

Thou One Begotten Son*John Brownlie (1857–1925)*

Thou one Begotten Son,
 Eternal Word adored,
 Immortal while the ages run,
 And our Almighty Lord;

To bring Salvation nigh,
 To vanquish death and sin,
 Thou didst in cruel anguish die,
 And life for mortals win.

Save us, O Christ our God,
 Save by Thy Cross, we pray;
 Thou who didst bear the Father's rod,
 And death by dying slay.

Thou art the Eternal Son,
 One in the glorious Three;
 Co-equal praise while ages run
 Shall ever rise to thee.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

*In the Nick of Time***In Him Was Life***Kevin T. Bauder*

The opening verse of John's Gospel emphasizes three truths about Jesus Christ, whom it calls "the Word." First, at any imaginable beginning, the Word already existed. The Word is the *eternal one*. Second, the Word always existed *with God*. Someone who is God is distinct from the Word, and the Word is *another one*. Third, the Word possessed all the qualities or properties of deity. The Word was God, the *divine one*.

The next two verses repeat and amplify these claims. John 1:2 states that "this one" (KJV, "The same") was in the beginning with God. This verse emphasizes both the eternity and the otherness of the Word. There has only ever been one God, but that one God subsists both as "The Word" and as "Not The Word." Whether "The Word" or "Not The Word," however, God has always been. He is before all beginnings.

The next verse (John 1:3) points out the radical distinction between God and "Not God." Everything "Not God" had a beginning: it came to be. Specifically, everything "Not God" came to be through the agency of the Word. As the King James Version puts it, "All things were made by Him." Obversely, nothing ever came to be apart from the Word. The only thing that *is* but never *came to be* is God.

Everything that is "Not God" had a beginning. The one who caused everything that is "Not God" to come into being was the Word. Since He is not among the things that were made, the Word Himself must be God.

John advances a new proposition in 1:4: "In Him was life." This means more than that the Word was alive. This expression looks ahead to a claim that Jesus will make about Himself later in John's Gospel: "I am the life" (11:25; 14:6). It also chimes with Jesus' teaching in John 5:26: "For just as the Father has life in Himself, so also he gave the Son to have life in Himself."

Creatures—things that are "Not God"—do not have life in themselves. If they are alive, they must gain their life from outside themselves. Creaturely life never generates spontaneously. All living creatures from amoebas to arachnids to aardvarks gain their life from some kind of previous life. Once these creatures are alive, their life must be propped up from outside. They



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

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eat food to live. They breathe air to live. They drink water to live. Creaturely life is dependent.

Creaturely life is also contingent. No created thing exists of necessity. No living creature ever *had* to be. Every creature that comes into being might never have been. In fact, creation as a whole might never have been made. God was free not to create, and He was free to decide which creatures He would make if He created anything. Nothing in the created world simply *is*.

Furthermore, creaturely life is finite. The lives of creatures are limited. Their existence only extends so far, either through space or through time. Their lives do not extend beyond their location. This truth is why we ask where people live. It is why every tombstone includes a birth date and a death date.

God is not like that. He relies on nothing outside Himself for life. His life flows from Himself. His life—His *being*—is necessary. God could never *not* be. And His life is infinite. Properly speaking, He exists outside of space and time, for time and space are His creations. Because He is outside of and above space and time, He can and does make Himself present simultaneously at every point in space and in every moment of time. Wherever and whenever He is, He is present in the fulness of His being.

This is the life of the Word. It is the life of Christ. In Him was life: life itself, necessary life, infinite life. The Word has life in Himself as the Father has life in Himself.

What about John 5:26? In what way did the Father give the Son to have life in Himself? Does this giving imply that the Son is somehow less truly God than the Father is?

When we think of the Father and the Son, we can view their relationship from two perspectives. We can view them either in terms of their *being* or in terms of their *persons*. In terms of their being, both Father and Son are equally God. Since there is only one God, each must possess the entire divine essence. God's nature is not divided up or parceled out between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father is not *part* of God. Neither is the Son or the Spirit. Each is all that God is.

When it comes to the persons of the Godhead, none is before or after another. Together, they are uncreated, incomprehensible, eternal, and almighty. Each is God in Himself (the word for that is *autotheos*). None gets His deity from the others. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each God, and they are all the *same* God.

But they are not the same person. How, then, should we view them from the aspect of their personhood? The persons are distinguished by the relationships that their names imply. The Father is unbegotten. The Son is begot-

ten. The Spirit proceeds. And in this sense, the Son owes His *personhood* to the Father, who begets or generates (not creates) Him. The Spirit owes His *personhood* to the Father and Son, who together spirate (but do not create) Him. The Son is the Son because He is begotten of the Father. The Spirit is the Spirit because He proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Son is only the Son in relation to the Father. The Spirit is only the Spirit in relation to the Father and Son. Consequently, both the generation or begetting of the Son and the spiration and procession of the Spirit must be eternal.

Some theologians believe that the Father communicates the divine nature to the Son by begetting Him. That is a mistake. If the Son is truly God, then He is God in Himself. What the Son receives from the Father is exactly His Sonship. The paternity of the Father is what constitutes the Son *as the Son*. But for every instant that the Son is the Son, He is also (eternally) God.

In one sense, the Son receives all that He is *as the Son* from the Father. In another sense, He holds the entire divine nature in Himself. This double relationship is paradoxical, but not contradictory. And it means that the Son can both have life in Himself (as God) and be given to have life (as Son). The best summary statement is that the Father, who has life in Himself, has given to the Son to have life in Himself.

As the Son, the Word owes His personhood to the Father. As God, the Word has life in Himself. Life is in Him. Life comes from Him. He, together with the Father and the Spirit, is the source of all life within created things.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
