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Ronald C. Fay

Liberty University, rcfay@liberty.edu

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WAS PAUL A TRINITARIAN? A LOOK AT ROMANS 8

RON C. FAY

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars who ask about God in the New Testament tend to assume the Trinity is either implicit in the text or else a later ecclesial construct. Typically the debate centers on the role and person of Jesus.¹ New Testament scholars themselves operate with a New Testament Theology approach to understanding or finding the Trinity, yet rarely do they ask whether certain authors actually held to some sort of Trinitarian thought in their writings, let alone in their theology. As a result, Francis Watson accuses James Dunn of being an Arian based upon Dunn's reading of Paul.² Watson critiques Dunn's organization³ of Paul's theology and the relationship he posits between Christology and Theology Proper. In order to support a Trinitarian position for Paul, Watson refers to Romans 8, using it as a *locus classicus*. He notes the function and work of the Spirit and Son, asserting that this is enough to show that Paul was a Trinitarian. However, does appealing to Paul's distinctions between Father, Son, and Spirit warrant sufficient support for the conclusion that he would adhere to an approximation of the conciliar decision of Nicea? This study will examine Romans 8, looking specifically at the Father, Son, and Spirit while assuming Paul to be a monotheist in order to test Watson's assertion by examining if he has an exegetical basis for stating that Paul was a Trinitarian.

At first glance, this seems an absurd issue, as many scholars quickly point to passages like I Corinthians 8:6 that demonstrate the divinity of Christ in the Pauline writings.⁴ However, two problems arise with such a solution. First, this gives evidence only for a "binity,"

¹ One need only look at the debate over the type or types of Christology seen in the New Testament. For a comprehensive summary of various positions, see Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 11-18.

² Francis Watson, "The Triune Divine Identity: Reflections on Pauline God Language, in Disagreement with J. D. G. Dunn" *JSNT* 80 (2000): 99-124. See 117 where Watson declaims Dunn's exegetical decision as a "characteristic Arian move" (emphasis original). Watson would have been better served, however, to state that Dunn understands Paul as an Arian, since Dunn attempts to describe Paul's theology and not necessarily his own.

³ Watson is replying directly to James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁴ In addition to the typical commentaries, see also the comments in Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism & Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 37-40.

not a Trinity, as this passage excludes Holy Spirit from consideration.⁵ Second, it does not answer the more nuanced question of how developed Paul's thought was on this matter. Clearly Paul had an open form of monotheism, yet one must consider to what extent he had developed his thought.⁶ He does not fully flesh out the implications of Jesus as Lord and as the one who saves with respect to the saving nature of the Father. Does Jesus fit into some sort of subset for Paul's Theology Proper, with Christology being inherently subordinate to it?⁷ Or is Jesus truly God, no matter the formulation of such an idea?⁸ How does the Holy Spirit fit into this picture?⁹ In the end, only careful exegetical work can point toward any conclusion.

Why does Watson refer to Romans 8 so often? The reason, as far as one can glean from his writing, lies in the confluence of the Father, Son, and Spirit. If one intends to offer a Biblical or exegetical critique of another's non-Trinitarian leanings, Romans 8 provides an ideal foundation for at least four reasons. First, it includes questions of salvation (8:1-4). Second, it speaks about the new life to be had in a believer via the Holy Spirit (8:5-6, 9). Third, it lays out some (though by no means all) of the roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Fourth, it includes a strong eschatological dimension that shines a spotlight on those roles. Romans 8 weaves together the various threads of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into a tapestry of the godhead. Clearly, this is why Watson leaned so heavily upon it.

2. FATHER

Typically when Paul uses the designation of $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$, he is referring to the Father, and so the investigation begins with Him due to His unambiguous designation as God. Who is God in Romans 8? God is the Father of all who believe, in that those who believe are adopted into His family and called His children and heirs (14-17). This adoption, whether understood in the Jewish context or, more likely, within the Greco-Roman context,¹⁰ is a legally binding

⁵ Dunn says it "redefines Jewish monotheism in...a 'binitarian' direction." James D. G. Dunn, "Was Christianity a Monotheistic Faith from the Beginning?" *SJT* 35 (1982): 303-35.

⁶ Care must be taken as well not to project later formulations or controversies back onto Paul.

⁷ James D. G. Dunn, "In Quest of Paul's Theology: Retrospect and Prospect" in *Pauline Theology, Volume IV: Looking Back, Pressing On* (E. Elizabeth Johnson and David M. Hay eds.; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 95-115. Note what he says on 108, that "the context of Paul's christology was Paul's continuing monotheism which narrows the possible avenues of interpreting Paul's christology." To be fair, Dunn points to another article on the subject that he wrote, "Christology as an Aspect of Theology," in *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor of Leander E. Keck* (Abraham J. Malherbe and Wayne A. Meeks eds.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 202-12. This article aims at an intentionally Trinitarian understanding of Paul, though such a short article can only give a trajectory.

⁸ Thus beginning to answer the concern of Nils Alstrup Dahl, "The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology," *Reflection* 73 (1975): 5-8.

⁹ A major source of interaction on this question will be Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994). Although delving into the OT background of such an issue would be interesting, it lies beyond the bounds of this work.

relationship. The function of the Father, in this instance, is truly to be Father to all His children by adoption through salvation. The Father has mercy on those He calls to be His children, those He calls to love Him (27-28).¹¹ The “Golden Chain” in 29-30 stresses the primary role the Father plays in the movement towards glorification through election, as God accomplishes it according to how His will.¹² At the same time, it is God who in fact subjects all of creation to decay, on account of Adam’s sin.¹³ Through the glory of His children, God will renew creation and set it free (20-23).

The major focus on the Father in this chapter, however, comes in the last pericope (though foreshadowed in 8:3, 11; this link will be developed later). Admittedly the adoption language and the renewal of creation point toward the Father as both an active and passive agent. At the least, He seems to work through others, as He renews creation through His children and He raises Christ from the dead. He also brings about new life through His Spirit, which will be touched on later.

Romans 8:31-39 stresses the acts of the Father through the Son, such that the Son is the agent by which God accomplishes His will. The opening question of this section, τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν, repeated throughout the book of Romans,¹⁴ often functions as an introduction to Paul’s own thoughts on the matter.¹⁵ This means the question heading 8:31 is not isolated, but instead proceeds from what comes before.¹⁶ The previous section of 8:18-30 shifts focus from the Holy

¹⁰ See C. S. Wansink, “Roman Law and Legal System,” in *DNTB* (Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter eds.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 984-91. The portion of highest relevance is found in the discussion on inheritance and adoption within the Roman system (990-1).

¹¹ This language is taken from Richard B. Hays, “The God of Mercy Who Rescues Us from the Present Evil Age,” in *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology* (A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera eds.; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 123-43.

¹² For the implicit monotheistic tendencies of this passage, see Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (3 vols.; EKKNT 6.1-6.3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978-1982), 2:166-7.

¹³ See C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; New York: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:414 and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 435-6.

¹⁴ Technically, the phrase appears 7 times (3:5; 4:1; 6:1; 7:7, 8:31; 9:14, 30; though 3:5 is missing the οὖν).

¹⁵ Thus Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 189 and James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (2 vols.; WBC 38A-B; Dallas: Word, 1988), 1:306. Schreiner (*Romans*, 304) says it is part of Paul’s voicing the objections to his argument and clarifying what he means, which Cranfield agrees with (Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:297), while Fitzmyer calls it part of Paul’s polemical style (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993], 432).

¹⁶ All commentators agree on the connection, but vary on the amount of connection. Moo (*Romans*, 539), Fitzmyer (*Romans*, 530), and Schreiner (*Romans*, 458) all argue for 5:1-8:30 being in view. Dunn argues for the entire epistle up to this point (*Romans*, 1:499) with Cranfield holding to only a minimalistic 8:29-30 (*Romans*, 1:434), though he does say it is a conclusion for the entire section from 5:1-8:30. John D. Moores, *Wrestling with Rationality in Paul: Romans 1-8 in a New Perspective* (SNTS Monograph Series 82; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 118-121 wants to argue for 8:29-30 only based on the content of the question in 8:31 being pulled directly from 8:29-30, but his argument misses the link between 8:29-30 and the rest of Romans, especially chapter 5 (see June E. Lewers, “The Relationship of Suffering and Hope in Romans 5 and 8,” MA thesis, Trinity

Spirit back to the Father between 8:28 and 29.¹⁷ From the allusion to Genesis 22, Paul asks a set of questions in 33-35, but scholars debate how many questions and the presence of answers to those questions. These verses can be read with at least five different understandings.¹⁸ To begin, though, the pattern of the last verses needs to be made clear. Talbert argues convincingly that 35-39 are a chiasmic question and answer set.¹⁹ He explains that there are two questions in 35, the first being a “who” question and the second a “what” question. The responses come in the reverse, so that “what” is answered by 36-37 and “who” by 38-39.²⁰

One of the more important stories in the Old Testament with respect to Abraham is that of the Aqedah, the formal name for the binding of Isaac. Abraham, in obedience to God, takes his son Isaac up a mountain to sacrifice him. After Isaac is bound and put upon the altar, God stops the sacrifice and provides a ram in Isaac’s stead. Through this act of near sacrifice, Abraham shows his devotion to God and his faith in God.²¹ This story brings up a few questions. The Levitical law did not require any binding of the sacrifice, so why is it that this binding of Isaac is mentioned in this passage? Wenham speculates,

Perhaps it was because Abraham might relatively easily have slit Isaac’s throat when he was off guard; that an elderly man was able to bind the hands and feet of a lively teenager strongly suggests Isaac’s consent. So this remark confirms that impression given by vv 7-8 that Isaac was an unblemished subject for sacrifice who was ready to obey his father, whatever the cost, just as his father had showed

Evangelical Divinity School, 1984).

¹⁷ Many commentators place 8:28 in the section about the Father (Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:425-29; Moo, *Romans*, 527-8 [though he does make allowance for it to be transitional]; and Schreiner, *Romans*, 448-9) and a few in the section about the Spirit (F. F. Bruce, *Romans* [TNTC 6; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 166), but it makes more sense to see it as a transitional verse moving from the Spirit to the Father (so Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 521; seemingly Dunn, *Romans*, 1:481; and Peter J. Achtemeier, *Romans* [IBC; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985], 131), though this does not solve the dilemma of the subject of *συνεργεῖν*.

¹⁸ Instead of listing all the options and the supporting arguments for each, the reader is referred to Moo, *Romans*, 541 n. 27, which lists the possibilities. Moo himself argues that there is little difference between the views in that they all culminate in 38-39 anyway, but this misses the importance of the quotation of Psalm 44:22 (43:23 LXX) in 36. One should note that this quotation also includes a portion which is echoed in Isaiah 53:7, as the verbal parallels are direct in that *ὡς πρόβατα* and a form of *σφαγή* appear in both. Dunn, *Romans*, 1:505 and Hays, *Echoes*, 62-63, make this connection explicit. The differences are minute as Isaiah places *σφαγή* in a prepositional phrase. For the context of the Isaianic passage, see J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 433.

¹⁹ Charles H. Talbert, *Romans* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 229-30.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Talbert actually does not place 36 in this chiasmic pattern, having A = 35a, B = 35b, B’ = 37, and A’ = 38-39. However, 36 fits naturally as part of B’.

²¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (3 vols.; CC; trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 2:361. Westermann says, “The reason consists in a positive and negative part: now I know that Abraham is God-fearing; this has been shown by the fact that he has not withheld his only son from God.” See also 2:362. Westermann goes on to note the similarity in the Hebrew of Genesis 39:9, but the LXX does not pick this up.

his willingness to obey God to the uttermost.²²

While Abraham actively showed faith, Isaac silently obeyed.²³ This does not make Isaac a main character, it instead makes him more of a narrative prop in that he does nothing but receive action throughout this section. Isaac is not a main character at all but a passive recipient of grace. What really comes out in this story is not the faithfulness of all involved, but the faithfulness of Abraham (in believing) and God (in providing). This theme will be picked up in Romans 8:32 and the surrounding context.

The opening word of 8:32 makes an immediate and strong connection to the previous verse and its subject.²⁴ What is interesting is not only what is said, but how it is said. There are clear affinities between the first part of Romans 8:32 and the LXX Genesis 22:12, 16.²⁵ The two important parallels are the usages of the words ἐφείσω and υἱός. This gives the entire sense of the passage, showing God's caring nature in that He is willing to sacrifice His very son. Grammatically, it is significant that ἀγαπητοῦ is replaced by ἰδίου in verse 32, making it an allusion instead of a loose quotation.²⁶ Paul previously had called all Christians sons, and so instead of using beloved, it made sense in the argument to single Jesus out in a poignant way.²⁷ This also constitutes a change that follows the Hebrew text as opposed to the Septuagint.²⁸ In all

²² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis* (2 vols.; WBC 1-2; Dallas: Word, 1987-1994), 2:109. Wenham argues (2:108) that, "Isaac is shown to have those qualities of perfection always looked for in sacrificial victims (cf. Lev 1:3). And either way, our appreciation of the trustful love that existed between father and son is enhanced."

²³ David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 143-58.

²⁴ BDF, §439.3, points out how the γέ stresses the opening relative pronoun. This then should intensify the link with the antecedent. See also Nigel Turner, *Syntax* (A Grammar of New Testament Greek 3; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 331, who agrees.

²⁵ Note the parallels in the table below:

Genesis 22:12 (LXX) 12 καὶ εἶπεν μὴ ἐπιβάλης τὴν χειρὰ σου ἐπὶ τὸ παιδάριον μηδὲ ποιήσης αὐτῷ μηδέν νῦν γὰρ ἔγνω ὅτι φοβῆ τὸν θεόν σὺ καὶ οὐκ ἐφείσω τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ δι' ἐμέ	Romans 8:32 32 ὅς γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείλατο ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων παρέδωκεν αὐτόν, πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα ἡμῖν χαρίζεται;
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²⁶ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), talks of echoes and allusions. A more helpful designation, however, would be to talk of quotations (those verbatim or nearly verbatim mentions of a text from the LXX or Hebrew, usually accompanied by an introductory formula), allusions, and echoes.

²⁷ Origen, *The Fathers of the Church: Origen, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6-10* (Vol. 104; translated by Thomas P. Scheck; Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001) 93, says that, "lest it should be thought that he handed over one of these who appeared to be adopted amongst his sons, by the general sense of 'sons,' he has added, 'his own Son,' in order to point to him who alone is begotten by an ineffable generation from God himself."

²⁸ The Hebrew is אֶת־יִשְׁחָרֵץ. The Greek of the LXX calls for Paul to use ἀγαπητοῦ instead of ἰδίου for a more precise allusion. See Nils Alstrup Dahl "The Atonement-An Adequate Reward for the Aqedah? (Ro 8:32)" in *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honor of Matthew Black*, (E. Earle Ellis and Max Wilcox eds.; Edinburgh:

likelihood, however, Paul was more worried about distinguishing Jesus from “other” sons of God.²⁹ He wanted to keep Christ as the unique Son of God, specifically as a natural son instead of as an adoptive son (cf. Gal 4:4-5). A connection between Jesus and Isaac can be argued based on the type of sacrifice made by both: a sacrifice of life done willingly. Judaism, however, understood the Aqedah as an example of Abraham’s love and faithfulness, not Isaac’s.³⁰ As stated above, this is the point of the passage within Genesis.³¹ In turn, Paul is concerned with the Father and not the Son.³² The use of Genesis 22 further clarifies who God is by setting Him in parallel with Abraham. Abraham had faith in God and loved Him to the point where Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son, his promised heir, though he ultimately was kept from such an act. God loved humankind so much that He was not only willing to sacrifice His son, but He actually went through with the sacrifice.³³

The full argument of Romans 8:32 is missed unless one continues on to the entire paragraph, for the rest of the verses support the idea detailed above. The Father is the main focus of the allusion made to Genesis 22. He is the focus at the end of 8:32 as well.³⁴ The entire section is not a typical doxology. If one instead sees this section as a group of questions and answers, the ideas fit more readily into a single scheme that leads from 8:31 all the way through 8:39.³⁵ Within this structure, the style changes from straight questions in 31-32 to questions with

T&T Clark, 1969), 17.

²⁹ This is supported by Moo, *Romans*, 520; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:436; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:501; and Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 530-31. Dunn is the only one, however, that explicitly mentions the Hebrew of the passage.

³⁰ Talbert, *Romans*, 228. Talbert cites eight different Jewish sources showing the use of the binding as an example of Abraham’s faithfulness.

³¹ Romans 8:32a is an allusion to Genesis 22 due to the verbal parallels being quite direct and the subject matter extending to encompass the purpose of the pericope.

³² For this reason, those who want to see Isaac as a type of Jesus in Romans 8 miss the thrust both of the passage in Genesis and the usage here. While it is a valid echo of who Christ is, the differences cause the concept of type-antitype to be invalid. Contra Walter Schmithals, *Der Römerbrief: Ein Kommentar* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1988), 308, who wants to use this to argue for a functional sonship for Jesus.

³³ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 530-31, points out how closely this idea fits with John 3:16. Contra Nils Dahl, “Atonement,” 18, where he states, “It is unlikely that Abraham’s act of obedience was ever considered a typological prefiguration of God’s act of love.” The problem with Dahl’s reasoning is he bases it upon the idea that Paul’s use of the Aqedah had to be parallel to other Jewish sources. Dahl misses the importance of the point he makes later when he says that Isaac was essentially never seen as a type of the Messiah in *Jewish literature* (“Atonement,” 20). There are a lot of texts considered Messianic by Christians that are not seen that way by Jews. Dahl seems as a presupposition to disregard any kind of Christological reading of the Old Testament by Paul, instead only allowing parallel usages.

³⁴ Cf. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 532.

³⁵ So Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:437-438; Moo, *Romans*, 541; Schreiner, *Romans*, 461-62; Hays, *Echoes*, 59. Achtemeier, *Romans*, 148-49; Barrett, *Romans*, 172-73; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 528-30; and Moores, *Rationality*, 122; all claim 33-34 being entirely composed of questions (though in various ways).

answers in 33-34, and finally there are two questions in 35 answered by 36-39. In addition, most commentators see an echo of Isaiah 50:9 (50:8 LXX) in 33-34, which means the construction of the two verses should be seen as unified instead of broken into separate statements.³⁶ Therefore, what we have is a section of carefully constructed questions with answers throughout all of 31-39 and especially in 33-34. Following this are the two questions asked in 35 which 36-39 are set to answer. Thus, 33-35 are specifically a type of give-and-take designed to focus the reader on a particular theme which Paul is trying to drive home. This means the entire section, 8:31-39, is answering the question of 8:31, and the answer is that nobody can stand up to God, not because of His power, but because of His love made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ.³⁷ Thus, the Father is an active agent in that He sent the Son, but a passive agent in that it is the Son who dies. The Father in Romans 8 functions both actively and passively.

3. THE SON

Christology peppers a large portion of Romans 8, though it does not take center stage. Jesus Christ functions in multiple ways in Romans, but Paul describes a more diversified set of functions in chapter 8. Jesus' role in salvation is highlighted in the chapter, particularly with the mentions of being in Christ (or Christ Jesus). "In Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ) remains a debated phrase, yet it is integral to Pauline idiom with respect to salvation and the life of believers. Within Romans, the phrase functions as more than just an identifier for Christians, rather it maintains a communal unity within the sphere of the person Jesus Christ.³⁸ According to 8:2, the content of this salvation is life, specifically life in Christ. Most commentators, including Dunn, understand the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ to modify the verb ἠλευθέρωσεν.³⁹ This does not fit the context, however, nor the grammatical development of the sentence. Of the 12 other occurrences in Romans, ἐν Χριστῷ never modifies the phrase or word it precedes, rather it always modifies what it comes after.⁴⁰ In fact, Dunn points out that the theological understanding of Christian life being ἐν Χριστῷ appears explicitly in 6:23, yet he still objects to such an understanding in 8:2.⁴¹

³⁶ Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:437; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:503; Moo, *Romans*, 542 n. 32 (Moo's grammar is confusing, but a quick check on 5:9-10 shows he must be referring to the allusion occurring here); Schreiner, *Romans*, 462; Schmithals, *Der Römerbrief*, 310-311; and Hays, *Echoes*, 59-60; all see the echo. Both this section of Romans and the section in Isaiah carry courtroom themes. For the full impact of the "court scene" in Romans 8:31-39, see Isabelle Parlier, "La Folle Justice de Dieu: Romains 8, 31-39," *Foi et Vie* 5 (1992): 103-110. For the legal language in Isaiah 50:8-9, see Claus Westermann, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. David M. G. Stalker; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 2:231, and Motyer, *Isaiah*, 400. John D. Watts, *Isaiah* (2 Vols; WBC 24-25; Waco: Word, 1985-1987), 2:204, calls this political language, but his continued analysis actually fits more of a legal mode.

³⁷ The first part of 8:35 is a clear echo of 8:31 materially.

³⁸ See especially Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Sacra Pagina 6; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996), 190, 235-6, who links 6:1-11 with 8:1. With respect to the comparison between ἐν Χριστῷ and ἐν πνεύματι, see below.

³⁹ See Dunn, *Romans*, 1:418.

⁴⁰ In addition to 8:1-2, the phrase also appears in Romans 3:24; 6:11, 23; 8:39; 9:1; 12:5; 15:17; 16:3, 7, 9, 10.

⁴¹ Ibid. Dunn states, "The preposition phrase should probably be taken with the verb; to take it with the preceding phrase... would have very interesting corollaries for Christology and Pneumatology, but the lack of any

For that matter, 6:11 also points in the same theological direction (ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). Thus, eternal life can be found only in Christ Jesus.⁴²

Adjacent yet related to the idea of life in Christ, the place of Jesus as the firstborn or the coheir plays a major role. It takes pride of place due to its connection with the Golden Chain. Paul defines Jesus as a coheir, yet He retains the rights of firstborn. As Christians will come to share in His inheritance, so must they first share in His sufferings (17). Paul compares the present suffering of the church directly to the suffering of the Christ, yet he does so in passing only to stress the impending glorification, a future glorification promised by the glorification of Jesus.⁴³ One finds the practical culmination of this theme in 29, as God conforms all Christians into the image of His Son, namely Jesus. The importance of the συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ phrase remains debated, yet Cranfield makes a convincing case that it contains multiple theological truths.⁴⁴ First, he contends that it points toward the special relationship between the Father and Son in that Jesus Himself is not limited to κατ' εἰκόνα, but rather is εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ.⁴⁵ Second, he suggests that Paul thinks of this conformity as a process that leads to glorification rather than being a single instantaneous event. Thus being like Christ should be a long term goal rather than a short term result. Again, Paul likely links this conformity to Christ as being through the agency of suffering, at least to some degree. Therefore this conformity to Christ is a subset of Him being the firstborn and Christians being His coheirs.⁴⁶

Why is Jesus the preferred image instead of God Himself? Would it not make more sense for those who bear the image of God to be conformed to the likeness of God?⁴⁷ There are two responses to this, though the first will dominate the discussion. The first reason that Paul talks of Christians being conformed into the image of Christ is because Jesus is the firstborn. Within the realm of Christology, one major metaphor or type Paul uses throughout his writings pertains to Adam, i.e. Adam Christology.⁴⁸ Adam plays an important role in Romans, though he

real parallel elsewhere in Paul (though cf. 6:23) and its unusualness alongside his other statements on these themes tell strongly against such a construal..." This argument should carry no weight as the parallels of 6:11 and 23 negate it.

⁴² Contra Grant R. Osborne, *Romans* (IVPNTC 6; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 196, where he argues for the life here being from the Spirit in terms of Christian living instead of life being from Christ in terms of conversion, though his categorization fits the overall flow of the passage. The overlap between the indwelling of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will be addressed below.

⁴³ Wilckens, *Römer*, 2:138-9.

⁴⁴ Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:432.

⁴⁵ See the brief discussion in Wilhelm Thüsing, *Per Christum in Deum: Studien zur Verhältnis von Christozentrik un Theozentrik in den paulinischen Hauptbriefen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1965), 146-7.

⁴⁶ Schreiner (*Romans*, 453-4) makes this very point, though he uses different terminology.

⁴⁷ Quick appeal to certain Johannine passages could easily be done, yet that would be outside the scope of this investigation and fit better into a Biblical Theology approach. However, the obvious link would be John 1:18, among many others.

is only explicitly mentioned in 5:12-21 (named in 5:14 only). The argument in Romans 5 follows the logic of salvation coming through a conduit similar to which sin came, a single person who would found a new line. While God created Adam as the first human, Jesus is the antitype being the last Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:45).⁴⁹ The last Adam entails more than just a title, it refers to the creation (or recreation) of a new line, of which Jesus is the firstborn. While some argue that the status of firstborn is achieved through His resurrection, and literally speaking this would be true, this does not encompass the fullness of the term. Within Paul's works, the title holds at least two distinct meanings, signifying both unique status and the ability to inherit. Colossians 1 covers both meanings, as 1:15 speaks of Jesus' special status with respect to creation as being "firstborn," yet Paul juxtaposes this with being "firstborn" from among the dead, a clue to the type of inheritance. Dunn speaks of this as intentionally carrying the tension between immanence and transcendence.⁵⁰ In addition, Colossians 1:15 ties the language of firstborn directly to the image of God language (ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως), which gives a direct link in answering the question posed earlier.⁵¹ To claim that one meaning of firstborn is in view without the other misses the context of Paul's argument in Romans 8. This title shows the uniqueness of Christ's position, that He alone can claim such status or such a relationship with the Father, as opposed to the adopted sons.⁵² Firstborn also holds connotations of inheritance, which directly connects to the language of 8:17. Jesus holds the special honor of being the firstborn, in contrast with those adopted as being born later, and He holds the proverbial rights to doling out the inheritance, which is life.⁵³ The title stresses His preeminence among the sons of God; while there are many sons, there is only one who is firstborn. Thus, God will conform Christians to the image of Christ since He is the last Adam, the firstborn of the children of God.

The second reason for Jesus being the image to which Christians are conformed is that He is the sent one. This language of sending appears more often in John than in Paul, though it typically occurs in John only when Jesus speaks of Himself, yet Romans 8 contains some important uses of it.⁵⁴ This image of sending likely reflects more than mere agency; it reflects a

⁴⁸ See most notably the various works of James D. G. Dunn, culminating in his *Theology of Paul*, 199-204, 208-12, 241-2, and 288-93.

⁴⁹ See especially Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 788-90) and Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1281-5.

⁵⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 90.

⁵¹ For more on this, see Peter O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC 44; Nashville: Nelson, 1982), 42-5.

⁵² Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:432.

⁵³ See Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 332-3.

⁵⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), xvii. Dunn notes that one must be careful not to project the whole of the Johannine usage of being sent back into the Pauline usage. In reply, one must also not negate Pauline

higher level of ontology and authority. Dunn notices how 8:3 echoes language found “in the book of Wisdom and including the sending of Wisdom and of the Spirit in 9.10 and 9.17.”⁵⁵ Dunn disagrees with any ontological referent, mostly because he considers sonship to be directly linked to the resurrection and not to the action of sending.⁵⁶ Indeed, the sending of the Son, as opposed to the creation of the Son, assumes the preexistence of Jesus, otherwise it would not be a sending at all.⁵⁷ One can create something that does not exist, but one can only send something that already exists. Dunn counters this point by stating that the passage has such a strong Adam Christology that the nature of the verse allows this to only point at Jesus’ death (and possibly resurrection).⁵⁸ If left at this Dunn’s case might stand, yet he goes on to link Jesus’ sonship with “his whole life,”⁵⁹ negating his own point. By linking the sending to Jesus’ entire life, Jesus must be sent into the world for this purpose rather than being sent after already being in the world, otherwise his “whole life” could not in fact be in view. Indeed, Moo considers this sending as pointing to the incarnation and beyond to the crucifixion.⁶⁰ If sending is linked directly to the crucifixion event (and not the resurrection only), then there is a clear connection between 8:3 and 8:32,⁶¹ since Paul stresses the motif of God’s own Son again, though this time as an allusion to Genesis 22:12, 16. In 32, the emphasis is on God’s actions being performed through Christ, namely that God is the one who hands over His Son and God is the one who sacrificed Jesus for all. At the same time, God did not leave Jesus dead, rather the Father raised the Son both from the dead and to the height of being at God’s right hand (34).⁶² Jesus was sent in order to be a propitiation for sin, yes, but also to be glorified and exalted to the right hand of the Father. Jesus as the one who was sent covers His preexistence, His death, and His glorification. He is the image Christians are to be conformed to because He was the last Adam, thus the image of God, and He was the sent one, thus He suffered and was glorified.

usage because of Johannine usage either. The assumption of a dichotomy is as dangerous as the assumption of a lack of dichotomy.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 44-5. Strangely enough, the evidence Dunn gives (e.g. Luke 20:13 and Mark 12:7-9) contradicts his own point since the sending motif always assumes sonship *before* sending, thus negating a resurrection scenario for sonship.

⁵⁷ Klaus Haacker, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (THKNT 6; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), 152 and Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 484-5. Haacker argues briefly for his position whereas Fitzmyer simply asserts it.

⁵⁸ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 45.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Moo, *Romans*, 478-81. He stresses the sacrificial aspect, something highlighted again in 8:32.

⁶¹ Fitzmyer (*Romans*, 484) also notes this link, though he mentions it only in passing.

⁶² The importance of the allusion to Psalm 110:1 in Romans 8:34 should not be understated, but there is a lot of material on this as is (see Ziesler, *Romans*, 229 n. x). For how the phrase operates in this passage, see Dunn, *Romans*, 1:504.

Jesus also functions in other ways in Romans 8. For example, He intercedes (ἐντυγχάνει) for us before the Father (34). This intercession likely fits into a royal court atmosphere, in that the context displays a regal setting. Moo argues that this intercession functions in a high priestly way.⁶³ However, the context does not support such a viewpoint, nor does Paul appeal to the metaphor of the high priest anywhere in Romans. Schreiner argues that the death of Jesus functions as the means by which He intercedes.⁶⁴ He makes a good point in that Jesus' death plays a central role in this section, but the present tense of the verb (thus giving an iterative sense, which would contradict Jesus' once for all death) coupled with the natural progression of the verse (from death, to resurrection, to glorification, to function) makes such a reference unlikely. Dunn looks at this intercession as being parallel to both the angels in Jewish apocalyptic literature and a possible hint of Adam Christology.⁶⁵ Rather than defending his point, Dunn is careful to point to these as possibilities. However, it is unlikely that Paul has Adam Christology in view here at 8:34: other metaphors are more at the forefront of the passage. The parallel with Jewish apocalyptic imagery, however, should not be so quickly brushed aside. Cranfield takes a slightly different view than Dunn, and instead of seeing it as the righteous sufferer making a case before the ruler, he believes the image most likely fits the picture of a king and his vice-regent, in that the vice-regent makes a case on behalf of the people.⁶⁶ The formal wording of the passage indicates one of two settings: either a legal courtroom or else a kingly throne room. The idea of intercession fits both pictures, and the language would seem to have more of a forensic tone, especially the usage of ἐγκαλέσει and κατακρινῶν, but the immediate allusion to Psalm 110:1 would indicate the throne room setting is more likely. Jesus not only saves His people by His death and resurrection, He continues to intercede for them as vice-regent before the Father. Jesus existed before He was sent, He was sent as a sacrifice for God's people to become adopted as sons, He rose and was glorified, and now He serves as vice-regent.

4. THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit plays a central role in Romans 8.⁶⁷ This can be seen in the main idea of the chapter, as Paul brings the Holy Spirit into a discussion of the law by use of the phrase, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." I have already argued that "in Christ Jesus" links directly to "life," and therefore it is tied to the rest of the phrase. While the majority of commentators spend time talking about the relationship of the Spirit to the law (even putting the law in quotes), one needs to note that the Spirit is characterized by life. The contrast in 8:2 lies between the types of law, namely that of the Spirit of life against that of sin and death. While the

⁶³ Moo, *Romans*, 542-3.

⁶⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 463.

⁶⁵ Dunn, *Romans*, 1:504.

⁶⁶ Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:438-9.

⁶⁷ Though limiting his discussion to 8:1-30, see Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 515-9.

parallel is not exact, the antithesis is.⁶⁸ Taken in conjunction with 8:10-11, this verse lauds the Spirit as the giver of life. Paul enumerates the reasons for the Spirit being characterized by life in 3-11.⁶⁹ This section presents a dichotomy between flesh and Spirit which result in death and life, respectively. The flesh in and of itself will not remain, whereas the Spirit gives a resurrection life to the body (11).⁷⁰ The contrast between life and death is a contrast between the Spirit and flesh, or restated as a contrast between living in the Holy Spirit versus living apart from Him.

Life comes from the Spirit based also in part upon how the Spirit functions as a connective agency from Christ to the believer. Given the prominence of the phrase in the Pauline corpus “in Christ” (which was discussed earlier), the question now becomes: How is this related to being “in the Spirit” or living “according to the Spirit”? Ben Witherington argues for Jesus being present and active in believers through the work of the Holy Spirit.⁷¹ This life is made available by means of Jesus’ death and resurrection, but it only becomes a reality in the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit. The life according to the Spirit fosters the dwelling of Christ within the believer (10).⁷² Thus, the work of Christ finds completion in the work of the Spirit. Life can be offered due to the work of Christ, yet it is only given through the work of the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit, then, represents in a very real way Christ in the believer, and thus the Spirit serves as the actual presence of Christ.

What then does Paul envision as the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? If the Spirit serves as the real presence of Christ, then is the Spirit actually a part of Christ? What does it mean that both Jesus and the Spirit intercede before the Father on behalf of believers? The last question derives from the fact that both Jesus and the Spirit serve as the subject of ἐντυγχάνει, in 34 and 27 respectively. Wilckens explains the repeated use of the verb as the difference between an intercessor within the Christian and an intercessor before the Lord (though he casts the discussion in strictly eschatological terms).⁷³ Moo agrees with this distinction, noting that Christ stands before the Father while the Spirit “prays...on our behalf” (cf. 26).⁷⁴ This function of the Spirit is concurrent with that of the Son, though Paul approaches them in different ways.⁷⁵ The role of the Spirit in terms of the life of the Christian is closely

⁶⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 1:417-8. Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 476. Schreiner (*Romans*, 400) points to 8:6 in arguing that the result of the work of the Spirit is life.

⁶⁹ Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:378 who argues that the γάρ links 3-4 with 2. Contra Schreiner (*Romans*, 401) who thinks both 1-2 are in view.

⁷⁰ See especially the discussion in Schreiner, *Romans*, 414-5. That Paul has in view the Holy Spirit in 8:11 can hardly be doubted due to the meaning of ζωή and the incomprehensibility of πνεῦμα referring to a human spirit, notwithstanding the arguments of Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 491.

⁷¹ Ben Witherington with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 210-1.

⁷² Fee (*Empowering Presence*, 552) paraphrases the verse with, “if Christ by his Spirit is dwelling in you...,” making the same point that the Spirit serves as the presence of Christ.

⁷³ Wilckens, *Römer*, 2:174-5.

⁷⁴ Moo, *Romans*, 527.

linked to the role of Christ in that Jesus enables the giving of life and the Spirit actually gives it, the Spirit actively brings believers into the adoptive relationship with the Father and therefore also with the Son, and Jesus intercedes before the Father as does the Spirit.

The question of the relationship between the Son and Spirit in Romans 8 cannot be answered until one examines 8:9. This verse contains two different titles for the Holy Spirit, both of which reflect on the relationship of the Spirit to the Son. First, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God. There lies an obvious distinction between the Father and the Spirit in that the Spirit intercedes before the Father, so any argument for the Spirit being just an aspect of the Father in Paul and not a separate person is doomed from the start! The Spirit clearly has divine authority in that it can enable humans to call upon the Father as “Abba.”⁷⁶ That the Holy Spirit derives in some way from God would not be controversial to a Jewish audience, let alone a pagan one.⁷⁷ The Spirit knows the mind of the Father and acts according to His will (8:27, cf. 1 Cor 2:11).⁷⁸ Second, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ. Cranfield notes how the work of the Son and Spirit are so closely entwined that some have argued that the Spirit *is* the exalted Christ.⁷⁹ The statement fails to adequately account for the distinction embedded within this verse. Dunn moves in the opposite direction, noting how the movement from πνεῦμα θεοῦ to πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ redefines the Spirit into a narrower identity.⁸⁰ Both ideas miss the significance of the two parallel statements. The overlapping functions of the Son and Spirit in no way make the two identical, rather it displays the importance of those overlapping functions, especially since those functions tend to be performed in different ways. Rather, this shift hints at a true Trinitarian doctrine within Paul.⁸¹

5. WAS PAUL TRINITARIAN?

Paul in Romans 8 hints at a Trinitarian doctrine, but was he really a Trinitarian? In one sense, the answer must be no. Paul did not use the explicit terminology that would later

⁷⁵ Haacker, *Römer*, 168. Haacker states, “An eine Fürsprache des Geists vor dem Thron Gottes zu denken, liegt weniger nahe, weil V. 27a dann unmotiviert erschiene und eine Konkurrenz zur Rolle Christi in V. 34 entstände.”

⁷⁶ Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:842. The essay by Cranfield at the end of his commentary briefly but cogently discusses how Paul’s concept of God coherently fits within a Trinitarian scheme and only a Trinitarian scheme.

⁷⁷ Dunn, *Romans*, 1:428-9. Dunn does not directly make this point, but reading his comments on the connection to the Judaic background gave me this insight.

⁷⁸ Thiselton (*Corinthians*, 258-9) makes reference to 1 Cor 2:11 indicating that such a close relationship between someone and God can only occur if both are indeed God in some respect.

⁷⁹ Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:843. Schreiner (*Romans*, 413-4) explicitly rules out this option by saying that they are not “identical, only that they are inseparable in terms of the saving benefits communicated to believers.”

⁸⁰ Dunn, *Romans*, 1:429. Dunn stretches the point too far, however, when he suggests that this is a part of the development of early churches concept of the Spirit.

⁸¹ Schreiner (*Romans*, 414) declares, “Texts like these provide the raw material from which the church later hammered out the doctrine of the Trinity.”

characterize the historic conflict within the early church. In a less formal sense, however, Paul was Trinitarian. Obviously the Father is God, in that θεός is often synonymous with God the Father in Romans.⁸² Paul is clearly monotheistic, and this monotheism must be understood as the basis of his Theology Proper. Again, other parallel texts both inside and outside of Romans make this more or less uncontroversial.⁸³ The Son, however, is equated with the Father by being the sent one, the one given authority to function as God on earth as the display of *God's* love occurs in the death of Christ (8:39; cf. 5:8).⁸⁴ At the same time, being sent shows Jesus' submission to the Father, especially since the crucifixion was the reason why the Father sent the Son. In addition, the Holy Spirit is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ, an overlapping relationship that points to authoritative equality between the Father and the Son with respect to the Holy Spirit. In fact, Cranfield says, "The ease with which Paul can pass from one expression to the other is one more indication of his recognition of the divine dignity of Christ."⁸⁵ This gives us at least a binity, two who are the One God. The question arises as to the place of the Holy Spirit. Paul has called the Spirit both of God and of Christ, which would seem to give evidence for a decidedly subordinate position. However, the function of God the Son and the Holy Spirit overlap in complementary ways at numerous points. The freedom from the law found in the death of Christ becomes entwined with the need to walk in the Spirit.⁸⁶ The Christian life must be lived ἐν Χριστῷ, yet it also must be lived ἐν πνεύματι, phrases which carry parallel significance and deliver the same resulting state. The Holy Spirit, then, while being functionally subordinate to the Father and Son since He is "of" them, still maintains the function of deity, and thus the Holy Spirit is also God. Again, within the strict monotheistic background of Paul, this can only be reconciled through a Trinitarian understanding of Romans 8. Paul not only displays a Trinitarian understanding of the Father, Son, and Spirit, he also relates the subordination of the Spirit to the Father and Son and the Son to the Father.

6. CONCLUSION

This inquiry began by asking if Francis Watson's use of Romans 8 as a Trinitarian proof-text has a legitimate exegetical foundation. In order to find an answer to the question, the Father, Son, and Spirit were considered independently throughout the text of Romans 8, and this study took Paul's monotheism as a given. In regards to the Father, there is no dispute that Paul considered Him God. With respect to the Son, the concepts of life in Christ, being the firstborn, and being the image to which God will conform Christians gives credence to understanding Jesus as divine. The issue of intercession brought home the point. The Holy Spirit also intercedes for believers, and life comes to believers by way of the Spirit. Paul described the Holy Spirit as both

⁸² Romans 9:5, and its attendant controversy, falls outside of the bounds of this article.

⁸³ For example, C. H. Giblin, "Three Monotheistic Texts in Paul," *CBQ* 37 (1975): 527-47.

⁸⁴ Hays, "God of Mercy," 135.

⁸⁵ Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:388.

⁸⁶ Neil Elliott, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism* (JSNTSup 45; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 258-9.

of God and of Christ, displaying a subordinate role for the Spirit, yet clearly the Holy Spirit executes functions reserved for God. There can be little doubt that, through reading Romans 8, Paul was indeed a Trinitarian.