spirit, not once but continuously. So is our case. We are the redeemed people of His blood (Eph. 1:7). But we do not have life of our own (Col. 3:3); we must subsist on the Word and Spirit of the Redeemer (see Isa. 59:21). To 'subsist' on a thing means to 'live or stay alive by means of that thing'. If you love life, that's something you never abandon!

So how could we ever think of staying alive without the Spirit or have less of Him?

Yes, if not put out totally, the Spirit can glow faintly in your heart. That's why the following scriptures warn and exhort us:

Quench not the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19).

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands (2 Tim. 1:6).

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (1 Tim. 4:14).

"Quench not" (i.e. don't extinguish or put out); "stir up" (i.e. stoke up); "neglect not". The call is, 'renounce spiritual indolence'. Or as the apostle Paul put it, "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord" (Rom. 12:11 *ESV*).

In case you don't realize it, fasting and prayer is service to God. At least, one old lady in scripture was noted for that—Prophetess Anna who spoke of baby Jesus when He was presented in the temple:

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38).

Prophetess Anna is an inspiring example of how not to be indolent but to be fervent in spirit. This is the spirit of the command in 1 Thess. 5:17: "Pray without ceasing".

The result is that you will not "put out the Spirit's fire" (NIV, ISV) but rather "fan it into flames" (*ESV*)! That's when we will be "filled with the Spirit" as commanded in Eph. 5:18:

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.

The two cannot co-exist: fullness of the Spirit and the excesses of the flesh generated by wine/gluttony. But since it's the Spirit which gives life, the indulgence of the flesh is not an option unless we seek death. The wise choice is to be "filled with the Spirit". One way to achieve this is to fill our souls—our inner selves—with songs and other stimulating spiritual activities and vibes. Hence we are told in verses 19 and 20 to speak to ourselves "in *psalms* and *hymns* and *spiritual songs*, *singing* and *making melody* in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ".

An ever joyful and grateful heart plus unceasing prayer fills a believer with the Spirit!

For the record, any believer who makes gluttony a habit of life and never fasts is a retarded spiritual baby who has not outgrown “the milk” of the word (the basics of the faith) so that he could grow into a mature believer able to accept the “strong meat” of the word. We read in Eccl. 10:16-17:

Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!
Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

The outcomes of daily wining and dining and periodic fasting are not the same. The gluttonous “child” is under “woe”—misery, grief, affliction and calamity; the abstemious “son of nobles” is “blessed”—happy, fortunate, and favoured! But both are described as ‘kings’ who both rule over ‘lands’. Since in Bible-logue “land” is man or people (Jer. 22:29), the “land” under reference in vs. 16 is an individual who is ruled (or controlled) by a mind (or “king”) obsessed with food and fleshly pleasures, while the “land” in vs. 17 is one ruled by a mind (or “king”) focused on spiritual advancement and therefore deprives the body of food and bodily pleasures as and when necessary. Yet it’s not a self-imposed hunger strike that never ends! The spiritually minded noble “king” allows the body to take in food in the right quantities at the proper time for physical strength and not for revelry or eating sake!

The opposing attitudes of the two ‘kings’, in relation to their spiritual development, stem from their unequal spiritual understanding and maturity. The ‘child king’ is a baby in Christ who instead of *growing* by “the sincere milk of the word” (1 Pet. 2:2) has stuck at that level – repentance, initial faith in Christ, water baptism, etc (Heb. 6:1-2). He has refused to be weaned off “the milk” and therefore is inexperienced in the word of righteousness, which is the “strong meat” of the word for the mature believer:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.
For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.
But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

The spiritual condition of the immature believer is deplorable indeed. Because he continues to live on milk instead of strong meat, he’s “unskillful in the word of righteousness”, being unable to differentiate good from evil. His spiritual senses remain blunt. Like the average child who is unable to distinguish between nutritious food and harmful things but puts all into his mouth, it’s anything goes for the spiritual baby in Christ but mostly error! (See Heb. 13:9; Eph. 4:14).

Again, a good example is fasting. While it’s common knowledge that periodic fasting is ‘good’ for one’s spiritual life, the baby believer would often neglect it because of his inability to appreciate its tremendous spiritual worth. In the end, his choice to abstain from fasting is

one of sin because he has knowingly rejected what is good (Jam. 4:17). Never mind Christ said, “Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:21) and a sister testified in church how it drew her closer to God and brought her a long sought-after breakthrough. Fasting is not for him; it’s too hard a task!

Because the baby lacks the ability to choose good over evil, his immaturity often manifests itself in outright carnal attitudes which only show his continued use of ‘milk’:

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? (1 Cor. 3:1-4).

The “brethren” are still milk-sucking “babes in Christ” and so “carnal” in their behaviour. Apparently, they are only slightly ‘better’ than the ‘unchurched’. Their refusal to outgrow the use of the milk of the word has meant that they remain basically hooked to the flesh, and the end is not desirable:

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Rom. 8:5-6).

Just as no baby is likely to grow into a healthy adult should she refuse to take solid food, so the continued use of “the milk of the word” will yield no meaningful spiritual life in Christ, unless ‘strong meat’ is added (see 2 Pet. 1:4-9). Because by itself ‘the milk’ cannot help one to outgrow carnality, the fate that awaits the unbeliever is the same fate that awaits the immature believer. How sad!

However, the command is to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). One proof of this spiritual growth in grace is the endurance of hardness. The apostle Paul encouraged Timothy, his spiritual protégé:

Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Thou therefore **endure hardness**, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully (2 Tim. 2:1-5).

The message is simple: If you will be strong in grace, you must endure hardness. In other words, it takes the endurance of hardness to be “strong in the grace that is Christ Jesus”. The growth in grace is the ‘crown’ but it’s not a crown to be won on a silver platter. Like the soldier focused on the battle and thus detached from civilian life, the Christian soldier must not be distracted by worldly affairs but ‘fight’ “as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”, intent to please His Commander. But (to borrow a related analogy from athletics) he must “strive lawfully”—according to the rules.

One of the rules is unceasing prayer along with occasional fasting. It’s hard but that’s one way to be “strong in the grace that is in Jesus” (see 2 Cor. 11:27 & 1 Cor. 15:9-10) and thereby please Him:

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man (Luke 21:34-36).

The believer who heeds the instruction of Christ, the Captain of our salvation who was Himself made perfect through endurance of suffering (Heb. 2:10), is the blessed “land” whose “king is the son of nobles”. This is the believer prepared for the return of His Lord:

(Luk 12:42 KJV) And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* lord shall make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of meat in due season?

(Luk 12:43 KJV) Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

(Luk 12:44 KJV) Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

(Luk 12:45 KJV) But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to EAT AND DRINK, and to be DRUNKEN;

(Luk 12:46 KJV) The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

(Luk 12:47 KJV) And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.

(Luk 12:48 KJV) But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

So, don’t let spiritual indolence rule your life and ruin your destiny in Christ. Understand the Master’s will and perform it (Eph. 5:17). He says, “Open your mouth and I will fill it”. Many don’t put it on their prayer list, but one request the Lord recommends we present to the Father in prayer is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It’s a gift freely and voluntarily given, but it’s so precious a gift that the Master impresses on us the need to pray persistently to the Father for it with all the seriousness we could muster. He tells us in the Parable of the Friend at Midnight:

Luke 11:5-13

And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?

And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.

I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if *he ask* a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?

The incentive to get up in the middle of the night to give bread to his friend for his friend's friend was simply not there. Not only would he disturb his sleeping children if he got up to do the bidding of his friend, but midnight was such an ungodly hour! But then, the friend of this householder would not be easily dissuaded even when his friend literally told him off his front door! He kept calling, begging and banging the door. Finally, the householder could no longer take it and got up to get the bread for his friend. His persistence had paid off.

So should we approach prayer. We must persist in prayers until our request is granted, while entertaining no fears of disappointment or doubts. "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened".

Even better, the object of our petition is not a sinful human being but "the Father of lights" from whom all good gifts come (Jam. 1:17). Even if human parents, prone to evil as they are, are naturally inclined to give "good gifts" to their children, how could the perfectly good heavenly Father ever refrain from giving the good gift of the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

Those who haven't yet received have not asked or they have asked with wrong motives, as Simon of Samaria did (Jam. 4:3; Acts 8:13-22). Or they have failed to pray persistently for it.

Frequently, however, a believer might have already received the Spirit following repentance and faith in Christ. But does that mean he or she should never pray for it again?

There's such thing as having the Spirit of God and another as being full of the Holy Spirit. The latter was often applied to the apostles (Acts 2:4), the deacons of the early church, such

as Stephen (Acts 6:5, 7:55), Barnabas (Acts 11:24) and the membership of the early Church generally (Acts 4:31). Peter, for one, so overflowed with the Spirit that his shadow healed the sick (Acts 4:8; 5:15-16). In the case of Paul, it was aprons used on his anointed body that healed the sick and drove out demons from people (Acts 19:11-12).

While it's God who allots the Spirit to each according His set measure (Eph. 4:7; Rom. 12:3; cp John 3:34), the Lord lays on us a responsibility to guard against the smothering of the Spirit's fire through unceasing prayer, which, in effect, ensures our being continually refilled with the Spirit.

In the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25), Christ describes two groups of believers who display two different levels of commitment to their reservoir of oil being the Holy Spirit. While one group of five virgins took extra oil because they anticipated the possibility of the oil in their lamps running out, the other five took no extra oil hoping that what they already have in their lamps would see them through till the coming of the One they awaited – the bridegroom. The two different approaches the two groups adopted towards the oil in their lamps, as well as the equally different outcomes of their approaches, earned them the labels “wise” and “foolish” respectively.

A continuation of His Mount Olivet discourse prompted by the disciples' inquiries about the sign of His coming and of the end of the world (Matt. 24:3), the point Christ emphasizes in the parable is that believers must be ready with their extra oil of the Spirit at all times so we will be ready to meet Him even when He comes at a time we do not expect (Matt. 24:44, 50). He narrates the parable:

(Mat 25:1 KJV) Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

(Mat 25:2 KJV) And five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish.

(Mat 25:3 KJV) They that *were* foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

(Mat 25:4 KJV) But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

(Mat 25:5 KJV) While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

(Mat 25:6 KJV) And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

(Mat 25:7 KJV) Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

(Mat 25:8 KJV) And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

(Mat 25:9 KJV) But the wise answered, saying, *Not so;* lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

(Mat 25:10 KJV) And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

(Mat 25:11 KJV) Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

(Mat 25:12 KJV) But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

(Mat 25:13 KJV) Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

All ten virgins had one objective—to meet the bridegroom. But while the bridegroom delayed in coming, both groups of virgins – the “wise” and the “foolish” – “slumbered and slept”. ‘Slumber and sleep’ are related but are not the same. ‘Slumber’ means to ‘doze’ or ‘sleep lightly’, while ‘sleep’ denotes ‘deep sleep’ probably with a snore! A virgin waiting for the bridegroom and who is so expectant that she has taken extra oil cannot possibly fall into a deep sleep. Already on tenterhooks, all she could do in the waiting period of relative inactivity is to doze off.

Set in the very final days leading up to Christ’s return, this ‘waiting period’ dates from when the preaching of the true gospel stops with the onset of the three-and-half year tribulation period triggered by “the abomination of desolation” (embodied in the antichrist) standing “in the holy place” (Matt. 24:14-15; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:5, 7). That’s when the remnant church flees and is persecuted by the antichrist until Christ returns “after the tribulation of those days” to gather up His saints (Matt. 24:16-21, 29-31).

Even during this period, spiritual indolence will not have taken hold of the “five wise virgins”—the watchful, praying, spiritually prepared members of God’s church. Yes, evangelistic and church activities will have ‘slowed down’ considerably, yet the wise virgins will not have slowed down to a halt in the spirit. They will still be “fervent in spirit”, praying unceasingly—if not as vigorously as they used to do in pre-tribulation days—to keep the Spirit aflame. It’s a period they enter prepared to meet the Bridegroom, their Lord (Amos 4:12); it’s a state of preparedness going back many years up to the time the Bridegroom is finally on its way. It’s not at the moment of the Bridegroom’s coming that an attempt should be made at ‘preparation’. That will be too late, and you will be caught out just as the five foolish virgins were!

Like the wise virgins, they too were aware of the Lord’s return and even looked forward to it. However, they weren’t ready for the spiritual hassle that went with a credible preparation for His return. They found their level of spiritual development ‘satisfactory’, believing they will somehow scrape through when He comes. Their flickering flame would do. No need to *unduly* worry. They were “at ease in Zion”. They refused to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”; they refused to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”. They had become spiritually complacent. ‘The Lord has done it all’, they reasoned. ‘I need to just pray a little, fast a little or none at all. The light I have is enough’.

The command to “be filled with the Spirit” was not meant for them; the excesses of flesh had eaten into their spiritual life. They had flung to the winds the Master’s warning that He would come a time we do not expect and thus we should be ever prepared for Him. They did not expect a *midnight* return when it would be too late to do anything.

But that’s exactly what happened. A “midnight cry” roared out rending the silence of the night, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him”, and they were caught napping! Their flickering lamps had finally gone dead! Not a gleam of candlelight shone.

The announcer's cry is said to have been made at "midnight" because the Lord will return at a time of total universal blackout (Amos 8:9) with the sun and the moon no longer emitting light:

Matt 24:29-30

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:
And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Acts 2:17-21

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

And on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Luke 17:34-36

I tell you, in that NIGHT there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.

Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

The only light that will shine "that night" is the fire of the Holy Spirit; the only people who will have light will be those filled with the Holy Spirit. It's a night that harks back to the great night of deliverance in which God brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt while the Egyptians wailed and mourned their dead—the deaths of their firstborns:

And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle (Ex. 12:29).

And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations (Ex. 12:41-42).

On the night of Christ's return, deliverance will be centred in only one place—mount Zion, the spiritual abode of the Spirit-filled "church of the first born":

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call (Joel 2:28-32).

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel (Heb. 12:22-24).

The church on earth is at one with the congregation in heaven by the spiritual unity of the Spirit from heaven. Everyone else, except the Spirit-filled church of Zion, is "chaff", doomed to destruction! Worldly status will not count—in fact, the leading men (firstborns) of this world will be the hardest hit (Rev. 6:15-17; 19:17-19)—except the Spirit-filled members of God's true universal church whose names are written in heaven. Only they will escape the fearsome War of Armageddon (the seventh plague/bowl judgment, Rev. 16:16-17) and its inescapable worldwide havoc (Rev. 19:11-16; Isa. 34:1-5). As "the sign of the Son of Man" appears in the heavens, they—the dead and the living Spirit-filled saints—will be resurrected and whisked away by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of Christ to heaven:

Isa 26:19-21

Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers [John 14:2], and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

For, behold, the LORD cometh out of His place [heaven] to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

Rev 19:1-3

And after these things I heard a great voice of MUCH PEOPLE IN HEAVEN [Rev. 7:9], saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:

For true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.
And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

1 Thess. 4:14-17

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God [the returning Christ] bring with Him.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The Saviour will undertake a massive operation by His Spirit on the day of His return. The Spirit-filled saints who died physically while the Holy Spirit yet dwelt within their souls and spirits will be “raised up” in a new glorious body (Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52-53), while the Spirit-filled living saints will be “changed”—clothed in the same glorious body of Christ—and snatched away together with the resurrected saints heavenward (1 Cor. 15:51; Phil. 3:20-21; Thess. 4:17; cp 2 Cor. 12:2, 4; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16)!

Philip, the evangelist, had a foretaste of the Holy Spirit-operated ascension when after bringing the Ethiopian eunuch to faith in Christ and baptizing him, he was snatched away from him by the Holy Spirit:

And when they were come up out of the water, THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD CAUGHT AWAY PHILIP, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:39-40).

Ascension by the Holy Spirit was also the way Christ, the Holy Spirit Himself, went up to heaven after His resurrection from the dead and firm instruction to the church “not [to] depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ‘ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost [by Me] not many days hence’” (Acts 1:4-5):

And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was TAKEN UP; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was CAUGHT UP unto God, and to His throne (Rev. 12:5).

Considering that the ascension occurred immediately after He reiterated the promise of the Holy Spirit for the last time (Acts 1:8), the subtle message for us is that we will similarly be “caught up” to God in heaven once we receive the power of His Holy Spirit; the subtle link between the two cannot be lost on us.

Salvation is all about repentance (inclusive of faith in Christ) and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This will only be fully realized on the day of His second coming when Spirit-filled saints are resurrected, transformed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air! The gift of the Holy Spirit is truly the down payment God has made towards our salvation, which at its revelation “in the last time” will see us resurrected/changed into immortal spirit beings (2 Cor. 5:1-5; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). And it’s all stated there in Joel’s prophecy—God pours out His Spirit on His servants and maid servants so there can be deliverance for them on Mount Zion on the day of His fierce anger when He unleashes His judgments on the world. Otherwise, you have no reason to look forward to “the day of the LORD” with joy and expectation:

Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.

As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.

Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it? (Amos 5:18-20).

Sadly, some believers will be left behind because they took no extra oil. The door of heaven will be slammed in their faces, and Christ, the Bridegroom, will shout after them, “Verily, I know ye not”. The truth of the scripture in Rom. 8:9 will finally dawn on them: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His”.

Meanwhile, the anointed saints who did not toy with the baptism of the Holy Spirit of Christ but continually sought to be refilled will be ‘partying’ with the Lord at the “marriage supper of the Lamb” in heaven. Not because the Lord displayed favouritism, but because they were “ready” for Him when He returned:

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself READY.

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God (Rev. 19:7-9).

The believers who failed to be ready for their Lord failed to draw lessons from the twice repeated instruction God gave to the Israelites in the Old Testament not to starve the seven-branched lamp (the Menorah) of olive oil but continually supply it with oil:

And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always.

In the tabernacle of the congregation without the vail, which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before the LORD: it shall be a statute for ever unto their generations on the behalf of the children of Israel (Ex. 27:20-21).

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually.

Without the vail of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the LORD continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually (Lev. 24:1-4).

The New Testament spiritual force of the instruction in Ex. 27 and Lev. 24 is that 'see to it that you never run out of the oil of the Holy Spirit but that you are continually refilled with the oil of the Spirit'. And what an apt application it is when we consider the New Testament spiritual significance of the candlestick of old:

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day [Lev. 23:3; Isa. 58:13; Mark 2:28], and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks *one* like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

His head and *his* hairs *were* white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes *were* as a flame of fire; And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp twoedged sword [of judgment or evaluation]; and His countenance *was* as the sun shineth in His strength.

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS which thou sawest are THE SEVEN CHURCHES (Rev. 1:10-20).

Christ, the High Priest of the Church, walks in the midst of “the seven golden candlesticks” (Rev. 2:1), being His glorious universal church in His priestly garments. He would not walk among an unlit church but a church, a “candlestick”, lit up with the fire of His Spirit. He warned the church in Ephesus:

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Rev. 2:2-5).

Their love for Christ was growing cold because the things of Christ were no longer their priority. In all probability, their prayer life was at a low ebb not to mention evangelism. Like the church in Laodicea, materialistic pursuits were beginning to eat away at their once vibrant spiritual life in Christ (see Phil. 2:21). Their new attitude grieved the Lord; they were in danger of losing His Spirit. “Repent”, He warned, “and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent”.

Christ will be able to remove the church (the candlestick) from its place in Ephesus because He owns the church; He bought it with His own blood. But a church belongs to Him essentially because He has put His Spirit in them or they are “none of His”! So all He does to render a group of people who purport to be His followers *churchless* is to take away His Spirit from them and the church (as defined in scripture as a community of the Spirit-led, Rom. 8:9, 14; 1 Cor. 12:13) is removed! So then, a group may give themselves every lofty Christian title or name, but without the Holy Spirit baptism they are a *non-church* in the sight of Christ. They are none of His! This was the danger that stared the Ephesian church in the face unless they repented!

Their non-church status meant that Christ would no longer walk among them because they were no longer His church. And the fault would be entirely theirs. They failed to prioritize the spiritual things of Christ and instead ingratiated themselves with the world in defiance of the divine command to live a separate, holy life from it. We read in 2 Cor. 6:

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and WALK in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people [See Lev. 26:11-12].

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:16-18).

Repentance is another opportunity to get right with God (2 Cor. 7:9-10). If not, Christ's candlestick will still shine *elsewhere*! At no point in time will the candlestick lit by God's Spirit be extinguished in all the earth. The Lord may only change its location by removing it from among the unworthy to another place as He threatened to do with the Ephesians (Matt. 21:43). The Spirit-filled true church will always be.

Let us, therefore, always seek to remain part of His Church through continual spiritual fellowship with Him, not by grieving Him but by doing those things that please Him. Short of that, we are none of His; we are non-church!

What Christ's warning message and the precarious spiritual state of the Ephesians teach us is that it's imperative we persist in the spiritual activities that ensure we stay Spirit-filled and that we don't ever dare shirk them! Lest we be made non-church!

Although the Lord Jesus was "full of the Holy Ghost" (Luke 4:1, 14), He would occasionally repair to a mountain to pray to the Father for spiritual renewal, for example, following a massive spiritual activity in which He healed and delivered crowds of sick and oppressed people or before such activity which would attract such folk in need. Christ in the flesh always sought to remain full of the Spirit through continual refilling! He wouldn't work at half tank but at full tank! Thus after ministering to thousands in healing and teaching, in addition to miraculously feeding them with five loaves and two fish, "He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone" (Matt 14:14-23; Mark 6:34-46). The end of the prayer saw Christ perform another great miracle—He walked on the stormy sea and caused Peter to also walk on it before He calmed it by word of command! (Matt. 14:24-33; Mark 6:47-51).

In Luke 6, He similarly had a 'quiet time' with the Father in prayer, this time to seek His counsel and guidance in the selection of the Twelve and more power to cast out demons and heal the sick:

In these days He went out to the mountain to pray, and ALL NIGHT HE CONTINUED IN PRAYER TO GOD.

And when day came, He called His disciples and chose from them twelve, whom He named apostles:

Simon, whom He named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew,

and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

And He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon,

who came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.

And all the crowd sought to touch Him, for POWER CAME OUT FROM HIM and healed them all (Luke 6:12-19 *ESV*).

Power came out of Christ to heal the sick and to cast out demons (see also Luke 5:17; 8:43-46). After the healing and deliverance session, the amount of power in Him at the start of the session would have gone down. Replenishment was therefore in order, and Christ would repair to the mountain again and again.

Now, if Christ deemed it fit to spiritually re-energize Himself on occasion, what about you and me, conceived in Adamic sin and only now being reborn into the spiritual likeness of Christ?

The answer has already been looked at: “Pray without ceasing”; “Don’t be slothful in business; be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord”.

Christ Multiplies Himself through the Simultaneous Distribution of His Spirit to Believers

One of the titles of Christ in prophecy is “His name shall be called Wonderful”. And wonderful indeed is He. He is in heaven but His work of salvation is alive and thriving on earth.

How does Christ ensure the continuity and sustainability of His work on earth exactly as He would have done it were He personally here on earth as He was 2000 years ago? Remember Christ was a teacher, a leader, a healer, a miracle worker, a philanthropist, a counselor and a preacher. How is He able to run all these highly specialized ministries of His salvation work on earth from heaven?

He gives the best illustration of how He has been able to entrench and carry out His multi-faceted work on earth in His analogy of the True vine.

John 15:1-8

I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman.

(2) Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

(3) Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

(4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

(5) I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

(6) If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

(7) If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

(8) Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

The Master states His main point in verses 4-6: Unless we abide in Him as a branch abides in a tree we cannot bear any spiritual fruit; but will be cut off from Him instead.

In the analogy He calls Himself “the true Vine”, the Father the Gardener who dresses the vine tree and cuts off the unfruitful branches, and the disciples “the branches” of the vine. But why the vine tree in particular?

Scripturally, the symbolic significance of the vine tree predates John 15 where Jesus uses it in reference to Himself. In the Old Testament, the vine was routinely used as a symbol of Israel, though mostly in a negative sense (Ps 80:8, 14; Jer. 2:21, 6:9; Ezek. 15:6; Hos. 10:1).

In Isaiah 5, Yah laments the abject failure of Israel, His vineyard, to bear fruit despite the best attention and care He gives her. He stakes out a fertile field, fences it, clears it of stones, plants it with choice seed, builds a tower in the midst of it, and then builds a winepress in expectation of fruit. Regrettably, however, all that the vineyard has to show for all the meticulous care are sour grapes! Israel, the vineyard, is terribly unfruitful and is only fit for destruction (vv. 1-7).

So then, Jesus as the ‘true vine’ means He is the ideal Israel (Isa. 49:1-3, 6) into which Yah had sought to mould the redeemed people of Israel; He’s the model Israel, the fruitful Israel, in whom there is no guile.

Fast-forward to the enlarged “Israel of God” in the New Testament, the Church, (Rom. 2:25-29; Gal. 6:16), and Christ is the perfect model of fruitfulness believers must look up to and reside in to be equally fruitful. As the branches of a tree are an integral part of the tree and therefore share its essential nature, so believers as branches of Christ, the “true vine”, should see themselves as essentially of the same kind as Christ.

And we are to “abide” in Him. The Greek word for “abide” is *meno* (Strong’s #3306), and it means to “abide, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand, tarry”. It’s to become integrally fixed in Him as a natural part of Him and, by means of that very attachment, to depend on Him for sustenance and growth. It’s not merely an association by accident or coincidence; it’s an immersion in His character. That is to say, we must abide in His attributes of holiness, righteousness and Spirit-led life, and we will be fruitful. How do we do that? ‘Let My words abide in you’, He says. Hence “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). His Word is Himself.

In the end, a whole new person emerges. You are not even a hybrid; your old nature has been rooted out (2 Cor. 5:17). In its place, the Christ personality has been formed in you (Gal. 4:19). You have come to abide in Christ through obedience to His words and, by that very fact, He Himself (His nature) has come to abide in you. He puts it succinctly in verse 4, “Abide in Me, and I in you”.

Already, our initial receipt of the word will have prepared the ground for His enduring stay in us. The word will have made us “clean”, making it possible for Him to dwell in us permanently for the purpose of making us fruitful. This explains the somewhat abrupt ‘digression’ (from the vine analogy) in John 15:3: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you”.

The next stage is to bear spiritual fruit, not once but enduringly. Such expectation calls for continual dwelling in Him through obedience to His words or we will be absolutely fruitless! Indeed, we will have no basis for hope of fruitfulness (v. 4). Cut off from our source of sustenance and growth, we will be sapped of all spiritual strength to do anything by ourselves; we will be absolutely useless; as He puts it, “without Me ye can do nothing” (v. 5). Besides, we will not linger on for long; we will be removed from the “true Vine” by the Father and cast into the fire lest we impede the growth of the entire vine (vv. 2, 3-6).

The watchword is “abide”, “abide”, “abide” in Him! We must never forget the order of the relationship. He’s the basis of our being, of our survival, and of our growth. He is our SOURCE OF POWER! Without Him we are not. But we are in Him not for mere association’s sake but to bear fruit for the Father’s glory. We cannot imagine the awesome responsibility this places on us; we cannot be the ones to stand in the way of the glory due the Father!

If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.
Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples (John 15:7-8).

Answered prayer is key to fruitfulness but that can’t be unless we abide in the word (see 1 John 3:22). Similarly, our claim to discipleship is spurious unless we have the fruits to show for it. Fruitfulness is the evidence of discipleship.

Thankfully, Christ loves us so much to see us remain fruitless with all the dire consequences this has for us. Love is the basis of the relationship of “the true Vine” in which Christ is the root and the stem and His disciples are the branches. So He continues:

As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love.
If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.
These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full (John 15:9-11).

Love is the glue of the relationship but it’s not shown by lip-service; the test of the love which keeps the relationship going is the keeping of His commandments. It’s by so doing that Christ has remained in His Father’s love; the same is the secret of our unremitting joy in Him.

Significantly, the love is not a one-way traffic between the branches on one hand and the true vine on the other; love should pervade the whole tree, and the branches should relate to another on the basis of love. This is the foremost commandment Christ has given to us His disciples, and we have His perfect, altruistic, sacrificial love shown towards us to inspire

us. His love demonstrable proves He considers us more than friends—a friendship we consent to if we do His commandments whereupon He lets us in on His family secrets:

This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.
Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you (John 15:12-15).

The mandate of the love relationship that has made us the very limbs of the Messiah from whom we derive our substance is to bring forth enduring fruit:

Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you (John 15:16).

It's not by our initiative that we became His limbs; it's by His choice, and He has deposited in us all the qualities we need to be fruitful—with unfailing answered prayer guaranteeing it all!

But what specific fruits do we bear which shows us to be a natural part of “the true vine”, albeit His branches?

The “fruit of the Spirit” and the “gifts” of the Spirit—who is Christ!

The “fruit of the Spirit” infuses us with the character (or personality) of Christ, empowering us to live His way of life:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23 ESV).

In a snapshot of Yeshua's personality, Matthew wrote in his Gospel:

Behold My servant, whom I have chosen; My beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.
He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets.
A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory.
And in His name shall the Gentiles trust (Matt. 12:18-21).

Matthew quoted this prophetic portrait of the Messiah's personality from Isaiah 42 after Messiah was maliciously and falsely accused of Sabbath breaking by the Pharisees for healing a sick man on the Sabbath. Instead of squabbling with the Pharisees, Jesus withdrew from them and quietly continued with His healing ministry. During His earthly ministry, Yeshua HaMashiach was the walking epitome of “the fruit of the Spirit”. Although He reproved sin and sinners, He loved all men from the bottom of His heart (Mark 10:21; John

11:32-36; 13:1; Gal. 2:20); although occasionally distressed by man's pitiable condition, He was joyful in spirit (Luke 10:21); in the direst of moments He was at peace with the Father and with Himself (Matt. 26:39; Acts 8:32); His patience was beyond compare—He patiently endured opposition and injustice (Heb. 12:3; 1 Pet. 2:23); His kindness drove Him to teach, heal and feed thousands of people (Mark 6:34; Matt. 14:14-21, 15:32, 20:34); He was so good goodness came to define Him (Acts 10:38); He was absolutely faithful in the discharge of His mission (Heb. 3:1-4); He was gentle to all, even children (Matt. 19:13-15), and He had self-control (Mark 14:55-60, 15:29-32; 1 Pet. 2:23).

As the members or branches of his body (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27) we should have the same temperament and personality Jesus had or we are not a natural outgrowth from Him. After all, "if the root be holy, so are the branches" (Rom. 11:16).

Similarly, we should have some of the same spiritual "gifts" Yeshua utilized during His earthly ministry. The purpose is to adequately equip us to carry on His spiritual priestly ministry the same way He did—a ministry characterized by the display of knowledge and wisdom in teaching, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits (and thoughts), and spontaneous intelligible speech (John 7:14-18, 46).

In the end, we become little 'Christs'. While we all have, and should have, His personality, He assigns each one of us a different aspect of His spiritual ministry:

- (4) Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.
- (5) And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.
- (6) And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.
- (7) But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.
- (8) For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;
- (9) To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;
- (10) To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues;
- (11) But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

Some see a trinity in the text in verses 4-6, "Spirit", "Lord", "God". Yet scripture makes it cogently clear that "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17). The "Spirit" or the "Holy Spirit" is simply the name by which His continued spiritual presence with His people is called. That is why He concluded each of His messages to the seven churches in Revelation with the saying, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). It was He the Lord Jesus speaking, but He referred to Himself as "the Spirit" because "the Lord is the Spirit"!

Thus it's neither surprising nor contradictory that while 1 Cor. 12 says that it's the Spirit which gives the gifts, we read in Ephesians 4 (written by the same Paul) that it's rather the descended and ascended Christ who gives people gifts which have a direct bearing on the offices He assigns His chosen in the church:

(Eph 4:7 KJV) But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

(Eph 4:8 KJV) Wherefore he saith, When He ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

(Eph 4:9 KJV) (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)

(Eph 4:10 KJV) He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.)

(Eph 4:11 KJV) And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

(Eph 4:12 KJV) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

(Eph 4:13 KJV) Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

(Eph 4:14 KJV) That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

(Eph 4:15 KJV) But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

(Eph 4:16 KJV) From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The Lord is the Spirit!

The gifts He gives His people (who constitute His body) are the supernatural proofs that Jesus' salvation ministry is still alive and active on earth and that He's still engaged in it. How can we be sure? He authenticates the work as His by the miracles He performs through His anointed ministers. We read in Heb. 2:3-4:

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him;

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?

The preaching of the true gospel, first preached by Christ, is accompanied by Him, and His spiritual, invisible presence is signified by the signs and wonders being performed:

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen (Mark 16:19-20).

The departed Messiah in heaven is inseparable from His disciples on earth in spirit. Wherever they are, He's in the midst of them: "... where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

Believers become so connected with Christ by His Spirit dwelling in them and giving them the Christ identity that they are hardly distinguishable from Him in the spiritual realm. This was clearly demonstrated in Ephesus when seven unbelieving Jewish exorcists who were not spiritually identified with Christ attempted to cast out demons by His authority. The evil spirit shouted at them, "Jesus I know and Paul I know" because Jesus, the exalted Lord over all, was in the apostle Paul. We read in Acts 19:13-17:

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

The fear which gripped the demon and his utterance do not suggest a reference to two unconnected individuals who both struck terror in him but to two individuals of the same kind—the Jesus kind! Hence "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" The Lord Jesus was not simply in Paul; He was "one spirit" with him through His indwelling Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).

Christ Jesus has by no means left the salvation scene to a separate spirit entity called the Holy Spirit. He's that same Spirit, for He's "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). His given name is *Yeshua*, *Yehowah saves* (Matt. 1:21). He is the true Vine, the abiding Tree of Life, from whom we draw spiritual life, growth and fruitfulness. Without Him we can do nothing. Thankfully, He's with us in spirit till the end of time. And His promise is this:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:12-13).

Halleluiah!

Partakers of His invisible Spiritual coming are Partakers of His visible second coming

As already discussed, Christ, towards the time of His departure to the Father, firmly promised us of His visible second coming to fetch us from earth to His "Father's house" in heaven where they are "many rooms" for us (John 14:1-6). But in the intervening period, He will not leave us without His comforting presence but will come to us.

In other words, He will keep in touch with us by His Spirit dwelling in us. But the relationship will not remain forever invisible; those of us who have His Spirit will actually live in His presence, and *see* His glory and *reflect* His glory:

Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24).

... I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:
And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:
Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me (Job 19:25-27).

As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness (Ps. 17:15).

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

This privilege is reserved for only those who participated in Christ's spiritual coming after His ascension when they experienced the baptism of His Holy Spirit. For to participate in the resurrection and ascension which will usher us into glory, it will take His indwelling Spirit:

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.
And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.
But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you (Rom. 8:9-11).

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30; see also Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:13-14).

So then, let us hold fast what we have in Christ to the end (Heb. 3:14); that is, "Christ in us the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). This is the cherished hope of all Spirit-filled believers except the disqualified:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test! (2 Cor. 13:5 ESV).

I sincerely hope that you, dear reader, have not failed to meet the test (v. 6), but that Christ is in you. Amen!

As "in the Beginning" so in the End – Our Fellowship is with the Father and His Son *Only!*

This is what we have been taught from the beginning (in both Genesis 1 and John 1): our fellowship is with the Father and the Son, no third being is involved:

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

And the apostle insists any teaching that adds to or takes away from this truth is a heresy and should be avoided like a plague:

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have HEARD FROM THE BEGINNING shall remain in you, ye also shall CONTINUE IN THE SON, AND IN THE FATHER (1 John 2:21-24).

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. HE THAT ABIDETH IN THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, HE HATH BOTH THE FATHER AND THE SON.

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 1:9-11).

Don't ever forget this: Our acceptance of the Father and Son as constituting the Godhead (Elohim) who alone is to be believed, obeyed and worshipped is eternal life! The apostle Paul duly acknowledged this truth, opening many of his epistles with greetings of "Grace *be* to you and peace from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ" as in 2 Cor. 1:2 as well as in Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; Phm 1:3; Eph. 6:23. He never singled out the Holy Spirit as a separate entity from the Father and Son but affirmed that "The Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).

The greatest treasure you could ever possess, and the most wonderful hope you could ever have, is to be indwelt by Christ through His Spirit. Christ in you is the hope of unimaginable glory! In Him is life and salvation to the glory of the Father. Amen!

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