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Steven Fitchie · Oct 24, 2016 · 3 min read

Only Begotten God or Only Begotten Son, John 1:18



“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” John 1:18 Webster’s Translation

Most modern translations have changed the words, “the only begotten Son” to read, “the only begotten God,” or similar words that add the word “God” (theos) a second time into the text in John 1:18. Trinitarian translators have chosen to change the text in John 1:18 based upon a few early Alexandrian manuscripts while ignoring the writings of the early Christians who cited John 1:18 well before the Alexandrian manuscripts were written. Trinitarian translators have also ignored the preponderance of early Greek manuscripts found outside of the Alexandrian type manuscripts which unanimously affirm John 1:18 as “the only begotten son.” Unfortunately, Trinitarian Greek scholars have chosen a few variant Alexandrian texts over texts found throughout the Roman Empire which all read, “the only begotten Son.”

The variant reading of “only begotten God” is problematic in three ways.

1. The phrase “only begotten God” is not used anywhere else in the Bible. In contrast, the phrase “only begotten Son” is used three other times by the apostle John (John 3:16 / John 3:18 / and 1 John 4:9).
2. Greek manuscripts throughout the Roman Empire all say “only begotten Son” in contradistinction to the Alexandrian manuscripts that say, “only begotten God.”
3. Second and third century Christian writers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, quoted John 1:18 as “Son,” and not “God.” Since these early Christian writers all cited John 1:18 as “only begotten Son” before the Alexandrian manuscripts, we know that “the only begotten Son” is the most accurate early rendering of the text and that the later Alexandrian manuscripts are likely interpolated variants.

Tertullian had argued against the Modalists that Jesus was another God Person of a Trinity. If Tertullian had had a text that read that the Son was “THE ONLY BEGOTTEN GOD” rather than “THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON” in John 1:18, he certainly would have quoted it, but instead he

always quoted texts that read "THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON."

Many subsequent Trinitarian translations of John 1:18 further distort the pure rendering of John 1:18 by adding, "God the only Son" and "who is at the Father's side." The ESV says, "the only God, who is at the Father's side." No Greek text says, "at the Father's side." Bosom (kolpos) means "chest" or "heart", not side.

John 1:18 in the Berean Literal Bible says, "No one has ever yet seen God. The only begotten God, the one being in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known."

John 1:18 in the New American Standard Bible says, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

Here we can see that "only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father" is the literal translation of the interpolated Alexandrian manuscripts but not the literal translation of the non-Alexandrian type manuscripts. Other Trinitarian translations from the Alexandrian manuscripts add more words to the Alexandrian manuscripts by translating the verse as, "God the only Son" "who is at the Father's side" which actually adds words to the Alexandrian Greek manuscripts. Hence, there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that any translation should read, "God the only Son" "who is at the Father's side."

The non-Alexandrian early Greek manuscripts unanimously state, "the only begotten son" rather than "the only begotten God." The earliest Christian commentators cited John 1:18 as "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father" long before the words "only begotten God" appeared. Therefore the historical evidence proves that the correct translation of John 1:18 should read "only begotten Son" and not "only begotten God."

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