

THE ETERNAL SONSHIP

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Some thirty years ago, brethren assemblies in the UK received a memo stating that the eternal sonship of Christ was a vital doctrine and had to be both taught and accepted in all assemblies and if any member of any assembly did not accept this teaching, he or she was to be put out of fellowship... in other words excommunicated.

It was a threatening memo.

This teaching, which had to be accepted on threat of excommunication, was that Christ was the Son before His incarnation, that He was actually the Son from eternity past and, therefore, throughout the Old Testament times, and that He certainly did not become a Son at His incarnation since He was already the Son and had been from eternity past.

At the time of creation and before, and at times of Adam, Abraham, Moses and the prophets, the Son was in Heaven as the Son, together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

In other words, there was never a time when Christ was not the Son. That is the teaching of the eternal sonship.

It is accepted without demur that the Trinity is divine and eternal. All three God. All three eternal. I most certainly accept the doctrine of the Trinity

The Bible states that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. It does not say that in the beginning was the Son. It says that the Word was eternal and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The first epistle to John chapter 5 verse 7 refers to the three that bare record in heaven now, the Father, the Word and the Spirit. I have read of brethren who claim that this verse is spurious.

At the second coming in Revelation 19, He is called Faithful and True, King of Kings, Lord of Lords and the Word of God.

John 1 clearly states that the Word of God is eternal and that He became flesh, became a man, became a person since the correct definition of a person is someone with a human body. If the Son is eternal, did He have a human body in his preincarnation days?

The answer is clearly no for the scripture says that God prepared a body for Him for the days of His flesh (Hebrews 10. 5, Colossians 1. 22 etc.)

So, if He were the Son before His incarnation did he have a human body?

In the fiery furnace it was said that though three were cast in, there was a fourth who appeared to be like the Son of God (Daniel 3. 25) but it must be remembered that these words are the words of a pagan king.

All other references to Son of God are in the New Testament and refer to Him while He was here and thereafter.

However, there is a verse that speaks of Him prophetically as Son of God and that is Isaiah 9.6: For unto us a child is born unto us a son is given, but prophecy of the Son is future and therefore that title is future.

The reference in Psalm 2 is also a prophecy, something in the future.

Are we expected to believe that, for example, in the days of Adam, God the Father called another member of the Trinity Jesus Christ? Surely not.

It is also a fact that God as Father is used in the Old Testament as a father of the fatherless (Psalm 68.5) the father of His earthly people (Isaiah 64.8), the father of all men (Deuteronomy 32. 6, Malachi 2.10) but never as the Father of a Son.

It is clear that, in some form, the Son was from everlasting (Micah 5.2). Before Abraham was I am, said the Lord (John 8.58). He shared the glory with the Father before the worlds began (John 17.5). The Father loved Him before the foundation of the world (John 17.24). He was in the bosom of the Father.

But Father in the Old Testament does not refer to God the Father having a Son at those times.

But the scripture says that in the beginning was the Word. Do all these references to His being with the Father before His incarnation refer to Him in the days when He was known as the Word.

And the Word became flesh and was given a name Jesus. He would not have been given a name if He already had it. God said, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." (Hebrews 1. 5, 5.5.) The second text says, "Today have I begotten Thee."

There was a day when the Son was begotten. That is what the scripture says. We cannot argue with that. Does that mean that there was a day or a time when He became the Son? Does this mean that the Eternal Word became the Son when born of the Holy Spirit and Mary? We read that He took on a body which God had prepared for Him.

It is clear that He was always destined to be the Son to appear on earth and to be the Saviour.

The argument is made that the Son existed as the Son before his incarnation, but that He was begotten as a man when conceived by the Holy Spirit.

That seems contrived and confusing and God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14. 33)

Can an example from everyday life help?

Jane Smith was born to Stan and Daisy Smith. She was always known as Jane Smith until she married Mr Brown and now she is Jane Brown, a wife and a mother. She is no longer the unmarried daughter of Mr and Mrs Smith, but, even in her married state, she is still Jane to those who have known and loved her since she was a child.

Is it not the same principle as the Word becoming a man?

The Lord Jesus did not begin at Bethlehem. Before that He was the Eternal Word of God. Can we argue against this? He is the Eternal Word and He is divine.

Let me quote Sam Hadley

'I believe that Jesus was begotten at His birth in Matthew 1. Born of Mary, He became human with a physical body and, as Jesus, took the place of being subject to the Father.'

These matters are not easy. There was no physical son before the incarnation.'

However, Sam believes that Isaiah 9.6, which says that 'a son will be given', does refer to the notion that in eternity past the Son was the Son and known as the Son. But that is just one verse and refers to the future.

It raises another problem which plagued the church for the first seven centuries and since the mid 1840s. That is the doctrine that God is three persons or God is in three persons. This is the heresy of tritheism, the belief in three persons in the Godhead which means three Gods.

The correct meaning of the word person is someone who has a human body. God the Father is spirit as is the Holy Spirit. They do not have human bodies. In fact, the Lord Jesus said that they were invisible. No man hath seen God at any time (John 14). The Spirit is like the wind, invisible in itself, but you can see the effects of it (John 3).

I realise that dictionaries not only give the correct meaning of words but of their usage. Teenagers call fantastic things wicked, whereas Hitler was wicked.

I have put these thoughts to many Christians who have not responded with a Christian attitude. Some told me that I was in serious error. Some said I was a heretic. Some said that they would have nothing to do with me.

But let me state what I believe again.

I believe in the Trinity. All three God. God all three. All eternal.

I believe that in the beginning was the Word and that the expression Eternal Word is both valid and correct.

I do not say that the Lord Jesus only began when conceived. I believe that He was and is and always has been and will be the Eternal Word of God. The first epistle to John confirms this.

I believe in the Deity of Christ.

That memo of all those years ago has created problems and was ill-advised.

To add to the dilemma, a tract was 'found' long after the death of its alleged author, J N Darby, in which he allegedly writes about the eternal sonship, that there was never a time when He was not the Son. If you read this tract the style is very different from all of Darby's other writings. Many Darby scholars dismiss this tract as a fake.

What about the appearances of God in the Old Testament? C H Brown has written an absorbing pamphlet showing that in Old Testament times Jesus was Jehovah. This is based upon much evidence including the fact that Jesus in the days of His flesh referred to Himself as I AM, the same expression used by Jehovah who identified Himself as I AM, for example, when before Moses and elsewhere.

In the Old Testament, therefore, He was not referred to as the Son or as Christ, but as Jehovah and the Eternal Word. The I AM of the Old Testament is the Christ, the I AM of the New Testament.

Others refer to the appearances of Christ in the Old Testament as Christophanies. These are said to be appearances of Christ before His incarnation as in the Garden of Eden, as Melchizedek, when before Moses, Joshua etc.

Christophanies also refer to His appearances after the resurrection

Brethren are fussy about words and they are quite right to be so. Roman Catholics believe that Jesus taught that at Mass it is the actual body and blood of Christ that is eaten. That is taking things too literally; it is supposition, conjecture and surmise. Is not the notion of eternal sonship the same?

Let me reiterate. Jesus Christ is eternal and divine and yet before His incarnation He is presented to us as the Eternal Word and as Jehovah. He was destined to be the Son and the Saviour of all those who put their trust in Him.

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