

The Trinity

by
Edward Henry Bickersteth

Chapter III

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I would proceed then to my second proposition:--*That Scripture, in the Old and New Testament alike, requires us to repose our ultimate confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Or in other words, I maintain that Scripture brings before us One mysterious Person, the Son of God, the Son of man, in wondrous union with the Father but of distinct personality from the Father, to whom all the attributes of Deity are ascribed and who claims and receives, without protest, yea, as his just and inalienable right, equal trust, adoration, love, and service with him who says, "I am Jehovah, my Name is Jealous, and my glory will I not give to another."

If this be proved, it will appear that the dignity of Christ stands at an INFINITE distance above that of any created being whatsoever, and is ON A PERFECT LEVEL with that of the Increate [uncreated] Father. My whole argument indeed challenges the views of Arians as well as those of Unitarians. I am the more anxious to state this explicitly because in a most courteous answer¹ which has appeared to the first edition of this work, the author says: "The chief respect in which you make me feel how little insight you have into our actual position is, that you over and over again state or imply that we believe Christ to be a mere man." I had, however, guardedly stated in my preface that those whose opinions I was controverting "regarded Christ only as a most highly-exalted and divinely-endowed CREATURE: that, in a word, to them he was not God." To this I apprehend all Unitarians would subscribe. Thus Dr. Sadler quotes with approval the words, "The Father bears a likeness to the Son *whom He has created.*" And a review in "The Enquirer" of both works says: "In Dr. Sadler's treatise there is, we need hardly observe, no attempt to retaliate the charge of idolatry, because they worship *one whom we regard as a creature.*" Now it is in my judgment of little moment what degree of creature-eminence you concede to the Lord Jesus if you deny his Deity. For after all, whatever difference exists between the Infinite Creator and a finite creature must still in your view exist between God and Christ. But at all events, the propositions which I have drawn out on the broad basis of Scripture combat every view which denies that SUCH AS THE FATHER IS, SUCH IS THE SON, AND SUCH IS THE HOLY GHOST.

1 *Gloria Patri, by the Rev. Dr. Sadler.* I would take this opportunity of expressing my sense of the great urbanity which marks this reply; though the author has not even attempted to grapple with my main propositions, nor erected, so far as I am aware, any new defences of Unitarianism other than those which have been often proved untenable.

That the personality of the Father and the Son is distinct, and that they are neither to be identified nor confounded, is so self-evident a truth, and is so seldom denied by those to whom I write, that two or three Scripture proofs will abundantly suffice. At his baptism and transfiguration the voice of the Father was heard saying of him, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17 and 17:5). Jesus addresses his Father in prayer. Jesus says, "It is written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bears witness of myself, and the Father that sent me bears witness of me" (John 8:17,18). And further, which is incontrovertible evidence (for the will is the essence of personality), "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). But the tenets of Noëtus and Sabellius, who denied this truth, are so rarely affirmed by Unitarians, that with this brief notice I may at once proceed to bring Scripture testimony of all Divine attributes being predicated of the Son.

Is the Father Eternal? Bethlehem was the predicted birthplace into our world of One "whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).² The Word who was made flesh and dwelt among us "was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2,14), and himself assumes the incommunicable co-eternal Name, I AM (John 8:58). And he who appeared in vision to John in Patmos, like unto the Son of man, declares, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come. I am the first and the last. I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:8,11,17,18. Cf. ch. 2:8).

Compare these words, "I am the first and the last," which are here beyond contradiction uttered by the Son of man, with Isa. 44:6 or 48:12, where the same words are confessedly used by the One Supreme God of himself, and you have, in the language of Dwight, "the strongest assertion that eternity past and to come belongs to the Son."

Is the Father Omnipresent? Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). "There I am," not there I will be, referring to his Divine presence at all times. Two or three of his people, (says Scott) may be thus met together in ten thousand places all over the earth at the same time: this must therefore be allowed to be a direct assertion of his omnipresent Deity. Again, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). Is not this a positive declaration that he is with the apostles and succeeding ministers always unto the end of the world? But who can be so in all the separate and distinct regions in which they

2 On this passage from Micah, Chrysostom observes, when contending with those who would be the first to detect any strained interpretation of their own Scriptures--Οὗτος καὶ τῆς Θεότητος καὶ τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος δείκνυσι. τῷ μὲν γὰρ εἰπεῖν, αἱ ἔξοδοι αὐτοῦ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος, ΤΗΝ ΠΙΟΑΙΩΝΙΟΝ ΕΔΗΛΩΣΕΝ ΥΠΙΑΡΕΝ, κ. τ. λ. Chrysost. Contr. Jud. Op. (edit. Bened.) i. 561.

The prophet here proves both the Godhead and the manhood of Christ; for in that he says, "his goings forth are from the beginning, from the days of eternity," he plainly declares his existence before all worlds, &c.

preached and do preach, except that Divine Being who fills all things, that Divine Essence which occupies all space, that God who is a Spirit.³

Is the Father Immutable? "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8); and, "Unto the Son he saith . . . Thou, Lord . . . art the same, and thy years shall not fail" (Heb. 1:8,10,12).

Is the Father Almighty? Creation demands omnipotence: "All things were made by him" (John 1:3). The sustentation of all things demands omnipotence: "By him all things consist" (Col. 1:17). Universal government demands omnipotence: "All power is given unto him in heaven and earth" (Matt. 28:18). Co-extensive operation with God the Father in a boundless empire demands omnipotence. And Jesus Christ, when explaining his words, "My Father works hitherto and I work," declares, "What things soever He (the Father) does, these also the Son does likewise" (John 5:17-19). And a careful comparison of Rev. 1:8 with ver. 13, 17, ch. 2:8, 22:13, needs, as it seems to me, leave no doubt upon our minds that the Son of man declares of himself, "I am the Almighty."

Is the Father himself incomprehensible while comprehending all things? Peter said to our Lord--absolutely, without qualification, and with reference to that prerogative of omniscience, heart-knowledge--"Lord, Thou knowest all things" (John 21:17). And Christ Jesus says of himself, "No man knows the Son but the Father; neither knows any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:27). "In this passage both the omniscience and incomprehensibility of Christ are declared by himself. He who knows the Father is omniscient; he who is known only by the Father is incomprehensible" (Dwight, vol. ii. 77). Also, he says, "As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father" (John 10:15). The riches of Christ are declared to be unsearchable. His love passes knowledge (Eph. 3:18,19). And, "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

Is the Father infinitely good and holy, so that "there is none good but one, that is, God" (Matt. 19:17)? And again, "there is none holy, as Jehovah" (1 Sam. 2:2). Jesus says, "I am the good Shepherd" [John 10:11,14]. And he is called "The Holy One and the Just" (Acts 3:14, etc.)--the one who knew no sin--without sin, without spot--"holy, harmless,

³ Sellon's Treatise on the Deity of Christ, p. 22. The Unitarian suggestion that the end of the world signifies the end of the Jewish age, while it does not disprove the above argument, (for such unfailing presence of a mere man with his apostles in their wide-spread evangelistic labours was as impossible for forty years as for eighteen centuries,) is negated by the only other instances of Matthew's use of this phrase (ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος), ch. 13:39, 40, 49, where it plainly indicates the final day of judgment; and ch. 24:3, where a careful consideration of the two-fold question of the disciples, founded on the two-fold declaration, ch. 23:38, 39, and of the two-fold answer it receives, proves that the end of the world respects the second advent of Christ in glory. The further suggestion that the promise, "Lo, I am with you always," was fulfilled to Paul and others by the invisible bodily presence of Christ is refuted by Peter, who says of him, "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things," Acts 3:21, and by Christ Himself, who says, "And now I am no more in the world," John 17:11. See Dwight on this passage.

undefiled" (Heb. 7:26)--Jesus Christ the righteous, in whom is no sin--"full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Is the Father the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things in heaven and earth? Jesus is the Creator, for "by him (the Son of his love) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16). And "without him (the Word) was not even one thing made that has been made" (John 1:3). Jesus Christ is the Preserver, for "he (the Son) upholds all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4)--and "because I live (he says), ye shall live also" (John 14:19). Jesus is the supreme Governor: for "unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8). He is "over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. 9:5). He is "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16). And "his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14; compare also Luke 2:33).

Is the Father the Searcher of hearts? "These things saith the Son of God . . . all the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins and hearts" (Rev. 2:18-23); and "He (writes John) knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:24,25).

Is the Father the Most High Judge of all? Jesus Christ likewise stands forth as the appointed Judge of all men. For it is written, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10). And "when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another" (Matt. 25:31,32).

Here then we have all⁴ the essential attributes of Godhead ascribed to Christ; and this not in one or two obscure passages but by a general consensus of those holy men who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Many other proof texts of similar character, if space permitted, might be brought forward. But these suffice. What do you, who are seeking the Lord, learn from them of your relation to Jesus Christ? He stands forth before you, who are but of yesterday, as himself from everlasting (Job 8:9); before you, whose life is a vapour, as having life in himself; before you, who are tied to a narrow spot of earth, as Omnipresent; before you, a mutable man, as unchangeably the same; before you, who without him can do nothing, as Almighty (John 15:5); before you, who are not sufficient to

4 Perhaps there is one adjective applied in Scripture to the Father, and not to the Son, I mean, "Invisible." If this be so, the reason is manifest from the character he sustains as the medium of communication betwixt the Creator and the creatures of his hand, "the Image of the invisible God." We have proved that he is in his Divine nature omnipresent and incomprehensible. That now we see him not, 1 Pet. 1:8, although always with us, is matter of fact. But a careful consideration of Heb. 11:27, "he endured as seeing him that is invisible," leads me to question whether the direct reference there is not to the Word, the Angel of God's presence, first seen by Moses at the burning bush, and still visible to the eye of faith, when he braved the wrath of the king.

think anything of yourself, as the Omniscient One in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2 Cor. 3:5); before you, frail and defective, as the Holy and the Just One without sin; before you, a creature of the dust, as your Creator; before you, whose goodness is as the flower of the field, as your Preserver; and before you, who confess your feebleness in self-government, your short-sightedness in self-knowledge, and your reliance on a court of final appeal, as the Ruler of all things, the Searcher of all hearts, and the Judge of all men. Can it be that in the presence of such infinite goodness and glory no feelings of adoration arise in your heart? It is not that he is at an immeasurable distance from you, so that what he is and what you are have no intimate connection. But he made you, sustains you, watches you. The offices he fills towards you are those of God. And he is so unutterably good and gracious. What remains? If you believe this testimony you must confide in him, you must love him, you must adore him. No other feelings than those of entire reliance and supreme love would at all answer the claims of such a one upon you. And they are the Scriptures of truth which, by portraying so gracious a Lord, have elicited that confidence and warranted that affection.

But this is not all. Thus far we might argue with unfallen beings, and thus might urge those holy intelligences who left not their first estate, to obey the Divine command, "Let all the angels of God worship him" (Heb. 1:6). Let us remember our position before God--fallen, guilty, strengthless; and, as reasonable beings, inquiring with the deepest anxiety, "What must I do to be saved?" Now it is not too much to say that the hopes of all mankind with regard to salvation, from the wreck of Paradise lost to the prophetic vision of Paradise restored, are fixed on this mysterious Son of man: on him as the seed of the woman who should bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15); as the Lord whose future advent cheered the saintly Enoch (Jude 14); as the living Redeemer on whom the patriarch Job rested his hopes of immortality (Job 19:25); as the son of Abraham, a benefactor, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed (Gen. 22:18); as the Shiloh of Jacob's dying bed (Gen. 49:10); as the Angel of the burning bush and of the fiery pillar (Ex. 3:2; 14:19); as the Captain who fought for Israel and nerved the arm of her warriors (Ex. 32:34); as the begotten Son of God, the assessor of his throne, the Priest forever, predicted by the sweet psalmist of Israel (Ps. 2:7, and 110:1,4); as the virgin-born Emmanuel, foretold by Isaiah, the Child endowed with a name of lustrous Deity--Wonderful, Conseller, the Mighty God, the Father of eternity, the Prince of peace (Isa. 7:14; 9:6); as the Lord our righteousness, anticipated by Jeremiah (Jer. 33:6); as the appearance of a man on the sapphire throne, seen in vision by Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26); as the Messiah announced to Daniel who should be cut off, but not for himself, and should bring in everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24,26); as the Desire of all nations, of whom Haggai wrote (Hag. 2:7); and as the Sun of righteousness, seen from afar by Malachi, who should rise on the benighted world with healing in his wings (Mal. 4:2). On him, from age to age, the faith of every believer was fastened, by promise and by prophecy.

Let me, ere I pass on, select two passages from the Old Testament for your careful consideration. That same Psalm which proclaims the Divine decree, "Jehovah has said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (Psa. 2:7), closes thus: "Kiss the

Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" [ver. 12]. Remember the solemn denunciation, "Cursed be the man that trusts in man and makes flesh his arm" (Jer. 17:5). Is there not food here for the most thoughtful inquiry? How can you reconcile these texts? I venture to assert, only in the gospel of the Son of God.

Again, if you turn to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, you find: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (ver. 6). Comprehensive words embracing the transgressions of six thousand years! If the sins of those many generations were gathered together, how vast the accumulation, how insufferable the load of guilt! It is done, for Scripture continues: "The LORD hath laid on (hath made to meet on) him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). On him. On whom? On the chosen Servant of God in whom his soul delights (Isa. 42:1), but whose visage is marred more than any man (Isa. 52:14); on one who grows up as a tender plant, who is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:2,3). On him the sins of all were laid. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities.⁵ But can he sustain the load? Remember how earnest and awakened men would hold their breath in suspense to catch an answer on which an immortality of weal or woe depended. Can he endure the burden? He can; he dies in the endurance. His soul is made an offering for sin. His death is swallowed up in victory. He lives. He sees his seed. The pleasure of the LORD prospers in his hand. He sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied (Isa. 53:11)--our Redeemer, our Mediator, our Advocate. I beseech you, my friends, to weigh that chapter on your knees. See you not how the confidence of all mankind centres and clusters around that spontaneous victim, that dying man, that triumphant Saviour? The LORD grant that this same Scripture, which was the message of life to the eunuch of Ethiopia (Acts 8:32-37), may lead you to believe with all your heart in the Deity of the Son of God.

But now let us follow the course of history. At length the fulness of the time was come and God sent forth his Son (Gal. 4:4). Are not the eyes of all designedly pointed to him? Angels from heaven announce the glad tidings: "Unto you is born a Saviour" (Luke 2:8-20). Simple shepherds salute him, and Eastern wise men worship him (Matt. 2:11). He grows up, as foretold, a despised Nazarene. But at his baptism the heavens are opened, the Spirit of God descends like a dove upon him, and the voice of the Eternal Father proclaims, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Soon the devil assaults him (Matt. 4:1), and angels minister to him, their Lord. His herald points him out: "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

5 Nay more--It is, not only that he was (ver. 3) acquainted with grief, but (ver. 10) the LORD hath put him to grief: not only (ver. 5) he was bruised for our iniquities, but (ver. 10) it pleased the LORD to bruise him: not only (ver. 12) he bare the sin of many, but (ver. 6) the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all: not only (ver. 7) he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, but (ver. 10) thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin. If Jesus were only a spotless, sinless man, offering no vicarious atonement, how was it that a holy and just God--we will not say permitted such sufferings to light upon a perfectly innocent being--but himself caused him to suffer?

He speaks as man never spoke (John 7:46). He works wonders of goodness and of grace, such as man never wrought (John 15:24). He introduces a morality of unequaled simplicity and purity and worth. He preaches the glad tidings of the kingdom of heaven. But his own received him not. He is betrayed, condemned, and crucified. He dies, the Just for the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18). He lays down his life. He has power to take it again (John 10:18). He rises. He ascends to the right hand of God. There he receives gifts for men (Ps. 68:18). He sheds forth his Spirit. He gives repentance and remission of sins (Acts 5:31). He ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). He is preparing a place in glory for his children; and thence he shall shortly come again and take us unto himself, that where he is there we may be also (John 14:1-3).

Who, I ask, can believe this simple story of redeeming grace and not repose their whole confidence in this Saviour? Who can refrain from trusting him with supreme reliance? Who can forbear loving him with the most absorbing love? If Scripture forbade these emotions, as being due only to the infinite Father, what force we must lay upon ourselves to prevent them springing up in the trustful heart! But does Scripture forbid them? Nay, verily. Prophecy, as we have seen, foretold that thus it should be, and blessed the confidence. And when the Saviour walked our fallen world, suppliant sinners worship him, and he refuses it not. They put their whole trust in him, and he declares it not only suitable but essential (John 9:35-38). Upon it hangs eternity. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). But is this trust altogether identical with that we are required to repose in the Father? It is one and the same. He says, "Believe in God; believe also in me" (John 14:1). His invitations penetrate the weary heart: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). And his words fall like dew on the parched and thirsty soul, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." He insists that "all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father" (John 5:23). He concentrates the affection and the affiance of his people upon himself as the one Mediator (Matt. 11:27). He invites us to offer up our prayers in his prevalent name (John 16:23,24). And finally, he assures us, "He gives eternal life" unto his own disciples (John 10:28) and "will raise them up at the last day" (John 6:40).

And after his ascension to glory, what is the conduct and the testimony of his chosen apostles? In the name of Jesus Christ they do all their mighty works. For Jesus Christ's sake they suffer the loss of all things. They uniformly preach Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit seals their message. They know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-3). Yea, I should have to transcribe a great portion of the Epistles [if] I wanted to transfer to these pages all the evidence those letters afford, that Scripture requires us to repose our supreme reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ. The most casual glance might make us suspect that a name which meets our eye every few lines was none other than that of the Divine Saviour of the world. Why else its perpetual recurrence? A deeper search confirms this. Take for instance the first few verses of the Epistle to the Ephesians:

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

"According as He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved:

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

The privileges are surpassingly great, but mark how they are all ours IN CHRIST. It is "an apostle of Jesus Christ" who writes. The church is described as the faithful "in Christ Jesus." The benediction is given from God our Father, and co-ordinately "from the Lord Jesus Christ." God is praised; it is as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." All spiritual blessings are ours; they are ours "in Christ." We are chosen; it is "in Him." We are predestinated unto the adoption of children; it is "by Jesus Christ." We are accepted; it is "in the Beloved." We have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins; it is "in him through his blood." We are indebted to Christ for all. We are compelled to look up into him and say, "O Lord, my trust is in thee."

The force of this reasoning will appear more strongly if you attempt to substitute here for the name of Jesus that of any man, however exalted and self-devoted, or of any creature, however lofty in the scale of creation. Make the trial. Read the passage given above, substituting the name of Michael the archangel, or of Moses the legal mediator, or of Stephen who sealed his witness with his blood, for that only "name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). You cannot do it. You stop short. It is an intolerable discord. It is blasphemy. For you feel this would be reposing in the creature an exhaustive confidence due only to the Infinite Creator, and offering to man a supreme gratitude which is the prerogative of God our Saviour.

Such passages might be easily multiplied. I would mention the first chapters of the Epistle to the Colossians, of Peter's first Epistle, of John's first Epistle. I study all, and in all I find Jesus my Saviour. Do you admit the cry of the awakened conscience is, "What must I do to be saved?" You must acknowledge that the reply of the New Testament from end to end--from the angel's message to Joseph, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21), to the ascription of praise recorded by the aged John in Patmos, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father"--the reply, I say, is plain and unhesitating, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). It is not only that one of illimitable goodness and infinite perfections, your Creator and Preserver, stands before you, a man of limited and finite capacities; but he presents himself to you [who are] fallen, and guilty, and lost, as one who is able and willing to raise you from the lowest depths of sin and make you members of a royal

priesthood, and cause you to reign with him among the sons of light forever and forever. No utterance but one like Mary's satisfies his claims: "My spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:47). The Lord grant unto you and me like precious faith, that resting on these exceeding great and precious promises an entrance may be ministered unto us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! (2 Pet. 1:1,4,11).

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