

## The Eternal Sonship of Christ

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Among the various heresies that have misled saints and troubled the Church down through the centuries is that of the denial of the Eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The assertion has been made that while Scripture plainly teaches that our Lord was the Eternal Word, it nowhere declares that He bore the name of Son until His incarnation. This is a tacit denial of the Eternal Father as truly as of the Eternal Son, for if the Son was not in the Trinity from eternity, how then could the Father have any such title until Christ was born of Mary? One has well asked, "Had the Father no bosom until Christ was born in Bethlehem?" He is said definitely to have subsisted in the bosom of the Father ere He came into this scene — an expression which surely implies Sonship.

But there are definite Scriptures that make it very evident that He was God the Son, one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, three Persons in the unity of the Godhead, ere He stooped in grace to link humanity with His Deity and thus became the Son of God in a new sense, as Man upon earth, having no human father. We think at once of that

grand passage which Luther called “the Miniature Gospel,” **John 3:16**: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Did He become the Son after He was given, or was He the Son from eternity? Clearly the latter is the case. The term, “only Begotten,” to some suggests the incarnation as though linked with the thought of generation, but it is not necessarily so used in Scripture. Five times in the New Testament our Lord is called “the only Begotten,” and in each instance the suggestion is that he was Son by unique relationship. Isaac is said, in Hebrews eleven, to be Abraham’s “only begotten.” Yet according to natural generation, Ishmael was begotten by Abram long before Isaac was born; but Isaac was his son by unique relationship, miraculously born, and thus spoken of in a very different way than that in which Scripture speaks of Ishmael. So our Lord was God’s unique Son from eternity. Men may try to reason from humanity up to Deity, and so ask the unbelieving question: “How could a son be as old as his father?” — a question which Arians and Socinians have been asking all down through the centuries; but they forget that the divine relationship of Son and Father is not patterned after the human but the human is rather intended to be a picture of the divine. On the human plane, of very necessity, the Father exists ere the son is born; but in the Godhead the Son and the Father are both eternal, as in the Spirit.

Note a number of other passages in which it is very definitely set forth that it was the Son Himself who came into the world. He did not become the Son after He left Heaven to take up the work of redemption. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (**John 1:14**). Here the Word and the only Begotten are clearly identified. He was always the Word; He was ever the only

Begotten of the Father. Again in the 18th verse we read: “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” This verse might be more clearly rendered as follows: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son subsisting in the bosom of the Father, He hath told Him out.” The Son came from that bosom down into this scene in order to make God the Father known to man. It would not be correct to say, as some have done, that he left the Father’s bosom, for the Father’s bosom implies the place of affection. But He came from that place into this scene and ever enjoyed the Father’s affection while here. This is what is emphasized in **John 3:13**: “And no man has ascended up to Heaven but He that cometh down from Heaven, even the Son of man, who is in Heaven.” As the incarnate Son on earth, He lived in Heaven in the sense of ever enjoying blessed communion with the Father. But it was the Eternal Son who thus became the Son of man, and so revealed the Father.

This is the test of faith, as we see in **John 3:18**: “He that believeth in Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the only begotten Son of God.”

In the First Epistle of John, the same precious truth is insisted upon: “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (**1 John 4:9**). It would be the gross misrepresentation of what is here declared so clearly, to teach that God sent the Word, but the Word became the Son after He entered into the world. The very opposite is the declaration of the Holy Spirit.

The term, “The Son of the Father,” as used in **Second John 3**, in itself implies Eternal Sonship in a deeper sense than the term “Son of God,” which is used in Scripture in two ways: in some instances it too speaks of eternal relationship;

in others, of what our Lord became as a man, as for instance, when the angel said to Mary: “That holy thing which will be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (**Luke 1:35**). Both thoughts are involved in Peter’s great confession: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16).

It would rob the soul of the believer of much that is precious, were he to fail to recognize this blessed truth that Christ is the Eternal Son. It would lower, too, one’s appreciation of the love of the Father, who sent Him into the world, if we failed to realize that the One whom He sent was the Son of His love from all eternity, the One who had ever been with Him, the delight of His heart, but who came forth from the Father into the world, that he might become the propitiation for our sins.

How could one read our Lord’s prayer in the seventeenth of John understandingly, if we failed to recognize that it was the Son speaking to the Father, with whom He had been in eternal relationship. He speaks of “the glory which I had with Thee before the world was” (v. 5). Could this be other than the glory of Sonship — participation with the Father in all that pertained to His purpose of grace toward this poor world?

How cold and disappointing the suggestion that though He was the Word, He was not the Son! And what feebleness of comprehension as to the dignity of Sonship is manifested by those who say, as some have recently declared: “Becoming the Son was His first step downward toward the Cross of shame,” as though He were, in some sense, humiliating or degrading Himself in becoming the Son of the Father! Could anything involve a greater misapprehension of the relationship existing between the Father and the Son, as set forth in the Word?

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