

PREFACE

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 (1 John 5:20).

In writing this volume the authors are fully persuaded that the Bible is the written Word of God, inerrant and absolutely infallible. God's Word is the only valid source of information concerning the existence and character of God and the origin and destiny of man. In humbleness of heart and with childlike faith we should submit to God's revelation of Himself: "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" (Matthew 11:27).

The Bible reveals among other things that God has graciously made full provision for man's salvation in and through His only-begotten unique Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the desire of God that redeemed man should worship, honor, love, and serve Him. As the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever."

A correct understanding of God's revelation of Himself is vital if we are to respond properly to God in worship, love, and praise. One of the most remarkable truths revealed in the Bible is the triune nature of the godhead—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

These three persons of the godhead are one in the essential being of God, and yet each person is carefully distinguished in the Scriptures. Each person of the triune godhead has unique glories that rightly apprehended increase our love and admiration for our great God.

The Bible reveals that in the godhead exists a very special relationship that is implicit in the names *Father* and *Son*. We believe the Scriptures clearly teach that this relationship is of an eternal nature and that it displays one of the most beautiful and appealing glories of the Lord Jesus Christ, one that should delight our hearts and inspire our worship.

Over the years many have denied the eternal Sonship of Christ. Their reasons are basically twofold: (1) they feel that the term *Son* denotes inferiority and subjection, characteristics felt to be inappropriate to our understanding of the essential and eternal nature of Christ; (2) they speculate that the relationships between the persons of the godhead revealed in the New Testament were not actually personalized until the time of Christ's incarnation or even later. The position of those who deny the eternal Sonship of Christ will be referred to in this book as the incarnational Sonship view.

The differences between the two positions are significant. These differences are not simply matters of semantics or mere theological technicalities; they are fundamental. The following chart helps to summarize and contrast the two positions:

| ETERNAL SONSHIP | INCARNATIONAL SONSHIP |
|---|---|
| He was always the Son of God. He is the eternal Son. | Before the incarnation He was not the Son of God. |
| "Son of God" is Who He Is. | "Son of God" is What He Became. |

| ETERNAL SONSHIP | INCARNATIONAL SONSHIP |
|--|---|
| His Sonship is essential to His true identity and cannot be divorced from the person that He is. | His Sonship is not essential to His inherent identity. |
| “Son of God” is who He is in His being of beings. | “Son of God” is merely a title and role that He assumed. |
| His Sonship directly relates to His deity. | His Sonship directly relates to His incarnation. |
| “Son of God” means equal with God, indicating likeness or sameness of being. | “Son of God” means subservient to God, less than God. |
| God the Father has always been God the Father. | God the Father did not assume the title and role of Father until the incarnation. |
| Before the incarnation the Son was ever in the Father’s bosom. | Before the incarnation God had no Son, nor was He the Father. |
| The Father/Son relationship has eternally existed in the godhead. | Before the incarnation there was no Father/Son relationship in the godhead. |
| The Father sent His own Son into this world (see John 3:16-17; Galatians 4:4; etc.). | The One who would become the Father sent the One who would become the Son into this world. |
| The triune God has eternally existed in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. | The triune God has eternally existed in three persons, but not as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These were roles that were assumed in time. |

The authors are concerned because many believers, when confronted with these two positions, do not see the importance of the issue.

Years ago one of this century's great preachers, Dr. H. A. Ironside, wrote a history of the Plymouth Brethren movement. In this volume he mentioned an American Bible teacher, a follower of F. E. Raven, who denied eternal Sonship:

More recently the so-called Raven meetings have been divided over the teaching of an American leader who denied the truth of the Eternal Sonship of Christ. This most serious error caused many to take a definite stand against it and led to another separation. But sadly enough by far the greater majority saw nothing wrong in such views and have gone on with the promulgator of them. This puts these meetings entirely off the ground of the early Brethren who considered a true confession of Christ the very first consideration.¹

Several observations should be made: (1) Dr. Ironside, recognized as a man of keen doctrinal discernment, considered the denial of eternal Sonship a "most serious error"; (2) some took a definite stand against this error and a separation resulted; (3) Dr. Ironside was grieved not because of the necessary separation, but because "the greater majority saw nothing wrong" with such teaching and they continued to follow this Bible teacher; (4) Dr. Ironside as well as the early Brethren considered the denial of eternal Sonship to be incompatible with "a true confession of Christ."

History often repeats itself. Today there is a similar situation that is of grave concern to the authors and numerous others. When confronted with the denial of eternal Sonship, too many believers, including pastors and other Christian leaders, do not understand the importance of the

issue. They do not consider the denial serious error. They see nothing wrong with it. In their way of thinking it does not significantly affect the true doctrine of Christ, and the issue is certainly not worth fighting over. They are grieved not because of the error that is allowed and propagated, but because of those voices who seek to proclaim and preserve the doctrine of eternal Sonship. Those who speak out are criticized for their lack of love and tolerance and for causing discord among brethren.

In writing this book the desire of the authors is not to divide brethren, but rather to unite believers on the basis of a common understanding of the blessed person of the Son of God “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). This book seeks to show from the Scriptures the divine character of Christ and the eternal nature of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. This book also seeks to alert believers against any teaching that would in any way detract from the glory of God’s eternal and beloved Son.

The doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ cannot be set aside or minimized for the following reasons: (1) it is a doctrine plainly taught in the Word of God; (2) the teaching that denies the eternal Sonship of Christ robs the body of Christ, the true church, of a vital and precious belief essential to a proper understanding and appreciation of His person and work; (3) the truth of the gospel message and its presentation are affected because if we are not proclaiming Christ as the eternal Son of God, then we are preaching a Savior other than the person who has been revealed in the Scriptures; (4) failure to understand the persons of the godhead as revealed by His Word limits one’s practical relationship to His triune being; (5) denial of eternal Sonship deprives us of the enjoyment of one of the most beautiful glories of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this book George Zeller first establishes the deity of Christ and His pre-existence, after which he briefly examines the significance of the incarnation. Then he explains the doctrine of eternal Sonship and contrasts this position with the incarnational Sonship view.

The defense of the doctrine of eternal Sonship begins in chapter 6 with an examination by Mr. Zeller of the clear Scriptural evidence in support of the truth that the Father/Son relationship existed long before Bethlehem. The following chapter, written by Renald Showers, shows the Biblical significance of the term *Son of God* and demonstrates that it cannot mean “subservient to God.” Next is his detailed examination of Psalm 2:7, which is a critical Old Testament passage relating to Sonship; Dr. Showers considers this verse in light of its context and its New Testament usage.

Certain passages in God’s Word seem to some to support the incarnational Sonship position; in chapter 9 Mr. Zeller discusses these passages and analyzes some of the other arguments used by opponents of eternal Sonship. In the final chapter he explains why this doctrine is so important and necessary and why it must be upheld and defended by God’s people.

Dr. Herbert Bess, a Hebrew scholar, has graciously granted the authors permission to include in appendix A the excellent article in which he demonstrates that the true significance of the term *Son of God* is based on a very common Hebrew and Semitic idiom. His research gives further Biblical evidence supporting the conclusions of this book. In appendix B Mr. Zeller quotes other Bible teachers on the subject of eternal Sonship.

It is the great desire of the authors that readers of this book might be better enabled to praise and worship God as they contemplate the enormity of Christ’s condescension. The eternal Son emptied Himself and humbled Himself and became poor so that He might taste death for every

man, thereby making it possible for the believing sinner to be made rich in Him (2 Corinthians 8:9). May the living God ever receive our glory, honor, and praise: “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17).

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