

Come, Lord, and Tarry Not*Horatius Bonar (1808–1889)*

Come, Lord, and tarry not;
 Bring the long-looked-for day;
 Oh, why these years of waiting here,
 These ages of delay?

Come, for Thy saints still wait;
 Daily ascends their sigh:
 The Spirit and the Bride say, Come!
 Dost Thou not hear the cry?

Come, for creation groans,
 Impatient of Thy stay,
 Worn out with these long years of ill,
 These ages of delay.

Come, and make all things new,
 Build up this ruined earth,
 Restore our faded paradise,—
 Creation's second birth.

Come, and bring Thy reign
 Of everlasting peace;
 Come, take the kingdom to Thyself,
 Great King of Righteousness!

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***The Only Begotten***Kevin T. Bauder*

The apostle John concludes his examination of the Word in John 1:15–18. He states that John the Baptist testified about the Word, who existed beforehand. He recognizes the Word as the source of grace and truth. He names the Word specifically as Jesus Christ.

John's closing observations in 1:18 are as important as anything he has written. The verse raises several interpretive and theological questions. Answering these questions requires a bit of extra discussion and detail.

John begins by noting that no one has ever seen God. Anyone familiar with the Old Testament would recognize the truth of this statement. God did sometimes adopt certain visible appearances, so that people could be said to have "seen" God (Exod 24:9–11). But what they saw was not God Himself. It was only a glorious appearance that God took for the occasion. As Moses later wrote, they saw "no manner of similitude," no form, no likeness (Deut 4:15). That is why all images of God were strictly forbidden (Deut 4:15–18).

Yet John insists that Jesus Christ has "revealed" God. Different versions translate this word in various ways: *declared* (KJV), *explained* (NASB, LSV), *made...known* (NIV, ESV), *revealed* (HCSB). The term has the idea of relating or setting something forth in detail. John is claiming that Jesus Christ either gives or is the detailed disclosure of God.

In John 1:18, the text probably applies the label *God* specifically to God the Father. To say that no one has seen God is to say that no one has seen the Father. Why draw this distinction?

Sometimes Jesus (the Word) is identified as God. Other times He is distinguished from God. John does both these things in John 1:1. He says that the Word was *with* God, and yet the Word *was* God. Jesus, the Son, is God. People have seen Jesus—they have seen the Son. So when John says that no one has ever seen God, he cannot be speaking about the Son. He must be speaking about the Father, who is unseen and invisible (John 5:37; 1 Tim 1:17). When the term *God* is used without any other designation or qualification, it may be speaking specifically of God the Father. That is what John 1:18 does.



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www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
 900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Jesus has a different designation in this verse. Translations differ in how they render it. They say that He is the *only begotten* (KJV, NKJV, NASB, LSB), *only* (ESV), or *one and only* (HCSB, NIV). The traditional understanding of the word is *only begotten*. About a hundred years ago, some Greek scholars began to suggest that this expression might better be translated as *unique*. They traced the word to a different etymology. They also found some occurrences in secular Greek that seemed to fit the notion of *unique* better than *begotten*. As recently as thirty years ago, *unique* was still being taught as the best translation.

Since then, the pendulum has swung in the other direction. Many theologians and Greek scholars are recognizing that John 1:18 is drawing attention to the begetting of the Word. This shift is important, because *only begotten* is the term that describes most precisely the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Begetting is what distinguishes the Father from the Son. The Father is unbegotten. The Son is begotten but not made. This begetting is not simply a matter of Christ's incarnation, but of the Second Person's eternal subsistence in relation to the First Person.

So is Christ only begotten or is He unique? The answer is *yes!* Both are theologically correct. But the text is probably emphasizing His begottenness rather than His uniqueness.

One more thing needs to be said about *only begotten*. Begetting is not the same thing as beginning. Psalm 2:7 declares that the Father has begotten the Son "this day." Paul quotes this verse and applies it to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:28–37). Clearly the resurrection is not when Jesus began. In an important sense, the resurrection represents His begetting in terms of its public declaration. But it is not His beginning. Neither is His birth in the manger of Bethlehem. For the Father to be the Father, and for the Son to be the Son, the begetting and generation of the Son must be an ongoing and eternal act.

John 1:18 raises one more significant question. Some ancient manuscripts of the text call Jesus the only begotten *Son*. Other, even more ancient manuscripts call Him the only begotten *God*. Which is correct?

Theologically, both are true. Christ is the Father's only begotten Son. He is also the only begotten God. The Father, while God, is unbegotten. The Holy Spirit, while God, is not begotten but proceeds. Only the Son is begotten. He is the only begotten God.

Early copyists of the Greek New Testament regularly used abbreviations. The abbreviation for God (*theta sigma*) and the abbreviation for son (*upsilon sigma*, with a rough breathing mark over the upsilon) are nearly indistinguishable if written rapidly. Copyists could easily mistake one for the other. What seems to have happened is that the early reading *God* was mistaken and written as *son* by a scribe who had just read *only begotten*. But this is

a difference without any theological impact. Jesus Christ is both the only begotten Son and the only begotten God.

The point of this passage is that Jesus Christ, God's only begotten, has made God's character and will known to humans. Christ is the detailed revelation of who God is. Because He is God with the Father, He discloses the Father's disposition and will.

Later in Jesus' ministry, the disciple Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father (John 14:8). The request recalls the incident when Moses asked to see God's glory (Exod 33:18). God told Moses that no one could see His glory and live (33:20). Moses only got to see God's afterglow (Exod 33:23). But Jesus told Philip that whoever has seen Him has seen the Father (John 14:9). Philip had already been given the privilege that was denied to Moses. As Paul puts it, those who have met Jesus have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6).

There is only one God. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. They are not different Gods, but the same God. Each possesses the whole divine nature. We humans cannot ever see more of God than can be seen in Jesus Christ. All that the Father is, the Son is, except that the Son is not the Father. If we want to know God, then let us turn to the Son, the Word, Jesus Christ.



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.
