The One God is triune. No Christian would deny this statement. The One God is three persons, each fully God, yet they are not each other. Again, Christians universally affirm this statement as well. The One God is a divine and infinite Being consisting of three subsistences: The Father unbegotten, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Though this last statement has been one that the Catholic, Orthodox (denying only the Spirit’s procession from the Son), and Protestant churches have universally confessed, it is nevertheless a statement that is under serious scrutiny in our day. The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, specifically, is rarely spoken of, and far too often outright denied in the majority of baptist churches across this great land. While today’s talk will not change that, we are going to discuss the importance of standing on the solid historical and biblical ground of the teaching contained in our great Christian tradition. We will deal with this topic in three ways. We will first define what is meant by the eternal generation of the Son. Second, we will do a creedal/confessionial historical survey of the doctrine. Finally, we will deal with modern objections. Allow me to confess at the outset that I will likely disappoint many here for several different reasons. For those hoping that the entire lecture is exegesis of Scripture alone I say in advance that this talk will serve to whet your appetite but will in no way exhaust what Scripture has to say about this. For those hoping that I focus exclusively on the historical development of this doctrine, I will not satisfy you either, as this is intended to be a broad discussion of a topic that our confession of faith takes for granted. Finally, for those heresy hunters looking to this as a final death blow against the errors of modern exegets, I will again disappoint. While I will draw blood, my intended goal is to draw your attention to something lost that needs to be recovered in our day. I leave it to you, the listener, to follow up in your own studies on this glorious, Gospel truth. John Owen famously said, “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.” I think these are wise words to meditate upon as we now turn to what is meant by the eternal generation of the Son.

1: The doctrine of the Trinity has at its core 2 affirmations: symmetry and asymmetry. When we speak about God we are talking about a God that is 3 persons, or subsistences, that share the one, undivided, nature or essence. James Dolezal reminds us that “a thing’s nature is what distinguishes it from all other kinds of beings and thus provides its quiddity (or what-ness).” The What, or quiddity, of God is symmetrical. All three persons have, fully, whatever the what-ness of God is. Yet we do not mingle or confuse the 3 persons. This is the asymmetrical aspect. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. Anything true of the One God is true of all three persons, yet the properties that distinguish the subsistences from one another cannot be said of each, nor can that which distinguishes them be a property of the one undivided essence. Let us be sure to reject any thought of essences right away. The Father has the whole, divine essence. The Son has the whole, divine essence. The Spirit has the whole, divine essence. Yet there are not three essences. We struggle to comprehend this, yet it is essential to biblical trinitarianism. Divine unity is numerical unity. As previously stated, the personal properties of the three subsistences are not interchangeable. The question we have before us is what then distinguishes the Father from the Son? Nehemiah Coxe simply answers that “The relative property of the Son is to be begotten.” The eternal generation of the Son answers the question of how the Son as to his personal subsistence, is distinct, or asymmetrical, from the Father, yet still shares the whole, undivided, essence. The Father is father of the Son. The Son is son of the Father. The Father cannot be the Son and Son cannot be the Father. Yet the Father and the Son share the whole, undivided essence. Symmetry and asymmetry. Let me now provide a short definition of the eternal generation of the Son. The best succinct definition I’ve come across is given by John Webster. He says, “Eternal generation is the personal and eternal act of God the Father whereby he is the origin of the personal subsistence of God the Son, so communicating to the Son the one undivided divine essence.” Stefan Lindblad offers some affirmation by negation when he reminds us that this happens “without any imperfection, dependence, succession, multiplication, mutation, causation, derivation, confusion or division, either of the one common divine essence or of the distinct personal subsistences of the Trinity.” Note that this generation is eternal. The Son is not made, or created. This is a necessary, not voluntary, act. This begetting is an ad intra (or internal) act of the eternal God. God just is. While, again, this doctrine is incomprehensible it is not to be dismissed simply because we cannot comprehend it. As Robert Shaw stated in the 19th Century, "We cannot pretend to explain the manner of the eternal generation of the Son; but to deny it upon the ground that it is incomprehensible by us would be preposterous; for, upon the same ground, we might as well deny the subsistence of three distinct persons in one Godhead.” This doctrine is essential to understanding the unity and diversity in the Godhead. There is a reason why this doctrine has been the only sufficient systematic throughout church history at explaining the unity and diversity of God. More on this in section 2 and 3. The central aim in affirming the eternal generation of the Son is to protect the full divinity of the Son. Afterall, what do you call the son of a duck? A duck. A thing begets that which it is. A human begets another human. A dog a dog. And if the Son is begotten of God, He is God. We should not think of the term generation, or begotten, as univocal. Listen to Francis Turretin as he explains the analogical usage of this term. He says, “As all generation indicates a communication of essence on the part of the begetter to the begotten (by which the begotten becomes like the begetter and partakes of the same nature with him), 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 and is made perfectly like him).” He continues, “Whatever may be the analogy between natural and human generations, and the supernatural and divine, still the latter is not to be measured by the former or to be tried by them because they greatly differ (whether we consider the principle, the mode or the end). For in physical generation, the principle is not only active, but also passive and material; but in the divine it is only active.” Building on this he says further, “In the former [natural generation], a communication is made not of the whole essence, but only of a part which falls and is alienated from the begetter. In the latter [divine generation], the same numerical essence is communicated without division and alienation. In [human generation], the produced is not only distinct but also separate from the begetter because the begetter generates out of himself terminatively (or in a conclusive manner). In [divine generation], the begetter generates in himself and not out of himself. Thus the begotten Son (although distinct) still is never divided from him. He is not only of a like (homoiousious), but also of the same essence (homoousios).” One error that is made when considering the begotten Son is when we apply this merely to the incarnation. Are we saying that the flesh is begotten of God? Then the flesh will share the nature of that which it was begotten of. But we affirm the full humanity of Christ. Thus when Scripture speaks of the begotten Son, we see this speaking to personal subsistence within the Godhead and not deified flesh. Wilhelmus A Brakel commenting on this absurd notion remarks, “Does the human nature determine sonship? Or could we say that Christ’s human nature is the image of the invisible God? Is not He the Son of God from eternity, being in the form of God? Is not He in His divine nature the express image of His Father’s Person?” Moving forward, the biblical witness to this doctrine is both expressly set down and necessarily contained in the pages of Holy writ. Much has been made of the use by the fathers of the term “only begotten (monogenes in Greek)”. Modern scholarship has cast doubt on this interpretation of the Greek word, monogenes. However, this word is not the sole ground by which the Fathers of old stood firm on this biblical doctrine. Though I think there is a good case to be made for the term “only begotten,” let us proceed to the texts not in dispute. Look at Hebrews 1:3-6: “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God's angels worship him.” John Gill deduces from verse 3 that “the Father and the Son are of the same nature, as the sun and its ray; and that the one is not before the other, and yet distinct from each other, and cannot be divided or separated one from another,” and then commenting on verse 4 he notes that “this intends. . . (the) equality and sameness of nature, and distinction of persons; for if the Father is God, Christ must be so too; and if he is a person, his Son must be so likewise, or he cannot be the express image and character of him.” Hebrews quotes Psalm 2:7, “I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” These texts, at the very least, put to bed the claim that the Son is not begotten of the Father. We need not rely on monogenes to support the begetting of the Son. A Brakel commenting on Psalm 2:7 notes as well that “‘This day’...must be interpreted in a manner congruent with the nature of God for whom everything is simultaneously in the present and for whom a thousand years are but as yesterday.” And as we talked about earlier, you beget the “what” that you are. Turning now to Proverbs 8:22-25 we read, ““The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth.” This text has been a constant historical proof text for the doctrine of the eternal processions. 1 Corinthians 1:24 tells us that Christ is “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Proverbs 8, thus speaks to the Son as being “brought forth” from the Father. The Father has never been without wisdom. Thus, despite convoluted claims about this text teaching the creation of wisdom (or the Son), this text actually demonstrates (via tota Scriptura) that there never was a time that the Son, who is the wisdom of God, was not and yet the Son is “brought forth” from the Father. Commenting on this text, Owen stated, “God possessed him eternally as his essential wisdom--as he was always, and is always, in the bosom of the Father, in the mutual ineffable love of the Father and Son, in the eternal bond of the Spirit.” He says later (combining this text with John 1:18) that “His being the only-begotten Son declares his eternal relation unto the person of the Father, of whom he was begotten in the entire communication of the whole divine nature.” Seeing this text in light of Micah 5:2 is also helpful. Micah 5:2 says, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” A Brakel comments here that “this text speaks of two different ‘goings or comings forth.’ The one would be from Mary according to His human nature, whereas the other would be ‘from of old, from everlasting,’ that is, according to His divine nature.” Cyril of Jerusalem commenting in the 4th C. says, “do not fix your attention on him as coming from Bethlehem simply but worship him as begotten eternally of the Father. Admit no one who speaks of a beginning of the Son in time, but acknowledge his timeless beginning.” John 5:26 is also a text that must be addressed. It reads, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.” As time is quickly fleeting, I will simply point out that the life in himself that the Father possesses is the same life in himself granted to the Son. Many modern exegets have exclusively tied this to judgement and do not see this as a text on divine self-existence. I sincerely wonder if this would be the case were there not a problem with this doctrine. The Father’s having life in Himself is a statement that could not be said of creation. This is a “God thing.” God judges the living and the dead. Even judgement is God’s prerogative. A Brakel says of John 5:26, “As the Father has this life in himself, the Son likewise has this life in Himself. Thus, the Father and Son are equal; identical life is in each of them and in this respect they are the same. The difference, however, consists in the manner in which they possess this life; the Father having life in Himself, has given to the Son likewise to have life in Himself…” This granting by the Father seems to be far more consistent with what Augustine calls “an eternal grant.” Lastly I think we should consider the multitude of texts like but especially 1 John 4:9: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son (or only-begotten Son) into the world, so that we might live through him.” This text says God sent his Son into the world. The consistent testimony of Scripture is that God sent His Son into the world. The Son did not become Son in the womb of Mary. The Son has always been Son. The 19th C. JFB Bible commentary even notes this text as “a proof against Socinians, [seeing] that the Son existed before He was ‘sent into the world.’” Have now defined eternal generation and considering biblical support for the doctrine, let us now turn to the creedal/confessional historical survey of this doctrine.

2: The great majority of us here are confessional Christians. We recognize the importance of the great confessions of the past. This section will not be my sharing with you individual church fathers who have taught this doctrine. For one, that would be something that would take far more time than I’ve been allotted. Furthermore, it is much wiser to look to those creeds handed down to us to find what the Christians of old have taught. Many opponents of this doctrine attempt to find isolated quotes from one person here or one person there (normally from the 20th Century as it is a very difficult task to find a denial of this doctrine before that). Let us first look at the Nicene creed. The council of Nicea was held in 325 AD in what is now modern Turkey. It was a council brought together in the midst of the Arian controversy. The Arians denied the full divinity of the Son and the slogan “there was a time when he was not” was a sort of mantra of the Arians. In 381 AD, the council of Constantinople was convened. From these two councils we have what we refer to as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. The part of the creed we are interested in states: “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.” Remember the context of the council of Nicea. The Nicene fathers were seeking to protect and defend the full divinity of the Son. How did they do this? The confessed exactly what we are speaking on today. What do you call the son of a duck? The Son is eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God. Next we turn to the council of Chalcedon. This council met in 451 in what is also now modern day Turkey. This council met to combat multiple heresies concerning the nature, or natures of Christ. As Chalcedon represents the pinnacle of confessional Christology, I will quote what is called the Chalcedonian definition in whole: “We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God [theotokos], according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.” These men confessed that the Son was “begotten before all ages”, “consubstantial with Father according to the Godhead” and “consubstantial with us according to the Manhood”. These divines understood that to be begotten of God according to his manhood would harm both the teaching of Christ’s full humanity and the denial of his consubstantiality with the Father as to the Godhead. They affirmed with the holy Fathers the eternal generation of the Son as a doctrine defending the full divinity of the Son. The Athanasian Creed dated to the fifth or sixth century, while not written by Athanasius, has been the third head of Nicene orthodoxy and trinitarian thought. These three creeds are generally a package deal when speaking of Nicene orthodoxy (again held by the Catholic, Orthodox (with a minor objection), and Protestant traditions alike). Allow me, for the sake of time, to selectively quote the creed: “we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. . . .The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. . .And in the Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are co-eternal. . .So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.” Moving virtually unchallenged to the time of the Reformation we get to the great confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries. The Book of Concord of the Lutherans begins by affirming the Apostles’, Nicene, and Anthanasian Creeds. The 2nd Helvetic Confession in the 16th Century states, “We believe and teach that God is one in essence, and three in persons -- Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Father hath begotten the Son from eternity; the Son is begotten in an unspeakable manner; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeds from both, and is to be worshiped with both as one God. There are not three Gods, but three persons -- consubstantial, coeternal, distinct as to person and order, yet without any inequality. The divine essence or nature is the same in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.” The Belgic confession, composed in the 16th Century, forms a third of what has become known as the three forms of unity. In article 10 it states: “We believe that Jesus Christ according to His divine nature is the only begotten Son of God, begotten from eternity, not made, nor created (for then He should be a creature), but co-essential and co-eternal with the Father, the very image of his substance, and the effulgence of his glory, equal unto Him in all things. He is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature but from all eternity, as these testimonies, when compared together, teach us.” The 39 articles of the Church of England in the 16th Century states in article 2: “The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man..” Finally, the WCF, Savoy Declaration, and our own 2nd London Baptist Confession states plainly that “The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son.” What we see is an unbroken chain of clear, unambiguous affirmations of the eternal generation of the Son. Scott Swain sums this up nicely: “Between the time of the fourth and eighteenth centuries, it would be difficult to find a Christian theologian--who would not affirm [the eternal generation of the Son].” He does recognize that there was “a ‘minority report’ of Reformed theologians going back to John Calvin expressed reservations about certain formulations of the doctrine, particularly among the church fathers. These reservations notwithstanding, Calvin and this Reformed minority report continued to affirm the broad ecumenical consensus that the doctrine of eternal generation is true, theologically meaningful, and biblical.” There has been, as he said, some disagreement over the term eternal generation. Even some great minds of the past have expressed reservations about the term and/or “certain formulations” of eternal generation while maintaining that the Son is eternally begotten, such as Calvin. As the doctrine has been explained (or formulated) thus far, however, there is no theological difference between eternal begottenness and eternal generation. I will be happy (very happy) to discuss the nuance of this with anyone after this lecture, including the differences between specific church fathers, but I will let that dog lie for now. Let us now look at some modern objections to the eternal generation of the Son.

3: I want to first mention what might be the two most common objections (from trinitarians) to eternal generation from the pews...a vacuum and various versions of social trinitarianism. Many reject the eternal generation of the Son as protecting the full divinity of the Son and eternal distinctions of the subsistences while replacing the doctrine with mere assertions of what historically has been the end results of the very doctrine they are denying (thus the vacuum objection). Many want to hold to eternal distinctions of the subsistences and full divinity of the persons while rejecting the doctrine that got us there. I will simply and lovingly call on these people to carefully consider what they are abandoning. On the other hand, social trinitarianism has been a modern model (certainly by internet theologians) proposed perhaps most famously in our day by William Lane Craig. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig describe the trinity as “distinct centers of consciousness, each with its proper intellect and will.” They ask us to consider that “we could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God...It seems undeniable that there is some part-whole relation obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.” James Dolezal comments on this statement pointing out that “This denial that the whole divine nature is in each divine person would be similar to calling one’s hand, foot, or nose ‘human,’ since each part is a part of the individual human, while denying that the entirety of humanity is in any other part.” I will not mince words here, this denial of the simplicity of God is a denial of anything that could conceivably be called orthodox trinitarian thought. Irenaeus writing in the 2nd C. has very relevant rebukes to these vain philosophers: “But if they had known the Scriptures, and been taught by the truth, they would have known, beyond doubt, that God is not as men are, and that His thoughts are not like the thoughts of men. For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those affections and passions which operate among men. He is simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to himself, since His is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly seeing, and wholly light, and the whole source of all that is good--even as the religious and pious are wont to speak concerning God.” The Belgic Confession has as its opening words the following statement: “We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God.” Given that the audience today is likely not sympathetic to this foolishness in the slightest, let us move on. I mainly want to focus in on two aspects of what I believe to be a great error that we, as baptists, seem to be dealing with currently. For those of you who may have dozed off I call on you to listen up. What I am getting ready to address is an error that, whether you know it or not, has planted deep roots in conservative Christian (especially baptist) circles. It is being pumped out by meta-church organizations, popular websites, and even conservative, evangelical southern baptist seminaries. The error I refer to goes by many names. ERAS (eternal roles of Authority and Submission), ESS (eternal submission of the Son), and EFS (eternal functional subordination). I will, hereafter, simply refer to the collective group by the term ERAS. This is not to diminish the other titles or fail to allow for nuance but rather to save myself from having to say ERAS/ESS/EFS everytime I refer to this belief. This is a view that has become very pervasive in certain baptist circles, though certainly not only baptist circles. Most of the proponents of this view articulate their views in the context of gender identity and the roles in marriage. This has really crept into our churches through the biblical counseling movement. Let me say immediately that this is not a biblical counseling problem. Discipleship has become a forgotten practice in the larger evangelical world and those faithful men and women in the biblical counseling movement are seeking to correct this wrong using what my Pastor, quoting the Puritans, calls “soul care.” However, many in this movement have taken the position that when we argue for complementary roles in marriage we should be using the Trinity as an analogy. They say things like, “The Son is equal to the Father, yet He submits to Him and so you, wife, are equal to your husband, yet you should submit to him.” Let it be made abundantly clear that ERAS proponents are speaking to ad-intra submission. This is not incarnational submission alone. What is troubling about this is that a key tenant to biblical counseling is a relentless commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture. Yet, the analogy just presented has absolutely zero biblical support. The view that a wife is equal to her husband, yet should be submissive while the husband also being equal should sacrificially love his wife has much, strong, biblical support, yet the analogy between a husband and wife and the Trinity is met with biblical silence. The only text that could conceivably be used to deny this would be 1 Corinthians 11:3: “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” As we will see shortly, this is incarnational headship is not only appropriate but necessary. There are really two aspects to ERAS that I want to address. The first is that held by some that deny the eternal generation of the Son and instead replace it with structures of authority and submission to explain eternal distinctions of the persons. The second sees the eternal generation of the Son as consistent with ERAS. Both are in error. Before moving any further in this discussion it must be said that the ERAS adherents we are talking about deny any ontological subordination or submission. One of the most ardent proponents of this view is on the faculty at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Bruce Ware. Dr. Ware states, “The property of the ‘eternal functional subordination’ of the Son, or of his eternal submission to the Father, surely is a property exclusively of the Son and one that the Father does not possess. But is not this property strictly and only a personal property? That is, this is a property of the person of the Son, and it is a property that could exist only in relation to another person. The Son could not possess this property were he a monad or a Unitarian deity. But as the person of the Son, his is under the authority of the Father, and as such his property of eternally submitting to the Father is a property of his personhood in relation (and only in relation) to the Father; hence it is nothing other than a ‘personal property.’” So Ware is expressly stating that the submission being spoken of is a submission of person and not nature. While Ware says in another book that “each Person is fully equal to each other in their commonly possessed essence” he says earlier that “The Father possesses the place of supreme authority, and the Son is the eternal Son of the eternal Father. As such, the Son submits to the Father just as the Father, as the eternal Father of the eternal Son, exercises authority over the Son. And the Spirit submits to both the Father and the Son.” Wayne Grudem claims that “If we do not have economic subordination, then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have the three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity.” He continues, “For example, if the Son is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally ‘Father’ and the Son is not eternally ‘Son.’ This would mean that the Trinity has not eternally existed.” Considering section 2 of this lecture I can only scoff at this audacious claim. But what’s wrong with this? Glenn Butner brings to light a grave error of this view. He says, “EFS posits that all divine actions are divisible into an operation of commanding by the Father and an operation of obeying by the Son. The Son does not share in the distinct operation of commanding, and the Father does not share in the distinct operation of obeying.” He continues, “Here we do not have a theology of a single operation carried out in a threefold manner, from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. Rather, we have claims of coordinated-yet-distinct operations of the Father and Son.” This is contra-Nicene and is at odds with the doctrine of inseparable operations (a doctrine maintained by the pro-Nicene tradition…[as a side note, Grudem has brought up the charge of Modalism in relation to the doctrine of inseparable operations...I can only shake my head]). When ERAS posits that commanding is proper to the Father, and only the Father, while obeying is proper to the Son, and only the Son they have “divided a single divine operation into two operations.” [PAUSE] As I see it, a more evident problem with ERAS, though consistent with a denial of inseparable operations, is the problem of the will. The God-Man, Jesus Christ, had two wills. In Luke 22:42 Jesus said, “...not my will, but yours, be done.” This text along with others shows us that Jesus had “two natures...concurring in one Person and one Subsistence (mode of existence), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son…”, as the Chalcedonian Definition of 451 confesses. It also tells us that the God-Man had two wills, a fully human will and a fully divine will. The wills of Christ must be wills of nature as to be wills of person would indicate that the God-Man was not one person with two natures (orthodoxy), but two persons with two natures (this we call Nestorianism). Full humanity requires possession of a human will, and according to Chalcedon Jesus only possessed a human nature, not a human person. Jesus had to be fully human to fully redeem sinful humanity. This has been the constant faith of the Christian church since the confrontation with monothelitism in the 7th C. (which argued that will is a property of person and said that Christ had only one will). Lest anyone claim that it took 7 centuries to speak to this issue I will again quote Irenaeus writing in the 2nd C., “Jesus Christ was not a mere man, begotten from Joseph in the ordinary course of nature, but was very God, begotten of the Father Most High, and very man, born of the Virgin.” While not addressing will, specifically, one could very easily say this was proto-dyothelitism. ERAS requires submission in the person of the Son to the person of the Father prior to the incarnation and in the immanent Trinity. Mike Ovey (a leading proponent of ERAS) said as much: "Obedience suggests submission to the will of another, not oneself." For the Son to eternally submit to/obey the Father, the Son must have a distinct will from the Father. While I believe modern ERAS proponents to be more “willing” (pun intended) to abandon dyothelitism, Maximus the Confessor’s question to Pyrrhus during the monothelite controversy indicates that he believed subordinationism to be the greater threat. He asked Pyrrhus, “Wilt thou say that. . . because there are three hypostases there are also three wills, and because of this, three natures as well, since the canons and definitions of the Fathers say that the distinction of wills implieth a distinction of natures? So said Arius!” Agatho of Rome recognized the issue of operations, “For if anybody should mean a personal will, when in the holy Trinity there are said to be three Persons, it would be necessary that there should be asserted three personal wills, and three personal operations (which is absurd and truly profane).” As will is a product of nature and not of person (as previously shown), ERAS cannot be consistently taught without either compromising the one will of God (tritheism) or the ousia, or substance, of God (subordinationism). Both are unacceptable. I’m thankful for the blessed inconsistencies from ERAS proponents but what today is an inconsistency may tomorrow become heresy. Quoting Dr. Butner once more: “If a will is a property of nature, then the Trinity has one will and thus one person of the Trinity cannot qua divinity eternally ‘obey’ or ‘submit’ to another.” And as Dolezal points out, “eternal functional subordination requires that the volition of the Father, Son, and Spirit be three really distinct volitional acts.” While the fear of subordinationism is noted, for my money ERAS appears to be none other than social trinitarianism by another name, which already is a kissing cousin of tritheism. Quickly, some ERAS adherents think that the eternal generation of the Son is actually consistent with ERAS. Let it be noted that some of these men have come to hold to eternal generation having in times past rejected it, such as Ware and Grudem. Dr. Lindblad addresses this head on in his published review of One God in Three Person for the 2016 edition of the Journal of the Institutes of Reformed Baptist Studies. He says that this view “assumes that generation and submission are of the same order. They are not. The divine processions are subsistent relations within the undivided divine essence, and as such they are ontological categories. To be sure, the Son’s generation from the Father is not predicated of the divine essence; but because the generation of the Son from the Father is a necessary, eternal, immutable, impassible, and therefore, internal (ad intra) act of procession it does not terminate ad extra.” He continues, “Subordination and submission, however, are functional categories, pertaining to the divine works that do terminate ad extra.” What Lindblad is pointing out is the confusion of ad extra, functional categories, with ad intra, subsistent relations within the Godhead. He says later that “the ad intra modes of subsistence are not functional categories.” and he is correct. The Father’s generating and the Son’s being generated are ontological perfections. John Webster notes that “Begetting and consubstantiality are inseparable.” Coming full circle we again consider 1 Corinthians 11:3: “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” Remember I called this incarnational headship. The Son took on a full human nature as the Christ. Speaking to the incarnational obedience of Christ taught in Philippians 2:5-8, John Owen said, “This person ‘took on him the form of a servant,’--that is the nature of man in the condition of a servant. For it is the same with his being made of a woman, made under the law; or taking on him the seed of Abraham. And this person BECAME obedient. It was in the human nature, in the form of a servant, wherein he was obedient.” Obedience is natural to creation. Contra ERAS, Scripture teaches us that the Son learned obedience in the incarnation. Having now discussed the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, diving into the creedal/confessional historical survey of this doctrine, and briefly looking at modern objections to it we have reached our conclusion.

Some may wonder why the title is Eternal Generation of the Son: The Gospel’s Glory Preserved. Writing in the early 2nd C., Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the Ephesian church, “We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the Virgin. For ‘the Word was made flesh.’ Being incorporeal, He was in the body; being impassible, He was in a passible body; being immortal, He was in a mortal body; being life, He became subject to corruption, that He might free our souls from death and corruption, and heal them, and might restore them to health, when they were diseased with ungodliness and wicked lusts.” This doctrine is not some 4th C. doctrine that tradition has simply not allowed to die. This is something seen in Scripture and taught as early in the church as the 2nd C. (As early as Christian writings exist.) This doctrine has seen its edges smoothed out in the face of the heresies that attacked the church, as have all the great systematics of our orthodox christian tradition. The Reformed have always made it a point to defend doctrines like Justification by Faith alone and Sola Scriptura, but they have also stood fast on Who God is. A false gospel cannot save. Likewise, a false savior cannot save. Jesus said in John 8:24: “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” Most here realize that Jesus literally says unless you believe that “I am” (ego eimi), you will die in your sins. Jesus is fully divine. Trinitarian errors, at their heart, attack one of two things. The full divinity of the Son or the eternal distinctions of the persons. Modern Saballiens, we usually call them Modalist (you can find this teaching in the Oneness Pentecostals most famously) deny personal distinctions and see the Father, Son, and Spirit as different manifestations of the same “person” of God. Justin Martyr addressed this in the 2nd C. saying “For they who affirm that the Son is the Father, are proved neither to have become acquainted with the Father, nor to know that the Father of the universe has a Son; who also, being the first-begotten Word of God, is even God.” Justin argues against Sabellianism by affirming the eternal distinctions of the Father and the Son while affirming the deity of the Son. On the flip side, Jehovah’s Witnesses are a modern group that would most closely resemble the Arians of the Nicene period. They deny the full divinity of the Son. We, however, stand fast and affirm the God of Scripture as One God who eternally exists as Father, Son, and Spirit. The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son is not some ivory tower teaching that should stay safely bound away in the pages of the past but a biblical, confessional doctrine that we should all seek to learn and appreciate more. Herman Bavinck rightly said that “...the entire Christian belief system stands or falls with the confession of God’s Trinity. It is the core of the Christian faith, the root of all its dogmas, the basic content of the new covenant. . . It is in the doctrine of the Trinity that we feel the heartbeat of God’s entire revelation for the redemption of humanity. We are baptized in the name of the triune God, and in that name we find rest for our souls and peace for our conscience. Our God is above us, before us, and within us.”