The Purple Pulpit

Installment #16

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What of Christ Being "Begotten"?

Probably the most oft-quoted verse in the Scriptures is Jn. 3:16. In conventional translations the Lord Jesus Christ is there called God's "only-begotten Son." Early Arians in particular, as well as other types of subordinationists have locked on to that term and affirmed that if He was begotten, then there had to be a point before He was begotten. If His being begotten of the Father is thought of differently than of His being created, that would still mean that there was a point sometime in eternity past that the Son of God didn't exist. If there was a point when the Son didn't exist, then He isn't eternal, and therefore not truly God. Orthodox homoousian believers in Christ countered this reasoning with the idea of the "eternal generation" of the Son. This is the concept that the Son is always begotten, eternally being begotten, continually begotten, being ever begotten by the Father.

Just dealing with the wording and the natural sense of the terms, the subordinationist has the more cogent and natural thinking. Because of this fact, the reasoning of the ancient orthodox was philosophical rather than Scriptural, and therefore highly convoluted. One gets the sense in reading their arguments that they were straining

desperately to explain away the normal sense of the words. What the orthodox (as we) had on their side were the very celar statements in the Scripture concerning the Deity and eternality of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our position as to this term "only-begotten" is a third and (we believe) a more reasoned, and reasonable, and exegetical stance. The word in question in the Greek text is μονογενής (transliterated as monogenes, and phonetically-spelled mo – no – gen – as). It derives from the Greek words for "only" and that of "a kind or type." Putting them together as a compound word, we get the sense of "one of a kind." A one-word translation would be "unique." This removes the difficulty of the word "begotten," while maintaining the orthodoxy of the Deity of Christ : He is uniquely the Son of God, because He is natural Deity. This is also far more true to the original language as a translation.

But does the Scripture ever refer to the Lord Jesus as being begotten of the Father? The answer is "yes." This is in two senses in the Scripture. The first sense is seen in Mt. 1:20 wherein the Lord's humanity was termed "begotten" in Mary by the Holy Spirit. Lk. 1:35 conveys the same idea, though without using the word. So the first sense in which Jesus was begotten of God was in His miraculously-conceived humanity.

The other sense is more figurative in meaning. In Ps. 2:7 Yahweh the Father says to the Lord, "You are My Son; today I have begotten You." This is quoted by Paul in

Acts 13:33 and explained as referring to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It is indicating His being "the firstborne from the dead" in Col. 1:18. Here the tomb became a womb to birth the first resurrected Man.

So the Lord Jesus Christ is begotten from the Father, but not in His Deity, but in His humanity and resurrection from the dead.