

Controversy Concerning Christ's Eternal Generation



*From sermons preached by
W. E. Best*

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Controversy Concerning Christ's Eternal Generation Part 1

W.E. Best

“That God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, THOU ART MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE” (Acts 13:33 NASB).

Every subject of Scripture begins with God who has given the Holy Scriptures. Arguing about the authoritativeness of Scripture and being unable to agree on its teaching is doctrinally self-defeating. Denominationalism and non-denominationalism prove the disagreement on what the Bible actually says. There is little unanimity among professing Christians on basic Biblical principles. Furthermore, perfect concurrence of mind will never occur, even among regenerated chosen ones, until we are perfected in eternity. The absence of perfect like-mindedness does not excuse Christians from making effort to allow for different stages of growth in believers. We are exhorted to agree, be in the same mind, and in the same judgment (I Cor. 1:10). Therefore, every Christian is responsible to search the Scriptures to learn the main problems in professing Christendom.

Biblical authority does not continue in living men, but in the living oracles given by living prophets and apostles until Scripture was completed (II Pet. 1:16-21; II Tim. 3:15-17; Jude 3). Living oracles are like spring water in contrast to cistern water (John 4:13, 14). Like the woman of Samaria, only those who understand Christ's words in a spiritual sense find them living in operation. The oracles of God are living, and they are given to living people. They are called “living oracles” (*logia*, accusative neuter plural noun of *logion*, which means a saying or an oracle, and *dzonta*, present active participle accusative neuter plural of *dzao*, which means to live or be alive), because they are living to people who have been made alive by the Spirit in regeneration: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63 NASB).

The Holy Spirit who makes a person alive in Jesus Christ also makes him sensitive to the living and abiding word of God (I Pet. 1:23). In this sensitivity, the word becomes the instrument of salvation, not regeneration, to the elect (Rom. 1:16). Subsequent to salvation it becomes the instrument of progressive sanctification (John 17:17; Ps. 19:7-9; 119:1-174). There is a realm of truth beyond comprehension by man's natural powers, but this reality is never at the expense of the grammatical-historical account of Scripture. An artist can see and a musician can hear things the non-artist and non-musician could never see or hear. They illustrate that Christians understand and know things that non-

Christians cannot know or discern (Matt. 11:25-27; 16:17; I Cor. 2:14; I John 2:20, 27; 4:20).

The view that there is no eternal generation of the Son of God is as baseless as the theory of evolution. Evolution must be rejected because it contradicts the Bible, not because it is unscientific. If it were rejected because it is nonscientific, men would rely on science instead of the word of God.

The study of any Bible subject must begin where the Bible begins. Therefore, the starting place of eternal generation is the eternal decree of the "LORD" (*Yaweh*). The Psalmist, Job, and Moses spoke of the declaration of the Lord's decree: "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee" (Ps. 2:7 NASB). The Hebrew word for "decree" refers to something decreed, prescribed, or appointed. "But He is unique [consists of oneness—Owens] and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, that He does. For He performs [will complete—Owens] what is appointed for me, And many such decrees are with Him" (Job 23:13, 14 NASB). "And you shall observe this event [rite] as an ordinance [prescribed] for you and your children forever" (Ex. 12:24 NASB).

The Greek word for decree is *dogma*, a noun that means rule, law, order, or decree. It is used only 5 times in the New Testament (Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; 17:7; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14). Both the noun *dogma* and the verb *dogmatidzo* (*omai*), which means to obey rules and regulations—used only in Colossians 2:20—come from the verb *dokeo*. The noun *prothesis*, which comes from *protithemi*, provides a great study in the New Testament. The noun is used 12 times (Matt. 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4; Acts 11:23; 27:13; Rom. 8:28; 9:11; Eph. 1:11; 3:11; II Tim. 1:9; 3:10; Heb. 9:2). The verb *protithemi* is used three times (Rom. 1:13; 3:25; Eph. 1:9).

The Greek noun for "purpose" (*prothesis*) is derived from two words, the preposition *pro*, which means before, and *tithemi*, which means to place or set forth. The literal meaning is to place beforehand or to set forth prior to, and gives the meaning of purpose or plan. Therefore, God's decree (purpose) is an internal manifestation and exercise of His attributes that indicates what He will do. However, this is not the same as its execution. Purposing to create is not creation itself, as purposing to redeem and regenerate the elect is not actually redeeming and regenerating those the Father gave to Christ in the eternal covenant of grace.

Free grace theology stands alone in its emphasis on God's eternal purpose. Free will theology does not place God's eternal purpose in the foreground. This failure indicates Arminian free will theology is not theological but anthropological, because it begins with man instead of God.

God's purpose belongs to the ages. It includes both the conclusion and the means to that conclusion, because His purpose is executed by means. The

accomplishment of God's purpose by means is demonstrated in Paul's statement to the Thessalonians: "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thess. 2:13, 14 NASB). Election is unto salvation; therefore, it must precede salvation.

The following things reveal the way God executes His purpose:

1. God purposed to choose some to salvation (Eph. 1:4; I Thess. 1:4).
2. God chose to redeem by the Son the ones He chose to salvation (Eph. 1:7; I Pet. 1:18-21).
3. God chose to regenerate by the Spirit the ones He chose to redeem (John 3:8; Titus 3:5).
4. God chose the ones He regenerated by the Spirit to believe (John 3:18, 36; 10:26-30; Acts 13:48; I John 5:1).
5. God chose the ones He chose to believe to be holy (Heb. 12:14; II Cor. 7:1).
6. God chose the ones He chose to be holy to persevere (Heb. 10:39).
7. God chose the ones He chose to persevere to be glorified (Rom. 8:29, 30; I John 3:2, 3).

The preceding things are as simultaneous in God's mind as Christ's eternal generation, incarnation, death, resurrection, and glorification.

God executes His purpose in time by His decreed means. Those means are the fruits, not the cause, of His eternal decree or purpose. God will do what He pleases (Eph. 1:5, 9; Phil. 2:13) to fulfill His will (Eph. 1:1, 5, 9, 11).

The following things are true concerning God's purpose: (1) It is eternal (Eph. 1:4; II Tim. 1:9), (2) founded in Divine wisdom (Eph. 3:11), (3) efficacious (Is. 46:10, 11), (4) immutable (Acts 2:23), (5) absolute (I Pet. 1:2), (6) all-comprehensive (Rom. 8:28), and (7) permissive in reference to sin (Rom. 3:25, 26).

The Greek verb *gennaō* is used three times as a perfect active indicative with reference to the only begotten Son (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). It means to bear, bring forth, beget, or generate. No single graph for the perfect tense can be made. Eternal acts are indescribable. The eternal generation of the Son by the Father taking place in God's mind transcends time as well as the languages of time. Therefore, God uses an adverb of time (*semeron*) to accommodate Himself to man's limited understanding. The Hebrew word "Today" (*yome*) of Psalm 2:7 is used when speaking of day, daily, age, always, or perpetually. The Christian reader would understand it as "You are my Son; I have eternally [perpetually] begotten you." This harmonizes with the New Testament quotations (Acts 13:33;

Heb. 1:5; 5:5), which are a testimony in time to a fact beyond time in the eternal now. The testimony in time embraces the truth that Christ's eternity as Son in the past (from man's perspective) goes equally with His eternity in the future (from man's perspective), because there is no time in eternity. Jesus Christ was Son before He was appointed Heir (Heb. 1:2) and created all things (John 1:3). Scripture speaks of Melchisedek as a prototype (first or foremost type) of the Son of God: "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually [*dienekes*, pronominal adjective, which means continuous or for all time, or as an adverb, which means continually, or uninterruptedly]" (Heb. 7:3).

The perfect tense is a combination of aorist (point action) and present (linear action), which looks at both ends of the action. It implies a process, but views that process as having reached its consummation. The basic meaning is completed action with continuing results (resulting state of being). Neither the results nor the action is continuing. The following are ways the perfect tense may be used: (1) It may be used intensively, which means the action is not the point of emphasis. This is the tense of a finished product, a resultant state of being (Rom. 14:23). For example, it is a strong way of saying, "The Scriptures stand written" (Rom. 3:4) and "I am in a continual state of knowing" (I John 5:20). (2) It may be used consummatively, which means the completed action is emphasized (Rom. 5:5; II Tim. 4:7). (3) It may be used iteratively, which is a special case of the consummative (I John 1:1; II Cor. 12:17). Its stress is on completed action, but the character of the action is iterative before completion. (4) It may be used dramatically, where the past event is vividly brought into the present. It emphasizes the result (John 1:15; Rev. 5:7).

The Hebrew word for "begotten" (*yalad*) occurs in Psalm 2:7. It is a perfect masculine singular verb, which means to bear, beget, or bring forth. It is not causative in Psalm 2:7. It refers to an eternal relation of love. The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew) uses the perfect active indicative form of the verb *gennaō*, which is also used 3 other places (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). The Son of God excels the most excellent created creatures, God's chosen angels (I Tim. 5:21). No wonder the inspired penman of Hebrews extolled His excellence in Hebrews 1:1-14. Such transcendent language could never be applied to created creatures. Furthermore, the Father's love for the beloved One in His bosom transcends the love He has for His chosen ones He gave to the Son in the covenant of redemption. The transcendent love by the beloved Son of God is manifested in His willingness to lay down His life on behalf of the chosen ones the Father so loved that the Son of God was sent to be our Kinsman-Redeemer, Mediator, and Surety. Therefore, the generation of the Son is eternal and internal; and the Son's incarnation, ministry, and death are external and everlasting for our benefit.

Controversy Concerning Christ's Eternal Generation Part 2

"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware" (Ps. 2:7-9 NASB).

The declaration of Psalm 2:7-9 proves that the word "generation" is not inconsistent with equality. "Thou art My Son" is a term that would not apply to Jesus Christ if He were the Son of God in only an official or ethical sense (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; I John 4:9). The Lord Jesus Christ sustained a relation to God the Father that could be compared only with that which a son among men sustains to his father. The most important point to make in this regard is that the term "Father and Son" proves equality in the Divine nature (John 10:30). The Father chose for Himself (aorist middle indicative of *eklego*) a certain number from among mankind in His Son before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; John 17). Therefore, God appropriately and prophetically declared the eternal relationship and nature of the Father from whom and the Son in whom God's grace is eternally declared in His chosen ones (II Tim. 1:9).

The Divine Being destined some operations to be revealed in time for the benefit of the elect. Others will remain concealed (Deut. 29:29; Matt. 11:25-27). The eternal generation of the Son of God and the eternal election of some from among mankind to be sons of God are indwelling operations of God, but they differ. Eternal election is predetermined to be revealed in the lives of the recipients of grace (I Thess. 1:4; II Thess. 2:13, 14), but eternal generation is foreordained in God's decree to be declared (Ps. 2:7). One is subjective, and the other is objective. Since the excellence of the Son of God is equal with God the Father, such eminence can never be fully known by the people of God. That kind of knowledge, like the knowledge of God's love, surpasses knowledge: "...to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge...." (Eph. 3:19 NASB).

Knowing the unknowable appears to be a lack of clearness or distinctness about things that differ. However, Paul was placing one fact beside another fact in Ephesians 3:14-19 to show that one fact transcends the other fact: "...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through [*dia*, ablative of means, which means by means of] faith; and that you being rooted [perfect passive participle of *hridzoo*, which means have been firmly rooted] and grounded [perfect passive participle of *themelioo*, which means who have been firmly established] in love [The translation of the subordinating conjunction *hina* acts as a modifier and means in order that. It is omitted from the NASB], may be able [aorist active subjunctive of *exischuo*, which means may be fully able] to comprehend [aorist middle infinitive

of *katalambano*, a compound verb meaning to lay hold of, to obtain—I Cor. 9:24, to take possession of—Mark 9:18, to comprehend—John 1:5, to understand, realize, or learn—Acts 4:13; the middle voice indicates that these actions are for oneself] with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses [present active participle of *huperballo*, which means to go beyond or transcend] knowledge, that [*hina*, which means in order that] you may be filled [aorist passive subjunctive of *pleroo*, which means to fulfill, bring to completion, accomplish, make fully known, or proclaim fully] up to all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:17-19 NASB). Paul left no room for spiritual babies in the assemblies of Christ.

The revelation of God’s decree (purpose) gives the elect knowledge of Christ’s love; however, His love transcends the knowledge of the love Christians possess. In the same manner, the eternal generation of the Son of God transcends the everlasting regeneration of the sons of God who are eternally chosen in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Paul spoke about a particular love in the Ephesian passage under discussion, as the Psalmist spoke of a particular generation in his prophecy from God’s decree in Psalm 2:7, a statement quoted three times in the New Testament (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). Any person who denies Christ’s eternal generation by God the Father would, if consistent, be forced to reject the truth that grace was given to the elect in Christ Jesus from all eternity (II Tim. 1:9, 10). Furthermore, he would have to oppose the truth that God chose some for Himself before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). If election is disbelieved, grace is also disbelieved (Rom. 11:5). When grace is denied, nothing but hopelessness and despair remain.

A condition that has existed in professing Christendom for many years and is growing worse at an alarming speed is the concept of Excellency. “Majesty,” which is an inclusive word meaning character, grandeur, greatness in authority, or sovereignty, is not being expressed by popular religious minds. Their understanding of “Majesty” does not harmonize with Scripture: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov. 9:10 NASB). The “church” has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and substituted one so low and ignoble as to be utterly unworthy of any person who names the name of Jesus Christ. This low view of God is the cause of many other evils manifested today. A whole new philosophy of so-called Christian life has resulted from one basic error in religious thinking: “...You thought that I [God] was just like you...” (Ps. 50:21 NASB).

With the loss of the sense of Majesty has come the further loss of Christian awe and consciousness of the Divine presence. Religionists have lost the spirit of worship and the ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence. Therefore, the words “Cease striving, and know that I am God” of Psalm 46:10 (NASB) signify next to nothing to the self-confident bustling “worshipper” at the beginning of a new century. There may be external gains for many religions, but great internal losses are not even recognized (II Tim. 3:1-9). Where perverted

ideas about God appear, they soon rot the “churches.” Israel’s long history demonstrates this fact, and the general courses of the “churches” confirm it. Before the visible “churches” go into eclipse, their basic theology—the knowledge of the Holy One—will be corrupted. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of unworthy thoughts about God. Such thoughts lead to reprobation (Rom. 1:19-24).

Jonathan Edwards said, “Failure to ground the distinctions of the Divine essence by some immanent eternal necessity is to make easy the denial of what has been called the ontological Trinity, and then the rejection of the economical Trinity would not be difficult or far away.” A definition of Edward’s statement will afford a clearer understanding of the words “immanent,” “ontological,” and “economical”:

- (1) The word “immanent” refers to a mental act taking place within one’s mind and having no affect outside of it.
- (2) The word “ontological” denotes an argument that leads to an ideal conclusion of God’s existence. It is based on the Greek participle *on* of the verb *eimi*, meaning to be or exist. This argument reasons from God as the first cause of all things to the things He causes. It refers to the inherent idea that God exists. An individual may, as has been suggested, logically conceive of the nonexistence of the finite, but he cannot logically form a thought of the nonexistence of the Infinite. Absolute nonentity is unreasonable; therefore, the ontological argument has the approval of Scripture: “...I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14 NASB). This Biblical statement denotes the necessity of existence. Furthermore, the objective existence of God is more real than a person’s subjective idea of His existence.
- (3) The word “economical” applies to God working out His purpose to His own satisfaction: “...For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure” (Is. 46:9, 10 NASB).

The spiritual mind alone can understand that God speaks of things to come as though they were already present: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6 KJV). The statements “is born” and “is given” prove there is no time with Him who said, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14 NASB). God alone can call things to come as though they already exist: “As it has been written, I have appointed you [Abraham] a father of many nations, before God whom he [Abraham] believed, the One making alive and calling the things not existing as existing” (Rom. 4:17—translation).

In this age of signs and false wonders (II Thess. 2:9), one must realize that the Lord Jesus is not entrusting Himself to persons who “make decisions” on the basis of what they think they see (John 2:23-25). He knows the very roots of the trees. We know the character of the trees by their fruit. There are believers and “believers.” Superficial faith (human faith) may be brought into exercise by

miracles or circumstances, but that faith will vanish with the disappearance of the things that brought it into exercise. According to Scripture, Christ has no faith in such faith. Man's affections may be stirred, his intelligence informed, and his conscience convicted; but Christ cannot receive him because He knows he is a "rocky soil hearer," and his faith is temporary —human (Luke 8:11-15).

Fifty years ago while many Baptists and other religious buzzards were pecking away at the IMPECCABLE Son of God, this preacher vowed to God he would expose such heresy. He soon learned that the more truth a preacher gives the more criticism he receives. Lancelot Andrewes, who was born in London in the year 1555, was said to be able to cut and polish a text like a jeweler a diamond, and the rays of truth from its heart of light would flash from every facet. However, he was not without criticism. As for the Puritan charge that his puns and quips made his sermons worthless, it is easier to attack the manner than the matter of his discourses. He died at Winchester on his birthday in 1626 at the age of 71 years.

The following is a summary of Lancelot Andrewes' message from Psalm 2:70—"I will preach the law, whereof the Lord said to Me: Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee" (Andrewes). "I will preach," is a sermon. Do you have a license? Yes: He has spoken to, or indeed He was commanded. Who commanded Him? He who has lawful authority commanded Him. He did not advance on His own authority. He increased in an orderly manner and did not court the position. He came to it orderly. He was appointed to it.

What was His text? The text on which He preached was as it might be at the bringing forth of a Son. "Today," the birth was the sermon. He was "begotten," and He had more than one begetting. He had two natures, therefore, two nativities. One is eternal, as the Son of God. The other was temporal, as the Son of Man. The Apostle vouched for His begetting as the Son of God: "For to which of the Angels did He ever say, "THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE?" (Heb. 1:5 NASB). Here, the Apostle alleged to prove His Deity, the One Whose nature was far above and far more excellent than the angels.

He was twice begotten—"Today" begotten, and begotten before there was any morning star (Job 38:7). Therefore, He was begotten before there was any day at all, before any time that is called "Today." We are to take notice of both these generations. There is advantage of both, in order to show the truth of the identity of His nature and substance with His Father who begat Him and His mother who bore Him.

Two Persons are revealed in the text. The Father begets; the Son is begotten. The Son's begetting is not inconsistent with equality. The text is the declaration of an eternal fact in the Divine nature. Therefore, Sonship was manifested in the incarnation (Rom. 1:3, 4).

The word “begotten” is never used in relation to Christ’s human nature. The word “made” is used. Jesus Christ was twice begotten. He was “eternally begotten” (unique relationship), and He was “made” of a woman in time.

The summary of the message from Psalm 2:7 reveals some important truths proclaimed by Mr. Andrewes pertaining to Christ’s eternal generation. Messages of this nature should be a challenge to God-called men to preach the truth concerning the only begotten Son of God.