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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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*Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD*

purposes, may be found by Thee *handy* to Thy touch, in the place and in the condition in which Thou canst take us up and employ us in whatever way, on the moment, for Thyself." A servant thus cleansed and thus employed is indeed a "vessel unto honour," publicly owned by his Lord, destined to hear His "Well done."

F. F. BRUCE.

## THE ETERNAL SON\*

BY C. F. HOGG

What the Scripture has revealed about the nature of Christ transcends reason, yet is not inconsistent with reason, but belongs to a higher sphere into which reason cannot enter. In revelation the spiritual and eternal has dipped down into the temporal and material. What God has revealed concerning Himself is not intended as food for speculation or argument, but to make it possible for us to worship Him intelligently, "in spirit and truth."

Revelation is progressive, and, in the written form in which it has been preserved to us, was first of all made to a people who had well-nigh lost the knowledge of God, and who had been reduced to a condition of spiritual and physical degradation among the idolatrous Egyptians. Thus the background of the Old Testament is polytheistic, the worship of many gods.

Through many centuries after Moses, God taught and trained the Israelites that they might know that God is One, that beside Him there is no other. The lesson was not readily learned, for again and again they returned to idolatry, and only after a double

\* The subject of this article is of more than passing interest and importance. The crucial question it sets out to answer is: Is Christ's Sonship eternal or temporal? That is, is He eternally the Son of the Father, or only so in Incarnation? Many otherwise "sound in the Faith" believe and teach that it belongs to time and is not therefore eternal. This would seem to us to cut away the very foundations upon which the essential features and functions of His Sonship rest; not to speak of other phases of Scriptural doctrine, equally important, being affected.

This article by the late Mr. C. F. Hogg was written for our pages some years ago, and we reproduce it now both for its immediate value and timelessness. The writer was well-known in the British Isles and other parts of the world as a clear thinker, an able expositor and a preacher of great spiritual power. A posthumous volume, compiled from his numerous writings, has just been published by Pickering and Inglis Ltd., Glasgow. It provides most helpful guidance, in lucid and precise exposition, on many Scripture problems.

exile and long experience of dwelling among idolaters, was the truth that God is One burned into their souls.

The background of the New Testament is different; it is monotheistic. Israel, having learned the lesson, "The Lord our God, the Lord is One," the further revelation was offered to them that God is Triune, that in God there is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and yet, and of equal truth, these are not three Gods but One. Just as their forefathers had found it hard to learn the lesson of the Unity of God, so they found it hard to learn that in that Unity of nature there is a Trinity of persons.

We must beware, however, of reading the New Testament revelation into the Old Testament as, on the other hand, we must remember that the Old Testament can be understood only in the light of the New. And when the Old Testament is read in the light of the New, the result is harmony and completeness. God in the Old Testament revealed Himself in such a way that whilst no new revelation could be deduced therefrom, or imagined, or anticipated, yet every new revelation found its place in the framework of the Old.

There is no attempt made in the Old Testament to prove that God is. Neither is there any attempt made in the New Testament to prove that He is the Father, that the Son shares with Him, and the Holy Spirit with both, in essential, underived Deity. Just as the Unity of God is assumed in the Old Testament, so the Trinity of Persons in that Unity is assumed in the New. The Lord Jesus begins by speaking of His Father, and then of Himself as the Son, and later of the Holy Spirit. As the revelation proceeds it becomes evident that these Three are so related in nature that there is but *one* God subsisting in Three Persons. It will be plain, then, that in a matter of such moment, and so transcending our natural powers to understand or express, we should be careful in our phraseology, lest there be any suspicion of our doctrine being tri-theistic rather than Trinitarian.\* To this end we should, as nearly as we may, "hold the pattern of

\* The words of 1 John 5: 7: "For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one" (A.V.) are spurious, a deliberate and quite clumsy forgery, being entirely without ancient manuscript authority in Greek. Pious fraud is not the less fraud; truth may well cry out to be saved from its friends. The verse is plainly inconsistent with other Scriptures, for Heaven is not the place of witness-bearing, nor are 'Father' and 'Word' ever elsewhere linked together, but always 'Father' and 'Son,' 'God' and the 'Word'.

sound words," for, in the last resort, only words that the Holy Spirit teaches are adequate to express the mind of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ called Himself the Son, but the phrase at the head of this paper, "The Eternal Son," was not used by Him, nor, indeed, is it found in Scripture. The question arises, Does it express the teaching of Scripture? In this writer's judgment *it does*.

First of all, what is meant by "Son"? In Scripture the word has two principal meanings. The first is the obvious one, "offspring." It is not necessary to quote passages to illustrate this, its most frequent sense.

"Son" also means "one in whom *character* is expressed." A single instance will suffice here. In Luke 16:8, ". . . the sons of this age are wiser than the sons of light," plainly, not "offspring," but expression of character is intended. When the Lord spoke of Himself as "Son," it was in this sense He used the word. To understand "son" as the equivalent of "offspring" would involve thinking of the Father and the Son as superior and inferior, or in order of priority and posteriority, but, as we shall see, this would not be in accordance with Scripture.

Again, when the Lord speaks of Himself as the "Son of Man," we do not understand Him to mean that He was the offspring of man, but rather, that He is the *representative* Man, the archetypal Man, who fulfils all God's purposes for man, who is all that God intended man to be.

We may sum up the matter in this way, the Father is Deity in its *source*; the Son is Deity in its *manifestation*; the Holy Spirit is Deity in its *energy*; always premising, however, that this is but *part* of the truth concerning God Who can never be fully understood by His creatures, or adequately described in the language they speak.

The Fourth Gospel opens thus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." It does not call for demonstration that "God" here refers to the Father, but notice, while the Father is called God, He is not God in the sense that there is no other, for John goes on to say that "the Word was God." This order of the words must be preserved; it is obviously impossible to say that "God was the Word," inasmuch as the preceding statement is that "The Word was with God." The *nature* is one; the *Persons* are distinct, and this was so "in the beginning," *eternally*.

Just as God and the Word are associated in verse 1, so in verse 18 the same Persons are called Father and Son, and the Son is declared to be the Revealer of the Father. Yet they are distinct in such a way that it is said that the Father "gave" or "sent" the Son, and that the Son came and also that the Holy Spirit led Him even to the Cross. The thought of personality is associated alike with the Father and with the Son and with the Holy Spirit, for each acts of His own volition—in spontaneous harmony each with the other, since each has a separate will. (John 3:16; 5:30; 6:38; Matt. 4:1; Heb. 9:14.)

It follows from what has been said above that the title "Son" when applied to the Lord Jesus Christ connotes essential Deity—not Deity derived, or on a lower plane, or in a subsidiary sense, but full and necessary Deity, so that the Deity of the Son is as real as that of the Father, and is equally without qualification of any kind. Here the question arises—Is this Sonship *temporal* or *eternal*? Or, to use technical phraseology, is it an *ontological* Sonship, or an *economic* Sonship? That is, does the Sonship belong to the essence of the Deity, or is it something assumed in time to carry out the Divine purpose for the redemption of man, and for the restoration of the universe to its allegiance to God. Our answer is, that the Sonship is *eternal*; it is not something assumed for the discharge of functions to this world, or in the world to come, but is an essential relationship within the Being of God.\*

That the Sonship belongs to eternity Scripture abundantly testifies. The Epistle to the Hebrews begins: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son, Whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the worlds" (R.V.m.). That is to say, God has spoken to men in One who stands to Him in the relation of Son to Father. In ch. 5:8 it is said of Him that, "though he was (a) Son, yet (He) learned obedience" by the things He suffered; and in ch. 7:28, that "the Law appointeth men high priests having infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was after the Law, appointeth a Son, perfected for evermore." These passages refer to the Divine nature of the Son, but in ch. 1:8, "of the Son He (God) saith," and in ch. 6:6,

\* A word of warning is called for here. A denial of the Eternal Sonship of Christ does not necessarily involve a denial of His Deity. The question simply is whether the Sonship belongs to time only, or to eternity as well.

“. . . seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh,” His Personality is in view, as well as His nature, the former being prominent. The same remark applies to ch. 7:3: “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God,” and to ch. 10:29: “. . . who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God.” This Son of God is identified for us in chapter 4, verse 14: “Having then a great high priest, Who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.”\*

Reverting to the opening of the Epistle, from verse 2 we learn that this “Son” is the appointed “heir of all things;” He is the Agent in creation; He is the effulgence, or outshining, of the Divine glory. This latter ascription suggests an analogy with the natural figure of the sun and its rays. We do not see the sun, but we do see the rays that radiate from the sun; they reveal the sun to us, and in them there is nothing that does not come from the sun, nor do either the sun or its rays exist independently. So it is with the Father and the Son; the Son is, and ever has been, the sole Revealer of the otherwise invisible God.

Moreover, as Son He is the Sustainer of all things by His own powerful word. Thus, as He shares the nature of God, and expresses the character of God, so also He does the work of God. This is the sense in which He is called “Son;” the title is His, as is the relationship it connotes, *independently* of His Incarnation.

Consider next the familiar words of John 3:16-17. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him, should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him.” It is not said that God sent One Who, in coming into the world became His Son, but that He sent One Who *was* His Son, One Who sustained this relationship with God *eternally*.

The same writer, in what was possibly a covering letter to accompany his Gospel, declares that, “Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also,” suggesting what is certainly true, that the Fatherhood and Sonship are co-terminous. A man is not a father

\* It is characteristic of the Epistle that the writer does not add the title “Lord” to the name of Jesus until he first mentions His Resurrection in **ch. 13: 20.**

until he has a child; only when a child is born does the man attain the status of fatherhood. So it is in the higher realm of the Divine nature, in the mystery of the Trinity, the Unity of the Godhead, for if the Son is not the Son from eternity, then the Father is not the Father from eternity. Yet the Son Himself speaks to His Father of having been loved by Him "before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24; 1 John 2:23.)

We conclude, then, that Scripture teaches that the Son is essentially God. He is not God by the will of the Father; He is God of necessity; without Him, God is not. We conclude further that the relationship subsisting in God and described as that of Father and Son is essential relationship and, therefore, eternal, always providing that the distinction is preserved between the two meanings of the word Son: Eliminating from it (in this connection) the idea of offspring, and preserving only that of complete intimacy of *communion* and perfect expression of *character*.

The unique expression at the close of Col. 1:13 further illustrates this use of the title Son. The rendering of A.V. is, however, altogether inadequate, indeed is misleading, for the thought expressed in the original is not of the Father's *love* to Christ, "His dear Son," but of the expression of His *character*, and, therefore, the exact translation of R.V. is to be preferred: "the Son of His Love." That the title does not refer to the Son Incarnate only the context makes abundantly evident, as we shall see when we come to consider the following verses.

We must now give attention to some allied words that present difficulty in this association. One of these is found in Hebrews 1:5, "For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee?" This is a quotation from Psalm 2:7, which Paul also used as recorded in Acts 13:33, "God hath fulfilled the same unto our children, in that He raised up Jesus;" as also it is written in the Second Psalm, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee." I do not understand these words to refer to His Resurrection but to His Incarnation, and for this reason: v. 34 goes on, "And as concerning that He raised Him from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure (i.e., the covenanted) blessings of David." In v. 22 the same expression is used concerning David, "He raised up unto them David to be their King." With it may be compared Deut. 18:18,



"I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren," but the *prophetic* ministry of the Lord belonged to the *days of His flesh*, not to those that follow the Resurrection. There is nothing in the original of v. 33 to justify the "again" of A.V., so that *there* the reference is to the Resurrection, but in v. 34 to the *Incarnation*.

Thus there are two senses in which He is called "Son"—the general and more frequent sense, in which He is the sharer of God's nature and the expression of His character; and then this other where the reference is to what is described in Matt. 1 and Luke 2—His Incarnation.

In John 3:35 we hear the Lord saying that "the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand." And link with these the words of ch. 17:24, where He speaks of the Father having loved Him "before the foundation of the world." In both passages it is clear that the reference is to His *pre-incarnate* relationship with God. Consequently, in them the greater word for love is used *agapaō* the love that has its dynamic in itself. But in ch. 5:20, "The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth," the reference is to the experience of the Incarnate Son, who is the object of His Father's love because of His filial devotion. Hence the word used is *phileō*, which signifies the love that arises by the attraction of its object, the love of that which is lovable.

The reciprocal love of Father and Son, which is independent of the Incarnation, as declared in John 17:24, seems to be involved in the words of 1 John 4:8-9, "God is love (*agapaō*). Herein was the love of God manifested in our case that God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." The subject here is the manifestation of that love which is the synthesis of all the virtues of God, and of which He is the Source to His sentient creatures.

God is love, but love does not exist in a vacuum. Love exists only as there is a person to love, and a person to be loved; so that if God is love, and if from all eternity He has been a lover, there must ever have been an object for His love, Himself capable of loving. Thus the Father loved the Son, and the Son the Father in that timelessness which we call eternity. Into a world plunged into moral chaos and night by sin, the Son of God came to make manifest the love of God. That love was focused at Calvary, that from Calvary it might

illuminate the universe! We (who, through faith in Christ have become children of God) are lifted into that new creation where love is all lifted in experience into fellowship with God in so far as His love dwells in us, guiding and fashioning our lives and ruling our relations with our fellows. And this not in a spasmodic or fleeting way, but in the constant yielding of our interests to those of others, after the pattern of the Lord Jesus, and as the mind that rules in Him rules in us also (Phil. 2:4-5).

In Scripture "only begotten" does not necessarily mean an only child, but one upon whom *affection is concentrated*. Heb. 11:17 provides an illustration: "Abraham . . . offered up Isaac . . . his only begotten son." Now Isaac was not, in the literal sense of the word, Abraham's only begotten son, for he had others. But Isaac was *the* one upon whom his affection was concentrated (Genesis 22:2). "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest," is in the Greek Version (the Septuagint, from which the writer of Hebrews quotes) "Thy son, the beloved one, whom thou lovest." Another instance is found in Proverbs 4:3, where the Hebrew has "only begotten," and the Greek "beloved." In Psalm 22:20 the Hebrew and the Greek both have "only begotten," where the English versions have "darling."

Besides meaning the object of love as above described, "only begotten" has in it the idea of complete expression, perfect representation, as in John 1:18. Indeed, it may be suggested that each idea is the necessary complement of the other. Perfect expression seems, too, to be the intention of the parenthetical statement of v. 14 (R.V.m.): "We beheld His glory as of an only begotten from (*para*, with, or beside) a father." In any family among men the characteristics of the father may be distributed among all his children, but in the 'ideal' son all characteristics would find full expression in one. Were such a son set beside such a father the resemblance would be seen to be ideal. So the Only-begotten Son which is in (*ho on*, has His being in) the bosom of the Father, He hath (adequately) declared Him." Bear in mind that "declared" here refers not only to the words spoken by the Lord Jesus, but equally to His *works*, His *ways*, His *character*.

The expression "eternal generation" does not belong to Scripture, but to theology. There is, however, but a remote analogy between what is called eternal generation and human generation. Human generation is an *act*; *eternal generation* is a *state*. It belongs to that higher plane in which God lives beyond the limits

of time and space. The sun and its rays which continually come from it and reveal it, may serve as a feeble illustration. But at best illustrations drawn from nature fail to express the Divine relationships; may even be misleading if their strict limitations are not kept clearly in mind. Indeed, the term "eternal generation" is hardly tolerable because of the suggestion (inherent in the latter word) of an *act*, the bringing into being of one who, before that act, did not exist.

Yet another term, closely related to our subject, is "first-born." It, too, is found in its literal meaning in certain passages, whereas in others that meaning is extended. The literal meaning is evident in Heb. 11:28, as also in Luke 2:7, where it is said of Mary that "she brought forth her firstborn son," implying that she had *other* children as the wife of Joseph. Certainly there is no foundation in the Apostolic records for the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. The brothers and sisters of the Lord were His own sisters and brothers in the natural sense of the words. In the Mosaic law it was provided that no man, having two wives, one loved, the other hated, might "make the son of the beloved the firstborn before the son of the hated, which is the firstborn" (Deut. 21:16). Here, as well as in its primary sense, firstborn is used of headship and doubled inheritance. Firstborn also means the place of pre-eminence without reference to primogeniture, or even to birth, as in Ex. 4:22, where God speaks of Israel (the Nation) as "My son, My firstborn." Also in Jer. 31:9, He declares, "I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." In Ps. 89:27, the primary reference is to David and his heirs, but where the lineaments of a "greater than Solomon" are readily discernible.

In Col. 1:18 and Rev. 1:5 the Lord Jesus is said to be "the firstborn of the dead," which should be compared with, and understood by, 1 Cor. 15:20, "Christ hath been raised from the dead, the *firstfruits* of them that are asleep." His resurrection is the assurance of ours, and as the resurrection of "the dead in Christ" is to take precedence of all other, therefore they are called "the church of the firstborn (ones) who are enrolled in Heaven" (1 Thess. 4:16; Heb. 12:23).

In relation to the old creation Christ is said, in Col. 1:15, to be "firstborn." He is also "firstborn" in relation to the new creation (v. 18), and the reason given is, "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence." But besides this idea of pre-eminence there is the further thought suggested that Christ not

only stands at the Head of each creation, but He is the Type to which each conforms. This meaning is evident in Rom. 8:29, "whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that (*eis*, to the end that) He might be the firstborn among many brethren." That is, in the new creation the children of God are conformed to the type of which Christ is the perfect expression. Compare here Heb. 1:6, "and when He (God) again shall have brought in the firstborn into the inhabited earth He saith, and let all the angels of God worship Him."

The words of the Apostle in Col. 1:15 demand a further comment to obviate a wrong deduction from them. By "*first-born of all creation*" we are not to understand that He Himself is included in that creation. Rather the words are intended to *exclude* Him therefrom. The same grammatical form occurs in John 1:15, where the Baptist testifies concerning Christ: "He was before me." Literally, "first of me" or, as R.V. margin legitimately expands them, "He was first in regard of me;" though the meaning would have gained in lucidity had the paraphrase run "He was first in relation to me." On this analogy we may confidently paraphrase, "Who is . . . First-born in relation to all creation." He is not *included* therein any more than the Messiah to whom the Baptist testified was included in the testifier.

This is confirmed by a comparison with the use of the same idiom by other writers. Thus Xenophon speaks of "the greatest of battles since fought," making that one battle the *standard* by which the importance of all subsequent battles was to be measured. Milton describes Adam as "goodliest of men since born," but in so saying he does not include Adam among his own sons! And when he calls Eve "the fairest of her daughters" he plainly does not intend to include Eve in that category! With these analogous expressions before us it seems clear that the words "firstborn of all creation" are to be understood in the sense that the Lord is excluded from the category of created beings, not included in it.

The meaning of the passage may be illustrated by a great building. If the question were asked—"How did this building come into existence?" the answer would be, "The builders built it up, stone upon stone, beam upon beam." "How did the builders know where to put the stones and the beams?" Again the reply would be, "The architect provided the plan." Where did the architect get the plan? The answer to that

question is—Before a stone was put there, before a line was drawn on the plan, that building already existed in the mind of the architect? It was complete in whole and in its parts, in the architect's mind.

The Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the Architect and Builder of the Universe.\* Now, every building is built for some purpose or for some person. For whom, then, and for what was this Universe brought into existence? For the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that in it, through it, and to it, His glory, which is the glory of God, might be displayed.

Again, every building requires to be maintained, or the fabric will perish. Who maintains the Universe? The answer is, "By Him (the Son) all things are held together." He upholdeth "all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3).

To sum up—the various words used to suggest the relationship subsisting between the Lord Jesus Christ and God, and the contexts in which these words are found, tell of a Fatherhood and a Sonship which belong to the *nature* of God. This nature He has been pleased to reveal to us by the assumption of "flesh" (that is, of true and complete humanity) on the part of the Son, under circumstances with which we are familiar in common experience. But whereas the experience of this relation among men is faulty because of sin, in God it is perfect. And the object of this revelation is that men may be brought into fellowship with Him in what is the fundamental relation of life: "Yea, and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Thus we learn to love one another as the Father loves the Son, and to walk in the same filial obedience as the Son manifested when He lived on earth among men (1 John 1:3).

It is, of course, impossible within the limits of a brief paper to do more than indicate the material afforded by Scripture for such a study as this. But when we bring to it a humble and teachable spirit, and a genuine desire to know just what the Spirit is willing to impart concerning the knowledge of the Father and the Son, we shall not be disappointed. But if, due to some pre-conceived notion and desire to bolster up our own theories, we read into the Word or try to draw from the Word what is not there, we shall not merely err grievously but lead astray others who are incapable of discerning their right hand from their left in spiritual truth.

\* Compare Heb. 11 : 10, "the City . . . whose Architect and Maker is God" (R.V.m.).