

**A PROTEST AGAINST THE DOCTRINE OF
THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF
THE HUMAN SOUL OF THE LORD JESUS
CHRIST¹**

A SERMON

PREACHED AT

THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD,

On Monday Evening, February 22, 1836

BY JAMES WELLS

MINISTER OF THE CHAPRL.

**“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting.
Amen and amen.” PSALM 41:13**

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AND SOLD AT THE CHAPEL.

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¹ Please note that I have made minor changes to punctuation, and to some old English words to make this more readable to the modern student. The original scan of the document is unchanged. Richard Schadle

PREFACE

To the true Christian all truth is important, but that which relates to an eternal world is infinitely so, and especially as it involves all the free-grace honors of that triune covenant God, whose we are, and whom we serve; and it is our privilege to trust him where we cannot trace him; the doctrines of eternal generation and pre-existerianism it seems were brought forward to make the doctrine of the Trinity somewhat more *comprehensive*; but, alas! (like all other doctrines of men) they involve more difficulties than what they remove, so that we must still be content to believe that what the Lord says is true, although we cannot *comprehend how* it can be so.

For sinners to be punished with endless torment for living a few years in sin, and to be thus punished for sins they were sovereignly left to commit, while others are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, are things, though generally believed by the Lord's people, are nevertheless not very compatible with the depraved reason of fallen man. The doctrine of one divine person in the Godhead giving, sending, pouring out, and withholding another, is not at all palatable to reason; but the Lord says it is so, and therefore let any man at his peril dare to say it is not so; our rule of faith is not what we comprehend, but what the Lord says in his holy word.

I therefore send forth this sermon with at least this satisfaction, that it has been my aim to vindicate and illustrate what I, in the fear of God, believe to be *truth*.

And I believe that the Lord will make it useful to some, although it may prove rather troublesome and vexatious to others; but let not my pre-existerian reader be angry, nor too confident, he may yet become an anti-pre-existerian. I have had the happiness of seeing several within my own congregation renounce the sentiment of pre-existerianism, believing it to be an error.

A SERMON

“The first born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.” Colossians 1:18

It is an incontrovertible truth, that nothing can be equal in importance and glory to the salvation of immortal souls. Remembering this, I would remind you that we are not assembled this evening to contend for what may gratify the speculative feelings of the mere theorist in religion, nor to kindle the fire of party emulation; and if we are duly impressed with a sense of the presence of him from whom nothing can be hid, we shall at least remember that the “wrath of man works not the righteousness of God.”

That the Lord’s own people are left to differ in many things that must not be trifled with, is what all must admit; and it is their privilege to judge everyone for himself; and as such I feel myself as much at liberty to contend for what I believe to be truth, as others are at liberty to advocate what they believe to be truth. No one creature has any right to usurp the conscience of another. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind; and amidst the errors that are in the world, it does not appear to me that the doctrine of the pre-existence of the human soul of the Lord Jesus Christ is one of the least. I shall therefore (the Lord enabling me) freely and soberly speak my mind concerning it; and as it is probable that many of you do not understand this doctrine, never having seen nor even thought of such a doctrine being in the Bible, it may be proper for, me to give some account of this far-fetched hypothesis. We will therefore proceed to notice the subject before us in the following order:

1. The system itself.
2. The Scriptures and circumstances generally adduced by its advocates to vindicate it.
3. I will, the Lord enabling me, give you my views of those Scriptures and circumstances.
4. The evil of the doctrine.
5. What I require of its advocates in order to prove to me that it is a doctrine according to truth.

I. *The system itself.* It is this; viz., that the human soul of the Lord Jesus Christ was created before the foundation of the world; so that those of the pre-existerians, who profess to believe that he is God as well as man, say that he was a complex person before this world began; that the production of his human soul was the beginning of time. Some of them say that Deity could not make a covenant with itself, so that a covenant could not be formed without the human soul of Christ being there. Some, that when the human soul of Christ was produced, that soul contained all the spirits that were afterward produced; so that angels that are fallen, and souls that are lost, once formed as it were a part of the soul of Christ; but this is a notion for which very few among them contend. As some pre-existerians are Arians, some Sabellians, and some professed Trinitarians, it is not possible to give a statement of this doctrine that each of them would acknowledge as his own view of the subject. The professed Trinitarians generally, I believe, say that the production of the soul of Christ was the first act of Divine power, and that by this production one of the subsistences in

the Godhead became a complex person, and that this person entered into covenant with the Father and the Holy Spirit; and that this complex person created the world; that the birth of his human soul was the birth of time, and the birth of his body was the fulness of time.

II. *The Scriptures and circumstances adduced by its advocates to vindicate it.* One is, Genesis 1:26, “And God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness.” They tell us, that the image here spoken of, was the human soul of Christ, that is, the human soul of Christ was God’s image, and that Adam was made in the likeness of this image. Again, “I have found David, my servant, with my holy oil have I anointed him.” They say he could not be anointed as God; therefore, he must have existed as man. Again, Proverbs 8:22,23, &c. “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water,” &c. “Then was I by him, as one brought up with him.” They say that this is language too low to ascribe to him as God. That it cannot be said of him, as God, that he was *set up, brought up, brought forth, and possessed*. And that the word from everlasting, does not mean from everlasting literally, and that he is not here spoken of as God, but as man; and that, therefore, his soul must have existed before this world began. Again, John 1, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God; and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God; all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made: in him was life, and the life was the light of men.” They say that the WORD means a complex person, and that as God, he was IN God, and as man he was WITH God; and that, therefore, his human soul must have been there. Again, John 6, “I am the true bread that comes down from heaven.” They say that it cannot mean that he came down as God, and that it therefore proves he pre-existed as man. Again, “These have known and believed that I came out from God;” and that, therefore, as man, he must have been with God. Again, “And what if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before.” This they consider to be quite conclusive. Again, “And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self, with the glory which I had with you before the world was.” Here they say, he prays for a glory which he had laid aside, and, therefore, must have possessed it before. Again, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.” Here we are told, by our opponents, he could not become poor as God, therefore, he must have existed and been rich as man. Again, “Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians, 2). Here we are told by our opponents, that his human soul was in the form of God, and that it put off that form, and, therefore, it must have pre-existed. Again, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature: for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him; and he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence” (Colossians 1). Here we are told (by pre-existenarianism) that as it is beyond dispute, that it is a complex person here spoken of, and creation ascribed to him; he must, therefore, have been actually a complex person when he created the world, and was thus the

first born of every creature; and that had not this been the case, he could not in all things have the pre-eminence. And Revelation 3:14, "The beginning of the creation of God;" that is, say pre-existenarians, his human soul was the first thing created. The circumstances generally adduced in favor of the pre-existerian hypothesis, are, the Savior's appearances in human form to the Old Testament saints, as his appearing to Joshua, wrestling with Jacob, and appearing in the fiery furnace, with the three worthies; they say it is beneath the dignity and decency of Deity thus to appear in human form, and converse so familiarly with man; but that admission of the doctrine of pre-existerianism, makes the appearances of the Lord to the Old Testament saints easy to be understood.

III. *My own views of these scriptures and circumstances;* and in order to be understood, I will here make a few observations on the five following things: 1st. The Trinity in unity; 2nd, That the three persons in the Godhead eternally possess each other; 3rd, That the covenant of grace was from everlasting; 4th, That local movement is ascribed to God; 5th, That one divine person, in the economy of grace, does send another. 1st. The trinity in unity. Be it then remembered that there are three divine persons in the Godhead, for we find personal acts ascribed distinctly to each, and we are to baptize in the name of each. The Psalmist bears testimony of three: "The God of Israel (the Father) that spoke" (to Christ for him). "The rock of Israel (Christ) spoke to him; the Spirit of the Lord spoke by him." "Christ created the world; the Spirit of the Lord moved upon the waters;" and God the Father said "it was good;" thus there are three, and three persons, there is but one God. These glorious persons in the Godhead are one as to their origin, they are self-existent. One as to their greatness, they are infinite. One as to their nature, they are divine; and one as to their knowledge, mind, and will. Thus, the Lord our God is one God. 2ndly. That the three persons in the Godhead eternally possess each other. So that though from everlasting the Maker lived alone; yet he was not solitary but social, as there is no divine perfection but what is possessed by each. They thus naturally, socially, and delightfully possessed each other from everlasting. We know the Holy Spirit possesses the Father, and reveals him to the church; and we know the Holy Spirit possesses Christ, and testifies of him to the heirs of glory; and we know that the Father possesses Christ and draws his people to him; and we know the Father possesses the Holy Spirit, and gives him to his children; and we know that the Lord Jesus Christ possesses the Father, for the Father dwells in him; and we know that the Lord Jesus Christ possesses the Holy Spirit, and that he sends him to his family; thus do the persons in deity possess each other. 3rdly. That the covenant of grace was from everlasting; that is to say, that the three persons in deity did from everlasting form a Covenant of salvation, that one of the divine persons undertook to take, in the fulness of time, our nature, and that he was thus covenantly constituted God-man, and that the church was loved and chosen, and given into his hands, or rather that the act of election gave the church into his hands; thus was Christ chosen for, and appointed to be, the salvation of the church: that he both loved the church, and gave himself; and being one in nature, mind, and will, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, he was by them chosen to that for which he gave himself to be, as there cannot be any mercy independent of Christ; and as the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting, there must have been a Christ from everlasting; and so it is written, "O Lord, you are our Father, our Redeemer, your name is from everlasting." (Isaiah 63:16) I therefore conclude that the covenant of mercy was from everlasting. 4thly, That local movement is ascribed to God. Let us go down and confound their language. Pre-existenarianism says, that such scriptures as speak of God's coming down, going

up, and the like, are better understood of the human soul pre-existing; this may appear, at first sight, rather feasible, but then what shall we do with this plural pronoun US? The Savior says, "If any man love me, he will keep my words: my Father will love him, and WE will COME unto him and make OUR abode with him" (John 14:26) While these scriptures remain in the Bible, I dare not say that local movement is not ascribed to God. 5thly, That one divine person, in the economy of grace, does send another. This is a doctrine of the Old Testament as well as of the New Testament: "You send forth your spirit, and they are created" (Psalm 104) "Take not your Holy Spirit from me;" and in the New Testament we read again and again, of the Holy Spirit being sent; how, then, can I join with those who deny the holy scriptures, and say, that one divine person cannot send another. Whether all pre-existenarians do this is a matter that I must leave with God and their own conscience. I know there is only one right means for a man to cleanse his way, and that is by taking heed thereto according to the Lord's word. After thus noticing that there are three persons in the Godhead, and that these three are one, that these three eternally possess each other, that the covenant of redemption was from everlasting, that local movement is ascribed to God, and that one divine person does send another; after thus somewhat preparing my way, I come to notice the scriptures that are by some thought to contain the doctrine of the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ: the first I shall notice, is Revelation 3:14, the beginning of the creation of God; the question arises, what does the word creation, as here used, mean? Does it mean investiture, or does it mean a production of something out of nothing? as we know that the word creation is used in both these senses. We often apply the word creation to the act of investiture; hence we say, the king created peers; and so, we find the Latin language often apply this word, to the act of investiture, as *consoles creantur*, that is, consuls are created. Again, *militares tribum creantur*, military tribunes are created. Again, *ille creator Rex*, he is created king. And it is remarkable that the Greek word (*ktisios*) here translated creation, is applied by St. Peter to magistrates, alluding, of course, to their being invested with civil power, so that I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning of the creation of God by investiture; and let not our opponents ridicule this idea, for the Lord declared to Abraham, that he (Abram) was a father while as yet he had no child, yet he was invested with the paternal name *father*: he was thus, by investiture, the beginning of the Jewish and other nations, of which he was the father. The Greek word (*arche*) here translated beginning, has a more extensive meaning than our English word *beginning*; the Greek word (*arche*) frequently signifies the chief; hence, the Savior is called the chief Shepherd: the original word is *archipoimenos*; that is, the chief Shepherd. The Greek word for archangel is *archangelos*, meaning the chief angel; nor can I think it would be doing any violence to this scripture to read it thus: he is the chief of the creation of God, not that we need even this way of rendering the Greek word *arche*, for this passage does not say that his human soul was the first thing created, nor can I believe that it means such a thing; it is evident that the meaning is, that he was the chief or the beginning of the creation of God, by investiture; that is to say, he being the co-venantly constituted Christ of God from everlasting, for it is declared that his goings forth were of old from everlasting (Micah 5:2): he was thus from *everlasting*, the cause of creation. Abraham was, by being invested with the paternal name *father*, the beginning; and he being thus the beginning, was afterward to be the beginner. So, the Lord Jesus Christ was not only from everlasting, the beginning, but he also began creation, and was thus the beginner. Not only is he said to be the beginning, but also the *ending*: if his being called the beginning means the production of his human soul, then why is he

also called the *ending*? Now mind, not *ender* but *ending*. I have just as much right to believe that his being called the ending, means the annihilation of his human soul, as I have to believe that his being called the beginning means the production of his human soul; the truth is, he was from everlasting, the cause of creation, and was thus the beginning of the Lord's works of old, the beginning of the creation of God, and as he created the world he was the beginner, and he is the cause of the end of the world, as it will only stand until his people are gathered in, on his account this world was created, and on his account it shall end. He is thus the beginning and the ending of time, as well as the beginner and ender. I therefore believe that he is called the Alpha because he was truly God, and the covenantly constituted Christ of God from *everlasting*, and that he is called Omega because he is the Christ of God to everlasting, but more of this hereafter.

The next scripture I shall notice is Genesis 1:26. And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness;" we are told by pre-existerians, that the image here spoken of is the human soul of Christ; and that Adam was created after its likeness. I must confess this is to me rather a curious way of explaining this scripture, so that it seems that we are not to believe that Adam was in any sense an image of God, but only an image of a human soul, called, by pre-existerians, the glory-man, the pattern-man, and the like.

It is said of the elect that they are predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ, the meaning of which is, that they are to be like him, and see him as he is; here the word image means Christ himself. Adam begat a son in his own likeness after his image; here I understand that he begat a creature like himself, and no doubt it alludes also to his sinner-ship.

Concerning Adam, the scriptures assure us of two things; 1st, that he was made in the image and after the likeness of God; 2ndly, that he was a figure of him that was to come. (Romans 5:14.) My views of this portion of the Lord's word (Genesis 1:26) are, that Adam was holy, and thus faintly sets forth the holiness of God. He was righteous, and thus reflected the character of God as a God of righteousness. He was wise as appears in his naming the beasts and knowing Eve. He had dominion, and thus he was an image of God as to his (the Lord) being a God of holiness, righteousness, wisdom, and sovereignty. But perhaps it may be said, is not this shutting the Lord Jesus Christ out of this scripture? to which I answer, Yes, it would be, if he were not God as well as man. The very manner of this scripture appears to militate against the doctrine of the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ; for it does not say, Let us make *another* man, but, "Let us make *man*." This certainly at least seems to say, Let us make a nature that is not yet made. There is no account in this scripture of a pre-existing man. I have, however, to observe, that Adam was not only in the image of God in the sense that I have noticed, but he was also the figure of him that was to come. Mark, it does not say that he was the figure of a human soul that then was in existence, but the figure of him that was to come; the formation of Adam was the joint work of the sacred three. God the Father begat the human nature of Christ; the Holy Spirit formed it; the eternal Son of God assumed it. Adam's body was formed first; then God breathed into it a living soul. Adam's soul did not exist before his body: he stood in paradise as long as it was necessary for the glory of God that he should; and Christ is placed in the church, the true garden, and he will stand as long as it is necessary, he should, and that will be forever. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever. In many more respects was Adam a figure of him that was to come.

Pre-exterianism merely makes Adam an image of a pre-existing human soul. But scripture makes Adam an image of the God that then was, and a figure of the man that was to come. Christ is called the last Adam, the second man the Lord from heaven (1 Corinthians 16). Mark, it does not say a human soul, but the LORD from heaven. It is evident that the intention of this scripture is to declare his Godhead as well as his manhood, and to this end he is said to be a quickening spirit; the Lord from heaven, as the Father quickens whom he will. So, the Son being God as well as man quickens whom he will; and we find quickening ascribed to the Holy Spirit (John 6:63). For these three are one, but, according to pre-existerianism, we are to understand by his being declared to be the Lord from heaven, that it means merely a human soul came down from heaven, and took a body, and thus instead of God manifest in the flesh, it is a mere man, declared to be a quickening spirit, the Lord from heaven; and thus we lose more than one half of the truth and importance of this scripture by its being robbed of the Godhead of Christ. Neither does the Greek word (*kurios*) here translated *Lord*, exclude the idea of self-existence, but is often in the New Testament applied to God, as in Matthew 4:10. "You shall worship the (*kurios*) Lord your God." And Mr. Parkhurst, in his Greek lexicon, says, that the heathen believed the sun to be self-existent, and to denote the same, called it (*kurios*) the self-existent luminary of the world. Therefore, as the Greek word *kurios*, as well as the English word *Lord*, does not always exclude (but often includes) the doctrine of self-existence, I believe that the only scriptural reason that can be assigned why the Lord Jesus Christ is said to be the Lord from heaven, and a quickening Spirit, is, because he is God as well as man.

Again (Psalm 89), it is written, "I have found David my servant, with my holy oil have I anointed him." The pre-existerians say he could not be anointed as God; therefore, he must have existed as man. They found their argument on the words (I have found) being in the past tense, and it seems they do not much like the doctrine of God calling things that are not as though they were (Romans 4:17). Yet there are many scriptures that cannot, without such a doctrine, be understood. Such as "he *was* slain from the foundation of the world." "He *was* led as a lamb to the slaughter." "You are all fair, there is no spot in you." We find the glorification of the saints spoken of in the past tense, as "whom he justified he also glorified." All these things were fixed and settled by the Lord, even from everlasting; and the Lord declared them done; when, as yet they were only covenantly done. It is in this sense that I understand this scripture, "I have found David my servant, with my holy oil have I anointed him." The Lord speaks in this way of Cyrus, "Thus, says the Lord, to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right-hand I *have holden* to subdue nations" (Isaiah 40:1). The Lord spoke thus of Cyrus many years before Cyrus was born; these scriptures, then, are decidedly opposed to the doctrine of pre-existerianism, nor do I know of any but what are.

I now come to Proverbs 8. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old; I was set up from everlasting, or ever the earth was, when there were no depths, I was brought forth," &c. "Then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." Here is not a word about a human soul, although there is a sense in which his soul, his body, his life, his death, his people, and his glory are included. Let us, however, try this scripture by the doctrine of pre-existerianism, and then by the doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship.

According to the pre-existerian scheme, it will run thus, that nothing is included in this scripture but what was *actually* in heaven before this world was, therefore, according to pre-existerianism itself, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ is not included, nor his obedient life, nor his atoning death, nor yet his people, so that this scripture is not intended to set forth the eternity and glory of the Sonship of Christ, but merely that a human soul was produced and made very happy, and that the words *from everlasting*, do not mean from everlasting! And so we are to listen to the logic of men instead of obeying the truth of God. Pre-existerianism certainly makes awful havoc of the word of God, and as such I cannot believe it is of God. Let us now try this scripture by the eternal Sonship of Christ; when I say the eternal Sonship of Christ, my meaning is, that one of the eternal three was from everlasting invested with Sonship, and is thus the eternal Son of God, in truth and love; and as I have before observed, the eternal three possessed each other from everlasting, and that in the endearing characters of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. For myself I cannot believe in the doctrines of begotten divinity and eternal generation, though I believe many who hold these terms, are right in their meaning, for who can find out the Almighty to perfection. By the word *beginning*, I understand the beginning of time: as to saying, as pre-existerians do, that time commenced before this world began, is evidently a mere human opinion, as there is no foundation in the Bible for such a notion.

The Lord will put an end to time by putting an end to this world (Revelation 10:6). As time began by the world being created, so it will end by the world being annihilated. What is time but the revolution of seasons, which revolution is by the being and order of the universe. According to pre-existerianism one would think that Moses instead of saying, "IN the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," that he would have said, AFTER the beginning; but no, Moses, the man of God, knew that it was "*in* the beginning (of time) that God created the heaven and the earth." If the beginning of time be not here meant (Genesis 1:1), then what is meant? To say the word beginning here *means merely* the beginning of the world, is only saying, that the world began when it did begin, and so the word beginning would be superfluous. Allow that the word beginning means the beginning of time, then we can make sense of it. Thus, that as time began when the world began to be, it was IN (not after) the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. So here, in Proverbs 8., I understand the word beginning to mean the beginning of time: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." I have already shown that the eternal three from everlasting possessed each other, and one of the sacred three was from everlasting invested with Sonship; he was of course possessed in, and at the beginning of the world, the creation of which was the Lord's way of bringing the human race into existence; so that the Son of God was there not only when he gave to the sea his decree that the waters should not pass, &c.; he was not only possessed then, but before these works of old, even from everlasting, and so before the earth was. But, perhaps, it may be said, that it also says, that "he was set up *from* the beginning;" yes, it does say so, and it also says that "he was set up from everlasting;" and the question arises what is here meant by the two words, *beginning* and *everlasting*. Pre-existerians try to harmonize these two words by saying, the word everlasting does not mean what it says, that is to say, that it does not mean literally from everlasting, but only from the beginning of time, though, for my part, I believe that the words from everlasting mean what they say, so that the meaning of Proverbs 8:23, appears to me to be this, that the Savior sustained the character of wisdom from the beginning, or ever the beginning was, even from everlasting.

I have before hinted that the creation of the world was the joint work of the eternal three. We find in this chapter (Proverbs 8) that creation is not ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ, BUT as other scriptures do ascribe creation to him; it very interestingly illustrates the doctrine of a plurality of persons in the deity; and so we find creation ascribed to the Father, to Christ, and to the agency of the Holy Spirit. By his spirit he garnished the heavens. Of course, the word beginning, as used in the book of God concerning the Son of God, is not always to be understood in the same sense, as I have already shown that when Christ is called the beginning, it denotes that he was the cause of creation, as well as the Creator; and that he was the way in which the mercy of the Lord was from everlasting upon his people. Hence John sets forth his relative character, Godhead and power, by saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." Being God, he was, in the relative character of the WORD, with God; and is it not very wonderful that if his human soul did exist in the beginning of time, that out of the many references that are made to Christ as a Creator, by the inspired writers, that not one should make the least mention of any such soul being then in existence, though they speak of him in his covenant capacity. "In the beginning was the Word," but it does not say, in the beginning was the human soul, nor does it say that the Word was not *before* as well as *in* the beginning. It appears to me that he is often spoken of as being in the beginning, to teach us that nothing was done without him from everlasting before the beginning; nor in the beginning, nor after the beginning, so that Christ and his cross have been the great theme of the saints, in all ages.

His manifestation of himself to Adam in a way of mercy, after the fall, is evidently called a beginning (I John 1), that which was from the beginning, which was Christ the word of life, so that the first believer was made acquainted with his complexity, obedient life, and atoning death. The Lord told Adam that the seed of woman should bruise the serpent's head, but I do not find the Lord said anything to Adam about a pre-existing soul, yet Christ and his cross have been the theme of the church from the beginning (*viz.* from the first believer) to the present time, and will be when time is no more.

But while the WORD was *in* and *from* the beginning, it was not *in* and *from* the beginning *only*, but from everlasting; hence how beautifully does the prophet Micah (5: 2) set forth the Godhead complexity, and eternal Sonship of Christ; "But you Bethlehem Ephratah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, *from everlasting.*" This accounts for the mercy of the Lord being from everlasting. There is no mercy without Christ, therefore Christ must have been Christ from everlasting. Now as it cannot mean that his human nature existed from everlasting, it must mean that he was God actually, and Christ covenantly, *from everlasting.* This appears to me to be the meaning (Isaiah 53:16). "You, O Lord, are our Father our Redeemer; your name is from everlasting." The terms Father and Redeemer are personal, relative, and covenant names, and as the Lord's covenant name is from everlasting, then our God was Father, Son, and Holy Ghost from everlasting, and thus the church of old sang, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel *from everlasting*, and to everlasting. Amen and amen (Psalm 41:13.) And again, says Habakkuk

(1: 12), “Are you not *from everlasting*, O Lord my God, my holy ONE.” Christ is the Holy One of Israel, and is here declared to be from everlasting, but pre-existerianism says, that he was not the Son of God until his human nature actually existed, and it could not exist from everlasting, and as these scriptures declare him to have been a Redeemer from everlasting, these scriptures therefore refute the doctrine of pre-existerianism.

By the words set up from everlasting, I understand that he was from everlasting invested with his sonship and mediatorial character. It is said (Proverbs 8:31), that he was “rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and that his delights were with the sons of men.” By the word earth, as here used, I understand is meant the human race: the habitable part of this earth, that part which is loved and chosen to salvation; this part being put into the hands of the Son of God before time was; the Savior’s obedience and blood imputed to them, and they complete in Christ; blessed with all spiritual blessings according as they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world, for the mercy of the Lord was upon them from everlasting. This part of the earth was thus rendered habitable; hence the Psalmist not only speaks of the great work which the Redeemer should perform but speaks of it in the past tense. “You *have ascended* on high, you have led captivity captive, you have received gifts for men, yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might *dwell among them*” (Psalm 68:18). These, then, are the habitable part of the earth, and his delight were *with* the sons of men: mark, his delights were *with* the sons of men; then if his delights were with the sons of men, they must have been in some sense *with him*, so that the only scriptural conclusion is, that they were *with him relatively*, of course reason would say, how could his delights be with them if they were not there. Two things are quite certain, viz., that his delights were *with* them, and yet they were not there actually.

Here are a few more words (Proverbs 8) that are applied to the Savior, which I shall notice, viz., the words brought forth, and brought up with him. Here I would observe that from everlasting he undertook our cause, so that from everlasting he came forth on our behalf, for his goings forth were of old *from everlasting*; and he was by the Father, as one brought up (on our behalf) with the Father, from everlasting, for he came forth from everlasting. His going forth from everlasting, is expressive of his oneness with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and of his infinite love and condescension in undertaking our cause, his being set up, brought up, and brought forth, is expressive of the joint love and condescension of the Father and the Holy Spirit; thus, while he went forth from everlasting, so he was brought forth from everlasting. It has been asked by pre-existerians, that if these things are said of Christ as God, why are not such things said of the Father, and I think the reason is very obvious, for the Lord Jesus Christ sustains characters which neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit does; and as he had undertaken to take our nature, and was from everlasting the Son of God relatively, it was necessary that language should be used suitable to his person and character, as God and the Son of God.

The pre-existerians, however, say, that the language used in Proverbs 8 is too low to relate to Christ as God; it is certain that one truth often explains and illustrates another: for myself I believe that the Holy Spirit is one of the co-equal and co-eternal persons in the one God. It is said of him what *he shall hear* that he shall speak; that he is sent by the Father. Here is one person purely divine sending another person who is purely divine; he is also sent by the Savior. Not only is he spoken

of as listening, as being sent, but as being given. Here is one divine person giving another; he is also said to be withheld. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Again, "take not your Holy Spirit from me." How is it that the Holy Spirit, who is purely divine, can be spoken of as listening, as being sent, given, withheld, poured out. Striving and the like, and another divine person, cannot be spoken of as set up, brought up, brought forth, possessed, and given; and yet language which seems equally incompatible with self-existence, infinity, and eternity, is applied to the Holy Spirit; and yet pre-existerians say that the language used in Proverbs 8 is too *low* to apply to the Lord Jesus Christ as God, and yet many of them believe (at least profess to believe) in the personality and coequality of the Holy Spirit. I must confess that I cannot conceive how I could be a pre-existerian and a trinitarian at one and the same time, for, of course, if I thought this language in Proverbs 8 too *low* to apply to the Savior as God, I should, by the same rule, be at once tempted to conclude that the Holy Spirit could not be one of the co-equal persons in Deity. As the language applied to him is inapplicable to such dignity, nor is it any wonder that so many who venture to the precipice of pre-existerianism should be hurled into the pit of Sabellianism.

Again: "This is he of whom I said. After me comes a man which is preferred before me, for *he was before me.*" Pre-existerians tell us that they cannot suppose that John was here telling the people that God was older than he (John) was; and that therefore John must have meant that his (Christ's) soul pre-existed, and so, according to this interpretation, John only preached a part of a Christ, that is, that this man's (Christ's) body was born of a woman months before John was, but that his soul existed a great while before that, for, say they, it would be absurd to suppose that John was telling the people that God was older than he (John) was. Well, perhaps, it would be absurd to suppose that John was telling the people that God was older than he (John) was, but I cannot think it very absurd to suppose that John was telling the people that Christ was something more than man, so that when John says of Christ, "he was before me," I understand that John means that Christ is God as well as man. John thus introduces the *whole* person of Christ, but pre-existerianism shuts his Godhead out. If pre-existerians content themselves with believing John preached a part of a Christ, I must say, for myself, I cannot believe but what John preached a whole Christ, and that when he said after me a man comes, which is preferred before me, for he was before me: to this glorious person did John ascribe the taking away of the sin of a chosen world; surely, then, when he said he was before him, he must have meant that he was God as well as man, for no mere man can redeem his brother.

Again, it is written, John 3:13, "No man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." Here we have again the doctrine of calling things that *are not* as though they were; this passage like the foregoing evidently includes his whole person, so that, by virtue of the oneness of his person, he was, while here on earth, virtually in heaven, even as man, and he, as a divine person, came and took our nature, and while he came of his own will, he also came by the joint will of the Father and the Holy Ghost; and thus while he came of his own will, he, being one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, was sent, for if it be said of the Holy Spirit that he is sent, if this be said of one divine person, why not of another. The Holy Spirit is said to be sent *from* the Father, and so Christ being God as well as man, came down from heaven in a two-fold sense; he came down as God, and dwelt among men; he came down virtually as man, as his manhood was begotten of God; as it also virtually existed before, and so he said,

“What if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before.” And what did the disciples see ascend? why they saw his body ascend, therefore there is quite as much reason to believe that his body pre-existed as there is that his soul pre-existed. He does not say, what, if my soul should ascend where it was before? so that I must continue to believe what I do now, namely, that he was there before actually as God, and relatively as man, or else I must believe that his body as well as his soul pre-existed, which absurdity I hope never even to dream of; yet the scriptures, in my view, afford as much proof (and that is none) of his body having pre-existed as that his human soul pre-existed. Again, John 5:51, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven, and the bread that I will give is my flesh.” I have before noticed that he came down from heaven as God to take our nature, and that he was before relatively man, as well as actually God. According to the pre-existerian doctrine, this passage in the sense of it would run thus: My soul is the living bread which came down from heaven, and my soul is the flesh which I will give for the life of the world; for pre-existerians will have that it was *merely* the human soul that *came* down from heaven; so, of course, the human soul must be the flesh that is given for the life of the world. Thus, pre-existerianism shuts out both the Godhead and body of the Lord Jesus Christ from this scripture.

I believe that the word flesh, as here used, means the whole person of Christ: that he is not the bread of life merely as man, nor as God abstractedly, but as God-man; and so it is written: “And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ, *this is the true God and ETERNAL LIFE*” (1 John 5:20). Thus, then, as God-man he is the bread of life. “He loved the church and *gave himself* for it,” &c.

But again, we are told that such language as “he came down from heaven,” proceeded from God: “and sent of the Father,” is language more suited to his human soul than to his God head. We again say, that language, equally in-compatible with infinity, is applied to the Holy Spirit; not that such language is applied to either so much to express their self-existence and infinity, as it is to express their personality, condescension, covenant relation, and gracious acts: to this the language is suited, and for this it is evidently employed; and while it is said of one divine person (the Holy Spirit) that he proceeds *from* the Father; that he is *sent*, and that he is given, I shall feel fully at liberty to believe that the same things may, with propriety, be applied to another divine person.

The next scripture I shall notice is John 17:5: “And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was.” We are told by pre-existerianism², that the glory here spoken of is a glory that Christ had parted with³, and that he here prays to be restored to it; that is, that the human soul here prays to be restored to what it left in heaven. Thus we see that pre-existerianism shuts out of this scripture, the Godhead and the body of Christ; and yet we know that he, as God actually, and man relatively, had a glory with the Father before the world was, and we know also that his body as well as his soul is glorified; nor does this scripture say (according to my view of it), either in the sense of it or sound of it, that the Savior here prays

² I believe Wells is referring to John Stevens, an eminent preacher who was born at Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, June 8th, 1776. Please see page 18ff on The Gospel Herald, Vol six 1875 for extensive information on John Stevens. Richard Schadle

³ Stevens on the Trinity, p. 157. As noted by Wells here and afterwards

to be *restored* to a glory that he had parted with. It does not say anything about having parted with any glory; he prays to be glorified, and that with a glory he had before the world was but he does not say that he had ever parted with it. Even according to pre-existerianism his body had never actually possessed this, and yet we know that his body is included in this prayer: therefore it is evident that the sense of this scripture is, that he here prays to be glorified as God-man with the glory which he as God actually; and man relatively, always had, and so his manhood is glorified with the glory which he as God actually, and as man relatively, had with the Father before the world was; nor does it seem that the disciples understood him as meaning the descent of his soul when he said, "I come forth from the Father;" for the disciples immediately exclaimed, "Lo, now speak you plainly and speak no proverb, now are we sure that you know all things" (John 16:29, 30); as though they should say, now we know that you are God as well as man, and, therefore, that you know *all things*. I think if they had thought that he meant that his soul pre-existed, that they would not, on this ground, have exclaimed, "Now we know that you know *all things*." So that I believe that they understood him to mean that he was God as well as man, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father by Christ Jesus, to dwell in the saints; so the eternal Son of God proceeds from the Father to take our nature; for we know that the Son of God is come and has given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and this is the true *GOD and eternal life*, and so he knows all things, and is God over all blessed for ever more. He came and took our nature (sin excepted), and thus as God-man performed his mediatorial work, and as God-man left the world and went to the Father; not that he, as God, was separated from the Father in coming to take our nature, because, as one with the Father; he is self-existent and infinite, yet even as God he is spoken of as descending and ascending, and so sings the Psalmist of him, "God is *gone up* with a shout" (Psalm 47:5). The conquest of the cross is not a victory wrought by a mere man, but the triumph of an incarnate God; so, then he that entered the realms of bliss was the God-man mediator, not that as God he ever could be absent from any place.

But for another scripture, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich yet for your sakes become poor, that you through his poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Pre-existerianism tells us that the meaning of this scripture is, that the human soul of Christ pre-existing, was possessed of vast treasures of heavenly honors, that it divested itself of all these when it took a body, and thus became poor that the saints, through his poverty, might be made rich. But if his human soul pre-existed and possessed such vast treasures of wisdom and knowledge, is it not rather remarkable that the scriptures nowhere speak of his *recovering* this wisdom and knowledge; it is said he grew in wisdom, but it is not said he *recovered* his wisdom; his human mind of course was finite, so as not to comprehend the day of judgment. How absurd, then, the pre-existerian notion, that he could comprehend the whole business of salvation, but now could not remember, though he once knew, when the day of judgment was to be.

Let us hear what the scripture says on the subject of his being poor. The "foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has now where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). Such was the poverty he for our sakes condescended to undergo. This is one of the many more things that made him a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was of the royal tribe of Judah, and as man was, by virtue of descent, heir to the throne and crown of Judah, and even his own disciples thought that he intended to be an earthly king. As the kingdom of Judah was his, he

may, even in this sense, be said to have been rich; but if he had taken these riches, how then should he have performed the work which the Father gave him to do: so that though he was thus rich, yet, for our sakes, he became so poor as not to have where to lay his head; and to me it appears that this is what is meant in Psalm 89:44, “You have made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground;” his mediatorial glory could never cease, his crown be profaned, nor his throne cast to the ground. I therefore conclude that the meaning is, that though he was born of royal blood, and by right was rich, yet for our sakes became poor. “The Son of man had now where to lay his head.”

Again, Philippians 2, it is written, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Pre-existerianism tells us, that the meaning of this scripture is, that the human soul of Christ was in the form of God; that it put off this form and took upon it the form of a servant, and that he emptied himself; and that on account of his human soul being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God. This pre-existerian interpretation amounts to this, that in consequence of the greatness of his human soul he was equal with God; BUT as it says that he thought it not robbery to be EQUAL with God, I believe the reason is, that, as he was one with the Father as God, it was therefore no robbery to claim equality with the Father: “I and my Father are one;” and yet as man his Father is greater than he; and so, as man, made himself of no (earthly) reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant. Pre-existerianism tells us that when the Apostle says, that Christ was in the form of God, that the words *form of God* do not mean his Godhead, or that he was God really, but that his human soul was in the form of God, and so by the same rule, when it is said he took upon him the form of a servant, we are not to understand that it means that he was a servant really, but only in the form of one; thus, according to pre-existerianism, this scripture does not say that he was God really or a servant really, although it clearly shows that he was really God, and truly the servant of the Lord. If he were not God, it could not be said that he was equal with God; and if he were not man, it could not be said that he made himself of no reputation, and that he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Nor did he put off the form of God, when he put on the form of a servant, for he was still truly God and the image of God; and as to saying he emptied himself, is saying what the scriptures do not warrant: the scriptures nowhere say that he emptied himself, neither does the Greek word (*etapeinosen*) here translated, humbled himself, allow of such a meaning. Neither Parkhurst nor Screvelius give any such interpretation to the word. So that the word, he humbled himself, as in our English Bible, is perfectly right: there is, therefore, from this scripture no authority to say that he *emptied* himself. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

It is not said that God restored his soul to its exaltation, but that God has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, not a word in this scripture about the pre-existence of a human soul.

I come now to Colossians 1 “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, for by him were all

things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist, and he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.” Pre-existerianism tells us that if the human soul of Christ did not pre-exist, he could not be the first-born of every creature, that he could not be before all things, and that he could not in all things have the pre-eminence.

It appears to me, if I were a pre-existerian, that I should not be able to understand or make any sense of this Scripture, without contending that his body pre-existed as well as his soul, for this Scripture affords quite as much reason to believe that his body pre-existed as that his soul pre-existed, for it says, “In whom we have redemption through his *blood*, even the forgiveness of sin. That it is a complex person spoken of in this Scripture, no man in his right mind will deny, and a person having a body; the majority of pre-existerians themselves do not allow that his body pre-existed, yet his body is included in this Scripture as being before all things, as much as his soul is; it is, in my view, beyond dispute, that in this Scripture the whole person of Christ is included; so that, of the two, there is more propriety in saying that his body, as well as his soul, pre-existed, than there is in saying that his soul pre-existed without his body; for, mark, “we have redemption through the *blood* of him who is the first-born of every creature.”

There are some pre-existerians who say that his body actually pre-existed, but these are merely exceptions; we will say, then, that pre-existerians generally believe that his soul (but not his body) actually pre-existed; so that their interpretation of this Scripture would run thus, we have redemption through the blood of him, a part of whose human nature was before all things, a part of whose human nature was the first born of every creature, a part of whose human nature has the pre-eminence in all things; and that his human nature could not have the pre-eminence in all things without actually existing. This leaves the holy and ever-glorious body of the great Redeemer destitute of pre-eminence, and says, the body is only the inferior part of the man, the soul is the chief of the man. Well, suppose it is, was not the body of the Lord Jesus Christ as essential to our salvation as his soul? without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin; surely, then, if his body was essential to remission of sin, we ought to be careful how we apply the word *inferior* to it. He shall change our vile body and fashion it like unto his *glorious body*.

However, truth compels me to say, that it does appear to me, that pre-existerianism, in its interpretation of this Scripture, does violence to the Savior’s body, by making the priority and pre-eminence of his manhood to consist in priority of *time* instead of priority of place; and, according to pre-existerianism, we are to believe that a part of the human nature of Christ was the first-born of every creature, and that a part of the human nature of Christ has the pre-eminence in all things, and so, of course, the Savior’s body is not included in the words, *the first-born of every creature*, nor in the word pre-eminence; but as the apostle includes his body, and says that we have redemption through *his blood*, as the apostle thus includes it, I dare not join with pre-existerianism in excluding it.

To me it is evident that the pre-eminence of Christ consists in three things, viz., in the dignity of his person, perfection of his mediatorial work, and universality of dominion. The dignity of his

person, as the God-man Mediator; in this character he was known to the saints in all ages of the world; from everlasting he was God, and the Son of God. The Old Testament saints knew that Christ, as man, was fairer than the children of men, and that, as God-man, he was “chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely;” that he was the Holy One of Israel, as God, and the covenantly constituted Son of God. He was before all things, and by him all things were created, and by him all things consist. Not only has he the pre-eminence in dignity of person, but also in his mediatorial work. Did the mediatorial work of Christ have the pre-eminence before it was actually performed? if it had not, then what became of the Old Testament saints. They could be delivered in no other way than by the blood of Christ; no other way than by the Savior’s obedient life could they be justified before God, while in his covenant hands they were safe. On no other ground than that of the Savior’s mediatorial work would the Father lift upon them the light of his countenance; and in no other way would the Holy Spirit regenerate, illuminate, and emancipate their souls. They saw the Redeemer’s day and were glad. These truths are very paralyzing to the doctrine of pre-existerianism, for how that can have the pre-eminence which does not actually exist, is, it seems, what pre-existerians cannot imagine: yet it was so that Christ in the dignity of his *whole* person, and perfection of his work, had all through the Old Testament age the *pre-eminence*, so that they sang of his personal work, and that in the past tense. “He *was* led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers he opened not his mouth. God is *gone up* with a shout; you *has* ascended up on high.” Thus, in all things, in the Old Testament age, he had in his whole person and mediatorial work the pre-eminence. But, says pre-existerianism, how could he have the pre-eminence if his soul did not exist; and we ask, how could his mediatorial work have the pre-eminence when it did not actually exist? Neither could the human soul of Christ alone (supposing it to preexist) be a way of access to Deity. This would be putting his body, his obedient life, and atoning death away, as being no part of the way of access to God. Pre-existerianism certainly gives to Christ a very poor pre-eminence, making it to consist in his soul existing a few years before his body. However, this is not the pre-eminence the Bible gives him. The Bible gives him preeminence, by ascribing super-eminence to his whole person, his work and his dominion.

Such was the nature and form of the everlasting covenant, that all worlds and things were put into his hands; so that as God and the Son of God (as Mr. Hart says), “He upheld all worlds, while Mary upheld him;”, as God he was exercising universal dominion, while, as to his human nature, Mary was carrying him in her arms.

He is said to be the first-born of every creature; that is, according to pre-existerianism, a part of his human nature was born in heaven before this world was. Certainly, we read of his being born in Bethlehem; of his being born of the Virgin Mary; and of his being born from the dead: but this doctrine of his being born in heaven, is a doctrine I have never yet met with in the Bible, and as such, do not feel myself bound to receive it. He is the first-born of every creature. For myself I do not believe that this means priority of time, but priority of dignity and place, though pre-existerianism says, that it means priority of time, but then they do not include his body in this priority, and the Apostle in this scripture does include his body and tells us that we have redemption through his blood. Nor is this the only scripture where the words, *first-born*, mean priority of place. Exodus 5:22, reads thus: “And you shall say unto Pharaoh, Thus, says the Lord, Israel is my son, even my FIRST-BORN.” We know this cannot mean that the Lord had not a people in the world

before the actual existence of the offspring of Abraham. Israel is, therefore, in this place called the first-born, to denote priority of relation and place. Again, Jeremiah 31:9, "I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born."

Now let us take these three scriptures in the literal sense and see where it would lead us to. First, "Israel is my first born," therefore, no creature existed before Israel. Again: "Ephraim is my first-born," therefore, Israel could not be the first-born; it must be Ephraim. Again: "He is the first-born of every creature:" thus we are got into the land of confusion, through being led by the sound instead of being guided by the evident sense of these scriptures.

Now read them in the *sense* of the Word, all is harmonious: "Israel is my first-born, even the chief among the nations of the earth. Ephraim is my first born, even the chief among the tribes of Israel. Christ is the first born, even the chief of every creature." The apostle Paul (Romans 8:29), says, "Whom he did foreknow he did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." Now, mind, the apostle does not say, that his soul pre-existed that he might be first-born among many brethren. What, then, does the apostle mean but priority of dignity and place? Surely if his human soul had pre-existed, the Holy Spirit would have inspired some of the holy penmen of the Scriptures to have told us so. But not a word about a pre-existing soul do we find from Genesis to Revelation.

But again, to the subject of his being called the first-born. And here I observe that he is called the only begotten Son of God. This, in great measure, explains the reason why he is called the first-born, being the *only* begotten Son of God: that is to say, no one was ever begotten in the way, and in the relation, that he was. His human nature was begotten, created, and produced by the Lord. In this sense he is God's *only*, and, therefore, first, and last begotten Son, his being thus the Lord's only, and so last-begotten. Being thus begotten he was safely brought into the world; there was no danger of his dying in the womb or in the birth; he was, therefore, brought into the world as man and as God man. "And God said, Let all the angels of God worship him," which they joyfully did. He was therefore of every creature, the first-born Savior, and the last, for beside him there is no Savior.

Isaac is said to be Abraham's only begotten son; although he was neither his first nor his only son literally, as Ishmael was born many years before Isaac, yet Isaac was the first-born, the only begotten, and had the pre-eminence. Isaac was Abraham's free-born son, and heir of all that Abraham had. Christ is God's free-born son, and heir of all things. The first, the only, and last-born heir of all. But, according to pre-existerianism, Isaac, in order to have the pre-eminence over Ishmael, ought to have been born before him. Isaac was not born first literally, yet he had the pre-eminence. Jacob was not the first of Isaac's sons, yet he had the pre-eminence. Ephraim was not the first of Joseph's sons, yet he had the pre-eminence. (Genesis 48i). David was not the first of Jesse's sons, yet he had the pre-eminence. Here we see that there are plenty of instances where priority of time does not give the pre-eminence. The Lord Jesus Christ, as God, and as the covenantly-constituted Son of God, not only has priority as to dignity but has priority also as to time, and therefore says, "Before Abraham was I AM." Not my human soul existed before

Abraham, but “before Abraham was, I AM” which is a declaration of his self-existence. He was then before all things, and by him all things consist.

The children being partakers of flesh and blood (that is, as I understand, they are human and not angelic), he passed by the nature of angels and took upon him the seed of Abraham: and thus, as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also took part of the same.

According to pre-existerianism, his taking on him the seed of Abraham would read thus; his human soul took not on it an angelic spirit but a human body; but if we admit that the apostle's meaning is that the Son of God took not on him angelic but *human* nature, that is, body and soul, then the words are clear and suitable: as to the words flesh and blood, we have seen, are used (John 6) to denote something more than flesh and blood literally.

But pre-existerianism tells us that as the New Testament makes mention of his taking a body and does not mention his taking a soul at the same time, that, therefore, it is evident that he did not take a soul when he took a body; so, of course, whenever the body is mentioned, it means the body only. Wherefore when he comes into the world, he says, “Sacrifice and offering you would not, but a body have you prepared me. For I come to do your will, O God, by the which will we are sanctified though the *offering of the body* of Jesus once for all” (Hebrews 10). So then, according to pre-existerianism, it was only his body that was made an offering for sin. Again, he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. Neither of these scriptures mention his soul, and yet I believe that the soul as well the body is meant, and I also believe that when Isaiah (53:10) says, that his (Christ's) soul should be an offering for sin, that he meant both body and soul. But according to the pre-existerian rule of judging, as Isaiah mentions, only the soul; he excludes the body, and, as Paul mentions, the body only, he excludes the soul, and thus Isaiah excludes the body, and Paul the soul, and so we get rid of the human nature of Christ altogether: thus, pre-existerian notions, like the Midianites, fall upon each other and kill the very doctrine they pretend to keep alive.

But again (Galatians 4:4), “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” Here he is said to be made of a woman, made under the law. What I understand by this scripture, is, that the whole human nature, body and soul, was made by the Lord *in and of* a woman; and that his whole human nature was under the law; yes, that it *was made under* it, and not before it. The pre-existerian sense of this scripture will run thus: his body only was made of a woman, his body only was under the law, so we see that this doctrine of pre-existerianism at one time shuts out the Godhead of Christ; at another time shuts out the soul of Christ; and at another time shuts his body out, and is evidently a tradition of men, to say the least of it.

As to how the human nature of Christ was made of a woman; and was yet holy, having no sin, either originally, inherently, nor practically; how a clean thing could thus be brought out of an unclean thing, is what no mortal can comprehend or explain; and how sin first came into existence no mortal can explain, any further than that it was by the rebellion of angels. Man has a soul and body, but the mysterious and every way suited union is inexplicable; but then we believe the fact as firmly as though we could explain the mystery. The Lord Jesus Christ as to his human nature

was made of a woman; and God says, it was holy; and for my part, as the Lord says it was holy, I am as satisfied that it was so, as I should be if I could explain how a clean thing can be made out of an unclean thing. And as to the doctrine of the descent of human souls, whether they descend from the parents, or whether they are sent into the infant body immediately from God, is a matter that no man can explain. We may have our opinions about it the same as we have about the fall of angels, but we cannot explain it. My opinion concerning the descent of human souls, is, that they descend from the parents, and another may believe that they come immediately from God; neither have *a thus says, the Lord* to decide the matter. There are, however, some reasons why I believe they descend from the parents. First, because our souls are by nature dead in sin, and it is said, we died in Adam, so that I cannot help thinking but that we derive our sinful souls, as well as our vile bodies, from our parents, for I cannot believe that the Lord creates sinful souls, nor do I see how an holy and immortal soul can become unholy by coming into a mortal body, and if the Lord creates and sends the soul immediately from himself, and the soul becomes dead in sin, may it not rather be said that we died in ourselves than in Adam. Another thing that inclines me to this view of things, is, that when the Lord created Adam, he breathed into his nostrils, and Adam became a living soul. But we do not read that he breathed into Eve's nostrils; so that I am inclined to believe that Eve was made both body and soul from Adam.

Again, it is said, Ecclesiastes 12:7, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." The body returning to earth *as it was*, evidently means, as it was before the creation of Adam. And as Solomon refers here to the creation of Adam from the earth, does he not also mean that as all the bodies of the human race were to descend from Adam, so all the souls of the human race should descend from Adam, and thus as the body shall return to the earth, as it was before Adam was created, does it not mean that the Spirit shall return to God who gave it, when he breathed into Adam the breath of life. For myself I am much inclined to think that this is the meaning of this scripture, but then I cannot explain it, nor bring a "thus says the Lord," to prove it; nor can anyone bring a scripture to prove to the contrary; therefore, after all it is inexplicable.

A modern writer⁴, however, has made such a use of the doctrine of God creating souls, and sending into every infant body immediately from himself, that in order to avoid charging the Lord with creating sinful souls, has declared sin to be only a *negative*; that is, the absence merely of good, but not the presence of evil; "in me," that is, "in my flesh (says St. Paul) dwells no good thing." Here, then, is the absence of good, which is the negative. Now for the positive. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, *but sin that dwelleth in me*. Here, then, is the positive: so that sin is both a negative and a positive; that is to say, it is not merely the absence of good, which leaves the soul in possession of neither good nor evil; but there is not only the absence of good, but the presence of evil. "When I would do good evil is present with me." Through the absence of good we have neglected to obey the law; but then we have not stopped here; we have gone on into positive transgression against the law, and thus our sin of omission renders the Savior's obedient life necessary for our justification; and our sin of commission, or positive transgression, renders his atoning death necessary. But if sin be only a *negative*, then the Savior's death would not be

⁴ Stevens Second Letter to Dr. Hawker, p. 45.

necessary; so that this doctrine of sin being only a negative, in effect, does away with the atoning death of Christ, and is, therefore, a doctrine full of the most deadly poison, inasmuch as it makes light of sin, and trifles with salvation.

I now come to make a few observations concerning the appearances of the Redeemer to the Old Testament saints. That the Savior did appear to them is beyond dispute; as, to Abraham, Jacob, Joshua, Gideon, to the three in the fiery furnace, and to many more, and that in human form: but these were *bodily* appearances; and certainly a body is not a soul, nor a soul a body. He appeared to Joshua with a drawn sword, and wrestled with Jacob, and walked in the fire with the three worthies; so that these bodily appearances of the Savior to the Old Testament saints, no more prove the actual existence of his human soul than they prove that the angels that sometimes appeared with him, have human bodies, for they appeared in bodily form; and yet angels have not got bodies. But then it is said, the Savior was called a man; “there wrestled a *man* with Jacob.” The angels that appeared with him to Abraham, are called men, and two angels that appeared at the sepulcher at the Savior’s resurrection are called men, and yet we are assured they were angels.

The Holy Spirit appeared in *bodily shape* like a dove; but does this prove that he must be actually and really a dove as well as God, because he appeared in bodily shape as a dove. Certainly not, my belief is, that the Holy Spirit condescended to appear in the shape of a dove, as being expressive of his endearing characters, and peace-speaking work; and often do we sing with pleasure:

“Descend from heaven immortal Dove,
Stoop down and take us on your wings;
And mount, and bear us far above
The reach of these inferior things.”

As the Holy Spirit appeared in bodily shape like a dove, as being expressive of his endearing characters, so the eternal Son of God appeared to the Old Testament saints in human form, as being expressive of his covenant character and relation, as the God-man mediator: but as to how angels that have no bodies could appear in bodily shape, and eat and drink, and how one of the glorious persons in the Godhead could appear in bodily shape like a man, and yet his human body not in actual existence, are mysteries which no mortal can explain. We know it was so, and however impossible these things may appear in the nature of things, they are possible with God.

“No nearer we venture than this,
To gaze on a deep so profound,
But tread (while we taste of the bliss)
With reverence the hallowed ground.”

Vain man would be wise, though born like a wild ass's colt; and as to the doctrine of the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ, explaining the Savior’s appearing in human form to the Old Testament saints, it does not appear to me to go a step towards it, for there is not one word about a human soul appearing, they were all *bodily* appearances.

But then it is asked, is it not beneath the grandeur, decency, and dignity of the Supreme Majesty of heaven, to supply the place of such a human soul, for the purposes or actions of animal nature, and that the great and eternal God himself, in an immediate manner, should converse in so humane and familiar a way, as this angel did with several of the patriarchs.⁵ So, according to this way of reasoning, it is neither grand, decent, honorable, nor becoming in the Almighty to converse with his creatures as he pleases.

How awfully, then, must the Holy Spirit have de-graded himself, in appearing in *bodily* shape like a dove, and even God the Father, speaking with human voice and that to the disciples, saying, “This is my beloved Son, hear you him.” I must confess if I could believe that it was beneath the dignity of one of the eternal three to appear in human form to the Old Testament saints, I must also believe that it was beneath his dignity to take our nature at all, especially for that nature to be laid in a manger, and, for aught we know, to work for its living; to live as an outcast, and die in unparalleled distress. Was it then more beneath the dignity of the eternal Son of God, to converse in the character of God-man with his beloved saints of old, than it was actually to take our nature, and become a man of unequalled sorrow. That the Savior’s obedience and blood was always the ground on, and the way by, which the Lord has appeared to his people there is no doubt; without this no man before or after the death of Christ, ever got to heaven, but when mortals begin to prescribe rules for the Almighty, it is indeed time to cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils.

IV. *I now come to notice, some of the evils of the doctrine of pre-existerianism.*

1st. It makes light of the body of Christ, as it excludes it from pre-eminence, declaring that the pre-eminence of the human nature of Christ consists in priority of time; at the same time allowing that his body had not this priority, and thus seems to say, that his body is such an inferior part of his person, that it matters but little whether it be taken into consideration or not, and yet on account of the resurrection of the saints being by virtue of his resurrection, he is called the firstborn from the dead; for he was not the first literally that was raised from the grave, nor was his body the first body that was in heaven, but his body has pre-eminence over Enoch and Elijah; notwithstanding that, it is no use to try to turn it off, by saying, he was the first that was raised from the dead to a life of eternal glory. The apostle says that he was the first born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. And how delightfully is this set forth by the prophet Isaiah (26:19), where we have an interesting manifestation of our triune covenant God. Says the Father to the Son, “Your dead men shall live.” Says the Savior, “Together with my dead body shall they arise.” Says the Holy Spirit, “Awake and sing, you that dwell in the dust; for your dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.” No resurrection without the resurrection of Christ. He in this, also, has the pre-eminence.

2ndly. The pre-existerian doctrine makes light of the work of Christ, since it does not make the work of Christ form any part of that medium by which the Old Testament saints had access to God. It makes out that merely a human soul was sufficient for them, and whereas without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin; yet we are to be told, by pre-existerianism, that Christ could be no use to the Old Testament saints, any further than what his human nature actually existed: then

⁵ Stevens on the Trinity, page 176.

as his body and his work did not actually exist, why then it was no use to them, they got to heaven without it.

3rdly. Limits the Holy One of Israel in making out that he could not appear in human form, and speak with human voice, without having a human soul in actual existence, although the Father, who is purely divine, did speak on several occasions, with human voice, and the Holy Spirit, who is purely divine, appeared in bodily shape like a dove; and that although one divine person is said to strive with man, another cannot appear in human form and wrestle with man.⁶ Thus does pre-existerianism limit the God of heaven and earth.

4thly. It makes the covenant, the everlasting covenant of grace, a time covenant, formed, as they say, after time. And whereas the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, and Christ, in the character of God-man, is without beginning of days, or end of life; and in making the covenant a time covenant, it (pre-existerianism) denies the antiquity of Christ, making out that he was not the Son of God until his human nature actually existed; and whereas he was the Holy One of Israel from everlasting (Habakkuk 1:12); it makes out two salvation covenants; one covenant as to which of the eternal three should take our nature, and another covenant for the salvation of the church; whereas the one covenant of grace is ordered in all things and sure, and the human nature of Christ was one of the things included in this covenant.

5thly. Pre-existerianism gives the church a created instead of an uncreated life and says that the Old Testament saints could have no root of life unless the human soul of Christ was in actual existence, when the truth is, it is his Godhead which is the root, and his human nature the offspring; he is thus the root and the offspring of David, David's Lord and David's Son. Christ is the life of the church, not as man abstractedly, but as God-man his Godhead the root, his manhood, obedience, and death, the medium. We know that the Son of God is come and has given unto us an understanding that we may know him that is true. This is the true GOD and eternal life. According to pre-existerianism, it ought to have been, this is the true MAN and eternal life; not but what, in a certain sense, this would be true; but the Apostle would have us know that Christ is God as well as man, and that as God he is the root of life, and in his manhood, obedience, and death, the medium, and thus Christ, as God-man, is the eternal life of the church.

6thly. Pre-existerianism ascribes actual repentance to Christ in the Old Testament age, saying, when God (in the Old Testament) is said to grieve, to repent, and to be angry. Supposing it to mean the human soul of Christ, it may be taken in a more literal sense than we may imagine.⁷ Is it possible that pre-existerians, after speaking so much about the exaltation, greatness, and happiness of this pre-existing human soul, that it, after all, had but a miserable life, being perpetually perplexed with the affairs of men, and was really sorry, and literally repented of having made man, and that sometimes promised good to the people, and afterwards was really sorry that he had promised to do good. If I were a pre-existerian I should think that Christ as man is as unhappy now as he was before he took a body, for men are quite as abominable. However, I rest quite assured

⁶ Mr. _____, a pre-existerian Minister, some time ago, asked an old Christian, who the Old Testament saints saw in heaven before the incarnation of Christ. And pray, Sir, replied the old Pilgrim, who did they see in heaven while Christ was in the womb of the Virgin. The Minister, it is said, was quite confounded at this unexpected reply.

⁷ Stevens on the Trinity, page 195.

that the great Redeemer is perfectly happy, and as to repentance, he says, it “shall be hid from his eyes” (Hosea 8:14).

7thly. Pre-existerianism treats the Old Testament with irreverence. It admits that the Old Testament is a transcript of Christ, and then says, to suppose that this transcript was on the earth many centuries before the original was in being, is a most singular supposition for a rational mind to entertain⁸; so then we are to understand that the Old Testament is a transcript only of that which actually existed. So then, of course, we must not believe it says anything about the Savior’s body, or his being led as a Lamb to the slaughter, making his soul an offering for sin, and being born of a virgin. However, singular as it may be, I must believe that the Old Testament as well as the New, is a transcript of the *whole* person of Christ, although it is clear that his whole person was not in actual existence. I dare not treat the Old Testament with such irreverence as to say it is not a transcript of the *whole* person of Christ, and of the fulness of Godhead.

As pre-existerians sometimes demand of us absurdities, I shall at this time take the liberty of demanding of them a few impossibilities, in order to prove to me that the doctrine of the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ is a doctrine of the Bible.

1. That the Old Testament saints were saved without the work of Christ; for they say, how could they know Christ if his human soul were not there. Then we ask, how they could know and be saved by the work of Christ as it was not yet performed.
2. Prove that his body actually existed at the creation of the world, for his appearances to the Old Testament saints were bodily appearances; and we have as much right to believe that his body pre-existed as that his soul pre-existed, and when they can prove to me that his body actually existed, then I will believe that his soul preexisted.
3. That he could not be the Son of God without his human nature actually existing.
4. That the mercy which was from everlasting was independent of Christ, for as pre-existerians generally will not have it that Christ was the Holy One of Israel from everlasting, of course in order to stand their ground, they must prove that the mercy which was from everlasting was independent of Christ.
5. That he was actually slain from the foundation of the world, for they say he is called the firstborn because he was *literally* born before any other creature, and as it said that he was slain from the foundation of the world, we have just as much right to believe it was so literally as we have to believe that his human nature was born of a woman before a woman existed.
6. That one divine person cannot send another, and so when we are told that the Father sends the Holy Spirit, we are not to believe it. This is a very necessary thing for the safety of their doctrine, viz., to prove that one divine person cannot send another, and that when it is said the Father sends the Holy Spirit, we are not to believe it.

⁸ Ibid, page 128

7. That the saints could not be chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, because they were not there; for, say they, how could they be chosen in Christ if his human soul were not there, and thus the eternal Son of God could not take them into his hands without a human soul to enable him so to do. So then, of course, if he could not be Christ without his human nature being there, why, then, of course, they could not be made saints without being actually there; and, of course, they are not complete in Christ, because they are not so actually. This our pre-existerians must prove if they can.

8. That God cannot with propriety call things that are not, as though they were. (Romans 4: 17)

Thus, when they can prove to me, that the Old Testament saints were saved without the work of Christ; that Christ's body actually existed at the creation of the world; that he could not be the Son of God relatively without his human nature actually existing; that the mercy which was from everlasting was independent of Christ; that he was actually slain from the foundation of the world; that one divine person cannot send another divine person; that the saints are not complete in Christ, and that God cannot, with propriety, call things that are not, as though they were: when pre-existerians can prove to me the truth of these propositions, then I shall be a pre-existerian.

And as to the origin of this doctrine of the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ, I solemnly believe it to be an invention of the wicked one, and thrown by that arch-enemy into the minds of men, for the obscuration of the doctrine of the trinity, for the denying of the Godhead of Christ, and for the doing away of the personality of the Holy Spirit, and pre-existerians themselves must acknowledge that Sabellianism is a system into which pre-existerianism has thrown its thousands and its tens of thousands.

FINIS.

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