

The Divinity of the Son of God

by James Arminius

James Arminius defends the divinity of the Son of God against misconceptions and emphasizes the importance of orthodox theology.

Scripture: Proverbs 30:4, Isaiah 9:6, John 1:14, John 5:26, John 10:30, John 14:9, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 2:9, Hebrews 1:3, 1 John 5:7

Topics: "Trinity Doctrine", "Eternal Generation"

Description

James Arminius addresses the controversy surrounding the Divinity of the Son of God, refuting the notion that the Son is autotheos, having His essence from Himself and not from the Father. Arminius defends the traditional belief that the Son derives His Deity from the Father by eternal generation, warning against the errors of Tri-theism and Sabellianism. He highlights the importance of upholding the truth of the ancient Church's teachings on the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Son.

Transcript

VIII. THE DIVINITY OF THE SON OF GOD

With regard to the Divinity of the Son of God and the word *autotheos* both of which have been discussed in our University in the regular form of scholastic disputations, I cannot sufficiently wonder what the motive can be, which has created a wish in some persons to render me suspected to other men, or to make me an object of suspicion to themselves. This is still more wonderful, since this suspicion has not the least ground of probability on which to rest, and is at such an immense distance from all reason and truth, that, whatever reports have been spread abroad respecting this affair to the prejudice of my character, they can be called nothing better than "notorious calumnies."

At a disputation held one afternoon in the University, when the thesis that had been proposed for disputation was the Divinity of the Son of God, one of the students happened to object, "that the Son of God was *autotheos*, and that he therefore had his essence from himself and not from the Father." In reply to this I observed, "that the word *autotheos* was capable of two different acceptations, since it might signify either "one who is truly God," or "one who is God of himself;" and that it was with great propriety and correctness attributed to the Son of God according to the former signification, but not according to the latter."

The student, in prosecution of his argument, violently contended, that the word was justly applicable to the Son of God, principally according to the second of these significations: and that the essence of the Father could not be said to be communicated to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, in any other than in an improper sense; but that it was in perfect correctness and strict propriety common alike to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." He added "that he asserted this with the greater confidence because he had the younger Trelcatius of pious memory, [but who was then living,] as an authority in his favour on this point; for that learned Professor had written to the same purport in his Common Places."

To these observations I answered, "that this opinion was at variance with the word of God, and with the whole of the ancient Church, both Greek and Latin, which had always taught, that the Son had His Deity from the Father by eternal generation." To these remarks I subjoined, "that from such an opinion as this, necessarily followed the two mutually conflicting errors, Tri-theism and Sabellianism; that is, (1.) It would ensue as a necessary consequence, from these premises, that there are three Gods, who have together and collaterally the Divine essence, independently of this circumstance -- that one of them (being only personally distinguished from the rest) has that essence from another of the persons.

Yet the proceeding of the origin of one person from another, (that is, of the Son from the Father,) is the only foundation that has ever been used for defending the Unity of the Divine Essence in the Trinity of Persons. (2.) It would likewise follow as another consequence, that the Son would himself be the Father, because he would differ from the Father in nothing but in regard to name, which was the opinion of Sabellius. For, since it is peculiar to the Father to derive his Deity from himself, or (to speak more correctly,) to derive it from no one, if, in the sense of being "God of himself," the Son be called autotheos, it follows that he is the Father."

Some account of this disputation was dispersed abroad in all directions, and it reached Amsterdam. A minister of that city, who now rests in the Lord, having interrogated me respecting the real state of this affair, I related the whole of it to him plainly, as I have now done: and I requested him to make Trelcatius of blessed memory acquainted with it as it had actually occurred, and to advise him in a friendly manner to amend his opinion, and to correct those inappropriate words in his Common Places: this request the minister from Amsterdam engaged to fulfill in his own way.

In all this proceeding I am far from being liable to any blame; for I have defended the truth and the sentiments of the Catholic and Orthodox Church. Trelcatius undoubtedly was the person most open to animadversion; for he adopted a mode of speaking which detracted somewhat from the truth of the matter. But such has always been either my own infelicity or the zeal of certain individuals that, as soon as any disagreement arises, all the blame is instantly cast upon me, as if it was impossible for me to display as much veracity [or orthodoxy] as any other person. Yet on this subject I have Gomarus himself consenting with me; for, soon after Trelcatius had published his common places, a disputation on the Trinity having been proposed in the University, Gomarus did in three several parts of his theses express himself in such terms as were diametrically opposed to those of Trelcatius. The very obvious difference in opinion between those two Professors I pointed out to the Amsterdam minister, who acknowledged its existence. Yet, notwithstanding all these things, no one endeavoured to vindicate me from this calumny; while great exertion was employed to frame excuses for Trelcatius, by means of a qualified interpretation of his words, though it was utterly impossible to reconcile their palliative explanations with the plain signification of his unperverted expressions. Such are the effects which the partiality of favour and the fervour of zeal can produce!

The milder and qualified interpretation put upon the words of Trelcatius, was the following: "the Son of God may be styled autotheos, or may be said to have his Deity from himself, in reference to his being God, although he has his Deity from the Father, in reference to his being the Son." For the sake of a larger explanation, it is said, "God, or the Divine Essence, may be considered both absolutely and relatively. When regarded absolutely, the Son has his Divine essence from himself; but, when viewed relatively, he derives it from the Father." But these are new modes of speaking and novel opinions, and such as can by no means consist together. For the Son, both in regard to his being the Son, and to his being God, derives his Deity from the Father. When he is called God, it is then only not expressed that he is from the Father; which derivation is particularly noted when the word Son is employed. Indeed, the essence of God can in no manner come under our consideration, except it be said, "that the Divine Essence is communicated to the Son by the Father." Nor can it possibly in any different respect whatever be said, that this essence is both "communicated to him" and "not communicated;" because these expressions are contradictory, and can in no diverse respect be reconciled to each other. If the Son have the Divine Essence from himself in reference to its being absolutely considered, it cannot be communicated to him. If it be communicated to him in reference to its being relatively considered, he cannot have it from himself in reference to its being absolutely considered.

I shall probably be asked, "do you not acknowledge, that, to be the Son of God, and to be God, are two things entirely distinct from each other?" I reply, undoubtedly I subscribe to such distinction. But when those who make it proceed still further, and say, "since to be the Son of God signifies that he derives his essence from the Father, to be God in like manner signifies nothing less than that he has his essence from himself or from no one;" I deny this assertion, and declare, at the same time, that it is a great and manifest error, not only in sacred theology, but likewise in natural philosophy. For, these two things, to be the Son and to be God, are at perfect agreement with each other; but to derive his essence from the Father, and, at the same time, to derive it from no one, are evidently contradictor, and mutually destructive the one of the other.

But, to make this fallacy still more apparent, it must be observed, how equal in force and import are certain double ternary and parallel propositions, when standing in the following juxta-position:

God is from eternity, possessing the Divine Essence from eternity. The Father is from no one, having the Divine Essence from no one. The Son is from the Father, having the Divine Essence from the Father.

The word "God" therefore signifies, that He has the true Divine Essence; but the word "Son" signifies, that he has the Divine Essence from the Father. On this account, he is correctly denominated both God and the Son of God. But since he cannot be styled the Father, he cannot possibly be said to have the Divine Essence from himself or from no one. Yet much labour is devoted to the purpose of excusing these expressions, by saying, "that when the son of God in reference to his being God is said to have his essence from that form of speech signifies nothing more, than that the Divine essence is not derived from any one." But if this be thought to be the most proper mode of action which should be adopted, there will be no depraved or erroneous sentiment which can be uttered that may not thus find a ready excuse. For though God and the divine Essence do not differ substantially, yet whatever may be predicated of the Divine Essence can by no means be equally predicated of God; because they are distinguished from each other in our mode of framing conceptions, according to which mode all forms of speech ought to be examined, since they are employed only with a design that through them we should receive correct impressions. This is very obvious from the following examples, in which we speak with perfect correctness when we say, "Deum mortuum esse," and "the Essence of God is communicated;" but very incorrectly

when we say, "God is communicated." That man who understands the difference existing between concrete and abstract, about which there were such frequent disputes between us and the Lutherans will easily perceive what a number of absurdities will ensue, if explanations of this description be once tolerated in the Church of God. Therefore, in no way whatever can this phrase, "the Son of God is autotheos," ["God of himself," or "in his own right,"] be excused as a correct one, or as having been happily expressed. Nor can that be called a proper form of speech which says, "the Essence of God is common to three persons;" but it is improper, since the Divine Essence is declared to be communicated by one of them to another.

The observations which I now make, I wish to be particularly regarded, because it may appear from them how much we are capable of tolerating in a man whom we do not suspect of heresy; and, on the contrary, with what avidity we seize upon any trivial circumstance by which we may inculpate another man whom we hold under the ban of suspicion. Of such partiality, this incident affords two manifest examples.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/james-arminius/the-divinity-of-the-son-of-god/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net