

# SON OF GOD & GODHEAD

Brother Beebe: - As in the 7th number of Signs, for this year, there are two communications which call for some reply from me. I presume you will indulge me in such reply. But also on further investigation, I think, brother Clark's previous communication requires some more extended notice than I took of it in my recent letter. I must, therefore, request the permission to thus notice it previous to replying to the other. From the unaccountableness of the circumstance, that it is fifteen years or more since I first published through the Signs my views relative the sonship of the Son of God and to the popular idea of three persons in the Godhead. I have had repeated occasion to argue these subjects since through the same channel, and have uniformly preached in accordance with those views; and that brother Clark, during all that time, has been holding social and brotherly intercourse with me, preaching with me, &c., without any intimation that he considered my views heretical. And from the fact that during that period he has been a reader of the Signs, and must have known that the very ground I occupied was that of sustaining the doctrine of the essential, self-existing Godhead of the Son of God, in opposition to the apparent denial of that doctrine by some of the positions of the popular system, he has now, without showing any direct ground for it, come to the conclusion that I deny the divinity of the Son of God. I am led to enquire, whence this new born zeal and these conclusions in opposition to my views? From its connection with Rappahannoc Association, and the formal dissent contemplated, as he says, in that body from those points on which we differ, I am led to conclude that something is designed; and lest this should be a separation from me and any with whom I may accord on these points, I have thought it desirable that our distinct views on these points might be presented to view in connection, that they and others may know about what they are aiming to make a split. It is for this that I ask this indulgence of you and the readers of the Signs. There is a preliminary point on which we appear to differ, which I will first notice.

I hold that the Scriptures, being the revelation of God, must be true in all their parts, and therefore wherein they mark distinctions, by words or by connecting circumstances, those distinctions should be strictly regarded in all our consulting of them. Brother Clark will contend for the observance of such distinctions in some things. He will not admit that sprinkling or pouring is baptism because the words used and the circumstances mentioned in the Scriptures clearly point to immersion distinctively as baptism. But in reference to the subject before us, there are distinctions definitely pointed out, as between a father and a son, which they disregard. Further, I believe that no contradiction can exist in pure truth. As the Scriptures are the pure truth of God, there can be no real contradictions in them. Hence, whenever we hold a system which involves the language of the Scriptures in contradictions, we ought to remember the injunction of Paul, "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom.3:4). May this injunction have weight with us and lead us to reject our system as false rather than by implication represent the Scriptures as containing falsehood. Brethren, are not these positions consistent? If they are, please bear them in mind as we proceed.

Now to come to the points of difference. They contend that God exists as three persons and one God, that these three persons are alike equal and alike the self-existent God, but that they exist by distinct modes of existence, that the Father exists of Himself that the Word or Son exists by the generation of

the Father, being begotten of Him, and that the Holy Ghost exists as He proceeds from the Father and the Son. This I presume will be admitted to be a simple and candid representation of their views. Now to this system I conscientiously object, that it presents palpable contradictions, and that as they represent this as the revelation of God, they charge Him with these contradictions. They say that the three are alike eternal, self-existent and independent, and yet that the Father alone has an underived existence, and that the other two exist by a derived existence and depend on the existence of the other; the Son on the existence of the Father, and the Holy Ghost on the existence of the Father and the Son. Can they then be alike independent in their existence? If I say of two persons, one is the father and the other is the son, do I not distinctly convey the idea that the one existed as a person before the other, and that the latter's existing as a person is a consequence of the previous existence and action of the former; and hence while the father's existence did not depend on the previous existence of the son, the son's existence did depend on the previous existence of the father? Now when they say there are three persons in the Godhead, and of these three, as persons, one of them is the Father, and of another, He is the only begotten Son of this Father, what reason is there that the same declaration made concerning these two divine persons does not tend to convey the same idea, as to the previous existence of the one, and the subsequent and dependent existence of the other, as in the case of two men? When, therefore, they contend that the one is the Father, and the other His Son in relation to their personal existence in the Godhead, how can they, without a plain contradiction to that declaration, say in reference to the same personal existence, that they are alike eternal and independent in their existence? Is this letting God be true, but every man a liar, in charging these, and several other contradictions in this system, to God's Word? Again, I object to this system because that by making the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost three persons in the Godhead, they make them to be three distinct individuals, for what less does the term person mean, than an individual being? This, I think, at best is dividing the Godhead more than I believe the scriptural revelation of the one God will admit. But when we carry it out, that they contend that each of these persons is distinctively God, as each is a distinct individual, there must be three individuals existing by distinct modes of existence, and, of course, three Gods. Brother Clark says of the Apostles, that they were not afraid of making a plurality of gods by maintaining that the Son of God was Jehovah. Neither am I; but the Apostles never taught that the Son of God in His Godhead was a distinct person from the Father, so that his remarks are altogether out of place. When I was led to look at these inconsistencies, and contradictions in the Nicene system, I turned to an examination of the Scriptures on that head, and I found that they by no means sustained that system. I found that God has revealed Himself as three, and so as three, that distinct things are affirmed of each; but not so as three as to infringe upon the unity of God. Hence it is said, "These three are one." Hence, whenever God is spoken of He is spoken of as the one God, that is absolutely God, whether in reference to the Father, the Word or Son, or the Holy Ghost. Therefore, I conclude that each in His distinct relation is the one God, having all the fullness of the Godhead in that relation, whether as Father, as Son, or as the Holy Ghost.

I found that the Son is declared in the same person in which He is spoken of as Son to be absolutely God and one with the Father; yet that as Son He is uniformly spoken of as personally distinct from the Father and subordinate to Him; as that He is begotten of the Father, and which, as before noticed, conveys by the expression clearly the idea of a priority of existence in the Father. And things are affirmed of Him as Son which cannot consistently be affirmed of the Godhead as such. He says of Himself, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do," &c. John 5:19. Could it be affirmed that as God, He could do nothing of Himself? Again, it is written, "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman," &c. Gal.4:4. Could it be said consistently with the unity of God that God sent forth God made, &c.? Yet these and many like things are said of the Son. I, therefore, believe that the Son possesses in Himself such a distinction from the Godhead as is thus marked by the declarations of Scripture. Not that He as Son exists distinct from God, but that as I have said and as the Scriptures

affirm abundantly, that in His Person He is God, whilst He possesses that which is begotten of the Father in personal union with His Godhead as the Word, which constitutes Him personally distinct from the Father and the Holy Ghost. This distinct and begotten or produced existence, which constitutes Him as Son in distinction from the Father, I find not only revealed in the declaration that He is the Son of God, but also in that life which is declared to be in the Word in the beginning, for it reads, "In the beginning was the Word," &c. John 1:1; and in verse 4, "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." The declaration that this life was in Him certainly conveys the idea that it was something distinct from His essential existence as the Word or God. And if thus distinct, it must be a produced existence; and as a produced existence, it could be in Him and not destroy His Godhead.

In turning to Col. 3:3 & 4, we find it said of the saints, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Is not this the same life which is the light of men; said to be hid in God as that life was in the Word? And this life is Christ, and Christ is the Son of God Mt. 16:16. Hence it is said of the Word, when He was made flesh John 1:14. "And we beheld His glory." As the glory of the invisible God? No, but "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

Thus, the believer's life is identified with Christ, and Christ with the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father. Consequently, the Son of God, as such, is the life of the saints and the head of them in that life. How else could they be born of God, seeing He is the Only Begotten of the Father, unless they were begotten in Him as a head, as we are the creatures of God and being created in Adam. As brother Clark says, Is there anything like grandsons about this? Whilst we have in the Son the Godhead in all its fullness as existing in the Word, we have also the life of His people, thus constituting Him one with the Father, and one with His people, and yet possessing a personal distinction from each, in distinction from the Father, He is begotten of Him and is the life of His people, in distinction from His people, He is God. He is, therefore, just such a person as could act as Mediator between God and men. Without His being thus distinct, in person, from each, He could not sustain the office of Mediator. "Now a Mediator is not a Mediator of one, but God is one," says Paul Gal. 3:20. And again, I Tim. 2:5 - "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," not the man Jesus, but the Christ as well as the Jesus. Hence, as He had an existence in the beginning which was distinct from Him as God, and this existence is the Christ, we see that from the beginning we had an existing, living Mediator in the Head of the church. As Paul represents, as above, that the Mediator must be a person distinct from the one God, and from men; according to the system of our brethren, which represents Christ as existing only as God, and therefore as the one God, until about eighteen hundred years ago, there was no actually existing Mediator until then. If for four thousand years God could hold gracious intercourse with many of the fallen posterity of Adam without an existing Mediator through whom they were to commune with Him, I cannot see why such communion might not still be continued without a Mediator. But such a thing could not be. Paul says, "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" II Tim. 1:9. How could this be if there was no life of believers, no Christ in existence until about eighteen hundred years ago?

The views which I have advanced have been charged with Sabellianism. But any candid reader of what I have written will see the falsity of such charge. They will see that I believe just what the Scriptures say, that "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one" I John 5:7; that is, that God exists as three, but so as three, as to be absolutely one, and therefore, not three persons or individuals.

I have been charged with Arianism, so brother Clark charges me with denying the divinity of the Son of God. He says he has made it deliberately, but I must say he has made it wantonly. I cannot view it in any other light, though I presume he designed no such looseness. What I have written will, I think,

show the entire incorrectness of the charge. I will, however, add that brother Clark, I think, will admit that the Word was made flesh, or became a perfect man, without in the least destroying His essential Godhead. Why then could He not exist with the life of His people, and therefore a begotten life in Him, and as personally one with Him without destroying His divinity? However, it is enough to sustain me against such a charge, that, in the same declaration of Him, in which it is said, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men," it is also said, "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1 & 4.

Again he appears to think there is nothing in the Scriptures to warrant the idea of Christ's being anything else than God and man. Strange! Does brother Clark harbor the idea that God in His word has carelessly used descriptive and distinctive names and terms, where there are no distinctions designed? Is not the Lord Jesus Christ in the Scriptures declared to be God and Jehovah, and the Son of God, and man? Are not these three distinctive names, and is there nothing distinctive intended by them? Does not the name Jehovah imply absolute, independent, and self-existence? Does not the term Son, as used among men, and generally in the Scriptures, distinctively imply a begotten, and therefore dependent existence? And does not the term, man, imply a fleshly existence? Was He not a Son before He was made of a woman and made under the law? I cannot believe that our Lord is revealed to be what He is not. Why then are these three distinctive terms so often used of our Lord if He does not possess the three distinct existences thereby designated? Can brother Clark answer these enquiries so as to make them harmonize with the truth of Scripture declarations and yet so as to deny His distinct existence as the Son of God? In John 1st, as already noticed, we have the three natures, "The Word was God;" again, "In Him was life;" again, "The Word was made flesh," verse 1,4 & 14. In Isa. 9:6, we have A child born and a Son given, are not these distinct? And again, His names are The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. Are not these names descriptive? I presume brother Clark could not say that the name Everlasting Father being given to the child born and the son given implies He is distinctively the Father in the Godhead. Brother Clark will probably shuffle these queries off by saying the subject of God's existence is a mystery. True it is a mystery, but does this imply that we should, by our constructions put upon God's word, involve it in contradictions? There is a material difference between mystery and contradictions. It is nowhere written, great are the contradictions of godliness. Contradictions in his system I have already pointed out, the above hint therefore will be sufficient. I have thus presented my views as contrasted with the popular system, by which it will be seen that I, in common with the advocates of that system, hold that God exists as three, and that these three are one, and so one, that either of the three is, in His distinct relation, the one God. They hold that there are three persons in the Godhead. I deny that, but say that the Son is a proper and distinct person from the Father and the Holy Ghost, in relation to His sonship; but that He does not exist in His sonship separate from His Godhead, any more than He does as man, so that in His distinct personality He is God, Son of God, and Man. They hold that His sonship relates to His Godhead, so that He is no otherwise God than as He is begotten of the Father; I deny this as contradictory to His being equal with the Father, and to His being the independent and self-existent God; and in distinction, I hold that His sonship consists in His being begotten of the Father as the Head of His church and life of His people and that they thus, in their spiritual life, were begotten in Him and proceed from Him, and that He is the "first born among many brethren" Rom.8:29. And now brethren, is there anything heretical, anything anti-scriptural in those points wherein I differ from you, anything contradictory to the Son of God's being absolutely the Jehovah, whilst He is the Son of God, and Man, possessing these existences distinct from His Godhead, yet inseparable from it, and personally one with it; any diminishing of His capacity to act as the one Mediator between God and men? If there is, then clear yourselves from the heresy by separating from me. But beware how you encourage splits among us, when that from which you would separate is sustained by the word of God. I am willing to join issue with brother Clark in an appeal to the saints of the most high God, which it is that denies that the Son of God is the Jehovah, he

who says He is begotten of the Father as God, or I in contending that He is unbegotten, unproduced in His Godhead; and whether I any more diminish His essential Godhead by contending that He exists as the life of His people as well as man in His personal union with His Godhead, that he does in admitting that He exists as proper man in like union with His Godhead. Whilst having joined in this appeal to the saints, I would not forestall their decision, but wish them to consider and speak candidly if they are disposed to do so, and say which more denies the idea of absolute self-existence, he who contends that it is an unbegotten, underived existence, for this is the point; I would beg indulgence to lengthen this communication by stating what I believe to be the actual difference between me and brother Clark and other brethren whom I could name, and that reduced to the shortest span. It is simply this, that I believe that Christ actually existed from before the foundation of the world, in union with His Godhead as the Head and life of His people, and they deny His so existing, and therefore in effect, deny His actual existence as the Christ and Mediator until He was born of Mary. Also, we differ in the reference of His sonship, they referring it to His Godhead and I referring it to His existence as Head and life of His people. This is the amount on this subject; it, to be sure, extends itself to the subject of regeneration as to what constitutes that. Whether this be a sufficient ground for a split I leave them to judge for themselves. My opinion and my feelings are that it is no cause for a split or for hard feelings; but as I do not wish to intrude upon their fellowship after what brother Clark has developed by crowding myself upon their churches, or associations, I shall stand aloof, till invited.

There are one or two other things in brother Clark's communications which I wish to notice. He charges me with having proscribed all the saints from the apostles' days down. How have I proscribed them? By making my views on this subject a test of fellowship? I deny the charge. The first instance of my publishing my views on this subject, through the Signs, was to defend them from the charge of heresy, which certain brethren had made against them, as advanced in conversation and preaching; and in most cases since, in which I have discussed the subject through the Signs, it has been in self defense from similar charges. In these communications I have protested against making our different views on this mysterious subject a test of fellowship, or a charge of heresy; so long as the essential Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ was maintained. If, by the charge, he means that I have been too harsh relative to the views of others, I probably am guilty. I feel that I am deficient in the graces of meekness and humility as well as in every other christian grace. There have been some occasions for producing excited feelings. When the subject of the sonship of Christ, as I now view it, was first opened up to my view, the revelation of Him in the Scriptures seemed so to harmonize in relation to His being the Jehovah, and to His subordination as Son, and in reference to His relation with His church and people, that I thought surely Old School Baptists would receive the Scripture testimony on the subject. But what have I met with from them, as a general result, but charges of heresy, and of bringing forward new things to make a split and lead a party, &c. Again, when I consider the origin of the system, as such, of three persons in the Godhead, and of the sonship of Christ as generally received by Catholics, Protestants and Baptists; for brother Clark is not correct in saying I have proscribed all the saints from the Apostles' days. The Apostles never taught that there are three persons in the Godhead, nor that it was as God the Son was begotten. Mosheim says, speaking of the affair of Anus, and of the council of Nice, A.D. 325, until then "nothing was dictated to the faith of christians in this matter, &c. Hence it happened that the christian doctors entertained different sentiments upon this subject, without giving the least offense, and discoursed variously concerning the distinctions between the Father, Son and Holy Ghost." (See in his church history his account of the Arian affair and the council of Nice.) When I say I consider the character of the majority of the Bishops composing this council, the decrees they established, as well as the creed; that they sanctioned Constantine's assuming as emperor an authority in religion, and that from this council emanated the first professed christian persecution against christians; first against Arians, and then against Donatists and Novations, with whom was evidently the true church, I am led to the conclusion that here was developed the Beast in his first assuming the seat and power of the

dragon; and therefore that the creed and decrees of this council will go down with the Beast. See also Jones' account of this council, and remarks in his church history. Hence, I have felt impatient at seeing Old School Baptists holding so tenacious to the creed of that council, and in its spirit branding all as heretics who dare to differ from it. I may, therefore, have spoken too severely on this point. I give not the above account to reflect upon brethren, but as a matter of well authenticated historical fact, to show brother Clark that he was too brash, regardless of candor and of facts in his sweeping charge.

Brother Clark also admonishes me relative to the effects of my discussions. How many have been edified by them is not my province to decide. But I know that the multitude are not always on the side of the truth. I have probably as great an itching, naturally, for popularity as others; and I do highly regard the fellowship of brethren, and of brother Clark and those who appear to have been with him in this stand against my views. But I have not been trained in my experience to a popular course. In my early experience I was constrained by a regard to Scripture testimony to break off from my connection with the most numerous and influential denomination in New Jersey, and to hunt up a few despised and scattered members of a Baptist church in that vicinity, before unknown to me, and ask them to admit me to baptism and connection with them. And as they had no preacher, I had to go to the city of New York (thirty miles), and request a preacher to visit them and baptize me. My travel ever since has been in the same course. Again and again have I had to leave the many to go with the few; but it has not been my lot to leave the few and adhere to the many. And does brother Clark suppose that at this time of life I am to be induced, unless by being convinced of error, to cease to advocate what I have conscientiously received as revealed truth for the sake of being with the majority? With Jeremiah I may conclude that I was born a man of strife and a man of contention Jer. 15:10.

Brother Clark on I Cor. 15:45, and brother Williams, I will, if permitted, attend to in another communication.

Centreville, Fairfax County, Virginia,

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S. Trott.

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