

WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT 1
IN MILLARD ERICKSON'S 2
TEACHING ABOUT JESUS DEITY, 3
HUMANITY, AND RETURN 4

BILL GROVER 5

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In memory of my dear wife Jan.

1

I'll love you forever Sweetheart.

2

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INTRODUCTION

Erickson was born in 1932 in Minnesota. His education consists of the B.A. from the University of Minnesota, the B.D. from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, the M.A. from the University of Chicago, and the Ph. D. from North Western University. Erickson is the author of over twenty-five books and many journal articles. He taught at Western Seminary in Portland and was the dean of Bethel Theological Seminary. Also, Erickson has been the president of the Evangelical Theological Society. His systematic theology, *Christian Theology*, is widely used in the training of pastoral students.

Erickson, an ordained Baptist minister, like many theologians, has arrived at his own doctrinal positions. He is an egalitarian believing that there should be equality among genders. He is only moderately Calvinistic. He rejects vigorously the tenet that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father. He is highly critical of various forms of liberal Christianity. And, Erickson teaches that the incarnation required the divine Son to forego His use of the infinite powers of God as omniscience and omnipresence.

I do think that one should be cautious in criticizing the views of God's servants. But I am put in the position of thinking

1 that if the Bible attributes full deity to Jesus Christ, which in
2 my view it clearly does, then affirming that the unchange-
3 able divine nature of our Lord Jesus requires that the infinite
4 properties of Christ be thought of as unaltered. We should
5 acknowledge in an uncompromising confession that Jesus, in
6 His divine nature, possesses all of the powers of God.

7 Portions of Erickson's teaching about the Person and return
8 of Christ differ from that of many evangelical theologians in
9 a number of ways and, as said, to explain these differences is
10 why I write. First, in regard to the Person of our Lord, with all
11 evangelicals, we can observe how focused the Bible is in ful-
12 filling its objective of defining the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture
13 is uncompromising in attributing deity to the divine nature of
14 Jesus. For example, Christ is "the image of the invisible God...
15 the representation of His essence" (Col. 1:15 ff; Heb 1:4). Christ
16 is God Himself and the creator of the universe (Jo 1:1-3; 20:28,
17 Titus 2:13, Heb 1:8). Below it will be shown that Christ as God
18 possesses the divine attributes such as eternality, omnipres-
19 ence, omnipotence, and omniscience which only are the traits
20 of God Almighty. Yet, our Bible also shows Christ, in His hu-
21 man condition as being born, maturing (Lk 2:52), becoming
22 weary at Jacob's well (Jo 4:6), not knowing some things (Mk
23 13:32), taking naps in a boat (Mk 4:38) and being subject to pas-
24 sion and death. These experiences cannot be true of God who
25 is unchangeable (Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17) and who cannot die. But if
26 Christ is God then how can such experiences be predicated of
27 Him? That is explained in texts as Philippians 2:6,7 where it is
28 stipulated that the divine, eternal Son added humanity to His
29 Person. Our Lord now exists in two natures divine and hu-
30 man. But that tenet is much easier said than explained. And,

beliefs regarding that doctrine are part of what distinguishes 1
Erickson's Christology from that of others. 2

While all evangelicals agree that Christ has both divine and 3
human natures existing in one Person, Christian theologians 4
nevertheless disagree on some particulars regarding what is 5
included in Jesus' human nature, what was the effect of the 6
incarnation on the divine nature, how one nature relates to 7
the other, and how Christ's divinity relates to God the Father. 8
Erickson can be shown to express strong opinions about these 9
topics, and this justifies my attempt to explain how Erickson's 10
Christology should viewed as being in sharp contrast in 11
several ways to that of many other evangelical theologians. 12
Because of his beliefs that the divine nature of our Lord is not 13
eternally begotten by and is only temporally role subordinate 14
to the Father, that Christ lost the use of divine powers in in- 15
carnating but had these powers restored in his glorification, 16
and that Christ does not ever act through one nature alone, 17
Erickson's distinguishes his Christology from the teachings of 18
many. But please note that I am neither saying that Erickson 19
is not an evangelical nor am I insisting that all elements in his 20
Christology are necessarily wrong. I will try to offer facts and 21
the reader can decide for him or herself. 22

Also, in regard to the return of our Lord, yes, Christ will 23
personally come again in His own way and in God's own 24
time. Generally, all evangelicals agree with that, but they dis- 25
agree about important particulars regarding Christ's second 26
coming. Yet, the Bible is meant for our understanding, and it 27
speaks often of Jesus' return. So, we should endeavor to grasp 28
what the Scriptures say about it. There is disagreement be- 29
tween Erickson's teaching about Christ's return and that of 30

1 many other evangelicals. Erickson adheres to the Historic,
2 Premillennial, Post-Tribulational position which distinguishes
3 his eschatology from that of a large number of other Christian
4 theologians. I will try to describe the different beliefs about
5 Christ's return held by evangelicals, some of the biblical and
6 theological evidences behind each, and where Erickson's
7 views are different from many. Again, this effort is not meant
8 to condemn any evangelical.

9 The issues which I intend to discuss basically will reveal
10 that scholars trained at the highest level of biblical interpreta-
11 tion and in the complexities of systematic theology and some-
12 times, as well, in historical dogma, despite such exhaustive
13 training do not agree on a number of doctrines concerning
14 theology about Christ who is the very center of our faith. To
15 a large extent, I believe the reasons behind these differences
16 can be explained to Christian laypersons not formally having
17 seminary level training in biblical interpretation and theol-
18 ogy. And attempting this is required in order to fulfill the pre-
19 scriptions in texts as 1 Timothy 5:17, 6:3, 2 Timothy 2:2, and
20 Titus 1:9 which mandate such instruction. There are many
21 Scriptures which pertain to the Christological doctrines that
22 are connected to the theology about Christ's Person and His
23 return. A believer should not avoid an encounter with the
24 contradicting viewpoints on these Scriptures and doctrines
25 held by reputable evangelical scholars. Yes, this can be confus-
26 ing at times, but I believe a diligent student of the Bible who
27 wishes to understand will learn much by making this attempt.

28 But evaluating the contrary opinions among evangelicals
29 on the return of Christ, the two natures in Christ, and how our
30 Lord's divine nature relates to the Father requires a number of

guiding principles. One of these is fairness which involves a 1
serious attempt to understand the opinions expressed by oth- 2
ers and to represent them honestly. Another is being open to 3
the direction of the Holy Spirit. This must not be in the man- 4
ner of supposing a position of superiority in erudition or be- 5
lieving that one possesses a spiritual giftedness exceeding 6
those of others. Although, by that last statement I do not mean 7
to imply that the Holy Spirit does not endow believers with 8
special charismata. But I think following the direction of the 9
Spirit in general instead means keeping a prayerful attitude 10
of respect for vigorous Bible interpretation and a personal 11
humility and surrender to God knowing that we all are liable 12
to commit errors. That is why I will do my best to carefully 13
and honestly explain variant viewpoints and the reasons for 14
these, but I will try to avoid pushing my own beliefs on the 15
reader other than wholeheartedly affirming Jesus' deity and 16
humanity existing in one Person. I cannot think of a better 17
example to emulate than the theologically favored Augustine 18
who wrote 19

Lord the one God, God the Trinity, whatever I have said in 20
these books that is of Thine, may they acknowledge who are 21
Thine, if anything of my own, may it be pardoned both by 22
Thee and by those who are Thine. Amen.¹ 23

My understanding of the Christological beliefs of Erickson 24
is derived from a number of his books which cover a period of 25
several decades. I think it may be helpful to briefly survey the 26
content of each of these: 27

"Making Sense of the Trinity" (2000) is a small book con- 28
taining three chapters which deal with whether the Trinity 29
is biblical, whether it makes sense, and whether it makes any 30

1 difference. I find Erickson view interesting, but in my opinion
2 incorrect, that Christ can be fully God but not be omnipresent
3 because He is in a body,² that in the incarnation the Divine
4 Son lost direct access to the consciousness of the Father,³ and
5 that, nevertheless, by a process called perichoresis there is an
6 interpenetration of life and personality within the
7 Godhead, the idea that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are
8 bound together in such a close unity that the life of each flows
9 through each of the others, and each has access to the thought
10 and experience of the others.⁴

11 If the life of the Father flows into the Son, how can the Son
12 know less than the Father knows? If God is an omnipresent
13 Spirit, how can He be restricted by a physical body? These
14 ideas will receive attention in future chapters. But, there is
15 much here in Erickson's little volume that other evangelicals
16 reject.

17 "The Word Became Flesh" (1991) is a large volume of over
18 600 pages. It has an over- all focus on contemporary incarna-
19 tional Christology. ["Incarnational" refers to the pre-existent,
20 divine Son of God adding to His Person the human nature.]
21 Part1 of the book discusses the historical aspect of the Creed
22 of Chalcedon of the fifth century. Part 2 deals with various
23 types of theology as Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology,
24 and Black Theology and also includes thoughts on the histo-
25 ricity of the Christian faith. Part 3 purports to construct a con-
26 temporary incarnational Christology. This section of the book
27 relates to my subject in its chapter on the logic of the incar-
28 nation wherein Erickson opines that Jesus must have given
29 up the use of His divine powers of omniscience, omnipotence,
30 and omnipresence in order to become human.⁵ I will later

have to note that I and many evangelicals do not accept that view, and I will explain why.

“The Evangelical Mind and Heart” (1993) is said to offer perspectives on theological and practical issues. The practical issues discussed are those of ecology, signs and wonders, and whether there is a shortage of the clergy. My particular interest in this writing is in chapter 5 “Contemporary Evangelical Christology.” Here Erickson claims,

In the incarnation some of the qualities of abstract deity (though not of essential deity) became latent. This means, for example that Jesus continued to possess the omniscience that pertains to God in the abstract, but that it was latent during His time on earth...Before the incarnation He chose to so limit Himself that He had access to that infinite knowledge only when the Father made it available to Him.⁶

One should note that Erickson assumes several points which he does not attempt to justify. What is the evidence that omniscience, or any attribute, can be held only in abstract or that

God can discontinue His use of His attributes? What Scriptures say that the pre-existent Son chose to limit the use of His divine powers? Philippians 2:6,7 does not say that. Could Erickson be wrongly attributing weakness to Christ's divine nature which is true only of His human nature? Can the Persons in God even have different levels of active intelligence? None of these problems with Erickson's teaching are settled in this book.

“God in Three Persons” (1995) also has three parts. Part one has three chapters which discuss the historical formation of Trinitarianism. The next three chapters in Part two treat

1 three problems with Trinitarianism. And Part Three consists
2 of fourteen chapters which comprise “a contemporary state-
3 ment” that God exists in three “Persons.” It is here I find more
4 reason for writing of my book. For in chapter 13 Erickson ex-
5 presses his belief that much of Christendom --which since the
6 first century has taught that God the Father from eternity has
7 generated or has begotten God the Son-- is wrong,⁷ and that
8 the incarnation affected a temporary, functional change in
9 how the Son relates to the Father.⁸ We can assume that the
10 change Erickson has in mind includes that in the incarnation
11 the divine nature of Christ must have become dependent on
12 the Father in order to on occasion use the divine attributes of
13 God.

14 In “Contemporary Opinions on Eschatology” (1982) Erickson
15 states he has written a book requested by his students which
16 would examine various options in eschatology. He covers three
17 conflicting millennial positions which concern Christ’s return:
18 Postmillennialism, Amillennialism, and Premillennialism. He
19 evaluates each position. Then Erickson proceeds to explain the
20 several views on how Jesus’ second Coming relates time wise
21 to the Tribulation: Dispensationalism, Pre Tribulationalism,
22 Post Tribulationalism, and the Partial Rapture view. This book
23 does not strongly endorse any one position but is purposed
24 only to provide the strong and weak points of each. Erickson
25 is only bent here on explaining the different eschatological
26 views-and that is worthwhile. Later in his systematic theol-
27 ogy Erickson will argue for his particular eschatology.

28 What is seems curious to me is that just five year before
29 (1977) Erickson had composed “A Basic Guide to Eschatology”
30 which covers the same material, even with the same chapter

names, in much the same manner as his 1982 work. So, one might wonder why his students could not simply use the earlier book instead of asking Erickson to write another.

In my opinion, Erickson's "Who's Tampering with the Trinity" (2009) is very interesting as it thoroughly assesses two positions in the current relational subordination debate: (1) Christ in His deity always has been role subordinate to the Father, or (2) Christ in his deity was only obedient to the Father during His time on earth. The latter is Erickson's position. Note that Erickson only explains and evaluates the argumentation for these two positions. There is a third view however which is that at no time was the divine nature role subordinate. Instead only the humanity of Jesus was subject to the Father and will always be subordinate. Unfortunately, Erickson does not extrapolate on this position despite it being endorsed by such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Calvin, and C. Hodge.⁹ Nevertheless, much material will be derived from this volume in chapter six of my book.

God the Father Almighty (1998) is a book on the attributes of God such as immutability, omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. Despite the title having "Father" in it, Erickson

does not limit the divine attributes to the first Person of the Trinity. Erickson makes it clear that he discusses not just the Father in particular but the nature of God in general.¹⁰ That is, the attributes of God belong to each member of the Trinity as each is God. Both traditional and non-traditional views on God's attributes are explained and biblical texts are often referenced and explicated. But Erickson here accepts the traditional positions. For example, he writes that God's omniscience is a "function of the being of God."¹¹ And in regard to

1 God's immutability Erickson affirms that the Bible says that
2 God is "the unchanging one."¹² But these two positions suggest
3 a difficulty in Erickson's understanding of the incarnation
4 which he says caused the divine Son to lose the independent
5 use of omniscience. If God is immutable and omniscient, how
6 can God incarnate not know some things?

7 Christian Theology (2013) is a popular systematic theol-
8 ogy used in seminary. It has over a thousand pages and cov-
9 ers the common tenets in systematic theology as the doctrines
10 of (1) God, (2) Sin, (3) Christ, (4) the Holy Spirit, (5) Salvation,
11 (6) the Church, and (7) the Last Things. I will find this volume
12 very helpful in defining Erickson's positions of the divine at-
13 tributes, the Trinity, Christ's role subordination to the Father,
14 the effects of the incarnation on the divine Son, how the two
15 natures in Christ relate the one to the other, and how the Great
16 Tribulation and the Millennium relate to Jesus' second coming.

17 In summary, it is my understanding that Erickson's
18 Christology varies from many other theologians in his beliefs
19 that (1) the divine nature of the Son is not eternally begotten
20 of the Father, (2) when incarnating Christ was required to
21 give up the use of some divine attributes, (3) the divine nature
22 only temporally was in submission to the Father's author-
23 ity, (4) Christ does not act distinctly through each nature, (5)
24 the divine nature was glorified as His powers were restored
25 after the resurrection, and, (6) Christ will return after the
26 Great Tribulation but before the Millennium. As I have said,
27 Erickson's views may be correct, but those views have been
28 challenged by many. To explain why they have been chal-
29 lenged is my purpose for writing this book.

END NOTES CHAPTER ONE

1. Augustine. *On The Trinity*, 28.57. 2
2. Millard J. Erickson. *Making Sense of the Trinity*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000),60. 3
4
3. *Ibid.* 5
4. *Ibid.*, 57. 6
5. Erickson. *The Word Became Flesh*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 553-561. 7
8
6. Erickson. *The Evangelical Mind and Heart*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 104. 9
10
7. Erickson. *God in Three Persons*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 305, 309. 11
12
8. *Ibid.*, 307. 13
9. Gregory Nazianzus. *Third Theological OratioOn on the Son*.18; John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 2.14.2; Charles Hodge. *Systematic Theology Vol II* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981 reprint), 395 14
15
16
17
10. Erickson. *God the Father Almighty*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 13. 18
19
11. *Ibid.*, 184. 20
12. *Ibid.*, 96. 21

CHRIST IS GOD

Erickson does teach, of course, that Christ is God, although, in the opinion of some, he has greatly minimalized what must be included to be God. That will be mostly be explained in chapter four. But to put the Bible's affirmation of Christ's deity in focus for now, let's note some places where the New Testament explicitly calls Jesus Christ "God." (Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this chapter are from the NET Bible.)

* John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word. and the Word was with God and the Word was fully God."

The New World translation¹ notes correctly that the first "God" has the definite article in front of it (*ton theon*), but the second "God" does not. So, because of that difference, that translation mistakenly arrives at a heretical Christology by rendering the text as "the Word was with God and the Word was a god."¹ But this translation presents several problems. First, to a Jewish mind, as John, the Creator of the universe is Elohim (Gen 1:1) who is Yahweh (Jehovah) (Gen 2:4). And, Yahweh is the only God (Isa 45:5). But in John 1:1, the Word (the Son) is the Creator. Therefore, The Word is truly God, the Creator, not "a god." Then, the second instance of the noun "God" in John 1:1 may have been left anarthrous (no article)

1 in order to indicate that the Son is not all there is to God.² That
2 is, the Father and the Holy Spirit also are God. Next, it is to
3 be noted that in the Greek the order is “God was the Word”
4 not “the Word was God.” And, it has been argued by Morris³
5 that a definite noun which precedes the verb regularly lacks
6 the article. This is called the “Colwell Rule.” Fourth, the word
7 “God,” in the New Testament often does not have the article
8 for example, there is no article in the Greek in front of “God”
9 in John 1:6, 12, 13, and 18 (where God the Father is the sub-
10 ject). Also see texts as Romans 1:17, Galatians 1:14, Philippians
11 2:11 or Colossians 1:2 where “God” is not articulated. Fifth,
12 even in this same book of John (1:18, 20:28), the noun “God” is
13 applied to Jesus and there it has the article. The New World
14 Translation of John 1:1 is, therefore, both grammatically and
15 theologically incorrect.

16 * John 1:18: No one has ever seen God. The only one him-
17 self God, who is in the presence of the Father, has made God
18 known.

19 Did the author in 1:18 intend to say “the only begotten Son”
20 as the King James has it or is the better reading “only (mean-
21 ing “one of a kind”) God”? There are two issues: text and word
22 meaning. First, this verse presents a textual problem which
23 is an issue concerning how the original Greek text was writ-
24 ten. We do not have the original which John wrote. So, we
25 compare the earliest copies available. And, the earliest cop-
26 ies (p66 and p75) read *monogenēs theos* (only, or only begot-
27 ten,⁴ God). It further has been thought unlikely that a copy-
28 ist would change the reading from “Son” to “God.”⁵ Second, see
29 chapter three regarding the meaning of the word *monogenēs*.

But according to the best evidence we have, John 1:18 is an affirmation that Jesus Christ is God.

* Romans 9:5: To them belong the patriarchs, and from them, by human descent, came the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever!

You will observe that in the NET Bible the clause ends after "forever" indicating that Christ, Himself, is God over all. However, the RSV renders the verse, "To them belong the patriarchs and of their race according to the flesh is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever." By putting a period after "Christ," the verse is not, in the RSV, made a declaration of the divinity of the Son and the second clause becomes a doxology. It is up to the translator to supply the punctuation. So, the translator's work can influence one's decision on whether the apostle calls Christ "God" in Romans 9:5. And, other issues on which there is not agreement affect the translator's decision.

Kasemann asserts that since Paul never calls Christ "God," it cannot be that the text is an affirmation of Christ's deity.⁶ However, as Dunne notes, "Paul was already used to associating Christ with God and attributing divine functions to Christ." But Dunne's reservation over whether Paul would call Christ "God over all" is based on 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 where Christ delivers up the kingdom to God the Father.⁷ If Christ gives up the kingdom, how can He be God over all is Dunne's issue. However, first as will be shown, in Titus 2:13 Paul clearly calls Jesus "God," and in Romans 10:13 the apostle applies the LXX (i.e., the Septuagint, a pre Christian, Greek translation of Old Testament) form of the tetragrammaton (YHWH) found in Joel 2:32 to Christ. If Paul called Christ "Yahweh," he surely could have called Christ "God." Further in Philippians 2 Christ

1 is said to exist - not to have "existed" in God's nature (The tense
2 is present). God cannot stop being God! So, Kasemann's objec-
3 tion is nullified.

4 Second at issue in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 is whether
5 "Christ" in the passage refers to the the divine nature of Jesus
6 or whether it is better understood as referencing Jesus' hu-
7 manity. But 15:20 which begins the passage refers to Christ
8 being raised from the dead and that the resurrection came
9 through a man. Did the divine nature die? Was the divine
10 nature resurrected? So, it seems likely that it is the human-
11 ity of Christ which yields up the Kingdom to the Father- not
12 the deity of Christ. This is the opinion of others as Augustine,
13 Hillary, and Ambrose.⁸ Further, according to Hebrew 1:8 and 2
14 Peter 1:11 the kingdom of Christ has no end. It seems a better
15 understanding of 1Corinthians 15:24-28, therefore, is that the
16 Father joins the Son as the mutual Ruler of the kingdom not
17 that the Son relinquishes His authority over it. Third, it seems
18 unlikely that the ending of Romans 9:5 is a doxology as Paul's
19 practice is to name the deity before the doxology as in Romans
20 1:25, "the Creator, who is blessed forever." Finally, as Paul had
21 just defined the humanity of our Lord ("by human descent")
22 it would naturally follow that he should now address Christ's
23 divinity.⁹

24 *Titus 2:13: as we wait for the happy fulfillment of our hope
25 in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus
26 Christ.

27 The NET Bible leaves out an important definite article in
28 its translation. The Greek, reads "the great God and Savior."
29 This is significant for understanding the text because of what
30 is known as the Granville Sharp Rule. This rule is that when

an articulated, singular noun is joined to a following singular 1
noun of the same case which is not articulated and is joined 2
to the first by the conjunction *kai* (and), then the second noun 3
refers to the same individual as the first. The rule is applied 4
here by the New Testament Greek experts Robertson and 5
Wallace.¹⁰ Therefore, Titus 2:13 is a plain reference to the New 6
Testament calling Jesus Christ "God." 7

* John 20:28: Thomas replied to Him, "My Lord and my God." 8

It should be noted that Thomas' exclamation upon seeing 9
the resurrected Jesus whom he, himself customarily referred 10
to as "Lord" (Jo 14:5), just as did the other apostles (Jo 13:13), 11
should be understood as addressing Jesus. This is plainly 12
shown by the phrase "replied to Him." Thomas is calling Christ 13
"God" just as John in 1:1 and 1:18 refers to Jesus as God. This is 14
not a prayer to God above; it is a confession that God enfleshed 15
stands before him. 16

*Hebrews 1:8: but of the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, 17
is forever and ever." 18

An issue is whether or not "O God" is vocative, that is be- 19
ing addressed to the Son. Westcott believes that it is, and he 20
consequently translates, "God is Thy throne."¹¹ However, God 21
is nowhere else ever called a "throne." And clearly verse 9, "So 22
God, your God" and stating that Christ was involved in cre- 23
ation (1:2) evidences that the author of Hebrews is not adverse 24
to calling Jesus "God." Further, the passage is stating how the 25
Son is greater than the angels. So, the opining of many is that 26
this text is yet another evidence that Christ is God.¹² 27

* 2 Peter 1:1: From Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus 28
Christ, to those who through the righteous of our God and 29

1 Savior, Jesus Christ, have been granted a faith just as precious
2 as ours.

3 Here the Greek construction is the same as Titus 2:13, that
4 is, "The God of us and Savior Jesus Christ." The verse is saying
5 that Jesus is both Savior and God. One can observe this same
6 construction in other texts in 2 Peter as well:

7 2:20, The Lord of us and Savior

8 3:18, The Lord of us and Savior

9 In all three the Greek reads article, singular noun, conjunc-
10 tion *kai*, singular noun. And, in all three the second noun re-
11 fers back to the first. 2 Peter 1:1 clearly refers to Jesus as God.

12 But, in addition to referring to Christ as God, Scripture
13 also ascribes the attributes of God to Christ. Let's first allow
14 Erickson, himself, to inform us on what is included in the di-
15 vine powers. Erickson explains that the attributes of God con-
16 stitutes what God is .¹³ Then, one could not understand that
17 without His attributes God could not be God? So, if God is no
18 longer omniscient, He is no longer God? We will come back
19 to that thought. Erickson proceeds to classify the divine attri-
20 butes as communicable (e.g., humans have degrees of these as
21 "love") and incommunicable.¹⁴ Among this second group are
22 included God's omnipotence, unchangeableness, omnipres-
23 ence, and omniscience.¹⁵ These qualities, Erickson says, must
24 remain constant with God as God is also "immutable." Erickson
25 elaborates,

26 There is no quantitative change. God cannot
27 increase in anything because He is already
28 perfection. Nor can He decrease, for if He were
29 to, He would cease to be God. There also is no

qualitative change. God's nature does not un- 1
dergo modification...His nature remains un- 2
changed no matter what occurs. 3

But wait, the incarnation of God was an occurrence, right? 4
And speaking of the incarnate God, Erickson asserts that Christ 5
in "taking a physical body involved having a definite physical 6
location, and this meant separation from the Father."¹⁶ Having 7
a definite location and being separated from the Father are 8
"modifications" right? Sure, Erickson asserts that the incarnate 9
Son "still had the power to be everywhere,"¹⁷ but "as an incar- 10
nate being Christ was limited in exercising omniscience."¹⁸ 11
Christ could not use a power which He still had? Does that 12
make any sense? Some may think that Erickson is double talk- 13
ing his readers here. The divine Son who is immutable in his 14
powers becomes incarnate and so cannot exercise those pow- 15
ers. There is lots more on this topic in chapter four. But for now, 16
observe that Scripture portrays Christ after the incarnation as 17
being omnipresent (Mt 20:28; Eph 1:23), omnipotent (Col 1:17; 18
Rev. 1:8), omniscient (John 21:17; Col. 2:3), eternal (Rev. 1:8; Heb 19
1:8), and immutable (Heb 1:12; 13:8). 20

Because of such affirmations in Scripture, evangelical sys- 21
tematic theologies commonly insist that Christ possesses the 22
divine attributes. Strong, for example, teaches that Christ, 23
among others of the divine qualities, is omnipotent, omni- 24
present, and omniscient.¹⁹ Berkhof also notes that Scripture 25
ascribes to Christ the divine attributes as omnipresence and 26
omniscience.²⁰ Likewise, Grudem details why he affirms 27
the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of Jesus.²¹ 28
Should one wonder how it these can aver that Christ had such 29

1 powers given that He became human, and a mere human can-
2 not possess such attributes, the answer is that our Lord be-
3 came human without ceasing to be God. Yes, He became man,
4 but He did not stop being God. As Calvin explains it, the Son
5 descended from heaven without ever leaving heaven.²²

6 But despite the Bible frequently ascribing the divine at-
7 tributes to the Son of God, Erickson is strangely quiet in his
8 systematic theology, *Christian Theology*, on that topic in his
9 chapter 31 called "The Deity of Christ." Yes, Erickson discusses
10 topics as Jesus' self-consciousness which alludes to Christ's
11 pre-existence, but nowhere in the chapter is it stipulated that
12 the pre-existent Christ as God is omniscient or omnipres-
13 ent. Instead even in a chapter used to exhibit Christ's deity,
14 Erickson is intent on maintaining that the powers of deity be-
15 came latent in the incarnated God. His deity "was exercised
16 and experienced only in concert with His humanity."²³ So, the
17 omniscient one became ignorant because by incarnating He
18 then had a human brain which did not allow Him the faculty
19 of omniscience. And, the omnipresent one became localized
20 because He then had physical body which did not allow Him
21 to be present everywhere!? But, is there no reason to believe
22 that the incarnate God exists both in and outside of His hu-
23 manity? Of course there is a reason. God cannot change. The
24 omniscient, omnipresent divine nature must continue to be so
25 because God is immutable.

26 And that Christ exists in two natures with separate activi-
27 ties, the unchangeable divine nature unaltered in its infinite
28 powers and the changeable humanity weak and without di-
29 vine abilities, is what is taught in the church fathers. Observe
30 that Athanasius declares that the divine Son while present

in the body was not absent elsewhere. Even as He walked on 1
earth, He continued to quicken the universe. Athanasius de- 2
nies that the divine abilities and activities of the Son were cur- 3
tailed by the brain or body of Christ.²⁴ Or consider Augustine 4
who distinguishes what should be attributed to the Son as 5
man from what is to be ascribed to the Son as God.²⁵ Or note 6
the teaching of John of Damascus who precisely educates us , 7

When, then, we speak of His divinity we do not 8
ascribe to it the properties of humanity...Nor 9
again do we predicate of His flesh or of His hu- 10
manity the properties of divinity...Christ, then, 11
energizes according to both of His natures...the 12
Word performing through the authority and 13
power of its divinity all the actions proper to 14
the Word...and the body performing all actions 15
proper to the body.²⁶ 16

So, where Erickson would predicate the ignorance of Christ 17
(Mk 13:32) to the divine nature²⁷, the Damascene instead 18
would connect it to the human nature only. But why would 19
Erickson be so different? Read more of the answer to that in 20
chapter four. 21

Yet, for now observe that one aspect of Erickson's teaching 22
on how the Persons in the Trinity relate could be in conflict 23
with his understanding that Christ incarnate "did not have 24
direct access to the consciousness of the Father and of the 25
Holy Spirit. He did not consciously know all that the Father 26
knew."²⁸ That aspect is Erickson's belief in perichoresis which 27
means "the life of each of the Persons flows through each of 28

1 the others and each has direct contact to the consciousness of
2 the others."²⁹ Were this doctrine correct, then the Incarnation
3 which Erickson claims caused the divine Son to be separated
4 from the Father and to lose the use of His divine powers would
5 not only have affected the Son, it also would have seemingly
6 modified the function of the Father and the Holy Spirit. For,
7 if the Son no longer has access to the life or consciousnesses
8 of the other Persons of the Trinity, then They no longer have
9 their life and consciousnesses flowing into the Son. But can
10 such a modification be thought as being compatible with the
11 unchangeableness of God? Can Christ first having access to
12 the life and experience of the Father then not having that fit
13 with what which should be understood of the constancy at-
14 tributed to Jesus in Hebrews 1:12, "You are the same," and 13:8,
15 "Jesus Christ is the same." But if Christ as God first has the full
16 use of God's powers then no longer has the use of them or if
17 Christ as God first has the life of the Trinity flowing into Him,
18 then does not, how is Christ immutable? But, I'm getting far
19 ahead of myself. More on this later.

END NOTES: CHAPTER TWO

1

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CHRIST AS SON

2

It may surprise the reader to learn that evangelical scholars do not agree on how Christ is God's Son. Van Bruggen is of the opinion that the term "Son of God" should not be used to refer to the pre-existent divine Person. It instead was the "Word" who was pre-existent. Van Bruggen states several arguments which he believes support his view. First, John 1:1-3 identifies "the reality before the incarnation" as the Word not the Son. Second, John 3:16 indicates that as Son, Christ's work is only fulfilled on earth. Third, the "only begotten Son" describes a man. Fourth, "The expression 'Son of God' cannot be abstracted from Jesus of Bethlehem born of the Virgin Mary." Fifth, "the name 'Son of God' came into the world after the incarnation."¹ This view, however, is contrary to the well-established dogma of the early church which taught that Christ is eternally Son through a process of being begotten (or generated) by the Father (see below).

Van Bruggen is not denying the deity of Christ, of course, he is rather distinguishing the proper term to be used of that divine Person before and after the incarnation. The Word becomes the "Son of God" by becoming human—being born of Mary through divine power-- is seemingly what Van Bruggen

1 is saying. But some may think otherwise taking instead the
2 position that as God sent His Son “into the world,” Christ,
3 therefore, must have existed as Son before that. Note 1 John
4 4:9: “God sent His only begotten Son into the world” (KJV). But,
5 does “into” allude to after or before the incarnation?

6 Then, there is a second view that the phrase “Son of God”
7 denotes a position of relational inferiority. Wayne Grudem is
8 insistent that the role of obeying is

9 appropriate to the role of the Son...if the Son is
10 not eternally subordinate to the Father in role,
11 then the Father is not eternally Father and the
12 Son is not eternally Son. This would mean that
13 the Trinity has not eternally existed.²

14 Note that Grudem is not saying that the Son is subordinate
15 in essence-only in authority.

16 In contrast, a third position is that of Erickson who opines
17 that what should be understood by the Scripture calling Christ
18 “God’s Son” is that Christ is equal to the Father. As evidence of
19 this position, Erickson contends that “the word ‘son’ for the
20 Jews referred less to derivation from the father and more to the
21 likeness of the son to the father.” Erickson sees John 5:18, “(He)
22 said also that God was His Father making Himself equal with
23 God” (KJV) as evidencing the Son’s equality with the Father.³
24 While Erickson does not reference this study, Bess notes that
25 in the Old Testament phrases as “sons of the prophets” or “sons
26 of the troop” do not indicate subordination to or derivation
27 from but, instead, membership in a group.⁴ So, being God’s
28 Son would mean that Christ is included in what is God. Thus

far we have seen three understandings of the phrase “Son of God”: (1) Van Bruggen=being born of Mary by the power of God the Father, (2) Grudem=being role subordinate to God the Father, (3) Erickson=being equal to God the Father.

But, fourth, the pre dominate position of the early church was that Christ is Son of God because He is eternally begotten of the Father. And, this doctrine also is held by many moderns as well like Donald Crisp. Crisp avers that there are three reasons for accepting the doctrine that God the Father eternally begets Son who is therefore truly God.⁵ One reason is that by that doctrine the individualization between the Father and the Son is made. One begets and one is begotten. Be reminded that Grudem believes that the Son’s eternal relational subordination to the Father provides that individualization. One directs and one is directed. A second reason for accepting the tenet of the Son’s eternal generation, according to Crisp, is that it is implied in the Bible. A third reason is that it was held in the ecumenical symbols (i.e., creeds) of the early church. I wish to spend some time on Crisp’s last two reasons.

But first note that Erickson in one book rejects the ancient doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. He argues that the “begetting passages” (e.g. Jo 1:14, KJV) which call Christ the only begotten Son “should be seen as referring to the earthly residence of Jesus.”⁶ So, let’s look closely at the strength of Crisp’s final two reasons for believing in the eternal generation of the Son: (1) It was the belief of the early church (and I will also reference the creeds of the Reformation) , and, (2) It is implied in Scripture (here I will discuss biblical texts and the meaning of the Greek compound adjective *monogenēs* which often is thought used to allude to the Son’s

1 generation. The reader should keep in mind that by his posi-
2 tion of rejecting the tenet of the eternal generation of the Son
3 that, Erickson is setting himself apart from much of the teach-
4 ing of the church and from the interpretations of many other
5 evangelicals. That does not necessarily make Erickson incor-
6 rect, but it does make his Christology different.

7 So, did the early church teach that the Son is eternally be-
8 gotten of the Father? Yes! Origin informs that the Son's gener-
9 ation is before all creation.⁷ And, John of Damascus assures his
10 readers that Christ was everlastingly, without time, begotten
11 of the Father.⁸ And Augustine also states that Christ was be-
12 gotten "apart from time."⁹ And Athanasius declares that "the
13 Son is begotten of the Father without beginning and eternal-
14 ly."¹⁰ These are not merely examples of random views among
15 some church fathers. They are expressions of the orthodox
16 belief of that time as demonstrated by the early ecumenical
17 creeds of the church:

18 The Nicene Creed (325/381): "And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
19 the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all
20 the worlds..."

21 The Chalcedonian Creed (451): "Our Lord Jesus Christ...be-
22 gotten before all ages of the Father..."

23 The Council of Constantinople (680-681): "Our Lord Jesus
24 Christ must be confessed to be very God...begotten of His
25 Father before all ages according to His Godhead."

26 And, this same doctrine of the eternal generation of the
27 Son is reflected as well in the creeds of the Reformation:

28 Luther's Small Catechism 1529): "Jesus Christ, true God, be-
29 gotten of the Father from eternity."

Belgic Confession (1561): “Jesus Christ, according to His di- 1
vine nature, is the only begotten Son of God, begotten from 2
eternity.” 3

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571): 4
“The Son, which is the Word, begotten from everlasting from 5
the Father.” 6

The Westminster Confession (1647): “The Son is eternally 7
begotten of the Father.” 8

Clearly such an array of creedal statements indicate that 9
millions of believers have affirmed that the Son is eternally 10
generated (begotten) of the Father. But there is not one refer- 11
ence to eternal generation in Erickson’s *Christian Theology*. Of 12
course, despite such overwhelming acceptance of it, the doc- 13
trine may not be correct. But one would think that in his ac- 14
claimed systematic theology, Erickson would at least discuss a 15
belief held by millions of believers through the centuries. But 16
more important than it being the dogma of so many is wheth- 17
er there is a basis for it in Scripture. So, let’s look at what is 18
understood to be the biblical evidence for the doctrine of the 19
eternal generation of the Son. (All of the following Scripture 20
quotations are from the NET Bible.) 21

Psalm 2:7. “The King says, I will tell you what the LORD de- 22
creed. He said unto me: You are my son. This very day I have 23
become your father!” 24

Among some of the church fathers and moderns too, this 25
text alludes to the eternal generation of the Son. Origen, for 26
example, elaborates on the text in this manner: 27

“Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten 28
Thee.” This is spoken to Him by God, with 29

1 whom all time is today...The day is today with
2 Him in which the Son is begotten, and thus the
3 beginning of His birth is not found as neither is
4 the day of it.¹²

5 And, Giles opines that Psalm 2:7 gives “biblical justification
6 for designating the eternal self-differentiation between the
7 Father and the Son as *the eternal begetting of the Son...* .13

8 However, against this understanding are, perhaps, the
9 New Testament references to Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13: 30, 32, 33
10 and Hebrews 1:5: 5:5:

11 God raised Him from the dead. And we pro-
12 claim to you the good news about the prom-
13 ise to our ancestors that God has fulfilled to
14 us, their children, by raising Jesus, as it is also
15 written in the second Psalm, **You are my Son;**
16 **today I have fathered you.** / So also Christ did
17 not glorify Himself in becoming high priest, but
18 the one who glorified Him was God, who said
19 unto Him, **You are my Son! Today I have fa-**
20 **thered you.**

21 These texts do not appear to connect Psalm 2:7 to the doc-
22 trine of eternal generation but instead to Christ being risen
23 from the dead and by that resurrection becoming our High
24 Priest. It is not clear to some, therefore, that Psalm 2:7 is evi-
25 dence of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father.

26 Proverbs 8:12, 22, 25 with 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30.

“ I wisdom live with prudence...The LORD cre- 1
 ated me as the beginning of His way, before 2
 His works of old. ...Before the mountains were 3
 settled, before the hills, I was brought forth/ 4
 Christ `I is the power and the wisdom of God... 5
 Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God.” 6

(see below that “created in Prov 8 is *qānāh* which is bet- 7
 ter translated “acquired”; *bārā* is the common term for create.). 8
 Readers should note that Athanasius’ discourses against the 9
 Arians –heretics who asserted that the Son of God is a created 10
 being and not of one essence with the Father—is comprised 11
 of explanations of texts wrongly used to evidence that Christ 12
 is a merely a creature. Athanasius spends six chapters in his 13
 second discourse on Proverbs 8. The Son cannot be a creature, 14
 this church father argues, because the Son is He who created 15
 all, ¹⁴ the Son is worshipped, ¹⁵ and the Word is unique as being 16
the Son.¹⁶ 17

Giles launches an argument meant to identify the Wisdom 18
 in Proverbs 8 with the work of Jesus. First, Christ is from the 19
 beginning, but so is Wisdom (Prov. 8: 22, 23). Second, Christ 20
 descended from heaven, but so did Wisdom (Prov 8:31). Third, 21
 Second, Christ is Creator. But so is Wisdom (Prov 8:27-30). 22
 Fourth, Christ is born of God. But do is Wisdom (Prov. 8:25). 23
 Fifth, Paul in 1Corinthians identifies Christ as Wisdom.¹⁷ 24

Giles is not alone among moderns to connect Wisdom in 25
 Proverbs 8 to Wisdom is in 1 Corinthians 1. Bruce in com- 26
 menting on 1 Corinthians 1:24 avers, 27

1 The identification of Christ with the **Wisdom**
2 **of God** in primitive Christianity carries with
3 it the ascription to Him of the functions predi-
4 cated of personified Wisdom in the Wisdom
5 literature of the OT and inter-testamental pe-
6 riod, especially as God’s agent in revelation and
7 creation.¹⁸

8 Grudem also thinks that Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is not a mere
9 personification of God, but is more than a personification. For
10 what, Grudem argues, could working as a crafts man at God’s
11 side in creation and rejoicing before Him (Prov 8:31 NET) in-
12 dicate other than a Person. But Grudem cautions his reader
13 not to understand Wisdom as being created. In Proverbs 8:22-
14 25 the verb sometimes translated “create” is *qānāh* not *bārā*.
15 And, Grudem explains that *qānāh* generally means “to get,
16 to acquire.” So, “The Father summoned (as in ‘acquiring’) the
17 Son to work with Him in the activity of creation.”¹⁹ Therefore,
18 Proverbs 8:25 does not indicate that Wisdom is created, and
19 thus, the argument that our Lord Jesus, in His divinity, is a
20 creature as He is the Wisdom of God falls flat due to correct
21 semantics. Jesus Christ be forever glorified! But one can un-
22 derstand the possibility that “I was brought forth” in Proverbs
23 8:25 could be an allusion to the eternal generation of the Son.
24 It is interesting to note, however, that Grudem, who so adeptly
25 evidences that Wisdom is not created, at the time of writing
26 his systematic theology rejected eternal generation.²⁰

27 John 5:26. For just as the Father has life in Himself, thus He
28 has granted the Son to have life in Himself.

D.A. Carson observes that this verse presents the problem of how if Christ is God, He requires to be given the power to have "life in Himself." Carson opines that the best explanation is provided by "Augustine and other church fathers that this is an eternal grant." There never was a moment that the Son did not have life in Himself.²¹ Carson believes that John 5:26 expresses the eternal generation of the Son.²² Carson asserts that the Reformers also held to Augustine's view that this verse references the Son being granted the power to have life in Himself in eternity.

But perhaps Carson has never read the Reformer, John Calvin, on John 5:26. Calvin writes,

The meaning of the words is this: "God did not choose to have life hidden, and, as it were, buried within Himself. and therefore, He poured it into His Son, that it might flow into us." Hence we conclude, that this title is strictly applied to Christ, so far as He was manifested in the flesh...Christ, so far as He is man, was appointed by the Father to be the Author of life...²³

Again, in his Institutes Calvin comments on John 5:26,

For there he is speaking not of the properties which He possessed with the Father from the beginning, but with those in which He was invested with the flesh in which He appeared. Accordingly, He shows that in His humanity also fulness of life resides, so that everyone

1 who communicates in His flesh and blood, at
2 the same time enjoys the participation of life.²⁴

3 So, the Reformer, Calvin, denies that John 5:26 refers to
4 eternal generation. However, this is not to say that Calvin re-
5 jected eternal generation. He did not reject it.²⁵ But he did deny
6 that the generation of the Son, though being from everlasting,
7 was continuous.²⁶

8 Perhaps the Father giving the Son to have life in Himself
9 should be interpreted by the context which is temporal. The
10 context is the living believing in Jesus and the dead hearing
11 the voice of Jesus and being resurrected. But these events
12 happen in time. The context is not about eternity past. So, it
13 may be that the Son receiving the power of life in Himself also
14 alludes to an event in time, that is, it concerns Christ's human-
15 ity. And, the context is one reason why Charles Hodge says, "...
16 it is the historical Person Jesus of Nazareth here spoken of...
17 ."²⁷ So, it is disputed that John 5:26 is a biblical evidence for the
18 doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son.

19 1 John 5:18. We know that everyone fathered by God does
20 not sin, but God protects the one He has fathered.

21 Giles asserts that interpreters from the early fourth cen-
22 tury have understood 1 John 5:18 as speaking of the "beget-
23 ting of the Son outside of time."²⁸ Yet, if one peruses the indi-
24 ces of texts in the volumes containing the assorted writings
25 of Athanasius, Augustine, Ambrose, Leo, Gregory the Great,
26 Hilary, John of Damascus, and Theodoret, one finds not a
27 single reference to 1 John 5:18.²⁹ This suggests that Giles may
28 have over stated his case.

However, some moderns who comment on the verse do 1
believe it speaks of the eternal begetting (generation) of the 2
Son. Dahms insists, "According to John 5:18 the Son of God was 3
born of God."³⁰ And others agree.³¹ 4

On the other hand, the translators of the NET Bible believe 5
that one begotten in 1 John 5:18 is not God the Son but is rather 6
the believer. But, even if it is Jesus Christ who in 1 John 5:18 7
is said to be begotten of the Father, we do well to note that 8
the word "eternal" is not in this verse. Nor does the context 9
suggest that that the eternality past is when the begetting 10
occurred. That is likely why Grudem remarks that John 5:18 11
probably refers to the incarnation when Christ was born as a 12
man.³² 13

Finally, in discussing what some take as the biblical evi- 14
dence for the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son the 15
texts of John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9 must be consid- 16
ered because each of these, and only these, apply the adjective 17
monogenēs to Jesus Christ. But at issue is whether this word 18
means "one and only" Jo 1:14 (NET Bible) or "only begotten" 19
(KJV). An example of the importance of this word's meanings 20
to a discussion on whether the Son is eternally begotten is 21
Louis Berkhof's contention, 22

The personal property of the Son is that He is 23
eternally begotten of the Father (briefly called 24
'filiation')...The doctrine of the generation of 25
the Son is suggested by...the Son also being re- 26
peatedly called "only begotten."³³ 27

1 But does the adjective actually mean “only begotten”? One
 2 cannot definitely ascertain that it does were he to look at pop-
 3 ular and extensive dictionaries of New Testament Greek. For
 4 while Buchsell avers that the meaning is “only begotten,”³⁴
 5 Bartels understands the term to mean “only.”³⁵ Monographs
 6 which focus on the word’s meaning also do not agree. Dale
 7 Moody argues that it means “only.”³⁶ But Lee Irons recently
 8 presented an extensive review of the ancient Greek usage of
 9 the *genēs* stem in the adjective which overwhelmingly had
 10 the idea of begetting.³⁷ But, one may wonder if the meaning
 11 of the word among the ancient Greeks must control its mean-
 12 ing among the Old and New Testament Jews. We can note
 13 first that in the Septuagint translation made by Jews of the
 14 Hebrew Bible monogenēs is employed to translate yahid. But
 15 the Hebrew word yahid does not mean a begetting, it means
 16 “only” or “precious” (being an only one).³⁸ Second, the usage of
 17 the adjective in the Septuagint does not seem to be conveying
 18 the idea that children are born but rather that they are unique
 19 for example Judges 11:34. Third, when the adjective describes
 20 children in the New Testament, then again, the idea is that
 21 they are unique not that they are born, for example, Luke 7:12;
 22 8:42; and, 9:38. So, possibly John’s usage is not intended to de-
 23 scribe Christ as “only begotten” but, instead” the unique (the
 24 only) Son of God. So, Erickson has reasons to question eternal
 25 generation. But, in his Christian Theology, he does not give
 26 these reasons or even bother to allude it.

27 As an aside, while this book is not purposed to remark
 28 on non-evangelical views, in the context of discussing how
 29 Christ is God’s Son, we do not go too far astray by briefly
 30 contrasting the position of some evangelicals that the Son is

eternally generated by the Father with that of Latter-Day 1
Saints' Christology. The reader is likely aware that in Mormon 2
theology God the Father, once a man, was exalted into being 3
divine.³⁹ And, as we mortal humans do, God the Father wished 4
to marry and bear children. And so, as Orson Pratt reveals, 5
God the Father's wives (note plural) are required to be obe- 6
dient to Him.⁴⁰ Likewise, McConkie elaborates that "All men 7
are the spiritual children of an Eternal Father (and) an Eternal 8
Mother."⁴¹(or Mothers?) 9

So, the spirit of Christ, as did those of all men, came into 10
being as a result of God the Father mating with a Mother God. 11
And, Christ's body came into being when God the Father, a 12
glorified Man, chose to act as Mary's husband, that is, actually 13
having Mary as His wife, and then afterwards God gave Mary 14
back to Joseph.⁴² As Smith blathers, "Christ was begotten by 15
God. He was not born without the aid of Man. And that Man 16
was God."⁴³ 17

Later, Christ, at first a mere man, advanced into being a God 18
through His obedience.⁴⁴ Clearly, these points are all extra- 19
biblical and heretical besides being ludicrous and offensive. 20
On the other hand, as we have seen, there are varied opinions 21
among evangelicals on the meaning of Jesus' sonship to the 22
Father. But it is very important to note., and here's the differ- 23
ence, we evangelicals are trying to base our beliefs on exposi- 24
tions of the Bible not on fantastical imaginings of supposed 25
modern prophets and their followers. Evangelicals are not like 26
the ancient Greeks believing that gods and goddesses have sex 27
and bear children. 28

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CHRIST AS GOD IS NOT EMPTIED OF POWERS THEN RESTORED

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I think it is likely that Millard Erickson's Christology is more extensively different from other evangelicals in his teaching that the divine nature of Christ gave up the use of His divine powers as God when adding humanity to His Person. Regardless, for example, of one's view on eternal generation or the Second Coming, functional kenoticism-- which states that use of the omni attributes of God as omniscience and omnipresence were unavailable to Christ on earth -- is decidedly unpopular among evangelicals. Yet, Erickson clearly is a functional kenoticist.

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For example, it is Erickson's opinion that the divine attributes possessed by God the Son,

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...became latent. God's knowledge of all things may have been limited in actual exercise by His consciousness being related to a human personality and particularly to a human brain. The exhaustive knowledge of all truth which

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1 the deity of Christ possessed (His omniscience)
2 was in His unconscious. He therefore, just like
3 anyone else, had to grow in knowledge of the
4 subjects that a Jewish boy of that time would
5 learn.¹

6 Elsewhere, in regard to God the Son's loss of the use of di-
7 vine omniscience in the incarnation, Erickson avers that,

8 Apparently during this time of incarnation, the
9 Son did not have direct access to the conscious-
10 ness of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. He did
11 not consciously know all that the Father knew,
12 such as the time of His second coming...²

13 And again, he states,

14 ...He was still omniscient but He possessed and
15 exercised knowledge in connection with a hu-
16 man organism that grew gradually in in terms
17 of consciousness... Yet this should not be con-
18 sidered a reduction in power and the capacities
19 of the second Person of the Trinity, but rather
20 a circumstance induced limitation on the exer-
21 cise of His power and capacities.³

22 What is Erickson's logic that Christ as God lost the use of
23 His omniscience? Christ incarnate has a human body and
24 brain. So, the incarnated, infinite God must now be physically
25 confined to and intellectually limited by His humanity. The
26 Bible says, He "became flesh" (Jo 1:14) so He no longer could be

everywhere is the argument. And He no longer knew every- 1
thing. What is the proof? It is Mark 13:32, where Christ states 2
that He did not know the time of His return. 3

But wait. Is there a tiny chance that the Lord was speaking 4
only of His humanity and that in His deity He, then, and al- 5
ways, knew all things and though while in a human body, He 6
remained omnipresent in His divine Spirit? Now, I could cite 7
many who would affirm the view the incarnate Son retained 8
His use of divine powers.⁴ But note, for example, Calvin's 9
explanatory remarks on Mark 13:32, "Christ, who knew all 10
things (John 21:17), was ignorant of something in respect of 11
His perception as a man" (my emphasis).⁵ Only in His human- 12
ity did Christ did not know is Calvin's explanation. In His deity 13
He remained all-knowing. 14

And, how else does Calvin disagree with Erickson on the 15
qualities retained by the divinity of our Lord? Calvin insists 16
that even after the incarnation, God the Son remained omni- 17
present. The Reformer stipulates, 18

Another absurdity which they obtrude upon us 19
-viz, that if the Word of God became incarnate, 20
it must have been enclosed in the narrow tene- 21
ment of an earthly body, is sheer petulance. For 22
although the boundless essence of the Word 23
was united with human nature in one Person, 24
we have no idea of any enclosing. The Son of 25
God descended miraculously from heaven, yet 26
without abandoning heaven... .⁶ (my emphasis) 27

1 But Erickson asserts that Christ could no longer be om-
2 nipresent because His body prevented Him using that attri-
3 bute. "...He had the power to be everywhere (omnipresence).
4 However, as an incarnate being, He was limited in the exer-
5 cise of that power by the possession of a human body.⁷ So,
6 Christ can be omnipresent, but He cannot be omnipresent!?
7 Has Erickson never read Calvin? Surely, he has, but Erickson
8 in his *Christian Theology* of 1200+ pages chooses not to inter-
9 act much with positions opposite of his own regarding Christ's
10 divine attributes.

11 Erickson is not alone in his view that when God the Son
12 added humanity to His Person, Christ was required to forego
13 the use of some divine powers. This is because some think
14 that qualities as omnipresence and omniscience are incompat-
15 ible with human nature.⁸ They are correct. These powers are
16 not compatible with humanity, but Christ is in two natures,
17 and these qualities are to be predicated to only His divinity.
18 Functional kenoticists say Christ cannot have two different
19 sets of attributes: human and divine.⁹ They say this because
20 they deny the integrity of Christ's two natures.

21 So, our Lord, GOD incarnate, while still divine, being young,
22 was required to grow up (Luke 2:40, 52)? And being weary
23 needed to sit on Jacob's well (John 4:6)? And being sleepy He
24 must take naps (Mark 4:38)? Does this sound like God? But
25 Christ is God. So, if these Scriptures are accurate, and they are,
26 our Lord must have lost the use of His divine powers, right?

27 Or, could it be that Christ exists in two natures, God and
28 man, and that each nature retains its own properties and that
29 the Scriptures just referenced reflect only the qualities true
30 of His human nature? But what are the lines of argument for

that position? There are four: (1) the nearly universal teaching of the church, (2) the correct understanding of Philippians 2:6, 7, (3) the immutable nature of God, and, (4) Christ's use of divine powers after the incarnation. Let's look at each of these four evidences separately:

1. The teaching of the church. (excerpts from creeds are from Schaff's The Creeds of Christendom vols I, III.)

In the fifth century there arose a division between factions which disagreed on how the humanity of Christ relates to His deity. Are there distinguishable qualities in each of the two natures in Christ which pertain only to the individual natures? The creed of Chalcedon (451) decided that Christ does exist in two natures which remain distinct:

Christ...to be acknowledge in two natures inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparately, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved. (my emphasis).

This statement of faith requires that each of the two natures in Christ retains its properties. I do not feel that Erickson's view that the divine nature of Christ lost the use of His divine properties fits with this creed.

Or, consider the Westminster Confession of Faith which states that "The Son of God...(has) two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and manhood...each nature doing that which is proper to itself. (VIII:II,VII-my emphasis). This confession avers that each nature in Christ does what is

1 proper to it. That is, for example, the humanity does not know
2 some things but the deity knows everything. The humanity is
3 not everywhere at once, but the deity is omnipresent. The hu-
4 manity is not all powerful, but the deity is omnipotent. Again,
5 this is not Erickson's position! And so, his Christology differs
6 from that of many evangelicals.

7 The positions in these creeds, and others, are reflected in
8 the Christological writings of Christian theologians over the
9 centuries just as, for example, Leo the Great, John of Damascus,
10 Martin Chemnitz, and Wayne Grudem.

11 Leo writes,

12 Our restoration was not to be carried out with-
13 out human weakness and without Divine pow-
14 er, both "form" (that is "nature") does that which
15 is proper to it in common with the other, the
16 Word, that is, performing what is the Word's
17 and the flesh that which is of the flesh.¹⁰

18 John of Damascus writes,

19 Christ, then, energies according to both His na-
20 tures...the Word performing through the au-
21 thority and power of its divinity all the actions
22 proper to the Word...and the body performing
23 all the actions to the body, in obedience to the
24 will of the Word that is united to it.¹¹

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Martin Chemnitz writes,

Each nature in Christ performs in communication with the other that which is proper to it...
Christ works according to each nature and that each nature in Christ works in communion with the other.¹²

Wayne Grudem writes,

One nature does some things that the other nature does not do. Evangelical theologians in previous generations have not hesitated to distinguish between things done by Christ's human nature but not by His divine nature or by His divine nature but not by His human nature.¹³

These several references evidence the position that Christian theologians through the ages have taught that the divine nature of Christ did not become limited by Jesus' humanity. His divine nature continued to function as before the incarnation. But, in contrast, Erickson's view is that when incarnating, God the Son lost the use of some powers of God. That makes Erickson's teaching on Christ's deity different from the Christology of many other evangelicals.

2. The meaning of Philippians 2:6, 7. "Who though He existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men and by sharing in human nature." (NET BIBLE)

1 I would like to comment on three points in this passage in
2 response to Erickson's assertion that the text means "it is the
3 equality with God, not the form of God, of which Christ emp-
4 tied Himself."¹⁴

5 First, Christ existing in God's form means that Christ is
6 equal to God.

7 Note that the word "exists" (*huparchōn*) is in the present
8 tense. It does not say that upon incarnating Christ ceased be-
9 ing in God's form (that is, in God's nature.¹⁵) Modern professors
10 of Biblical Greek affirm that as this text stipulates that Christ
11 is in God's form, He is, therefore, equal to God.¹⁶ In my opinion,
12 the grammatical argument by Burk¹⁷ which is that the articu-
13 lated infinitive (the to be equal) acts as a wedge between form
14 of God and equal with God thus removing Christ's equality
15 with God from His being in God's nature, is not grammatically
16 correct as the united opinion of the references in endnote #16
17 indicates. I think Burk is driven by his desire to evidence his
18 opinion that Christ in His divine nature is role subordinate to
19 the Father. I would think that the church fathers, Chrysostom
20 and Athanasius, having Greek as their native tongue, under-
21 stood their own language better than does Burk. And, they
22 say that if Christ existed in God's form Christ was therefore
23 God's equal.¹⁸

24 Second, Christ did not grasp (the Greek is *harpagmos*) at
25 equality with God.

26 This clause must not be understood as meaning that Christ
27 chose to grasp or not to grasp at being equal with God. That
28 equality was already, and ever will be, His. Glory to God's
29 Son forever! The correct interpretation of "grasp" is explained
30 in a summary of the research completed for Roy Hoover's

Harvard Th.D. dissertation.¹⁹ Hoover's research (yes, this is a bit technical) revealed that when this Greek word in the accusative case follows certain verbs, including "regard," then the meaning is idiomatic as "not using what one possesses for one's own advancement." (my phrasing). That is, Christ did not use His equality with God to achieve benefits for Himself is Paul's meaning. And, that interpretation is quite in line with Philippians 2:4 where Paul instructs us not to be concerned with our own interests but those of others as well. Instead, 2:5 informs that we are to follow Christ's example. What is that example? It was considering others, in Christ's case, by humbling Himself as man and becoming obedient.

Third, Christ emptied Himself by adding human nature to His Person.

As stated above, Erickson teaches that our Lord emptied Himself of being equal with God. This is not correct. Instead, "emptied" has no modifier. The text does not say that Christ emptied Himself of anything. Instead, He emptied Himself by adding to His Person (not to His divinity) the nature of a slave.²⁰ His divine nature, which cannot change (see below), was not modified or enslaved, but the added human nature born of Mary was enslaved and became obedient. So, there is nothing in this passage about the deity of Christ losing its divine powers; instead, the weaknesses of Christ related in the Gospel accounts should be ascribed only to our Lord's added humanity.

3. The Immutable nature of God.

The tenet of the unchangeableness of God is commonly agreed upon by evangelical theologians. Feinberg opines that, "God must be immutable in His Person, purposes, will (decree),

1 and ethical rules....”²¹ In Frame’s view, God is unchanging in
2 His essential attributes, , decretive will, covenant faithfulness,
3 and truth.²² And, Strong explains, “the nature, attributes, and
4 will of God are exempt from all change.”²³ Affirmations as
5 these, as said, are common among evangelical theologians who
6 agree that God’s being and essential qualities do not change.

7 But my position is that if God the Son, the second Person of
8 the Trinity, stops being omniscient, omnipresent or omnipo-
9 tent, then that is a change in the nature of God. Consider, for
10 example, Erickson’s questionable “circumstance-induced limi-
11 tation” explanation of Christ losing the ability to be omnipres-
12 ent because He took a body (See Erickson’s *Christian Theology*,
13 670). Compare Erickson’s argument to a man in a car accident
14 who has a spinal injury which disables him from walking. To
15 contend that he still has the power to walk if only he had not
16 lost the use of his legs is paramount to saying that Christ still
17 has the power to be everywhere if only He had not assumed
18 a body. Clearly, first being omnipresent, then not being omni-
19 present, is a change in God’s attributes.

20 But, Christ did assume a physical body. So, could He still be
21 omnipresent? Yes, His divine nature remains unchanged be-
22 cause God’s nature is immutable. The divine nature of Christ
23 is neither enclosed by the body, made ignorant by the human
24 brain or rendered weak by the musculature of Jesus in His
25 manhood. Christ’s limitations pertain only to Christ as man.

26 But, then how could Christ assume humanity if God chang-
27 es not? He could because the humanity was added to His
28 Person not blended with His divine nature. The divine nature
29 remains unchanged. And that is one place where Erickson dif-
30 fers from many evangelicals.

Various Scriptures, here in the NET translation, testify to the immutability of God's nature. For example,

Hebrews 1:8. Your throne O God is forever and ever...You founded the earth. in the beginning Lord, and the heavens are the works of your hands. They will perish, but you continue. And they will all grow old like a garment...but you are the same.....James 1:17. The Father of lights with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change.

In my opinion, if God's nature has not "the slightest hint of change," then the divinity of Christ cannot lose the use of His divine attributes.

4. Christ's use of divine powers after the incarnation.

After the incarnation, Christ is still omnipresent according to Matthew 28:20 and Ephesians 1:23. And, He is still omnipotent according to Colossians 1:17 and Revelation 1:8. And He is still omniscient according to John 21:17 and Colossians 2:3. And, He is still eternal according to Hebrews 1:8 and Revelation 1:8. And, He is still omniscient according to Hebrews 1:12 and 13:8.

The functional kenoticists who believe that Christ on earth lost the use of His divine powers only to regain them, as do Davis²⁴ and Erickson,²⁵ may refer us to Philippians 2:9 "God exalted Him." Perhaps they think that the divine nature of Jesus which had been emptied now had been exalted. But the humbling and obedience mentioned in 2:8 follow the taking of the form of a slave and the humanity in verse 2:7. In that human

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1 form, Christ humbled Himself, and in that same human form,
2 Christ was exalted. It does not say that He reacquired divine
3 powers which were lost. The exaltation in Philippians 2:9 is
4 that of His human nature not that of Christ's divinity which
5 cannot be further exalted.

6 Erickson's position on Christ giving up the use of divine
7 powers when incarnating is contrary to that of most evangeli-
8 cal theologians.

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WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT IN MILLARD ERICKSON'S TEACHING?

24. Stephen T. Davis. "Is Kenosis Orthodox" in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 115. 1
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25. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 637. 3

CHRIST IS DISTINCTLY ACTIVE THROUGH HIS HUMAN NATURE

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In addition to Erickson's belief that the divinity of Christ was required to forego the use of His powers as God is Erickson's contention that Christ did not act distinctly through His human nature. He explains, "The union of the two natures meant that they did not function independently. Jesus did not exercise His deity at times and His humanity at other times."¹ That teaching that the Lord did not sometimes act through His humanity in distinction from His deity separates Erickson's Christology from that of many. Erickson does not provide scriptural support for this assertion in his systematic theology, so, let's look at a few biblical texts on our own to see if his view matches the biblical portrayals of Christ. Do these following activities suggest that both natures must be involved in each of Jesus' acts or could Christ at times be active in only one nature? In Mark 4:48 Christ takes a nap. So, is it God getting sleepy too? In John 4:6 after walking, Christ was worn out. So, does God needs a rest? In Hebrews 5:7 Christ prays.

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1 Is God praying to Himself? Such texts as these indicate that
2 Christ sometimes works only through His humanity.

3 But it appears that on other occasions it is the deity of
4 Christ which is active. In John 17: 5 Christ mentions His pre-
5 existence glory with the Father. Is this a man's memory? In
6 Matthew 28:20 Christ states His presence will be with the
7 apostles wherever they are. Is this the presence of an omni-
8 present man? In Colossians 1:27 Christ dwells in each believer.
9 Is it Jesus' human soul that dwells inside of us? These texts
10 surely refer to Christ's divine nature only. So, it appears that
11 Christ works individually through His divinity in some con-
12 texts. In contrast to Erickson, I think Christ at times acts dis-
13 tinctly through each of His two natures. As Hodge explains,
14 "So, of the acts of Christ, some are purely divine...some are
15 purely human."²

16 The human nature of Christ is believed by many theolo-
17 gians to possess the properties which enable it to will, experi-
18 ence, and act. Again, it is Hodge who elaborates,

19 In teaching, therefore, that Christ is truly man
20 and truly God, the Scriptures teach that He
21 had a finite intelligence and will, and also an
22 infinite intelligence. In Him, therefore, as the
23 church has ever maintained, there were and
24 are two wills two *energeiai* (energies) or opera-
25 tions... So, of the acts of Christ some are purely
26 human.³

27 One can read the same opinions on Christ possessing a
28 human will, intelligence, and energy in distinction from His

divinity in the theology of many as, for example, John of 1
Damascus⁴ Chemnitz,⁵ and, Grudem.⁶ But, if Christ's humanity 2
is not active, what is the purpose of Jesus' human intelligence, 3
will, and energy? 4

However, various forces and trends in church history 5
through the centuries have presented challenges to the posi- 6
tion that Christ's humanity acts or wills distinctly from His 7
deity. Five of these are Apollinarianism, Cyrillian Christology, 8
non-Chalcedonian Christology, monothelism, and *enhypos- 9*
tasia. Let's look at each: 10

In the fourth century Apollinarus ventured his under- 11
standing of Christ's limited humanity. Christ could not have a 12
human mind, Apollinarus conjectured, because were Christ to 13
have a human intellect, then Christ could not remain sinless. 14
The human mind would yield to temptation. So, Apollinarus 15
said the divine Logos functioned as the only intellect in Jesus.⁷ 16

The sinlessness of Jesus is, of course, a biblical teaching. As 17
Peter insists, Christ "did no sin." (1 Peter 2:22). But we cannot 18
think that it was Jesus' divine mind which resisted sin since 19
the Bible says that God "cannot be tempted" (James 1:13). So, 20
it was not the divine nature of Christ, which is God, that was 21
tempted. Consequently, it was the humanity of Christ which 22
resisted the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 2). That requires 23
that Christ, at times, wills, experiences and acts in His human- 24
ity only. Supporting this are Romans 5:15, 1 Corinthians 15:21, 25
and 1 Timothy 2:5 where Christ, as a man, is responsible for 26
our salvation. 27

Further, it is Christ's unblemished and uncompromised vic- 28
tory, as a man, over temptation whose example we are to fol- 29
low. Just prior to Paul noting Christ's obedience to God, which 30

1 Paul lists as occurring after our Lord's assumption of human-
2 ity, Paul exhorts the Philippians to have the same attitude as
3 Christ. And just before his insistence that Christ committed
4 no sin, in 1 Peter 2:21 we are told to follow Christ's example.
5 But were Christ resisting sin in His divinity, how could that be
6 an example for us mere mortals to emulate?

7 So, in my opinion, Apollinarus' view that Jesus as God con-
8 quered temptation cannot be correct. And, it follows that, we
9 should understand that if it were only the humanity of Jesus
10 that was tempted and was victorious in resisting that, then
11 it must be that Christ does, in fact, act distinctly through His
12 human nature on some occasions. So, Erickson appears to be
13 wrong, and his view is certainly contrary to that of many
14 evangelicals.

15 Cyrillian Christology became popular in the turbulent fifth
16 century debate between Cyril and Nestorius, and the follow-
17 ers of each. This doctrinal disagreement brought havoc to the
18 church and tore it apart giving rise to the Christology of the
19 new ante-Chalcedonian denominations soon to be discussed
20 below. The debate appears to have arisen due to Nestorius'
21 preaching that while Mary is the Mother of Christ, she is not
22 the mother of God. This view was in keeping with Nestorius'
23 judgement that the humanity of Christ must be distinguished
24 from the deity of Christ. But, modern research indicates that
25 Nestorius did not, by understanding that difference between
26 the Lord's two natures, teach that Christ is two Persons.⁸ Still,
27 popular dogma then was that Mary is God's mother since God
28 is in Christ.

29 On the other hand, it can be argued that Cyril taught that
30 after the incarnation, Christ existed not in two but only in one

combined nature. In Cyril's work, *on the Unity of Christ*, Cyril 1
claims that "We speak of the single nature of God the Word in- 2
carnate and made man." ⁹ It was Cyril's position on the single, 3
unified nature of Christ which motivated him to anathematize 4
any who stated that any act of Jesus can be separated from the 5
action of Christ's divine nature. ¹⁰ Does that view sound famil- 6
iar? One should be able to understand how Cyril's Christology 7
is similar to Erickson's who also asserts that Christ did not act 8
distinctly through His human nature. 9

In an attempt to settle the Christological debate, the ecu- 10
menical council of Chalcedon was held in 451. Note that the 11
creed resulting from this council for centuries was deemed to 12
be the orthodox position of the church. It still is. This creed 13
teaches that the properties of each nature in Christ are both 14
preserved and distinct and that Christ is perfect in both His 15
deity and humanity. But some adherents to Cyril's views were 16
dissatisfied with Chalcedon not combining Christ's two na- 17
tures into one as Cyril had taught. These are the non-Chalce- 18
donians, and some of them began their own denominations 19
which remain today. 20

Non-Chalcedonian Christology teaches that there is a uni- 21
ty of one nature out of two in Christ; His nature is composite. ¹¹ 22
That position is termed *miaphysitic* by some. As there is only 23
one combined nature in Christ, any weaknesses of Jesus de- 24
picted in the Gospels are actually those of the incarnate Word 25
of God. ¹² 26

Non-Chalcedonian Christology argues that if Christ con- 27
tinues to exist in two distinct natures after the incarnation, 28
then there is no real union in His being. ¹³ One does not have 29
to do laborious reflection to realize how such Christology as 30

1 this results in the persuasion that Christ is not active though
2 His distinct human nature as that nature is not distinct from
3 His divine nature. But it seems that the effect of the non-Chal-
4 cedonian denial that Jesus works through His human nature
5 separately from His divine nature is not that much different
6 from Erickson who says, "Jesus did not exercise His deity at
7 times and His humanity at other times."¹⁴ One might wonder
8 what the function of Christ's humanity might be if Jesus does
9 not specifically act through it.

10 Monothelitism is the belief that there is only one will in
11 Christ. Christ's humanity does not possess its own will. In the
12 seventh century this position was perceived as a resurgence
13 of the doctrine that Christ has but a single nature, which is
14 termed "monophysitism." However, there are some evangeli-
15 cal theologians today who do not deny that Christ has two
16 natures, as Strong, who believe that were Christ to have two
17 wills, then He must be two Persons.¹⁵ Strong insists that Christ
18 possesses "the essential elements of human nature" and "the
19 active powers, which belong to a normal and developed hu-
20 manity,"¹⁶ so I think one has good reason to inquire of Strong
21 how Christ lacking a human will can have "the active pow-
22 ers" of normal humanity. Normal humanity does not possess
23 divine, infinite volition. If Christ has only one, divine volition,
24 how is He truly human?

25 In order to combat the rise of monothelitism, the ecumeni-
26 cal council of Constantinople in 680-681 was held. Included in
27 this creed are the words,

28 ...we likewise declare that in Him are two natu-
29 ral wills and two natural operations ...according

to the teachings of the holy fathers. And these 1
two natural wills (i.e., the wills are in the na- 2
tures) are not contrary to one to the other...His 3
human will follows...as subject to His divine 4
and omnipotent will. 5

The position that Christ acts distinctly through His hu- 6
man nature is enforced by this statement of belief in that it 7
averts that the human will of Jesus is subject to the divine 8
will of Jesus, and, consequently, by that submission, Christ 9
human nature must be able to act. Therefore, Erickson's posi- 10
tion that Christ does not act distinctly though His humanity 11
is not in harmony with those evangelicals who concur with 12
Constantinople. 13

Enhypostasia is an attempt to provide a personality (hy- 14
postasis) to the human nature of Christ. The logic is that a na- 15
ture must be personalized. But Christ is one in Person. So, the 16
humanity cannot personalize the human nature. That would 17
result in our Lord being two Persons. So, it is conjectured that 18
the divine nature of Jesus is that which personalizes Jesus' hu- 19
man nature. 20

This theory is popular. However, it can be objected to be- 21
cause if a human nature has no strictly human center, then 22
it has no human ego; it is doubtful that the divine nature can 23
function in the place of a human ego.¹⁷ 24

Is the humanity of Jesus just God dressed up as a man? Or 25
are we not rather to believe that "He likewise shared in their 26
humanity" and "had to be made like His brothers and sisters 27
in every respect" (Hebrews 2:14,17 NET Bible). But if it is the 28
divine Logos only which personalizes the humanity of Christ, 29

1 then how is Christ like us? We are not personalized by God.
2 Yet, if Christ has a human center of activity, must He not be
3 two Persons? This is not subscribed to by the following ten
4 evangelicals who reject that Christ is two Persons, but who,
5 in various words and concepts, do, nevertheless, contend that
6 Jesus is active in His humanity.

7 1. DM Baillie from 1935 until he died in 1954 was the Chair
8 of systematic theology at the University of St. Andrews.
9 Baillie teaches that Jesus as a man experienced God in faith
10 and prayer. Therefore, in agreement with Moberly, Baillie
11 says Jesus must have a human nature that is personable.¹⁸ He
12 raises an important point. Can we believe that the human na-
13 ture of Jesus is not active in His trust in and prayers to God? Is
14 God required to have faith in God? Must Jesus' faith in God not
15 be human as in an "I-Thou" relationship?

16 2. John Knox was professor of New Testament at Union
17 Theological Seminary and Episcopal Theological Seminary of
18 the Southwest. Knox rejects the position that the "person" in
19 Jesus' humanity is the Logos. Knox argues that a humanity
20 without a human center is not human. "Unless He was human
21 to the lowest depth of His conscious and subconscious life, He
22 was not truly human at all."¹⁹ Understand that Knox is not de-
23 denying the deity of Christ; instead, he is asserting the integrity
24 of Jesus' humanity. In the Gospels and in Paul too, Christ is
25 called a man. But a true man is not simply God clothed in hu-
26 man flesh.

27 3. H. Orton Wiley was an Arminian professor of system-
28 atic Theology. In Wiley's Christology we are introduced to the
29 tenet, seen also in the Reformed theologians Warfield and
30 Shedd, that in Christ are two sets of consciousnesses, human

and divine, and that Christ sometimes experiences in one of 1
these and at other times in the other. For example, saying He 2
is one with the Father (John 10:30) occurs in His divine con- 3
sciousness, but saying He thirsts (John 19:28) is that of His 4
human consciousness. Wiley even ventures to say that the 5
human nature acquired personality by its union with the di- 6
vine.²⁰ But Wiley by "personality" does not mean "person." It is 7
the one Person of Christ which acts through either nature. But 8
if we ascribe mind, volition, and energy to Christ's humanity, 9
how can we say these do not result in personality? 10

4. W.G. T. Shedd was a Reformed theologian who also af- 11
firms that "there arises in the Person of the God-man two gen- 12
eral forms of consciousness, the divine and the human." This 13
is because Christ has two natures. In Christ these conscious- 14
nesses "fluctuate according as the divine or human nature 15
was uppermost." It is the human consciousness which hun- 16
gers or sorrows and the divine consciousness through which 17
Christ commands the storm to still or raises the dead. ²¹ In this 18
manner Shedd is able, in my opinion unlike Erickson, to satis- 19
factorily account for the diverse activities of Jesus which are 20
either divine, human or both. 21

5. B.B. Warfield was professor of Theology at Princeton 22
from 1887 to 1921. In his Christology, "The self-consciousness 23
of Jesus is, in other words, distinctly duplex and necessarily 24
implies dual centers of self-consciousness." But while Warfield 25
believes in Christ's "double consciousness," divine and human, 26
Christ remains "in one Person."²² Warfield is not teaching that 27
because Christ has two centers of consciousness, He is, there- 28
fore, two Persons. 29

1 6. Thomas Morris, then professor of philosophy at Notre
2 Dame, suggests that in Christ are two ranges of conscious-
3 nesses. The divine mind having direct access to the earthly
4 experience of Jesus, but the human mind not generally hav-
5 ing access to the omniscience of the divine. Christ is one
6 Person with two “streams of consciousness.”²³ The two-minds
7 in Christ view is in keeping with the commonly expressed
8 evangelical position, and it is unlike Erickson’s. Morris can ex-
9 plain Christ knowing all but not knowing all by Jesus’ active
10 possession of two minds; Erickson, instead, explains Jesus not
11 knowing by saying that in the incarnation Jesus was required
12 to lose His use of omniscience.

13 7. Gordon H. Clark also expresses the belief that in Christ
14 are two conscioues. Clark makes the observation that the
15 boy Jesus did not know everything (Luke 2:40, 52), but as God,
16 Christ is omniscient. Clark thinks that requires the humanity
17 of Jesus to be personal. Clark also notes that the suffering of
18 Christ on the cross cannot be that of the divinity because God
19 is impassible.²⁴ Clearly Erickson’s Christology, which denies
20 that Jesus though His humanity willed, experienced, and act-
21 ed in distinction from His deity, is in disagreement with that
22 of Clark.

23 8. Oliver Crisp, professor of Theology at Fuller Theological
24 Seminary, teaches that Christ has two wills and two “theaters
25 of operation.” God, the Son, does act through His human na-
26 ture to do some things. The two wills in Christ can be under-
27 stood as Jesus having “two theatres of action in one Person.”

28 9. Wayne Grudem, professor of Theology at Phoenix
29 Seminary, explains that Christ has both two wills and two
30 centers of consciousness. That is why, Grudem says, Christ

could both be omniscient and not know somethings. While it 1
is the Person of Christ that does the acts of His natures, "One 2
nature does some things that the other nature does not do." 3
One should perceive clearly that Erickson's teaching, that the 4
Lord does not act distinctly through His humanity, is contrary 5
to Grudem's teaching. 6

10. D. Glenn Butner is an assistant professor at Sterling 7
College. His premise is that if the humanity of Christ has a hu- 8
man will, then the Son's obedience could have been that of His 9
humanity and not of His divinity.²⁷ But that conclusion would 10
require, contrary to Erickson, that the Lord is separately ac- 11
tive in His human nature. This position on the role subordina- 12
tion (obedience to God the Father) made by Butner leads us to 13
the topic of the next chapter: Christ Obedient. 14

But first let's be reminded of some of the reasons why the 15
doctrine that Jesus is active, at times, just through His human 16
nature is important. It explains the human frailties of our Lord 17
in the Gospels as His learning, weariness, suffering, and death. 18
It does not put reductions on the infinite powers of Christ's 19
divine nature. It best gives purpose and function to our Lord's 20
human intelligence and will. It accepts at face value the Bible 21
calling our Lord "a man." It is faithful to the Bible's teaching of 22
Christ being our Savior by His obedience in His manhood. It 23
finds in Jesus' human obedience a true example to follow. It 24
best fits the early creedal statements of the church and the 25
opinions of many evangelicals. It is faithful to the doctrine of 26
the immutability of God. It does not detract from the equally 27
necessary declaration of the uncompromised Deity of our 28
Lord. Yet, Erickson denies this doctrine. 29

30

END NOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

1

- 2 1. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 670.
- 3 2. Hodge. *Systematic Theology*, 395
- 4 3. *Ibid.*, 390
- 5 4. John of Damascus. *Exposition*, 13.
- 6 5. Chemnitz. *Two Natures*, 235.
- 7 6. Grudem. *Systematic Theology*, 560.
- 8 7. Apollinaris. "Fragments 25, 76" in Richard A. Norris Jr.
- 9 *The Christological Controversies*. (Fortress Press, 1980), 108, 109.
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- 18 10. Cyril's 4th anathema found in Robert L. Fern. *Readings*
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- 28 14. Erickson. *Christian Theology*, 670.

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19. John Knox. *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 63, 64, 68. 7
8
20. H. Orton Wiley. *Christian Theology, vol II*. (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1952), 181, 179. 9
10
21. W.G.T. Shedd. *Dogmatic Theology, vol II*. (Nashville: Nelson, 1980), 320-323. 11
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22. B.B. Warfield. *The Person and Work of Christ*. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 258-260. 13
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23. Thomas V. Morris. *The Logic of God Incarnate*. (London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 103, 105. 15
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24. Gordon H. Clark. *The Incarnation*. (Jefferson, MA.: The Trinity Foundation, 1988), 22, 24, 45, 67. 17
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25. Oliver D. Crisp. *The Word Enfleshed* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 91, 113 ; *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 71. 19
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21
26. Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology*, 560, 558. 22
27. D. Glenn Butner. *The Son Who Learned Obedience*. (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick, 2018), 86. 23
24

CHRIST IS OBEDIENT

2

There are three basic positions on the obedience of Christ to God the Father. In the last several decades this subject has been debated at length. One view argues that God the Son became obedient in His divine nature only after the Incarnation. A second view states that in His divine nature Christ has always (from eternity) been role subordinate to the Father. Then, the third view is the position that the submission of the Son to the Father does not occur in His divine nature at all either eternally or temporally. Rather, it is only in His human nature that the Son is obedient to God the Father. The reader should be reminded that Erickson could not concur with the last position as he avers that Christ does not act through His humanity in distinction from His deity.

Instead Erickson agrees with the first view: After the incarnation, in His divine nature, Christ subordinated Himself to the will of the Father. This relationship did not exist before the incarnation. Erickson calls his position “The Equivalent Authority View.” While Erickson briefly comments on this position in his systematic theology,¹ he more thoroughly argues it in a chapter in *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity*. Here Erickson discusses several well-known theologians as

1 Warfield, Buswell, Jewett, Bilezikian, and Giles who agree
2 that the Son, as God, is not eternally role subordinate. Some of
3 the arguments advanced by these are that “Son of God” means
4 equality with God, the Father is also dependent on the Son,
5 and as, Christ learned obedience (Heb 5:8), His role subordina-
6 tion could not have been eternal.

7 In contrast to Erickson, a notable example of one holding the
8 second view—which states that in His deity Christ is eternally
9 relationally subordinate to the Father-- is Wayne Grudem. In
10 his *Systematic Theology*, Grudem avers that the eternal role of
11 the Father is commanding and the role of the Son is obeying.
12 These roles cannot be reversed. If they were, the Trinity could
13 not be eternal.² Grudem also argues his position as a contrib-
14 utor in edited books. In one, Grudem expounds on what he
15 believes is the biblical evidence for his view.³ Much of this
16 evidence will be noted below in discussing twelve texts. In
17 another book, Grudem mounts a reply to what he deems to
18 be errors in theological arguments and biblical interpretations
19 contrary to his position.⁴ Three of these theological issues also
20 will be briefly discussed below.

21 As indicated, a third position is that the Son’s role subordi-
22 nation to the Father occurs only in His human nature; it thus
23 is neither occurring eternally nor temporally in Christ’s di-
24 vine nature. Augustine, for example, explains,

25 ...we are to distinguish in them(that is, in the
26 Scriptures) what relates to the form of God, in
27 which He is equal to the Father, and what to the
28 form of a servant which He took, in which He
29 is less than the Father (that is in) ... the form of

a servant, He came not to do His own will , but 1
the will of Him that sent Him.⁵(my emphasis) 2

In this passage, Augustine teaches his readers that Christ's 3
obedience to God the Father occurs not in His divinity but in 4
His humanity only, in His form of a servant (see Phil 2:7). Thus, 5
it is not eternal. 6

Expressing the same sentiment, John of Damascus informs, 7

"But the Lord having become obedient to the 8
Father, became so not as God but as man. For 9
as God He is not said to be obedient or disobedi- 10
ent."⁶(my emphasis) 11

Here the Damascene plainly rejects the view that the Son is 12
obedient in His divine nature. 13

Gregory of Nazianzus in his argumentation against those 14
who question Christ's divinity by alluding to texts which sug- 15
gest Christ to be subordinate replies, 16

But, in opposition to all of these, do you reck- 17
on up to me the expressions which make for 18
your ignorant arrogance, such as "My God and 19
your God," or "greater" or "created" or "made"... 20
"servant" "and obedient" "can do nothing of 21
Himself"...to give you the explanation in one 22
sentence: What is lofty you are to apply to the 23
Godhead...but all that is lowly ...to the incar- 24
nate. ...(He) was made man⁷ (my emphasis) 25

1 Gregory refutes the interpretation that such “lowly” bibli-
2 cal texts, as those stating Jesus’ obedience, refer to Jesus’ deity.
3 Instead, they refer to the humanity of the Son. So, in Gregory’s
4 view, Christ’s role subordination is not eternal and it occurs
5 only in His humanity.

6 Likewise, John Calvin teaches that Christ

7 being called the servant of the Father (and) ...
8 not to do His own will...apply entirely to His
9 humanity, since, as God, He...does all things af-
10 ter the counsel of His own will.⁸ (my emphasis)

11 This passage in the Institutes plainly contradicts the po-
12 sitions that Christ in His divine nature is either eternally or
13 temporally obedient to the Father. The obedience of the Son
14 is, Calvin says, to be predicated only to Jesus’ human nature.

15 And, again, another is Charles Hodge who declares

16 Such being the Scriptural doctrine concerning the Person
17 of Christ, it follows that although the divine nature is immu-
18 table and impassible, and therefore neither the obedience nor
19 the suffering of Christ was the obedience or suffering of the
20 divine nature.⁹(my emphasis)

21 Hodge in plain language asserts that the obedience of
22 Christ does not occur in His divine nature.

23 So, Erickson’s position, and Grudem’s too, contradict the
24 view of many. But, the believer must examine relevant
25 Scriptures to help him or her reach a conclusion. Just naming
26 proof texts is inconclusive. Such Scriptures are interpreted dif-
27 ferently depending on one’s view. The evidence behind differ-
28 ent opinions should be scrutinizes. I will try to do that fairly,

but my conviction will become evident, I fear. So, let's look at
twelve disputed texts (ESV translation) to see if can be proven
that Jesus obeys the Father in His divine nature.

1. Mark 14:62: you will see the Son of Man seated at the
right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.

It has been argued by Grudem that "the right hand of power" is a place of unequal authority.¹⁰ The highest power is that of God the Father. So, God the Son only being at the Father's "right hand," has only delegated authority. But one may wish to know if sovereignty is an essential attribute of God, and if Christ is God, how Christ cannot be sovereign. There is a possible answer to that below under theological issues which suggests that each Person in the Trinity has His own properties and absolute sovereignty is not seen as a quality of the Son. Of course, one may observe that even were "the Son of Man" in this verse to mean Christ in His deity, the text does not reference an eternal relationship. It does not prove the eternal relational subordination of Christ. But perhaps guiding one's thought toward deciding whether "Son of Man" in Mark 14:62 means Christ as God or Christ as man, one might look at Peter's declaration at Pentecost in Acts 2:32, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God... ." (my emphasis) So, does

Peter in referencing Christ being at "God's right hand" means the Son's divine nature is at God's right hand? How so, since, according to Peter, Christ was placed there after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. But the divine nature did not die, and it was not resurrected. So, one is given good cause to understand Mark 14:62 as referencing the humanity of Jesus only. Were that the case, this text fails to evidence the eternal

1 relational subordination of the Son or even that Christ's divine
2 nature is ever role subordinate.

3 As the previous chapter argued, in my opinion, one should
4 not think, for example, that the humanity of Christ is the great
5 "I AM" (Jo. 8:58) or that the deity of Christ was weary at Jacob's
6 well (Jo 4:6). So, I have no trouble thinking that Christ being
7 "at God's right hand" is a statement about our Lord's humanity.
8 On the other hand, one should note that to distinguish the vo-
9 lition and energy between the Son as man and the Son as God
10 cannot be done if one is of Erickson's persuasion that both na-
11 tures are involved in each of Christ's incarnational activities.

12 2. John 5:19: The Son can do nothing of His own accord, but
13 only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father
14 does, that the Son does likewise.

15 In his attempt to prove a hierarchy of authority exists in
16 God, Keener asserts, Jesus "merely carries out what the Father
17 teaches Him."¹¹ (my emphasis). So, Not only is God the Son's
18 sovereignty being questioned, now His omniscience is too!
19 Christ, as God, needs to be taught? But what is it that makes
20 the Son God if it is not His divine attributes as sovereignty and
21 omniscience? In commenting on the texts in Isaiah chapters
22 40-49, Frame insists that knowledge is the test of a true God."¹²
23 So, can the Son be God if, as God, He must be taught by the
24 Father? But how can we escape this dilemma of wanting to
25 affirm Jesus' deity on one hand but saying Jesus, as God, is not
26 omniscient on the other?

27 But does the context of John 5:19 indicate that it is the de-
28 ity of Christ which is the subject? Are there any contextual
29 clues? Well, Jesus is walking in 5:1. He is called a "man" in 5:11.
30 The Jews were planning to kill Him in 5:18. Does God walk? Is

God a man? Can God die? This verse says nothing about the 1
relationship of Christ to the Father in eternity past. It is no 2
evidence for eternal role subordination. So, it is that context 3
which motivates Calvin to understand that John 5:19 con- 4
cerns only Jesus' humanity not His deity.¹³ 5

Yet, even were this verse instead meant to reference 6
Christ's divinity, it has even then been argued that it does not 7
subordinate the Son but demonstrates instead His equality 8
with the Father because the works of the Son are the same as 9
the works of the Father. Ambrose rebukes those "unbelievers" 10
who argue for a subordination of the Son on the basis of this 11
text by replying that this proves the equality of the Son since 12
"the work of the Father and the Son is one."¹⁴ And, Augustine 13
chastises "the unlearned" and "least instructed" for taking 14
John 5:19 as a referent to Christ in the form of a servant. 15
Instead, the meaning is that the acts of the Son, as God, and 16
the Father are the same. So, according to Augustine, that unity 17
of action shows that the Son is "equal to the Father."¹⁵ 18

3. John 6:38: For I have come down from Heaven, not to do 19
my own will but the will of Him who sent Me. 20

Does this mean that the divine will of the Son as God is sub- 21
ject to the supreme will of God the Father? (Please see the dis- 22
cussion below on whether there are multiple powers of voli- 23
tion in God). It appears that it does not to Hilary as this church 24
father declares it is Christ as a man who "subjected Himself," 25
and in the form of a servant He was obedient unto death. That 26
obedience of death "has nothing to do with the form of God."¹⁶ 27
But it was not a man that came down from heaven was it? 28
It was the Son as God who did, right? So how can Hilary be 29
correct? 30

1 Perhaps Hilary still may be expressing the correct doctrine
2 as Paul plainly says, Christ who exists in God's form "took the
3 form of a servant ...And being found in human form, He hum-
4 bled Himself by becoming obedient... "(Phil 2:7, 8). In which
5 nature then, did Christ become obedient? Was it the one "in
6 human form"? But, does the human nature of our Lord even
7 have the power of volition to obey God in distinction from the
8 divine nature? It does according to the ecumenical council of
9 Constantinople in 681 which stipulates,

10 For as His flesh (that is His "humanity") is called
11 and is the flesh of God the Word, so also is
12 called the natural will of His flesh called and is
13 God the Word's own will, as He Himself says,
14 "I came down from Heaven, not to do my own
15 will, but the will of the Father who sent me,
16 calling the the will of the flesh His own...¹⁶ (my
17 emphasis)

18 This creed states that obeying the Father's will was the
19 work of the will of Jesus' humanity. So, yes it could be that
20 John 6:38 is referencing the coming down of the divine God
21 the Son to do the Father's will. But the doing of the will of
22 the Father could be accomplished in the human will of Jesus
23 who "came down" by becoming man. And, were this correct,
24 then John 6:38 provides no evidence for either Grudem's or
25 Erickson doctrines of Christ obeying in His deity.

26 But if it is the Son who came down, is this not proof of the
27 Son eternal role subordination? Did the Father not command
28 the Son to come down as Grudem has insisted that the Father

commands and the Son obeys? Or instead, might the Son's descent from heaven to incarnate and become obedient unto a redemptive death be an effect of an agreement between the Father and the pre incarnate Son and not a situation of one commanding and the other obeying? Berkof teaches that the Father, Son, the Holy Spirit made a "voluntary agreement" to provide redemption in which the Father would be the originator, the Son the executor, and the Holy Spirit the applier.¹⁷ This covenant is also endorsed by Reymond who cites it as being also Warfield's suggestion.¹⁸ If there is merit in the doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption, that provides the rationale for the Son to be the one who comes down. Or perhaps it might be because Christ, being the eternal Son, best fits the role of incarnating.

4. John 14:28: The Father is greater than I.

Kitano opines that this text evidences that Christ in His deity is less in authority than God the Father.¹⁹ This interpretation is not uncommon as it is the view of Bruce and Beasley-Murray as well.²⁰ The latter expositor adopts the position that as the Son, as God, is dependent on the Father for "every aspect of His ministry" and as the Father is "the origin and end of the Son's mediation in revelation and redemption," the greatness spoken of by Jesus is not likely to be limited to "the conditions of the incarnation."

But the view of these three, and, of course there are others-- that our Lord references the greater authority of the Father in relation to His own as God-- is rejected by many. Among the church fathers who deny that view are Ambrose and Augustine who teach that John 14:28 refers to the humanity of Christ.²¹ Augustine comments that the verse relates to

1 "His assumption of human nature." Others among the church
2 fathers understand that "greater" refers not to authority but to
3 origin. The Father eternally generated the Son.²²

4 Gregory Nazianzus who avers that "in His character of the
5 Word He was neither obedient or disobedient for such ex-
6 pressions belong to servants and inferiors," therefore relates
7 John 14:28 to Jesus' humanity only.²³ Perhaps, then, in the end
8 what determines one's understanding of John 14:28 pivots on
9 whether one believes that God obeys God and whether obedi-
10 ence can be an attribute of God Almighty. For of Himself, Jesus
11 says, "I am the Almighty" (Rev 1:8). With that, Athanasius con-
12 curs, "The Word was God almighty."²⁴ So, does the Almighty
13 One obey one who is even "mightier" than He? Does that make
14 any sense?

15 5. John 17:5. And now Father, glorify Me in your own pres-
16 ence with the glory that I had with you before the world
17 existed.

18 Cowen, who argues that the Gospel of John reveals the eter-
19 nal subordination of the Son to the Father explains that this
20 text demonstrates "the Son's dependence on the Father for his
21 glory reaches into eternity before the incarnation."²⁵ Does the
22 text really mean that God the Son has no eternal glory except
23 that which is given Him by God the Father? A God who lacks
24 His own glory!? So far in this chapter we have seen efforts to
25 deny God the Son His omniscience (Keener above)- no, that is
26 only the Father's. And His sovereignty is not His own either
27 (Kitano above) - no, that too is only the Father's. Now even God
28 the Son's glory is said not to be of Himself; it belongs to the
29 Father who glorifies Him. So, is the Son's eternal glory from
30 the Father? Note two points:

First, let's look at the Greek construction of "I had with you." It is: *para seautō*. Now, *para* can mean "from" when it occurs with a genitive. But "you" (the Father) is in the dative case which case can mean "with" but also indicates being "by" or "by the side of."²⁶ So, the meaning of this verse likely is that the Father and the Son (along with the Holy Spirit, of course) share in common a glory which inheres in the divine nature. It is not that the Father gave the Son glory in eternity. The Son has His own glory because He is of the essence of God.

And, second note that in Philippians 2 it says that Christ being honored brings glory to God the Father. What happens to the Son, glorifies the Father! We have already read of this in John's Gospel. In 11:4 Jesus raising Lazarus glorifies God. In 13:31 God is glorified in the Son of Man. Shall we argue that God the Father's Person is dependent on the Son to glorify Him? I think not. The Father being glorified and the Son being glorified is simply acknowledging and making known their respective splendor and honor. For the divine Persons, it is not giving glory to one another as if They did not already possess it; it is recognizing Their glory. Cowan appears to err when he says that the Father gives the Son glory.

6. 1 Cor 8:6. For there is one God from whom are all things and for whom we all exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

It can be suggested that the tenet of the eternal relational subordination of the Son to the Father treads dangerously close to questioning the unity of essence between the Son and the Father. Certainly, no evangelical wishes to assert that. But Dahm's explanation of this verse might cause wonderment to some. He says that in this text "Lord" is contrasted with "God."

1 The effect is that merely economic subordination (i.e., God
2 acting in creation and salvation) is not the referent. "Essential
3 subordination" is Paul's meaning.²⁷ Hopefully this should not
4 be intended as a rejection of the doctrine that the Son and the
5 Father are the same in essence.

6 Dahm's interpretation is contrary to many. Athanasius be-
7 lieves that this verse is evidence of the Son's equality. Calvin
8 explains that this verse means that Christ is the God in Isaiah
9 33:22. And Hodge stipulates that "God" here means all three di-
10 vine Persons.²⁸ Further, it is doubtful that calling Christ "Lord"
11 is suggesting that He in any way is less than God.²⁹

12 7. 1 Cor 11:3. The head of Christ is God

13 A central issue in understanding this text is the mean-
14 ing of the Greek *kephalē* which is often translated "head."
15 The question of what was in Paul's mind is not definitively
16 decided either by Bible commentaries or by Greek lexicons.
17 Robertson and Plummer say the Greek word means "suprem-
18 acy" over but Bruce avers that it means "source" or "origin."³⁰
19 Brown also states the meaning is "source" or "origin," however,
20 Schlier believes "the obedience of subjection" is meant. In my
21 opinion, the issue is settled by Grudem's research of 36 writ-
22 ers from the eighth century B.C. to the fourth century A.D.
23 Grudem surveyed over 2000 examples. He concluded that the
24 Greek term indicates authority over.³¹ Based on this text, then,
25 Grudem asserts that while God the Son and God the Father
26 are equal in powers and all other attributes, "the Father has a
27 greater authority than God the Son."³²

28 But another issue is whether "Christ" in this text has our
29 Lord's divine nature or His human nature in mind. This ques-
30 tion is germane because in 1 Corinthians alone Christ is said

to be coming (1:7), to have died (8:11), and to be risen (15:20, 22). 1
Additionally, elsewhere Christ is said to have been born (Mt 2
2:4), to be the son of David (Lk 20:41), to be a man 1 Tim 2:5), to 3
have blood (1Pet 1:2), and to have come in the flesh (1 Jo. 4:3). 4
Certainly, these texts refer to the humanity of Christ not to 5
the deity of Christ. Perhaps this is why Ambrose writes "Let 6
God, then, be the Head of Christ with regard to His manhood, 7
and Augustine explains this text refers to Christ "made flesh in 8
His humiliation."³³In addition to these sources from the patristic 9
age, one may examine views on 11:3 in the Reformed era. 10
Calvin says that the Father is only the Head of Christ in Jesus 11
"as He has in our flesh made Himself subject to the Father, for 12
apart from this, being of one essence with the Father, He is 13
His equal," and Chemnitz in the time Luther writes, that God is 14
only the Head of Christ according to Jesus humanity.³⁴ These 15
sources explaining 11:3 as referring to our Lord's human na- 16
ture and these Scriptures which describe the humanity as be- 17
ing Christ, do not mean that "Christ" also cannot refer to Jesus' 18
divine nature. But they do call into question that 11:3 must re- 19
fer to Christ's divine nature. 20

Let's pause to note that none of the seven verses examined 21
so far prove that the submission of the Son to the Father occurs 22
in Christ's divine nature. So, Erickson's position is brought into 23
question and Grudem's is too. 24

8. 1Cor 15:28. When all things are subjected to Him, then 25
the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all 26
things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. 27

Kovack, Shemm, and Dahms insist that this text proves 28
that the Son as God is eternally role subordinate to the author- 29
ity of the Father.³⁵But must "Son" here have the divine nature 30

1 as its referent? Could “Son” in this text refer instead only to
2 the humanity of Jesus? Is Dahms correct that suggesting this
3 interpretation denies, “the unity of the incarnate Son”?

4 To answer this, one should consider the argument ad-
5 vanced by Butner who notes that in 15:20 Christ is resurrected
6 and in 15:45 Christ is the second Adam (i.e., a man).³⁶ So, do we
7 not have grounds in the context to distinguish between what
8 is true of one nature in Christ and what is true of the other?
9 Further, 15:47 calls the Son a man. Is the unchangeable divine
10 nature of Christ a man?

11 Perhaps this is why no less an expositor than Calvin
12 remarks,

13 In the first place, it must be observed, that all
14 power was delivered over to Christ, in as much
15 as He was manifested in the flesh...Christ will
16 then restore the kingdom which He has re-
17 ceived, that we may cleave wholly to God. Nor
18 will He in this way resign the kingdom, but He
19 will transfer it in a manner from His humanity
20 to His glorious divinity...and Christ’s human-
21 ity will then no longer be interposed to keep us
22 back from a closer view of God.³⁷

23 Butner and Calvin, therefore, refute the position that I
24 Corinthians 15:28 means that Christ as God is subordinate to
25 the Father. And, that contradicts Erickson’s teaching of Christ,
26 as God, being temporally role subordinate as well as that of
27 the eternal role submission of the God the Son propagated by
28 Kovack, Shemm, and Dahms.

9. John 11:41. "Father I thank you that you have heard Me. 1
Personally, I think that Grudem is extraordinarily reach- 2
ing in arguing that because the Father is never said to have 3
prayed to the Son but the Son is said to have prayed to the 4
Father, this proves that the Son as God is eternally role obedi- 5
ent to the Father.³⁸ In the first place, does it make any sense 6
at all to believe that God prays to God? If God is all powerful, 7
then the Persons in God are too. So, why would one who is 8
God need to pray to the another who is God? 9

So, does this text mean that the Son in His divinity is pray- 10
ing? Consider another occasion of Jesus praying. Was it Christ 11
in His divine nature that was in agony in Luke 22:44? Was it 12
the divine nature that sweated like great drops of blood? Was 13
it the divine nature that required strengthening by angels? 14
God is strengthened by angels? Of course, it was not. So, why 15
insist that in John 11:42 is God praying to God? Why this un- 16
relentless effort to attribute to Christ's deity what should only 17
be predicated of His humanity? 18

Such interpretations are controlled by the unreasonable 19
desire to subordinate one Person in God to another. Did God 20
grow up in Luke 2:52? Did God not know in Mark 13:32? Did 21
God receive a beating in Luke 22:63? No, these speak of the Son 22
as man not of the Son as God. And, so do those texts in which 23
Christ prays. Such experiences should only be classified un- 24
der the humiliation of the Son made possible by His becoming 25
man: "being found in human form, He humbled Himself" (Phil 26
2:8-my emphasis). 27

10.Ephesians 1:3,5. Blessed be the God and Father of our 28
Lord Jesus Christ...He predestined us as sons through Jesus 29
Christ, according to the purpose of His will. 30

1 Grudem argues that this text shows that the Father has
2 eternal authority over the Son as God because the Father
3 foreknew and predestined the divine Son's redeeming
4 activities.³⁹Grudem enforces the point with several related
5 texts:

6 Romans 8:29: For whom He foreknew He also
7 predestined to be conformed to the image of His
8 Son. 2 Timothy 1:9: Who saved us and called us
9 to a holy calling, not because of our works but
10 because of His own purpose and grace, which
11 He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages be-
12 gan. 1 Peter 1:18, 19: Knowing that you were
13 ransomed from the futile ways inherited from
14 your forefathers, not with perishable things
15 like silver or gold, but with the precious blood
16 of Christ ...He was foreknown from the founda-
17 tion of the world...

18 It cannot be reasonably denied that God the Father is rep-
19 resented in these Scriptures as foreordaining the salvific work
20 of the Son. But does that mean that the Father predestinated
21 the work of the Son as God? Look at Romans 8. Obviously,
22 what we are being conformed to is Christ's humanity not to
23 His deity. We are not invested with the powers of God. And
24 in 2 Timothy 1, are we not saved by the suffering of a man?
25 And in 1Peter 1, it is not the shedding of the blood which is
26 foreknown. Does God bleed?

27 For Grudem's argument to be valid, were the divine decree
28 to be eternal, as he, himself says it is ⁴⁰ that is paramount to one

Person in the immanent Trinity exerting predestinating control over another Person in God. But such a teaching has been often rejected by evangelical theologians. Shedd remarks that no necessary activity of God pertaining to Trinitarian distinctions can be a part of the divine decree.⁴¹ Likewise, Strong believes God decrees nothing in Himself.⁴² And, Chafer teaches,

God, however, did not decree anything concerning Himself, His attributes, and the mode of His existence in three Persons or any inherent relationship of responsibility within the Godhead. The Decree of God relates to His acts which acts are not immanent and intrinsic and are outside of His own being.⁴³ (my emphasis)

But according to Chafer's teaching, while in God's eternal plan the salvific work of the Person of Christ is decreed, that decree would not include an eternal role subjection of the Son as that subordination would be intrinsic to the divine Being. It follows that it was the work of Christ as man that the Father ordained. And, that the Father ordains that work of Christ's humanity to be accomplished in time is not evidence that the Son's divinity is role subordinate to the Father in eternity.

This seems an appropriate occasion to note a grammaticism in Philippians 2:7, "(He) made Himself nothing" or as the KJV, "(He) emptied Himself." Unfortunately, neither of these translations include the pronoun (He) which is in the Greek. What is significant in that pronoun ("He" *heauton*) here is its placement before the verb. In biblical Greek the pronoun is not required; the verb itself indicates the number and gender of the

1 subject. So, when Paul added the pronoun, the verb “emptied”
2 is made emphatic. The *kenosis* of the divine Son was therefore
3 self- motivated not predestined by the Father. Yes, what the
4 Son did as man was ordained by the Father, but Christ, as God
5 emptying Himself, was not. This understanding of the force
6 of the pronoun in Philippians 2:6 is held by O’ Brien, Feinberg,
7 and Barth.⁴⁴ Consequently, Jesus’ becoming man is not evi-
8 dence for the eternal relational subordination of the Son as
9 it was the Son’s own choice. And, Christ’s work of salvation
10 was by Christ’s humanity as only in His humanity can Christ
11 suffer, bleed and die. So, Erickson also errs when He says the
12 incarnate God was role subordinate temporally to the Father.
13 As man He was, as God He was not.

14 11. Galatians 4:4. God sent forth His Son born of a woman.

15 In an effort to evidence the Father’s greater authority over
16 God the Son, Claunch refers his reader to this verse.⁴⁵ But
17 who is sent? It is He who was born of a woman. That is why
18 Gregory Nazianzus states that this verse applies entirely to
19 the humanity of Christ.⁴⁶ (my emphasis) It seems even when a
20 verse explains itself, some are determined to force its meaning
21 into their pre- determined theories. The next, and final, text
22 also well illustrates this determination.

23 12. Heb 5:8. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience
24 through what He suffered.

25 Wayne Grudem opines that this Scripture should convince
26 us that God the Son is eternally role subordinate to God the
27 Father because it must be the eternal Son which is the refer-
28 ent in Hebrews 1.2, 4 and 6.1.⁴⁷ But first, if a biblical writer in
29 some places in his book refers to the eternal Son, can he can-
30 not elsewhere refer to the Son instead in His humanity? For

example, John 3:18 must refer to the divine "Son" but John 1 8:28 to the "Son" as man. Or consider 1 John 4:9 "His only Son" 2 would seemingly mean the Son as God, but 1 John 4:10 the 3 Son dying as a "propitiation for sin" must mean the death of 4 the Son as man. 5

Second, Grudem's view of Hebrews 5:8 is problematic be- 6 cause, despite Erickson's contention that the divine nature 7 lost the use of omniscience, 5:8 says the Son learned obedi- 8 ence. So, can this be the divine Son? Does God learn? If one 9 is an Open Theist, then yes.⁴⁸ But as Job replied to Zophar, 10 "Can anyone teach God knowledge"? Finally, just preceding 11 5.8 is the phrase in 5:7 "In the days of His flesh." This would 12 seem to set the learning by the Son to occurs in His humanity. 13 Grudem's interpretation of Hebrews 5:8, in my opinion, is an- 14 other profoundly ineffective attempt to justify the view that 15 God is role subordinate to God. 16

To bring this chapter to a close, I would like to briefly 17 comment on three questions then make an observation on 18 Philippians 2:7. 19

1. Does God have three faculties of will? This question is 20 significant. If each Person in God has individually the pow- 21 er of volition apart from the other Persons, then one Person 22 could obey the Other(s). But were the singular will of God to 23 inhere in the nature of God, then one Person could not submit 24 His will to another Person in God because both would have 25 the identical will. Among the church fathers, it was common- 26 ly taught that God has a single power of volition.⁴⁹ Moderns 27 too as Shedd and Charles Hodge teach that there is only one 28 will in God.⁵⁰ 29

1 2. Does the economic Trinity indicate relations in the im-
2 manent Trinity? If the Son in time obeys the Father, does that
3 mean that He must have obeyed the Father in eternity. It does
4 according to the teaching of Bird and Shillaker, "The God who
5 is known in the economy of salvation corresponds to the way
6 God actually is." If not, they say, the Bible is deceiving us.⁵¹ But
7 first, in "the economy of salvation," those subscribing to eternal
8 role subordination teach God the Son carries out the orders of
9 the Father. But in eternity past, before creation, where noth-
10 ing except God exists, what orders from the Father would the
11 Son carry out? Second, as Jowers argues,⁵² if God is immutable,
12 then every act of a divine Person must be eternal. Therefore,
13 were this true, then as God, the Son cannot begin to become
14 obedient (Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 5:8). Christ's obedience,
15 then, must occur only in His humanity.

16 3. Does the Son as God have the property of obedience
17 which the Father does not have? At issue is whether differen-
18 tiating between the superior authority of the Father requires
19 that one reject God's unity. That unity is thought by many to
20 be based on each Person in God sharing in the identical divine
21 nature and therefore having the identical set of attributes.
22 But were the doctrine of the eternal generation discussed in
23 chapter three true, then the Father and the Son must have
24 some difference in properties as one begets and the other is
25 begotten. So, some as Ware,⁵³ reason that the property of au-
26 thority belongs to God the Father and that the property of
27 obedience belongs to God the Son. For that theory to be ac-
28 cepted, it must be first be convincingly shown that the New
29 Testament teaches that Christ in His divine nature is obedi-
30 ent to the Father. But to many, as myself, those teaching the

eternal role subordination of the Son have not proven their 1
case. And I'd like to comment one more verse which, to me, 2
further evidences the difficulty of proving that Christ, as God, 3
is subjected obedient to God the Father. 4

Does the Bible ever say when Christ became obedient? It 5
appears to in Philippians 2:6, 7. Here the NET Bible translates, 6
who though He existed in the form of God, did not regard 7
equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied 8
Himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other 9
men, and by sharing in human nature. He humbled Himself, 10
by becoming obedient. 11

Recall the explanation above regarding the force of the pro- 12
noun "He" in this passage showing that becoming man was 13
self- motivated by Christ. Then, note when Christ become 14
obedient. It was after He began sharing in human nature. 15

What is oneway Erickson's teaching about Jesus is differ- 16
ent? Erickson teaches that Christ on earth in His deity was 17
role subordinate to the Father. In contrast, others teach that 18
Christ's obedience is eternal. But as has been shown, many 19
believe that the Son's obedience to the Father occurs only in 20
Jesus' human nature. 21

END NOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX

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CHRIST IS RETURNING

2

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first is meant to outline the various positions on the rapture and the millennium with minimal evidencing of these. The second section will consist of some opinions on a number of individual Scriptures dealing with related questions. The chapter will mostly focus on the issues between posttribulational (Erickson's position) and pretribulational eschatology. The reader may notice an objectivity sometimes not apparent in the discussions of the Person of Christ above. That is because I am not wholly settled on my own views in some of these matters regarding sequence of the events related to the return of Christ. My objective has changed from showing how Erickson's Christology of Christ's Person is wrong, in my opinion, to how his Christology of Jesus' second coming compares to that of others. (all biblical citations in this chapter are from the ESV translation)

Understanding the Positions 18

There are four different views on the Millennium held among evangelicals. Amillennialism is the position that there will not be a future period of time when Christ rules on earth. Revelation 20 is interpreted as the souls of believers reigning

1 with Jesus in heaven. Postmillennialism states that the Lord
2 will return after the Millennium is brought about through the
3 world being improved by preaching the Gospel and evil being
4 diminished. Historic Premillennialism (Erickson's view) is the
5 belief that the second coming is one, simultaneous event (rap-
6 ture and return), that signs will precede it, and that Christ will
7 reign on earth. Dispensational premillennialism focusses on
8 a separation of Israel from the Church. The rapture is said to
9 be imminent and, after seven years of tribulation, the rapture
10 will be followed by the

11 return of Jesus with the church. Signs will precede that.
12 Revelation 20 refers to Christ's physical reign on earth.

13 There also are four positions on the Rapture.
14 Pretribulationism (often taught in Dispensational
15 Premillennialism) teaches that the Rapture will occur be-
16 fore the Great Tribulation. The church will not be in the
17 Tribulation. Instead, the Church will meet Christ "in the air"
18 being removed from the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Post
19 Tribulationism (Historic Premillennialism) understands that
20 believers will go through the Great Tribulation and that the
21 return of Christ follows it. The Partial Rapture Theory is that
22 only faithful believers will be caught up to escape the tribula-
23 tion in its entirety. Later other believers will be raptured. The
24 Mid Tribulation View is that the Church will go through the
25 first half of the Tribulation, but before God's wrath is poured
26 out, the Church will be raptured.

27 Erickson believes and teaches the premillennial, post tribu-
28 lational view of Jesus' second coming. He opines that a cor-
29 rect understanding of the Bible sees that a two-stage return
30 of Christ is unbiblical. He does not agree with there being a

sharp separation between believing Israel and the church. 1
He states that signs will precede the coming rapture.¹ To express 2
it another way, Erickson rejects A Millennialism, Post 3
Millennialism, Pre Tribulationalism, Mid Tribulationalism, 4
and the Partial Rapture theory. That puts him at odds with a 5
great many evangelicals. But I am not saying that Erickson is 6
wrong. 7

Erickson's teaching is also contrary to Dispensationalism. 8
Dispensational theology teaches that there have been and 9
will be a number of arrangements, by some said to be seven, 10

between God and man. These are often categorized as 11
(1) Innocence in Eden, (2) Consciousness, fall to the flood, (3) 12
Human Government, flood to the call of Abraham, (4) Promise, 13
Abraham to Sinai, (5) Law, Sinai through most of Jesus' min- 14
istry, (6) Grace, period of church to second coming, and, (7) 15
Kingdom, the 1000 year millennium.² Characteristic of this 16
teaching is its literal approach to biblical interpretation. An 17
example of this hermeneutic is the position that promises to 18
national Israel will be fulfilled in the Millennium. It is taught 19
that Israel will be converted after Jesus' second coming. This 20
is said to be indicated in texts as Acts 15:16 and Romans 11:26.³ 21

The Restoration of Israel 22

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you 23
to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial 24
hardening has come upon Israel until the ful- 25
ness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this 26
way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The 27
Deliverer will come from Zion, He will banish 28

1 ungodliness from Jacob”; “and this will be my
2 covenant with them when I take away their
3 sins.” (Romans 11:25-27).

4 Erickson, who is not dispensational, questions that now or
5 in the future God especially favors Israel. The Lord looks on
6 the gentile and Jew alike. Jews will only be saved by being
7 added to the church not through resuming a favored nation
8 relationship.⁴ One argument against the restoration of Israel is
9 advanced by Bales who asserts that as Israel broke its covenant
10 with God, it has no particular redemptive future.⁵ But others
11 maintain that God still has a plan for Israel. Pentecost lists an
12 impressive number of Scriptures which could be understood
13 as referring to a future “regeneration” of Israel as Isaiah 1:27,
14 Jeremiah 23:6, and Ezekiel 11:19.⁶ Buswell appears not to reject
15 that notion as he teaches that as Christ sits on David’s throne
16 (Luke 1:32, 33), “the future Kingdom of Christ is in a very real
17 sense Jewish....”⁷

18 A number of dispensationalists teach that the church age is
19 an interval between the first coming of Christ and the millen-
20 nium which is brought about by Israel rejecting the Messiah in
21 the first century. The Davidic kingdom, Ryrie, avers, has been
22 postponed.⁸ Bales, on the other hand, contends that Matthew
23 3:2, “Repent, for the Kingdom is at hand,” demonstrates that
24 the Kingdom was not postponed. John the Baptist, Bales ar-
25 gues, did not say the Kingdom would be postponed were the
26 Jews not to accept Messiah; instead, they would be “cut off”
27 from it (Matthew 3:10).⁹

28 Yet, in the minds of many, the fulfillment of the Davidic
29 Kingdom will occur in the Millennium. The Davidic Covenant,

Bock and Blaising explain, is referenced in texts as 2 Samuel 7, 1
1 Chronicles 17, and Psalm 89. That kingdom is in two parts: the
establishment of David's house and the intimate relationship
between God and David's descendent (Christ).¹⁰ According to
Baker, Scriptures as Luke 1:32, 33 and Acts 2:30, 15:16 show
that the Davidic Covenant will occur at Christ's second coming.¹¹
As Ryrie surmises, "...the new covenant is for Israel...and
by comparing millennial passages it is clear that the period of
fulfillment is the millennium."¹² Erickson, of course, rejects
this.

The Rapture 11

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven 12
with a cry of command, with the voice of an 13
arch angel, and with the sound of the trumpet 14
of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 15
Then we which are alive, who are left, will be 16
caught up together with them in the clouds to 17
meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always 18
be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 . 19

As noted, Pretribulationists teach that the rapture will 20
occur before the tribulation removing the church from that 21
calamity. Then at the conclusion of the tribulation Christ re- 22
turns with His saints to earth. So, the second coming is sepa- 23
rated into two stages, they say. As LaHaye and Jenkins aver, 24
"There are far too many conflicting activities connected to His 25
return to be merged into a single coming."¹³ It can be argued, 26
for example, that in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 Christ does not come 27
to the earth but in Acts 1:11 He does. Also, in John 14:3 Jesus 28

.¹⁶ In contrast, the pretribulationist argues that the resurrection of the faithful does not occur at one time. Some are raised at Christ's second coming and other are later raised at the end of the millennium. ¹⁷ Bock and Blaising understand that Revelation 20:4 refers to tribulation martyrs raised from the dead ¹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:17, then, would be a previous resurrection of believers.

The Question of the Imminence of Jesus' Second Coming

In those days after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. Then He will send out the angels and gather His elect...
Mark 13:24-27.

Another difference between the pre-tribulationist position and others is that it teaches that no signs will precede the rapture of the church. But, in regard to the above passage, Erickson comments, "This certainly sounds like the rapture of the church after the tribulation."¹⁸ And, were this correct, then, obviously, significant signs precede that second coming. However, a pre tribulationist, who believes that there will no signs preceding the rapture, may place the passage as referring to "kingdom disciples who will pass through the tribulation after the church has been raptured out of the world."¹⁹ Note the comparison of features of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 with some in 1 Thessalonians below.

1 Sproule provides for us some translations of Greek terms
2 which require believers to anticipate the return of Jesus:

wait for Luke 12:36 expect 2 Peter 3:12-14 keep awake Matthew 24:42,43 near at hand Mark 13:29	await eagerly Romans 8:23,25 be sober 1 Thessalonians 5:6,8 wait for 1 Thessalonians 1:10
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3

4 But do these texts require a doctrine of imminency? Yet,
5 Sproule, a Pre tribulationist, defines imminency as an apos-
6 tolic teaching developed over time. It is a “qualified imminen-
7 cy.”²⁰ I think, for example, the apostles were expected to fulfill
8 their commission to preach and baptize all nations (Matthew
9 28:19) before Christ’s return. So, just after Jesus ascended,
10 (Luke 24:51), His return would not be imminent. But later it
11 could be.

12 Feinberg, a pretribulationist, responds to arguments
13 against imminency: (1) Where signs are connected to the sec-
14 ond coming, the topic has been changed from the rapture (1
15 Thessalonians 4:13-18) to the second coming (2 Thessalonians
16 2:2-4). (2) What are supposed to be signs in texts as 1 Timothy
17 4:1-3 or 2 Timothy 3:1-7 are conditions not signs. (3) Prophecies
18 as Matthew 24:14 relate to the tribulation not to the church’s
19 preaching.²¹

20

The Church and the Tribulation

21

And to wait for His Son from heaven whom

22

He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us

from the wrath to come...For you yourselves are 1
fully aware that the Day of the Lord will come 2
like a thief in the night while people are say- 3
ing” There is peace and security,” then sudden 4
destruction will come upon them...But you are 5
not in darkness, brothers, for that day to sur- 6
prise you like a thief...For God has not destined 7
us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through 8
our Lord Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:2-9). 9

Archer admits that these texts may be referencing being 10
saved from “God’s wrath in general against sin,” but he insists 11
that Revelation 3:10 (discussed below) clearly means that the 12
church will not go through the tribulation.²² On the other 13
hand, Erickson differentiates between the church experienc- 14
ing the coming tribulation and the church experiencing God’s 15
wrath. The church will be in the tribulation, he says, but while 16
in it will not be an object of divine wrath.²³ But one may ob- 17
serve that even if believers (kingdom saints, not the church?) 18
are saved from divine wrath during the tribulation, they may 19
not be spared given the prediction in Matthew 24: 9, “then 20
they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death 21
and you will be hated of all nations for my names sake.” 22

Yet, Feinberg offers several arguments which he feels evi- 23
dence that the church will not be in the tribulation accord- 24
ing to 1 Thessalonians 1:10: (1) the context of the Thessalonian 25
epistles is the Day of the Lord which is associated with Christ’s 26
return. Hence, a general idea of being saved is not the referent. 27
(2) the text refers to a coming wrath concurrent with Jesus’ 28

1 second advent. (3) 1 Thessalonians 1:10 appears to be related to
2 5:9 which states that the church will not suffer divine wrath.²⁴

3 Walvoord has put together fifty reasons why the church
4 will not go through the tribulation. For example, (1) None of
5 the New Testament Scriptures on the Tribulation (i.e., Matthew
6 13:30, 24:15-31, or 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11) mention the church,
7 (2) the church is not appointed to wrath (Romans 5:9), (3) the
8 rapture is imminent so the tribulation must follow it, (4) the
9 Holy

10 Spirit as a Restrainer (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8) could not be
11 removed without the church being removed as well, (4) There
12 is an interval between the rapture and the second coming
13 (5) there are many contrasts between the rapture and the
14 second coming.²⁵ Some of these contrasts may be that in 1
15 Thessalonians 4:17 Jesus comes in the air for His own but in
16 Thessalonians 3:13 He comes with His saints and in Revelation
17 19:7-9 the church is in heaven at the marriage of the Lamb but
18 in Revelation 20:1-4 the church rules with Christ on earth.

19 Interpreting the Scriptures

20 Hermeneutics

21 Pentecost avers,

22 Perhaps the primary consideration in relation
23 to the interpretation of prophecy is that like all
24 other areas of Biblical interpretation, it must be
25 interpreted literally.²⁶

26 Literal interpretation allows some prophecy teachers
27 to predict that the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt.²⁷ This is

believed to be a special future blessing on Israel and is thought 1
to be in accord with texts as Ezekiel 40:5-44:31. We should 2
note that Erickson's non-Dispensational, Post- Tribulational, 3
Premillennial eschatology , also true of the hermeneutics of 4
others as Post and A Millennialists,²⁸ prevents him from in- 5
terpreting a number of Old Testament Scriptures literally. 6
Instead, in his view, there is not a future time of particular fa- 7
vor to Israel.²⁹ 8

Old Testament Prophecy Regarding Israel's Restoration 9

Despite our reference to Ezekiel, Bales contends that "there 10
is no explicit announcement of the national restoration and 11
reestablishment of the Jewish polity and worship." He bases 12
this conclusion on Scriptures as Matthew 21:28-46 and Luke 13
13:6-9 which Bales insists indicates that the Jews will lose 14
their place in the Kingdom.³⁰ On the other hand, in addition 15
to Old Testament Scripture besides Ezekiel, a glorious future 16
for national Israel appears to be the subject matter in texts as 17
Isaiah 1:27, 4:3,4; Jeremiah 23:6, 31:33, 34; and, Zephaniah 3:12, 18
13. And the New Testament possibly reaffirms these promises 19
in Romans 11:26, 27. 20

Daniel's 70th. Week 21

Daniels 9:24-27 is understood by Dispensationalists as re- 22
ferring to the period of the great tribulation. It is believed to be 23
a period of seven years. The passage is understood as showing 24
the Church as a mystery in that the prophecy only references 25
"Daniel's people." It is said that the prophecy alludes to a re- 26
building of Jerusalem then to a destroying of it. But in the end 27

provided this list, but without expositing the entries in each, 1
these writers proceed to enumerate more than a dozen events 2
which will occur in each. To some that method omits the im- 3
portant point of first proving that the Scriptures listed really 4
reference two different parts of Jesus' return. 5

Romans 11:26, 27 6

And so all Israel will be saved as it is written: 7
'The deliverer will come out of Zion; He will re- 8
move ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my 9
covenant with them, when I take away their 10
sins.' 11

But to which Israel is the apostle referencing: a future na- 12
tional Israel or a Jewish remnant of believers in Christ in the 13
present? Perhaps Paul's usage of the term "Israel" in Romans 14
9-11 should be the background for interpretation. For example: 15

9:6,7, not all descended from Israel are Israel but 16
through Isaac shall your offspring be named. 17
9:27, Though the sons of Israel shall be as the 18
sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved. 19
9:30, Israel who pursued a law.10:19, Did Israel 20
not understand? 10:21, But of Israel He says. 21
11:7, Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. 22

It may therefore appear to many that the apostle seems to 23
use the term in Romans 9-11 to reference national Israel. Were 24
that correct then most likely "Israel" in 11:26 possibly does not 25

1 mean a remnant of Israel which is part of the Church. Instead
2 it refers to a salvation of national Israel. With reasoning as this,
3 Ryrie maintains that the use of the words "Israel" and "church"
4 by Paul shows that the church is not new Israel.³⁶ Erickson, of
5 course, rejects this.

6 1 Corinthians 15:23, 24

7 But each in his own order; Christ, the first
8 fruits, then at His coming, those who belong to
9 Christ. Then comes the end... .

10 On this passage Blaising³⁷ argues for the Premillennial po-
11 sition by noting (1) "end" in 15:24 need not mean the moment
12 of the Second Coming, (2) the resurrection of believers (15:23)
13 does not preclude a subsequent resurrection of unbelievers,
14 and (3) the "end" is the resurrection of unbelievers because
15 then death is abolished. The premillennial view of these vers-
16 es are that the adverbs are adverbs of time denoting sequence.
17 On the other hand, Strimple³⁸ contends that the adverbs *epita*
18 and *eita* both translated "then" do not indicate a series: Christ's
19 resurrection, followed by the resurrection of believers, fol-
20 lowed by the resurrection of unbelievers. Strimple's under-
21 standing conflicts with Erickson's view that believer's will be
22 resurrected at the beginning of the millennium and unbeliev-
23 ers at the end of the millennium.³⁹

24 The Vocabulary of the Second Coming

25 George Ladd, a post tribulationist, whose objective is to
26 show that the rapture and the return (Second Coming) are one

event not two, teaches that *Parousia*(coming/ arrival) is used 1
 with the rapture of the Church. Ladd says 2 Thessalonians 2:8 2
 shows that the rapture is not a secret event. In His *Parousia* 3
 Christ comes with His saints (1 Thessalonians 3:13). The word 4
Apokalupsis, Ladd continues, means “revelation.” 1 Corinthians 5
 1:7 is said to show that we are waiting for Jesus’ revelation. But 6
 if the revelation occurs seven years after the rapture then be- 7
 lievers would not be waiting for it. The third word is *Epiphania* 8
 (manifestation). Ladd notes that Christians in 1 Timothy 6:14 9
 are told to wait for Christ’s manifestation. But, Ladd argues, if 10
 that is so, then Christ’s manifestation must not follow a rap- 11
 ture by seven years.⁴⁰ 12

However, in contradiction, Pentecost, a Pretribulationist 13
 who separates the Second Coming into two events, contends 14
 that *Parousia* is used both of the church’s rapture (1Corinthians 15
 15:23 and 1 Thessalonians 2:19) and of the return of Christ 16
 to the earth (1 Thessalonians 3:13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:8). 17
 Pentecost as well believes that *Apokalupsis* can reference ei- 18
 ther the rapture (Colossians 3:4 and 1 Peter 1:7) or the Second 19
 Coming (2 Thessalonians 1:7 and Luke 17:30). In regard to the 20
 Greek *Epiphania*, Pentecost suggests that in 1 Timothy 6:14 21
 and 2 22

Timothy 4:8 refer to the Rapture but 2 Timothy 4:1 and 23
 Titus 4:8 reference the Second Coming (seven years later).⁴¹ 24

1 Thessalonians 4:17 25

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be 26
 caught up together with them in the clouds to 27

1 meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always
2 be with the Lord.

3 The Amillennialist, Anthony Hoekma, states that this text
4 is not correctly interpreted to mean that Christ after years,
5 that is, after the tribulation, will return to earth with His
6 saints. Hoekema points out that the word translated “to meet”
7 (*apantesis*) “is a technical term used in the days of the New
8 Testament to describe a public welcome given by a city to a
9 visiting dignitary.” Hoekema continues, then the welcoming
10 committee will “go back with him into the city.”⁴² Blomberg, a
11 Premillennial Post Tribulationist, makes the same point based
12 on the usage in Hellenistic Greek. He illustrates the custom
13 from the New Testament in Matthew 25:6 and Acts 28:15.⁴³
14 Were this custom rightly understood as the meaning of “to
15 meet” in this text, then 1 Thessalonians 4:17 does not evidence
16 a sevenyear period between the Rapture and the Return.

17 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2

18 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus
19 Christ and our being gathered together to Him,
20 we ask you brothers, not to be quickly shaken
21 in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spo-
22 ken word, or a letter seeming to be from us to
23 the effect that the Day of the Lord has come.

24 Walvoord equates “The Day of the Lord” in this passage
25 with the great tribulation. He explains that Paul is correcting
26 the false teaching that the church would go through the

tribulation.⁴⁴ In stark contrast, Ladd contends that this text does not say that the rapture will precede the Day of the Lord and that the apostacy will occur before the rapture. Otherwise why would the Thessalonians have to be warned about the deception of the antichrist (verses 3, 4).⁴⁵ In Burge's opinion, the Day of the Lord is identical to the Day of Christ (Philippians 1:10) and will be a day of surprise (2 Peter 3:10) "ushering a climatic battle (Revelation 16:14) and universal judgment (2 Peter 3:12)."⁴⁶

Revelation 3:10 10

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth. 11
12
13
14

At issue in this verse is whether "Keep...From" (*ek tereō*) means a removal of believers from the hour of trial. Moo questions that *tereō* would be used to convey a removal as *airō* (e.g., John 17:17a) is a better choice to indicate that.⁴⁷ And Ladd reminds his readers that in John 17:15 where *tereō* occurs "keep them from the evil one" there is no idea of a removal involved.⁴⁸ However, in his commentary on Revelation Walvoord, while showing awareness of John 17:15, nevertheless argues, 15
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In view of the context of the Book of Revelation, however, as it subsequently unfolds the horrors of this very tribulation period, it is evident that the promise here to the church at Philadelphia. 23
24
25
26

⁴⁹

27

1

Revelation 20:6

2

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priest of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him for a thousand years.

3

4

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In Walvoord's same commentary he notes that in verses four and five a thousand years also is mentioned. Therefore, he says, that amount cannot be spiritualized. Nor can the thousand years be the present age, Walvoord argues, because during it, Satan is bound (20:2). But in the present age Satan is vary active (e.g., Luke 22:3; Acts 5:3; 2Corinthinas 4:3,4).⁵⁰ Yet, Strimple, who represents the Amillennial position, counters with texts as:

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John 12:31, Christ's death drives out Satan; Colossians 2:15, at the cross, Christ is victorious over demonic powers; Hebrews 2:14, 15, Christ's death destroys Satan's power. 1 John 3:8. Christ appeared to destroy Satan's work.⁵¹

16

17

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So, texts as these could be interpreted to mean that Satan being bound does not evidence that there is a future millennium of a thousand years. Instead, the Amillennial position takes this passage as referring to the entire history of the church.⁵²

21

22

23

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25

What these brief discussions of some ideas and Scriptures concerning eschatology have shown is that evangelical scholars who faithfully attempt to base their understanding on

26

27

WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT IN MILLARD ERICKSON'S TEACHING?

Scripture are nevertheless much in disagreement about the 1
events and sequence of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2
But we still can be sure that He is returning. Praise God. 3

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