

A Few Words on John 5:17-27.

With Remarks on Recent Doctrine Concerning the Trinity.

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online: 25.10.2022, updated: 25.10.2022

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Foreword.

We believe that at the present time God would bring home to His children a deeper sense of the love that He has to them; and this can only be known as the eternal relationship existing between the Father and the Son is known. "The love wherewith He loves the Son, such is His love to us." And this love is inseparable from the eternal relationship referred to. These words in Colossians 1: "The Son of His love:" along with these other words, "The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father," reveal a love and a relationship which had no beginning. If the love had no beginning, so the Son Who is the object of it had no beginning. "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world," is a declaration on the part of the Son Himself which decides both points. That there is a mystery relating to the Trinity no one surely denies. But to deny the Trinity, in the sense of denying that Father, Son and Holy Spirit ever composed it, is not only to set aside the plain teaching of Scripture, but also to rob the child of God of his most precious heritage.

In the following pages we show, amongst other things, that to attempt to attach these names to the Godhead in relation to time only is to throw everything into confusion, and shroud this final revelation of God in darkness. Under this new teaching nothing can be known as to the three Persons of the Deity. All is involved in obscurity. If accepted, it would affect our view of other vital truths beside the one in question.

It will be seen, therefore, that the subject dealt with is of the utmost importance. It is the seriousness of what is involved which has led the writer again to take up his pen. No one ought to desire controversy for its own sake, but when many of the Lord's people are being misled, when they are being asked, nay almost compelled, to accept error as if it were the highest truth or suffer the consequences; and when man's word is being placed on a higher level than God's—who can remain silent? Especially when this error has been crystallised in a revised hymn book, and thus bound round the necks of succeeding generations.

It is reported that certain of the Lord's people are being warned not to read anything which conflicts with this new teaching or calls it in question. Such advice, if it has been tendered, reflects no credit either upon those who gave it or those who are asked to accept it. As to the latter, it is an insult to their spiritual manhood and intelligence. They might just as well be in the Church of Rome. Only sycophants or cowards would allow themselves to be influenced by such advice. More unworthy or disastrous counsel could hardly be given, and one earnestly hopes it will not be followed. The truth can always take care of itself, and God can take care of His people. May the following pages be read in the fear of God and with a single eye to His glory. R.E.

There seems to be some difference of opinion amongst the Lord's people as to the true interpretation of the above passage. Some would place a limit upon certain statements, supposing them to have reference only to the Incarnation; while to others it would appear as if, by necessity, they have a wider bearing. In seeking to expound the passage, the writer does not forget how profound the subject is, nor does he overlook the fact that others have spoken before him, and he would pay due deference to their views. Nevertheless, no human interpretation can compass the whole truth, nor in any sense be regarded as exhaustive or

final. There are crises, too, and controversies, which help to give certain aspects of truth special emphasis. Such occasions forming a background which throws into relief and clearer outline, what before had been only dimly discerned.

But more, not only is our Lord's teaching here of the utmost importance, and to be deeply cherished by every devout and intelligent student of the Word, but much of it has a special bearing upon the truth of the eternal Sonship of Christ, which has been so much discussed in recent months. A further contribution to this controversy has recently appeared from the pen of Mr. James Taylor entitled, "*Names of Divine Persons*," which the writer proposes to notice, after considering the passage of Scripture above mentioned.

The opening verse contains the profound statement, "My Father works hitherto, and I work." No prophet, or any other human being, ever employed language such as this. The statement embraces only seven words; yet those seven words not only contain an assertion which only One in equal rank with the Father could make, but cover the activities of God in relation to man, throughout all time. Here is One Who can place Himself on equal footing with the Father as a co-worker.

We start then with the full claim on the part of the Son to continue the work of the Father. The words, "My Father works" refer, of course, to Old Testament times. And it was the Father who worked, and therefore existed as the Father. Such words hardly fit Mr. James Taylor's doctrine of three Persons in the Godhead without any distinction whatever. If so, why single out One, and One only, as working? The very fact of mentioning One, and therefore making a distinction, is indubitable proof that the distinction existed before incarnation, because the statement has reference to what occurred before that time. The tremendous character of the utterance is seen from what follows. The Jews estimate of it was that the One before them was making Himself equal with God.

From verse 19 we learn that the statement of verse 17 refers to the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son are correlative terms. Yet there is a distinction. "The Son," we are told, "can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do." Now it is of all importance we should grasp the significance of this, and not only so, but that we should come to see that Scripture maintains this distinction, we think, almost without variation. That is, statements are made about the Son which are never made with reference to the Father, and *vice versa*. And this is so sometimes quite apart from Incarnation.

The very passage we are considering affords examples of what we are saying. In verse 22 we read, "The Father judges no man." God was always the Father, as we have seen, but the moment He is *revealed* as such, that Name, being the Name of grace and relationship, it must, apparently, be dissociated from all thought of judgment.

But that is only part of the verse. It goes on to say, "But has committed all judgment to the Son." Now Scripture never speaks of the Son committing anything to the Father; that is, in a similar way to this.

Again, verse 26, "As the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son to have life in

Himself." We shall consider the import of this later, it is quoted now as a further example of what has been stated. We merely remark that no time is indicated in either case. In Acts 10:42, we find the apostle Peter affirming: "It is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." But we are not told *when* He was thus ordained.

Just one other example, and this is found in Acts 1:7, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in His own power." Here again we are not told *when* this was done, and it is to be particularly noted that the words are not "which God has put in His own power," or "which the Son has put in His own power," but "which the Father has put in His own power." Now times and seasons have their place far back in human history, a further proof that the Father was always the Father.

But we have only, so far, considered part of verse 19. It proceeds, "For whatsoever things He does, these also does the Son likewise." Here then we have two statements which may be considered separately. One, that "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do;" the other, He can do whatever the Father does, and so these statements contain a double truth. First, we see the place the Son has ever taken in relation to the Father, and this gives us an insight into the blessed relationships existing between the Persons of the Trinity—the Son has never acted apart from the Father. Secondly, that, at the same time, there is equality; He can do whatever the Father does.

It is but the truth conveyed in these familiar words, "Trinity in unity, and unity in Trinity."

Verse 20—"For the Father loves the Son."—Could there be a more profound statement, or one more moving? He singles Himself out from everyone as the object of the Father's love. Who could give us such a revelation but the Son Himself? Who but He could use such language? He knows the Father, and He knows Himself to be the object of the Father's love. Had this love a commencement? If so, when? Was it at the Incarnation? or was it later at the baptism? Another utterance from the same lips will correct all such ideas. "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). To say that the One loved was not the Son then, is to rob the statement of all meaning. If the love had no beginning, is it at all likely that "Father" and "Son", as such, had a beginning? There are no just grounds for supposing, nor any suggestion anywhere in Scripture to lead us to suppose, that the love here spoken of is either the love of One unknown Person in the Godhead for Another, or (what is equally unbelievable) merely the love of God to His Son as Man, which is here spoken of. The words "God is love" have been quoted in an attempt to justify one or other of these propositions. But these profound words, "God is love," are found in connection with God's love to us, and not in any sense do they refer to Christ or to the outflow of love of One unknown divine Person for Another. No, when our Lord uttered these words, "The Father loves the Son," He meant us to take them just as they stand. They can mean only what was always true, and not merely something which became true in time. To suggest such a thing is to juggle with the words of Scripture. The words "The Father loves the Son" mean "The *Father* loved the *Son*," and nothing else.

Thus, as we have said, we are admitted into the holy and blessed relationship which belongs to the Trinity, and such secrets are still further disclosed in the concluding words of the verse,

“And shows Him all things that Himself does: and He will show Him greater works than these that ye may marvel.” “Counsels,” “purposes,” “election” all belong to the Father. Thus in the Epistle to the Ephesians where this side of the truth is specially presented, the Father is seen to be the Source of all. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” is the ascription in Ephesians 1:3. “The Father of glory” is referred to in verse 17, and the apostle prays for their enlightenment that they may acknowledge Him as such; and in Ephesians 3:14, he bows his knees unto “the Father ... of Whom every family in heaven and earth is named.” The Son shared in all these counsels, but as finding their source in, and flowing from the Father. He found His eternal joy and delight in what the Father showed Him. So the apostle Peter, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1. Peter 1:2).

Yet verses 21-23 place the Father and the Son on an equality, which would be totally unnecessary if we are only asked to consider Deity in the abstract, and totally irreverent, or something worse, if we are only to consider the Son as Man. Nor does this thought of equality at all interfere with what is said in the previous paragraph. Equality does not necessarily imply that they are in every way identically the same, and that no distinction whatever is to be made. The equality is seen in the fact that “as the Father raises up the dead and quickens them; even so the Son quickens whom He will.” In committing all judgment to the Son it is in view of possessing equal honours with the Father, “that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He that honours not the Son honours not the Father *which has sent Him.*” A statement which leaves us in no doubt as to the eternal existence of the Father and the Son *as such.*

The Three Titles, “The Son,” “The Son of God” And “The Son of Man.”

In the passage under consideration occur these three titles, and a careful discrimination between them will greatly assist us in understanding their meaning. as well as assist us to rightly understand the passage itself. The distinction which exists between the Son, the Son of God, and the Son of Man has been discussed in a previous publication.¹

But the subject is so important and sheds such light upon the whole question under discussion as to our Lord’s Sonship, that some further remarks may not be out of place.

The other day we saw it stated in a theological work, that wherever the Son is spoken of it means the Son of God. That is, the one is but an abbreviated form of the other. Can this be substantiated? We think not. If it were so, there would be manifest contradiction between Luke 10:22 and Eph 4:13. The former passage states, “No man knows who the Son is,” nor does the Lord even hint that a time would ever come when it would be otherwise.

Thus, when Paul asserts that the very end and aim of Christian ministry is “till we all come unto the knowledge of the Son of God,” we are left in no doubt that there must be a very important distinction between these two titles. All this helps us to understand what a marked distinction there is between the titles, the Son and the Son of God, as Scripture uses them. They are, of course very closely connected, because both titles belong to the same Person, and both refer to Sonship though in different ways.²

Yet, as we have said, there is a marked distinction. The angel did not say to Mary, "That Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son." The title there employed, and with strict accuracy is, "Son of God." For there can be no doubt that He Who ever was "The Son," is, in a special sense, "Son of God in Manhood. As such, He is the representative Man. He represents God to men, and He is the representative Man before God. He is seen thus in John 1:32-4. John the Baptist sees the Spirit descending upon Him, and immediately exclaims, "This is the Son of God." Paul in Galatians 2:20, uses the title as having a meaning of its own and as something quite distinct from the other title he has already used in the same verse. He has been speaking of *living to God*. How is this realised? I live," he says, "by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." The love of the Son of God expressed all that God, known in grace, was to him. This is from God to men. Only the Son of God could fully represent God to His creatures, but beginning from the other side, it is equally true, as Eph 4:13 shows, that what the Son of God is as Man now before God, alone fully represents, what redemption has accomplished—"a perfect Man". This is set forth in the place and relationship occupied by Christ. There will be a company one day before God all bearing His image and sharing His position and relationship. On the other hand as *the Son* He has a glory all His own (John 17:5).

Returning to John 5, we notice that the title, the Son, is, in the passage under review, used far more frequently than either of the others. As we have said, it is used as the correlative of the Father, and stands in relation to the Father, whereas "Son of God" is used in a different connection, and stands usually, if not invariably, in relation to God. The Father works, so does the Son, and whatsoever the Father does, the Son does likewise. "The Father loves the Son." All men are to "honour the Son even as they honour the Father."

Why then should there be a change of title when we reach verse 25? First, because v. 25 must not be taken as a mere repetition of v. 24. We know some good authorities have taken the view that the two verses speak of the same thing. Nevertheless, there are many and serious objections to this view. Will the reader notice that both statements are prefaced by "verily, verily." Now, we can hardly conceive our Lord repeating these words if He was only reiterating what He had already just said. Second, while v. 25 speaks of "the dead," these words are not found in v. 24. Thirdly, it is generally admitted that this verse (v. 24) speaks of spiritual life being imparted to those who are spiritually dead. But the term, "the dead," found in v. 25, is never used of the spiritually dead, but is invariably used of the physically dead. When our Lord said to His disciples Lazarus is dead," He meant physically dead. This is the meaning of "the dead," in 1Cor 15, so also in Rev 20, whereas in Eph 2, where the reference is to the spiritually dead, the expression used is "dead in trespasses and sins."

Why should there be any exception to the above in John 5:25? There is absolutely no reason for it. The entire verse agrees with the thought that "the dead" here are the physically dead. The thing spoken of was about to happen, and it was to be a proof that Jesus was indeed the Son of God—the very title used in the verse. Our Lord's own words in connection with the raising of Lazarus confirm this. In John 11:4 we read, "When Jesus heard that, He said, this sickness is not to death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." For this reason He tarried two days still in the same place. Death was allowed to conquer for the moment, for apart from resurrection the full glory of the Son of God could not

be revealed. Had He answered the summons at once and merely raised Lazarus from a sick bed, the sisters would not have seen His tears nor the full revelation of His power. He is “declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from (or ‘of’) the dead.”

We must read John 5:25, in the light of this, and then we shall discern its meaning and see why the title Son of God is used. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming and now is (these words are not employed in the previous verse) when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.”³

Little needs to be said as to the remaining title used in the passage before us, namely, “The Son of Man;” for I am not aware that anything is in dispute regarding this. It is the title used most often by our Lord when speaking of Himself. “He was made (or became) in the likeness of men.” “The Word became flesh.” Scripture does not say He became the Son.⁴

He was here in the full habit and character of Man. If Messiah links Him exclusively with Israel, Son of Man has a wider significance, namely, God’s purpose for man and a universal dominion. “What is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the Son of Man that Thou visitest Him?” As such He will have dominion over the works of God’s hands. In Hebrews 2, where Psalm 8 is quoted, we see the Man to Whom the promises in that Psalm refer. God has found a Man who will fulfil all His will. All things are to be put under Him.

Before passing to the consideration of verse 26, we would point out that v. 28-29 are an extension of verse 25. Having stated in this verse, “The hour is coming and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God,” our Lord amplifies this by saying, “Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in which all that are *in the graves* shall hear His voice.” Not isolated cases, such as Lazarus for instance, but *all*, some at the resurrection of life, and others at the resurrection of judgment.

John 5:26.

In some respects this is the crucial verse of the chapter, and the one around which controversy has been the keenest. There are some who maintain that this can only refer to Incarnation. But where is there any reference to Incarnation, or even to our Lord as Man? It is not something given to the Son of Man but to the Son. In the very nature of things *TIME* is excluded. To introduce the thought of time into the eternal relations of Divine Persons is simply an anachronism. Time does not relate to God, and has no place with Him. Past, present and future do not exist as such, for Him it is one eternal NOW.⁵

The wonder of the human mind is that while it seems to be boundless, it is really limited. There is an essential constitution of the mind itself, which God has ordained, which controls our reason and ideas and beyond which it cannot go. In “*The Gospel and its Ministry*,” p. 71, the late Sir Robert Anderson has some very pertinent remarks on this point. He says:—

“A superficial thinker might suppose the powers of human imagination to be boundless. He can imagine the sun and moon and stars to disappear from the heavens, and the peopled earth to vanish from beneath his feet leaving him a solitary unit in boundless space; but let him

try to grasp the thought of space itself being annihilated, and his mind in obedience to some inexorable law, will refuse the conception altogether. ... And the practical conclusion we arrive at is, that our idea of 'past, present and future,' like that of space, is not derived from experience, but depends upon a law imposed upon our reason by the God Who made us."

The above could be illustrated in a variety of ways. The mind can comprehend that God exists. It cannot comprehend a Being without a beginning. We can affirm, of course, that He had no beginning, as an act of faith, but the finite mind of man is compelled from its very constitution to put a beginning to everything.

How absurd then it is to suppose, when we read that the Father has given to the Son to have life in Himself, it can mean only that which such words convey to our limited understanding. In this connection it is opportune to remind ourselves that certain theological expressions which have been in use, such as "eternal generation," "begotten before all worlds," etc., are not out of place *if taken as they were meant to be taken* by those who coined them. They were never meant to be anything more than finite expressions of what is infinite. Least of all did those who employed them intend to convey the idea of any beginning to the life of the Son, or that He was created. They held strongly to the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, and that He was co-existent and co-eternal with the Father. Such expressions as the foregoing are intended to be nothing more than an attempt to put into words the highest conception of the human mind regarding something altogether beyond its range.⁶ Christ was the sent One of the Father. "Whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world" are the words of our Lord. And again, "I am not come of myself," "I proceeded forth and came from God; *neither came I of myself; but He sent me*" (John 7:28; 8:42, 10:36).

How can such statements be reconciled with J.T.'s suggestion that service was not *imposed*;⁷ "all is in liberty." "It was His own act." Was the foreordination *before the foundation of the world* (no question here of Incarnation) Christ's own act, that is, in the sense in which J.T. speaks? Was it Isaac's *own* choice to be laid upon the altar, apart altogether from his father's? And was Abraham wrong when he said, "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering?" If nothing is imposed, in what sense are we to understand the words, "By Whom also He made the worlds?" That there was no bondage, servility or compulsion in all this is freely admitted. In the words already quoted there was a "free and living union in which all are bound together by an absolute outpouring of each to other in love. It is the glory of them all to be one ... by a moral living for and in each other."

We see then how utterly false is J.T.'s way of stating the matter, and this leads us to notice that, however much he may object, his teaching involves him in Tritheism. On p. 6 he makes an attempt to escape from the charge. He says:—

"What among other things is fatal to this charge, is that Tritheism, although false, is necessarily a term relative to creation, whereas the condition of the Deity contemplated is that which existed apart from and before creation. ... That three infinite, co-equal, co-eternal Persons existed is unquestionable, and that relations and affections suitable to them existed is owned, but what is held by many of the people of God with the utmost assurance is, that Scripture does not furnish us with these relations or the names that express them."

We were accustomed during the Great War to the term, "smoke screen," under cover of which an enemy escaped from a difficult position. This is what J.T. attempts to do, and by a similar method. We have read of fish which when attacked can emit an inky fluid and so evade its enemy. Let the reader ponder the quotation given and he will see only a cloud of words.

First, how can our author presume to know so much about Deity when he implies again and again that in the aspect he is presenting we can know nothing? On p. 5, we find such a phrase as "While God remains in impenetrable absoluteness." How does he know then there were "three infinite, co-equal, co-eternal Persons existing, if all is covered up by *impenetrable* absoluteness How can he say "I believe relations suitable to Themselves always existed between the Divine Persons?" (p. 7). The fact is, J.T. borrows more than he is willing to allow from the very doctrine he is denying. He himself admits as much at the top of p. 8. "There is really no means," he says, "of distinguishing the Persons in absoluteness save as by employing the relative Names furnished in Scripture." "No means." Does this not show how completely the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit belong to the very Being of God?

Then we have the statement, "Tritheism, although false, is necessarily a term relative to creation." What a strange assertion! How can anything which is *false* be a necessity? And especially how can it be so in regard to God? We have never met with a more extraordinary doctrine. The fact is, a thing which is really false, does not exist at all, or it would not be false. A false idea or belief may exist in the *minds* of people, but the very fact that it is false is as good as saying that it has no existence actually. If a false statement is made about a person it is false because the thing alleged has no existence. Yet J.T. can say, "Tritheism, although *false*, is necessarily a term relative to creation."

What is false is, that J.T. should try to escape from his dilemma by assuming something which is a creation of his own imagination. Tritheism by those who used the term was meant to apply to J.T.'s doctrine, not of revelation or creation, but of the Deity. He restates his error in the very pamphlet before us. In fact, his whole doctrine necessarily involves it. "He speaks of each being self-existent" (p. 3). What he means by self-existent is clear from what he says on p. 5 when referring to Christ. "It was His own act," he says, and he is speaking of Him as being in the form of God. And again, "Three infinite, co-equal, co-eternal Persons." To which no objection could be taken as standing by itself, but regarded in the light of his other statements can only be taken as meaning that each was God independent of the others and acting from Himself. In other words, three Gods, which is what Tritheism means.

Further, how can Tritheism be a term relative to creation? Unless J.T. wishes us to understand that there was no Triune God until creation; just as he teaches there was no Father, Son or Holy Spirit until Incarnation. He tells us that the condition of the Deity contemplated is that which existed apart from and before creation. It is precisely to this condition, that J.T.'s teaching in regard to Tritheism attaches. If there is "no means of distinguishing the Persons" (p. 8) as J.T. avers, what is this but Tritheism? To all intents and purposes there must be three Gods, if the words J.T. repeatedly uses mean anything. How can we attach Names to Persons we cannot identify? Thus under this teaching we do not know really, Who is the Father, or Who the Son or Who the Holy Spirit.

Only if these Names belong to the very essence of the Deity; only if God never existed apart from what they express can we possibly identify the Persons they represent. To say that these Names express only what became true at the Incarnation is not only to lower them immeasurably, but we are left without any means of applying them for, as we have seen, J.T. says, "there is no means of distinguishing the Persons."⁸

It is simply impossible to think of any beginning in these relationships. As to God Himself, things do not begin with Him. Of Him, it is ever true, "Which is, and which was, and which is to come." Mr. Darby has pointed out the fact that *when He is fully revealed*, He is revealed in the truth of the Trinity, proving He was ever such—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not a Trinity merely in character (this is all J.T. allows), but in Person.

This is why the charge of Sabellianism has been brought against the teaching we are exposing. That is, it denies the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be the original and eternal condition of God, and speaks of it as if it only began with the beginning of the world, or with Incarnation. In connection with which someone has remarked, "The Scriptures would then be no true revelation of the nature of God; on the contrary, they would suggest what is absolutely false." That this estimate is correct is seen from the fact that those who support the error we are contending against insist upon our starting from time and reading backwards. Take for instance the statement, "The Father sent the Son." Yes, they say, but this was written after He became Son, and therefore must not be taken as meaning that He was Son when sent. If John 1:1 is quoted the reply is, but John is merely carrying back the Name by which Christ was known on earth into eternity. The only authority for this is a doubtful rendering of Luke 1:2, putting a capital and reading "attendants on the Word." Yet a whole edifice is reared by J.T. and his supporters upon such a doubtful foundation, although it is the only instance of Christ being referred to thus in the New Testament, except in John's writings. Does this afford any basis for denying the eternity of the Word and the eternal Sonship? Why does John omit to tell us that Christ became the Word, and instead say, "The Word *became* flesh?" What a strange way to speak if He was only the Word *after* becoming flesh. But quite in keeping with John's standpoint; for John presents things from the Divine side. God presented to men, not man presented perfect in Christ before God. Nor does he write from the point of view of time. The statement, "The Word *became* flesh," evidently is meant to be understood exactly in the sense which the order of the words and the words themselves express, of which the chapter where they are found affords sufficient evidence, seeing that in the earlier part the title "the Word" stands in relation to creation, creation being one distinct manifestation of God. To teach, therefore that He became the Word is absolutely contrary to the whole trend of the first chapter of John's Gospel.

Yet on p. 6 of "*Names of Divine Persons*" we are told, "With the utmost assurance," that "Scripture does not furnish us with these relations or the names that express them," yet John 1:1-3 furnishes us with a Name which is related to a period antecedent to Incarnation, and expresses that which was true before time began. That it is a Name applied to the Second Person in the Trinity—the Son—is proved by Col 1:16 and Heb 1:2. In all these passages creation is attributed to One and the same Person.

So that here is a flagrant contradiction of Scripture on the part of J.T. Further down on the

same page he tells us, "The persons are the same in the absolute as in the relative." But, on his own showing, how can he know which is which? Which Person became the Father, and which the Son and which the Holy Spirit?, J.T.'s doctrine leaves us in absolute confusion and darkness. All he can say is, "The instructed believer recognises, not three Gods, but one God in the Trinity, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and he *assumes* (italics ours) that nothing inconsistent with this ever existed."⁹ Which if language means anything, means that *instructed* believers, believe exactly what they have always been taught to believe, and refuse absolutely to *assume* anything.

When he attempts to speak of the Godhead, he is obliged to borrow the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit in order to give expression to his thoughts, which is one of the clearest proofs possible that such names express relations that existed eternally. He virtually has to admit this, for he goes on to say, "It is obvious that we must so speak of them (Divine Persons), for no other names are furnished in Scripture." The fact is, these names fit into the whole framework of Scripture, and are in harmony with all that we know of God. Why are no other names furnished?

The more one pursues J.T. in his hopeless effort to explain his meaning and disentangle himself from his rash assertions, the more one becomes convinced of the fundamental unsoundness of his theories, and that his doctrine is a most serious departure from the truth as revealed in Scripture. If his words are to be taken in their ordinary meaning, then what he holds is unadulterated Sabellianism, though perhaps the *form* in which it is presented may be somewhat novel. That is, the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not express what God is, in His own essential Being and eternal existence, they have no meaning beyond the relations God is pleased to enter into with His creatures. They relate to us and not to Him, and they date from less than 2000 years ago. Such views rob us of any true idea of God, teaching as they do that Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not represent God essentially, only a form in which He has been pleased to make Himself known. 'To quote again from the words used by J.T., "I believe relations suitable to Themselves always existed between the Divine Persons." But again we ask, how do we know? And most of all how do we know what these relations were if Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not express them?

Thus according to J.T., "relations suitable to Themselves" is one thing, relations suitable to us is something altogether different. What a chasm and what a cleavage is thus introduced. Father, Son and Holy Spirit have, nothing to do with Deity as such; the names are merely an accommodation in respect of us, which means that after all, God is unknown.

See into what darkness and confusion we are plunged; Scripture declares that God made the worlds by His Son, but, according to this strange doctrine we are combating, He was not the Son when this was done, consequently we know not Who made the worlds. We do not know even Who became the Son. Scripture tells us emphatically, and with a clearness we should have thought none could have misunderstood, "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." But according to J.T. there was no Father to send and no Son to be sent. How then can we understand Who was sent or Who sent Him? We are "Not to apply names to Divine Persons in their absolute form," we are told. To Whom then shall we apply the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Under this superior regime, as it claims to be, we cannot possibly know,

as we have already said, Who is Father or Who is Son. We are left with certain names and that is all, as to the Persons Themselves we know not Who they are. It is impossible under this teaching to identify Them.¹⁰

How could One send Another under the conditions described by J.T.? And to say that One came of Himself, came as the result of His own will, and came to be known as the Son, means that He was not truly sent (the teaching under review can mean nothing else), and is as opposed to our Lord's own words that He came not of Himself but was sent, as anything could be. "I proceeded forth and came from God," He declares, "Neither came I of myself, but He sent me." How can this be true if "Three infinite, co-equal, co-eternal Persons" is all that can be said, and all that can be known of the Deity in regard to Itself? Under these conditions such a term as "sent" and such words as "I came not of myself" are entirely inappropriate.

As usual, this error is vaunted as superior truth, and so the writer of the pamphlet in question speaks of the "most regrettable attitude" of those who differ from him, and claims that "instead of detracting from the Trinity, it honours it by ascribing to the Holy Persons the co-equal and co-eternal dignity that belongs to each." This is an old device of the enemy. No one wishes to deny "the co-equal and co-eternal dignity" of the Three, and to suggest that they do is merely to throw dust in people's eyes. But to insist upon three co-equal and co-eternal Persons and stop there, conveys nothing to the mind, as we have intimated already.

We have already shown in "*The Truth as to the Trinity*," that there are references both in the Old and New Testaments which clearly indicate the eternal existence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as such. The Son is the "Son of the Father's love." The Son and the love are co-extensive. Whenever the love existed the Son, Who was the object of it, existed, and as we have seen, the love was there before the foundation of the world. In Eph 3:14-15, the Father is presented as the One Who gives being and character to every family in heaven and earth. This Scripture speaks of families which had their being before Incarnation, and their origin is attributed to the Father; while as to the Holy Spirit, passage after passage both in the Old and New Testaments reveal His eternal existence. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee," are the words of the angel to Mary. Then clearly He did not begin to exist *as the Holy Spirit* at the Incarnation. The angel is aware of His pre-existence and names Him. When we are told, "God sent forth the *Spirit* of His Son," it surely means precisely what it says, that the Spirit was sent, and not a Person Who became the Spirit by being sent. Now the words, "sent forth" are equally used in the same passage in regard to Christ, "God sent forth His Son." Why are we to attach an entirely different meaning to these words when applied to the Son from what we do when applied to the Spirit? If the Spirit was the Spirit when sent forth, so was the Son the Son when He was sent forth. The conclusion from all this is inevitable. If the Father and the Holy Spirit existed, as such, before Incarnation, then the Son must have existed as such also, for it is impossible to conceive of even One existing without the other Two.

J.T. seems to realise the difficulty in which his doctrine involves him as regards the Holy Spirit and he devotes some pages in an attempt to elucidate it, but with deplorable results. At the very commencement he is compelled to make the confession, not merely that the Holy Spirit is a distinct Person, but, he says, "He is *seen* as a distinct Person from the outset." In making this admission, he clearly gives his whole case away, for how could He be *seen* to be

a *distinct* Person from the outset, except some name is used to designate Him? J.T. has tried to make us believe that no names may be used in regard to the Three Persons of the Trinity prior to Christ being on earth. Realising the impossibility of such a position, he does not hesitate to carry back the names, but to whom does he affix them? Unless One Person was always the Father, and *reveals Himself as such*, how can we know which of the Three is Father? Is it not clear that the names must come down to us from God's side, and what they represent must have been always true, or we could never discriminate between the Persons with any intelligence or any meaning whatever?

We are thankful then for the admission that the Holy Spirit "is seen as a distinct Person from the outset." He proceeds to quote from Genesis, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The Spirit strove with men; also to refer to the words, the Spirit garnished the heavens. J.T. refers to all these, and they are described as the activities of a distinct Person, though of course not apart from the other Persons in the Godhead, and let us remember these activities were long before Incarnation. According to J.T.'s own words we have an "appellation ... used to designate this Divine Person." Is not this the same Person Who testified *beforehand* through the prophets, "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow?" (1. Peter 1:11.) And was it not by the very same Spirit—the *eternal* Spirit—that Christ offered Himself without spot to God? In fact, is not the Holy Spirit the Agent in regard to every divine intervention, whether it be Creation, Inspiration, Incarnation, Redemption or Judgment?"

But here J.T. introduces the *smoke screen* with a vengeance. Realising, probably that his admission was likely to carry him too far, and that he must qualify it, he proceeds to say, "Spirit conveys what God is essentially, it cannot be regarded as a name of One only of the divine Persons viewed in the conditions of absolute Deity, for this would be to assume that the other two divine Persons were not Spirits which, of course, is not true."¹¹ But he has already told us that the Holy Spirit "is seen as a distinct Person from the outset." (p. 9.) Now he tells us there is no distinction. That Spirit is not a designation to be applied to "*One only*" (italics his), but may equally be applied to All. What utter confusion! He might just as well say that the term Father applies to All, or the term Son. That God is a Spirit is perfectly true, but was not our Lord referring to Someone distinct from the Father when He said, "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter?" J.T.'s argument is that because God is a Spirit, the appellation, "Holy Spirit" cannot be applied to One only of the Three Persons. If this argument were true, then it would be equally a mistake to apply the name Holy Spirit to One of these Persons now, for the simple reason that the fact of God being a Spirit is as true to-day as ever it was. In the light of this fact, that God being a Spirit is ever true, and yet the Holy Spirit is referred to as a distinct Person in this dispensation, his whole argument falls to the ground.

To know God in any real sense, we must know what He is essentially, which means, He must be revealed to us as He always existed. This does not mean, of course, that we can fully comprehend Deity,¹² but it does mean that any revelation of God to be true must be a revelation of what He essentially is, and always has been. Had Abraham learned that when God said to him, "I am the Almighty God" (1Mo 17:1). He had only just become Almighty, merely in relation to one of His people, such a revelation could not have made the same impression upon Abraham as to know God had always been Almighty. The same remark

applies to the revelation of God to Moses as Jehovah, and it is equally true with regard to the last and greatest revelation. If Father, Son and Holy Spirit merely reveals some character God has assumed in relation to His dealing with mankind and not something essential to Himself, then the whole character of the revelation is immeasurably lowered. Every revelation of God, whether in connection with His power, His righteousness, His love, or even His wrath must, in the very nature of things, be true to what He ever was.

“The Word” and the “Word of God.”

The writer of the pamphlet before us is equally astray when he comes to speak of the title “The Word.” We have referred to this already and shown that the title stands in relation to Creation, “All things were made by Him”, and consequently has a far deeper significance and wider application than J.T. gives it. We merely pause now to note that on p. 11 there is a reference to Rev 19:13, “His name is called the Word of God.” J.T. overlooks the fact that a distinction must be drawn between the two titles, “The Word” and “The Word of God.” He is spoken of as “The Word” when what is in view is His Person in relation to His part in Deity and to Creation; where it is no question, for the moment, of His activities amongst *men*, but of the material universe. How many ages before man appeared we do not know. When He comes forth to take His place as supreme *amongst men*, “King of kings and Lord of lords,” He is spoken of as “The Word of God.” In Rev 19 He expresses God in judgment and government as before He had expressed Him in Creation and Redemption, for one might say that Creation is the outward garb of God. In fact, in whatever way God is pleased to express Himself, whether in Creation, Redemption, Government or Judgment, Christ is the One to express Him and no One else. The assumption that Christ was familiarly known as the Word in the days of His flesh and amongst His disciples finds no support from Scripture.¹³

To suppose that a name given on earth is the starting point is wholly contrary to the natural and evident meaning of the text, and is in direct contradiction of the general character of John’s teaching, and is also the very reverse of the Divine method. God does not begin from the bottom, but from the top—not with man but with Himself. The Burnt-offering comes first in Leviticus, not the sin offering. Yet J.T. affirms, “The lowly Jesus, known in testimony here, is the starting point in the mind of the Spirit.” If it was only as the lowly Jesus that Christ became the Word, why does John state matter in the very opposite way, commencing with God and Creation and then in verse 14 saying, “Word became flesh?” The starting point is evidently the Word in His eternal glory, with God, not One on earth with men. In verse 4 we are told, “In Him was life.” Are we to believe that that life never found expression in any way until Incarnation? What about the Theophanies of the Old Testament? Paul evidently did not think so for he declares, “They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them and that Rock was Christ.” (1Cor 10:4.) Did Christ begin to be the Life and the Light only when He appeared among men? Surely these terms express what He was essentially, then why treat the title, “The Word” differently? He was known on earth as Life and Light quite as much as the Word.

Even when John is speaking of what dated from Incarnation, in the opening of his first Epistle, he cannot forbear connecting it all with what is eternal. The life manifested is that “*eternal life*,” which was “*with the Father!*” Eternal life did not begin with Incarnation, it is associated with a *relationship* that existed as between the Father and the Son from all eternity. So when

our Lord introduces the thought to Nicodemus He connects it with heavenly things and the Son of Man which is in heaven, and this brings us to a very important point in this controversy. How does J.T.'s view of Sonship affect our ideas as to other truths long known and cherished? The solemn fact confronts us that if this old error, now resuscitated, is accepted, other truths become seriously affected. In this connection, we would specially mention the truth of *eternal life*. Our whole conception of this vital truth must be altered if the Sonship of Christ began only in time and on the earth. Eternal life would be robbed of its distinctive character. In this connection let us consider one very important Scripture.

Eternal Life.

In 1. John 5:11-12, we read:—

“And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life.”

We have already made some reference to these words, but specially with regard to the distinction existing between the titles “the Son” and the “Son of God.” What we now wish to point out is, that “eternal life” is inseparable from the Son. The inspired apostle states this in the most emphatic way; he declares, “He that has the Son has life.” Could the truth of eternal life be more clearly identified with the Son? It is not that we are given some description of the life itself, or merely that some of its characteristics and blessings are mentioned, our thoughts are directed entirely to a Person, and to that Person in the highest possible way. Not to Christ in any official capacity merely, but to what He is in His own Person. If we want to know the greatness of the blessing—to understand its unique character, and all that is involved—we must think of the Son. “He that has the Son has life.” No other words could state what eternal life is so explicitly and so profoundly.

It will, therefore, be seen at once that as regards the true nature of eternal life everything depends upon whether certain things are true of the Son or not. If He only *became* the Son, if this life belongs to time, and had no beginning until Incarnation, then we must modify our view of eternal life accordingly. Eternal life, as Scripture employs that word, is emptied of nearly all its meaning. Let us consider for a moment the place eternal life is given in the opening sentences of the prayer of John 17. Jesus lifted up His eyes to *heaven*, and He asks to be glorified. “Glorify Thy *Son*.” What for? “That He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him.” Eternal life is the gift of the Son, but it could not be fully known until the Son is in glory. The Father glorifies the Son in order that the Son may give it. Father and Son are thus both associated in the most intimate way with this supreme blessing. If the title *Jesus Christ*, used in verse 3, seems to detract from this, it is not so in reality, for the Son has already been mentioned. It is just an instance of the exactness of Scripture, for had the knowledge of the Father and the Son been spoken of, it might have seemed to contradict Luke 10:22. The Father is revealed in a way the Son is not.

1. John 5:11-12 makes it abundantly evident that to possess this eternal life is to have the Son. Eternal life, therefore, has to do with a relationship which ever existed between the Father and the Son. We do not, of course, share in Deity.¹⁴ Eternal life is neither having part in

Deity nor is it limited to what belongs to time, or to a relationship which began only in time. It has to do with the eternal relations of the Father and the Son, for eternal life is inseparable from these. Could this be stated in clearer language than that (which is introduced by way of a parenthesis) at the opening of John's first epistle? Having mentioned "the Word of *life*," the writer immediately proceeds to enlarge upon the character of that life; "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." Consequently, "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus. Christ." That is, we enter into the joy the Father has in the Son, and what the Son finds in the Father, and into the love of both. In the light of such a Scripture who can assert that the life spoken of here began only in time? The One who became the word of life in manifestation is the same of Whom it is said, "In Him was life." Who can deny that this life gives character to eternal life? It became the light of men. Or who can doubt the plain evidence of Scripture that this life has to do with the relationship ever existing between the Father and the Son? A life "with the Father" before ever it was manifested here? To deny eternal Sonship is really to deny eternal life.

If these things be so, then are we not again brought face to face with the inevitable conclusion that the relationship of the Father and the Son is eternal? That the truth of the Trinity, revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, belongs to the life of the Godhead in its most essential character? And all this for our blessing. It is the knowledge of all that God was essentially, and the character of Divine relationships, which give to eternal life its true and unique character, whereas the denial of these things would leave it both impaired and impoverished.

Thus we may judge of the doctrine under discussion by what it would deprive us of in regard to truth generally.

In view of this, it is with a feeling akin to amazement that we read on p. 19 of "*Names of Divine Persons*."

"The Lord, in causing attention to be called to this Sonship in a definite way during recent years, has in mind assuredly to clarify the understanding and faith of His people as to it."

We are bound to say, such an assertion leaves us cold and unconvinced. As to clarifying the understanding, on the contrary, it throws everything into confusion, and we are left in uncertainty upon the most vital themes. This will become evident if we summarise what has been before us:—

1. How can we understand God at all, if we can know nothing of the Three Persons in the Godhead and their relationship One to Another? Scripture tells us that One of These was *sent* to earth. But Who sent Him? On J.T.'s showing there can be no answer to this question. Yet that One declared, "I proceeded forth and came from God," and then adds (and these are the crucial words), "Neither came I of myself, but He (the Father) sent me." How could this possibly be, if what the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit represent had no existence? And if there was no Father, but all were alike, Who did send Christ?
2. It is impossible to decide, if we accept the teaching under examination, Who is the Father, Who the Son and Who the Holy Spirit, unless they existed as *such* from the

beginning (that is, in eternity). Which really means that we are deprived of all knowledge of God. *Father* becomes only a name, nothing more, for it identifies no one. To know Them in any true sense They must have been *always* Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet J.T. talks of clarifying our understanding.

3. Further, does it clarify our understanding to tell us that the Holy Spirit is seen as a distinct Person from the outset, yet that the name “cannot be regarded as a name of One only of the Divine Persons viewed in the conditions of absolute Deity?” To what conditions then does the Name of Holy Spirit belong? J.T. cannot have it all ways. He cannot say that these names had no meaning or application until Incarnation, yet say that the Holy Spirit is seen as a distinct Person from the outset, and finish up by declaring that the Name does not apply to One only of the Divine Persons viewed in the conditions of absolute Deity, because God is a spirit. Does all this clarify our mind?

The darkness deepens when J.T. calmly tells us that this name cannot apply to only One Person, because God is a Spirit, which, if true, would mean the name Holy Spirit cannot be applied now. Throughout Scripture the Holy Spirit is referred to by that Name, not only long before Incarnation, but subsequently, and, as already pointed out, the existence of One is proof of the existence of all.

4. J.T.’s use of the word “inferiority” does not help to clear our understanding. The connection in which it is used on p. 7 of his pamphlet is altogether out of place and misleading. How can he speak of “graded relations” in regard to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and tell us that these relations involve “relative inferiority in two of Them?” (we presume the Son and Holy Spirit).

In such a connection the word “inferiority” is totally inadmissible. We do not speak of a wife being inferior to her husband. They are one. Nor do we think of “inferiority” even though she is in a place of subjection. In certain particulars she may be his inferior. In point of strength, for instance, but in certain other respects she may be his *superior*. How are we to strike the balance? We cannot, which proves that to speak of inferiority is out of place. Nor has it any place as between an earthly father and son. In point of fact, the son may be his father’s superior in education, position and wealth.

The same is true as between the Three Persons of the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are speaking now in regard to their eternal relations, “Such as the Father is, such is the Son and such is the Holy Ghost,” so runs the Creed. This truth has been confessed in all ages. J.T. writes as though something new had been revealed to him, which no one ever knew before. Where is any *inferiority* indicated in the statements we have been considering in John 5? “My Father works hitherto and I work.” “What He sees the Father do, these does the Son likewise.” “Even so the Son quickens Whom He will.” “That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.” “As the Father has *life in Himself*, so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself.”

5. The argument has been used that as the names Christ, and Christ Jesus belong to time, yet stand in certain Scriptures in relation to God’s eternal purpose before time, so it is with the title the Son in such Scriptures as, “The Father sent the Son.” He was not Son at the time, it is alleged. But such an argument is seen to have no weight whatever when it is recognised that the title “The Son” belongs to an altogether different category from the other names. Jesus is the name given at His birth; Christ, Lord and Son of Man are more or less official titles, and apply to a place God gives Him, and which He takes in relation to men, but “The Son” involves what is personal and moral, and has to do with life and

nature. It stands in Scripture as the correlative of the Father and carries with it personal relationship to the Father. In the very nature of things therefore it belongs to what is eternal.

The words, "Thou art my Son this day have I begotten Thee," judging from the connection in which they first occur, probably do not refer to birth, in the ordinary sense, at all, but to the fact that Christ has been raised up to fill a certain position or office. This is true both in Ps 2 and Acts 12. In that position He is greeted as God's Son; as in resurrection He is "Declared to be the Son of God with power." It is similar in character to "Firstborn" and "Begotten." These terms are used not in connection with birth, in the ordinary sense, but in regard to position and resurrection. Nothing contrary to the thought of eternal Sonship can be deduced from these words (Rom 1:4; Col 1:15; Rev 1:5). For the same use of the word "begotten" see 1. Peter 1:3 where it is not the thought of "new birth" even, however important that is in its place, much less of birth into this world, but of God's sovereign power in resurrection which has given believers a new hope and a heavenly inheritance. All this may include some idea of birth (as we speak of the birth of a nation or era), but not of generation, or of beginning of life in this world.

6. We are asked to believe, on J.T.'s authority that Christ knew not what it was to be the Son until born of Mary, instead of being in this blessed place of relationship and love always; and that the Father was dependent upon the creature to give Him the Son of His love. Until then the joys which belong to Fatherhood and Sonship were unknown. That there are mysteries about such a relationship, from whichever point of view we regard it, we frankly admit, but to suppose that such a stupendous relationship, with all that it involves, is *less* than 2000 years old, is as contrary to reason and all right feeling as it is to Scripture. If we read John 17, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that Father and Son are bound up with the essential being of God and with eternal relations. To suppose that this relationship had existed but a few years when this prayer was uttered is unthinkable. We have those words, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." Was the work which Christ came to do only made known to Him after He became Man on earth?

In John 16:28, we read, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go to the Father." J.T. demands that we should rend this verse asunder. He asks us to believe that neither Father nor Son existed when Christ came forth, only when He returned!!

As Mr. F. W. Grant says, "It would lower immeasurably the whole character of the revelation to deny the eternal character of this relationship—the making the Father not the real and essential name of God, but only a character assumed by Him in time." If the latter were true, such words as, "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," would lose their value and their character would be entirely altered. As to John 1:18, F.W.G. remarks, "Not 'who is now,' that is not the force of the expression, but, the 'One being,' or 'Who is always' there."

To sum up. The way in which J.T. repeatedly contradicts himself, as we have shown, is clear proof that his teaching is unscriptural—in fact; is not of God. Two more instances must suffice. On p. 4, he tells us that to suppose that the names of the Trinity are the same as "existed in the pre-incarnate absolute ... conditions of Deity ... is intruding into things we have not seen."

Yet on the opposite page he tells us, “They (the three Persons in the Deity) are not ‘God’ to Themselves.” However did he find this out? What an extraordinary statement for any man to make! “Not God to Themselves!” Is not this intruding into things he has not seen? When God said to Israel, “I am God and there is none else; I am God and there is none like me” (Isa 46:9), was He not conscious of being God? And did not such a statement include all three Persons? Can he possibly mean what he says, or does he mean, “They are not the God of *one another*?” If this is what he means, then he has expressed himself very obscurely and clumsily. To say, “They are not ‘God’ to Themselves,” means either that they are not conscious of being God, or that each of the Persons is not God to the Others. Both of which statements are false and indeed meaningless.

The second instance we referred to stands part of the same statement as the above p. 4. He asserts that to use the names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is to imply, “that the Persons were not co-equal, for this is conveyed in the order in which they are presented, and in the names taken.” Yet on p. 9, as already pointed out, he says speaking of the Holy Spirit, “He is presented in Scripture as having part in Deity. He is seen as a distinct Person from the outset.” “Presented in Scripture,” that is, before the Incarnation, and presented, “as having part in Deity.” What an absolute contradiction we have here! On the one hand, we are told that, to speak of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is to imply that the Persons are not co-equal, yet on the other hand, that the Holy Spirit is spoken of as having part in “the Deity.” How is it possible to have part in Deity and not be co-equal? The use of names therefore does not imply inequality as J.T. asserts. Moreover, he goes on to say, as we have before pointed out, that although the Holy Spirit is expressly mentioned in Old Testament times, yet, “The name cannot be regarded as that of *One* only of the Divine Persons,” for “God is said to be a Spirit.” So that if to mention the Holy Spirit is to imply inequality, and the name applied to All, then all must be unequal. That is, each One is unequal to the Others! We must really leave J.T. to disentangle himself and his followers from the hopeless confusion in which both he and they are involved. What does all this prove, but that the only intelligent—the only possible way of thinking of the Deity is in terms of Father, Son and Holy Spirit? J.T.’s doctrine has simply landed him in a hopeless muddle.¹⁵

Finally, what does this teaching we have been reviewing amount to? It comes to this, that when God gave a *partial* revelation—as to Abraham, when He revealed Himself as Almighty; or to Moses as the Self-existent One—such a partial revelation was of something which had been ever true of Him; yet when He makes Himself known in the full and crowning revelation of Himself, this according to J.T. does not go beyond a mere accommodation of Himself to man, something which was not always true, but only *became* true; in other words, not a Personal revelation of what He essentially is, but only of a character He had assumed.

Footnotes

[1] See the “*Truth as to the Trinity*,” to be obtained of R. Elliott, 17 Eaton Rise, Ealing, London W.5.

[2] If this difference had been observed, we think Mr. J.T. would not have fallen into the error of limiting Sonship to Incarnation. [R.E.]

[3] We do not mean to imply that the hour had not come for dead souls to be quickened, but the introduction of these words, upon which the Lord seems to lay particular emphasis, are a further indication that verse 25 is not merely a repetition of v. 24. [R.E.]

[4] Surely Phil 2 in connection with all that the apostle says there with regard to what Christ became, would have been just the occasion to have said He became *the Son* had it been true. [R.E.]

[5] [This paragraph:] ?Same error as A. J. P.? [Wm.C.R]

[6] ?But they were willing to convey God's thoughts to us!? [Wm.C.R]}

If it be asked, why use such expressions at all? there is a double answer. First, that Scripture itself sets the example; and secondly, they are intended to convey certain ideas. It is not intended that the words themselves should be scrutinised and considered the important thing, or as if they conveyed nothing more than their ordinary use would imply. Not the words, but the ideas they are intended to convey, is the important thing.

It is only fair and reasonable that we should be consistent and not have one rule for the words of Scripture and another for the words of men. When we read in Scripture of the "eyes of the Lord;" "the right hand of the Lord;" "the soles of His feet," etc., do we say, that cannot be true, God is a Spirit, and has no eyes, or hands or feet? We do not reason in that way. Such words convey to us the idea that God can see, that He has power, and that all things are subject to Him. Not the words, but the idea, is what concerns us. Then why not do the same when we read, "Begotten of the Father before all worlds?" Where is the difference between this and the words of Prov 8:23, "I was set up from everlasting?" Even if this is taken as impersonal, applying to Wisdom, are we to conclude from these words that there was a time when God began to have wisdom or to exercise it? Such statements are repeated again and again in this passage, "When there were no depths *I was brought forth*;" "Then I was by Him *as one brought up with him*." (The force of these last words is, we believe, *nursling*.) "*From the beginning*," certainly might convey to our minds a commencement, but as applied to God and Christ we do not take it in that way.

In the light of these considerations let us come to a careful study of John 5:26. May God satisfy us with honey out of the rock (Ps 80:16.)

Every word of the verse needs to be carefully pondered. Especially is it of utmost importance to notice the first clause:—

“For as the Father has Life in Himself.”

Can any time be fixed when this began? Was it not always true? The Father is referred to, not God be it noted. And this is so because the statement refers to something between the Father and the Son. In the light of the remainder of the verse, we see that the emphatic words are, "Has life in Himself."

"So has He given to the Son to have life in Himself."

Can "life in Himself" in relation to the Son mean less than it means with regard to the Father? "As"—"so," will the reader ponder carefully this conjunction—then let him ponder some such questions as these. Why should our Lord preface this profound statement as to Himself in the way He does? Why was it necessary to emphasise the fact of the Father having life in Himself? Why not say simply "The Father has given Me life?" Whatever answer the reader may make he will at least admit that the words, "has life in Himself," with reference to the Father, have a most important bearing upon what follows. And the "as"—"so" must at least mean that the Son has life in Himself even as the Father has life in Himself. The complete statement involves two most important truths, and these truths must never be separated; both must be acknowledged. One is, the equality of the Son with the Father; the other, the Father is regarded in Scripture as the Source. The question "when?" does not arise, for indeed, in such a connection, it can have no place.

Here then, we have something as between the Father and the Son. In the next verse, with regard to another matter altogether, the title is changed to "the Son of Man." But this title is not the one used in the verse we are considering, and the distinction is of tremendous importance. In v. 26 it is not something given to the Son *as Man*, but to the Son, and this makes all the difference possible.

The two clauses of the verse are correlated and must be taken together. Not only is there the “as”—“so,” but the words “life in Himself” are used in relation to the Son equally with the Father. How then can we regard what is stated here of the Son as true only when He became Man? The manner in which the truth is stated forbids such a thought. We have seen it asserted that the Son always had life in Himself, in His own right, as it were, but when He became Man He received it as a gift from the Father. There seems to be two very strong objections to this view. First, if He had it in His own right, what reason was there for the Father to bestow it upon Him in becoming Man? Why did this become necessary? Second, the truth of the Incarnation is falsified. The truth of the Incarnation is that God became Man without ever ceasing to be what He ever had been. Except in regard to that which He voluntarily relinquished (Phil 2). The life He had always lived He brought to earth, the difference being that His entry into the world provided new conditions. “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.” In a very important sense Incarnation added nothing to Him. He remained the Son, and therefore necessarily retained the life He had always possessed as the Son. “The thing of which He speaks,” says J.N.D., “*is in God*, the *position* in which He speaks of it is a position taken.” And again, “He was not like an independent being with equal rights; another God Who acted on His own account, which, moreover, is impossible. There cannot be two supreme and omnipotent Beings.” And this last statement is true, whether we think of Christ as God or Man.

The truth as to the Deity is not that there are Gods—three supreme and omnipotent Beings, each having His own life and acting from Himself—but three in one—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—One God; and though for the sake of accommodation we use the word Person, and speak of three Persons in the Godhead, yet there are not three Persons as we understand persons. Such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were three persons; each having his own separate life.

With some difficulty is found in the word “given.” “If life was a gift,” they argue, “this surely implies that once it was not possessed, but at some time it was received, and further, if applied to the Son in eternity, does not this derogate from the glory of His Person as God?” We have already pointed out that all such forms of argument are totally beside the point. The word is used to convey to us the idea that, as we have said, the Son is not an independent Deity. He has no separate, independent life in Himself. But this idea can only be conveyed to us in our own language and along the line of our own thinking, and as we have shown earlier, Scripture adopts this method. To draw human deductions from the word “given” is altogether beside the mark. If we stumble at it we lose a most profound and affecting truth. The truth is that, while the Son has life in Himself, and is thus equal with the Father, the life which He has is the life which was ever in the Father, and not an independent life. Father and Son are bound together in perfect oneness. But Scripture always regards the Father as the Head and Fount of Trinity. Verse 26 preserves the truth of the Godhead in its double aspect—Three in One and One in Three.

Time, such as “giving” implies to us, must not be thought of. There are no dates in the history of God. Nor is it any easier to understand the word “given” if we relate it exclusively to Christ as Man. Had He not always life in Himself? (See John 1:4.) What object would there be in “giving” it up that He might receive it from the Father in Incarnation? He no more gave up the life He had than He gave up Deity.

What then is the idea intended to be conveyed by “has given?” Would not our Lord impress upon us by the use of these words a truth of tremendous and most far reaching import which concerns the very nature and being of Divine Persons? namely, that the Son possesses nothing apart from the Father. It touches the core of the matter we are discussing, and furnishes the key to any right understanding of the Trinity and of the Godhead itself. The Son has no life independently of the Father, but equality of the Son with the Father is established by the fact that He equally has life in Himself. “As the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself.” As one, well qualified to speak, referring to these words, remarks:—“Language clearly spoken of the eternal Son, not merely of the Man Christ Jesus.” And who further remarks concerning the whole passage we are considering:—“The whole of this passage is one which our Lord clearly spoke of Himself in His Divine Nature and of His relation to the Father in that nature which He had in common with Him, yet no language can more expressly mark a distinction of personal action and personal attribute.”

Giving is *sharing*, and we submit that the idea our Lord intended to convey is that He fully shared the life of the Father, and that in every way, for He has “*life in Himself*.”

It is the revelation of this oneness, ever existing between the Father and the Son, which constitutes our own blessedness. The breathings of that heart, though uttered when here as man, tell of what it means to the Son to share everything with the Father. Even when speaking of the glory which is all His own, and remains His own, never to be shared by us, He does not think of it as some glory possessed apart, “And now, O Father, glorify Thou *me with Thine*

own self with the glory which I had *with Thee* before the world was.” (John 17:5). Not any glory He possessed in solitary grandeur, this was not what the heart longed for, but “*with Thine own self*,” “the glory which I had *with Thee*.”

To employ again words used by another with regard to the Trinity and quoted elsewhere (See “The eternal Son,” by R.E., p. 3). “Here and there (in Scripture) we are shown (as it were) an opened heaven and the Godhead is revealed in its ‘essential Trinity.’ ... God is shown to us as dwelling in no solitary grandeur. One who called Him ‘Father’ is in His company, and who establishes the truth of the title by sharing with Him the full possession of that glory, which created things may ‘see’ but none but God can ‘have’ ... God is love, and the union of the Three is not one of barren necessity. It is a free and living union in which all are bound together by an absolute outpouring of each to other in love. ... It is the glory of Them all to be one ... by a moral living for and in each other, in a mutual devotion such as serves as an example for men.”

If John 5:26 refers only to what was true in Incarnation it would throw everything into confusion and open the door to serious error. For we cannot suppose that in becoming Man He relinquished Deity and that the Father restored Deity to Him subsequently. No date or time is mentioned, therefore why introduce such a thought?

“Names of Divine Persons.”

We now come to consider the new doctrine—or, more correctly speaking, old error—which is being foisted upon the people of God; its latest form appears in a pamphlet by J.T. under the title, “*Names of Divine Persons*.”

We have no hesitation in saying that the statements in this pamphlet present an absolutely false view of God, and of the relations of the three Persons in the Godhead to each other, on the one hand; and, on the other, detract immeasurably from the blessing that is involved in the revelation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and especially from that particular blessing which the Scriptures of the New Testament speak of as “eternal life.”

On p. 5 we read “This attitude of service is not imposed by One of the Persons (of the Trinity) on the others, all is in the liberty of infinite love, for God is love. Christ being in the form of God took a bondman’s form—It was His own act.”

J.T. says “It was His own act:” now Scripture everywhere teaches the very opposite.{{Not so, Phil 2 “Made Himself ... took upon Him ... “.

[7] It may be that J.T.’s use in this connection of the word ‘imposed’ is altogether wrong, we are only dealing with what, in J.T.’s use of it, seems to lie behind the word. [R.E.]

[8] As to names, no one supposes that names are a necessity to God, or language for that matter. The point is, the names express that which was ever true of each of the Three Persons. [R.E.]

[9] Then if nothing inconsistent with the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—ever existed, why not the thing itself? [R.E.]

[10] This dilemma, from which there appears to be no escape, suggests that the Father must always have been the Father and the Son always the Son. [R.E.]

[11] The Creed, and rightly, expressly forbids us to say there are Three Holy Ghosts. [R.E.]

[12] Nor can we fully comprehend the Trinity. [R.E.]

[13] We do not accept for a moment, all that J.T. builds upon Luke 1:2. To begin with, as we have said, and others have pointed out; it is extremely doubtful whether a capital W is in place here. The “word” (or what is equivalent) was a term in common use as covering the whole mission and ministry of our Lord. In Heb 2:3, in regard to the “great salvation” we have, “Which at the first began to be *spoken* by the Lord.” In Eph 2:17, “And came and preached peace,” and Acts 10, “The word which God sent, preaching peace by Jesus Christ ... that word I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea,” vs. 36-37. [R.E.]

[14] It is important to keep in view that there are two ways of approach to this subject. One from the point of view of abstract Deity, which has more to do with the unity of the Godhead, and the other that the Three Persons may be

viewed in their relationship one to another, namely, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While Deity in the abstract is altogether beyond us, we are told in Scripture something as to these distinctive relationships, and we find in such a revelation our own joy and blessing. [R.E.]

[15] A further proof of this writer's carelessness and want of accuracy, as well as the reckless way in which he attempts to escape from difficulties is found in his tract "*Inscrutability*". He is dealing with the words of Luke 10:22, and endeavours to show that the emphasis is not upon "*Son*", but upon the pronoun "*who*". He rests his whole argument upon this, yet in Mt 11:27,—the parallel passage—the word "*who*" does not occur.!! [R.E.]