

SPECIAL STUDIES NUMBER ONE

John 14:28

John 14:28 reads as follows:

"Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."

The words "My Father is greater than I" are often used by the enemies of Christ to prove that He is less than God. In a book entitled "*Things In Which It Is Impossible For God To Lie*", copyright 1965, and published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, presenting the views of the Jehovah's Witnesses, self called, we read of this view as follows:

"...how can Jesus be the Most High God himself? Or be 'equal in power and glory...'? He could not...Jesus always acknowledged himself as underneath God... In fact, Jesus told his faithful apostles: 'The Father is greater than I am.' (John 14:28)" (end quote, pages 263, 265, 269).

Their position is plain. In another book entitled *The Kingdom Is At Hand*, copyright 1944, their view is stated as follows:

"At the time of his beginning of life he was created by the everlasting God, Jehovah... he was the first and direct creation of Jehovah God... He was not an incarnation in flesh, but was flesh, a human Son of God, a perfect man, no longer spirit, although having a spiritual or heavenly past and background" (end quote, pages 46,47,49).

In another of their books entitled *The Truth That Leads To Eternal Life*, copyright 1968, we read again:

"When Jesus was on earth he certainly was not equal to his Father... he himself said: 'The Father is greater than I am!' (John 14:28)... After Jesus' death, God raised him to life again... However, he was still not equal to his Father" (end quote, pages 22,23).

These statements reflect the view of the Jehovah's Witness sect. Our text stated, "...my Father is greater than I." The words obviously mean something. Anyone who is repeatedly taught to deny the deity of

Christ will see in them something that supports their view. One thing is certain: To use the text to deny the Deity of Christ is to make it militate against the hundreds of positive statements already amassed in this writing in proof of the Deity of Christ. To interpret a scripture in one place so as to put it at variance with what the scriptures say in other places is to "pervert" the truth. This was the very tactic employed by the devil in Matthew 4. The devil said, "it is written" (Matthew 4:6). And that verse of scripture from which he quoted, when isolated from the rest of what God's word says elsewhere regarding the same subject matter, seemed to prove his point. Christ, however, answered, "It is written again." And that verse of scripture from which He quoted proved that the devil's use of the scripture was incorrect. Therefore, it is by taking what "is written" and comparing it to what "is written again" regarding the same subject that we arrive at the truth of what God has said.

To teach as the Jehovah's witness previously quoted of Christ, that "*at the time of his beginning of life he was created by the everlasting God, Jehovah... he was the first and direct creation of Jehovah God*" (end quote), is to assume a position that is diametrically opposed to many other positive statements in God's word. The Lord Jesus Christ cannot be a creature because John 1:3 clearly reads, "all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." We comment on this verse more extensively later in this special studies section. Here, let us simply say: If "all", not some, "things" were created by Christ, He preceded "all" created "things". If He preceded "all" created "things", He is uncreated. If He is uncreated, He is eternal. If He is eternal, He is God. Therefore, Christ could, and did, say, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Revelation 22:13). If Jehovah God created some sort of little god, Jesus Christ, He did not have any knowledge of it because Jehovah said, "before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (Isaiah 43:10).

Because of a heretical position, the Jehovah's witnesses must change the scriptures to suit their position. They add the word "other" to Colossians 1:16,17 in an effort to escape the truth of John 1:3. They insert the article "a" in between "was" and "God" in John 1:1, and spell the "God" with a little "g". Thus, their position is that "the Word was a god" (*New World Translation*), instead of God in the highest sense in which the word can be understood. They substitute the word "Godhead" in Romans 1:20 for the word "Godhead" in Colossians 2:9. They do this without any manuscript evidence. the two words are entirely different Greek words, and are of different origin, and meaning. The word in Colossians 2:9 means "the Deity", as we point out in the special studies section dealing with that text. They translate it deceptively,

"divine quality", as though it was from the word in Romans 1:20. This watered down perversion leaves the impression that Christ was simply "god-like" rather than "the deity".

We certainly could add other alterations of scripture by the Jehovah's Witness in order to support their damnable lie, but one thing is certain up to this point: There are numerous positive statements that Jesus Christ is God, and not in a lesser sense, but "equal with God". The things which only God can do were done by Him. The attributes of God were possessed by Him. Therefore, to interpret any passage of scripture so as to deny that mass of evidence is to "wrest the scriptures" to one's "own destruction", as well as to the "destruction" of all who believe the confusion.

Let us now quote John 14:28 again:

"Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."

Notice, in this verse, the Lord mentions two things which are found within the contextual setting as follows:

1. "I go unto the Father";
2. And, "I...come again unto you."

The first of these is found in John 14:12. And, the second is found within the principle of John 14:18,21-23.

Of these two ideas, which would occasion the ground of rejoicing in John 14:28? Would the Lord's disciples "rejoice" because Christ said "I go"? Or, would they "rejoice" because He said, "I...come again unto you"?

Of these two, we would naturally think that His promise to "come again" would be the basis of rejoicing, and not His departure from them. But, that is just the opposite of what the text in John 14:28 says. It was not His promise to "come again" that would occasion rejoicing in the text. It was rather His departure. Notice:

"If ye loved me, you would rejoice, because I said I go unto the Father."

But, how can this be? Two things make it possible:

1. "If ye loved me";

2. And, "My Father is greater than I."

When Christ first spoke of His departure, His disciples were perturbed. Yet, He tells them, "If ye loved me, you would rejoice, because I said I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I." For several years, the relationship of these disciples with the Lord was based largely upon His physical presence among them. John, the apostle, and one of that inner circle of disciples, said of this relationship, "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life... For the life was manifested, and we have seen it...*" (I John 1:1,2). Thus, the five senses, as seeing, hearing, touching, etc., were prominent in their association with the Lord. But, Christ informed them of a coming time when things would change. They would no longer have the comfort and example of His physical presence. He was about to leave them, and His presence among them would be enjoyed solely on a spiritual basis. The disciples were not happy about the prospect of His departure from the earth.

If, however, they viewed His departure in the right light, they "would rejoice". But, what is that right light? His departure must be looked at in an entirely disinterested sense, that is solely as gain to the Lord, rather than their own personal loss. Often in our relationship and association with others, we derive certain personal benefits. When something comes along that causes that friend to be moved far away from us, as a job transfer, we often are more occupied with the loss of personal gains than the real welfare and benefit to the one leaving. We see only our loss, not the other's gain.

This idea can be best illustrated by physical death. Suppose we have a friend, or loved one, who has been sick for quite some time. The illness is terminal, and the one who is ill has suffered greatly over a long period of time. there is no reasonable chance that this one can be cured, and be restored to some normal function in life. This person knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. When this person dies, do we see only the loss to self? Or, can we, out of love for that person, view death as gain? Certainly, where human emotions are involved, both ideas are in our minds. But, knowing the state of the dead who die in the Lord, we truly are able to "rejoice" because of the benefit to the one who has died. But, what makes that death "gain"? Because, it was the alleviation of intense suffering, and ushered one into the very presence of God where the surrounding circumstances were "far better".

What true friend would want to keep that sick, suffering, incurable friend here purely for selfish interests? In the incarnation, our Lord was in a state of "humiliation" (Acts 8:33). He "became poor" (II.

Corinthians 8:9), and "hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). The prophet spoke of Him as, "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...He was oppressed, and he was afflicted..." (Isaiah 53:3,7). In crucifixion, "his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men" (Isaiah 52:14). His flesh was so mutilated that He prophetically could say, "I may tell (or, count) all my bones: they look and stare upon me" (Psalms 22:17).

But, What would be the alleviation of all this? His ascension to the Father. What real friend would not "rejoice" to see his friend free from such degradation, and elevated to a state more worthy of him? Thus, the Lord said:

"If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."

These words have nothing to do with Christ's essential being, but rather apply to His incarnate state. His Father was "greater" in position, and in surrounding circumstances. If the Lord's disciples viewed His departure as gain to Him, rather than their own loss, they "would" have rejoiced, knowing full well the infinite difference between one's position here and there, and one's surrounding circumstances here and there.

In John 14:29, Christ added, "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that , when it is come to pass, ye might believe." The question is: believe what? John 13:19 answers, "Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he." The "he" is in italics. Thus, "believe that I am". This is clearly the style of Deity, as we show in our special study of John 8:58.

Only God knows the future. Christ in demonstrating that ability, would prove that "I am". The words in John 13:19 refer to the Lord's betrayal by Judas Iscariot. The prediction was given to strengthen the disciples' faith. Do not miss the Lord's tender concern for His disciples. Those men could have been adversely affected, if the betrayal had taken them unawares. But, the Lord's prediction here would assure them that He was in complete control of the situation. He was never surprised, and was never caught unawares. He was never deceived, and was never a helpless victim of unregenerate hearts.

Knowing some things in the future would completely paralyze mortal men, and render them unfit to cope with the responsibilities of life. When God revealed certain future events to Daniel concerning Israel,

Daniel said, "I...fainted, and was sick certain days" (Daniel 8:27). The Lord not only knew what He was facing as "the Messiah", but predicted what would befall Him before it took place (Mark 10:32-34). He did this to credentialize Himself, and to assure the hearts of His nearest friends that He was in control.

In Isaiah 53, parts of which are quoted and applied to Christ as in Mark 15:28, Acts 8:32-35, I Peter 2:22,23, etc., He was not the object of desire by the masses (53:2,3). His lowly condition made Him an object of contempt (53:3). But, His humiliation and sufferings were vicarious, not accidental, or the result of His own faults (53:4,6). Thus, He was perfectly innocent, yet He did not resist such treatment (53:7). Even those for whom He suffered and died may mistake His person and office (53:8). His case adequately presents the two extremes of righteous punishment and perfect innocence (53:9). But, the glorious fruit of these very sufferings will correct all errors (53:10). He becomes a savior only by becoming a substitute (53:11). Even after the work of expiation is accomplished, and His glorious reward secured, the work of intercession we be still continued (53:12).

He knew His lot in advance, He predicted it, and voluntarily entered into it. He was in complete control, yet no man "endured such contradiction of sinners against himself" (Hebrews 12:3); as did the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing that His Father was in the heavens, surrounded by a heavenly host of worshippers, would any true friend want Him to remain here in a state of humiliation? His Father was "greater", not in Person, but in position and surrounding circumstances. Any one thinking truly about what the Lord experienced here in contrast to what awaited Him there, "would rejoice, because" He was about to "go unto the Father".

Christ often used the words "my Father". Those words upon first glance would seem to convey no more than a relationship to the Father which any "son of God" bears. Therefore, many say that Christ was a son of God, but God has many "sons" (I John 3:2). Hence, according to them, there is nothing unique about Christ's relationship to the Father. We comment on this idea more fully under the special study of John 5:18. But, here let me say "The words "my Father", without a doubt, do speak of a uniqueness which Christ bears to the Father which no one else bears. In the first place, Christ is not a Son of God, as if He was but one of many. He is "The Son" (John 5:19,20,21,22,23,25,26,27), a fact stated no less than 10 times in those 8 verses. See also I John 5:5,10,12,13, where He is spoken of as "the Son" 6 more times. In the second place, Christ often addressed the children of God. If His relationship to God the Father was no different than their relationship

to the Father, then He had ample opportunity to speak of "our Father" to prove that. But, not one time did He ever say "our Father" as if to imply something in common with all believers in Christ. He always said, "your Father" (Matthew 5:16), not "our Father". Or, He said, "my Father...you" (Luke 24:49), and not "our Father". Such is always the case. Therefore, the words "my Father", or "your Father", and never "our Father", prove a uniqueness that many deny.

There is only one who is "the Son of God", and He is "equal with God", being the same essence. He existed before "all" created things. Thus, He is uncreated (John 1:3). If He is uncreated, He is eternal (Revelation 1:8; 22:13). If He is eternal, He is God (John 20:28). He is the Person in the Godhead who reveals God (Matthew 11:27; John 1:18; 14:9), God the Son proceeding by eternal generation from God the Father in a birth that never took place because it always was. "God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4; I John 4:14). Therefore, He was the Son of God before He was "sent forth". The relation of the Second Person in the Godhead to the First Person has from all eternity been that of a son, and, like all else related to the Godhead, is not only eternal, but unchangeable. A sound exposition of Colossians 1:15-17 shows, not that the son is there placed on a level with the creature as opposed to the Father, but on a level with "the invisible God" as opposed to the creature. The uniqueness of the sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ is brought out in John 1:18.

John 1:18 reads as follows:

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

The Jehovah's Witness translate this text in their New World Translation as follows:

"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten god who is in the bosom position with the Father is the one that has explained him."

We have, in previous articles, pointed out that the "God" which "no man hath seen" is specifically "God... the Father". Men have "seen God", but where God assumed various forms, and appeared to man, the one seen was always the second person in the Godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has always been the Revealer of God, and the only One who has enabled man to see God (Matthew 11:27; John 1:18; 5:37; 14:9). Therefore, we will not consider that part of John 1:18.

The words "only begotten" do merit some consideration. This phrase is from the Greek word "monogenes", and is used of the Lord Jesus Christ in five texts in the New Testament as follows:

1. John 1:14 - "only begotten";
2. John 1:18 - "only begotten";
3. John 3:16 - "only begotten";
4. John 3:18 - "only begotten";
5. And 1.John 4:9 - "only begotten".

The words "only begotten" usually convey to the mind of man something other than what the words really mean. We have already pointed out that Christ was not a son of God, merely one of many. In addressing God's children, He never referred to "our Father", as if to express a relationship to God the Father which all saved people have. His words made it clear that His sonship was altogether different from the sonship of all others.

In Hebrews 11:17 we read:

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son."

Here, the words "only begotten" refer to Isaac, and are translated from the same Greek word "monogenes", used of Christ. Isaac, however, was not Abraham's only son, but He was "unique", and this is what the expression "only begotten" conveys. Isaac was Abraham's "only" son of promise. Abraham had one son before Isaac, and several more after Isaac. Yet, Isaac is called "his only begotten son".

That phrase is associated with the words of verse 18, "of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called". Isaac, no doubt, was "unique", and, thus "only begotten". These words again prove that the Lord Jesus Christ was not a child of God in the same sense in which all believers in Christ are God's children.

The sonship of Christ may be considered either from the view point of Deity, or from the viewpoint of the incarnation. From the viewpoint of the incarnation, it is written: "...that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). From the viewpoint of Deity, it is written, "no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." The sonship of this text was present from eternity. Christ was "the only begotten son" before the incarnation.

Thus, within close proximity we have referenced to "the only begotten" twice, John 1:14,18. Some apply the first to the incarnation, simply meaning that Christ's human nature is ascribed to the supernatural paternity of God. I believe that both expressions refer to Deity. This is supported by the context since Christ existed before "all things" (John 1:1,3,18), and id Jehovah (John 1:23), and was God's "only begotten son" before He was given (John 3:16,18).

In the work of redemption, there is a subordination of the Son to the Father. The Father gives the Son, sends the Son, delivers up the Son, prepares a body for His incarnation, and in filial obedience the Son fulfills the Father's will, even to the point of crucifixion. The ground of this subordination is purely in His filiation, not in any distinction of essential divinity.

Moreover, it is probable that the terms Father and Son, as applied to the First and Second Persons in the Godhead, are somewhat anthropomorphic in character. That sublime and eternal relationship which existed between these two persons is best expressed to human understanding in terms of Father and Son, but wholly without implication that the two persons, on the divine side, are not equal in every particular.