

## FATHER AND SON TOGETHER

The last two chapters have dealt with some basic facts about the nature and work of both the Father and the Son. When seeking to understand the Bible we must allow it to instruct us by bringing Scriptures together and letting them explain one another. For though we are looking at 66 different books, written over a long period of time, they have one message because they are the product of one mind, that of Almighty God Himself.

Since the Bible was written, church creeds that were formulated hundreds of years later have caused confusion by introducing words and phrases which have no Biblical basis. The Bible never says that Father and Son are ‘co-equal’ and ‘co-eternal’. It never talks about ‘confounding the Persons’ or ‘dividing the Substance’. Terms like ‘Unity in Trinity’ and ‘Trinity in Unity’ are completely unbiblical and are foreign to the language of both Testaments. For the Doctrine of the Trinity is a human idea, not a scriptural one.

When we let the Bible speak for itself we find that the true position is wonderfully clear. The important thing is that Bible teaching gives proper recognition to all that both Father and Son have worked together to achieve. This gives the Lord Jesus the honour that is properly due to him – which the man-made Doctrine of the Trinity denies him – and it gives God the glory that is truly due to His great name. First we will consider the problem facing both mankind and Almighty God. Then we will see the wonderful solution He made possible by the gift of His Son.

### ❖ The Problem Addressed

Mankind was in a death trap! Since Adam rebelled and started mankind on its downward path, into sin and ending in death, there had seemed to be no escape. Even the best of endeavours had proved inadequate, until at last this sentence could be passed upon all men:

***“That every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:19,20).***

This was the dilemma – God had given mankind a law, in which He had defined what was “right” in His sight and what was “wrong”, but nobody had been able to keep it. So the law had ended up condemning everybody to death. Elsewhere he calls it a “ministry of death, carved in letters on stone” (2 Corinthians 3:7). God was right but everybody else was wrong. He was Holy; mankind was “Guilty” when measured by that standard.

God is holy and righteous in all His ways – He is the *“High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy”*. God defines and declares what is right and what is wrong. Once that position has been stated, God never changes or alters His position; for God cannot be unrighteous. Scripture says that *“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind” (Numbers 23:19).*

So what was to be done about it? How could God forgive men and women the wrongs they had committed in His sight without compromising His holiness? He could not just say “That’s all right! I forgive you”. That would indicate that He had changed his attitude towards sin and that it wasn’t really so bad after all.

This is what God did to uphold the standard of His holiness and yet enable Him to forgive sinful mankind. He acted in such a way that He both displayed:

- the meaning of absolute goodness and, in stark contrast,
- the awfulness of sin.

In this chapter we will concentrate on the first demonstration – the display of God’s righteousness through the life of His Son. This is how Paul expresses that development:

***“By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Romans 3:20-22).***

Can you see what this very important passage is saying? God is shown to be right in a way which is quite different from the way in which the law showed rightness or righteousness. Jesus came to show mankind what “right” really means. And, in the way he was killed, the people who killed him showed what “wrong” really means. So the coming of Jesus showed, as never before, the difference between right and wrong. This is such an important point. It is right at the centre of the apostle’s argument and we need to spend a while thinking about it.

## ❖ God's Righteousness Demonstrated

We have seen already how God's law spelled out His standards and what they meant in everyday terms. If people lived accordingly they would have happy and wholesome lives. But nobody ever did, and it seemed that nobody ever could be consistently good. Everybody did something wrong. So there was never a practical, living demonstration of godliness. People knew how to live if they wanted to please God, but they couldn't do it.

Paul now explains that God, in His great love and determination to save sinners from sin and death, found a way of showing people godliness in action. He arranged for people to see what He was truly like, although they could not see Him. In demonstrating His holiness and righteousness, God also declared how lovely and attractive a life of moral purity and freedom from sin really is.

And there was another reason for this demonstration. God cannot lower His standards or compromise His holiness. In revealing more about Himself God would show that He was absolutely right to condemn sin. And He would invite people to agree with Him about that. Here's Paul again on this very theme:

*"Now **the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law ... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe ... This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**" (Romans 3:21-26).*

Note the last phrase in particular. God wanted to pardon sinners and to declare them "not guilty"; in Paul's terminology, He wanted to be their "justifier". But He could not do that by being unjust Himself. Instead He showed His righteousness in a way that left no doubt about His attitude to sin and its awful consequences. God sent Jesus into the world so that right-minded men and women could see that God was right to condemn sin and determine to follow Him. God knew that human nature would show itself in its true colours when confronted by someone who lived an utterly selfless and wholly God-centred life. That was precisely what happened.

## ❖ Godliness on Display

When Jesus lived on earth his quality of life exposed the failings and shortcomings of the people he lived alongside. Many people found that sort of life deeply attractive and began to follow him. Others were deeply disturbed by it, especially the religious authorities – people who were supposed to be showing their fellow men how best to live. While some people came to love Jesus, the hatred of others grew and grew until at last they determined to kill him.

So the coming of Jesus demonstrated the righteousness of God in two quite different ways.

- The lovely life that Jesus lived demonstrated the very essence of the life of God – what godliness was really like and why God was right to seek to destroy sin;
- The shocking reaction of the men who hated Jesus, plotted his death, and had him cruelly executed by crucifixion, showed in the starkest terms what human nature is really like, and thus why God is absolutely right to seek to destroy sin. Sin was shown up as "sinful beyond measure" (Romans 7:13).

The way Jesus lived, and the things he said and did, demonstrate what a life of purity and godliness is really like. The people among whom he lived had never experienced anything like it. They had heard about God's grace and truth, but they had never seen it in action in quite this way. The "glory of God" had been something wonderful but hidden. Now it was openly displayed, being lived out in the circumstances of everyday life. A man from Nazareth, a carpenter, had come to show mankind just what godliness was really like. The life that God required was being lived out in the streets of first century Israel.

*"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 ... And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God ... he has made him known**" (John 1:14-18);*

*"**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him, '**Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that **I am in the Father and the Father is in me**, or else believe on account of the works themselves'" (John 14:6-11).*

In that first quotation John told his readers that God's method of communication had now taken on a different and quite wonderful form. God had previously communicated through the spoken and written Word, which had told mankind of His gracious plan and purpose. That was the Word which first brought the world into existence (John 1:1; Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6,9). Since then, the same Word had communicated God's purpose to mankind through the Jewish fathers and the prophets. But now the method of communication was different:

- *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:1).*
- Nobody can see God (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17), for He is invisible, but Jesus has *"made him known"* as never before.

### ❖ **God's Living Word**

Jesus said to Philip that he was the way to God – the way that leads through truth to life. He explained that if Philip thought about the life he had witnessed over the years in which he had been a close follower of Jesus, he would realise that he had seen a living demonstration of what God was like. Jesus and the Father were so close in purpose and intention that to see one was to glimpse the other. Jesus had perfectly demonstrated the family likeness. Because he was wholly dedicated to doing what his Father wanted, the Father had done His work through the works of Jesus. So, Jesus said:

**"He whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure" (John 3:34);**

*"Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood'" (7:16-18);*

*"He who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.' They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said to them, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him'" (8:26-29);*

**"I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me" (12:49,50).**

All these are sayings found in the gospel of John, the very apostle who explained that God was communicating with mankind in a very special way when *"the Word became flesh"*. In recording them, John reminded his readers that Jesus communicated God's message both by the things that he said and by the way that he lived. As another inspired writer expresses it:

*"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1,2).*

### ❖ **Father and Son**

All this was something that Father and Son did together but that was not understood by those who conspired to have Jesus crucified. Perhaps that was because they did not want to understand it. Jesus explained to them that he had not come on his own authority; that he did not speak his own thoughts, but those given him by God; he appealed to them to listen to what God was saying through him. They simply charged him with blasphemy, claiming that he was making himself equal with God. Here's one example of that charge:

*"This was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.' **This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.** So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, **the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.** For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing'" (John 5:16-20).*

Jesus was claiming to be God's Son but the people thought he was claiming equality with God, which Jesus strongly denied. They were very jealous for God's sovereignty and very protective of His position. To understand why this was, we need to appreciate how insistent their Scriptures were about the uniqueness and unity of God. Here are a few examples:

*“The LORD is God; **there is no other besides him** ... know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; **there is no other**” (Deuteronomy 4:35-39);*

*“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (6:4,5);*

*“See now that I, even I, am he, and **there is no god beside me**; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand” (32:39);*

*“**Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me**. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour” (Isaiah 43:10,11);*

*“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; **besides me there is no god**. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me” (44:6,7);*

*“I am the LORD, and **there is no other, besides me there is no God**; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that **there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other**. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things” (45:5-7);*

*“**There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour**; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For **I am God, and there is no other**” (45:21,22).*

Given this emphasis it is no surprise that the Jewish leaders were jealous guardians of the unity of God, something they still insist on to this day. If the Lord Jesus had been claiming equality with God, his claim would have been a direct challenge to those Scriptures. But he was not. Over and over again Jesus protested that he was not equal with God. What he said was that God was his Father, and that he was God’s Son.

#### ❖ **Only Begotten Son**

As the Son of God, Jesus was unique. God had never begotten a Son before and will never do so again. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary and had no human father. Mary was told:

*“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High ... And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ And the angel answered her, ‘**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God**’” (Luke 1:31-35).*

This was the long-awaited breakthrough promised by God through the prophet Isaiah, who had said that a virgin would bear a special child:

*“Behold, **the virgin shall conceive and bear a son**, and shall call his name Immanuel” (7:14).*

By fathering a Son who would live on earth among men and women, God drew near to mankind in a very special way, one which had never happened before. This is why Jesus was given the name “Immanuel”, which means ‘God with us’. That is the same point the New Testament makes about his coming:

*“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);*

*“God so loved the world, that **he gave his only Son**, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send **his Son** into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of **the only Son of God**” (John 3:16-18);*

*“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that **God sent his only Son into the world**, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that **he loved us and sent his Son**” (1 John 4:9).*

The coming of God’s Son was a remarkable development in His plan of salvation. He initiated it. Unless God had caused His Son to be born on earth there would have been no hope for mankind. For there was no prospect of anyone else being able to live a righteous life and by so doing declare that God was right about all that mankind had done, or had failed to do. God’s law had always been

broken, even by people who tried to keep it. Now someone had come who would keep the law and, in doing so, would redeem people who would otherwise have been condemned.

*“When the fullness of time had come, **God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons**” (Galatians 4:4).*

### ❖ Son not Father

Today some people regard the statement that Jesus was God’s Son as of less importance than it really is. They believe Jesus to be part of a triune godhead, of the same substance as the Father, co-equal and co-eternal. But Jesus made no such claims. He said that he had been sent by God; he had not come of himself. He did not claim to be equal with his Father. He was His Father’s Son, and God was his God as much as He was anybody else’s. How could Jesus have expressed the position more clearly? We saw earlier in this chapter how the Jews thought he was claiming to be equal with God, and looked at part of his reply. Now look at the full reply, and see how insistent Jesus is:

*“This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, **the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son, that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him**” (John 5:18-23).*

That pattern is repeated often, for Jesus regularly explained the superiority of his Father in every respect.

*“**I can do nothing on my own.** As I hear, I judge, and my judgement is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. **There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true** ... The testimony that I have is greater than that of John (the Baptist). For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that **the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me**” (John 5:30-37);*

*“Jesus said to them, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that **I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me.** He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (8:28,29);*

*“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for **the Father is greater than I ... but I do as the Father has commanded me,** so that the world may know that I love the Father” (14:28-31);*

*“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, **to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.** And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated **by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek**” (Hebrews 5:7-10);*

*“About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, **‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’**” (Matthew 27:46);*

*“Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, **‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’**” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’” (John 20:17,18).*

### ❖ God the Father

The New Testament is just as insistent as the Old that there is only one God. But it also rejoices in the fact that God now has a Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. They are seen as distinct, and the Lord Jesus Christ is still declared to be subordinate to His Father. It wasn’t that he *was* inferior only when he was on earth, and became equal when in heaven with God, as people who believe in the Trinity suppose. That wrong thinking makes nonsense of Scriptural teaching like this, all these verses having been written *after* Jesus ascended to heaven:

“We know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that **“there is no God but one”** (1 Corinthians 8:4);

“You were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all**” (Ephesians 4:4-6);

“**To the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord**, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 25);

“I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and **the head of Christ is God**” (1 Corinthians 11:3);

“**Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father** after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘all things are put in subjection,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. **When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all**” (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

None of these Scriptures detract from the work of the Lord Jesus when, for our sins, he suffered and died. Far from it! The New Testament agrees entirely with the Old in describing the supremacy of God. It highly exalts Jesus for the work that he accomplished together with his Father. Have you ever thought about that? If Jesus was part of an eternal godhead, his mission to earth was really bound to succeed – it couldn’t be otherwise. But if he first came into existence on earth, there was no certainty about the success of his mission. It depended upon him and his willingness to do his Father’s will. So how greatly we should honour the Son for all that he has accomplished on our behalf.

God the Father	The Lord Jesus Christ – His Son
Immortal and Eternal – He can never die	Born mortal – He could die, and did, for us
Holy and Righteous – “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13)	“In every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15)
Self-existent: “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2)	Born of a virgin: “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman” (Galatians 4:4)
Nobody can see the invisible God and live (Exodus 33:20), “who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6:16)	Jesus showed mankind what God is like by living according to God’s laws and thus displaying His character – the family likeness (John 14:9)
God is “the only true God” (John 17:3)	Jesus Christ is His Son, whom He sent into the world (John 17:3)
God told Jesus what to say and do; Jesus willingly obeyed (John 8:26-29)	God asked Jesus to die as a sacrifice; Jesus willingly obeyed



## ❖ Willing Obedience

That last point is crucial to our appreciation of what Father and Son have done to save mankind from sin and death. God needed someone who would undo the harm done by a wilfully disobedient man – Adam. But there was no-one able to live a sinless life. So God caused a Son to be born and asked him to surrender his life in total obedience. This Jesus did. He did not have to do it; he chose to do it, and that is an important difference. It was his life of willing obedience that undid the harm first done by Adam. Because of this great accomplishment we should highly honour the Lord Jesus and greatly exalt him.

*“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. **For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father**” (John 10:14-18);*

*“Though he was in the form of God, (he) did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, **he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father**” (Philippians 2:6-11).*

## Things to Read

-  A lot of Scripture has been referred to in this chapter and it is important to make sure that the extracts quoted properly reflect the teaching of the entire passage. Pick those that especially interest you and look at them in their context in the Bible.
-  Try reading the whole of John chapter 5 or Philippians chapter 2 to get the sense of how Jesus challenged his adversaries, and how the apostles explained their understanding of how Father and Son worked together to achieve our salvation.

## Questions to Answer

- 8.1 Jesus said that he and his Father were one. Look at that saying (in John 10:30) to understand just what Jesus was claiming. Then compare it with John 17:11,21-23. What do those Scriptures teach?
- 8.2 When the apostle John said that the Word was with God in the beginning (John 1:1-3), what was he telling his readers about Jesus? Was he saying that Jesus existed at the beginning; or that God had a plan and purpose from the beginning which would eventually result in the birth of God’s only begotten Son? Give your reasons for whichever option you think is right. (Compare John 1:1-14 with Psalm 33: 6-9; Proverbs 8:1-32 and Hebrews 1:1)