

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

Introduction to Progressive Revelation

Progressive revelation is an important principle in the field of biblical interpretation. Progressive revelation may be defined as the gradual, disclosure of divine truth in Scripture. That is to say that the Bible is to be interpreted in stages of time. Progressive revelation may be understood as theological evolution.

There are many different views. Traditional thought is that progressive revelation means that God did not unfold His entire plan to humanity in the Book of Genesis or, for that matter, in the entire Old Testament. The Doctrine of the Cross perspective is that God did unfold his plan in the Creation and in the Old Testament. The problem heretofore is that the Creation has been a mystery, and so, God's plan has been a mystery.

New Testament scripture describes how Jesus taught the cross for salvation. Many times Jesus reiterated that one must take up one's own cross in order to follow him. He taught that there were four steps on the cross to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught that there were three steps on the cross before the result—entry into the kingdom of God. Jesus even defined four attributes of God of the Cross--*all nations* (humanity), and *Father, and Son and Holy Spirit* .

But there was no revelation of the fourfold God of Creation.

Progressive revelation of a fourfold God occurred with Church Father Saint Irenaeus from the early second century. Irenaeus is the earliest witness to see the canonical character of all four gospels that fit on the cross. He wrote in his principal work “Against Heresies” (c. 180) that the Word of God was fourfold in form held together by one Spirit.

The Gospels could not possibly be either more or less in number than they are. Since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is spread over all the earth, and the pillar and foundation of the Church is the gospel, and the Spirit of life, it fittingly has four pillars, everywhere breathing out incorruption and revivifying men. From this it is clear that the Word,

the artificer of all things, being manifested to men gave us the gospel, fourfold in form but held together by one Spirit. As David said, when asking for his coming, 'O sitter upon the cherubim, show yourself'. For the cherubim have four faces, and their faces are images of the activity of the Son of God. For the first living creature, it says, was like a lion, signifying his active and princely and royal character; the second was like an ox, showing his sacrificial and priestly order; the third had the face of a man, indicating very clearly his coming in human guise; and the fourth was like a flying eagle, making plain the giving of the Spirit who broods over the Church. Now the Gospels, in which Christ is enthroned, are like these. (3.11.8)

Irenaeus' fourth living creature, *was like a flying eagle*, is written in Revelation 4: 7-8. It is interpreted that the forward moving flying eagle describes the Eternal Father, who is constantly in forward motion, just as time is constantly moving forward.

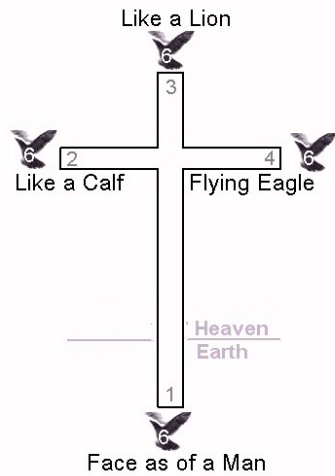
7. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. 8. and the four living creatures, having each

one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about

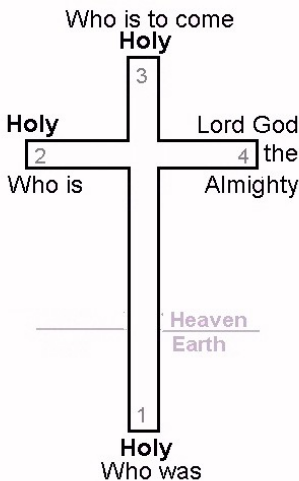
and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come. (Rev 4:7-8, ASV)

So Revelation 4:8 declares the timeless identity of *Lord God, the Almighty*, who is the fourfold God of Creation.

Irenaeus ends his "Against Heresies" discourse with, "Now the Gospels, in which Christ is enthroned," are like these, which he calls the foundation of the Church.



Four Living Creatures



Lord God, the Almighty