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Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Dear Friends,

"Has anyone ever asked you this question? "When Jesus died for our sins, did God die?" Some of us recall in the 1950s a "modern" preacher affirming that "God is dead." Interestingly, at that time even mainstream Christianity confronted and firmly rejected the man's blasphemous notion. He may have been a good existentialist, but he failed the test for being a Biblical Christian. The greater question, perhaps, is "What happened to Jesus' deity during the Incarnation?" Occasionally sincere Christians will leave the mistaken impression that He set aside His deity, so that He lived as nothing more than a perfect human being. If He went to Calvary as nothing more than a perfect human, He could have atoned for no one's sins! The Mediator between God and man must be both God and man in His mediatorial work. In this chapter we shall study two subsequent passages from John's gospel that underscores the pointed truth that John affirms in the first two verses of his gospel, that Jesus was eternally, during the Incarnation, now, and for eternity fully God. In the history of Christian theology perhaps the two most insidious assaults against this foundational truth occurred early in Christian history, one through a man named Sabellius and the other through a man named Arius. Sabellius denied the doctrine of the Trinity, claiming that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mere modes of God's revelation of Himself to God. "Modes" of revelation prompts the typical reference to this error as modalism. Typically in conversation with a contemporary modalist will accuse Trinitarians of believing in three gods. When we consider the various passages in the New Testament, modalism will not stand the test of Scripture. It falls to the sad plight of making Jesus a deceitful ventriloquist as we read of His prayers to the Father and the Father's answers to Him. The Arian heresy depicts Jesus as a created being, not eternal, never God—in fact the greatest of created angels, typically claiming that Michael the archangel is in fact the same being as Jesus. While our primary objective is, and should always be, pursuit of Biblical truth, the survival of these two insidious errors into the twenty first century requires that we examine them to some extent to arm inquiring Christians against the invasion of ideas from these sources. In the first eighteen verses of his gospel John sets forth his primary premise for the whole book that he wrote. His affirmation of Jesus' eternity, full deity, and Incarnation will unfold in profound details as we read through this unique gospel. In this chapter we will examine two passages from John's gospel that exhibit this amazing truth.

God bless,
Joe Holder

Jesus: Fully God and Equal with the Father

"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." ([Joh 1:1-2](#))

In the last chapter we examined the language of this verse that indicates that John clearly asserted that Jesus and the Father, the "Word" and "God," are equal—that the Word existed as God, not as an unequal and inferior being. Did John intend to teach this point? Did Jesus, according to John's gospel, teach that He existed as God's equal, fully God as well as fully man? We will examine a couple of passages in John's gospel to see if John corroborates his point in these first two verses.

"But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." ([Joh 5:17-18](#))

When Jesus spoke the words, "My Father..." the Jews interpreted His words to mean that He claimed full equality with the Father. The Greek word translated "equal" is the root word for "isosceles," a triangle with two exactly equal sides. Notice Jesus' answer to the Jews.

"Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." ([Joh 5:19-23](#))

Notice Jesus specific words in the twenty-third verse, "...That all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." A. T. Robertson offers a concise linguistic commentary on the implications of this sentence, "Jesus claims here the same right to worship from men that the Father has. Dishonouring Jesus is dishonouring the Father who sent him (8:49; 12:26; 15:23; I [Joh 2:23](#)). See also [Lu 10:16](#). There is small comfort here for those who praise Jesus as teacher and yet deny his claims to worship. The Gospel of John carries this high place for Christ throughout, but so do the other Gospels (even Q, the Logia of Jesus) and the rest of the New Testament."^[1] Notice Robertson's assertion; "Jesus claims here the same right to worship from men that the Father has."

In the section below I will quote from an official Jehovah's Witness publication that attempts to refute both the doctrine of the Trinity and Jesus' full deity and equality with the Father as God. Arius introduced the idea that Jesus was the first and most preeminent of God's creation, and that He subsequently created the whole material universe under the direction and empowerment of God. Arius taught that Jesus was never fully God or equal with God; that He was created and thus had a beginning. The Council of Nicaea, 325 AD, rejected Arius' teachings in favor of the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity and Jesus' full deity and equality with the Father. Since the Watch Tower organization (Jehovah's Witnesses) rejects both the doctrine of the Trinity and Jesus' full deity and full equality with the Father, I have included some of this publication's claims, along with Biblical reasoning that contradicts the claims made in this publication. As we pursue a correct and Biblical view of God, including both Jesus' full deity and full equality with the Father, it is important that we understand the historical errors that have challenged this Biblical teaching. In the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society publication *Should You Believe in the Trinity*, published in 1989, you see the "official" teaching of the Jehovah's Witness organization regarding Jesus and the question of deity and equality with the Father, with God.

- Page 16, "Jesus never claimed to be God."
- Page 24, in presenting their views of both the verses from [Joh 5](#), cited above, and [Joh 10:30](#), the publication states, "But who said that Jesus was making himself equal to God? Not Jesus. He defended himself against this false charge in the very next verse (19): 'To this accusation Jesus replied...the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing.'—JB. By this, Jesus showed the Jews that he was not equal to God and therefore could not act on his own initiative."[\[2\]](#)

This publication makes no mention of Verse 23 in which Jesus clearly refuted the claims of the publication by distinctly claiming equal rights to honor with the Father.

By a full reading of the context in [Joh 5](#), we discover that, rather than refuting a false misunderstanding of His comments regarding equality with the Father, we affirm that the Jews correctly understood Jesus' words, and Jesus in fact defended His claim of equality with the Father.

Rather than extracting a single verse from the context, let's look at the fuller context of [Joh 10:30](#).

"I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and

because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." ([Joh 10:30-38](#))

In this full context Jesus asked the Jews who accused Him to apply a specific litmus test to His claims of equality with the Father. If He performed the works of the Father, they should believe that He was equal with the Father. If He did not perform the works of the Father, they should rightly reject His claims of equality with the Father. In our [Joh 5](#) passage we read that both the Father and Jesus raise the dead; they do the same works. He further claims the same keeping power over His sheep as the Father ([Joh 10:27-29](#)). Thus, both in this immediate context and in the extended context of John's gospel, Jesus claimed to perform the same works that the Father performed. In [Joh 1](#) did John not clearly affirm that both Father and "Word," Son, were involved in the work of creation? Clearly based on Jesus' claims of performing the same works as the Father, He passed His own litmus test and affirmed His claim of equality.

"I and my Father are one." A. T. Robertson expands the grammatical and theological implications of Jesus' claim of equality, oneness, with the Father in this passage.

"**One** (Greek word) [*hen*]). Neuter, not masculine (Greek word) [*heis*]). Not one person (cf. (Greek word) [*heis*] in [Ga 3:28](#)), but one essence or nature. By the plural (greek word) [*sumus*] (separate persons) Sabellius is refuted, by (Greek word) [*unum*] Arius. So Bengel rightly argues, though Jesus is not referring, of course, to either Sabellius or Arius. The Pharisees had accused Jesus of making himself equal with God as his own special Father ([Joh 5:18](#)). Jesus then admitted and proved this claim (5:19–30). Now he states it tersely in this great saying repeated later (17:11, 21). Note (Greek word) [*hen*] used in [1Co 3:3](#) of the oneness in work of the planter and the waterer and in 17:11, 23 of the hoped for unity of Christ's disciples. This crisp statement is the climax of Christ's claims concerning the relation between the Father and himself (the Son). They stir the Pharisees to uncontrollable anger."^[3]

In His priestly prayer Jesus prayed for a return to His former glory that He enjoyed with the Father prior to the Incarnation.

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (Joh 17:5)

Jesus' petition is not for restoration to a former position of inferiority to the Father, but for glorification to His eternal glory with the Father, "...with thine own self...." How could Jesus be restored to such an intimate position, "...with thine own self," and not be viewed as fully God? As a pertinent aside to our primary study, it should also be noted that Jesus did not pray for restoration to deity. In the Incarnation He did not surrender His deity! He prayed for restoration to His former glory.

In a subsequent study we will examine the Biblical teachings regarding the Incarnation more fully, but it is important to note at this point that Jesus did not in any way surrender His deity during the Incarnation. He did not stop being God during the Incarnation. Jesus did not pray for restoration to the position of deity, but to the position of *glory* that He held with the Father before the Incarnation. During the Incarnation, Jesus remained fully God, just as He was eternally fully God prior to the Incarnation. In the Incarnation God didn't change, but Jesus added humanity to His full deity. Now in heaven Jesus remains fully God with the compliment of His material, though resurrected and glorified human body that He occupied during the Incarnation. He left the full glory of His deity. At times during the Incarnation He did not use His full attributes of deity, but His willing choice not to use those attributes does not indicate that He did not possess them, nor that He was not fully God during the Incarnation. The Watch Tower publication mentioned above makes this statement regarding the person of Jesus (Page 15), "Jesus, no more and no less than a perfect human, became a ransom that compensated exactly for what Adam lost—the right to perfect human life on earth."

Scripture emphatically affirms that Jesus was fully God during the Incarnation, no less than before or after. It will also affirm that Jesus paid the ransom for far more than restoration of man to the "right to perfect human life on earth."

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heav'nly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Thomas Ken (1637-1711)

Elder Joe Holder

[1] A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), [Joh 5:23](#).

[2] Robert M. Bowman, a respected Christian apologist, has written a thorough refutation of the Watch Tower publication, entitled *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, Baker Book House (ISBN 0-8010-0981-2).

[3] A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), [Joh 10:30](#).