

Christ  
as  
Only God

by  
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Translation Problems  
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A

Christ  
as  
Only God

"No one has seen God at any time. The unique God, the one who is in the bosom of the father, that one has declared him." John 1:18.<sup>1</sup>

In the King James Version, Revised Standard Version, and a great majority of other translations this verse is translated to read "only begotten son", or "unique son", or some other similar translation. Very few read "God", two examples being the New American Standard Bible, and the Spanish Biblia de las Americas. The preponderance of translations reading "son" reflects a difficulty in rendering *μονογενης Θεος* in a theologically acceptable manner.

Text

The modern translators are not original in their problem. The scribes of various centuries have struggled over this difficulty also, and have passed on their struggles to us in a totally delightful selection of readings for this passage. Just pick your reading according to your theology!

There are four relatively important readings:

1. *μονογενης Θεος* P66<sup>x</sup>BC\*L
2. *ο μονογενης Θεος* P75 <sup>2c</sup>
3. *ο μονογενης υλος* ACKW<sup>supp</sup> X ΔΘΠΥ063 f1 f13
4. *μονογενης υλος Θεου* it
5. *ο μονογενης υγ*<sup>ms</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>ALL translations not otherwise credited are by the author.

Taking these in reverse order, 5 lacks external evidence. No. 4 appears to be a combination of 1 and 3. No. 2 is a slight variation of No. 1. This leaves 1 and 3 as possibilities for an original reading. No. 1 is the most difficult reading, superficially speaking, and would most likely have given rise to the others. A scribe thinking that in referring to Christ one should say "Son" could easily have changed the reading. A late scribe could have produced the 4th reading by combining two. It seems that the first reading is the best.

Externally, this reading is supported by the best mss of the Alexandrian tradition, although Western and Byzantine witnesses are not overly in evidence. Older witnesses consistently support *Θεός* as the correct reading. This, combined with the very strong internal evidence suggests strongly that *μονογενὴς Θεός* is the original reading.

The word *μονογενὴς* originally gave some difficulty, being mistaken for a derivative of *γεννᾶω* (to beget, to become the father of), rather than *γεννάω* (to be, to become.) It in fact means the only one being (or in existence), and does not at all imply creation or birth in which connection it has been used by modern "Arians". This text therefore refers to Jesus as the only, or unique God.

#### Theological Implications:

The text, as stated above supports the concept of the unity of God and Christ. The statement of unity was perhaps too strong for the scribes of old and the modern translators. Christ is one with and is, "the only God". "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." John 1:1.

The difficulty lies with a conceptual dichotomy between the natures and "duties of God the Son and God the Father. I would like here to avoid controversy concerning the physical difference in persons and concentrate on the character and work of these two parts of the Godhead in their roles in the plan of salvation.

The standard explanation of the plan of salvation given by Adventists is that God has a law. That law is the transcript of His character. For the violation of that law there is a penalty to be exacted. "The penalty must be exacted. The Lord does not save sinners by abolishing his law, the foundation of his government...." SDABC 6, p. 1070. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:23 RSV. Christ then takes our penalty by His death on the cross, and so shields us from the wrath of God. "And he is the propitiation for our sins:..." 1 John 2:2. A propitiation, according to Webster's Third New International Dictionary is "something that appeases or conciliates a deity".

From the above, some false concepts have been gleaned. 1. God is harsh and demanding, but Christ will plead for me. Sometimes this results in "I love Jesus, but I'm afraid of God." or, "Jesus is for children, but God is only for grownups." (an actual quote). 2. God is rigidly confined by His own law. 3. God is arbitrary, and will not give wayward man the slightest chance.

The first of these is settled in John 1:18 and some of the other texts from John which have been quoted. God the Father, and God the Son are one. They act as one. Neither has a bad temper which must be appeased by the other. Then why did Christ come? "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory...." John 1:14.

"...that one has declared him." John 1:18. "He who has seen me has seen the Father; . . ." John 14:9. Jesus came as a revelation of God (including Himself),

Secondly, God's law is his own character. "The law of God is as sacred as God Himself. It is a revelation of His will, a transcript of His character, the expression of love and wisdom." PP 52. In a sense, however, God is bound by his law. It would not be a transcript of his character if He were not like that. It is affirmed, however, in a number of Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy references that there is a penalty for the violation of God's law.

Thirdly, God is not arbitrary, because He has a way of escape for sinners. LR

But now there are some threads which must be tied together. Jesus came as revelation of God. But there were two aspects to this revelation. First, He lived a life on earth, He became one of us, He showed us His ideal for our lives. This is sufficient explanation for His life. But what of His death? That is the second aspect. It is made up also of two parts. It showed the immutability of God's law. "The law reveals the attributes of God's character, and not a jot or tittle of it could be changed to meet man in his fallen condition. God did not change His law, but He sacrificed Himself,...."

DA 762. The second aspect ends the previous quote. God showed that He Himself was prepared to take the penalty of his own law, so as to allow man to go completely free. yes, but...

It is dangerous to anthropomorphize God. Men are often given to vengeance in place of punishment. God can be both just and merciful. It is perhaps a failure to recognize this that has led men

to view Christ as merciful and God as vengeful. Only this has seemed to explain the occurrences and statements of the Bible.

Viewed in this way the text can be a beautiful theological gem rather than the problem passage that the ancient scribes viewed it as. God and the Son are one. God Himself came to earth. God Himself loves us enough to provide a way for our salvation. And it was God Himself who was revealed in the man Christ Jesus.