

The Eternal Sonship of Christ

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid,
which is Jesus Christ.
(1 Cor 3:11)

The position under criticism

There is an abandonment of orthodox Trinitarianism roaming in the Evangelical church. There are some who suppose that Jesus only became the Son of God at the incarnation, that his sonship was not eternal but was effected in time. Before he became a man, the second person of the Trinity was known as the Word, and was eternal as the Word but was not a son; he was still God, but not the Son from eternity. He specifically became the Son of God when the two natures, divine and human, existed in union. He is not the Son by virtue of his human nature, nor his divine nature, but because of his complex nature. Thus in eternity God is only known by numbers (one, two and three) and is only named at the incarnation. Variants of this view are that Jesus became the Son of God only at the resurrection, at the ascension or by virtue of his covenant office.

The whole church (even the Roman church) has historically considered this to be a grave, erroneous idea, and formally stated the true position as far back as the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD).¹ However, the error has gained significant credence in the last 150 years and J. C. Philpot needed to write a sustained treatment of the subject in 1861. R. L. Dabney attacked these aberrant views in 1880, when they were propounded by Alexander Campbell. The Exclusive Brethren were plagued with this teaching when F. E. Raven succeeded John Darby in 1882. Raven's view was continued by James Taylor Senior (1870-1953) when Raven died in 1903. Both Raven and Taylor developed several other aberrant teachings, but centred around the doctrine that Jesus only became the Son of God at the incarnation. Taylor's son assumed influential leadership and went even further falling into alcoholism and immorality, but still maintained an international support. It seems that error in Christology always leads to other deviations.

Today we are seeing a major recurrence of this heresy which many view as a minor, abstract, theological detail. The Charismatic front are beginning to revamp it. In a recent article, the Assemblies of God leader Aaron Linford stated that: *'eternal generation is a theological fabrication. There was a time when the Father gave the Son to have life in himself (Jn 5:26 where edoke, aorist tense, speaks of an event in time). This constituted our Lord "a quickening spirit" (1 Cor 15:45), able to impart life to others'*² He implies that Jesus is a created being: *'The term [son of God] is always used of a creative act',* who was begotten *'in time'*. He teaches that Jesus was the Eternal Word who only became the Son at the incarnation.

¹ Origen had earlier used the term, but confronted with Arianism, the church produced widespread cogent defences of eternal Sonship and generation, particularly by Basil the Great.

² *Vanguard*, Issue 9, January 1999, p4; an international journal which claims to be a defence of the faith once delivered unto the saints. Though opposed to recent Charismatic extremes like Toronto, it fully endorses historic Pentecostal doctrine.

In the anti-charismatic Reformed camp we see a major international leader teach exactly the same thing. John MacArthur Jnr. has expounded this same position in his commentary on Hebrews and his recent Study Bible. There are so many examples of his error I will quote just a few, firstly from his Hebrews book:

- *'The term Son has only to do with Jesus Christ in His incarnation.'* (p27)
- *'The Bible nowhere speaks about the eternal sonship of Christ.'* (p27)
- *'He had not always had the title of Son. That is his incarnational title ...this is an extremely important point.'* (p28)
- *'He did not receive the title of Son until He was begotten into time.'* (p27)

And from his Study Bible:

- Jesus' Sonship is: *'A relationship planned in eternity past'* but only *'realised in the incarnation.'* (Notes on Ps 27.)
- Sonship is: *'A title expressing ... voluntary submission ... for the purpose of fulfilling the program of redemption... God's Son was born in a point of time ... at His incarnation.'* (Notes on Heb 1:5.)

I am told that other Evangelicals like: James Oliver Buswell, and Walter Martin (now deceased) also adopted this error. Today we are confronted with a minimising of the importance of Christ in Evangelical circles,³ massive attention given to the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, combined with appalling teaching on the Sonship of Christ; thus we are on the verge of seeing an Arian⁴ and/or Socinian⁵ revival.

A Crucial Doctrine

The Messiah was always considered to be the Son of God manifest in the flesh, even by Jews (Matt 16:13-16; Jn 1:49, 11:27); and believing in him is the test of salvation (Jn 3:18, 35-36; 1 Jn 2:23, 5:9-12). Denying eternal sonship is a dangerous thing to do. Christology is the most important doctrine that affects our fellowship. If someone does not hold to a true doctrine of Christ, we should separate from that person:

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 Jn 1:9-11).

Believing in the eternal Sonship of Christ is a fundamental part of believing in the Son as our saviour. If we fail to honour this truth, we stand condemned:

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is

³ As, for instance, in churches which focus upon legalism, ethnic Israel or Celtic spirituality.

⁴ Arianism was an early heresy which taught that Jesus was not equal with God the Father. The *Logos* (Word) was a being created in time (or a point in eternity) who shared no substance with God. Christ is thus subordinate to the Father. MacArthur comes close to this when he also teaches that Jesus is subservient to the Father as a result of his incarnational sonship. *'There is a certain servitude that the second member of the trinity, the Son of God, offered to the Father even in the Old Testament ... submission is implied ... the Son, the second member of the trinity, took on a subservient role to the purposes of the Father in the redemptive history.'* (Interview in *Evangelical Times*, November 1997). Here MacArthur fails to understand the difference between a role in redemption and an equality of personhood in Trinitarian relationships. When 'clarifying' his position, he never clearly stated Christ's co-equality with the Father.

⁵ Socinianism results from the teachings of Socinus (1529-1604), an anti-Trinitarian theologian who based his doctrines on rationalism.

condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.... He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (Jn 3:18, 36)

The name of the Son, in Biblical terms, refers to his being, nature, person and work as revealed in the testimony of scripture. If Jesus is the Son from eternity (as we shall prove), and if this is denied, there remains a fearful prospect of judgment.

'And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.' (1 Jn 5:20)

Those who have eternal life are the same who know that God's Son has come. They have this life because they are in him. As eternal God, the Son imparts life to the ones who know him. Those who do not know the eternal Son, do not have eternal life. Jesus Christ is: *true, God's Son, the true God and eternal life.*

Arguments

- The title of sonship relates to Jesus' glorious divine nature not his human nature (Jn 1:14, 18; Heb 1:8).
- The divine nature of Jesus is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father (Jn 1:1), therefore he must be the eternal Son of the Father.
- The Holy Spirit chose the words: *Father* and *Son* in order to express relationship within the Godhead. These are not arbitrary titles, but like all Biblical names, express a deeper truth. Fatherhood and filiation exist within the Trinity. To deny this is to make God a liar in his choice of scriptural words, we would be unable to trust anything in scripture if words do not mean what they say.
- The words 'father' and 'son' are used repeatedly in connection to demonstrate that one is reciprocal on the other; e.g: Matt 11:27; Lk 10:22; Jn 5:22, 10:33-37; Rm 8:32.
- Scripture everywhere states that paternity is an eternal, immutable characteristic of the first person of the Trinity. If God is eternally a father, then Jesus must eternally be a son. If there is no eternal Son, there is no eternal Father.
- God is revealed in a Son (Heb 1:1-2), it is the Son who is the brightness of his glory and fully expresses him. If God is eternal and a person, then in order to reflect him, the Son must be eternal and a person. Thus Sonship has nothing to do with humanity. When Christ became a man, he took on human nature, not a new personality. Since God is eternally three persons, the creation and needs of man did not affect the essential personhood of God. The provision of redemption in God's eternal counsels did not result in three persons (see later).
- The doctrine of the Trinity is undermined by the error of denying Christ's Sonship. The Trinity is founded upon a unity of essence but a separation of persons within it. If the second person is not the Son from eternity, then the distinction between Father and Son is blurred. Sonship declares the distinction of personhood but also undergirds the oneness of essence (Jn 10:30).
- The error results in a denial of the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son.
- If Sonship is not eternal, then it must be created in time. This is the foundation of Arianism.
- The error, at least, suggests a change in the personality of Christ. He became a son in time, therefore, something was added to his divine person. This destroys his

immutability and renders him less than God; it also requires changes in the Trinitarian relationships. The incarnation did not alter Christ's personality, which is infinite. The assumption of human nature made no change to that. At the incarnation a co-existence took place of the human nature with the divine nature but without addition or subtraction to personality. The same person now has two natures, a new permanent manifestation which previously had been limited to his theophanies. Defining sonship differently (e.g. as occurring in time), must involve a change in personal relations in the Godhead; the first person becomes a Father and the second person, a Son. This is a change of personality, not a mere manifestation of it. The immutability of Christ and the Father is ruined.

- At the incarnation Jesus became the Son of man, he was already the Son of God:
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (Jn 1:1-4); with
For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself. (Jn 5:26)
- Jesus is the Word because he is the Son. The Son is a prior title and the reason for the second. He is called the Word because the Father speaks by him as his only begotten Son. Only the Son knows the mind of the Father and manifests him.
God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. (Heb 1:1-3a).
- Christians are loved by God because they are in the Son, it is in Christ that we have every spiritual blessing, and this election in the Son took place in eternity (Eph 1:4), so Jesus was God's Son then.
- Why would Jesus only become the Son at the incarnation or by virtue of the covenant? What purpose is served by this? Sonship is not essential to redemption. The redeemer has to be God and man whose blood has an infinite value. This saviour does not have to be a Son. If Jesus is really the Word, or some other title in eternity, who has no real filial relationship to the Father, why change that title and independent relationship? If this is true, what then would we call the first person of the Trinity since he wouldn't be a Father?
- Christ's disciples recognised Jesus as the eternal Son before the resurrection (Jn 11:25-27). Martha confessed, *'Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world'*. She understood that the Messiah was the Son of God, sent from heaven.
- Even Christ's opponents understood Jesus to claim that he was the eternal Son of God. By insisting that he was God's Son, the Jews understood him to claim equality with God the Father (Jn 5:18); and for this they killed him. Claiming to be equal with the Father of necessity means that the claimed Sonship is eternal. Jesus can only be equal with God if he is eternal, and his equality is claimed on the basis of his Sonship. [The Jews did not doubt that God's Son would come as the Messiah (Ps 2; Isa 9:6), what they disputed was that Christ was that Son.]

Scriptures

The overwhelming testimony of scripture is that Jesus was eternally the Son of God.

Group 1

The divine nature of Christ's Sonship

- **Heb 1:8** *'But to the Son He [the Father] says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your Kingdom"'*. The Son is God as the Son, and as the divine Son was able to manifest the brightness of the Father's glory (Heb 1:3).
- **Jn 1:14, 18** *'And 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. ... No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.'* The glory John beheld was a glimpse of the glory of the divine nature (e.g. at the transfiguration). Jesus' human nature did not express glory (Isa 52:14, 53:2b; Jn 17:5); his human nature veiled that glory (Heb 10:20). The phrase, *'only begotten'* leads to the theological term *'eternal generation'*. The phrase applies to Jesus' divine nature not his human nature - which was not in the bosom of the Father from all eternity. The Word was the *'only begotten'* who *'became flesh'*, the Son was such in eternity and he took on human nature.
- **Ps 2:7** *'I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You."'* Even the Jews understood this to apply to the Messiah and imply equality with God, hence the sonship is from eternity. The word *'today'* is not given to point out a certain time when the generation began, but to identify the eternal present that lies in God; all things are present with God. The generation is present in eternity, (Turretin). The generation is also not part of the decree, and thus arbitrary, but is the foundation of the decree. Unless Christ had been the eternal Son, he could never have been appointed a mediator and saviour. The initial application to David is only of the nature of a type. (Or figure; compare the figurative immortality applied to Melchizedek in Heb 7:3 with the real eternity of Christ of whom Melchizedek is a type.) Paul uses this text to prove that Christ's resurrection is a full declaration of his sonship (Acts 13:33) thus proving the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham.

Conclusion 1: The Bible is clear that Christ's Sonship refers to the divine nature.

Group 2

The sending of the Son

- **Jn 3:16** God gave his only begotten son to the world, therefore, the second person of the Trinity was a son before he was given. God loved before he gave, this love moved him to give his son. This means that the son was such in the divine nature.
- **Rm 8:32** *'He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?'* God delivered his Son, gave him up, to be incarnate and able to be crucified. Jesus was a Son before he was delivered into the world.
- **1 Jn 4:9** *'In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.'* God sent his only begotten Son into the world. The act of sending does not make Jesus a Son, he was already the Son who was sent. If a man sends his son to do a task, the sending does not make him a son. If a husband sends his wife to buy bread, the sending does not make her his wife. If a man sends his daughter on an errand, the sending does not change her into his servant. For a while the daughter acts as a servant to perform a task but she is always his daughter (Philpot). Jesus became the Father's servant in fulfilling the role of saviour, but Jesus was always God's Son.
- **Matt 21:33-46; Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19** **The Parable of the Vineyard.** Here we

specifically see the Father sending his only beloved Son. What could be plainer?

- **Rm 8:3** *'For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.'* God sent *'his own Son'* to do what the law could not perform. The words emphasise that Jesus is God's true and only Son by his existence in his divine nature. The sonship has nothing to do with title or office, but is the relationship of the second person of the Trinity to the Father. If Jesus was not the Son in eternity, the Holy Spirit would have used a different title in these texts, perhaps *'God sent his Word who became a son'*. But no, the Spirit specifically states that God sends his Son into the world to perform a task.
- **Gal 4:4** *'when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law'*, a further example of God sending his Son.

Conclusion 2: The Bible is clear that Christ was the Son in heaven before he was sent to be a redeemer and mediator.

Group 3

The intimacy of the heavenly relationship of the Son to the Father

- **Jn 8:16-23, 29** In this passage Jesus is countering the accusing judgment of the Pharisees and declares his spiritual authority as the Son. The realm that Jesus is considering is that of heaven and its impact upon earth: *'You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world'* (v23), *'Where I go you cannot come'* (v21). His ministry is true because it emanates from the Father. It is from heaven that God testifies to his Son's authenticity: *'the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me'*, (v18). Jesus' earthly ministry is undertaken in intimate connection with the Father because their relationship is unified: *'I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me'*, (v16). This unity of relationship is so intimate that it goes beyond any relationship a previous prophet may have had with God because Jesus fully manifests the Father's personality as a Son: *'If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also'*, (v19). This relationship began in heaven, from whence the Father sent his Son: *'He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him'*, (v 29). It is impossible to read this chapter and not see that Jesus' Sonship began before his incarnation.
- **Matt 11:27** *'All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.'* Jesus declares that God is hidden from men who cannot know him without special revelation. As the Father he is 'Lord of heaven'. But Jesus goes on to explain that only the Father knows him. This only makes sense if Jesus is referring to his pre-incarnate existence as Jesus' human family would have known him well enough as a man. Then he adds that only Jesus, as the Son, knows the Father. Again this is knowledge beyond human understanding, for instance over and above any knowledge that a prophet may have had about God. Jesus is clearly talking about a relationship that existed before the incarnation in heaven; in that relationship he was a Son to a Father.
- **Jn 10:15** *'As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.'* See above.
- **Jn 10:28-30** *'And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.'* Jesus speaks as the Son of God stating that the elect were given to him as the Son, by the Father. When did this giving take place? Answer, in eternity (Eph 1:1-4). Before time the Son, who is equal (one with) the Father, was given the elect as

a bride.

- **Jn 17:1-4** *'Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.'* See above.
- **Jn 17:5** *'And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.'* What can be clearer than this. Jesus speaks to God as his Son mentioning the glory that he had with the father 'before the world was'. The Sonship was in the glory.
- **Jn 17:24** *'Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world'.* The Sonship of Jesus must have been established on the basis of love. This is why the terms of family are used by the Holy Spirit to describe God. The Trinity is a place of loving communion, which is what the church is called to emulate, hence the names of Father and Son. Terms like 'word' do not suggest this at all. When did this loving originate - 'before the foundation of the world'. Sonship is, therefore, eternal.
- **Jn 17**, Jesus High Priestly prayer. If read in its entirety, it is impossible to understand this as anything other than Jesus addressing his Father in terms entirely applicable to his pre-incarnate role as covenant surety. It is impossible to see the Father-Son relationship originating in time at the incarnation from this chapter.
- **Jn 14:9-11** *'He who has seen Me has seen the Father ... I am in the Father, and the Father in Me ... the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me'.* **Jn 14:20** *'At that day you will know that I am in My Father'.* These texts make crystal clear the intense union between the Son and the Father. If the Son is one with the Father, and if the Father is a spiritual being inhabiting eternity, then the Son must also be a spiritual being from eternity. If sonship was not a part of this eternal unity then different words would have been required and Jesus would be guilty of misleading people. Time and time again John refers to Jesus' eternal Sonship and the passages mount one on top of another. Taken in the whole context, the weight given to the doctrine is immense.
- **Prov 30:4** *'Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, If you know?'* Scholars recognise this verse to be referring to the first and second persons of the Trinity (e.g. Delitzsch and Fausset). Here both the Father and the Son are testified as being eternal by an Old Testament writer.
- **Prov 8:22-36** Older writers frequently used this as a key text to support Christ's eternal Sonship but it does admit of a lack of clarity because many see this as a poetic personification of wisdom. I will not use it here as a main plank since there are so many clearer supporting texts. However, it does have value for us:
 - * firstly, the word 'created' in v22 (as RSV etc.) is wrong. The word (*qanah*) should be translated as possessed. Likewise, 'shaped' (as RSV) or 'created' (LXX) in v25, (*chuwl*) should be translated 'begotten'. [To those who use this mistranslation against us: if wisdom was created by God, how did God manage without it and if referring to Christ - how can the creator be the created?]
 - * Secondly, sound rules of interpretation deny that this is a mere personification of wisdom. It does not have the substance of this figure of speech (prosopopoeia) and repeatedly human activities are attributed to it in short precepts, (Turretin).
 - * Further, items that can only be applicable to Christ are attributed to it (v32, 35,

36). 'Wisdom' is also a name, or title, of Christ (1 Cor 1:24); here the plural is used to intensify the idea. Just as wisdom is possessed from the beginning, Christ was with God from the beginning (Jn 1:1). Just as wisdom is a delight to God, Christ is the beloved Son (Matt 3:17). Just as wisdom is ordained and anointed by God, Christ was foreordained in eternity and anointed to be a mediator for his people (1 Pt 1:20); and so on.

If we thus understand that Christ is seen here as the wisdom of God, we also see an eternal begetting.

Conclusion 3: The Bible is clear that Christ enjoyed a deep, intimate communion with the Father in eternity as a Son.

Group 4

Creation through the Son before time began

- **Heb 1:1-2** *'God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.'* God created the world through his Son in eternity.

The Son existed before all things

- **Col 1:13, 15-17** *'... the Son of His love ... He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.'* This requires no further comment.
- **Mic 5:2** *'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.'* This prophecy is fulfilled in the birth of Christ and testified as such in the new Testament. Just as Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Christ is stated to be from everlasting. This was understood by Jewish scribes.

The Son existed before Abraham

- **Jn 8:54-58** *'Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."' (v58).* This was spoken in the context of Jesus being a Son to the Father. A reading of the whole narrative in Jn 8 must convince the unbiased reader that Jesus is stating that his Sonship is eternal and heavenly.

Conclusion 4: The Bible is clear that the Son was present in eternity but also established creation (and thus time).

Group 5

The Father's love for the church

- **Jn 17:23** *'I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.'* The Father's love for the saints is the same as his love for the Son. The Father loved the church in eternity (Eph 1:4-5). If this love was the love which God has also for the Son, then Jesus was the beloved Son in eternity.

The giving of Christ as a covenant surety

- **Gal 2:20** *'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.'* The Son of God loved Paul in eternity and gave himself to be his saviour. Election took place in eternity not in time (Eph 1:4).

Conclusion 5: The Bible is clear that the Son agreed in eternity to become a redeemer in order that a people could know the same love that existed between the Father and the Son.

Group 6

The incarnation was subsequent to Christ's Sonship

- **Rm 1:3-4** *'..concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.'* Jesus was God's Son who was incarnated of the line of David at a later time.

The authority to execute judgment

- **Jn 5:26-27** *'For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.'* When was this authority given? It was a decree of God from before time began. Jesus, as the Son, accepted the responsibility of procuring redemption for man by becoming man. With this role God gave the Son authority to be the judge of men. The granting of authority to the Son took place in eternity on the basis that he would also become the Son of man.

The sacrifice of God's Son

- **Rm 8:32** *'He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?'* God did not spare his only Son but gave him up to death for us. What else can these words mean other than the Son was always such in eternity but God gave him to be a sacrifice for us. The consenting, covenanting or giving of the Son unto death took place in eternity (Rev 13:8) even though the act of sacrifice itself took place in time.

Conclusion 6: The Bible is clear that in order to rescue his people, the eternal Son had to become a man in time.

Objections

Jesus was made a son in time, *edoke* is in the aorist tense and speaks of an event in time.

Jn 5:26 *For as the Father has life in himself; so hath he given (edoken) to the Son to have life in himself.*

- The aorist tense does not necessarily speak of an event in time but simply of a past event. The aorist does not give any further qualification or definition. If this event was in eternity, then the aorist is still applicable. For example: *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the*

heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.' (Eph 1:3-4). Here the underlined verses are in the aorist tense but both clearly refer to eternity. ['Has blessed' = first aorist active participle; 'chose' = first aorist middle indicative.]

- John is referring to a time that is past to us but outside time to God. Here there is no priority or posteriority, no superiority or inferiority. We are dealing with eternity and the nature of God. The second person of the trinity was established in a filial relationship before time began so that God was always a Father and Jesus was always a Son. The relationship within the Trinity is communal, loving and equal, not simply functional. As Turretin explains, the works of the Trinity inwards (e.g. begetting) are eternal and, therefore, unceasing; for if they had an end they would also have had a beginning and God would not be immutable. These works are perfect and perpetual, but to us finite beings, perfect acts are past events; so scripture uses the past tense to describe them (Ps 2:7; Prov 8:22-31).
- We have no problem with other subjects which are also eternal and thus exist outside time and do not occur at a later time than God's existence e.g. God's eternal decrees. God chose a people from eternity, yet to human understanding this must have occurred subsequent to God's existence! Eternal generation is no different.
- Hardly any commentators would support this view. The only one I've found is Lenski, but he does not hold completely to confessional orthodoxy and, as D. A. Carson has demonstrated, his Greek is frequently faulty.
- This verse asserts equality between the Father and the Son, both have life in themselves, all creatures only have derived life communicated to them. If the Father had only given life to the Son at the incarnation, the Son would not be equal.
- John 1:4 makes clear that '*In him* [Jesus as the Word] *was life*'. Jesus did not need the Father to give him life as a man in some special way, his life is not derived. The ability to generate life was not given at the incarnation but already innate in the second person of the Trinity in eternity. If this life was part of Sonship (Jn 5:26), then Jesus was the Son in eternity. John amplifies this when he says, that the Son is '*the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us*' (1 Jn 1:2).
- 'Given' has the sense here of appointed or authorised not imparted (c.f. Isa 42:6, 49:8, 55:4). The surrounding verses are about Christ giving life to others. This verse explains that this is possible because, as the means of salvation, Christ is appointed to be the fountain of eternal life to those who believe. This is why the logical 'for' (*gar*) is used. Christ can exercise judgment and generate life because he has life in himself. This aspect of salvation was appointed to Christ by God in the eternal covenant. The verse is not directly referring to the manner in which Jesus exists, the authority here is mediatorial, related to the power of raising the dead and judging. Any functional subjection in salvation proves nothing about Christ's person/nature.

If the Father granted Jesus to have life in himself and begat him as a Son, there was a point when the Father took precedence in time and authority, therefore, the son is not equal.

This took place in eternity and there is no beginning or end in eternity, neither is there any priority or posteriority of time. Furthermore, the nature of God excludes superiority and inferiority. Jesus is the 'eternal' Son which testifies of co-equality with the Father in eternity, they both exist from all eternity. This is no harder to accept than the fact that the Trinity is three in one at the same time. We cannot apply human rationality to this. Furthermore, though a man becomes an adult before he has a son, he actually becomes a father at the same instant as his son is born. Father and son come into being at the same

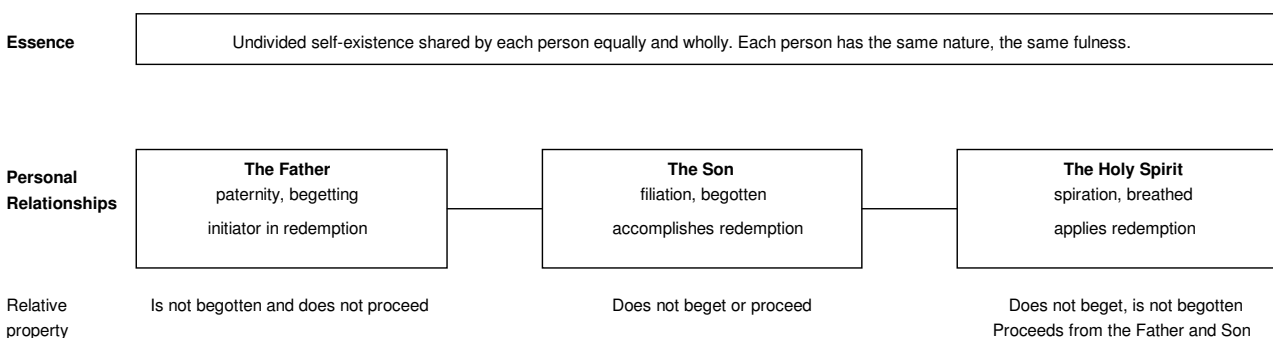
moment.

The Bible is clear that the Sonship of Christ is not like human filiation. The Son is equal to the Father and of the same essence as the Father. There is no suggestion in scripture of priority of personhood in the Trinity, but there is a distinction, and even priority, in the roles of the Trinity in redemption. The Father initiates, the Son achieves and the Spirit applies; but this does not imply an order of value in the persons. All three persons agreed to their roles in redemption when they covenanted before time to save mankind. We must accept the scriptural statements: the Son is equal to the Father and the Father begot the Son in eternity.

We must carefully distinguish between the essence and personality of God. There is not one God with three different names (Sabellianism), neither are there three separate Gods (Tritheism). As far as God's essence (essential nature or being) is concerned, God is self-existent and all three persons have life in themselves, not derived life. God is '*I am that I am*'. The essence of God is possessed by all three persons, thus there is one undivided nature in God. The persons do not each possess a part of the essence, but enjoy the whole; for instance of Christ scripture states, '*in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*' (Col 2:9), '*For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell*', (Col 1:19).

Yet there are three distinct persons in this one self-existent essence. There is a communication and dependence only in the personality of the Godhead, not the essence. The being of God is self-existent, the persons in the Godhead exist in relationship and function. The Sonship of Christ is not an aspect of the essence but the person; this is how he subsists within the Godhead. Concerning the essence of God, Christ is self-existent, but regarding the Trinity, he is begotten. Christ is God, but he is also the begotten Son of God. This identifies his personal relationship in the Trinity, it is not a mere name, title or office; neither is Christ a begotten God as this would deny Christ's own self-existence. The Son always emanated from the Father by an eternal and internal act, not beginning through generation nor being before it. Neither is Christ the Son of himself because essence does not generate an essence but a person. (The Son is another *one*, not another thing, he has a different mode of subsisting.)⁶

Essence and Person in the Godhead



The objection above leads one to posit that: the Father existed first who then begot a Son, who is another God, and then from these two proceeded another God called the Holy Spirit. This is not Biblical Trinitarianism but very similar to the modes of Brahman (Brahma,

⁶ This complex and difficult subject can be pursued further in Turretin, Inst. (P&R) Vol 1, p300ff and John Gill, Body of Divinity, (Baker) Vol 1 pp44ff, 180ff, 201ff, 232ff.

Vishnu and Shiva) in Hinduism or the Egyptian trinity of Osiris, Isis and Horus. It not only must be rejected, but must be identified as blasphemous.

The sonship of Christ occurred at the incarnation only.

Acts 13:32-33 / Heb 1:5 / Ps 2:7 / Lk 1:35

This confuses the scriptures which speak of God *manifest* in Jesus as the Son with the idea that they mean a creation of the Word as a son. In fact, Christ was not actually begotten as a man since he was not fathered as such, the Holy Spirit mysteriously acted within Mary and Christ was made of a woman. Christ is begotten as the eternal Son of God in his divine nature, but as a man he appears like Melchizedek - without human genealogy.

The '*holy thing*' in Mary's womb was said to '*be called the Son of God*' (Lk 1:35). It does not say that he became the Son of God. Jesus' human nature, as distinct from his divine nature, is never called the Son of God in the New Testament. Jesus' divine nature and Jesus' united two natures are called the Son of God (note Rm 1:3-4). The parallel passage uses the name 'Emmanuel' instead (Matt 1:23). Just as Jesus was God before he was called Emmanuel ('God with us'), so Jesus was the Son of God before being called so after being born of a virgin. Being born did not make him God (Emmanuel), neither did it make him the Son of God.

If the Son was created as such at the incarnation, then the Holy Spirit would have more claim to being his Father than the first person of the Trinity since he initiated the event in Mary's womb (Lk 1:35). This is clearly absurd. The Spirit is also called the Spirit of Christ (Rm 8:9; 1 Pt 1:11) and the Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6); but if Jesus was made the Son at the incarnation, he should be called the Son of the Spirit. Further, the first person could not have been a Father in the Old Testament or in eternity contra Heb 1:1-2 and Eph 1:3-4. Also, why would Jesus call himself the Son of Man. There would be no use for that title since his manhood had made him the Son of God according to this error. Apart from all this, the Son is mentioned several times in the Old Testament (Dan 3:25; Ezek 21:10; Prov 30:4; Ps 2:7, 12; 89:26-27) and identified as the being before or active in creation (Col 1:13-16; Heb 1:1-2).

The incarnation did not make Jesus the Son of God, but demonstrated that he was God's only Son.

The sonship of Christ occurred at the resurrection.

Acts 13:32-33 *'And we declare to you glad tidings -- that promise which was made to the fathers. "God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You."*

This has already been explained under the section concerning Rm 1:4. The resurrection confirmed and declared that Jesus was God's Son. The erroneous assertion cannot be true because God had already testified that Jesus was God's Son before the resurrection (Matt 3:17, 17:5) and Peter famously confessed it. Even pagan Gentiles recognised this (Matt 27:54) and demons shouted it (Lk 4:41). This fact alone destroys the objection.

Other responses include:

- Since Jesus raised himself from the dead (Jn 2:19, 10:18), this error would mean that Jesus begat himself.

- If resurrection made Jesus a son, it did not make him the only begotten son since he is the first-born from the dead of many saints who will share his resurrection, even many who rose with him at his resurrection in Jerusalem (Col 1:18; 1 Cor 15:20; Matt 27:52).
- If resurrection results in sonship, what about the resurrection of the wicked at the end?

In Acts 13 Paul asserts the resurrection from Ps 16:10 in Acts 13:35. The earlier quotes (Ps 2:7, Isa 55:3) refer to the fulfilment of the promise to the patriarchs. Scripture often states that things are born when they have been manifested (e.g. Prov 17:17). The resurrection proved, declared and testified to Christ's eternal Sonship. It did not establish a finite sonship.

The sonship of Christ occurred at the ascension.

Heb 1:4 *'... having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.'*

Jesus was not made to be better than angels after the cross; he was already more excellent than angels because he created them (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16). Receiving the inheritance did not make him a Son; rather, because he was God's Son, he received the inheritance. The point of this passage is to show that God's Son has now assumed humanity. God's chosen one has incorporated manhood with the inheritance obtained, and now represents man as High Priest at the right hand of God. The glory is that God's eternal Son left heaven, became man, and became obedient unto death to fulfil God's eternal purpose. For this he is considered most worthy and all will bow to him in worship (Phil 2:7-11).

The sonship of Christ occurred as a result of his covenant or mediatorial office.

By this is meant that the distinctions in the Trinity are formal, not personal, arising as a result of the covenant when God undertook to provide man's salvation; i.e. the need for redemption required the second person to become a Son. The designations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit did not exist in eternity but were revealed to men through the covenant. Needless to say, there is not the slightest evidence for this assertion. Arguments against it include:

- The covenant is said to be eternal, so these designations were in existence in eternity (Heb 13:20). In fact, this verse even mentions the blood of Jesus in this context since he was considered from eternity to be the lamb slain for his people (Rev 13:8).
- If this error was true, it postulates three separate Gods with no vital relationship and communion between them because they are not distinct persons. It ravages the Trinity.
- In his greatest trials and stress (e.g. Jn 17:1), Jesus prayed to the Father in filial terms that reveal more than mere formal titles would convey. There is an intimacy here that goes deeper than a mere functionality. Why would Jesus call himself God's Son so intimately and frequently if he were not really such? There would be no need to do that in semi-private prayer. Why would God habitually mention loving his *only begotten* Son?
- The relationship of the Son to the Father is what constitutes him as the only mediator: *'For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.'* (Hebrews 7:28). This clearly testifies that Christ's Sonship is what makes him a great priest not that his priesthood (mediatorship) makes him a Son. Likewise, his Sonship is also the foundation of his prophetic role, making God known: *'No one has seen God at*

any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.' (Jn 1:18). [Note: any sense of priority here is of order not of time since these roles were established in eternity also.]

- Office does not constitute relationship but servanthood; thus Moses, the prophet and deliverer, is a servant (Heb 3:5-6). In adopting a mediatorial role, Jesus also becomes a servant, willing to die for his people (Isa 53; Phil 2:7-8). If Christ's relationship to the Father was established by office, this would make him a servant, not a son. The apostles testify of the wonder and humility of God's Son becoming a servant and taking this mediatorial role for us. This wonder would be lost if it was the role which resulted in the Sonship. To become a son by office is an absurdity. One becomes a son by generation or by adoption. Jesus, as the glorious Son of God, took upon himself the office of a servant, and thus gained great glory (Heb 5:8). A servant can be adopted into a family as a son (like Moses, Ex 2:10) but the second person of the Trinity did not take up the non-existent office of a son.
- The value of Christ's covenant role is in his Sonship: his priesthood is great because he is God's Son (Heb 4:14), his blood is efficacious and precious because it is the blood of God's Son (1 Jn 1:7). The greatness is not in the official capacity but because it is God's Son in the office.
- Finally, if this error is true, texts like Jn 3:16 become meaningless.

From everlasting the persons in the Godhead have been in vital inter-communication, with specific functions, titles, relationships and roles which are involved with a covenant to gather a redeemed people. The covenant, like the people, was from eternity and the Sonship of Jesus was the critical part of this eternal scheme. The covenant did not create these relationships, but out of these relationships, God chose to have a people for his Son. The Bible reveals that God is a Father in his essential nature who loves and initiates. The Son is the one loved who carries out the Father's desires and the Spirit loves to fulfil and apply what is achieved by the Son. These roles are part of the essential nature of the persons of the Godhead.

There is a difference between believing in Jesus' Sonship and asserting that he was eternally generated by the Father. The first is true the second is not. The term 'eternal generation' is preposterous.

This is a logical fallacy as well as an unscriptural statement. Although the term 'eternal generation' does not appear in the Biblical text, it properly describes a scriptural concept, just as many other terms like 'Trinity' or 'total depravity'. If one accepts that Jesus is a Son, how did he become that Son if not by generation? If he is eternally a Son, how can the generation be other than eternal? The problems we encounter in understanding this are produced when we rationalise the subject according to human generation. This cannot be done when one is considering eternal beings inhabiting infinity. Like the doctrines of the Trinity and the dual nature of Christ, we cannot fully explain the process of eternal generation, but we must accept it since it is totally Biblical. Let us try to make this as simple as possible.

- **Scripture asserts that Christ is a Son.**
 - * The Father begets (Ps 2:7).
 - * The Son is begotten (Jn 1:14, 18).
- **Being begotten means that he was generated.**
 - * This is just plain English, if one is begotten one has been generated.

- **God's begetting is eternal.**
 - * If the term 'generation' is used of divine persons (i.e. one person begets, another person is begotten), and refers to divine entities with divine natures, then the generation must be eternal since divinity is eternal by definition.
- **As a result the attributes of this Sonship will also be eternal.**
 - * For example: power, wisdom etc. This is attributed to Christ in the Bible.

Jesus is the brightness of the Father as a flame is part of the fire or as a ray of light is part of the sun. Christ is the Son of the Father as thought is born from the mind. Jesus is the word of the Father as speech represents thought. They are so indivisibly connected as to be the same essence, but yet a distinction is still observable as one is the manifestation of the other.

Sonship requires generation, but this does not imply that the Father was before the Son and is greater than the Son if we are in eternal, spiritual, infinite realms. The alternative is that there is a greater being who produced both the Father and the Son and called them by those names. Scripture insists that Jesus is begotten by the Father and yet is equal to the Father. We either accept that or become unbiblical.

It is interesting, and rather worrying, that most of these objections to eternal generation (if not all) have been made by Socinian theologians for hundreds of years and were countered by godly men. Today these same objections are being made by supposed Evangelicals or even Reformed teachers!

Conclusion

This is not a minor doctrine. Any deviation from scriptural Christology leads to serious errors and denies the Son of God. The great problem with denying Christ's eternal sonship is that it leads directly to Gnostic thoughts about Jesus as a man (that is: he was exalted to divinity after the resurrection or after his baptism, he was only a glorified man setting the example for all of us to follow him his path and become little gods ourselves) or Arian and Socinian speculations (that is: Jesus is subordinate to God, similar to God but not of the same nature, and was created the Son of God in time or a point in eternity). The modern teachers mentioned in the introduction ought to realise that they are using exactly the same scriptures, and many of the same arguments, as these heretics did in the past.

Jesus' eternal sonship should be believed because it is Biblical, but it also preserves and protects the doctrine of the full deity of Jesus by establishing his divinity before the manger. If we deny his eternal sonship, we overturn his divinity and equality with God. If we do this, we destroy the Trinity.

Quotes

The author wishes to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the authors quoted here, particularly Philpot, Turretin and Gill. The quoted writers come from various backgrounds: Anglican Puritan, Presbyterian, Baptist and Independent churches; theological colleges and Christian Research Institutes.

The Son is evidently a 'Son' in a sense answerable to that in which the Father is 'Father' ... the Father and the Son mutually share honours which are essentially divine. If the paternity is something characteristic and permanent, so is the filiation.

R. L. Dabney. *Discussions*, Vol 1, Banner of Truth, p331.

The name Son of God, properly denotes his divine nature; and the name Son of Man, his human nature.

Manual of Theology, p201

Before his incarnation, the Son of God was in intimate communion of glory and blessedness with the Father. ... Various passages speak of him as the Son of God, antecedent to his coming into the world.

Ibid, p203

The phrases first-born, first-begotten, only-begotten, seem to refer to the true ground of the name, Son of God: but what these signify it is probably impossible for us to understand. The ideas of peculiar endearment, dignity, and heirship, which are attached to these terms, as used among men, may be supposed to belong to them, as applied to the Son of God; but all gross conceptions of their import, as if they were designed to convey to our minds the idea of derived existence, and the mode of that derivation, ought to be discarded as inconsistent with the perfection of Godhead. ... The phrase "Son of God", denotes not the mere office [of Messiahship], but the exalted nature which qualified for it.

Ibid, p204

John Leadley Dagg. *Manual of Theology*, Gano Books.

The Father and Son delighted one in another... without communicating that [sic] their joy to any other, for no creature did then exist ... consider ...the glorious condition of the non-incarnated Son of God ... wrapt up in the very soul of his Father, embosomed in God. ... The delights of the Father and the Son one in another, knew not a moment's interruption, or diminution.

The Fountain of Life, p43-44.

John 1:18. Here is insinuating, metaphorically, the intimate communion of the Son of God with the Father, which consists in eternal generation, in the strictest oneness or unity of nature, in the most ardent love, and in the communication of the most secret affairs. Glass Quoted by Flavel in a footnote, Ibid, p44.

Consider again the purity of that delight with which the blessed Father and Son embraced each other ... Consider the constancy of this delight; it was from everlasting ... and from eternity. Ibid, p46-47.

When was this compact made betwixt the Father and the Son? I answer, it bears date from eternity. Ibid, p58.

John Flavel. *The Fountain of Life*, Works, Banner of Truth, Vol 1.

The Sonship of Christ is an article of the greatest importance in the Christian religion. ... It is the distinguishing criterion of the Christian religion and what gives it the preference to all others, upon which all the important doctrines of it depend, even upon the Sonship of Christ as a divine person; and as by generation, even eternal generation. Without this the doctrine of the Trinity can never be supported.

John Gill. *Body of Divinity*, Baker, Vol 1, p206. [Gill spends more than 25 pages defending this doctrine.]

He was from eternity a divine person ... since the incarnation, he is not two persons, nor a compound person ... but is one and the same person.

The assumption of human nature no more changed his personality than his divine nature. Both remain the same. Of course the divine nature cannot change, either by increment or decrement otherwise it wouldn't be divine.

The Person of Christ, p393.

The creation of the human nature of the Son of God, therefore, does not induce the consequence that any addition was thereby made to his divine substance and ... personality.

We have then - 1. The eternal, divine personality of Christ by virtue of which he is a distinct subsistence [i.e. Son; Girardeau then explains that this personality is expressed in a divine nature and the assumption of a human nature in the eternal Son of God].

John L. Girardeau. *The Person of Christ*, Discussions of Theological Questions, Sprinkle, p395.

The name [Son of God], therefore, denotes the eternal, essential and absolute Sonship of the Saviour in relation to the Father as the First Person in the Holy Trinity.

Herman Hoeksema. *Reformed Dogmatics*, Reformed Free Press Assoc. p342.

This short but illustrious confession of Peter, compriseth eminently the whole truth concerning the person and office of Christ:-of his person, in that although he was the Son of man ... yet he was not only so, but the eternal Son of the living God.

The Glory of Christ, p30.

But of all the effects of the divine excellencies, the constitution of the person of Christ ... was the most ineffable and glorious. I speak not of his divine person absolutely; for his distinct personality and subsistence was by an internal and eternal act of the Divine Being in the person of the Father, or eternal generation - which is essential to the divine essence - whereby nothing anew was outwardly wrought or did exist. He was not, he is not, in that sense, the effect of the divine wisdom and power of God, but the essential wisdom and power of God himself. [Owen then explains that the incarnation was the assumption of human nature into personal subsistence and union with the eternal Son of God.]

Ibid, p45

The eternal personal existence of the Son of God is supposed in these expressions [Prov 8:22-23]. ...there was a peculiar glory and honour belonging unto the person of the Son, as designed by the Father unto the execution of all the counsels of his will.

Ibid, p54-55.

John Owen. *The Glory of Christ*, Works, Vol 1, Banner of Truth. [Owen, like other Puritans, repeatedly refers to Christ's eternal Sonship and the mutual delight of the Son and the Father in eternity.]

When, then, we say that Jesus is the eternal Son of God we declare His co-eternity, and when we say that He is the Son of God, as God the Son, we declare His co-equality with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

The Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, p22.

The eternal Sonship of Christ is no dry doctrine, but a fountain of life to the church of God; and as its vital streams flow into the soul they become springs of happiness and holiness.

J. C. Philpot. *The Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God*, Gospel Standard Pub. p67.

Scripture indicates that Christ's Sonship is an eternal Sonship ... if there was a time when the Son was not the Son, then, to be consistent, there was also a time when the Father was not the Father. If the first person's designation as 'Father' is an eternal title, then the second person's designation as 'Son' must be so regarded.

Ron Rhodes. *Christ Before the Manger*, Baker, p31.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament represent the resurrection not only as an integral part of Christianity, but as a pregnant proof of the eternal Sonship of Christ, and consequently every scheme must be false in which this great fact is not obviously possessed of this distinction.

James Henley Thornwell. *Collected Writings*, Vol 2, Banner of Truth, p67.

Certain it is, that the eternal Deity of the second person in the Trinity results necessarily and solely from his eternal Sonship, or from his having been everlastingly begotten of the Father in the same infinite and undivided essence.

The Son of God, as such, cannot possibly be inferior to the Father. There can be no difference, and consequently no inequality of nature, between them. Even among men, a son is as much a human being as his father: and surely, the uncreated and eternally begotten Son of the Father Almighty is and must be as truly a divine being as the Father who begot him.

Augustus Toplady. *Works*, Sprinkle Pub. p434.

That the Son is true God, both consubstantial (homoousion) and eternal with the Father, these four things ascribed to him (and belonging to God alone) invincibly prove: (1) the names of God; (2) the attributes of God; (3) the works of God; (4) the worship due to God.
Institutes, p283.

Was the Son of God begotten of the Father from eternity? We affirm.

Turretin then spends eleven pages defending the eternal generation of the Son!
Ibid, p292.

This generation [of the Son] was made without time (achronos); not in time, but from eternity. Therefore not priority or posteriority of duration can be observed here.

Ibid, p293.

Frances Turretin. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Presbyterian & Reformed.

He [Jesus] not only with great directness declares that He and the Father are one ... but He removes all doubt as to the essential nature of His oneness with the Father by explicitly asserting His eternity ("Before Abraham was I am", Jn 8:58). His co-eternity with God ("had with thee before the world was" 17:5; cf. 17:18; 6:62), His eternal participation in the Divine glory itself ("the glory which I had with thee," in fellowship, community with

Thee “before the world was”, 17:5). So clear is it that in speaking currently of Himself as God’s Son ... He meant, in accordance with the underlying significance of the idea of sonship in Semitic speech ... to make Himself, as the Jews with exact appreciation of His meaning perceived, “equal with God” (10:33).

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. *Biblical Doctrines*, Baker p149.

Appendix One

Testimony from the Church Fathers

To demonstrate that this doctrine is formally expressed from ancient times, I append the following quotes:

Ignatius of Antioch 110 AD

Jesus Christ . . . was with the Father before the beginning of time, and in the end was revealed.

Letter to the Magnesians 6.

Lactantius 307 AD

When we speak of God the Father and God the Son, we do not speak of them as different, nor do we separate them, because the Father cannot exist without the Son, nor can the Son be separated from the Father, since the name of 'Father' cannot be given without the Son, nor can the Son be begotten without the Father. ... They both have one mind, one spirit, one substance; but the former [the Father] is as it were an overflowing fountain, the latter [the Son] as a stream flowing forth from it. The former as the sun, the latter as it were a ray extended from the sun.

Divine Institutes 4:28.

Council of Nicaea 325 AD

We believe . . . in our one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, the only-begotten born of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, born, not made.

The Creed of Nicaea.

Cyril of Jerusalem 350 AD

Believe also in the Son of God, the one and only, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God begotten of God, who is life begotten of life, who is light begotten of light, who is in all things like unto the begetter, and who did not come to exist in time but was before all the ages, eternally and incomprehensibly begotten of the Father. He is the Wisdom of God.

Catechetical Lectures 4:7.

The Long Ignatius 350 AD

Our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the Virgin. For 'the Word was made flesh'.

Letter to the Ephesians 7.

For the Son of God, who was begotten before time began, and established all things according to the will of the Father, He was conceived in the womb of Mary, according to the appointment of God, of the seed of David, and by the Holy Ghost.

ibid., 18.

Jesus Christ . . . being begotten by the Father before the beginning of time, was God the Word, the only-begotten Son, and remains the same for ever; for 'of His kingdom there shall be no end'.

Letter to the Magnesians 6.

Athanasius 360 AD

When these points have been demonstrated, then they [Arians] speak even more impudently: 'If there never was a time when the Son was not, and if he is eternal and coexists with the Father, then you are saying that he is not a Son at all, but the Father's brother.' O dull and contentious men! Indeed, if we said only that he coexisted eternally and had not called him Son, their pretended difficulty would have some plausibility. But if while saying that he is eternal, we confess him as Son of Father, how were it possible for him that is begotten to be called a brother of him that begets? ... For the Father and the Son were not generated from some pre-existing source, so that they might be accounted as brothers. Rather, the Father is the source and begetter of the Son. . . . It is proper for men to beget in time, because of the imperfections of their nature; but the offspring of God is eternal because God's nature is ever perfect.

Discourses against the Arians, 1:14.

Basil The Great 368 AD

What was in the beginning? 'The Word,' he says. . . . Why the Word? So that we might know that he proceeded from the mind. Why the Word? Because he was begotten without passion. Why the Word? Because he is image of the Father who begets him, showing forth the Father fully, in no way separated from him, and subsisting perfectly in himself, just as our word entirely befits our thought.

Eulogies and Sermons 16:3.

When I speak of one essence, do not think as two separated from one, but of a Son subsisting from the Father from the beginning, not of Father and Son emerging from one essence. Indeed, do not speak of brothers; we confess Father and Son. There is identity of essence because the Son is from the Father; not made by his decree, but born of his nature.

(ibid., 24:4).

Gregory Nazianzus 380 AD

He is called Son because he is identical to the Father in essence; and not only this, but also because he is of him. He is called only-begotten not because He is a unique Son ... but because he is Son in a unique fashion and not in a corporeal way. He is called Word because he is to the Father what a word is to the mind.

Orations 30:20.

Council of Constantinople I, 381 AD

We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.

The Nicene Creed.

Council of Rome 382 AD

If anyone does not say that the Son was begotten of the Father, that is, of the divine

substance of him himself, he is a heretic.
Tome of Damasus, canon 11.

The Athanasian Creed 400 AD

The Father is not made nor created nor begotten by anyone. The Son is from the Father alone, not made or created, but begotten. . . . Let him who wishes to be saved, think thus concerning the Trinity. But it is necessary for eternal salvation that he faithfully believe also in the Incarnation . . . He is God begotten of the substance of the Father before time, and he is man born of the substance of his mother in time. . . . This is the Catholic faith; unless everyone believes this faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.
Athanasian Creed .

Augustine 416 AD

In the way that you speak a word that you have in your heart and it is with you . . . that is how God issued the Word, that is to say, how he begot the Son. And you, indeed, beget a word too in your heart, without temporal preparation; God begot the Son outside of time, the Son through whom he created all things.
Homilies on John 14:7.

Patrick (of Ireland) 452 AD

Jesus Christ, whom we . . . confess to have always been with the Father--before the world's beginning, spiritually and ineffably begotten of the Father before all beginning.
Confession of St. Patrick 4 .

Council of Constantinople II, 553 AD

If anyone does not confess that there are two generations of the Word of God, one from the Father before all ages, without time and incorporeally, the other in the last days when the same came down from heaven and was incarnate . . . let such a one be anathema.
Anathemas Concerning the Three Chapters, canon 2.

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