

The Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ

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THE ETERNAL SONSHIP OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

PREFACE

WHEN I was first led to advocate the true, proper and eternal Sonship of our most blessed Lord in the pages of the "Gospel Standard," and thus, as far as ability was given me, to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," I little anticipated two consequences which have mainly sprung out of my attempt to set forth truth and to beat down error: 1. The long, angry, and widely-spread controversy to which it has given rise; 2. That I should publish my papers on the subject in their present form. On these two points, therefore, I wish to offer a few words of explanation, as my readers may be thus, perhaps, better prepared to enter upon the perusal of the following pages.

1. As regards, then, the first point—the controversy which has thence arisen in the churches—let us take, as far as we can, an impartial view of all the circumstances of the case, not a narrow, one-sided glance of a part, but a full and fair consideration of the whole. I know that there are some who are so for peace at any price, that they would sooner almost surrender truth itself than see the churches vexed with strife. How far such are "valiant for the truth upon earth" I must leave others of keener sight and sounder judgment than I possess to determine; but, as far as regards peace principles, and that they are to be paramount to every other consideration, I read that the Lord Himself has said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword" Mt 10:34 And I am sure that if the good soldiers of Jesus Christ wield aright that indispensable part of the whole armour of God, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," it must needs cut, and that sharply too, both error and those who hold it; for "the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" Heb 4:12 and if it be all this, it may well pierce even to the dividing asunder of churches, and be a discernor of the thoughts and intents of both members and ministers. Of what use is a sword which will neither pierce nor cut? A blade that has neither point nor edge may as well be kept in the scabbard. If, then, we take but a partial, one-sided view of the question, and letting the sword fall out of our hands, rather weep over the miseries of war than fight with holy zeal for the honour and glory of God, we may grieve that this controversy has harassed churches, divided ministers, and separated chief friends. I can make full allowance for the feeling, for with all my "acerbity of temper" and "bitter spirit," so freely and, I must say, so unjustly imputed to me, I frankly confess that when I saw the effects of the contention, and how it was disturbing the peace of a church in London to which I was much united, not to mention others, I did myself; feel a measure of this grief. But that feeling has passed away, and I now rather rejoice that the controversy has arisen, for I fully believe that great and lasting good will come out of it. Before, then, we give way to what may prove to be mere fleshly feeling, should we not first ask ourselves as well as others, "Has not a bold declaration of truth always produced contention and division? Has it not always caused confusion and strife? And can it ever be otherwise? Must truth never speak because error takes offence?" The lovers of peace at any cost may say, "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still" Jer 47:6 But what must

be the answer? "How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the seashore? There hath He appointed it." Jer 47:7 If the Lord, then, has given the sword a charge against error, how can it be quiet, or rest, and be still in the scabbard? Has there not been a cause for this controversy? I believe there has, and a strong one, too. This controversy has made it evident to me, and doubtless to many others besides myself, that a vast amount of error has been secretly covered up in the churches professing the doctrines of discriminating grace. "Baldness was come upon Gaza" Jer 47:5 "Grey hairs were here and there upon Ephraim, and he knew it not" Ho 7:9 and this baldness, and these grey hairs, which before had escaped notice, have now been brought to light. I had been long persuaded in my own mind, from various indications which had come before my eyes, that there was much error in the churches professing the distinguishing doctrines of grace concealed from view; but I honestly confess, I was not prepared to find such an amount of it, that so many were tainted by it, or that it had taken such deep root in their minds. A storm is sometimes needed to clear the troubled sky, a hot furnace to separate the dross, and a sharp war to settle a lasting peace; and thus even a warm controversy may sometimes be beneficial to the church of God. In fact, the walls of our spiritual Zion have only been built as were in ancient days the walls of Jerusalem. "For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me" Ne 4:18 Had all the Lord's servants been "fearful and afraid," like two-thirds of Gideon's army Jud 7:3 truth would have long ago been surrendered, without even a show of battle, into the hands of the Midianites. But whoever "being armed and carrying bows turn back in the day of battle" Ps 78:9, truth will suffer no defeat.

Pure gold need fear no flame; thorough honesty need fear no detection, and heavenly truth need shrink from no examination. A doctrine which has stood more than 1,800 years, and withstood all the assaults of men and devils; a great and glorious truth which God has written as with a ray of light in the inspired Scriptures, and revealed by His Spirit and grace to thousands of believing hearts, is not likely to be overturned in these latter days by the tongue or pen of a few Baptist ministers, whatever natural ability they may possess, and however angrily they may preach or write. Neither their arguments nor their spirit will much move those who have received the love of the truth, and to whom Jesus has revealed Himself as God's beloved Son, in whom He is ever well pleased. One of their leading men may call it "a figment" and "a piece of twaddle," and may pronounce it "effete and ready to vanish away"; but it will live when both he and they are in their graves, and be new and thriving when their very names are forgotten. What hosts of errors and heresies have passed away! but truth lives and flourishes in immortal youth. So will it be with this present controversy. When we shall all have passed away from this present scene; when the places where we have lived our little span of life, where we have preached, and written, and argued, and contended, shall know us no more, Jesus will still be what He ever was, the Son of the Father in truth and love, and will still have a people on earth who will believe in, and love Him as the only begotten Son of God. But should a time ever come, which God in His infinite mercy forbid, when the churches of truth in this land shall abandon their faith in the eternal Sonship of Jesus, it needs no prophet to foretell their doom. Judgment will soon be at the door, for the salt will have lost its savour, and will be cast out to be trodden under foot of men, and the candlestick having ceased to shine will be removed out of its place.

2. And now for a few words why I send forth this little work. It is because I wish to leave on record my living and dying testimony to the true and real Sonship of Jesus, and that in a more convenient and permanent form than could be the case were it confined to the pages in which it first appeared. It is a truth which has for many years been very precious to my soul, and one

which I trust I can say the Lord Himself on one occasion sealed very powerfully on my heart. From the very first moment that I received the love of the truth into my heart, and cast anchor within the veil, I believed that Jesus was the true and real Son of God; but rather more than sixteen years ago God's own testimony to His Sonship was made a special blessing to me. It pleased the Lord in November, 1844, to lay me for three weeks on a bed of sickness. During the latter portion of this time I was much favoured in my soul. My heart was made soft, and my conscience tender. I read the Word with great sweetness, had much of a spirit of prayer, and was enabled to confess my sins with a measure of real penitence and contrition of spirit. One morning, about 10 o'clock, after reading, if I remember right, some of Dr. Owen's "Meditations on the glory of Christ," which had been much blessed to me during that illness, I had a gracious manifestation of the Lord Jesus to my soul. I saw nothing by the bodily eye, but it was as if I could see the blessed Lord by the eye of faith just over the foot of my bed; and I saw in the vision of faith three things in Him which filled me with admiration and adoration: 1, His eternal Godhead; 2, His pure and holy Manhood; and 3, His glorious Person as God-Man. What I felt at the sight I leave those to judge who have ever had a view, by faith, of the Lord of life and glory, and they will know best what holy desires and tender love flowed forth, and how I begged of Him to come and take full possession of my heart. It did not last very long, but it left a blessed influence upon my soul; and if ever I felt that sweet spirituality of mind which is life and peace, it was as the fruit of that view by faith of the glorious Person of Christ, and a the effect of that manifestation. And now came that which makes me so firm a believer in the true and real Sonship of Jesus; for either on the same morning, or on the next-for I cannot now distinctly recollect which it was, but it was when my soul was under the same heavenly influence-I was reading the account of the transfiguration of Jesus Mt 17, and when I came to the words, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him," they were sealed with such power on my heart, and I had such a view of His being the true and real Son of God as I shall never forget. The last clause, "Hear ye Him," was especially sealed upon my soul, and faith and obedience sprang up in sweet response to the command. I did indeed want to "hear Him" as the Son of God, and that as such He might ever speak to my soul. Need anyone, therefore, who knows and loves the truth, and who has felt the power of God's Word upon his heart, wonder why I hold so firmly the true and real Sonship of the blessed Lord? and if God indeed bade me on that memorable morning "hear Him," what better authority can I want than God's own testimony, "This is My beloved Son"? For, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God, which He hath testified of His Son." "He that thus believeth in the Son of God hath the witness in himself" 1Jo 5:9,10 But if he has not this inward witness, and for the want of it listens to carnal reason, need we wonder if he make God a liar? Truly did the blessed Lord say in the days of His flesh, "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" Mt 11:27 It has long been a settled point in my soul, "That a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" Joh 3:27 and therefore, if the Son of God has never been revealed with power to their heart, how can they receive Him as such? Happy are they who can say by a sweet revelation of Him to their soul, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" 1Jo 5:20 May I ever hear Him and Him only, and may He speak not only to me, but through me, to the hearts of His dear family; and as He has enabled me thus far to defend His dearest title and worthiest Name, may He now smile upon the attempt to give it a

more enduring form; and to Him with the Father and the Holy Ghost, Israel' s Triune God, shall be all the glory.

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CHAPTER I - Part 1

THE language of complaint put by the Lord into the mouth of one of His prophets of old was, "Truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter; yea, truth faileth" Isa 59:14,15. May not the same or similar language issue from the lips of His faithful servants now when they look around and see the reception that truth for the most part meets with in our day and generation? As regards the general mass of what is called "the religious world," may we not justly say, "Truth is fallen in the street"-despised and trampled under foot as a worthless thing? And as regards churches and ministers of clearer views and a sounder creed, in too many instances "truth faileth," either in purity of doctrine, power of experience, or godliness of life.

And yet, what possession can be so dear to the Church of God as the truth as it is in Jesus? To her it is committed by the Lord Himself as a most sacred and precious deposit Joh 17:8 Ga 1:8,9 Eph 3:10 4:11-16 5:25-27 Col 1:18-24 Col 2:6-10 1Th 2:4 1Ti 3:15 Re 3:22. {1} Her very standing, therefore, as a witness for God upon earth Isa 43:10 Ac 1:8 Heb 12:1, as well as all her present and future blessedness, are involved in her maintenance of it. Men may despise the truth from ignorance of its worth and value, or may hate it from the natural enmity of the carnal mind, and from its arraying itself against their sins and errors; but it is the only really valuable thing on earth; since sin defaced the image of God in man. Lest, therefore, it be lost out of the earth, the Lord has lodged it in two safe repositories-the Scriptures of truth Da 10:21 2Ti 3:15-17 and the hearts of His saints. The Scriptures, it is true, are in the hands of well nigh every man; but to understand them, to believe them, to be saved and sanctified by them, is the peculiar privilege of the Church of God. Therefore her liberty, her sanctification, her position as the pure and unsullied bride of the Lord the Lamb, nay, her salvation itself, are all involved in her knowing and maintaining the truth as revealed externally in the Scriptures, and as revealed internally in the soul.

Do we say this at a venture, or in harmony with the oracles of the living God? "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Joh 8:32. Then without knowing the truth there is no gospel liberty. "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth" Joh 17:17. Then without the application of the truth to the heart there can be no sanctification. "I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" 2Co 11:2,3. Then another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel than the truth corrupt the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ, seduce the bride from her rightful Head and Husband, and are as much the work of Satan as his beguiling Eve in Paradise 2Co 11:3,4. "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned. who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" 2Th 2:10-12 Then without receiving the love of the truth there is no salvation. Thus we see that without a vital, experimental knowledge of the truth, there is no liberty of spirit, no sanctification of heart, no union with Christ, and no

salvation of the soul. And what is a religion worth when all these blessings are taken from it? What the salt is worth when it has lost its savour; what the chaff is worth when the grain is severed from it; what the tares are worth when the wheat is gathered into the garner. How necessary, then, it is for churches and ministers to hold the truth with a firm, unyielding hand, and to give no place to error no, not for an hour! Remember this, churches and ministers, deacons and members, and all ye that fear God in the assemblies of the saints, that there can be no little errors; we mean as regards the vital, fundamental doctrines of our most holy faith. There may be differences of opinion on minor points, as on church government, the administration of the ordinances of the New Testament, the restoration of the Jews, the nature of the millennium; the interpretation of particular passages of scripture; but on such fundamental points as the blessed Trinity, the Person of Christ, the personality and work of the Holy Ghost, no deviation can be allowed from the straight and narrow line of divine truth. Error on any one of these vital points is from Satan; and he never introduces little errors; all, all are full of deadly poison. There was no great quantity of arsenic in the Bradford lozenges, not much strychnine in Palmer's doses, but death and destruction were in both; or where not death, disease and suffering for life. Error in itself is deadly. In this sense, the tongue of error is "full of deadly poison" Jas 3:8, and of all erroneous men we may say, "With their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips" Ro 3:13. "Their wine," with which they intoxicate themselves and others, "is the poison of dragons and the cruel venom of asps" De 32:33. The patient may vomit up the poison, but it is poison not the less. Do not, then, by reading erroneous books, hearing erroneous ministers, or associating with erroneous people, try the strength of your faith, or presume upon the soundness of your constitution. When you have tested the error by the inspired word of truth, and by the inward teaching of the blessed Spirit in your own heart, label it POISON! and "touch not, taste not, handle it not," any more than you would arsenic or prussic acid.

We are grieved to see an old error now brought forward and, we fear, spreading, which, however speciously covered up, is really nothing less than denying the Son of God. The error we mean is the denial of the eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Only-begotten of the Father before the foundation of the world. If the Lord has done anything for us by His Spirit and grace, He has wrought in our heart two things—a love to His truth and a love to His people. By both of these principles, therefore, we feel constrained to oppose this error to the utmost of our power, and to contend for what has been long commended to our conscience as the truth of God. This is no new question with us, no fresh doctrine which we have never before thought of or considered, but one the reality, power and sweetness of which we have for many years known and felt, for our very hope of eternal life hangs upon it. We do not expect, indeed, by any arguments to convince those who have deeply drunk into the spirit of error. It is a rare thing for any such to vomit up the sweet morsel which they have eaten in secret; and of most of them, we fear it may be said, as being entangled in the snares of the mystical harlot, "For her house inclined unto death, and her feet unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life" Pr 2:18,19. We rather write for those who tremble at God's Word, who have been made willing to receive the love of the truth that they may be saved thereby, and who dread above all things to be left to love and embrace a lie. And these often need instructing, for many of the saints of God are weak in judgment, and are thus laid open to the snares of Satan. They would not willingly, wilfully embrace error, but being simple, or not well rooted and established in the truth, they cannot discern false doctrine when speciously wrapped up in a cloud of words and backed with arguments and an array of texts, the meaning of which is, for the most part, perverted and distorted. Some, too, are drawn aside by favourite ministers of more

knowledge and greater experience, as they think, than themselves; and others view the whole question as a mere controversy of words, and that it is an obscure and abstruse doctrine, which they heartily wish had never been brought forward to divide churches, perplex inquirers, and separate chief friends. But such arguments are always at hand when truth begins to speak with decided voice. God's servants are only His mouth as they "take forth the precious from the vile" Jer 15:19; and when they wield the sword of the Spirit it may well sever churches and wound individuals, for "it pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow" Heb 4:12. The policy of Satan has always been to cry out against the truth as causing confusion, disturbing the general peace of the church, and filling the world with division and strife. It was so in the days of Athanasius, when he, almost single-handed, fought against Arianism. It was so in the days of Luther, when he began to oppose Popery; and it was so with our Puritan ancestors, when they testified against the various corruptions in doctrine and life which prevailed in their day. Those who from self-interest, love of carnal ease, entanglement in error, or cowardice of spirit, wished things to remain quiet as they were, all lifted up their voice against the disturbers of the general peace. We would say, then, to all who are zealous for the truth on earth, Do not think that this is a matter of little import, that we are plunging into a controversy about mere words, and troubling the churches with tithes of mint, anise and cummin, and omitting the weightier matters of judgment, mercy and faith. Examine the Scriptures for yourselves, especially the First Epistle of John, and then say whether the true Sonship of Christ is a matter of little importance. And as we hope, with God's help and blessing, to examine the subject prayerfully and carefully, in the light of His teaching, and as revealed in the sacred Scripture, we call upon our spiritual readers, not merely to give a passing glance to the testimonies that we shall bring forward, but to weigh them well in the balance of the sanctuary, and see for themselves whether we are contending earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, or, laying aside the commandment of God, are holding the tradition of men.

A few preliminary observations, however, may be desirable in order to lay down a clear track for us and our readers to walk in.

1. Our first rule must be that the Scriptures shall be our only standard of appeal, and these taken in their plain, literal meaning, without perverting or mystifying their evident signification.

2. All appeals to natural reasoning, as distinct from Scripture, and all carnal conclusions opposed to the word of truth must be discarded, and we must be content to receive the truth as little children in the simplicity of faith, without attempting to comprehend what is necessarily to our finite understanding incomprehensible.

3. Knowing our ignorance, and that a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven, we should seek the promised teaching of the Holy Spirit, who alone can guide into all truth, but who takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to the soul, and communicates that sacred unction which "teacheth of all things, and is truth, and is no lie." (See the following scriptures: Mt 11:27 Joh 6:45 Joh 14:21,26 Joh 16:14,15 Jas 1:5 1Jo 2:20 1Jo 2:27)

4. We must also have a deep conviction that nothing is more precious than the truth as it is in Jesus, and be made willing to buy it at any price, and not to sell it for any consideration. Whatever we let go, friends, wife, children, house or lands, name, fame or character, we must never give up the truth of God. To do so would be to prove that we never received it from God's mouth Pr 2:6, but were taught it by the precept of men Isa 29:13.

We lay down, then, at the very outset, as a standing mark for every spiritual eye these two

points:

1. That Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and
2. That a belief in Him as such is essential to salvation. A few scriptures will decide this; the main difficulty being, where there are so many, which to fix upon for that purpose; but let us examine carefully and prayerfully the following:

1. The first shall be the noble testimony of Peter. "When Jesus came into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" Mt 16:13-16. Peter's confession embraced two things:

- 1, that Jesus was the Christ;
- 2, that He was the Son of the living God.

By acknowledging the first, he declared his belief that He was the promised Messiah, the anointed One, whom all the prophets had spoken of, and whose coming at that period the saints of that day, such as Simeon, Anna, and those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem; were anxiously expecting Lu 2:26 Lk 2:36,38. By the second he acknowledged that Jesus was not only the Christ, the expected, long-looked-for Messiah, but the true, actual, and real Son of God. It is evident from the confession of Peter, of Nathanael Joh 1:49, and of Martha Joh 11:27, as well as from the adjuration of the high priest Mt 26:63, and the preaching of Paul in the synagogues Ac 9:20; that the Jews in our Lord's time identified the Christ, the promised Messiah, with the Son of God. It was most evidently the faith of the Jewish church, that the Messiah was no less than God's own Son. The question, then, with them was not whether the Christ, the promised Messiah, was the true and proper Son of God or not, but whether Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ; for if He were the Christ they knew He must be the Son of God, and that in His divine nature. And what other idea could they attach to the Christ being the Son of God than that He was His real and actual Son? If not wholly impossible, it was most improbable that such ideas could have been entertained by them as that He was the Son of God by virtue of the covenant, or of His complex Person, or any of those evasions of the simplicity of truth whereby His real and proper Sonship is now denied. To understand, then, this testimony from the mouth of Peter a little more clearly, we offer the following considerations. The blessed Lord had sought, so to speak, to bring His disciples to a clear and decided recognition of His divine Sonship by asking them two pointed questions:

1. "Whom do men, not you, but men generally, say that I the Son of Man am?" He called Himself "the Son of man," that He might draw forth more clearly out of their bosom their confession that He was the Son of God, for as such they had seen His glory and received Him Joh 1:12-14. The disciples told Him the various opinions which men entertained about Him. All saw and acknowledged that the Spirit of the prophets was in Him; and therefore some said He was John the Baptist, and some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. Then, to put the matter home personally to themselves, the blessed Lord asked them another, and a most searching question, "But whom say ye that I am?" as though He should mean, "Never mind what others think and say, tell Me for yourselves what you, My own immediate disciples, think and say." How nobly, then, how boldly, how believingly did Peter at once answer in the name of all the rest, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Did the blessed Lord repel the confession, or rebuke the confessor? No; on the contrary, He pronounced him "blessed," and declared that "flesh and blood had not revealed it unto him but His Father which is in heaven."

Do not these words of the blessed Lord clearly show that it was by divine revelation Peter knew and believed Jesus was the Son of the living God? And are not all "blessed" with faithful Peter, to whom the Father has revealed the same divine mystery, who believe as he believed, and confess as he confessed? But if the Father has not revealed it to their heart, need we wonder that men neither know, believe, nor confess it, but stumble at the stumbling-stone laid in Zion? We shall have occasion to refer to this passage again, and shall, therefore, dwell upon it no longer, but pass on to another, our present object being not so much to open the texts which we bring forward as to show from the word of truth the solemn importance of a right faith on this fundamental point.

2. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" Joh 3:35,36 . How clearly is believing on the Son of God made the test of life and salvation; how needful, then, to know who the Son of God is, that we may have a right faith in His divine Person, and not make a mistake in a matter of life and death. You may think that you believe on the Son of God, but may be deceiving yourself for want of a divine revelation of Him to your soul. You do not deny that He is the Son of God in your sense of the words, but may deny that He is the true, proper, real and only-begotten Son of God by His very mode of subsistence as a Person in the Trinity; or you may be looking to a name, a title, or an office instead of the Son of the Father in truth and love.

3. Take another testimony: "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father" 1Jo 2:23. Do you deny the eternal Sonship of Christ? Are you, as far as lies in your power, destroying that intimate and ineffable relationship which He bears to the Father as the only begotten Son of God? O what dangerous ground are you treading Beware lest you deny the Son, and so have not God as your Father and Friend, but fall into His hands as a consuming fire. Are not these testimonies enough?

4. But, to leave you without excuse on a matter of such importance, take as one more witness that most comprehensive of declarations proclaiming, as in a voice of thunder, those who have and those who have not life: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that be believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, that God hath, given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" 1Jo 5:9-12 .

But you may answer, "We believe all this. We are as firm believers in the Son of God as you can be. This is not the point of dispute between us. Where we differ from you is this, that we do not believe He is the eternal Son of God; for as a father must exist before a son, it is a self-contradictory proposition to assert that He can be, as a Son, co-eternal with the Father." That it is not so we shall hereafter attempt to show, but for the present we will simply ask you this question: "Do you mean to receive nothing as divine truth which involves apparent contradictions?" We say apparent, for we cannot allow them to be real. If you answer, "I can receive nothing which I cannot understand and reconcile to my reasoning mind," then you had better be a Socinian at once, for that is just his very position. He says, "I cannot receive the doctrine of the Trinity, for it contradicts the Unity of God, which I receive as a fundamental truth; and to assert that three are one and one is three, is to contradict all my fundamental notions of number." And thus he stumbles at the stumbling-stone laid in Zion. You see his error and the fallaciousness of his reasoning, but his argument is only your own in another form. You say, "I

cannot receive the doctrine that Jesus is the eternal Son of God because it denies His co-eternity and co-equality with Him; for a father is necessarily prior to a son, and a father is necessarily superior to a son." Certainly, if we carry earthly reasonings into the courts of heaven, and measure the being and nature of God by the being and nature of man. But the very idea of eternity excludes priority and posteriority of time, and the very nature of God excludes superiority and inferiority. 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. But you and the Socinian really stand on the same ground-the ground of natural reason and carnal argument. He draws a natural conclusion that three cannot be one, and therefore rejects the Trinity; you draw a natural conclusion that a father must exist before, and be superior to, his son, and as you believe the Lord Jesus to be a Person in the Godhead, you therefore reject on that ground the eternity of His Sonship. Thus, neither he nor you submit your mind to the Scriptures. You both really stand upon infidel ground, for both of you prefer your own reasonings and your preconceived notions to the truth as revealed in the Word of God. That speaks again and again of "the only-begotten Son of God," which, as we shall by-and-by show, refers to His divine nature, as in the following passage: "And the Word was made 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" Joh 1:14. It is evident from these words that there was a vital distinction between those who received Christ and those who received Him not; for "He came unto His own [literally, property or estate] {2} and His own [people by profession and outward covenant] received Him not." But there were those who did receive Him, and they did so because they "were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;" for they "beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The blessed Lord is here most plainly declared to be "the only-begotten of the Father." You cannot, therefore, deny that He is the begotten of the Father in a way in which none else could be begotten, and that He has a peculiar glory as such. This cannot refer to His human nature, for we read, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" Joh 1:18. What do these words imply, then, but that whereas no man hath seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son of God has seen Him, for He is, that is, from all eternity, as the eternal "I AM!" in the bosom of the Father. The human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ was not in the bosom of the Father when the Lord spake, but the divine was, for the words imply union, and yet distinctness-the closest intimacy; and yet the relative personality of the Father and the Son. And so again the passage, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" Joh 3:16, as plainly declares that Christ was the only-begotten Son of God before He came into this world. When did God love the world? Surely before He gave "His only-begotten Son," for His love to the world moved Him to bestow that unspeakable gift. Then He was certainly His "only begotten Son" before He was given and before He came; and how could He be this but in His divine nature? for His human did not then exist, except in the mind of God. How plain the testimony to a believing heart that the Lord Jesus is the only begotten Son of God by His very mode of subsistence; and is it not greatly to be feared that those who reject His eternal Sonship fall under that solemn sentence, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only-begotten Son of God"? Joh 3:18 Though hidden from our finite understanding, surely the Lord knew the mystery of His own generation; and is it not more consistent with the obedience of faith to believe the Lord's own testimony concerning Himself than to cavil, disbelieve, or explain it away, because such a doctrine

contradicts the conclusions of your reasoning mind? You censure the Arminians for saying that they cannot receive election because it contradicts their first notions, their primary, fundamental principles, both of the justice and love of God; and yet you, on precisely similar grounds, reject the eternal Sonship of Christ, as contradicting your natural views of priority and posteriority. So the Jews rejected and crucified the Lord of life and glory, because His appearance in the flesh as a poor carpenter's son contradicted all their pre-conceived opinions of the dignity and glory of the promised Messiah; and in a similar way infidels reject miracles as contrary to their fundamental opinions of the laws of nature being unalterable. Thus to reject the eternal Sonship of the blessed Lord merely because it contradicts some of your preconceived opinions is most dangerous ground to take, and is to set up your authority against that of the Word of truth.

Any observations of ours would but weaken the force of the testimonies that we have brought forward from the Word of truth. You that "tremble at God's word" Isa 66:2 and "hide it in your heart," that you may cleanse your way by taking heed thereto, and not sin against the Lord Ps 119:9,11, weigh these scriptures well, for they are the faithful and true sayings of God Re 22:6, the testimony of Him who cannot lie.

But it will be said that we are drawing nice and needless distinctions, and that all who profess to believe in the Trinity, the Deity and atoning blood of Jesus Christ, and the other leading truths of the gospel, believe in and acknowledge the Sonship of Christ. Yes, in lip; for they dare not in so many words deny so cardinal and fundamental a doctrine; but many who think and call themselves believers in the Son of God do all they can to nullify and explain away that very Sonship which they profess to believe.

But as it is necessary to point out and overthrow error before we can lay down and build up truth, we shall, as briefly as the subject allows, first show the different modes in which this fundamental doctrine of our most holy faith has been perverted or denied.

FOOTNOTES:

{1} Our space does not admit of our opening up and working out the above scriptures; but they all deserve the most attentive examination and consideration, as witnessing to the above declaration.

{2} It is in the neuter in the original, literally, "His own things;" the second "His own" is in the masculine, i.e., "His own men."

THE ETERNAL SONSHIP OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

CHAPTER I - Part 2

There are four leading ways in which erroneous men have, at different periods of the church' s history, sought to nullify the vital doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Jesus: - ;

1. Some place the Sonship of Christ in His incarnation, as if He was not the Son of God before He assumed our nature in the womb of the Virgin. The main prop of this erroneous view is the language of the angel to the Virgin Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" Lu 1:35 As this text is much insisted upon by those who deny that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God prior to His incarnation, it demands an attentive consideration. All Trinitarians-and with them we have chiefly to do upon this point-allow the three following truths in common with us: 1. The union of two natures, the human and divine, in the Person of the Lord Jesus. 2. That the human nature of the Lord Jesus was formed of the flesh of the Virgin by the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost. 3. That he who was born at Bethlehem was called the Son of God. Thus far there is no difference between the opponents of Christ' s eternal Sonship and ourselves. But now we come to a most important difference, in which lies the whole gist of the question, viz., whether He was the Son of God before His incarnation, or became such by it. Those who hold the latter view rest mainly on the text which we have just quoted. Let us, then, carefully and prayerfully examine the passage. The text asserts that "that Holy Thing which should be born" of the Virgin "should be called the Son of God." It does not say it should be or become the Son of God, but should be called so. Now, was the human nature of the blessed Lord ever called the Son of God as distinct from the divine? As far as our reading of the Scripture extends, we think we can safely assert that His human nature never was called the Son of God, nor can a single passage of Holy Writ, we believe, be produced where the pure humanity of Jesus, as distinct from His divine nature, is spoken of under that name. We most fully admit that in His complex Person He is called again and again the Son of God; for the union of the two natures is so intimate that after His conception or birth the actings of the two natures, though separable, are not usually separated in the Word of truth. But the angel evidently meant that the Child to be born should be called the Son of God as His usual preveiling title. This, however, was not true of the human nature of our blessed Lord, which never was called the Son of God, as distinct from His divine, but was true of Him as uniting two natures in one divine Person. The angel, therefore, did not mean that His holy human nature, but that He who wore that nature should be called the Son of God. This pure humanity was called "that Holy Thing" for two reasons:

1. To show that it was intrinsically and essentially holy-not involved in the Fall of Adam, nor corrupted by the taint of original sin, but, though of the flesh of the Virgin, sanctified by the Holy Ghost at the moment of its conception, under His overshadowing operation and influence. These two natures are distinctly named and kept separate in that memorable passage of the great Apostle-that mighty bulwark against the floods of error and heresy: "Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made 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". Ro 1:3,4 There Jesus Christ is declared to be "God' s Son," and yet "made of the seed of David according to the flesh;" therefore the Son of God before so made, and not becoming so by being made, and "declared" (margin), "determined" (The literal meaning of the Greek word is, "distinctly marked out," or "clearly defined.") "to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead."

Besides which, were Jesus the Son of God by virtue of His miraculous conception, He might rather be called the Son of the Holy Ghost, which is a thought shocking to every spiritual mind. It may, with God' s help and blessing, tend to throw some light on the subject if we compare the passage in Luke Lu 1:35 with the parallel place in Matthew, Mt 1:23 where the evangelist quotes "what was spoken of the Lord by the prophet." The prophecy of Isaiah, Isa 7:14 as quoted by the evangelist, was, "Behold, a virgin shall be with Child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us". Mt 1:23 The declaration to the Virgin, Lu 1:35 that "the Holy Ghost should come upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadow her," was to explain to her the mystery of her conception, and is therefore a passage strictly parallel to that just quoted from Matthew. The Son born of the virgin was according to Matthew Mt 1:23 to be called "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us," or God in our nature. "The Holy Thing," born of the Virgin, was, according to Luke, "to be called the Son of God." Now, in the same way as Christ was God before He was called Emmanuel, so was He the Son of God before, as being born of the Virgin, He was called the Son of God; and His being so born no more made Him the Son of God than His being so born made Him God. The Son of God could not be seen or known by the sons of men except as born of the Virgin; but His being so born did not constitute Him the Son of God. In the same way the resurrection of Christ is sometimes spoken of as "a begetting." Him to be the Son of God, as we find Paul speaking at Antioch. "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee". Ac 13:32,33 As this passage stands, taken in its literal, apparent signification, it would certainly seem to mean that Christ became the Son of God by His resurrection, for the Apostle applies the words of the second Psalm, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee," to the raising of Christ from the dead. But, as our opponents themselves will admit, the resurrection of Christ did not make Him the Son of God, for He was that before, as is evident from the confession of Peter, but it manifested Him to be such. The incarnation and the resurrection stand on the same footing as manifestations of the Son of God. By the incarnation He was manifested, by the resurrection He was declared to be the Son of God; but neither that by which He was manifested, nor that by which He was declared, made Him the Son of God, for He was so before either manifestation or declaration.

As far as we can understand the views of those that we are at present combating, they hold that the Lord Jesus Christ, before His incarnation in the womb of the Virgin, was the eternal Word, but not the eternal Son; but when He assumed flesh of the Virgin, then, for the first time, He became the Son of God. They therefore hold that He is the Son of God by virtue of His complex Person-in other words, that He is not the Son of God by virtue of His human nature, nor the Son of God by virtue of His divine nature, but the Son of God as uniting two natures in one glorious Person. But the mere fact of the Word taking flesh would not make Him the Son of God if He was not so before, for there is no connection between incarnation and Sonship. That by His incarnation He became the Son of man is scriptural and intelligible, but that by the same

incarnation He became the Son of God is as unintelligible as it is unscriptural. Indeed, He is the Word because He is the Son, not the Son because He is the Word. The Son is the prior title and the foundation of the second. Why is Christ called the Word? Because by Him God the Father speaks. But why does the Father speak by Him? Because He is His only-begotten Son. Who so fit to speak for the Father as the Son? Who so knows His mind? Who is so "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His Person"? We see, then, that He did not become the Son by being first the Word, but is the Word because He is first the Son.

But the clearest, plainest, and most decisive way of overthrowing this wild theory, this utterly unscriptural view, is to show from the Word of truth that Jesus was the Son of God before His incarnation. If this point can be proved from the Word of God, their error is at once cut from under them, and falls before the inspired testimony, as Dagon fell before the ark. To our mind nothing can be more plainly revealed in the Word of truth than that the Lord Jesus existed as the Son of God before His assuming flesh. But as this is the controverted point, let us examine some of these testimonies, they being so numerous and so plain that the difficulty is which to name and which to omit. But take the following from the Lord's own lips, and examine carefully and weigh prayerfully the Lord's own declaration concerning Himself: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son," etc. Joh 3:16 God is here declared so to have loved the world that "He gave His only-begotten Son." Now must He not have existed as His Son before He gave Him? If I give a person a thing, my giving it does not change the nature of the object given, does not make it different from what it was before I gave it. So, if God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, He must surely have been His only begotten Son before He gave Him. In fact, the truth proclaimed by the blessed Lord is this, the amazing love of God to the world, that it was so stupendously great that having an only-begotten Son He gave Him for the salvation of those in the world who should believe in His Name, that they might not otherwise perish. But His giving Him could not make Him His only-begotten Son, because the wondrous love consisted in this, that though He was God's only-begotten Son, still He gave Him. Any other interpretation quite destroys the meaning and force of the passage.

Now look at another passage of almost similar character: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Ro 8:32 The expression "spared not" is explained by the words which follow, "delivered Him up for us all," which are again fully explained by the Lord's own testimony before quoted, that God "gave His only-begotten Son." When, then, did God not spare His own Son? When, He delivered Him up. When did He deliver Him up? When He gave Him. When did He give Him; but when He gave Him out of His own bosom to become incarnate? Thus by this connected chain it is most evidently shown that He was His Son before He delivered Him up; in other words, before He came into the world; which is the very point that we are seeking to establish. But observe, also, the words, "His only-begotten Son," literally, His peculiar, His proper Son; and observe, too, that He was His own, His peculiar, and proper Son before He spared Him not, but freely delivered Him. His delivering Him out of His bosom to become incarnate could not, and did not, make Him His Son any more than it made Him God. If words have meaning, He was His own true, real and proper Son before He was delivered up. And if so, was He not His own Son from all eternity, in other words, His eternal Son? the point of truth for which we are contending.

But see how all the force and beauty of the passage are destroyed if the Lord Jesus were not the true and real Son of God before He was delivered up! The apostle wishes to show the certainty that God will freely give us all things. But why should we have this certainty that we

may rest upon it as a most blessed and consoling truth? It rests on this foundation, that God spared not His own in the original "idiou," that is, His proper and peculiar Son, but delivered Him up for us all. Here we have brought before our eyes the personal and peculiar love of a Father towards a Son. But though this love to Him as His own peculiar Son was so great, yet pitying our case, He did not spare to give Him up to sufferings for our sake. But if He were not the true and real Son of God, but became so by being incarnate, the whole argument falls to the ground in a moment. If Father, Son and Holy Ghost are mere names and titles, distinct from and independent of their very mode of subsistence, the Holy Ghost might have been the Father and sent the Son, or the Son might have been the Father and sent the Holy Ghost; for if the three Persons of the Trinity are three distinct subsistences, independent of each other, and have no such mutual and eternal relationship as these very names imply, there seems to be no reason why these titles might not have been interchanged.

But take another passage of similar strength and purport: "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent, His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him". 1Jo 4:9 God is here declared to have "sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." If men were but willing to abide by the plain, positive declarations of the Holy Ghost, and not evade them by subtleties of their own reasoning mind, this passage would of itself fully decide the whole controversy. Several things in it will demand and abundantly repay our closest attention: 1. The love of God towards us. Was not this from all eternity? Are not His own words, "I have loved thee with an ever-lasting love"? Jer 31:3 2. The manifestation, or proof, of that love, which was sending His only-begotten Son into the world; 3. The Person sent, which was no other than His only-begotten Son. Now was this love of God before or only just at the time when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us"? All must admit that it was before, for it was the moving cause which induced God to send His only-begotten Son. Then He could not become for the first time His Son in the womb of the Virgin, but must have been His only-begotten Son before He was sent. The mere act of sending could not make Him to be His Son, if He was not so before. One would think that no elaborate train of reasoning was needful to prove this, and that simple faith in God's own testimony was amply sufficient. And so it would be were not men's minds so perverted by prejudice, and drugged and intoxicated by a spirit of error, that they obstinately refuse every argument, or even every scripture testimony that contradicts their pre-conceived views. But what unprejudiced mind does not see that sending a person to execute a certain task does not make him to be what he was not before? A master sends a servant to do a certain work; or a father bids a son to perform a certain errand; or a husband desires his wife to execute a certain commission which he has not time or opportunity to do himself; the servant does not cease to be a servant, the son to be a son, nor the wife to be a wife by being so sent. You might as well argue that if I send my maid-servant upon an errand, my sending her makes her to be my daughter; or if I send my daughter it makes her my maid-servant. My daughter for the time becomes my servant, as the Lord Jesus became His Father's servant; but the relationship of father and daughter, as of Father and Son, existed prior to, and independent of, any act of service.

But to put this in a still clearer light, if indeed so plain and simple a point needs further elucidation, consider the parable of the vineyard let out to husbandmen Mt 21:33-46 Mr 12:1-12 Lu 20:9-19 We need not go all through the parable, but may confine ourselves to the last and simple point of the householder sending his son to receive of the fruits of the vineyard. "Having yet therefore one Son, His well-beloved, He sent Him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence My Son" Mr 12:6 What can be more plain all through the parable than that the

husbandmen represent the Jews, the servants the prophets, and the son of the householder the blessed Lord? But the point which we wish chiefly to dwell upon is the sending of the Son. We read of the Lord of the vineyard, which is God, "Having yet therefore one Son, His well-beloved Son, He sent Him also last." Now surely He was the "one Son, the well-beloved Son," before He sent Him, or the whole drift and beauty of the parable fall to the ground. The idea conveyed by the parable is evidently this: The Lord of the vineyard, which is God the Father, lived in a far country, at a long distance from the vineyard, viz., heaven, His dwelling place. With Him there was His one Son, and therefore His only-begotten Son, His well-beloved Son Lu 20:13 dwelling in the same abode with Himself, and therefore His Son before He sent Him, and quite independent of His being so sent. The husbandmen having refused to send the fruits of the vineyard by the servants, and having most cruelly treated them, the Lord of the vineyard makes, as it were, a last experiment. Then said the Lord of the vineyard, "What shall I do?" as if He took counsel with Himself how He should act. He then comes to a decision in His own mind, "I will send My beloved Son; it may be they will reverence Him." Now surely when the Father thus consulted and thus determined His Son must have already existed as His Son, been already at home with Him before the counsel could be taken or the resolution executed; If then the parallel has any force, or indeed any meaning-and it would be sacrilege to say it has not-God the Father must have had a Son in heaven with Him before He sent Him. If so, and we cannot see how the force of the argument can be evaded, the Lord Jesus Christ existed as the Son of God before He was sent by the Father; and if so, as we cannot conceive a time when He was not a Son, He is the eternal Son of the eternal Father.

But we have other testimonies in the inspired record to the same import. Thus we read of God "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" Ro 8:3 and of His "sending forth His Son made of a woman" Ga 4:4 There must surely be some meaning attached to the expression, "His own Son," analogous to a similar earthly relationship. If I were to write a letter to a friend, and say in it, "I send my own son with this," he surely would not understand me to mean that he was not my own son until I sent him, or that the bare circumstance of my sending him made him my son. And if I were to write to him afterwards an explanatory letter to say that I did not mean in, my former note that the bearer was really and truly my own son, but only that he became my son by bringing the note, would he not at once reply, "What could be plainer than the declaration in your first letter that he was your own son; what other meaning could I attach to your words? And if I have misunderstood them, I shall not be able for the future to understand your plainest, simplest language." Apply this argument to the passages before us, wherein God is said "to have sent His own Son." We may well say, If the meaning of these passages be that the Lord Jesus Christ was not God' s Son before He sent Him, but became His Son by being sent, we must for the future give up all hope of understanding the Scriptures in their plain, simple meaning. And surely those who assert that the Lord Jesus Christ was not the Son of God before He was sent, but became God' s own Son by being sent, are bound to explain the connection between being sent and becoming a Son, and to give some reason more valid than a pre-conceived prejudice against the eternal Sonship of Jesus.

But take another testimony of almost similar purport. "The life which I live in the flesh," says the apostle, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" Ga 2:20 Now, when did the Son of God love Paul? Before He gave Himself for him or after? It was because He loved him that He gave Himself for him, and therefore He must evidently have been the Son of God before He gave Himself for him. And when did He give Himself? When He came forth from His Father' s bosom, and assumed flesh in the womb of the Virgin. If, then, the

Son of God loved Paul before He came into the world, He must have been the Son of God before He came into the world. As the eternal Son of God He loved Paul, and as the eternal Son of God Paul believed in and loved Him.

One more testimony may for the present suffice. "Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made 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" Ro 1:3,4 First look at the words: "Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh." The Son of God is here declared to have been "made of the seed of David according to the flesh;" therefore He existed as the Son of God before made of the seed of David; for all will admit that it is His humanity here spoken of as made." We grant," say the opponents of Christ's eternal Sonship, "that He existed before His incarnation, but not as the eternal Son of God." How, then, did He exist, and what was His title? "The Word," they answer, according to the declaration, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." According, then, to your own showing, the Lord Jesus Christ existed as the Word before He was made flesh. "Undoubtedly," you reply. Now, what is the difference between the two expressions, "His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh," and "The Word was made flesh"? for by parity of reasoning, if "the Word existed as "the Word" before He was "made flesh," the Son of God existed as the Son of God before "He was made of the seed of David according to the flesh." The two texts stand on precisely the same grounds. Both speak of the Deity and of the humanity of the blessed Lord and as no change can take place in His glorious Deity, we justly infer that as He was the Word in His divine nature before He was made flesh, so He was the Son of God in His divine nature before He was made of the seed of David. Do not all these scripture testimonies prove as with one unanimous voice that the Lord Jesus Christ was the only-begotten Son of God before God sent Him into the world? Sending Him into the world no more made Him God's Son than, to speak with all reverence, my sending my son to school makes him my son.

2. Another error on this important point is that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. The main prop of this view is what we read in Ac 13:32,33 "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee." But the meaning of the apostle is abundantly clear from the passage already quoted Ro 1:4 His resurrection did not make Him, but manifest Him to be the Son of God. Did not the Father, before the resurrection, twice with a voice from heaven proclaim, "This is My beloved Son" Mt 3:17 Mt 17:5 Will any man then lift up his voice against the Majesty of heaven, and say that Christ was not the Son of God before His resurrection, which He clearly was not, if the resurrection made Him such? Why, the Roman centurion, who stood at the cross, had a better faith than this when he said, "Truly this was the Son of God" Mt 27:54 Nay, the very devils themselves were forced to cry out before His sufferings and death, "Thou art Christ, the Son of God" Lu 4:41 We may be sure, therefore, that none but a heretic of the deepest dye could assert that the blessed Lord was not the Son of God till made so by the resurrection.

3. Another erroneous view of the Sonship of Christ is that He is so by virtue of His exaltation to the right hand of God. This view is founded upon a mistaken interpretation of Heb 1:4 "Being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." Christ was made so much better than the angels, not as the Son of God, because as that He was better than they already, being indeed their Maker and Creator Joh

1:3 Col 1:16 Nor did He become God' s Son by being "appointed heir of all things," and "obtaining by inheritance a more excellent name" than all the angelic host. If I have an only son, and he inherits my property, his being my heir does not make him my son; but his being my son makes him my heir. So the blessed Jesus is God' s heir. But the beauty and blessedness, the grace and glory, the joy and consolation of His being "the heir of all things," lie in this, that He is such in our nature -that the same blessed Immanuel who groaned and wept, suffered and bled here below, is now at the right hand of the Father as our High Priest, Mediator, Advocate, Representative, and Intercessor; that all power is given unto Him in heaven and earth as the God-man Mt 28:18 and that the Father hath "set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" Eph 1:20 21 But He has all this pre-eminence and glory not to make Him the Son of God, but because He who, as the Son of God, "thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" Php 2:7-11 The joy of heaven above, the delight of the saints here below, their only hope and help, strength and wisdom, spring from this, that the Son of God is exalted to the right hand of the Father in the very nature which He assumed in the womb of the virgin. But if He were made the Son of God by this exaltation, it sinks His Deity by merging it into His humanity, and constitutes Him a made God-which is not God at all, but an idol.

In fact, these three views which we have endeavoured to strip bare out of their party-coloured dress are all of them either open or disguised Socinianism, and their whole object and aim are to overthrow the Deity of the Lord Jesus by overthrowing His divine Sonship. The enemies of the Lord Jesus know well that the Scriptures declare beyond all doubt and controversy that He is the Son of God. This mountain of brass they may kick at, but can never kick down. But they know also that if they can by any means nullify and explain away His Sonship, they have taken a great stride to nullify and explain away His Deity. Beware, then; simple-hearted child of God, lest any of these men entangle your feet in their net. Hold by this as your sheet-anchor, that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God in His divine nature, as His eternal and only-begotten Son. Faith in Him as such will enable you to ride through many a storm, and bear you up amidst the terrible indignation which will fall upon His enemies, when He shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter' s vessel.

CHAPTER I - Part 3

4. But there is another way in which erroneous men seek to explain, and by explaining deny, the eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus, and that is, by asserting that He is a Son by office. These men do not deny His essential and eternal Deity, nor do they seek to overthrow the Trinity. On these points they are professedly sound—we say, "professedly," for we fully believe that the Deity of Christ and the very doctrine of the Trinity Itself are so involved in the eternal Sonship of Jesus, that they stand or fall with it. This, however, they do not, or will not, see, and call themselves believers in the Trinity of Persons and the Unity of essence in the great and glorious self-existent Jehovah. But they do not believe that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are necessarily and eternally such, and neither are, were, or could be otherwise, but that they are covenant offices and titles which They have assumed, and by which They have made Themselves known to the sons of men. Thus they do not believe that Christ is the Son of the Father by eternal generation, His only begotten; Son, His Son in truth and love, but that the Three distinct Persons in the Trinity covenanted among Themselves, the Father to be the Father, the Son to be the Son, and the Holy Ghost to be the Holy Ghost, and that chiefly for man's redemption.

Monstrous figment! God-dishonouring error! which needs only to be stated to be reprobated by every believer in the Son of God as a deadly blow against; each Person in the Trinity, and destroying that eternal intercommunication of nature, without which They are Three distinct Gods, and not Three distinct Persons in One undivided Godhead. Truly Satan introduces no little errors into the church; truly all his machinations are to overthrow vital truths, and to poison the spring at the very fountain head. We bless God that there is a Covenant—a covenant of grace, "ordered in all things and sure;" we adore His gracious Majesty that in this everlasting Covenant the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost sustain certain relationships to the church of God; but we most thoroughly deny that these relationships made Them to be Father, Son and Holy Ghost; and that separate from them the Father is not really and truly Father to the Son, nor the Son really and truly Son to the Father, but only nominally so. For who does not see that if this be true, the Father might have been the Son, and the Son might have been the Father, and the Holy Ghost either the Father or the Son? for certainly if They are so, not by nature but by office, and are three equal, independent Persons, at liberty to choose Their several titles, there appears to be no reason why They should not have chosen otherwise than They did. We see, therefore, into what confusion men get when they forsake the simple statements of Scripture, and what perilous weapons they hold in their hands when they directly or indirectly sap the very throne of the Most High. But to clear up this point a little further, let us illustrate it by a simple figure. Suppose, then, that three friends, of equal rank and station, were to go on a journey, say a foreign tour; they might say to one another before they started, "Let us severally choose the three departments to which we shall each attend, I will take this part, if you and you will take that and that." Now, why might they not, as three friends, of equal station, without any tie of kindred, choose different departments from what they actually selected, for there was no anterior binding necessity that they should have chosen the exact offices which they fulfil? The same reasoning applies to the

Three co-equal Persons of the Trinity, if Father, Son and Holy Ghost be but mere covenant names, titles, and offices, and not their very mode of existence. But it will be said by such men, You carnalise the subject by your figure. Not so; we have too much reverence, we trust, for the things of God to carnalise them; but we use the figure to meet you on your own ground, and to show you by a simple argument the absurdity and folly, not to say the impiety of your views. We admit, nay more, we rejoice to believe that Father, Son and Holy Ghost sustain each distinct Their Relationships in the eternal Covenant; but these relationships are not arbitrary offices, which They might or might not have severally chosen, but are intrinsically and necessarily connected with, and flow out of Their very subsistence, Their very mode of existence. So that to talk, as some have done, that "the Three Persons in the Alehim" to use their barbarous Hebrew, "covenanted among Themselves to be Father, Son and Holy Ghost," is an abominable error, and tantamount to declaring that but for the Covenant, the Father would not have been the Father, nor the Son the Son, nor the Holy Ghost the Holy Ghost. Where is there one scripture for such an assertion? When the blessed Jesus, in that sacred, heart-moving prayer, "lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee" Joh 17:1, was there no other relationship, no more intimate and eternal tie than being His Son by assuming an office? We cannot express what we have seen and felt in that most blessed and sacred chapter, perhaps the most solemn in the whole Word of God; but there is that tender intimacy, that holy, filial communion with His heavenly Father breathing through it which conveys to a believing heart the fullest assurance that He is the eternal Son of God as being the only-begotten of the Father.

But as we cannot convey to erroneous men our faith, we must meet them on the solid ground of scriptural argument. Nothing then can be more evident than that the one great and glorious Jehovah existed in a Trinity, of Persons before the Covenant. What then were those Three Persons before the Covenant was entered into? Did that Covenant alter Their mutual relationship to Each other so as to introduce a new affinity between Them? You might just as well say that the Covenant made Them a Trinity of Persons, or called Them in to being, as, to say that the Covenant made Them Father, Son and Holy Ghost; for if these be but Covenant titles, had there been no Covenant, they most certainly, according to your own showing, would not have been Father, Son and Holy Ghost. This is indeed overthrowing the Trinity with a witness, and making the distinct, eternal subsistence of Three Persons in the Godhead depend upon a Covenant made on behalf of man. For remember this, that you cannot touch one Person of the Godhead without touching all; and if you say that the Son of God is a Son only by office, you say with the same breath that the Father is only a Father by office, and the Holy Ghost only a Holy Ghost by office.

But let us further ask, What do you mean, by saying that the Son of God is so only by office, or as a name or title? Has the Son of God, His only-begotten Son, no more real, intimate, and necessary relationship to His Father than calling Himself His Son, when He is not really His Son, but only so by office? Do you think you clearly understand what it is to be a Son by office? for persons often use words of which they have never accurately examined the meaning. The Lord Jesus, by becoming man, became the Father's servant by office, but if you make Him a Son by office, you strip Him of all His glory. His glory is this, that though He was a Son by nature, He became a Servant by office, as the Apostle says, "Though He were not 'became' a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered" Heb 5:8. In this we see His unparalleled condescension, His infinite love, and boundless depths of grace, that though by nature the eternal Son of God, and as such co-equal with the Father, He stooped to become a

servant. But apart from all Scripture revelation, it is an absurdity, an insult to common sense, to make the Lord Jesus Christ a Son by office. There are but two ways by which anyone can become a son:

- 1, by generation;
- 2, by adoption.

In the first case He is the father's son, his true, proper and real son; in the other, his made or adopted son. No office or service, no law or title, no covenant or agreement, can make a son if he be not a real or an adopted one. A servant by office may become a son by adoption, as Abram complained that "one born in his house as a servant was his heir," and as Moses became the son of Pharaoh's daughter Ex 2:10; and a son by nature may become a servant by office, but a son by office is an absurdity, both in nature and grace.

Now do look at the weight of these plain and united testimonies. Would God deceive us by telling us again and again that He had a Son, an own, a proper a peculiar, an only-begotten Son, if He had not? Where in all these passages is there the faintest intimation that the Sonship of Christ was not a true and real Sonship, but only a name, a title, a word, that might or might not have been, and but for the creation of man never would have been? To make the mutual eternal relationship which subsists between the Father and the Son depend upon a covenant made on behalf of man, is to destroy the very eternal being of both Father and Son. Surely, when the Father spoke Himself from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him," He meant that He was really and truly His beloved Son, that He was His most loving Father, and that we were to hear, believe in, and obey Him as such.

THE ETERNAL SONSHIP OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

CHAPTER II.

THERE are two things which every child of God has the greatest reason to dread; the one is evil, the other is error. Both are originally from Satan; both have a congenial home in the human mind; both are in their nature deadly and destructive; both have slain their thousands and tens of thousands; and under one or the other, or under both combined, all everlastingly perish but the redeemed family of God. Evil-by which we mean sin in its more open and gross forms-is, in some respects, less to be dreaded than error, that is, error on vital, fundamental points; and for the following reason. The unmistakable voice of conscience, the universal testimony of God's children, the expressed reprobation of the world itself, all bear a loud witness against gross acts of immorality. Thus, though the carnal mind is ever lusting after evil, thorns and briars much hedge up the road toward its actual commission; and if, by the power of sin and temptation, they be unhappily broken through, the return into the narrow path, though difficult, is not wholly shut out. David, Peter, and the incestuous Corinthian fell into open evil, but they never fell into deadly error, and were not only recoverable, but by superabounding grace were recovered. But error upon the grand, fundamental doctrines of our most holy faith is not only in its nature destructive, but usually destroys all who embrace it.

As, however, we wish to move cautiously upon this tender ground, let us carefully distinguish between what we may perhaps call voluntary and involuntary error. To explain our meaning more distinctly, take the two following cases of involuntary error by way of illustration. A person may be born of Socinian parents, and may have imbibed their views from the force of birth and education. Is this person irrecoverable? Certainly not. The grace of God may reach his heart and deliver him from his errors, just as much as it may touch the conscience of a man living in all manner of iniquity, and save him from his sins. Or a child of God, one manifestly so by regenerating grace, may be tempted by the seducing spirit of error breathed into his carnal mind by a heretic or by an erroneous book, and may for a time be so stupefied by the smoke of the bottomless pit as to reel and stagger on the very brink, and yet not fall in. Most of us have known something of these blasts of hell, so that we could say with Asaph, "My feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped;" but they have only rooted us more firmly in the truth. These are cases of what we call involuntary error. But there is voluntary error when a man wilfully and deliberately turns away from truth to embrace falsehood; when he is given up to strong delusions to believe a lie; when he gives heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, and seeks to spread and propagate them with all his power. These cases are usually irrecoverable, for such men generally wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived; error so blinds their eyes and hardens their hearts, that they cannot or will not see anything but what seems to favour their views, and at last they either sink into a general state of unbelief and infidelity or die confirmed in their deceptions. It is scarcely possible to read the Epistles of the New Testament, especially those of Paul to Timothy and Titus, and those of Peter, John and Jude, without being struck by the strong denunciations which those inspired men of God launched as so many burning thunderbolts against error and erroneous men. Any approach to their strong language, even in

opposing the most deadly errors, would in our day be considered positively unbearable, and be called the grossest want of charity. It is with most an unpardonable offence to draw any strong and marked lines between sinner and saint, professor and possessor, error and truth. The ancient landmarks which the word of truth has set up have almost by general consent been removed, and a religious right of common has become established, by means of which truth and error have been thrown into one wide field, where any may roam and feed at will, and still be considered as sheep of Christ. It was not so in the days of Luther, of John Knox, and of Rutherford; but in our day there is such a general laxity of principle as regards truth and falsehood, that the corruption of the world seems to have tainted the church. There was a time in this country when, if there was roguery in the market, it was not tolerated in the counting-house; if there was blasphemy in the street, it was not allowed in the senate; if there was infidelity in the debating-room, it was not suffered in the pulpit. But now bankers and merchants cheat and lie like costermongers; Jew, Papist, and infidel sit side by side in the House of Commons; and negative theology and German divinity are enthroned in Independent chapels. It would almost seem that Paul, Peter, John and Jude were needlessly harsh and severe in their denunciations of error and erroneous men, that Luther, John Knox, and Rutherford were narrow-minded bigots, and that it matters little what a man believes if he be "a truly pious" man, a member of a church, a preacher, or a professor. Old Mrs. Bigotry is dead and buried; her funeral sermon has been preached to a crowded congregation; and this is the inscription put, by general consent, upon her tombstone: For modes of faith let graceless bigots fight; He can't be wrong whose life is in the right. But if to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints he bigotry, let us be bigots still; and if it be a bad spirit to condemn error, then let us bear the reproach rather than call evil good and good evil, put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Here, then, we resume our subject, hoping, with God's help and blessing, whilst we contend earnestly for the truth as it is in Jesus, to advance nothing that may be in the least inconsistent with His sacred Word, and desiring His glory and the good of His people. But as Abraham, when he went up the mount with Isaac, left the young men and the ass at the foot; as Moses put off his shoes, at God's command, when he stood on holy ground; so must we leave carnal reasoning at the foot of the mount where the Lord is seen Ge 22:14, and lay aside the shoes of sense and nature when we look at the bush burning with fire and not consumed. Four things are absolutely necessary to be experimentally known and felt before we can arrive at any saving or sanctifying knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus:

1. Divine light in the understanding;
2. Spiritual faith in the heart;
3. Godly fear in the conscience;
4. Heavenly love in the affections. Without light we cannot see; without faith we cannot believe; without godly fear we cannot reverentially adore; without love we cannot embrace Him who is "the Truth," as well as "the Way, and the Life." Here all heretics and erroneous men stumble and fall. The mysteries of our most holy faith are not to be apprehended by uninspired men. Spiritual truths are for spiritual men; as the apostle beautifully says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" 1Co 2:9,10. It is, therefore, utterly impossible for men who are "sensual, having not the Spirit," to understand any branch of saving truth, much more the deep mysteries of godliness. We must be taught of God, and receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, or we shall never enter therein; and it is for those who have been so led and taught

that we mainly write.

We have already attempted to show the various ways in which erroneous men have sought at different times to overthrow the eternal Sonship of Jesus. If we have succeeded, with God's help and blessing, in refuting what is false, we have advanced a good way in proving what is true; for in grace, as in nature, the conviction of falsehood is the establishment of truth. Before, then, we proceed any further, let us fix our foot firmly on the ground that we have thus far made good, and not run backwards and forwards in confusion as though we had proved nothing. What is proved is proved; and as each successive step in an argument is clearly and firmly laid, it forms, as in a building, a basis to support a fresh layer of proof. These points, then, we consider to have been already fully established by us from the Word of truth:

- 1, that Jesus is the Son of God;
- 2, that He is not the Son of God by the assumption of human nature, or by the resurrection, or by sitting at God's right hand, or by virtue of any covenant name, title, or office;
- 3, that He was the Son of God before He came into the world; and
- 4, that consequently He is the Son of God in His divine nature. The pre-existential dreams and delusions we need not say we utterly discard as full of deadly error, and therefore need not stop to show that He is not the Son of God by virtue of a human soul created before all time, and united to His body in the womb of the Virgin at the incarnation. Here, then, we take our firm stand, that Jesus is the Son of God in His divine nature; and if that divine nature is truly and properly God, as the words necessarily imply, and as such is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, then He must be the eternal Son of the Father. No sophistry can elude this conclusion. Forsaking the Scriptures and the guiding light of divine revelation, you may reason and argue on natural grounds, and cavil at the words, "an eternal Son," and "eternal generation," as expressing or implying ideas naturally inconsistent, not to say impossible. But we shall not follow you on such boggy ground. If you will do so, lose yourself there; and, led by the ignis fatuus of reason, flounder from swamp to swamp, till you sink to rise no more; but we shall, with the Lord's help, abide on the firm ground of God's own inspired testimony, and draw all our proofs from that sacred source of all knowledge and instruction. But though we shall confine ourselves to the inspired testimony in opening up this subject, we shall endeavour to proceed step by step, carefully and prayerfully, in the hope that our pen may move in strict harmony with the truth of God in a matter so mysterious and yet so blessed. Follow us, spiritual reader, with the Scriptures in your hand and with faith and love in your heart, that we, as taught and blessed of God, may be able to set our seal to those words, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." If we have not this, what witness have we worth possessing?

1. First, then, we lay it down as undeniable scripture truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son Of God as God. This is the express testimony of the Father Himself: "But, to the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" Heb 1:8. Is it not clear from this express declaration from the Father's own lips, that the Son is God, and God as being the Son? How else is He "the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His Person"? Heb 1:3 The human nature of Jesus was not "the brightness of God's glory," for how could a created, finite nature represent the brightness of the glory of the infinite, self-existent I AM? Nor could the nature assumed in the womb of the Virgin be "the express image of God's Person." The Person of God must necessarily be divine, and the express image of it must be necessarily divine also.

2. Secondly, we assert that when the Scripture speaks of Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God, it speaks of Him as such in His divine nature. Thus, when John says, "And we beheld

His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father" Joh 1:14, that glory was the glory of Christ's divine nature; for how could His human nature, which was marred more than the sons of men, shine forth with the glory of His divine? This "glory of the Only-begotten of the Father" is most evidently the same glory as that of which Jesus speaks in those touching words: "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" Joh 17:5. But this must be the glory of His divine nature, for His human nature He had not then assumed. Then "the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father" must be the same "glory as He had with Him before the world was," and that could be none other but His divine. Thus we are brought in the clearest and most indubitable manner to this point, that Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God as God. The two passages that we have quoted bring us to this conclusion with all the clearness, force and distinctness of a mathematical problem. Examine one by one the links of this argument, and see if they are not firm and good. Jesus is the only-begotten of the Father; this is the first step. As the only-begotten of the Father He has a peculiar glory; this is the second step. This glory He had with the Father before the world was; this is the third step. As He could only possess this glory in His divine nature, for His human did not then exist, He is the only-begotten Son of God as God; this is the fourth step, and establishes the conclusion that He is the eternal Son of the Father, and that by eternal generation. You may object to the term "eternal generation," but how else can you explain the words, "the Only-begotten of the Father"? If you say that this refers to the human nature of Jesus, how can you interpret in that sense the passage, "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father?" Joh 1:18 Surely you will not say that the human nature of Jesus was in the bosom of the Father from all eternity. How was He ever in the bosom of the Father but as His only-begotten Son, and if He lay there from all eternity, what is this but eternal generation?

But we have by no means exhausted our quiver. "Thine arrows," we read, "are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; whereby the people fall under Thee" Ps 45:5. The Lord fill our quiver full of them; then shall we not be ashamed, but shall speak with His enemies in the gate. Look at the following testimony: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" Joh 3:16. Does not Jesus Himself here declare that the Father "gave His only-begotten Son"? Was He not, then, His only-begotten Son before, He gave Him? If language means anything, the words positively declare that God had a Son, an only-begotten Son, and that He so loved poor, fallen man that He freely and voluntarily gave this only-begotten Son for his redemption. But when did God love the world? Before or after Jesus came in the flesh? Of course, before, for love moved Him to give His only-begotten Son. Where, then, was His only-begotten Son when God loved the world? In heaven, with God. And what was He in heaven with God? His only-begotten Son. Then He was His only-begotten Son in His divine nature, for His human nature never was in heaven till after the resurrection. And if His only-begotten Son in His divine nature, and if He existed as such from all eternity, what is this but eternal generation? Surely Jesus knew the mystery of His own generation; and if He call Himself God's only-begotten Son, is it not our wisdom and mercy to believe what He says, even if our reason cannot penetrate into so high and sublime a mystery?

Where reason fails, with all her powers, There faith preveils, and love adores.

3. But you will say, "We do not deny that Jesus is God's only-begotten Son, for so the Scripture speaks, but He is so by virtue of the everlasting covenant." But how could a covenant beget Him? Begetting implies a being, not a compact; and to be begotten implies a nature, a mode of existence, not a covenant. The two ideas are essentially incompatible, for begetting

implies a relationship independent of, and anterior to, a covenant, whereas a covenant implies the existence of the covenanting parties.

But another may say, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but neither by virtue of His divine nor of His human nature viewed separately, but of His complex Person as God-man Mediator." But was His complex Person in heaven before the incarnation? Surely not. But that the Son of God was in heaven before His incarnation we have already abundantly proved. It is evident, then, that He is not the Son of God by virtue of His complex Person, for He was so before He took our nature into union with His divine. He must be the Son of God either as God or as man. We have shown over and over again that He is not the Son of God as man. What then remains but that He is the Son of God as God, and therefore previous to His assumption of our nature in the womb of the Virgin, and consequently anterior to His becoming God-Man? Has not the Lord Himself declared, "He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God"? Do you believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God? How can you if you deny that He is the eternal Son of the Father? For we have already proved from Scripture that He is the only-begotten Son of God in His divine nature; and he who denies that, most certainly believes not "in His Name," by which is meant His very Being and nature, Person and work, as revealed to the sons of men.

But as the matter is so important, let us now examine another testimony: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" 1Jo 5:20. Carefully examine the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost in this remarkable declaration, for it is well worth weighing word by word. "We know," says holy John, "that the Son of God is come." But how do we know that the Son of God is come? By the personal and experimental manifestation of Him as the Son of God to our soul Ga 1:16. But if not so manifested, not known. And who understand and "know Him that is true"? Those to whom "He hath given an understanding." Then where no such understanding is given, there "He that is true" is not understood or known. "And we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." Then if not in union with the Son, not in Him that is true, and therefore necessarily in him that is false. "This is the true God." Who? The Son. And why? Because He is the Son. "And eternal life." Then out of Him is eternal death. Why? Because only in union with Him is eternal life. Look at the chain as thus drawn out from beginning to end; weigh it well, link by link. "The Son of God is come." That is link the first. "We know that He is come." That is link the second. "He hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true." That is link the third. "We are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." That is link the fourth. "This is the true God, and eternal life." That is link the fifth. And may we not, with holy John, add another link to close the chain? "Little children, keep yourselves from idols;" and amongst them, from the idol of a Son by office, for such is not "the true God, nor eternal life."

4. But now let us advance a step further in our line of argument and show that Jesus is not only the Son of God in His divine nature, but as being "the only-begotten of the Father," is God's own, proper, true and eternal Son. Take the following testimonies by way of proof of this assertion: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" Ro 8:3. Here the Holy Ghost declares that "God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." Have you ever carefully weighed the meaning of the words, "His own Son"? If you are a father, does not your own son widely differ from an adopted son? The word means literally His "proper" and

"peculiar" Son-His own, in a sense specially distinct from any other. But let us examine this passage a little more closely. A certain work was to be done which the law could not do, for "it was weak through the flesh." The law was strong in itself, for it had all the authority of God to back it; but it was weak through man's infirmity-the flesh not being able to keep or obey it. God, then, sent His own Son to do what the law could not do. If words have any meaning, if the blessed Spirit choose suitable expressions to convey instruction, what can we understand by the term, "God's own Son," but that Jesus is God's true and proper Son by His very mode of existence? This is the grand and blessed revelation of these last days, as made known to the apostles and prophets, and embodied in the inspired pages of the New Testament. What, for instance, is the foundation of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and indeed of the whole Epistle, but that the Son of God has a relation to the Father, not only of a dignity but of a nature which He alone possesses? How clear and emphatic the language in which the apostle opens that weighty epistle, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds" Heb 1:1,2. View the Son thus spoken of as a Son merely by office or by covenant title, and the whole force and beauty of the words are lost. But see in the Son the true and real Son of the Father, then the love and mercy of God, as speaking in and by Him in these last days, shine forth in all their unparalleled lustre. So, in the words just quoted from Ro 8:3, the whole foundation of redemption is laid on this rock, that God sent His own Son. Can language be more plain or more positive? If Jesus be not God's own Son, His true, real and proper Son, what do the words mean? We say it with all reverence, that if Jesus be a Son only by office, or merely by virtue of His complex Person, such words as "His own Son" would but mock and deceive us, and lead us to believe a lie. If I were to point to a son of mine, and say to a neighbour or a stranger, "This is my own son," and a few days after the person learnt that he was not my own son, but an adopted child, whom I was accustomed to call my son when he was no such relation, should I stand clear of deception in the matter? If God, then, declares that Jesus is "His own Son," am I to believe that He is His Son by nature, His only-begotten, and thus His true and proper Son, or to make Him a liar? It seems to us that holy John has already decided the matter: "He that believeth not God, hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son." This is just your case, if you say that Jesus is not God's own Son, which you must certainly do if you say that He is not His Son in His divine nature. You do not believe God because you believe not the record or testimony that God gave of His Son, when He said from heaven, "This is My beloved Son." And what is the consequence? "You make God a liar." And is not that an awful position for a worm of earth to stand in? But such is ever the result of listening to natural reasoning and argument instead of believing the testimony of God.

But again. Have you ever looked at the word "sent" in the passage that we are now considering? There is a singular beauty and propriety in a Father sending a Son, which is completely lost if the Second Person is so far independent of the Father as to be a Son merely in name. As such He might certainly covenant to come, but could hardly covenant to be sent. But view Him as the Father's own Son, and then the love of the Father in sending Him, and His own love in consenting to come "Lo! I come" are beautiful beyond expression.

But this is by no means the only passage in which Jesus is spoken of as God's "own Son." Look at those words in the same blessed chapter Ro 8:32, which has comforted thousands of sorrowful hearts, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Can words be more expressive, He that spared

not His own Son"? Believing soul, you that desire to know God' s truth for yourself, who would not hold error for a thousand worlds, and are looking up for that wisdom which cometh from God, consider well the words; they are full of truth and blessedness. Do not the words, then, clearly declare that the love of God was so great to the church that there being no other way by which she could be saved, God the Father spared not His own true and proper Son? Make Jesus a Son by office, and the whole force, not to say the meaning, of the passage is gone in a moment. It would be nothing less than plucking away the whole love of God to His people. If Jesus be not God' s own proper and true Son, where is the compassion of the Father' s heart overcoming, so to speak, all His reluctance to give Him up? Where the depth of the Father' s love in delivering Him up for us all? The moment that you deny the eternal Sonship of Jesus, you deny the Father' s love to Him as His own Son, and with that you deny also the peculiar love that God has to His people. Thus you destroy at a stroke the unutterable love and complacency that the Father has to the Son as His own Son, and the compassion and love displayed to the church in giving Him up as a sacrifice for her sins. The only foundation of our being sons of God 1Jo 3:2 is that Jesus, our Head and Elder Brother, was the Son of God. Therefore He said to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God" John 20:17. Why "your Father"? Because "My Father. "Why your God?" Because "My God." "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" Ga 4:6. Why sons? Because Christ is the Son of God. Why the Spirit of His Son? Because the Holy Spirit proceedeth from the Father and the Son as His mode of subsistence. In removing these ancient landmarks of truth, men little think what havoc they make, we were going to say, in heaven and in earth. In heaven, by destroying the very mode of existence of the Three Persons in the sacred Godhead; in earth, by destroying the foundations on which the church is built. If you destroy the peculiar and unutterable love of God to the church, what do you leave us? And this you must certainly destroy if you deny the eternal Sonship of Jesus, for the love of the Father to the church is the same as His love to the Son: "And hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me" Joh 17:23 . O the depth of God' s love! To carry out this love both Father and Son, in a sense, made a sacrifice. The sacrifice that the Father made, out of His love to the church, was that He gave out of His own bosom His darling Son, and spared Him not the sorrows and agonies of the cross, but delivered Him up to the curse of the law, the temptations of the devil, the malice of men, and the burning indignation of Justice arresting Him as a transgressor. The sacrifice that the Son made was to leave His Father' s bosom and be delivered up to a life of suffering and a death of agony. How much is contained in that expression, "He that spared not His own Son" But does not all its force and meaning consist in this, that Jesus is the true and real Son of God? But if you still are in doubt about the meaning of God' s "not sparing His own Son," look at an almost parallel expression, "I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" Mal 3:17. In reading that passage, what meaning do you attach to the expression of "a man sparing his own son"? Is the own son spoken of there the man' s real, true and proper son, or an adopted one, or one calling himself so when he is not? You answer, and that well, "Why, the whole force of the passage depends on the person spared being he man' s own son." Then why interpret this passage in that sense, which, indeed, you cannot help doing, and explain what is said about God' s own Son in a manner quite different? But you say, "I cannot understand this eternal generation. It seems to me so inconsistent, so self-contradictory, that I cannot receive it." Do you mean, then, to receive nothing which you cannot understand, and which appears self-contradictory? Then you must on those grounds reject the two greatest mysteries of our most

holy faith-the Trinity and the Incarnation. We do not call upon you to understand it. But if you love your own soul, we counsel you not to deny it, lest you be found amongst those who "deny the Son, and so have not the Father" 1Jo 2:23.

But again, if Jesus be not the true, proper and real Son of God, how can we understand the parable of the vineyard and the husbandmen, given us by three evangelists? We need not go over this ground again, for we have already done so; but we may simply ask, If Jesus be not the true, proper and real Son of God, what is the meaning of the parable? No one would accept this interpretation, that it was not the real son of the householder that was sent, but a neighbour or a friend who personated a son, who assumed the office and took the title when he was not his son at all. Do you not see, as a general rule of Scripture interpretation, that whilst you hold the truth all is simple and harmonious, and different passages confirm and corroborate each other; but the moment that error is set up all is confusion, and you cannot by any possible means get one passage of Scripture to harmonise with the other? So it is with this parable as harmonising with the true and real Sonship of Jesus. The moment you see and believe that Jesus is the true Son of the Father, His only-begotten Son, the whole parable is full of exquisite truth, pathos, and beauty; but abandon that view, and the parable at once falls to the ground as devoid of all sense or significance.

It is with the eternal Sonship of Christ as with the Trinity, the Deity of Jesus, the Personality of the Holy Ghost, etc. It does not so much rest on isolated texts as on the general drift of God' s inspired Word-what the apostle calls "the proportion or analogy of faith" Ro 12:6. And it is an infinite mercy for the church of God that the Holy Spirit has so ordered it; for single texts, however clear, may be disputed, but the grand current of truth, like a mighty river, not only bears down all opposition, but flows on in a pure, perennial stream, to slake the thirst of the saints of the Most High.

But take another testimony to the same grand truth, and that from God' s own mouth. Twice did God Himself declare with an audible voice from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" Mt 3:17 Mt 17:5. Surely when God speaks from heaven those who fear His great name will by His grace listen, believe and obey. If Jesus "received from God the Father honour and glory, when that voice came to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" 2Pe 1:17, we who desire to honour and glorify Him should feel a solemn pleasure in obeying the Father' s voice, "Hear ye Him." Blessed Jesus, we do desire to hear Thee, for Thy sheep hear Thy voice, and Thy mouth is most sweet: yea, Thou art altogether lovely. When sin distresses our conscience, or error assails our mind, may we ever feel and say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Joh 6:68,69.

But if Jesus be the Son of God merely by office or covenant title, or by virtue of His complex Person, where is the blessedness of that voice from heaven proclaiming Him the beloved Son of the Father? It would but deceive and mislead us were it but a name, not a reality, a title implying a relationship which did not actually exist.. If words so plain and so expressive mean anything and who dare say, that God' s words mean nothing?, they most certainly declare an intimacy of divine relationship between the Father and the Son, peculiar and ineffable, deeply mysterious, but inexpressibly blessed. No name or title can give a natural and necessary relationship. My son is called my son because he is my son; and if he were not so, no calling could make him so. In the same or an analogous manner, the covenant, however blessed, however ordered in all things and sure, could not make the Word to be the Son of God were He not so in reality. Besides which, if Jesus is not the Son of God by His very mode of subsistence,

there would be, at least as far as we can see, no peculiar significancy in His becoming so by the covenant. It does not at all touch the efficacy of redemption, which depends on the Redeemer being God as well as man. If, then, the Second Person of the Trinity is not the Son of God anterior to and independent of the covenant of grace, there appears to be no reason why He should assume that particular title for the purpose of redemption rather than any other. As this, however, is a point involving many considerations, we shall not further press it, though it has a weight with our own mind.

Thus, in whatever point of view we examine it, we see error and confusion stamped upon every explanation of the Sonship of Jesus, but that which has always been the faith of the Church of God, that He is the Son of the Father in truth and love 2Jo 1:3. As such we, in sweet union with prophets, apostles and martyrs, with the glorified spirits in heavenly bliss, and the suffering saints in this vale of tears, worship, adore and love Him, and crown Him Lord of all.

THE ETERNAL SONSHIP OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

CHAPTER III.

WHETHER we set forth truth or whether we expose error, and we can scarcely do the one without at the same time performing the other, the Word of God must ever be the grand armoury whence we take the weapons of our spiritual warfare. This is both apostolic precept and apostolic practice. "Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" Eph 6:17. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" 1Pe 4:11. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" 2Co 10:4. In this spirit, as obeying this precept, and walking after this example, have we thus far attempted to overthrow that grievous error of denying the eternal Sonship of Christ, and to set forth that vital, fundamental truth of His being the Son of the Father in truth and love, which has formed the subject of our two last chapters. But we frankly confess that we have little hope of convincing those who have drunk deeply into the spirit of error. The poison is already in their veins, vitiating in them all that once seemed like truth and simplicity. As infidelity, when once it has got full possession of the mind, rejects the clearest evidences from positive inability to credit them, so error, when once it has poisoned the heart, renders it for ever afterwards, in the great majority of instances, utterly incapable of receiving the truth. Against every text that may be brought forward in support of truth an objection is started, a false interpretation offered, a counter statement made, an opposing passage quoted-the object evidently being not to bow down to truth, but to make truth bow down to error; not to submit in faith to the Word of God, but to make the Word of God itself bend and yield to the determined obstinacy of a mind prejudiced to its lowest depths. O what a state of mind to be in! How careful, then, should we be, how watchful, how prayerful, lest we also, "being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from our own steadfastness" 2Pe 3:17. A tender conscience, a believing heart, a prayerful spirit, a watchful eye, a wary ear, a guarded tongue, and a cautious foot, will, with God's blessing, be great preservatives against error of every kind. But to see light in God's light, to feel life in His life, to have sweet fellowship and sacred communion with the Father and the Son, to walk before God in the beams of His favour, to find His Word our meat and drink, and to be ever approaching Him through the Son of His love, pleading with Him for His promised teaching-this is the true and only way to learn His truth, to believe it, to love it, and to live it. No heretic, no erroneous man, no unbeliever ever stood on this holy ground. That childlike spirit, without which there is no entering into the kingdom of heaven; that godly jealousy for the Lord's honour which makes error abhorred and truth beloved; that tender fear of His great and glorious Name which leads the soul to desire His approbation and to dread His displeasure; that holy liberty which an experimental knowledge of the truth communicates to a citizen of Zion; that enlargement of heart which draws up the affections to those things which are above, where Jesus sits at God's right hand-these, and all such similar fruits of divine teaching as specially distinguish the living saint of God, are not to be found in that bosom where error has erected its throne of darkness and death. On the contrary, a vain-confident, self-righteous, contentious, quarrelsome spirit, breathing enmity and hatred against all who oppose their favourite dogmas,

and thrust down their darling idols, are usually marks stamped upon all who are deeply imbued with heresy and error. They may be very confident in the soundness of their views, or in the firmness of their own standing but God rejects their "confidences, and they shall not prosper in them" Jer 2:37

In resuming, then, our subject, we cannot but express our conviction that as we are enabled to read the scriptures of the New Testament with a more enlightened understanding, and to receive them more feelingly into a believing heart, we become more and more forcibly struck with these two leading features in them:

1. The clear revelation made therein that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and
2. The amazing weight and importance attached by the Holy Ghost to a faith in Him as such, and to a profession corresponding to that faith. It is not one or two passages, however plain and clear, but the whole current of revelation that carries such a conviction to a believing heart. The eternal Sonship of Christ is, as it were, the central sun of the New Testament, to remove which is to blot out all light from the sky, and to cast the church into darkness and the shadow of death. The manifestation of the Son of God is the sum and substance of the whole wondrous scheme of love which has brought heaven down to earth in the incarnation of Christ, and taken earth up to heaven in His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father, agreeably to that testimony of holy John, which may be called an epitome of the gospel: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us; because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" 1Jo 4:9,10. To believe in Him as the Son of God, and to confess Him as such before men-this, in the New Testament, is the distinguishing mark of the disciples of Jesus. That in believing Him to be the Son of God, they believed Him to be equal with God, which He could only be by being His true and eternal Son, is plain from the very language of the unbelieving Jews: "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" Joh 5:18.

We have already quoted two memorable instances of Peter' s faith and confession as witnessing to Jesus being "the Son of the living God" Mt 16:16 Joh 6:69. We will now, with God' s help and blessing, examine some others of a similar kind; and amongst them we will first take Paul' s belief in, and testimony unto, the same vital truth: "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" Ac 9:20. Carefully examine, spiritual reader, and prayerfully consider the words that we have just quoted. What a marvel is here! We see the once persecuting Saul called by sovereign grace, made a believer in that Jesus whose name he had so abhorred, and whose people he would fain have swept off the face of the earth, and preaching Him boldly as the Son of God in the very synagogues where he intended, in his blind rage and headlong fury, to compel the saints at Damascus to blaspheme Ac 26:11. What did his heart so firmly believe, what did his mouth so boldly preach, but this vital truth, that Jesus is the true and real Son of God? His simple, child-like, new-born faith knew nothing of those crafty perversions, those subtle distinctions whereby truth is now denied under the pretence of being explained. Rising up by power divine into a spiritual apprehension of, and a living faith in, the Son of God, whose voice he had heard and whose glory he had seen, he knew no such dishonouring views of God' s only-begotten Son as that He was not His Son by nature and eternal subsistence, but by office, by virtue of the covenant, by a pre-existing human soul, by His complex Person, or by any such other fallacious interpretation as erroneous men have since invented to darken counsel by words without knowledge, and sully the pure revelation of God. When God revealed His Son

in Paul's heart Ga 1:16, it was to show him His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; and this glory was the glory in which He eternally subsisted as the true and real Son of God. Paul, therefore, from the revelation that he had of Him in his own soul, believed that He was the Son of God in His divine nature and eternal subsistence, that true and real Son of the Father in whom the Old Testament church believed as the promised Messiah, and for whose advent it had been so long waiting in faith and hope.

A few words upon the faith of the Old Testament saints may not be here, perhaps, out of place; for it may explain why Nathanael, Paul, the Eunuch, and others so implicitly and instantaneously received Jesus as the Son of God when once they believed in Him as the promised Messiah. There was no doubt in the mind of the believing Israelite that the true, real and proper Son of God was to come. The clear language of the second Psalm (Ps 2) and the express declaration of prophecy Isa 9:6 had already firmly laid that as the foundation of the faith of the Old Testament church. The question with the elect remnant when, Christ came in the flesh was, whether Jesus of Nazareth were He. Immediately, therefore, that Jesus was revealed to a God-fearing Jew as the promised Messiah, faith flowed out toward Him as the Son of God, for whose coming he was looking. Such believing Israelites were Simeon, Anna, Zacharias, Elizabeth, Nathanael, and other godly men and women "who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem" Lu 2:38. In a similar way, the high priest "adjured Jesus by the living God to tell them whether He was the Christ, the Son of God." The very chief priests and elders, and all the council, did not doubt that the true and real Son of God was to come, for that was the faith of the Old Testament church; but they disbelieved that Jesus who stood before them was He; and they crucified Him as a blasphemer, not as doubting that when the Messiah did come He would be the eternal Son of God, but as rejecting the claim of Jesus of Nazareth to be such. Thus not only believers, but unbelievers concur in exposing the ignorance and refuting the errors of those who in our day deny the eternal Sonship of Jesus. But now look with the same spiritual eye at the faith and confession of the Eunuch Ac 8:37. Philip, who had preached unto him Jesus, and no doubt in so doing had declared to him His true and proper Sonship, refused to baptise him till he was assured of his faith. In answer to that appeal, what was his confession? "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" Ac 8:35-37. Now, can we for a moment think that this new-born believer in the Son of God viewed Him as such by office, or by covenant, or by any such crafty invention of subsequent days as erroneous men have sought out whereby to obscure truth too bright, too dazzling for their dim eyes? Or do we not rather believe that his faith rose up at once to embrace the sublime mystery that Jesus of Nazareth whom Philip preached was the true and real Son of God? It is a sound and safe rule of interpretation that the simple, literal meaning of a passage is that which the Holy Ghost intends. Apply that rule to those passages where Jesus is spoken of as the Son of God, and it at once follows that His true and literal Sonship is meant by the expression. The Scriptures are written for the plain, simple-hearted, believing family of God, who receive the truth from His lips in the same unreasoning faith as a child listens to the teaching of its mother Ps 129:2 Isa 28:9. Now, where would be the childlike faith of all these simple-hearted believers if the blessed Jesus was not really and truly the Son of God, but only so by some mysterious explanation which denies the plain letter of truth? Spiritual reader, avoid mystical, forced, fanciful, strained explanations, and receive in the simplicity of faith the plain language of the Holy Ghost. It will preserve thy feet from the traps and snares spread for them by crafty men, who by fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. Seek rather to know and feel the power of truth in thy own soul, and to experience that inward blessedness and sacred liberty which the Son of God gives to those who believe in His Name, according to His own

words-words of solemn import against the servants of sin and error, but full of blessedness to those who kiss the Son in faith and affection Ps 2:12. "And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" Joh 8:35,36.

Having viewed the testimony borne to the Sonship of Christ by individuals, we will now, though not in strict chronological order, look at the united voice of the disciples. We read that after witnessing the miracle of Peter's walking on the sea, and the ceasing of the wind when Jesus came into the ship, "then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God" Mt 14:33. It was not that they did not so believe before, but they were so overwhelmed with the greatness of the miracle, and so awed by the power and presence of the Lord then in their midst, that their hearts bowed down before Him in holy adoration and believing love, as the very Son of the eternal Father, and as such possessed of all the power and glory of the Godhead. Can we suppose that their minds were taken up with speculations such as daring men have since invented to deny and dishonour both Father and Son; or did not rather their simple, childlike, and divinely-inspired faith at once embrace the blessedness of the mystery that the Jesus whom they saw, and at whose feet they fell, was the Son of the Father in truth and love?

But it is needless to multiply testimonies of this nature. It must be evident to all who read the New Testament with an enlightened eye that faith in the Son of God is put forward again and again as the grand distinctive feature of those who are born and taught of God.

We shall therefore now pass on to show the way in which this blessed truth is intimately and inseparably connected with the experience of every living soul, for that is the grand mark and test of a doctrine being of God; and in so doing we shall, as before, keep as closely as possible to the Scriptures of truth. 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, purging the conscience from dead works and purifying the heart from idols, and giving and maintaining communion with God.

1. A life of faith is the grand distinguishing mark of a saint of God here below. But this faith must have a living Object, and such a one as can maintain it in daily exercise. "Because I live, ye shall live also," was the Lord's own most gracious promise Joh 14:19. Now let us see what was Paul's experience on this point: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" Ga 2:20. The life which Paul lived in the flesh was "by the faith of the Son of God." This was his life of faith, looking unto, believing in, hanging upon the Son of God, and receiving out of His fullness supplies for all his need Joh 1:16 Php 4:13,19. Now, how is it possible for any then to live a similar life of faith unless he believe in the same way in the Son of God? And how can he believe that He is the Son of God if he deny His true and real Sonship? His grace and glory, His Person and work, His blood and righteousness, His suitability and all sufficiency, His beauty and blessedness, His love and sympathy, His headship and dominion, His advocacy and intercession as the great Priest over the house of God-in the knowledge, faith and experience of which the very life of a believer is bound up, are all so intimately connected with, all so directly and immediately flow from; His true Sonship, that they cannot be separated from it. Thus, if there be no faith in the Sonship of Christ, there can be no true faith in the Son of God; and if there be no true faith in the Son of God, what is a man, with all his profession, but one who has a name to live and is dead?

2. Communion with God, that rich, that unspeakable blessing, whereby a worm of earth

is admitted into holy converse with the Three-in-One Jehovah, is intimately, indeed necessarily, connected with the life of faith of which we have just been treating. But there can be no communion with the Father and the Son where there is no "acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ" Col 2:2. In other words, there must be a living faith in, and a sincere confession of the Son as the Son, before there can be any sacred fellowship with the Father and the Son. This is John's testimony: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" 1Jo 1:3. How, then, can any have fellowship that is, communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ if they deny both Father and Son, which they most certainly do if they reject the real Sonship of Jesus? Well may God say to such, "If I be a Father, where is Mine honour?" Mal 1:6 You may call Me your Father. I reject your claim; for you deny My dear Son, and "whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father" 1Jo 2:23. There may be a notional Christ presented to the imagination, a letter Christ conceived by the natural understanding, a Christ upon the cross, as in pictures and on the Romish crucifix, painted upon the eye of sense; and by a strong effort of the mind there may be, with all these representations, a something like faith and feeling which may be thought by poor, deceived, deluded creatures a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. But if there be no spiritual faith in His Sonship, there can be no spiritual communion with Him. It is only as the soul is blessed and favoured with discoveries of Him as the Son of God that faith goes out upon Him; hope anchors in Him, and love flows forth toward Him; and where these three graces of the Spirit are, there and there only is there a saving knowledge of His Person, a blessed experience of His grace, and a sacred fellowship of His presence.

3. Nor can there be; as it appears to us from John's testimony, any walking in the light of God's countenance, any fellowship with the family of God here below, or any saving knowledge of the cleansing blood of the Lamb where Christ's real Sonship is denied. And what is religion worth when these three blessings are severed from it? Consider, in the light of the Spirit, the following testimony: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" 1Jo 1:7. Look at the three blessings spoken of in this verse:

1. Walking in the light as God is in the light;

2. Having fellowship one with another;

3. An experience of the blood of Jesus Christ His Son as cleansing from all sin. And observe how the whole stress of the verse lies upon the words, "Jesus Christ His Son." Take away His true and real Sonship—for light there is darkness, for fellowship with the saints there is separation from them, and for the cleansing blood there is a guilty conscience and a sin-avenging God.

4. As there is no communion with Father and Son without a living faith in the true Sonship of Jesus, and no knowledge of atoning blood, so there is no indwelling of God without such a faith and confession. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God" 1Jo 4:15. To be a saving confession there must first be a believing heart Ro 10:10, and wherever the one precedes, the other certainly follows 2Co 4:13. If, then, there be no true faith, there can be no true confession; but a heart which believes aright will ever manifest itself by a confessing tongue. It is for this reason that John pronounces such a blessing on "whosoever confesseth that Jesus is the Son of God." But do those confess Him who deny His true and proper Sonship? No; he only confesses Him whose eyes have been anointed to see His beauty and glory as the only-begotten of the Father, and whose faith embraces Him as having

been eternally such. In his happy soul "God dwelleth" by His Spirit and grace, for in receiving the Son of God as such into his heart, he has received the Father also 1Jo 2:23; and "he dwelleth in God," for by dwelling by faith in the Son of His love he dwelleth also in the Father. Then how can he who denies the true and real Sonship of Jesus have any part or lot in a blessing like this?

5. Another rich blessing connected with faith in the true and proper Sonship of Christ is victory over the world. "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" 1Jo 5:5 A man must either overcome the world, or be overcome by it. To overcome the world is to be saved; to be overcome by it is to be lost. He, then, who does not believe that Jesus is the Son of God does not, and cannot, overcome the world, for he has not the faith of God's elect; he is not born of God; there is no divine life in his soul; and he has therefore no power to resist the allurements, endure the scorn, or rise superior to the frowns and smiles of the world, but is entangled, carried captive, and destroyed by it. Where the world is loved the heart is necessarily overcome by it, for in the love of the world, as in the love of sin, is all the strength of the world. Now unless the love of Christ in the soul be stronger than the love of the world, the weaker must give way to the stronger. Unbelief, heresy and error cannot overcome the world, for such are utter strangers to the faith which purifies the heart from the lust of it, to the hope which rises above it, and to the love which lifts up the soul beyond it.

6. Again, it cannot be doubted that of all the blessings which God can bestow in living experience few surpass a knowledge of the possession of eternal life. But this rich blessing is intimately connected with faith in the Sonship of Jesus. This is John's testimony: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the Name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life" 1Jo 5:13. To whom does John write? To those that "believe on the Name of the Son of God." They alone can receive and believe his testimony, for they alone possess the inward teaching and witness of the blessed Spirit to the truth of his word. He does not write to heretics, to erroneous men, to disbelievers in, to deniers of the true Sonship of Jesus. As these have not the Son of God, they have not life 1Jo 5:12, and John writes not to the dead, but the living. For their sakes, and to confirm their faith and hope, he writes that, from the witness of the Spirit, they may know in their own hearts and consciences that they have eternal life; and this they have because they have the Son. If this be true, none can know that they have eternal life but those who believe in the Name of the Son of God. And how can we think that those believe in that Name who deny His true and real Sonship, to set up in its place an idol, a figment of their own vain mind? and because they cannot understand the mystery of an eternal Son, or make it square with their natural ideas of generation, renounce it altogether, or explain it utterly away?

Nor, as it appears to us, can the fundamental doctrine of the Trinity be maintained except by holding the eternal Sonship of Christ. There are two errors of an opposite nature as regards the doctrine of the Trinity:

1. One is Tritheism, or setting up three distinct Gods; the other,
2. Sabellianism, which holds that there is but one God under three different names. Each of these errors destroys the Trinity in Unity, the first by denying the Unity of the Essence, the second by denying the Trinity of the Persons. The true and scriptural doctrine of the Trinity steers between these two erroneous extremes, and holds a Trinity of Persons in a Unity of Essence. Now, the Lord Jesus, as the eternal Son of the Father, is distinct from Him as His Son, and yet necessarily one with Him as partaking of the same Essence; and the Holy Ghost, as proceeding from the Father and the Son, is distinct also from those Persons of the Trinity, and yet, as eternally proceeding from both, partakes of their Essence likewise. Thus we have a Trinity of Persons, but a Unity of Essence-One God, but eternally subsisting as Father, Son and

Holy Ghost. Eternal Sonship gives to the Son a Unity of Essence with the Father, and yet a distinctness of Person; thus, as the Son He is one with the Father Joh 10:30, and yet as the Son He is distinct from the Father. So eternal procession from the Father and the Son gives to the Holy Ghost Unity of Essence with the Father and the Son, and yet a distinct Personality. Upon this firm basis the Trinity stands. But if you remove the eternal Sonship of Christ, you also must take away the eternal procession of the Holy Ghost; and by so doing you destroy the Unity of Essence and inter-communion of Nature of Israel' s Triune God. If the denial of the eternal Sonship of Jesus involve such consequences, well may we tremble at such an error as removes the very foundations of revealed truth. All other views of the Sonship of Christ lower His essential and eternal dignity and, however craftily disguised, tend to, and usually end in, Arianism. If His Sonship be not His eternal mode of subsistence, it must, in some way or other, be created Sonship, and what is this but Arian doctrine in its very root and essence? How the Son can be eternally begotten, and how the Holy Ghost can eternally proceed, is a mystery which we cannot understand, much less explain; but we receive it by faith, in the same way as we receive the "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." If once we begin to reason on these matters, we are lost at the very threshold of our inquiry. To believe, not to speculate; to receive the testimony that God has given of His Son; not to doubt, argue and cavil, is the only sure path, as well as the peculiar blessedness of a child of God.

THE ETERNAL SONSHIP OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

CHAPTER IV.

As one stronghold of the opponents of the true and proper Sonship of the blessed Lord consists in the various objections, raised for the most part by carnal reasoning, which have been urged by various preachers and writers against it, and as some of these objections are very subtle and, at first sight, of some weight, we have felt that it might be desirable to notice those of any importance, and, as far as we can, to remove them out of the way, for they are often sad stumbling-blocks even to some who believe and love the truth. But before we take them up severally one by one, it may be necessary to premise a few observations on the nature of objections generally, for it is a subject often not sufficiently understood either by those who employ them, or by those who are influenced by them. It is a common idea, that if a strong objection be started against a doctrine, and that objection cannot be fully or satisfactorily answered, it is like laying an axe to the root of a tree, which at once effectually and for ever overthrows it. But there cannot be a greater fallacy, as will be in a moment evident from the following considerations:

1. The objection may be capable of an answer, though you may not be able to answer it;
or
2. It may arise from the objector misunderstanding or taking a false view of the question;
or
3. The whole subject may lie beyond the reach of our reasoning faculties; or
4. Compared with the weight of testimony in favour of the point in hand, the objection may be absolutely of no real weight. To make our meaning a little plainer, apply these considerations to the subject of miracles, and see how they bear upon the point of objections raised against their truth as narrated in the Old and New Testaments.

Infidels, such as Hume and others, have brought the most powerful objections against miracles, as being not only contrary to all our present experience, but as opposed to the very course and fixed laws of nature, as to gravitation, for instance, when the iron axe-head was made to swim 2Ki 6:6, or when the Lord walked upon the water. Now,

1. You might not be able to answer these objections were they put to you personally by a clever infidel. But another person, who had considered the subject more deeply than you might be able to do what you could not. Or,
2. The infidel objection might arise from the objector taking a false view of the whole subject of miracles as not understanding their necessity to establish revelation, or from his setting aside the power of God who made the laws of nature temporarily to suspend them.
Or
3. The explanation how water, for instance, was miraculously turned into wine, or a few barley loaves and fishes at once so multiplied as to feed thousands, may be wholly beyond the reach of our present faculties. Or
4. The objection drawn from natural reasons may not be worth a straw against the weight of the testimony on the other side, say of the five thousand men who ate of the loaves and fishes. Objections, therefore, even if they cannot be fully or satisfactorily answered, so far from cutting

the tree down against which they are directed, may not even lop off a bough from the stem. Be not, therefore, discouraged or tempted to give up the truth of Christ's eternal Sonship because strong objections may be brought against it.

But in addition to the considerations which we have offered upon objections generally, bear in mind as regards heavenly mysteries:

1. That there is not a single truth of revelation against which strong objections may not be raised;

2. That divine truth is a matter of faith, and thus out of the reach and beyond the province of reason, and that we are therefore called upon not to argue, but to believe;

3. That there is no more common device of Satan than to suggest objections against every sacred mystery; and

4. That if these objections be listened to, and obtain any firm hold over the mind, their almost inevitable effect is either to close it altogether against the truth, or to fill it with suspicions, or even infidel suggestions, which may cast it down into the greatest distress and perplexity. Anyone may find this to be the case who has watched the power of objections on his own mind, and felt how they have robbed and spoiled him of his strength and comfort in the hour of temptation.

But let us also bear steadfastly in mind that there is not a single revealed truth against which strong objections may not be alleged. He who denies or is ignorant of this has a very shallow knowledge either of the points themselves, or of the opposition that has been raised in all ages against them. Prophecy, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the resurrection of the body, the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, the doctrines of grace, and numberless other vital truths have ever had to encounter the greatest objections, and objections of such a nature that reason is utterly unable to answer them. I fairly confess for myself, as the result of more than thirty years experience of the power of objections on the mind, that if I had listened to them, or rather if they had not been subdued by the Spirit and grace of God, I should long ago have renounced every divine truth, and become a confirmed infidel. Thus I am, neither a stranger to objections, nor to the way-the only way-in which they can be met. And I no less plainly see in the case of those unhappy men whose minds are prepossessed with the objections which have been raised against the eternal Sonship of Christ, that they are held so fast in them that they cannot believe it, nor can they receive the strongest and clearest testimonies of Scripture in its favour.

Now, to bring these observations to a head, apply them to the various objections raised against the true, proper and eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord. When brought to the test, they will be found either to be misconceptions, or misrepresentations, or false deductions, or mere natural arguments, and therefore to stand on precisely the same ground as objections to miracles, because they are contrary to certain fixed laws of nature; or to the resurrection, because we see the body reduced to dust, and cannot understand how the same identical body can rise again; or even to the Bible itself, as containing many statements apparently inconsistent with the discoveries of modern science. It is, then, a most hazardous thing for a person who desires to know and believe the truth savingly for himself to listen to objections against it, and to give them a place in his mind. Let him rather seek the promised, teaching of the Spirit, and say to all objections which would wrest the truth out of his hand, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things which be of God, but those which be of men."

We must also bear carefully in mind that on such mysterious subjects as that before us it is impossible for us, with our present faculties, to comprehend them, and that therefore carnal

reason can always suggest objections to them which cannot be met on similar grounds What finite intelligence can grasp infinity? "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out" Job 37:23. "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea" Job 11:7-9. May we not, then, truly add, with Zophar, of those who object to divine mysteries because apparently contradictory to human reason, "For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass' s colt"? Job 11:12

But let me now address myself to some of the objections which have been made to the true and proper Sonship of our blessed Lord.

1. The first objection that I shall notice is that "we thereby make the Lord Jesus Christ to be a begotten God." The irreverence of this expression is quite in keeping with the usual way in which the opponents of truth seek to throw discredit on the views of their adversaries. Not content with drawing their own false deductions from the views which they oppose, they dress up these conclusions in a garb of their own manufacture in order to make them ridiculous or contemptible. Had they common fairness they would not impute to us so degrading, so irreverent a doctrine as a begotten God. The expression implies that we are Tritheists; that is, hold that there are three distinct Gods not three distinct Persons, and that of these three Gods one is the God who begets, the second the God who is begotten, and the third is the God who proceeds from the two other Gods. But this is not Trinitarianism, nor even Christianity under any form, but Hindooism. We are Trinitarians; that is, we believe there is but one God, who exists in a Trinity of Persons. If we held, as they impute to us, a begotten God, it would make us deny not only the Unity of the divine Essence, but the very self-existence of the only true God. We therefore repel the charge to the utmost of our power, and deny that our doctrine leads to any such conclusion. It is a mere natural deduction of their own. But do they not know that in heavenly mysteries we cannot, and must not, draw natural conclusions, especially if they clash with or contradict revealed truths? Is not revealed truth altogether out of the reach and beyond the grasp of the natural mind, and not amenable to logical argument? If reason be allowed to tread heavenly ground, and draw at its pleasure logical conclusions from Scripture truths, we must soon abandon the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the doctrines of grace, for strict logical conclusions would go far to overthrow them all. This is the very stronghold of German rationalism and English infidelity, and cannot be too much reprobated by a believer in revealed truth.

But as this objection was considered at some length in the Review of Mr. Crowther' s sermon "Gospel Standard," June, 1860; I will content myself with reproducing what was there advanced upon that point.

The adversaries of the eternal Sonship of our, blessed Lord often throw into our teeth that we hold what they are pleased to call for there is a sad want of holy reverence in their language "a begotten God." Thus the author of the above sermon says, "There is not one particle of evidence from Genesis to Revelation that the Deity of Christ is a derived, a begotten, a generated, and thus an originated and not an original Deity;" and again p. 9, "However much assertions may be made about eternal Sonship, eternal generation, or begotten God, those assertions being totally at variance with both the letter and the spirit of the word, are not entitled to any weight." Mr. Crowther and others may have deduced such a conclusion, but they must be sadly ignorant of divine truth not to know that in such sacred mysteries as the Trinity, and truths of a similar kind, it is not permissible to deduce logical conclusions from given premises, as in mere natural reasoning. But where can they find such an expression as "a begotten God" used by

any writer or preacher who advocates the eternal Sonship of the blessed Lord? It is an expression highly derogatory to the blessed Jesus, and intended only to cast contempt on the doctrine of His eternal Sonship. A few words, therefore, upon this point may not be out of place. We draw a distinction, then, between the Essence of God and the subsistence of the Three Persons of the Godhead in that Essence. God "is" Heb 11:6. His great and glorious Name as the one Jehovah is, "I AM," or "I AM that I AM." This is His Essence, which is necessarily self-existent; and this self-existent Essence is common to the Three Persons in the Godhead. Were it not so, Jehovah would not be one Lord De 6:4. But in this self-existent Essence there are Three Persons, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father, not in His Essence, which is self-existent, but in His Personality, or that by which He subsists as a Person in the Godhead. No writer to our mind has handled this point with greater clearness and ability than Dr. Gill, and as his words will justly and necessarily have more force and weight than any of our own, we will give an extract from his "Body of Divinity." on the subject. And first let us see what the Doctor says about the Essence of God:

There is a nature that belongs to every creature which is difficult to understand; and so to God the Creator, which is most difficult of all. That Nature may be predicated of God, is what the apostle suggests where he says, the Galatians before conversion served them who "by nature were no gods" Ga 4:8, which implies that though those they had worshipped were not, yet there was One that was, by nature, GOD; otherwise there would be no impropriety in denying it of them.... Essence, which is the same thing with nature, is ascribed to God; He is said to be excellent, in essence Isa 28:29, for so the words may be rendered; that is, He has the most excellent Essence or Being. This is contained in His names, Jehovah and I AM THAT I AM, which are expressive of His Essence or Being, as has been observed; and we are required to believe that He is, that He has a Being or Essence, and does exist Heb 11:6; and essence is that by which a person or thing is what it is, that is, its nature.

"This nature is common to the Three Persons in God, but not communicated from one to another; They each of Them partake of it, and possess it as one undivided nature; They all enjoy it; it is not a part of it that is enjoyed by one, and a part of it by another, but the whole by each; as all the fullness of the God-head dwells in Christ, so in the Holy Spirit; and of the Father there will be no doubt; these equally subsist in the unity of the divine Essence, and that with out any derivation or communication of it from one to another. I know it is represented by some who otherwise are sound in the doctrine of the Trinity, that the divine nature is communicated from the Father to the Son and Spirit, and that He is fons Deitatis, ' the fountain of Deity,' which I think are unsafe phrases, since they seem to imply a priority in the Father to the other Two Persons; for He that communicates must, at least, in order of nature and according to our conception of things, be prior to whom the communication is made; and that He has a superabundant plenitude of Deity in Him, previous to this communication. It is better to say that They are self-existent, and exist together in the same undivided Essence; and jointly, equally, and as early one as the other, possess the same nature."-"Body of Divinity," Book I., Chap. iv. [There is an excellent summary of the Doctor's views on these points in the Memoir of Dr. Gill, prefixed to Mr. Doudney's edition of his Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. i. p. 26] The Essence of God, then, as thus ably and clearly explained, is that by which He exists; and as there can be but one God, and He is necessarily self-existent, His Essence is clearly distinct from the modes of subsistence of the Three Persons in the Godhead. The adversaries of the eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord, we will not say designedly, but probably through misconception, would represent our views somewhat in the following light, which, however, we put forward

with considerable reluctance, as on a subject so holy and sacred we dare not to think, much more to speak in any way derogatory to the glory of a Triune Jehovah. They would represent us, then, as holding that first there existed the Father alone; that He begat another God, whom we call the Son; and that from the Father and Son there proceeded another God, whom we call the Holy Ghost. But this perversion of truth is not our doctrine, nor can any such conclusion be legitimately deduced from our views. It may serve their purpose to seek to overthrow the scriptural doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the adorable Redeemer, by dressing up our views in a garb of their own manufacturing, or passing off their illegitimate progeny as our true-born offspring; but we refuse the dress which they would put upon their back, and disavow the children which they would lay at our door. It does not follow because the Lord Jesus Christ is the only-begotten Son of God in His divine nature, that He is "a begotten God."

How, then, it may be asked, do we sustain our doctrine of eternal generation and at the same time obviate such a conclusion? We sustain it thus. We have already shown that there is a distinction between the Essence of God, which is one and self-existent, and the Personality of the Three Persons in the Godhead. Which is threefold, and thus intercommunicative, and so far dependent. We have to lament the inadequacy of language, or at least of our own language, to set such sublime mysteries forth; but the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity can only be so defended. The Unity of God implies self-existence; the Trinity in Unity implies relationship. Thus as regards the Unity of Essence Christ is self-existent; but as regards the Trinity He is begotten. He is therefore not a begotten God, though He is a begotten-Son. This explanation may be called mystical and obscure; but on such deep and incomprehensible subjects all thought fails and all language falters. Yet as we are sometimes called upon to state or defend our views of divine truth, it is desirable to have clear views of what we believe, and to express them as plainly as possible. We believe, then, that there are Three Persons in the Godhead, and that these are distinguished from each other by certain personal relationships, and that these personal relationships are not covenant titles, names, or offices, but are distinctive and eternal modes of existence. We are thus preserved from Sabellianism on the one hand, which holds that there is but one God with three different names; and Tritheism on the other, which makes three distinct Gods. But believing in a Trinity of Persons, in the Unity of the divine Essence, we say that the father is a Father as begetting; the Son is a Son as begotten; the Holy Ghost is a Spirit as proceeding. If, as imputed to us, we were to say that the Son is "a begotten God," we should deny Him self-existence in His Essence, as One with the Father and the Holy Ghost; as if we should say that He is a Son by office or by His incarnation, we should deny, as Mr. Crowther does, His true, proper and actual Sonship. To sum up the whole in a few words, it is in His Person, not in His Essence, that He is the only-begotten Son of God. Dr. Gill has opened up this distinction with his usual clearness and ability in the following extract from his "Body of Divinity":

When I say it is by necessity of nature, I do not mean that the divine nature, in which the divine Persons subsist, distinguishes Them; for that nature is one and common to Them all. The nature of the Son is the same with that of the Father; and the nature of the Spirit the same with that of the Father and the Son; and this nature, which They in common partake of, is undivided; it is not parted between Them, so that one has one part, and another a second, and another a third; nor that one has a greater and another a lesser part, which might distinguish Them, but the whole fullness of the Godhead is in each.

"To come to the point: it is the personal relations or distinctive relative properties which belong to each Person which distinguish Them from one another; as paternity in the First Person,

filiation in the Second, and spiration in the Third; or, more plainly, it is begetting Ps 2:7 which peculiarly belongs to the First, and is never ascribed to the Second and Third, which distinguishes Him from Them both, and gives Him; with great propriety, the Name of the Father; and it is being begotten, that is the personal relation, or relative property of the Second Person, hence called the only begotten of the Father Joh 1:14, which distinguishes Him from the First and Third, and gives Him the name of the Son; and the relative property, or personal relation of the Third Person is, that He is breathed by the First and Second Persons; hence called the breath of the Almighty, the breath of the mouth of Jehovah the Father, and the breath of the mouth of Christ the Lord, and which is never said of the other Two Persons, and so distinguishes Him from Them; and very pertinently gives Him the name of the Spirit, or breath" Job 33:4 Ps 33:6 2Th 2:8. "Body of Divinity," Book I., ch. 28.

It will be seen from these extracts that a distinction is drawn between Essence and Person; but as some of my readers may feel a difficulty in gathering up the distinction between the two, I submit the following idea as an illustration, but, be it remembered, only as an illustration. Human nature is distinct, or at least distinguishable, from the individual men and women who in common possess that nature. Thus we may say that, human nature is common to all men and women, and yet that men and women are distinct from one another as individuals. So, in a high and mysterious sense, the Essence of Deity, which is self-existent, may be distinguished from the Persons in the Deity, who sustain to each other a peculiar and eternal relationship. In Their Essence They are One, in Their Personality They are Three; in Their Essence They are self-existent, in Their Personality They subsist, the Father as Father to the Son, the Son as Son to the Father, the Holy Ghost to both as proceeding from the Father and the Son. Thus we establish a Trinity in Unity. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." There is the unity of the divine Essence. "There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost." There we have the Trinity of Persons in the divine Essence, "for these Three are One" 1Jo 5:7.

2. Another objection brought forward against the eternal Sonship of the blessed Lord is, that it denies His co-eternity and co-equality with the Father. For this is their carnal deduction from the doctrine of Christ's true and proper Sonship, that as a father necessarily exists before a son, if Christ be the true and proper Son of God, He must have come into being subsequently to the Father, and consequently cannot be co-eternal with Him. But to this we answer:

We must not carry ideas borrowed from earth and time into heaven and eternity, and weigh and measure the nature and being of God by the nature and being of man. But, even on natural grounds, so far from a father necessarily existing before a son, it is not true, for though a father exists as a man before he has a son, yet he is not a father before he has a son. Father and son, therefore, even in time, only co-exist at the same instant, for the mutual relationship commences at the same moment. But, the very expression, "the eternal Son," declares His co-eternity with the Father. For are there two eternities? If the Father exist from all eternity as the Father, and the Son exist from all eternity as the Son, is not this co-eternity? In asserting, therefore, His eternity we assert His co-eternity. So with His co-equality. As giving Him all the perfections of Deity, as making Him one with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the Unity of the divine Essence, we assert His equality, and if His equality, His co-equality; for as there are not two eternities, so there are not two equalities. If our blessed Lord is the eternal Son, He is necessarily the co-eternal Son; if He is the equal of the Father, He is His co-equal. Indeed, it is as His Son that He is co-equal with the Father; for as a Son He partakes of His nature, is the brightness of His glory, and the express Image of His Person. He therefore said to Philip, "Have I

been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou, then, Show us the Father?" Joh 14:9 And again, "I and My Father are One." In Deity there can be no inequality, in eternity no priority or posteriority. It is because men will persist in carrying earthly ideas into heavenly things that they thus stumble and fall at the foundation which God has laid in Zion.

3. Another objection made to the eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord is founded on the term, "eternal generation," which divines have made use of in order to express it. This expression seems especially to move their spleen; and the language which some of the opponents of the true and proper Sonship of Jesus have permitted themselves to use against it is truly awful to a spiritual mind, which has ever seen or felt the blessedness of that heavenly truth. It has been called even lately "a piece of twaddle," "a metaphysical conceit," "a self-contradiction," "an impossibility in the nature of things," "carnal and contrary to the Scriptures," "a fable," "a figment," "an error which has seen its day, which is now dying out, becoming effete, waxing old and vanishing away," [These expressions are all contained in a piece on the subject by "A Little One," in the "Earthen Vessel" for Nov., 1860.] as if the true and proper Sonship of Jesus, as the only-begotten of the Father, were a lying tale, a vain, absurd tradition, which the growing intelligence of the age was fast exploding. Nay, the same writer has gone so far as to declare in print that "he solemnly believes the eternal generation doctrine to be from beneath," and "to be intended by the enemy to lower and lessen the absolute Divinity and Godhead of Christ." ["Earthen Vessel," December, 1860.] Whence his "solemn belief" comes it is not for us to pronounce, but we are sure it is not from the same source as the faith which made Peter say, "And, we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" Joh 6:69. To one Who knows and loves the truth it is indeed truly grievous to read such declarations, and to witness the bold effrontery with which men and ministers, of whom better things might have been hoped, thus assail the blessed truth of our Lord's being "the only-begotten of the Father;" for though they may point their arrows chiefly against the expression, "eternal generation," yet it is the doctrine proclaimed by the term, not the bare term itself, against which they bend their bow. One of their complaints against the term is that it is not an expression to be found in the Scriptures, just as if we were so tied to every exact Bible word, as not to be allowed to use any other. The precise language of the Holy Ghost is, beyond all doubt, the very best, and no terms should be used which are not in full accordance with that inspired Word; but we are not so bound to the exact words of Scripture as to be debarred all others. If thus tied to exact Scripture terms, we ought strictly to use, no language but the original Greek and Hebrew, or if allowed to employ the words of our English translation, we should always observe their exact order. But if the doctrine be there, what reasonable objection can there be to a term as long as it expresses that doctrine clearly and correctly? It is necessary sometimes to use condensed expressions as conveying in a few words a doctrine or truth which otherwise would require a long sentence fully to express it. Thus we use, the words, "Trinity," "the Ordinance," as applied to the Lord's Supper, "the doctrines of grace," "particular redemption," "effectual calling," "final perseverance," none of which terms are to be found *totidem verbis*, that is, in so many precise words, in the Scriptures, but are yet all blessed Bible truths, and could not be so well, expressed by other terms. If, too, we object to the words "eternal generation," not only as not being scriptural, but as implying a contradiction, why should we not, on similar grounds, object to the words, "eternal union," "eternal counsels," "eternal decrees," "eternal fixtures," "eternal purposes," "eternal justification"? And yet these expressions are continually made use of by the very persons who so object to the term; "eternal generation."

But, not only is it an unobjectionable term, and one which has been sanctioned by our greatest divines, as Owen, Goodwin, Bunyan, Gill, etc., but it expresses what could not be so well or so clearly conveyed by any other. Those who so strenuously object to it, may not, perhaps, be altogether aware either of the time of its introduction or of the reason why it was first introduced. It is, then, not only one of those concise and convenient expressions which divines in all ages have employed to communicate scriptural truth in a clear, definite form, but was first used for this very purpose by the ancient Fathers. The necessity for the use of clear and definite terms soon arose in the Christian church; for as errors and heresies sprang up at a very early period as so many tares sown by the enemy of souls among the wheat, men of God felt themselves compelled to meet the subtle wiles of the adversaries of truth by proofs drawn from the Word of God. But besides adducing exact scripture language, it was found necessary, as error assumed a bolder front, to adopt specific terms, in order to define the truth more clearly; for it was soon discovered that erroneous men sheltered their heresies under scripture phraseology, assigning to it all the while a meaning of their own distinct from its true and received, acceptance. When, then, Arius in the fourth century broached his doctrine of the Son's being generated of the Father before time, but not from all eternity, and that, therefore, there was a period when the Son was not, {3} the ancient Fathers made choice of the term "eternal generation," to distinguish the proper and eternal filiation of Jesus from His generation in the sense of Arius, who admitted the generation of the Son, but not His eternal generation, and craftily used generation in the sense of making or forming, not begetting. He thus denied that the Son was co-equal, co-eternal and con-substantial of the same substance with the Father. {4} To oppose, then, this fearful heresy, which was, in fact, a denial of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and degrading Him to a mere creature, the early Fathers {5} employed the term "eternal generation" to express concisely what is stated more largely in the Nicene Creed, "Begotten of His Father before all worlds," "begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father"- "begotten before all worlds," in opposition to the Arian doctrine of a "begetting which was not eternal;" "begotten, not made," in opposition to the interpretation of begetting as a being made; and "of one substance with the Father" in opposition to the Arian heresy that He was not of the same, but only of similar substance.

Having thus seen the origin and reason of the expression, and that it was especially directed against the Arian heresy, let us now examine a little more closely its meaning, for we may be sure that the ancient Fathers meant something by it. The great leaders of the Council of Nice, at which the Arian heresy was condemned, such as Athanasius, etc., knew what they were about, for they had to contend with men of the most daring audacity and the subtlest intellect, backed by an army of adherents all over the then known world, and at one period with the whole temporal power against them. It was, therefore, a common saying at that time, "Athanasius against all the world, and all the world against Athanasius." Now, if these mighty champions for the truth adopted the term "eternal generation" to express the true filiation of Jesus, we may be sure that they had some good grounds for its adoption. By it, therefore, they meant this great and glorious truth, that Jesus is "the Son of the Father in truth and love" 2Jo 1:3; "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father" Joh 1:18; "His own Son" Ro 8:32; "His only begotten Son" Joh 3:16; that He was this from all eternity; and that, not by virtue of any compact, or covenant, or foreview, or constitution of His complex Person as God-man, but by His very mode of subsistence as a Person in the Trinity. They did not attempt to explain the mystery of His eternal generation, for "who shall declare His generation?" Isa 53:8 And they might well say to those who would fain bring such a deep, incomprehensible subject to be tried and judged at the

bar of human reason, "Who hath gathered the wind in His fist? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Sons name, if thou canst tell?" Pr 30:4. Neither His name, nor His Son's name, that is, neither the being and perfections of the Father, nor the being and perfections of His dear Son, can be comprehended by human intellect any more than a man can gather the winds in his fists, or wrap up the Atlantic in his cloak. They were content to believe and declare the truth, without venturing to comprehend, much less explain the mystery. {1} The Arians might argue that it was "a contradiction," an "impossibility," "an absurdity," for these are not new charges against the true and real Sonship of our blessed Lord, but their strong, yet simple, faith was not moved by such arguments, for it stood not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, and firmly rested in the sure testimony of God as revealed in the Scriptures, and in the inward witness of the blessed Spirit as sealing that testimony with a divine power upon their heart. This was their sufficient, their only and all-sufficient answer to all the cavilling arguments and subtle reasonings of the adversaries of truth. Milner well says of them; "To believe, to suffer, and to love-not to write" and we might add, "not to argue"- "was the primitive taste;" for they were of that martyr band {2} of whom we read that "they over-came" Satan and his accusations "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death" Re 12:11.

Here, and here alone, do I, too, as desiring to walk in these footsteps of the flock, find any rest for my own soul. I have seen and felt an indescribable grace and glory, an inexpressible beauty and blessedness in the true and real Sonship of Jesus, to give up which would be to renounce all my hope of eternal life. Thus, it is not with me a matter of argument, still less of theory and speculation, but a truth on which the whole weight of my soul hangs for eternity. With these views and feelings, then, and in the exercise of this faith, and hope, and love, in which I believe hundreds of the Lord's family share with me, I may well be excused if I have earnestly contended for a truth which has been made so precious to my soul. I should be sorry if I had contended for it unfairly, bitterly, or angrily, for besides wounding my own conscience by using such unhallowed weapons, I should have injured the cause which lies so near to my heart; for I am bidden to "put away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking" Eph 4:31; and I am assured by infallible authority that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" Jas 1:20. I may not be able, it is true, to answer fully and satisfactorily every objection which carnal reason may urge against it, or explain the mystery of an only-begotten Son. But can I explain how the Creator of the world lay in the Virgin's womb? Can I solve the mystery how Joshua bade the sun stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon? Jos 10:12, or can I unravel the miracle how the three children were cast into the burning fiery furnace, and yet that the very smell of fire did not pass on them? Da 3:27 The Son of God, I read, was with them in the furnace, and I know that He was not there in His complex Person, for He had not then assumed the flesh and blood of the children; but I can no more explain how He was there than I can explain His eternal generation. But I can believe what I cannot comprehend and realise a sacred blessedness in a mystery which I cannot explain. Nor do I rest my faith upon one or two isolated texts. I see the true and proper Sonship of our blessed Lord shining as with a ray of sacred light all through the New Testament. I see in it the love of God so tenderly and graciously revealed as when realised by faith melts the heart into gratitude and affection. I see in it such an ineffable and eternal relationship, intimacy and inter communion between the Father and the Son, and between the Son and the Father, of which we get a feeble glimpse in Joh 17, as, when felt, penetrates the soul with holy wonder and admiration. I see in it, too, the only title which the saints possess to become "sons of God," and as such to be made

"heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" Ro 8:17, for if He be no Son, then are they no sons, but because God is His Father, He is, therefore, their Father Joh 20:17. I see also in it a bond of eternal union between the Church and the Son, and through the Son with the Father, as expressed by the blessed Lord Himself Joh 17:21, which, as apprehended by faith, opens to the believing heart a view which fills it with astonishment and adoration. I see in it a security for the salvation of the elect of God, for it fixes it on the eternal love of the Father to His Son, as loving them with the same love as that wherewith He loved Him Joh 17:23; and lastly, I see in it that the very state of ultimate and eternal glory to which all the saints of God will be brought is that they may behold that glory which the Father has given to Jesus in that He loved Him as His only-begotten Son before the foundation of the world Joh 17:24. I see, also, that it is absolutely essential to the maintenance of the Trinity, as, if once we set aside the eternal and intimate intercommunion of the Three Persons in the sacred Trinity, we destroy the Unity of the Godhead, for we make Them three distinct Gods without any such necessary or natural relationship as gives Them that Unity by which, though They are Three distinct Persons, yet They are but One God. How, then, can I give up so choice, so blessed a truth? I had better part with my life, knowing that if I lose my life for Christ's sake, I shall surely find it; but that if I deny Him, He will as certainly deny me. My opponents may revile and deride me, may call me "a pope," "a fool," and "an ass," as they have already done. They may preach against me their abusive sermons, or write against me their abusive books, and I have already had no small share of both; but "I will take them upon my shoulder as my ornament, and bind them as a crown to me" Job 31:35,36, for I know that such treatment has ever been the lot of those who are valiant for the truth upon the earth. It is little to me what those may say and do who fight against the true and proper Sonship of the Lord of life and glory. It is not against us who seek to exalt His worthy Name that they fight, but against Him whom the Father has set as King upon His holy hill of Zion, and to whom. He has said, "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee" Ps 2:6,7. It would be their mercy if they could obey the heavenly warning, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry." But whether so or not, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" Ps 2:12.

FOOTNOTES: {1} Milner, in his Church History, treats this point with great clearness. Speaking of the Council of Nice, he says, "But it soon appeared that, without some explanatory terms, decisively pointing out what the Scriptures had revealed, it was impossible to guard against the subtleties of the Arians." Did the Trinitarians assert that Christ was God? The Arians allowed it, but in the same sense as holy men and angels are styled gods in Scripture. Did they affirm that He was truly God? The others allowed that He was made so by God. Did they affirm that the Son was naturally of God? It was granted, For even we, said they, are of God, of whom are all things. Was it affirmed that the Son was the power, wisdom and image of the Father? We admit it, replied the others; for we also are said to be the image and glory of God. Such is the account which Athanasius gives of the disputations. He was at that time deacon of the church of Alexandria, and supported his bishop with so much accuracy and strength of argument as to lay the foundation of that fame which lie afterwards acquired by his zeal in this controversy. What could the Trinitarians do in this situation? To leave the matter undecided was to do nothing; to confine themselves merely to Scripture terms was to suffer the Arians to explain the doctrine in their own way, and to reply nothing. Undoubtedly they had a right to comment according to their own judgment as well as the Arians; and they did so in the following manner. They collected together the passages of Scripture which represent the divinity of the Son of God, and observed that taken together, they amounted to a proof of His being of the same substance with the Father.

"That creatures were indeed said to be of God, because not existing of themselves, they

had their beginning from Him, but that the Son was peculiarly of the Father, being of His substance as begotten of Him."

"It behoves every one who is desirous of knowing simply the mind of God from His own Word, to determine for himself how far this interpretation of Scripture was true. The Council, however, was, by the majority before stated, convinced that this was a fair explanation, and that the Arian use of the term, God, true God, and the like, was a mere deception, because they affixed to them ideas which the Scriptures would by no means admit. But to censure the Council for introducing a new term when all that was meant by it was to express their interpretation of the Scriptures, appears unreasonable in the last degree, however fashionable. To say that they ought to have confined themselves to the very words of Scripture, when the Arians had first introduced their own gloss, seems much the same as to say that the Trinitarians had not the same right with the Arians to express their own interpretation of Scripture and in their own language."- Milner' s Church History, Vol. ii., p. 58.

{2} "Not a few of the Nicene fathers bore on their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus. Paul, bishop of Neocesarea, on the banks of the Euphrates, had been debilitated by the application of hot iron to both. his hands; others appeared there deprived of their right eyes, others deprived of their legs. A crowd of martyrs, in truth, were seen collected into one body."- Milner' s Church History, Vol. ii., p. 61.

{3} Arius thus speaks, "If the Father begat the Son, He that is be-gotten must have a beginning of His existence, from whence it is manifest that there was a time when the Son was not: and therefore it necessarily follows that He had His subsistence from things that are not," or was brought out of a state of non-existence into a state of existence.

{4} It must be either great ignorance or gross disingenuousness to impute to the advocates of the eternal Sonship of Jesus that they deny His co-eternity and co-equality with the Father, when the term, "eternal generation" was first used against the Arians, who held that heresy, and for the very purpose of declaring that as being the eternal Son of the eternal Father, the Son was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

{5} Basil, who was a great champion for the truth against the Arians, about the year A.D. 330, thus expresses himself: "As there is one God the Father, always remaining the Father, and who is for ever what He is; so there is one Son, born by an eternal generation, who is the true Son of God, who always is what He is. God the Word and Lord; and one Holy Spirit, truly the Holy Spirit."