

Chapter 1

The Trinity and the Priority of Jesus Christ

Tom Wells, *The Priority of Jesus Christ*

Quote of the Week:

*The New Testament resounds with the conviction that men in this age come to know God only when Jesus Christ is set forth.*¹

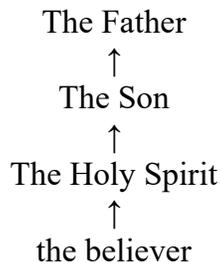
Key Scripture:

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him (John 1:18, NASB).

Lesson Outline:

Introduction: “Do we neglect God when we speak so much about Jesus Christ? ...Is it possible that there is a competition between God the Father and Christ the Son, in which it is vital for every Christian to choose the right side” (p. 1)?

- I. “The order of the Persons in the Godhead, and the relative emphasis we give to each, is not simply a theoretical matter” (p. 3). How we answer shapes how we live as Christians.
 - A. It’s clear where Jesus stands compared with other people. Many have used the acrostic JOY: Jesus, Others, You.
 - B. What about within the Trinity? Is the order Father, Son, and Holy Spirit accidental? There are at least two reasons for this order:
- II. The order of Father, Son, and Spirit reflects *ontological* relationships within the Trinity (how the members of the Trinity exist, their nature).
 - A. Eternal generation of the Son by the Father
 - B. Eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father (as Eastern Christians have said) or from the Father and the Son (as Western Christians say).
- III. The order of Father, Son, and Spirit reflects *economic* relationships within the Trinity (how the members of the Trinity relate to the created order).
 - A. We relate to the Father *through* the Son, and we know the Son by the work of the Spirit:



¹ Tom Wells, *The Priority of Jesus Christ* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2005), p. 13. Unless otherwise specified, all quotes are from *The Priority of Jesus Christ*.

B. In Acts we see the Holy Spirit directly teaching and guiding Christians, but Luke makes it clear that it is Jesus who sent the Spirit (Acts 1:1-2, 2:32-33).

IV. To understand what the Father is like, we “must look, not at him, but at the Lord Jesus” (p. 8-9).

A. Why not look at both? Because “no one has ever seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:18).

1. That doesn't mean there was no true knowledge of God before Jesus came.
2. It also doesn't mean that we can see Jesus today apart from the Scriptures.
3. But it shows the great difference between earlier revelation and the revelation we receive in Jesus Christ.

B. If we were looking only academically at God's character, we might trace the history of revelation—start in Genesis and watch understanding grow to its apex in Christ.

1. That can be a useful way to understand the patterns of Scripture.
2. But in salvation we must come first to Christ; we cannot savingly know the Father apart from the Son.

V. All of the Christian life “must be lived in light of the revelation of God in the Lord Jesus” (p. 10).

A. Growth is “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

B. As the Father creates light and brings us out of darkness (2 Cor. 4:6), that light comes “as the vision of the character and person of Jesus Christ” (p. 10).

C. We can't see the literal face of Jesus, but “Paul and the other apostles, in their preaching and writing, consciously and repeatedly explained the person and character of Christ” so that we would in turn see the nature of the invisible God (p. 10).

D. We see God's glory as we reflect on Jesus, because “the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being” (Heb. 1:3).

VI. There are other channels of revelation, other means of getting true knowledge of God (p. 11).

A. The Old Testament shows the character of God truly, and gives hints of the Trinity.

B. Nature and conscience, to some degree, bear witness to God (Rom. 1:19-20, 2:15).

C. Lives of Christians, to the extent that they have “clothed [themselves] with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14), point others to Christ [cf. 1 Cor. 11:1, 1 Thess. 1:6].

D. But these all take second place to Jesus—no one else has been fully Immanuel, “God with us” (Isa. 7:14, Matt. 1:23).

1. That's why Jesus insisted we follow Him exclusively (John 17:3; Matt. 6:24, 25:31-46).
2. The centurion with the sick servant (Matt. 8:5-13) may have trusted God to heal, but his trust was based on what he saw of Christ's power and authority.
3. Saving knowledge of God comes only through knowing Christ (John 17:3 with Acts 4:12; John 3:31-36).
4. Jesus came speaking the latest words of God (John 3:34)—the new and final revelation.
5. And the Father has given everything to the Son (John 3:35-36; cf. quote from Raymond Brown on page 16).