

Forgiveness in God's Unique Son

My last article focused on the wonderful promise given in the Scriptures that those who “behold the glory of the Lord” shown to us in his Word, “...are being transformed...” In this series from John 1:14 we’ve been looking, primarily, at the important biblical doctrine of the Incarnation. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The doctrine of the Incarnation includes the biblical truth that Jesus is truly and fully God as well as truly and fully man. We’ve been carefully investigating each phrase of verse 14 and we have two more important phrases to unpack. These phrases teach that Jesus is “...the only Son from the Father” and that he is “full of grace and truth.” I’ve noted that Jesus’ Incarnation—his miraculous conception and virgin *birth*—can never be *totally* separated from his sacrificial, atoning *death* on the cross.

Chuck Colson, well-known Christian author and speaker, once told of watching a television interview with a man by the name of Albert Speer. Speer was a key figure in Hitler’s Nazi regime. Of all the war criminals who were tried at Nuremberg for the horrors connected with the Holocaust, Speer was the only one to admit his guilt. He ended up serving 20 years in prison for his crimes. In one of his books, Speer commented that his guilt never could or should be forgiven and that he would forever be seeking to atone for his sins. Commenting on this statement, the interviewer pressed him further as to whether it would ever be possible for him to be forgiven. Speer shook his head and said, “I don’t think it will be possible.”

At this point Chuck Colson recalls his thoughts at the time. “I wanted to write Speer and tell him about Jesus and his death on the cross, about God’s forgiveness. But there wasn’t time. That interview was his last public statement; he died shortly after.” What Albert Speer didn’t know—what all Christians are blessed to know—is that God is the *God of all grace* who sent his Son to die for our sins. Jesus Christ lived perfectly, died and then rose again from the grave on the third day for all who would ever turn to him in faith. Because of the cross of Jesus Christ, “the only Son from the Father,” there’s *fullness of grace and forgiveness of sins*.

As we look again at our verse in this article, I want to call your attention to the phrase, “the *only* Son from the Father...” The Greek word that’s

translated “only” is a compound word that’s often translated “only begotten,” and that may be the best translation. To English ears this may have the sound of someone being born, as in “begetting,” and this is certainly one sense in which this word is used. For example, in Luke 7:12, the word is used to describe the “only son of the widow [of Nain].” In Luke 9:38, the word is used of a man’s only son who needed healing from an unclean spirit. And so the word can be used in the sense of an only child of natural birth.

However, a special use of this word is seen in the New Testament book of Hebrews 11:17. This text speaks of Abraham who was prepared to offer up his “only son, Isaac.” Now we know from the Old Testament book of Genesis that Isaac was not Abraham’s “only son.” In fact, Isaac wasn’t even the *first* son, but he was the *unique* son. Isaac is said to be the *son of promise*. (Galatians 4:21-31) So then, depending on what the writer of scripture is seeking to reveal, the term can be used for an *only son by birth* or, as it’s used here, a *unique son*. When we think of those who are Christians, God has *many* sons. In Galatians 3:26, Paul writes, “...for in Christ Jesus you are all *sons of God* through faith.” Even though that’s true, there’s no one who is the *unique* Son except our Lord Jesus. John spends much of this gospel exploring that unique relationship between the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

It seems then that the translators of the English Standard Version of the Bible may have sought to take the focus off of “begetting” by translating this “only Son.” The New International Version translators came up with “the One and only.” But they both sought to preserve the *uniqueness* of the Word made flesh. Clearly, there is only one *unique* Son. Jesus is, “...the only Son from the Father.”

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