

Men's Discipleship

False Religions: Jehovah's Witnesses Part 2.2

The Doctrine of God: Denial of the Trinity (Eternal Generation)

3. Protestant Confessions Affirming the Trinity and Doctrine of Eternal Generation

All the major Protestant confessions and catechisms uphold the Trinity as a foundational biblical truth. Protestants saw themselves as returning to biblical and ancient faith, rather than inventing new doctrines. They wholeheartedly embraced the early creeds (Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian) and ensured that Trinitarian theology was articulated in their own confessional documents. Whether Presbyterian or Baptist, the Protestant confessions all echo the same orthodox doctrine. They strongly affirm **co-equality and co-eternity** of the Persons. For example, the Westminster Confession explicitly quotes 1 John 5:7, Matthew 28:19, and 2 Corinthians 13:14 as proof texts on blueletterbible.org, reflecting how Protestants ground the Trinity in Scripture. These confessions *directly contradict* JW theology. Where JWs say only the Father is Jehovah (Lord), the Protestant confessions state **that the Son and Spirit are the same Jehovah, the same God as the Father**. Where JWs say the Son is not "of one essence" with the Father, the confessions declare the Son **is one in essence with the Father** (crcna.org; the1689confession.com). In short, the entire Protestant heritage upholds the Trinity as a **cornerstone of Christian orthodoxy**.

It's worth noting that the Protestants and Puritans did not view the Trinity as mere abstract dogma; they saw it as a vital truth that **magnifies God's glory and comforts believers**. The triune nature of God was preached and cherished. For instance, the **Westminster Larger Catechism** asks why our Mediator had to be God, and one reason given is that only God's Son could bear the weight of God's wrath – implying the necessity of Christ's full divinity for our salvation. The Protestants and Puritans also accepted the **Athanasian Creed's** strong language that one cannot be saved without affirming the Trinity (not because one must understand it exhaustively, but because rejecting God's triune identity is to reject God Himself).

The Nicene Creed:

I believe in one God,
The Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
Born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became a man.
For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
Who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
Who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Eternally Begotten of the Father: Understanding the Son's Eternal Generation

Protestant Confessions on "Eternally Begotten of the Father"

Historic Protestant confessions uniformly affirm that God the Son is *eternally begotten* of God the Father, echoing the ancient creeds. For example:

- **Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):** "In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons... God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; **the Son is eternally begotten of the Father**; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son." learn.ligonier.org
- **Belgic Confession (1561), Article 10:** "We believe that Jesus Christ, according to His divine nature, is the only Son of God—**eternally begotten, not made or created**, for then He would be a creature." crcna.org Here, the Belgic Confession pointedly adds "not made or created," guarding against any notion that the Son is a created being.
- **London Baptist Confession (1689):** The Baptists in 1689 echoed the same doctrine: "The Father is not derived from anyone, neither begotten nor proceeding. **The Son is eternally begotten of the Father**. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. All three are infinite and without beginning..." founders.org. In other words, the Son's unique personal property is to be begotten of the Father from all eternity, just as the Father's property is to be unbegotten and the Spirit's to proceed.

Despite minor differences in wording, each of these Reformed confessions upholds the eternal generation of the Son. They stand in continuity with the Nicene Creed's language: "*the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father **before all worlds**, God of God, Light of Light... begotten, not made*". In short, from a Reformed perspective, **Jesus Christ is the Son of God in an eternal, unsurpassed sense** – begotten by the Father **without beginning** or change, not by a physical process but as an eternal divine relationship.

The Meaning of "Eternal Generation" (Eternally Begotten)

The phrase "eternally begotten of the Father" refers to the **eternal generation** of the Son. This doctrine teaches that **God the Father eternally and by necessity gives existence (or "birth") to God the Son within the one Godhead** rbfi.org. In human terms, a father begets a son – communicating his own nature to his child. Likewise (though in an infinitely higher way), God the Father *always* communicates the one, undivided divine essence to the Son. The Son is **of the Father's own essence**, truly God of God. "*Whatever may be the analogy between natural and human generations and the supernatural and divine,*" wrote theologian Francis Turretin, "*still the latter is not to be measured by the former.*" Yet, "*as all generation indicates a communication of essence on the part of the begetter to the begotten... so this wonderful generation is rightly expressed as a communication of essence from the Father, by which the Son possesses indivisibly the same essence with Him.*" rbfi.org In simpler terms: just as a human father begets a child with the exact human nature, **God the Father begetting the Son means the Son is of the same divine nature as the Father** – fully and equally God. Indeed, "if the Son is begotten of God, He is God," as the logic of the early church went newadvent.org.

Importantly, "**eternally begotten**" **does not** mean the Son had a starting point or was created. Unlike human begetting, which happens in time and results in a new being separate from the parent, **the Son's generation is without beginning** and *without any division or change in God*. The Father and Son have always existed together in a relationship of *Fatherhood* and *Sonship*. As Gregory of Nazianzus (4th-century Church Father) explained, "*The Father is the Begetter... without reference to time, and not in a corporeal manner. The Son is the Begotten*" rdtwot.wordpress.com. In other words, God's act of begetting the Son is not a physical act and did not occur *at some moment* – it is an eternal reality of God's own being. **There was never a "time" when the Father existed without the Son**, just as a light is never without its radiance. Early Christians often used the analogy of the sun and its brightness: *as the sun continuously emits light without diminishing itself, so the Father eternally generates the Son*. Athanasius, defending this truth against ancient heresy, wrote that "*the whole being of the Son is proper to the Father's essence, as radiance from light, and stream from fountain*" newadvent.org. The Son is the Father's brightness – "*the radiance of His glory and the express image of His person*" (Hebrews 1:3) – **always shining forth, yet one in essence with the Light that shines** newadvent.org.

"Eternal generation" means **the Son's Sonship is an eternal fact of God's life**. The Father from all eternity lovingly **begets** the Son (and thus is eternally Father), and the Son from all eternity **proceeds from** the Father (and thus is eternally Son). This happens **within the one indivisible Godhead** – a mystery beyond full comprehension yet revealed in Scripture and affirmed by the church. It ensures that when we call Jesus *the Son of God*, we understand this **in the highest**,

most literal sense: He is Son by nature, not by adoption or creation. He is “very God of very God,” possessing the same divine attributes as the Father, yet distinguished as Son in relationship to the Father.

Not Begotten in a Human Sense

It’s crucial to **contrast eternal begetting with human begetting** to avoid misunderstanding. Human begetting involves a father existing *before* a son, a beginning in time, and a transmission of part of the parent’s substance, resulting in a separate being. None of these apply to God:

- **No Beginning or Temporal Sequence:** Unlike a human son who begins to exist at conception or birth, **God the Son has *always* existed with the Father.** “*In the beginning was the Word*” (John 1:1) – there was never a “*time*” when the Son was not. If there ever had been a time when the Son did not exist, then God would not have been eternally Father. But “*I was set up from everlasting... before the hills, I was brought forth*” (Proverbs 8:23–25) says the personified Wisdom of God – a Scripture Thomas Watson says “*declares the eternal generation of the Son of God.*” apuritansmind.com Because the Son is co-eternal, “*there was [n]ever a time when God was without a Son, and so He would be no Father; nay, [never a time] when God was without His glory, for Christ is ‘the brightness of His Father’s glory’*” apuritansmind.com. The Father has **always** been shining forth His Son.
- **No Physical Process or Change:** God’s begetting of the Son is **not a physical, sexual, or material act.** God is spirit (John 4:24), and the Father did not take a partner or undergo change to produce the Son. As Gregory emphasized, the Father begets “*without passion... and not in a corporeal manner*” rdtwot.wordpress.com. The term “begotten” is used by analogy to human fatherhood, but in God’s case, it signifies a *spiritual, eternal relationship*. The Son is called “the only begotten” to denote His unique **relationship and origin** from the Father, not any literal birth process.
- **No Division of Essence:** When humans beget children, the offspring is a separate being, sharing the parents’ nature but as a distinct individual. In the Trinity, however, the Father and Son (and Holy Spirit) *share one numerical essence*. The Son’s begetting does not split God’s substance or produce another god. Instead, the early church taught that the Son is of one substance (one *ousia*) with the Father. “*The radiance also is light, not second to the sun, nor a different light... but a whole and proper offspring of it. And... one would not say they are two lights, but sun and radiance... one light*” newadvent.org. Likewise, the Father and Son are not two gods, but one God – **one light with its radiance**. The Son’s divine life is **derived from the Father** in terms of personal origin, but it is **identical in quality and fullness**. Jesus Himself said, “*All things that the Father has are Mine*” (John 16:15), and “*I and My Father are one*” (John 10:30). Thus, *eternal generation* means the Son fully shares the Father’s Godhead even as He is **distinguished as Son**.

In short, calling Christ “begotten” does *not* imply any limitation, inferiority, or beginning. Instead, it secures His co-equal deity (He is **God from God**) while describing His personal identity as Son. As one theologian puts it, the Father’s begetting of the Son “*happens without any imperfection, dependence, succession... or division*” in God rbfi.org. It is an eternal,

mysterious truth of God's inner life. Our finite minds cannot fully grasp *how* the Father begets the Son, but we confess it because Scripture reveals a Father/Son relationship in God that transcends human parenthood.

Biblical Support for the Son's Eternal Generation

The doctrine of the Son's eternal begottenness is rooted in Scripture. The Bible calls Jesus *the only begotten (unique) Son of God* and depicts an eternal Father-Son relationship within the Godhead. Key passages include:

- **John 1:14** – “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*” biblehub.com This declares that Jesus (the Word) is the Father's “*only begotten*” Son, even **before** He took on flesh. The Son's glory is the Father's glory, showing that He comes from the Father's very being.
- **John 1:18** – “*No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.*” biblehub.com Here Jesus is called *ho monogenēs huios* (“the only-begotten Son”) and described as being “in the Father's bosom,” a phrase of intimate relationship. This verse teaches that the Son, dwelling in closest communion with the Father, reveals God to us. The Son's uniquely begotten status means **no one else shares this intimate, eternal Sonship**.
- **John 3:16** – “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” biblehub.com This famous verse underscores that the Son whom God sent for our salvation was no mere creature or adopted son, but **God's own only begotten Son**. The Father “gave” Him in love – implying the Son was His to give, *already* His Son from eternity. (See also 1 John 4:9 below, which echoes this truth.)
- **John 5:26** – “*For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.*” biblehub.com Jesus here claims that just as the Father is self-existent (the source of life), so the Son has that same self-existent life, *given* eternally by the Father. This is a profound statement of eternal generation: the Father is the eternal fountain of deity, and the Son eternally receives (and possesses) that same life in Himself. The Son's life “in Himself” shows His equality with God (only God has life *in Himself*), while “granted by the Father” shows the Son's personal origin *from* the Father. **John 5:26 strongly implies an eternal communication of life from Father to Son** – exactly what the doctrine of eternal generation expresses.
- **1 John 4:9** – “*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*” biblehub.com The Apostle John reiterates that Jesus is *God's only begotten Son*, and emphasizes that the Father *sent* this Son into the world. The term “only begotten” (Greek *monogenēs*) denotes the Son's uniqueness and divine Sonship. John's point is that **the Father's love is shown in sending One who was already His beloved Son** (cf. John 17:24 – “You loved Me before the foundation of the world”). The relationship of Father and Son precedes Christ's mission on earth; it is an **eternal relationship of love** within the Godhead.
- **Hebrews 1:3, 5** (to include another essential reference) – “[*The Son*], *being the brightness of His [the Father's] glory and the express image of His person ... sat down*

at the right hand of the Majesty on high. For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'?" (quoting Psalm 2:7). Hebrews 1:3 describes the Son as the **radiance** of God's glory and the exact imprint of His nature – language that aligns with eternal generation (the Son is to the Father as brightness is to light). Verse 5 quotes God calling Christ "*My Son*" and "begotten," which in its fullest sense applies to Christ's eternal Sonship (though Psalm 2 also has a prophetic fulfillment in Christ's resurrection/enthronement, the *ground* of that claim is His eternal Sonship). The early church read Hebrews 1:5 as supportive of the Son's divine generation: the Father declares the Son begotten (in a way no angel or creature is), indicating a unique Sonship belonging to Christ alone.

Beyond these, many other scriptures imply or reinforce the eternal Father-Son relationship: **John 17:5, 24** (the Son shared glory with the Father "before the world was" and is loved by the Father from eternity), **Colossians 1:15** (the Son is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" – "firstborn" in rank, not a created being, since *all things* were created through Him), and **Micah 5:2** (prophecy that the Messiah's origin is "from of old, from everlasting"). Taken together, the biblical witness convinced the church that Christ's Sonship is **eternal** and inseparable from His very nature as God. Jesus didn't *become* the Son at some point in time (whether at His birth, baptism, or resurrection); instead, ****He is the Son from everlasting to everlasting**, the second Person of the Trinity.

- **Origen of Alexandria (c.185–254)** – In *De Principiis*, Origen explicitly speaks of the Son's origin as "**without any beginning**". For example, he writes that God "is the Father of His only-begotten Son... who was born indeed of Him, and derives from Him what He is, but **without any beginning** newadvent.org." Likewise he describes the Son's generation as "**as eternal and everlasting as the brilliancy which is produced from the sun**" – that is, generation that is **without beginning or end** newadvent.org.

- **Athanasius of Alexandria (298–373)** – In his "*Statement of Faith*" Athanasius affirms the Son's eternal generation. He affirms belief "in one Only-begotten Son, begotten of the Father **without beginning and eternally**; of the same substance (homoousios) with the Father; living and powerful, the true image of the Father, equal in honor and glory" newadvent.org. This makes clear that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

- **Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389)** – Gregory repeatedly emphasizes that the Son is begotten beyond time. He famously says, "The Father is the Begetter... The Son is the Begotten... without reference to time" newadvent.org. He also asks, rhetorically, "When was the Son begotten? **When the Father was not begotten**," stressing that there was no time when the Son did not already exist newadvent.org. In Gregory's view, the Son is coeternal with the Father yet eternally derived from Him.

- **Augustine of Hippo (354–430)** – Augustine insists that the Son's begottenness is eternal. In a homily on 1 John, he exclaims: "**From the eternal Father begotten, from eternity begotten, in eternity begotten: with no beginning...**" newadvent.org. In other words, the Son is begotten by the Father in unending eternity, **without any beginning**, just as God Himself is "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14).

- **St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)** – Aquinas affirms that the Son is co-eternal with the Father. In his *Contra Errores Graecorum* he explains that “the Father is not prior in time, since the Son is eternal” isidore.co. Here Aquinas teaches that the Son’s existence has no temporal beginning – the Father could not have existed “before” the Son, because the Son is **eternal**. (Likewise he holds that the Son shares the one divine nature with the Father, and their distinction is one of relation, not of temporal priority isidore.co.)
- **John Calvin (1509–1564)** – Calvin consistently spoke of the Son as begotten before all ages. Confronting an Arian, he wrote that “the Word, begotten by the Father **before all ages**, assumed human nature by the hypostatic union... and the Word himself is called a Son **on account of his Godhead and eternal essence**” heidelbergblog.net. In Calvin’s view, then, the Son has been Son “from all eternity,” not a title acquired at incarnation, and is “**begotten by the Father before all ages.**”
- **John Owen (1616–1683)** – Owen affirms the historic faith about the Son’s eternal generation. He notes that the “sober writers of the ancient church” *constantly affirmed* the Son’s eternal generation: “Of the eternal generation of the divine person of the Son, the sober writers of the ancient church did constantly affirm that it was **firmly to be believed**, but as unto the manner of it not to be inquired into.” rbfi.org. Owen thus upholds the doctrine as an article of faith, even if the mode of generation is a divine mystery.
- **Francis Turretin (1623–1687)** – Turretin explicitly teaches that the Son’s generation is from eternity. In his *Institutes* (Q. 29), he writes that the Son’s generation “was made **without time** – not in time, but **from eternity**” krisispraxis.com. He emphasizes that this generation is not a temporal event: “the Son is from the Father, although not after the Father,” so that there is “no priority of duration” krisispraxis.com. For Turretin, eternal generation is a “hyperphysical” (i.e. above time) communication of the divine essence from Father to Son.
- **Thomas Watson (c.1620–1686)** – The Puritan Thomas Watson affirms the Nicene teaching in plain terms: “Jesus Christ, who is **begotten of the Father before all time**... This Scripture [Prov. 8:23–25] declares **the eternal generation of the Son of God.**” apuritansmind.com. Watson thus echoes Augustine’s language, explicitly calling the Son’s generation “eternal” and citing wisdom’s “brought forth” as declaring the Son’s eternal origin from the Father.