

THE PREEXISTENCE OF THE SON OF GOD

This issue is clearly stated in a number of passages of scripture. Before considering John 1:1-3, 14, let us cite from other scriptures as follows:

In John 1:15, 30 the harbinger of the Messiah says twice, ". . .he was before me." If this simply speaks of a higher dignity in rank, that is Christ over John the Baptist, then the text ought to read, "he is before me." It does not read "is," but "was," indicating a time relationship. John was older in years than Jesus in the flesh, but John declares, ". . .he was before me." Christ, therefore, in point of time preceded John the Baptist.

In John 6:33, 38, 41, 50, 51, 58, 62 we have a sevenfold declaration made by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself that He "came down from heaven." He spoke of ascending "up where he was before" (John 6:62), and in so doing He was "taken up. . .into heaven" (Acts 1:10). See His words in John 3:13. John records of Him, "He that cometh from above is above all. . ." (John 3:31).

In John 8:58 Christ said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." He does not say, "Before Abraham was, I was," but "I am." The word "was" in speaking of Abraham is from a word that means "was made," or "came into existence." Christ, unlike Abraham, gives Himself the sense of uncreated and continual existence in the style of Deity, "I am." The Jews did not miss the point, "Then took they up stones to cast at him. . ." (John 8:59). But, what they rejected, the Lord Jesus Christ proved to their very senses for He "hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."

We come now to John 1:1-3, 14, which reads:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. . .And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

John is the only writer to refer to the One who became incarnate as "the Word," or "the Logos" (John 1:1, 14; Revelation 19:13). He begins by saying, "In the beginning was the Word. . ." To say, "in the beginning" (John 1:1) and "from the beginning" (I John 1:1) are not identical. The expression "from the beginning" denotes that which is

"from the beginning" onward. John, however, does not say that "the Word" was "from the beginning." He clearly said, "In the beginning was the Word. . ." Thus, the language itself places "the Word" before "the beginning" of John 1:1.

Two other facts confirm this. One is the identity of "the beginning" in question. If we can identify "the beginning" in view, then we can determine whether or not "the Word" existed before it. Two is the meaning of the word "was," used four times in John 1:1-2, in contrast to the word "was" used in John 1:3, 6, 14.

As to "the beginning" in question, we appeal to the context of John 1:1-3 to determine the meaning. In verse 3, we have the beginning of "all" created things. Since "all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made," then we positively know that "the Word" preceded "the beginning" of "all" created things. Since He preceded "all" created things, and "all things were made by him," then He is not a creature Himself, but rather is "the beginning of the creation of God" (Revelation 3:14). The word "beginning" in Revelation 3:14 means in the sense of "the commencement," or "original bringer forth," of "all" created things. A. T. Robertson speaks of the word "beginning" in Revelation 3:14 as follows:

"Not the first of creatures. . .but the originating source of creation." (end quote, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Volume VI, page 321).

We know that He was "not the first of creatures," but not merely because a man like A. T. Robertson said so, but because "all things were made by him." Therefore, He preceded "all" created things. But, if He is a creature, then "all things were" not "made by him" for He himself would be an exception. Since, however, "all things were made by him," then He not only preceded "all" created things, but is "the originating source." John 1:1-3 teaches exactly the same truth as Psalms 90:2, which reads:

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

In God's word, there has always been a distinction between the God who has always existed and what has come into existence. The Greek brings this out clearly, and we appeal to scholarship for definition of the words involved. The word "was" in verses 1, 2 of John 1 is not the same word "was" in verses 3, 6, 14, nor do they even remotely mean the same thing. The word "was" of verses 1, 2 means "to exist," or "timeless existence," whereas the word of verses 3, 6, 14 means "to come

into being."

A. T. Robertson writes of the word used in John 1:1, as follows:

". . .conveys no idea of origin for God or for the Logos, simply continuous existence" (end quote, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Volume V, page 3).

Of the word used in John 1:3, Mr. Robertson states:

"All things 'came into being.' Creation is thus presented as a becoming. . .in contrast with being. . ." (end quote, same source, page 5).

Mr. Robertson identifies the word "was" in John 1:6, "There was a man. . .," and the word "was" in John 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh. . .," as being the same verb found in verse 3, speaking of "all" created things, pages 8 and 14 of the same source.

Marvin R. Vincent, in commenting on the word of verses 1, 2, in contrast to the word of verses 3, 14, writes as follows:

". . .was, denoting absolute existence. . .instead of. . . came into being, or began to be, which is used in vv. 3, 14, of the coming into being of creation and of the word becoming flesh" (end quote, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Volume II, page 24).

Thus, Mr. Robertson and Mr. Vincent speak the same thing as to the meaning of the two different words.

Leon Morris writes of the verb in John 1:1, 2 as follows in his commentary:

"The verb 'was' is most naturally understood of the eternal existence of the Word: 'the Word continually was'. . . certainly the verb denotes neither a completed state, not a coming into being. It is appropriate to eternal, unchanging being" (end quote, *The Gospel According to John*, pages 73, 74).

On page 79 of the same writing, Mr. Morris speaks of the verb in verse 3 as meaning, "came into being" (end quote).

Kenneth S. Wuest, who translated the New Testament word for word,

renders John 1:1, 3 as follows:

"In the beginning the Word was existing. . .All things. . . came into being, and without Him there came into being not even one thing which has come into existence" (end quote, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation*, page 209).

James Moffatt, in his work *The James Moffatt Translation*, translates John 1:1, 3 as follows:

"The Logos existed. . .through him all existence came into being, no existence came into being apart from him" (end quote, page 113).

Thus, Mr. Morris, Mr. Wuest, and Mr. Moffatt speak exactly the same thing as Mr. Robertson and Mr. Vincent.

Arthur W. Pink similarly testifies as follows:

"There are two separate words. . .both rendered 'was': the one means to exist, the other to come into being. The latter word is used in 1:3. . .and again. . .in 1:6. . .and again in 1:14. . .But here in 1:1 and 1:2. . .As the Word He did not come into being, or begin to be, but He was 'with God' from all eternity" (end quote, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, Volume I, pages 20, 21).

J. C. Ryle, in his *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, Volume I, page 7, similarly writes as follows:

"The expression 'was,' means existed, was existing. . .He had no beginning. He was before all things. There never was the time when He was not. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ is an eternal Being" (end quote).

William Hendriksen, in his *The Gospel of John*, pages 69, 71 similarly writes as follows:

". . .when the heavens and the earth were created. . .the Word already existed. . .he existed from all eternity. . .All things, one by one, came into being through this divine Word. . .Two facts are here stressed: a. that the Christ himself was not created; he was eternally. . .and b. that all things. . .were created by him. . ." (end quote).

These scholarly definitions of the word "was" in John 1:1, 2, and the difference in meaning between the word "was" in John 1:3, 6, 14, could be multiplied, but these suffice to show the harmony of definition involving these two different Greek words.

Of the word "was" in verses 1, 2, we summarize thus:

1. Robertson - "continuous existence"
2. Vincent - "absolute existence"
3. Morris - "eternal existence. . .continually was"
4. Wuest - "was existing"
5. Moffatt - "existed"
6. Pink - "to exist"
7. Ryle - "existed, was existing"
8. Hendriksen - "already existed"

Of the word "was" in verses 3, 6, 14, we summarize thus:

1. Robertson - "came into being"
2. Vincent - "came into being"
3. Morris - "came into being"
4. Wuest - "came into being"
5. Moffatt - "came into being"
6. Pink - "came into being"
7. Hendriksen - "came into being"

Thus far, we have given explanation of the words of our text, "In the beginning was the Word."

Now let us consider the words, "and the Word was with God." The word "with" is from a Greek word that means, "towards," or "face to face." A. T. Robertson speaks of it as follows:

"Pros. . .face to face with each other" (end quote, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Volume V, page 4).

The word "with" in John 1:1 is from the Greek word "pros." It means "towards," or "face to face." In I Corinthians 13:12 we read of "face to face." Those words are from the Greek "prosopon," from "pros," towards, and "ops," the eye. This word "prosopon" is also translated "face to face" in Acts 25:16. Moreover, the word "pros" is translated "toward" in such places as I John 3:21, ". . .then have we confidence toward God."

Marvin Vincent adds an additional comment on the word "pros." Not only does the word mean "towards," or "face to face," but Vincent adds as follows:

"The preposition *pros*, which, with the accusative case, denotes motion towards, or direction, is also used in the New Testament in the sense of with; and that not merely as being near or beside, but as a living union and communion; implying the active notion of intercourse. Thus: 'Are not his sisters here with us'. . .i.e., in social relations with us (Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:56). 'How long shall I be with you'. . .(Mark 9:16). 'I sat daily with you' (Matt. 26:55). 'To be present with the Lord'. . .(II Cor. 5:8). 'Abide and winter with you' (I Cor. 16:6). 'The eternal life which was with the Father'. . .(I John 1:2). Thus John's statement is that the divine Word not only abode with the Father from all eternity, but was in the living, active relation of communion with Him" (end quote, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Volume II, page 34).

"The Word" not only existed "in the beginning," but existed in the closest possible connection "with God" the Father. The text does not say, "The Word was in God," but rather, "The Word was with God." Since the preposition "with" means "towards," or "face to face," the text brings out three significant thoughts:

1. "Face to face" denotes communion, fellowship;
2. "Face to face" denotes a distinction between two parties;
3. And, "face to face" denotes a plane of equality.

As to the first of these, "face to face" denotes communion, fellowship. Throughout God's word the "face" of God was either "toward" His people, descriptive of fellowship and favor, or it was "against" His people, descriptive of His displeasure. Read Numbers 6:25; Job 13:24; Psalms 13:1; Psalms 31:16; Psalms 34:14-16; Psalms 44:24; Psalms 88:14; Isaiah 59:1, 2; I Peter 3:12 as illustrative of the point.

The prophesy of Psalms 16:8-11 is quoted by Peter in Acts, and Peter identifies the fact that "David speaketh concerning him" (Acts 2:25), that is the Lord Jesus Christ is the One of whom "David speaketh." What does Peter say of Him? One thing is: "I foresaw the Lord always before my face" (Acts 2:25). David could not say such a thing of himself. He asked, "How long wilt thou. . .hide thy face from me?" (Psalms 13:1). No creature can say, "I foresaw the Lord always before my face." The Father is ". . .of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. . ." (Habakkuk 1:13). Yet, there is One who is ". . .holy. . .undefiled, separate from sinners. . ." (Hebrews 7:26), who could say in truth, "I foresaw the Lord always before my face." This is the very one who was "with God," that is "towards," or "face to face," throughout all eternity. When John wrote, ". . .we have

an advocate with the Father. . ." (I John 2:1), the word "with" is the same word "with" in John 1:1, 2. Thus, our Advocate is "towards," or "face to face," with the Father on our behalf. Thank God, His children have One who continually, and earnestly beholds the face of the Father on our behalf. What fellowship we have as God the Father sees us, as He sees God the Son!

As to the second of these, "face to face" denotes a distinction between two parties. God is one essence, but subsists in three distinct persons. They are not separate, but distinct. If they were separate, then any One of them could be God to the exclusion of the other two. But, God is only one essence. Yet, in eternity past, that essence subsisted in three distinct persons. Since One was facing the Other, then a distinction does exist. That distinction existed in time past for "the Word was facing God." That distinction existed in time when Christ was here on the earth for scripture reads, ". . .Father. . .I come to thee. . ." (John 17:11, 13). And, that distinction exists in heaven today for scripture reads, ". . .Christ. . .in the presence of God. . ." (Hebrews 9:24), or of ". . .Jesus Christ. . .is on the right hand of God. . ." (I Peter 3:21, 22). Thus, He was the Son of God before He was "made flesh" since "the Father sent the Son" (I John 4:14). He was the Son of God while on earth (John 1:34). And, He is the Son of God in heaven (Acts 9:20). Thus, when John wrote the Book of Revelation, he identified "Jesus Christ" as distinct from "God. . .his Father" (Revelation 1:5, 6). These two distinct persons are but one essence, and are one in the attributes of God, and are one in those works which only God can do. Therefore, "the Word was" not only "with God," but "the Word was God." Whatever "God" is, with whom "the Word was with," we know "the Word was" exactly the same thing for "the Word was God."

As to the third of these, "face to face" denotes a plane of equality. In I John 1:2 John speaks of ". . .that eternal life which was with the Father. . ." Now notice two things: One, John does not say, "The Word was in God," but "the Word was with God." And, two, he does not say, "that eternal life which was in the Father," but "that eternal life which was with the Father." The word "with" in I John 1:2 is exactly the same word "with" in John 1:1. Therefore, as "the Word was facing God," so "that eternal life. . .was facing" God. Hence, as "the Word" who faced "God" was distinct from the One whom He faced, so "that eternal life" that "was facing the Father" is distinct from "the Father." Now hear John as to the identity of "that eternal life" as follows:

"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is

the true God, and eternal life."

The expression "that eternal life" as being "with the Father" is descriptive of "the Son of God" just exactly as the expression "the Word was with God" is descriptive of the eternal Logos. In Jeremiah 10:10 reference is made to Jehovah as "the true God. . .the living God." As "true" and "living" characterize Him, so "true. . .and eternal life" characterize "the Son of God" who, as the "son given" in Isaiah 9:6, 7 is called, ". . .The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father," or "the Father of eternity."

This one who preexisted in eternity past, in time "was made flesh" (John 1:14). Thus, "he was in the world," speaking of His incarnation, "and the world was made by him," speaking of His pre-incarnation work as Creator of "all things" (John 1:10).

Paul wrote, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). He added, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). Thus, God gave ". . .the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6). John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word. . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. . .and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father. . ." (John 1:1, 14). The eternal "Word was with God." We have previously noted that the word "with" literally means "towards," or "face to face." His face is not outwards, but inward, or "towards" the Father. Thus, His face is not outwards, as if He were merely waiting to reveal the Father. His whole being is "towards God," essence to essence, thought to thought.

In the eternal "Word," the Father stands revealed to Himself. To reveal God, one must know Him, and ". . .neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). The eternal "Word" is ". . .the very image of his substance. . ." (Hebrews 1:3, A. S. V.). Is "the very image" of God equal to God? Has God ever existed without an "image"? For instance, the radiance and brilliance of the "sun" is as old as the "sun." Without them the "sun" is not the "sun." We, however, cannot see the "sun" apart from "sunlight." In Psalms 84:11, it is written, "For the Lord God is a sun. . ." If there is, therefore, an eternal "sun," is there not equally an eternal "sunlight"? As the radiance of the "sun" is as old as the "sun," so "the very image" of God is coeternal with God. This is precisely why the word "being" in Hebrews 1:3 denotes, according to scholarship, "absolute and timeless existence. . ." (end quote, A. T. Robertson).

Since Christ is the perfect "image of God," He has consciousness and will. One, who is lonely, could not satisfy his desire for companionship by making his entire home out of mirrors, which furnish only a lifeless reflection of himself. Thus, "the very image of" God,

which is equal to Himself, can be nothing short of personal. God can only love that which is equal to Himself. God loves the Son for He is "the very image of" His person. God loves man who also in a sense is "in the image of God." God loves truth and holiness in man for they are God-like characteristics. But, the eternal "Word" only is the exact "image of God" in every respect; and what He is was not derived, or acquired, as with man. The "sun" is just as dependent upon the "sunlight" as the "sunlight" is upon the "sun." Without "sunlight" the "sun" is no true "sun." Thus, the outward expression of God is not something other than God, but God Himself. When Philip said, ". . . Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (John 14:8), Christ answered, ". . . he that hath seen me hath seen the Father. . ." (John 14:9). These two are distinct, ". . . me. . . the Father. . .," yet they are one for John 1:1 speaks of "the Word" as one, and "the God" whom He faced as another, yet "the Word was God," and the one whom He faced was "God."

We discuss the construction of John 1:1 more fully in the special study section of this writing, number seven, John 20:28. We discuss more fully also the preexistence of the Son in the special study section of this writing, number three, Philippians 2:6-8, number six, Colossians 2:9, and also under "The Angel of Jehovah."

In conclusion to John 1:1-3, 14, permit me to quote at length from an article found in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume IV, "Person of Christ," pages 2342, 2343 as follows:

". . .The Being who was incarnated. -- John here calls the person who became incarnate by a name peculiar to himself in the NT -- the 'Logos' or 'Word.' According to the predicates which he here applies to Him, he can mean by the 'Word' nothing else but God Himself, 'considered in His creative, operative, self-revealing, and communicating character,' the sum total of what is Divine (C. F. Schmid). In three crisp sentences he declares at the outset His eternal subsistence, His eternal intercommunion with God, His eternal identity with God: 'In the beginning the Word was; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God' (Jn 1:1). 'In the beginning,' at that point of time when things first began to be (Gen 1:1), the Word already 'was.' He antedates the beginning of all things. And he not merely antedates them, but it is immediately added that He is Himself the creator of all that is: 'All things were made by him, and apart from him was not made one things that hath been made' (1:3). Thus He is taken out of the category of creatures altogether. Accordingly, what is said of Him is not that he was the first of existences to come into being -- that 'in the beginning He already had

come into being' -- but that 'in the beginning, when things began to come into being, He already was.' It is express eternity of being that is asserted: 'the imperfect tense of the original suggests in this relation, as far as human language can do so, the notion of absolute, supra-temporal existence (Wescott). This, His eternal subsistence, was not, however, in isolation: 'And the Word was with God.' The language is pregnant. It is not merely coexistence with God that is asserted, as of two beings standing side by side, united in a local relation, or even in a common conception. What is suggested is an active relation of intercourse. The distinct personality of the Word is therefore not obscurely intimated. From all eternity the Word has been with God as a fellow: He who in the very beginning already 'was,' 'was' also in communion with God. Though He was thus in some sense a second along with God, He was nevertheless not a separate being from God: 'And the Word was' -- still the eternal 'was' -- 'God.' In some sense distinguishable from God, He was in an equally true sense identical with God. There is but one eternal God; this eternal God, the Word is; in whatever sense we may distinguish Him from the God whom He is 'with,' He is yet not another than this God, but Himself is this God. The predicate 'God' occupies the position of emphasis in this great declaration, and is so placed in the sentence as to be thrown up in sharp contrast with the phrase 'with God,' as if to prevent inadequate inferences as to the nature of the Word being drawn even momentarily from that phrase. John would have us realize that what the Word was in eternity was not merely God's coeternal fellow, but the eternal God's self" (end quote).

Amen and Amen. So be it.