

The Bible Identity of Jesus Christ, as Explained by J. M. Stephenson

“In reference to his dignity, he is denominated the Son of God, before his incarnation. Hear his own language: “He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true.” [John 7:18](#). “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.” Chap. 10:36. “In this was manifest the love of God toward us, because God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” [1 John 4:9, 10](#). ***The idea of being sent implies that he was the Son of God antecedent to his being sent. To suppose otherwise is to suppose that a father can send his son on an errand before that son has an existence, which would be manifestly absurd. “To say that God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,” is equivalent to saying that the Son of God assumed our nature; he must therefore have been the Son of God before his incarnation.***” (J. M. Stephenson, November 7, 1854, *Review & Herald*, vol. 6, no. 13, page 99, par. 10)

“But in the last place, on this point, *What was the origin of this nature; or in other words, the origin of the Son of God.* It is admitted by Trinitarians that the pre-existence, simply considered, does not prove his eternal God-head, nor his eternal Son-ship. Says Watson, a standard writer of the Trinitarian School, “His pre-existence, indeed, simply considered, does not evince his God-head, and is not therefore, a proof against the Arian hypothesis; but it destroys the Socinian notion, that he was a man only. For since no one contends for the pre-existence of human souls, and if they did, the doctrine would be confuted by their own consciousness, it is clear, that if Christ existed before his incarnation, he is not a mere man, whatever his nature, by other arguments may be proved to be.” This is an honest acknowledgment plainly expressed. And in reference to his nature, it has been shown to be Divine; and being such, it must have been immortal. Indeed this proposition is self-evident; for he who is Divine, must be immortal.

We cannot suppose that Christ was mortal, and, as such, would have been subject to death, had not the plan of redemption been devised; he must, therefore, in his original nature, have been deathless.

The question now to be considered, then, is not whether the only begotten Son of God was Divine, immortal, or the most dignified and exalted being, the Father only excepted, in the entire Universe; all this has been proved, and but few will call it in question; but whether this August Personage is self-existent and eternal, in its absolute, or unlimited sense; or whether in his highest nature, and character, *he had*

an origin, and consequently beginning of days. The idea of Father and Son supposes priority of the existence of the one, and the subsequent existence of the other. To say that the Son is as old as his Father, is a palpable contradiction of terms. It is a natural impossibility for the Father to be as young as the Son, or the Son to be as old as the Father. If it be said that this term is only used in an accommodated sense, it still remains to be accounted for, why the Father should use as the uniform title of the highest, and most endearing relation between himself and our Lord, a term which, in its uniform signification, would contradict the very idea he wished to convey. *If the inspired writers had wished to convey the idea of the co-etaneous existence, and eternity of the Father and Son, they could not possibly have used more incompatible terms.*

And of this, Trinitarians have been sensible. Mr. Fuller, although a Trinitarian, had the honesty to acknowledge, in the conclusion of his work on the Son-ship of Christ, that, *“in the order of nature, the Father must have existed before the Son.”* But with this admission, he attempts to reconcile the idea of the Son’s being “properly eternal,” as well as the Father; two ideas utterly irreconcilable. ***The idea of an eternal Son is a self-contradiction. He must, therefore have an origin. But what saith the Scriptures? They speak right to the point. The apostle Paul says, speaking of Christ, “Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature.” Col. 1:15.*** Notice, 1st. *This cannot refer to his birth of the Virgin Mary, in Bethlehem of Judea, because millions of creatures, in connection with this world, had been born previous to that time. Cain and Abel had been born more than four thousand years previously.*

2nd. The following verse makes his birth antecedent to the creation of all things in heaven and on earth, including all worlds, all ranks and orders of intelligences, visible and invisible. “For by him.” By whom? Ans. By the first born of every creature. The pronoun him refers to this being for its antecedent. “For by him 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.” Verse 16. All things in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, evidently include all the orders of created intelligences.

Now, he must have been born, i.e., had a real intelligent existence, before he could exercise creative power. But all the works of creation are ascribed to him as the “first born of every creature;” hence the birth here spoken of, must have been previous to the existence of the first creature in heaven or in earth. To be such, it must refer to his Divine nature, unless he had two distinctive natures before his incarnation; for which no one contends. But the 17th verse fixes the priority of the birth here spoken of. “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” Here the pronoun he refers to the same person for its antecedent, that the pronoun him does; and both refer to “the first born of every creature.” And the “all things, he is” before, in this verse, are evidently the “all things” named in the previous verse. Hence the point is fully established, that it is the Divine nature of our blessed Redeemer which is here spoken of; and that this nature was born: and in reference to his order, he was “the first born.”

Again, in [John 1:1-3, 14](#), we have the same class of evidence. "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 any thing made that was made." "In the beginning," evidently refers to the commencement of the series of events brought to view in these verses, which was the creation of all things. This gives "the only begotten of the Father" (see verse 14) intelligent existence before the first act of creative power was put forth, and proves that it is his Divine nature here spoken of; and that too, in connection with the creation of all things. In verse 14, this Word, who was "in the beginning" "with God," who "was God," and by whom "all things were made, that were made," is declared to be the "only begotten of the Father," *thereby teaching that in his highest nature he was begotten; and consequently as such, he must have had a beginning.*

Associate the many occurrences of the term, "only begotten Son of God," with the person, nature, and time, brought to view in the foregoing verses; and if any doubts still remain, in reference to the Divine nature of *the only begotten Son of God having had an origin*, you may compare them with those texts which exclude the possibility of his being eternal, in the sense of his never having had a beginning of days; such as "The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords,; who only hath immortality." [1 Tim. 6:16](#). This cannot be understood in the sense of none having deathless natures, or being exempt from death, except the Father; for Christ at that time was immortal in this sense: so were all the angels who had kept their "first estate;" it must, therefore be understood in the same sense, that we all understand, his being the only Potentate; not that there are no other potentates; but that he is the only Supreme Ruler. ***There cannot be two Supreme Rulers at the same time.***

Again, where it is declared, that there are none good except the Father, it cannot be understood that none others are good in a relative sense; for Christ and angels, are good, yea perfect, in their respective sphere; but that the Father alone is supremely, or absolutely, good; and that he alone is immortal in an absolute sense; that he alone is self-existent; and, that, consequently, every other being, however high or low, is absolutely dependent upon him for life; for being. This idea is most emphatically expressed by our Saviour himself; "*For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.*" [John 5:26](#). *This would be singular language for one to use who had life in his essential nature, just as much as the Father. To meet such a view, it should read thus: For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath the Son life in himself.*

If as Trinitarians argue, the Divine nature of the Son hath life in himself (.e., is self existent) just the same, and in as absolute a sense, as the Father, why should he represent himself as actually dependent upon the Father for life? What propriety in representing the Father as conferring upon him a gift which he had possessed from all eternity? If it be said that his human nature derived its life from the Father, I would answer, It does not thus read; or even if it did, I would still urge the impropriety of the

human nature of the Son of God representing itself as being absolutely dependent upon the Father for the gift of life. Would it not be much more reasonable, in such case, for the human nature of Christ to derive its life, and vitality, from its union with the Divine nature, instead of from its union with the Father? I understand this passage according to the natural import of the language: "For as the Father hath life (i.e., existence) in himself, (i.e., self-existent,) so hath he given to the Son to have life (i.e., existence) in himself."

I know I will be referred to the declaration of our Saviour, I have power to lay down my life, and to take it up again. [John 10:18](#). Read the last clause of this verse: "This commandment (commission—Campbell) have I received of my Father."

I will conclude the evidence upon this point by quoting one more passage. Paul says, "And again, when he bringeth the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." [Heb. 1:6](#). ***He must have been his Son before he could send him into the world.*** In verse 2, the Father declares that he made the worlds by the same Son he is here represented as sending into the world. His Son must have existed before he created the worlds; and ***he must have been begotten before he existed; hence the begetting here spoken of, must refer to his Divine nature, and in reference to his order, he is the first-begotten;*** hence as a matter of necessity he must have been "the first born of every creature." [Col. 1:15](#). "The first born of every creature."...

Having investigated the original nature, glory and dignity of our Lord and Master; having gazed a few moments upon the face of him who is the fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; having had a glance at the celestial glory he had with the Father, before the world was, and beheld that matchless form which is the image of the invisible God; and having looked with wonder and admiration upon this August personage, exalted far above angels and thrones and dominions, principalities and powers; *we are prepared, as far as our feeble perceptions can comprehend, to appreciate that amazing love and condescension which induced our adorable Redeemer to forego all the glories and honors of heaven, and all the endearments of his Father's presence.*

Although all his Father's treasures were his, yet he became so poor, that, he had not where to lay his head; oft-times the cold, damp earth being his only bed, and the blue heavens his only covering; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, scoffed at by the Jews, and mocked by the Gentiles; a houseless stranger, he wore out his life under the ignoble garb of a servant, and last of all "died, the just for the unjust," and took his exit from the world under the infamous character of a malefactor. *O! was ever love like this! Did ever mercy stoop so low?..."* (J. M. Stephenson, November 14, 1854, *Review & Herald*, vol. 6, no. 14, pages 105, 106)

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