

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Presenting the Timeless Truth of the Assembly to a New Generation of Believers

03-62

Dear Reader

The effect of the day in which we live has been to divide our affections between Christ and the world. O, may our affections be returned to the Lord and divine things so we will be in the spiritual condition to have divine priorities for our lives and to want to search out divine truth such as the Eternal Sonship of Christ, our second article. So, let's first look at this nebulous word *worldliness* so often used when speaking to young people, but not used enough when we older ones are in view.

WORLDLINESS

We are not of this world-system, but are the chosen ones of God for His Son (Jn.15:16-19; 17:6-18; 18:36)

World in Greek is *kosmos*. The context in Scripture makes it clear whether it speaks of the people who live on this earth as in John 3:16, the physical earth (Jn.21:25; Acts 17:24), or (as in most cases) that great man-made, Satan-led (2 Cor.4:4; Eph.6:12*) world-system of society, entertainment, business, politics, sports, music, internet, etc. that take the place of God. Although not necessarily sinful in themselves, Satan seeks to use these things to divert our affections, time, talents, energy and thoughts from Christ. On the other hand some of the things of the world-system are positively sinful, although accepted and indulged in by millions, and *Christians* also can fall prey to these things.

* NOTE: "age of this world" (JND). We live in the *age* (Gk: *aion* — a period of time viewed in relation to the spiritual and moral characteristics of that period) of this *world-system* (*kosmos*). Thus Satan is the God of this *age* — the *time period* of this world-system. The "age to come" (Heb.6:5) is Christ's millennial reign, when the present world-system will be replaced by a reign of righteousness when all open sin will be dealt with swiftly and righteously. So this world-system is passing away. Doing God's will is the only thing that brings ultimate blessing

Our citizenship is heavenly (Phil.3:20). We are not *of* this world-system (Jn.15:19; 17:14). Rather, we are *in* the world-system as *ambassadors* for Christ (2 Cor.5:20). An ambassador, although living temporarily in a foreign country, promotes the interests of his own country and doesn't get involved in the internal affairs of the country he is in. A good ambassador works hard to maintain his or her rightful position, to the glory of the home country and its leaders who appointed him/her to the honored position.

Do not love the world-system (1 Jn.2:15-17)

Note the words in this portion of Scripture. First, the *lust* (strong desire) *of the flesh* (our sinful nature) is naturally attracted to the world system. Our sinful nature is right at home in Satan's system. The *lust of the eyes* speaks of what our eyes see and make us (our sinful nature) desire. This is the basis of most advertising and the well known strong influence of TV and movies, etc. Then we have the *pride of life* -- that which makes me proud of myself instead of thinking what *God* has done for me. Scripture says all this is not of the Father, but of the world-system. Compare it with Satan's temptation of Eve (Gen.3). He used all three of the above factors to get her to sin.

Demas (whose name means *popular*) loved the present world (age) and thus forsook Paul (2 Tim.4:10) -- what he taught, the truth of the Church. Millions of Christians also are forsaking the Pauline truths, even those brought up in these wonderful, God-pleasing truths. How about you? A friend of the world-system is an enemy of God (Jas.4:4) -- really, *enmity* of God (JND note), the terrible state of our conscience. This is very serious, yet we seldom even think of it. Where is our heart's affection?

The Solution to this Danger of Worldliness

The solution is not found in lots of do's and don'ts not specified by the Lord. That is legalism. Rather, the solution is a heart-matter. Present your bodies a living sacrifice to God; don't be conformed to this present world-system age; be transformed (transfigured) by the renewing of the mind -- having our thoughts centered on Christ (Gal.1:3-4) and His things, on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, having virtue, being praiseworthy (Phil.4:8). Meditate on these words in relation to your life! Prove in your life what is the good, acceptable, perfect will of God (Rom.12:1-2).

Keep unspotted from the world (Jas.1:27). Stay away from its sinful activities and allurements (1 Thes.5:22-23). We all *know* what we wouldn't like the Lord to come up behind us and catch us reading, doing, watching, saying. *Well, He knows even the thoughts and intentions of our hearts* (Heb.4:12) ... and He doesn't forget. We will answer directly to Him for the things done in the body (2 Cor.5:10). How much better if we keep our eyes on Him (Gal.6:14), not on the world-system; if (like Paul) we keep our bodies under control (1 Cor.9:27) and bring them into subjection to the Lord's will. We live in an "if it feels good, do it" world-system. Remember, it's not just young

people who fail in these things! We who are older should remember what even the unsaved world says, “There is no fool like an old fool.” *How foolish for us (of any age) to think we can set our desires and priorities different than His and not have present and future consequences!*

Finally, don’t ignore doctrine – what the Lord would teach us and desires us to do. Endure sound doctrine instead of fables; don’t compromise with the truth (2 Tim.4:3-4). A fable sounds like the truth and may outwardly seem to work, but is not according to the Word. We’ve seen many of these fables and people continue to promote. Fables lead away from God. Don’t fall prey to fables!

We now want to consider a doctrine that has and continues to cause trouble for the Lord’s people concerning the Person of our blessed Lord. That this would become an issue among those who have been blessed with a great amount of truth and who profess to jealously maintain the “doctrine of the Christ” is even more amazing. This is the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ – was He the Son before being born at Bethlehem? The answer to this question is clearly “yes” from Scripture, but some who should know better take every opportunity to deny this blessed truth and, we have been told, even make its denial a necessary belief for fellowship with them.

One of the more recent outbreaks of this false doctrine came from Dr. John MacArthur, Jr., a popular Bible teacher, in his commentaries on Hebrews and Galatians. The book referenced at the end quotes from these commentaries. He reportedly has retracted these false teachings, although the status of those books is unknown.

Others have never heard of this doctrine and therefore don’t have any opinion one way or the other. When pressed, their reaction may be “so what.” They may argue the belief or denial of Christ’s eternal Sonship doesn’t affect His deity or sinless humanity, doesn’t affect His atoning death at Calvary, doesn’t affect our salvation, doesn’t affect Him as Head of His Church. So let people believe what they will on such a “minor” (in their eyes) doctrine.

But God’s Word says, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 Jn.9-11). What, I ask, is the doctrine of Christ? *It is all that Scripture says about Him.* We have no right to pick and choose which doctrine is important and which is not. His relationship in the past eternity is placed on the same level as His deity or sinless Manhood by these verses. Any persisted-in wrong teaching concerning Him is called an “evil deed” in the above verses. I even have a right to consider such per-

sons as apostates – unsaved professors and false teachers. I can have nothing to do with such persons, at least when they seek to teach the evil doctrine; not even greet them or shake hands with them. So *God* says that *everything* about His Son is vital. I might add that we don’t have any right to think of wrong doctrine as to the Father and Holy Spirit is any less abhorrent. Think of the blasphemous teachings and practices concerning the Holy Spirit of the Charismatic Movement and its offshoots.

A conference report of a number of years ago said, “The subtlety of that teaching which denies the eternal Sonship of Christ is this: While it affirms that the Lord Jesus is a divine, eternal Person, it denies the Father-Son relationship ... prior to incarnation God has called us to the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Cor.1:9), so if His Person is attacked, how can there be true fellowship?” A 1991 circular from the United Kingdom said, “What shall we say then of a person who confesses the eternal Sonship, but does not think it fundamental, and so works to commend and bring into fellowship those who do not affirm this truth? *He is an underminer of the foundations and is working against the truth.*”

The Doctrine of the Eternal Sonship

What does Scripture say on this doctrine? Is it a doctrine of God or of man? Let us look at a number of Old and New Testament verses. We will quote from the JND translation so there will be no question as to accuracy of translation. We will only consider the main question. Other questions brought up by these false teachers, such as that the term “eternal Sonship” indicates inferiority and thus shouldn’t be used of Christ, are clearly erroneous, but will be left for those who wish to read the referenced book where the matter is dealt with in detail.

1 Chronicles 17:13 – “I (Jehovah) will be his (David’s) father and he shall be My son.” Although speaking of a relationship with David, the thought of a father-son relationship involving a divine Person is established in the Old Testament.

Proverbs 30:4 – “Who hath ascended up into the heavens Who hath established the ends of the earth? What is His name and what is His Son’s name?” Clearly this refers to divine relationships before Christ’s incarnation. And God had a son -- God the Son -- in the past ages.

Isaiah 9:6 – “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and His name is called Wonderful.” The *child*, Jesus, had a beginning at Bethlehem, but this Child, this Man, preexisted as the eternal Son, and the *Son* wasn’t born in time, but was *given* by the Father to mankind, as we will have confirmed in many verses in John. God chooses His inspired words carefully!

Micah 5:2 – “Out of [Bethlehem] shall He come forth unto Me who is to be Ruler in Israel: whose goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity.” This verse clearly establishes the eternal preexistence of the Lord Jesus, who as Man, was to be born in Bethlehem hundreds of years in the future from when Micah prophesied.

Mark 12:6 – “Having yet ... one beloved Son, He sent also Him to them ... saying, They will have respect for My Son.” This story from verses 1-12 sets forth the Lord’s dealings with Israel. He sent many prophets whom Israel rejected and often killed. God said, “I have a Son; I’ll send Him.” So, clearly, this portion indicates the Son existed *as the Son* before the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Luke 1:35 – “The holy thing [Gk: *hagios*; absolutely separated- or holy-one] also which shall be born shall be called Son of God.” There is no question that *in Manhood*, God the Holy Spirit was Jesus’ father, as this verse states. But the quoted part doesn’t say that, but that He would be *called* what He already was – the eternal Son.

John 1:1-2 – “In beginning *was* the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” These verses establish Christ’s eternal preexistence as God: He existed before any beginning, but they also establish a relationship: He was *with* God. We aren’t told here what that relationship was, but John doesn’t keep us waiting long.

John 1:14 – “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have contemplated His glory, the glory [displayed excellence] of an only-begotten [unique-one, one of a kind] from-with a Father, full of grace and truth.” This One who we just saw was God Himself, who had such moral excellence as Man, was both from and with the Father. God the Father was the Father who sent the Son. This One existed before John the Baptist (v.15), although John the Baptist was born before the Lord Jesus in Manhood, because He is the divine Word who existed with God the Father before any beginning that can be named.

John 1:18 – “The only-begotten Son who *is* in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” The Greek makes it plain the Father’s bosom was the Son’s *constant* dwelling, past, present and future. It shouldn’t be thought of as a physical location (as when John leaned on Jesus’ bosom in John 13:23), but as a close and intimate spiritual and eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.

John 3:16 – “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.” The verse doesn’t say that “He gave the One who became His only-begotten Son in Manhood,” but He gave the One who already was His one-and-only

(or, unique) Son. There can never be another son as unique as *The Son*! We need to read our words carefully.

John 3:17 – “God has not sent His Son into the world to ...” Again, the One who God the Father sent was His Son, not One who became His Son.

John 16:28 – “I came out from the Father and have come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father.” In order to come into the world, the Lord came from the Father. The Father was the Father before the incarnation. He is still the Father. Who is speaking? The Son!

John 17:5 – “Glorify Me, Thou Father, along with Thyself, with the glory I had along with Thee before the world was.” The Lord had an excellence (glory) *with the Father before creation*, long, long before the incarnation. The Greek translated “along-with” gives the thought of presence and location, explains a JND note.

John 17:24 – “Father ... Thou lovest Me before the foundations of the world.” It was *the Father* who loved the Son for all past eternity! What can be clearer?

Romans 1:3-4 – “Concerning His Son, come of David’s seed according to the flesh, marked out Son of God in power.” The One who came of David’s seed according to the flesh, through Mary, was God’s Son – didn’t *become* God’s Son.

Galatians 4:4 – “When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, come of woman...” Again, it doesn’t say, “God sent forth the One who of a woman *became* His Son.” We must carefully read what God says! The One He sent forth already was “His Son”!

Colossians 1:13-17 – “The Son of His love By Him were created all things And He is before all, and all things subsist together by Him.” Many things in these verses are said of “the Son of His love.” They all refer back to that opening clause that defines who is being spoken about. So He was “the Son” in creation; the Son was “before all.” He clearly is the eternal Son!

Hebrews 1:2 – “God ... has spoken to us in the Person of the Son [or, in Son] ... by whom He made the worlds.” God the Father made the worlds through the Son. *That is His eternal name!* He was the Son on earth; He was the Son at creation, long before the incarnation!

Hebrews 1:8 – “As to the Son, Thy throne O God is to the ages of the ages.” This One whose name is “the Son” is God. Wasn’t that true in the past eternity as well as to the ages of the ages?

1 John 1:1-2 – “The Eternal Life which was with the Father and has been manifested to us.” Clearly John is speaking of the Son (1 Jn.5:20). This One now manifested to us, was before “with the Father.” The relationship of Father and Son existed before incarnation! Verse after verse confirm it!

1 John 10:14 – “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.” Again, it doesn’t say that the One who became the Father sent the One who became the Son, but that the One who was the Father sent the One who already was the Son. Eternal relationships clearly existed between God the Father and God the Son – relationships of love, not inferiority or superiority.

I Have Begotten You

I have taken three passages out of order, for they require more discussion since respected writers don’t agree on their interpretation. But neither interpretation supports the erroneous interpretation put on these passages by those who deny Christ’s eternal Sonship.

Psalms 2:7 – “Jehovah hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son: I this day have begotten Thee.”

Acts 13:33-34 – “Having raised up Jesus; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art My Son [timeless]: this day [in time] have I begotten Thee. But that He raised Him from among the dead ...”

Hebrews 1:5 – “For to which of the angels said He ever, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.”

Those false teachers who deny the eternal Sonship of Christ jump on these verses to claim that Christ became the Son in incarnation. Is that what the verses say? Absolutely not! But two interpretations are set forth by respected writers. J.N. Darby says, “He was a Son before He was begotten, for the *resurrection* was the day He was begotten, yet was He not a Son while walking on the earth? Acts 13:33 as quoted above seems to support this interpretation by saying, “Having raised up Jesus.” The surrounding context seems to also support this interpretation as it speaks of His resurrection. The book I reference says, “In Acts 13:33 Paul indicated that God’s resurrection of Jesus fulfilled His Psalm 2:7 decree concerning the Messiah. The day that God raised Jesus from the dead He begot Him as His Son in the sense that He brought Jesus forth from the womb of the earth by resurrection and thereby publicly decreed Him to be His Son.”

If this interpretation is correct, then clearly those who deny Christ’s eternal Sonship cannot use these verses to support their false doctrine. But other respected writers don’t accept the above. William Kelly in his commentary

on Acts (pg.189) says, “The raising up of Jesus in verse 33 does not go beyond the Child thus born, the Son thus given. And with this agrees Psalm 2:7 which refers not to His resurrection from the dead, as many have supposed, but to His birth, as the words simply express it.” See Vine’s *Dictionary* under “raise.”

The clearest explanation of this matter was recently expressed by Brother Leslie M. Grant in a *Lord is Near* calendar leaf. Referring to Psalm 2:7, he said, “The speaker here is the Lord Jesus, the Son of the Father in truth and love. He declares the decree from Jehovah’s lips, ‘Thou art My Son.’ This stands in absolute distinction from the following statement, for it refers to the Lord Jesus as He has been from eternity, the Son of God. It reminds us of the heavens being opened at the time of His baptism and the Father’s voice announcing, ‘Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I have found My delight’ (Lk.3:22), and a similar announcement at the time of His transfiguration (Lk.9:35).

“But the following statement is also marvelous indeed, ‘I this day have begotten Thee.’ For while the first [statement] declares His glory as the eternal Son of God, the second shows Him to have at a certain time been begotten by God. This of course refers to His becoming Man, so is prophetic of His birth in Bethlehem. As ‘the only-begotten Son of God’ He had no beginning, but there [is] a beginning to His Manhood.

“At the time of His birth there was a clear announcement made, ‘For today a Savior has been born to you in David’s city, who is Christ the Lord’ (Lk.2:11). There have been many deceivers who claimed to be Christ, but none of them was so announced *at his birth*, but only when they had advanced to the age at which they could practice gross deception. But no Israelite should have been deceived by such men, for the Word of God was clear that on a certain day, Christ would be announced as being born ... LMG.

Whatever explanation is accepted, neither support the wrong use made of these verses by the false teachers. Christ did not become “the Son” at birth; also, the Father did not become “the Father” at Christ’s birth. They were the Father and the Son for all past eternity.

Reading Material

I only know of one modern-day book that goes into this doctrinal heresy in detail. It is entitled *The Eternal Sonship of Christ – A Timely Defense of This Vital Biblical Doctrine*, by George Zeller and Renald Showers, available through *Believers Bookshelf* (bbusa@evenlink.com) and other book sellers. Also, *The Son of His Love* by W. Hocking and *The Son of God* by J.G. Bellett are good resources.

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