

Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Divine and Human, As Revealed in John 3:16 and Hebrews 1:3

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John 3:16

For those who read the English Bible, and who don't have access to the original languages in which the Bible was written, when you refer to John 3:16 and the related passages, for accuracy and the other reasons that follow, it is important to use either the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the King James version (KJV), or another version that refers to Jesus as the *only begotten* Son of God. The term only begotten correctly translates the original Greek word in this text, μονογενής (*monogenēs*), which literally means only begotten, only (*mono*) and begotten (*genēs*).

If you don't have a copy of the NASB within easy reach, here is that translation of John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

An increasing number of contemporary versions make a tragic error when they translate *monogenēs* as "His only Son" or "His one and only Son." Why is this mistranslation tragic? It detracts from the divinity of Jesus Christ. The term, only begotten, refers to Jesus being of the same essence or substance with the Father in the triune Godhead, and that Biblical reality testifying to Jesus' divinity is not communicated by the terms "only Son" or "one and only Son." In order to provide our salvation—which we cannot do for ourselves—Jesus had to be fully (100%) human *and also* fully (100%) divine.¹

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. By faith in Him we are credited with his righteousness (Romans 4), and thereby we become children of God by adoption. (Romans 8:13-17) We are chosen to be his children, brought into a saving relationship with Him, by our faith in Christ—faith that is a gift from the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

The Holy Spirit—who inspired the writing of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15-17)—led the apostle John to carefully quote Jesus' use of the term only begotten in John 3:16, and in other passages. This vital term informs us that Jesus and the Father, also together with the Holy Spirit,

¹ In the theological literature, these two aspects of Jesus' being are referred to as his having two natures, divine and human. As one who attends closely to language and its extensive implications, I don't like to use the word nature with God, or to speak of Jesus Christ having a divine "nature," since the root of the word, "nature," is from the Latin, *natus*, to be born, and God was never born; he has always existed (e.g., Psalm 90:2). Mostly, I try to use words such as Jesus' divinity to refer to the divine dimension of his being. Yet as a theologian, I reluctantly but cautiously—including using this explanation—do refer to the word nature, since it is used in the theological literature to indicate both Jesus' divine and human being, and since in common usage, people do not primarily think of the word nature as referring to being born but rather to one's, especially here Jesus', essential being. Nevertheless, it's a very important distinction to make, and it helps us witness more effectively for our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

though distinct individuals are one in essence and thus divine, a triune God. (Cf. John 10:10; 14:6-11)

Hebrews 1:3

Consider here just one more related Bible text (out of many others) that further explains Christ Jesus' deity. Hebrews 1:3 adds,

“who being the radiance of the glory and the exact expression of His substance, upholding all things by the word of His power, by Himself having made purification of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”
(Hebrews 1:3, my translation of the original Greek text)

Examining the verse more closely, we understand much more about Jesus' divinity. The words in the brackets are explanatory additions from me. We observe,

“who [Jesus Christ] being the radiance of the [God's] glory and the exact expression [χαρακτήρ (*charaktēr*)] of His substance [ὑποστάσεως (*hupostaseōs*) > ὑπόστασις (*hupostasis*), which in this context, connected with God, means substance, underlying essence], upholding [φέρων (*pherōn*)] all things by the word [ῥήματι (*rhēmati*)] of His power [δυνάμεως (*dunameōs*)], by Himself having made [ποιησάμενος (*poiēsamenos*)] purification of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Notice carefully the three participles: being, upholding, and having made. The Greek of the first two participles is in the present tense (denoting ongoing, durative, continuous condition) and in the active voice (denoting action by the subject, Jesus Christ).

The first of the two participles, “being” (ὄν [*ōn*]) indicates key aspects of His divinity, His ontological identity, that issue forth in dynamic active manifestations. Christ Jesus is the ongoing, indeed eternal, radiance (ἀπαύγασμα [*apaugasma*, radiance, effulgence, brightness]) of God's glory (δόξης [*doxēs*, glory, including all His attributes]) and exact expression, manifestation, of the glory of God from the very substance of God. Recall the most accurate translation of John 3:16 and the related passages in John's writings, where the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle to use the word, *monogenēs* (only begotten), thereby denoting the same substance of the Godhead, thus sharing the same being together with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, three distinct Persons who share the same substance, essence of being. The Greek word which is translated, “exact expression” (χαρακτήρ [*charaktēr*]), means, in the words of the outstanding Greek scholar and Biblical interpreter, the late R. C. H. Lenski, that Jesus Christ is “the expression of the very being, essence, reality of God.”²

The triune God, who reveals Himself in the Bible, consists of three distinct Persons who share one substance. The English has no comparable term to designate the three distinct beings who share the one essence or substance, i.e., *hupostasis*, so the word Person is used to try to convey

² R. C. H. Lenski, [*The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James*](#) (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938), p. 38.

that concept. God is One. All three Persons exist at the same time, each having his own specific functions, sharing the same substance, as they have and will for all eternity, from everlasting to everlasting (1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 41:13; 90:2; 103:17). In historic Christian theology this unity of the three Persons is called the hypostatic union (> Greek ὑπό [hypo], under + ἵστημι [histēmi], cause to stand = hypostasis, substance, essence), as we see above in Hebrews 1:3. Notice especially the original Greek words in the parentheses, including both the English transliterations and the translations.

The term is also applied to the union of—what are called for lack of a more Biblically accurate term—the two natures of Christ Jesus, the divine and the human. See the footnote on the first page. The Lord credits righteousness to us who believe in Him and do God’s will (Romans 4:1,24-25; cf. 8:1-4; Matthew 7:21), repenting when we fail, and recommitting to obey henceforward.

The second of the two participles is “upholding” (φέρων [pherōn]). It can also be translated sustaining or bearing. See Colossians 1:17, “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”) It can also mean administering and ruling, including conquering opposing forces and accomplishing His designated goal. For great comfort and assurance on some implications of this aspect of Jesus’ divinity, see John 16:33. Such upholding can only be done by one who is truly divine, indeed fully God as well as fully human.

Christ Jesus does this with “the word (ῥήματι [rhēmati]) of His power (δυνάμεως [dunameōs]).” This term is much more informative and significant than if it were expressed as the power of His Word. The Greek clearly indicates that Jesus’ word is a manifestation of His divine power. This reality refers to His omnipotence, His being all powerful, due to being divine. Compare Genesis 1:3 and John 1:1 and also Colossians 1:16-17. This is why Jesus is called “the Word,” e.g., John 1:1. When creating the world, He “said [רָאָמַר] (wayyō’mer, ‘and He said’ < אָמַר , ’amar, to say)], ‘Let there be light, and [immediately] there was light.’” (Genesis 1:3; cf. Psalm 33:9) Thus, in John 1:1, we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Similarly, remember Jesus’ mighty acts of healing with His word, e.g., “Lazarus, come out [of the tomb where he had been buried for four days].” (John 11:43-44) See also Luke 8:54, “Child, arise.” The Greek grammar, including inflection and syntax in these verses, indicates the word of Jesus’ power produced the effect He commanded, and it did so immediately.

In both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament, the word for word also means deed. Word and corresponding action go together. Pertaining to God, the two always go together; pertaining to Christians, they must, and repentance must follow when one sins.

God’s word is creative. Genesis 1 declares “God said.” In one form or another this declaration is made 11 times in that chapter. This creative word is powerful and sustaining. In Ps. 33:9, “He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast.” It is God who empowers his word and uphold[s] his creation....

It is God who repeatedly spoke to the prophets with his, “thus saith the Lord.” This formula occurs hundreds of times in the prophets, it occurs 122 times in the prophecy of Ezekiel alone. The formula “Thus Saith the Lord God,” gives a strong emphasis on the revelatory authority of that which is spoken.³ [Cf. Isaiah 55:11]

The third participle, having made (ποιησάμενος [*poiēsamenos*]) purification for sins, is in the aorist (past tense), denoting one past historical act. Jesus’ death is all-sufficient for the redemption of all God’s creation and efficient for all who believe in and follow Him: That is, sufficient for all but effective only for those who truly believe. It is not repeated, not ongoing, and not necessary to do again. We read later in Hebrews 7:27; 9:12,26-28; Romans 6:10 that Christ died once for all to take away the sins of those who believe. See all of Hebrews 9.

Significantly, the verb, *poiēsamenos*, is in the Greek middle voice, which represents the subject as doing something that concerns itself. The middle voice in this verse denotes that Jesus’ act of having made purification for sins involved—indeed greatly impacted—Himself. He never sinned, but when He, perfect and unblemished, out of His great love for us, took upon Himself our sins, His doing so had a huge, including very painful, effect on Him, indeed: excruciating torture. The Scripture is clear that involvement took place by His sacrificial death, which—because only He was sinless—only He could provide. The purification He provided becomes effective for all who believe in Him, whereby on account of our faith in Jesus Christ we are credited with His righteousness. (Romans 4)

See John 19:30, “It is finished.” The verb is Τετέλεσται (*Tetelestai*), which is in middle voice and perfect tense, denoting that in and through Jesus’ suffering and death, His redemptive work for us is completed. The reality that Jesus’ work is done is designated by the verb’s perfect tense that denotes completed action in the past, the resultant condition and effects of which continue.

It is very significant that immediately following Jesus’ death, the temple curtain was torn. I offer the following explanation of this event, recorded in Matthew 27:50-51, in my PowerPoint program, “[The Biblical Significance of Easter Signs and Symbols.](#)”

The temple curtain was massive, indicating the seriousness of sin that offends God, who is holy, holy, holy (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8), who will not permit sinful beings in his presence, and that this tearing apart of the curtain was done by God himself, not man. God, who is also all loving (1 John 4:8), has torn down the barrier between himself and his believing children, who are by their/our faith credited with the perfect work, at such great cost to himself, of his sinless only begotten Son Jesus Christ. The curtain in the temple Solomon built was thirty feet high. The first century A. D. Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that the temple Herod built was extended to 60 feet high and that the curtain was four inches thick. It was so heavy that it took 300 priests to lift and manage it. No human could have ripped it. Also, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom. This,

³ Thoralf Gilbrant, “[מָנָה](#)” in *The Old Testament Hebrew-English Dictionary*, The Complete Biblical Library (WORDsearch, 1998).

too, shows that it was God, and not human beings, who tore the curtain in two, thus permitting access to his most holy and loving presence.

You may well have some additional questions. Much more could be said, and I have done so on my Websites. I have a general Website (<https://fromacorntoak12.com/>), which can also be accessed by edwardseely.com, and an academic Website (<https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>). Both Websites are secure and free; I'm not selling anything. For more information on the subject in this post, you can likely locate it most quickly on my general Website by using the Search bar on the home page that will open by clicking on these links. On the search bar type in John 3:16, only begotten, Hebrews 1:3; Trinity, or any other key word or term. Once you have a document, use the "Find" feature in your tool bar.

Clearly, we confidently conclude that not just any son, even an only son, could secure our salvation. Only the only begotten, thus divine, Son who is the exact expression of the very being of God, indeed, the Second Person, in the triune Godhead, could provide for and uphold our relationship with Him forever. Further, we are comforted with the assurance that He has done so for all others, those "from every nation, tribe, people and language," (Revelation 7:9) including our loved ones who believe in and follow Him. Together, we'll serve our loving God with supreme joy through all eternity in His very presence!

I conclude this observation with an advisory comment I've made previously many times. Read the Bible and pray every day. Use at least two authentic versions of the Bible: the one you find most easy to read every day, and the other—that closely adheres to the original Hebrew and Greek—close by for further reference. If you have any question about the authenticity of a particular translation (use translations; be careful of paraphrases), check with a Christian pastor or professor who faithfully preaches and teaches God's Word. Read the version you find most easy to understand, which will likely be one of the more contemporary versions, BUT also have the NASB, the KJV, or another version that is a translation which adheres more closely to the original languages of the Bible. Doing so will give you great and continuing peace, comfort, and joy in Christ Jesus!