

The Most Abused Ellen White Quote In Adventism: Part 1

Hello brothers and sisters in Jesus. This op is my opinion regarding what the most abused Egw quote in Adventism is. While this is certainly a matter of debate I have a very good candidate. Would you like to know what I think it is? Here it is:

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived” {DA 530.3}

Now how is this quote abused? The answer is that it is used as a proof text for the doctrine of unbegottenism. The best example of this type of usage comes from Leroy Froom, as illustrated in his highly deceptive work - Movement of Destiny. Please note the underlined portions in the quote below

“In the midst of the foregoing assemblage, observe one all-embracing sentence minutely. Ellen White seemingly compressed everything pertinent to the eternity of Christ, as the Infinite God, into a single classic sentence: “In Him [Christ] was life, original, unborrowed, underived” (Signs, April 8, 1897). Consider the immensity of these three significant terms in their cumulative sequence. Catch their full import:

“Original”— *Inherently, innately, independently His. Without any antecedent. His existence was not acquired, obtained, conferred, or received. It did not come from another through transmission. It was His by nature—intrinsically, always, and personally His as the eternal Second Person of the Eternal Godhead.*

“Unborrowed”—*Not something not originally His from all eternity. It was intrinsically His own, by right of original possession. It was His, just as truly as was the Father's—not simply somehow gotten from the Father. It was no more borrowed than was the Father's.*

“Underived”—*Not acquired, received, earned, or obtained from another. It was solely, constitutionally, and individually His. Not formerly in possession of another, did not become His at some point of time, or through some process. It was His eternally, originally, through everlasting possession, from everlasting unto everlasting—because He was eternally God the Son.*

“That is the nature of Christ's eternal Godhood as seen through the unerring lens of inspiration. All this is involved in His absolute Deity. That is the clear intent of Ellen White's definitive, classic sentence, written when this was still an active issue. Such is the progressive guidance of the Blueprint—written nearly a decade after 1888.(Movement of Destiny pg 297, 298)

Now what just happened here? Mr. Froom just added to the subject didn't he? Did you catch it? The Egw quote in question, if you read it in context, is really a description of the type of life in the Man Christ Jesus yet what Mr. Froom did was try to make the quote out to be a proof of the unbegotten existence of Christ. Please notice that he claimed that all of his explanation was so as to catch the “full import” and “clear intent” of Egw's words and he presented his explanation as if it were viewing the matter “through the unerring lens of inspiration.” In other words, if you

should disagree with his interpretation of those words then you would be liable to be treated as if you had a false view and were denying Mrs. White's inspiration. This was modus operandi back in those days. The fallacy of a manufactured point of decision was accomplished by conflating an interpretation of Mrs. White's words for Mrs. White's words themselves. Thus you either had to accept the trinitarian/unbegotten interpretation of Mrs. White's writings, according to how men like Leroy Froom interpreted her, or you were considered to be a rejector of the Spirit of prophecy. Again, don't take my word for this, Leroy Froom confesses to this tactic:

*"I am sure that we are agreed in evaluating the book, Evangelism as one of the great contributions in which the Ministerial Association had a part back in those days. **You know what it did with men in the Columbia Union who came face to face with the clear, unequivocal statements of the Spirit of Prophecy on the Deity of Christ, personality of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and the like. They either had to lay down their arms and accept those statements, or else they had to reject the Spirit of Prophecy.** (Letter from LeRoy Froom to Roy A. Anderson, January 18, 1966)*

Ah but there's the rub isn't it? It's not actually Mrs. White's "*clear, unequivocal*" statements that are problematic but rather it is the interpretation added to them by uninspired men that is the issue. Yet those two have been severely conflated as if they were one of the same. This approach is still with us today in Adventism. If anyone begins to openly question the doctrine of the trinity and/or starts to ponder if the pre-incarnate Christ was begotten then the typical approach to deal with it is to share a compilation of certain selected Egw quotes that were designed for the express purpose of establishing the trinity doctrine and unbegottenism. And if you disagree or try to bring balance to the matter with other Egw quotes then you can be made out to be an heretic who is against the Spirit of prophecy. I personally experienced this myself. I am quoting one of my former professors in an email that he sent to me.

"Doug Batchelor was telling me that he was scolded by a conference president for believing that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had distinct roles before the incarnation, and he tried to get Doug's program taken off the air on a radio station in their region. I told him about your study and how certain faculty had reacted against your position even though you had justified it with dozens of quotations from Ellen White. He asked me if you would allow me to share a copy of your study with him. He is very interested in learning more about what Ellen White has to say on the subject. Let me know if you would feel comfortable sharing it with him. (Edwin Reynolds to Jason Smith 04/11/2018)

For the record I did feel comfortable sharing my studies and Dr. Reynolds sent them to Doug Batchelor. I do not know if he ever read them but if he did it is apparent that he was not convinced that a Son begotten is not the same as a son by creation. Yet I am getting off subject.

Please notice that even though I had justified my position with "*dozens of quotations from Ellen White*" I still faced a negative reaction against it. Certain of the faculty members reject the idea that the Son of God staked His eternal existence, they think it impossible for God to have begotten a pre-incarnate Son based on the DA 530 quote, and they think that Egw was following an erroneous tradition when she used the language "only begotten Son" and defined it as "a Son begotten." I know this as a fact, having heard it from their lips myself. How can these things be?

The best answer I can surmise is because of a new interpretation of Egw quotes that has become normative within Adventism. This really traces back to the late 1930's and 40's and culminates in the the Questions on Doctrines saga in the 1950s but I will not be getting into that history now. Instead let me get back on subject about the particular quote in question.

Anyhow, when it comes to pushing the doctrine of unbegottenism in modern Adventism I believe the reference quoted most often is DA 530 quote and the interpretation given to it is erroneous. If you read Adventist literature you will see this quote all over the place, implicitly and explicitly. I could literally give you hundreds of examples but I will just share three:

“Only gradually did this false doctrine give way to the biblical truth, and largely under the impact of Ellen White’s writings in statements such as: “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived” (Review and Herald January 6th, 1994)

"By the end of the 19th century, EllenWhite could not have been clearer when she distanced her description of Jesus from any pagan ideas of derivation: “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life” (DA 530) (Adventist Record August 25, 2018)

“A few pages further in the book she repeated her statement from 1897, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.” These statements clearly describe Christ as God in the highest sense. He is not derived from the Father as most Adventist up to that time believed, nor has divinity been bestowed upon him.” (Record, July 22, 2000)

Are you following? In the modern SDA trinitarian conception the original pioneers promoted a “false doctrine” that described Jesus according to “pagan ideas of derivation.” And supposedly it was Ellen White who actually saved the day by her quote in DA 530. In other words this quote, as understood by SDAs today, is teaching the doctrine of unbegottenism and the idea that the pre-incarnate Christ was begotten of God is a false, pagan doctrine.

Now perhaps the most flabbergasting thing about this interpretive approach to her quote is how out of harmony it is with the greater light of God’s Word:

“For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself (John 5:36)

Even though the Bible says that the Son was “given” to have life in Himself as the Father has in Himself, many modern SDA says “no” and use Mr. Froom’s interpretation of Ellen White to negate it. In Christ is life “original” so that means His life was not received. In Christ is life “unborrowed” so that means it was not somehow gotten from the Father. In Christ is life “underived” so that means it was not acquired, received, earned or obtained. So when the Bible says that Son was “given” to have life in Himself that cannot possibly mean “given.” Glyn Parfitt accurately represents such modern day Adventist thinking when he wrote:

“Surely it is evident that if Jesus’ life was given to Him by the Father, it could not be described as “original, unborrowed, underived.” [Glyn Parfitt “The Trinity what has God Revealed”]

Yet is it really evident? I have been scouring the Adventist periodicals from 1897 onward, when Ellen White first published these words, to see if this was how her statement was taken. Was her statement understood to mean that the Son was not given to have the same type of life in Himself as God the Father has? Was it taken to mean that the pre-incarnate Christ was unbegotten? That was what I was trying to find out.

What I have found is quite the opposite of the modern SDA view. Her words were actually understood to mean that God gave His own life to His Son for Him to have as His very own possession. To put it in other words, they were interpreted to mean that the life of God the Father, which is a self-sustaining fountain unto Himself, was given to His Son by virtue of His begetting with the result that He, the Son, is a self-sustaining fountain unto Himself too. This was in harmony with the original SDA conception but, there was a shift in terms of when this occurred. Let's prove this now.

First here is the conception of John 5:26 as explained by the SDA pioneer R.F. Cottrell:

“God “only hath immortality.” HE IS THE ONE FOUNTAIN FROM WHICH ALL LIFE IS DERIVED. BUT HE HAS **GIVEN** THIS PREROGATIVE TO HIS SON, THAT HE MAY GIVE LIFE TO THEM THAT BELIEVE. “FOR AS THE FATHER HATH LIFE IN HIMSELF; SO HATH HE GIVEN TO THE SON TO HAVE LIFE IN HIMSELF; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.” John v, 26. Life, in the literal sense, is here intended; for he is speaking of the resurrection of the dead (R.F. Cottrell “Life Through Christ” Review and Herald, March 15th, 1864)

Numerous other quotes to this same effect can be given all throughout the lifetime of Ellen White.

Now, just here is the salient point, I have not found any evidence from within the lifetime of Ellen White that even a single SDA changed views about the Son having been given this type of life. I have been looking but so far I cannot find even one proof of this change within her lifetime.

Thus the evidence suggests to me that the unbegotten interpretation of DA 530 is a modern interpretation of her words. It appears to be a side effect of the systematic efforts to repudiate the pioneer position and establish trinitarian doctrine as normative within the denomination. So there was a change that occurred but it is one that appears to be completely unknown during the lifetime of Mrs. White and for at least a couple of decades thereafter. The language of “original” and “underived” back in her day did not mean “unbegotten.” Please consider this quote from John Gill.

“THERE WAS LIFE IN THE WORD WITH RESPECT TO HIMSELF; A DIVINE LIFE, the same with the life of the Father and of the Spirit; and is IN HIM, not by gift, **NOR BY DERIVATION** OR COMMUNICATION; **BUT ORIGINALLY**, AND INDEPENDENTLY, AND FROM ALL ETERNITY: indeed he lived before his incarnation as Mediator, and Redeemer (John Gill on John 1:4)

Now I have sometimes run a little bit of a test on my brethren by asking SDA trinitarians about this quote. Specifically I have asked what they understood the author to be teaching. Without exception the response is that the author was unambiguously teaching that the pre-incarnate Christ was unbegotten. The SDA trinitarian brethren insisted that the quote's language of "nor by derivation or communication; but originally, and independently, and from all eternity" could mean nothing else except unbegottenism. Yet they were wrong! The problem is that they are interpreting language through the same lens as Froom. The irrefutable proof of their error is that very same author wrote this in the very same book shortly after the quote in question:

"...THE WORD IS HERE CALLED, "THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER"; WHICH CANNOT BE SAID OF CHRIST, AS MAN; FOR AS SUCH, HE WAS NOT "BEGOTTEN" AT ALL: nor on the account of his resurrection from the dead; for so he could not be called the "only begotten", since there are others that have been, and millions that will be raised from the dead, besides him: nor by reason of adoption; for if adopted, then not begotten; these two are inconsistent; besides, he could not be called the only begotten, in this sense, because there are many adopted sons, even all the elect of God: nor by virtue of his office, as magistrates are called the sons of God; for then he would be so only in a figurative and metaphorical sense, and not properly; WHEREAS HE IS CALLED GOD'S OWN SON, THE SON OF THE SAME NATURE WITH HIM; AND, AS HERE, THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER, **BEGOTTEN BY HIM** IN THE SAME NATURE, IN A WAY INCONCEIVABLE AND INEXPRESSIBLE BY US. (John Gill on John 1:14)

So, according to Mr. Gill, the Son had life in Himself not "by derivation" but "originally and independently" yet He was "begotten by" God the Father and was His "own Son," the "Son of the same nature with Him."

Amazingly enough the SDA trinitarians that I showed this quote just ignored it. They would not admit that the language "nor by derivation or communication; but originally, and independently, and from all eternity" did not actually mean unbegotten. Why did they not make this admission? Is it not obvious? Of course it is!

My only guess as to why they would not admit this is because they still wanted to definitively maintain that Egw's language about "life, original, unborrowed, underived" being in Christ meant that He was unbegotten. They did not want to admit, even as a possibility, that this type of life could be given.

And this leads me to another point. Not only do I remain flabbergasted about the disregard of John 5:26 but I see the exact same thing with Egw's writings too. Consider this quote:

"In him was life, original, unborrowed, underived. This life is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ. He cannot earn it; it is given him as a free gift if he will believe in Christ as his personal Saviour {ST April 8, 1897, par. 2}

Here we see that although this type of life is not inherent in man, man can nevertheless "possess it." How so? Through Christ! While no man can ever earn it, it can be "given him as a free gift"

through belief in Christ.

Now, what did we just read? We just read that “life, original, unborrowed, underived” can be possessed by man. It can be given Him as a free gift. So if that is the case for created beings then why in the world would anyone object to the idea that this type of life could be given to Christ for Him to have inherently? Why would John 5:26 seem out of the purview of reality in light of this? I stand astonished at how the doctrine of unbegottenism continues to blind men and women to the facts here.

So how much evidence do we need? We have John 5:26. We have ST April 8, 1897. We have the parallel language from John Gill. Yet none of it seems to have any impact. The cognitive dissonance that the doctrine of unbegottenism must resort to in order to maintain itself is astonishing. These individuals will not accept that this type of life can be given nor will they accept how the language of “original” or “underived” was used back in her day as compatible with “begotten.” It would appear that they want to use her language strictly for their own interpretive purpose instead of accepting the full scope of potential meaning for it as proven by history. This is one way how certain modern Adventists abuse this quote.

Now another way this quote is abused in Adventism is that the contemporary historical context is ignored. What do I mean by that? Well, we already demonstrated this via John Gill but let’s now do so within Adventism. Did Egw’s quote lead to the doctrine of unbegottenism for any of her contemporaries? Did it lead them to reject the idea that the Son of God was given to have life in Himself like how the Father had in Himself? No, it did not. As I stated previously I have been scouring the periodicals for even a hint of this and I cannot find it at all. Even as late as the 1930s I still find SDAs to be teaching that God the Father begot His Son. Let me illustrate and I will do so now by quoting SDAs after Mrs. White’s death.

"Since CHRIST IS BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER, he must therefore be of the same substance as the Father; hence he must have the same divine attributes that God has, and therefore he is God." (O, A. Johnson, *Bible Doctrines*, page 34, Lesson IX, 'God the Father' 1917)

“To beget means to cause to exist- Webster. The human body that was prepared for him was begotten, but Christ, the Anointed One, was not brought into existence when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. “His goings forth have been from of old from everlasting.” Micah 5:2. CHRIST WAS BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER SOME-TIME BEFORE THE PERIOD KNOWN AS TIME, (Rev 3:14) and he was begotten again at his resurrection (Acts 13:33, 34) (C.F. McVagh Canadian Tidings December 18, 1918)

““Using terms as we use them, THE SON IS CO-ETERNAL with the Father. THAT DOES NOT PREVENT HIS BEING THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD. We cannot go back into eternity and say where this eternity commenced, and where that eternity commenced. THERE IS NO CONTRADICTION TO SAY THAT THE SON IS CO-ETERNAL WITH THE FATHER, AND YET THE SON IS THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER.” (W. W. Prescott, Report of the 1919 Bible Conference for July 2nd, pg 20)

"We may conceive the Father existing from eternity and possessing infinite powers, simply

because he wills so to exist, without any cause external to himself, eternal and infinite and underived; and of the Son existing with the Father from eternity, and possessing to the full the Father's infinite powers, **BUT THESE RECEIVED FROM THE FATHER, EXISTING BECAUSE THE FATHER WILLS HIM SO TO EXIST, ETERNAL AND INFINITE AND DERIVED.** This conception will account for the entire language of the New Testament about the Son of God

“The Son is equal to the Father in everything except that which is conveyed by the terms Father and Son. He is equal to the Father in that he shares to the full the Father's existence from eternity and his infinite power and wisdom and love. But inasmuch as the Father possesses these divine attributes from himself alone, **WHEREAS THE SON POSSESS THEM AS DERIVED FROM THE FATHER,** in this real sense and in this sense only, the Father is greater than the Son

Evidently in an eternal Father and an eternal Son the ideas of older and younger can have no place. As we lift up the conception of son ship **OUT OF TIME** into eternity, these elements of it, ever present in human fathers and sons, at once disappear. When they fall away, does any conception essential to our idea of son ship remain?

"Yes; there still remains the chief idea, viz., **PERSONAL EXISTENCE AND POWERS DERIVED FROM ANOTHER PERSON. AND THIS IDEA IS PLAINLY EMBODIES IN JOHN 5:26** and in other express assertions from the lips of Christ describing his own relation to God." (W.W. Prescott, 1919 "The Doctrine of Christ: A Series of Bible Studies for Use in Churches and Seminaries" pg 20)

“As the absolute Son, He, who 'in the beginning was with God, and was God,' **WAS BEGOTTEN BEFORE TIMES ETERNAL;** as the Son, who was the-God-man, He was begotten by the resurrection from the dead. So shall we be 'sons of God, being sons, of the resurrection.' Luke 20:26." (W.W. Prescott Signs of the Times, Jan 8, 1929)

"...**ANY IDEA THAT THE SON IS PART OF THE CREATION ITSELF IS UTTERLY FOREIGN TO PAUL'S CONCEPTION.** See Colossians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Philippians 2:6-8. Moffatt makes the expression, 'the first-born of all creation,' plainer by translating the Greek: "born first before all the creation;" and with this Goodspeed is in substantial agreement.

"**THE WORD "BORN" IS USED BECAUSE, IN CONTRASTING THE CREATOR* WITH HIS CREATION, IT POSTULATES THE NATURE OF THE LORD'S ORIGIN. HE WAS NOT CREATED AS WERE CREATURES, BUT WAS BORN OUT OF GOD AS GOD; AND SO IS OF THE SAME NATURE AS THE FATHER.** Just as a human son is born human by nature because his father is human, so the divine Son of God is by nature "born" God because His Father is God" ("William G. Wirth "The 'Signs' Question Corner" Signs of the Times, August 5th, 1930)

“...before the resurrection, even before He came to earth, Christ was God's only begotten Son. When God gave Christ in the beginning, He gave His “only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” **PAUL MEANT TO CONVEY THE THOUGHT THAT JUST AS SURELY AS CHRIST WAS BEGOTTEN IN THE FIRST**

PLACE, just in the same sense was He begotten when He was raised from the dead. The resurrection did not make Christ God's only begotten Son. If it did, the same could be said of Moses and others who have been raised from the dead. Back in eternity somewhere, in some way unknown to us, CHRIST WAS BEGOTTEN; and on the day of this wonderful event, a decree was issued by the Father declaring this eternal fact which was incorporated in the laws of heaven. (H.M. Kelly, The Canadian Watchman October 1st, 1933)

"THE terms "Son of God" and "God the Son" are equivalent expressions in the mind of Jesus. HIS SONSHIP RESTED UPON A DIFFERENT BASIS FROM OURS. We are "sons of God," being the product of His creation and redemption. He was neither created nor redeemed, but HIS SONSHIP COMES BY VIRTUE OF HIS DERIVED POWERS AND ATTRIBUTES. ("Raymond Bullas, Australian Signs of the Times, 25th March 1935)

"In our text in Hebrews we find revealed our Lord's unique relation to God, the Father, and also HIS UNIQUE MODE OF DERIVATION FROM THE FATHER. In another place Paul calls Jesus, "His own Son (Rom. 8: 8)," thus separating Him from all the created intelligences by an infinite gulf.... There is light for us in the description here given of the mode of the Son's derivation. The earthly relationship of father and son, so familiar to the human family is the symbol taken to illuminate this profound truth... The expression "this day" has one meaning when used in connection with things of time, and quite another when used in connection with eternity. Dean Alford quotes the consensus of opinion of orthodox Christians as endorsing the view that the expression "this day have I begotten Thee" "refers to the eternal generation of the Son," and regards it as the "nunc stans" as it was called by the earthly Christian expositors. The church of Christ as a whole has stood stiffly through the centuries for the eternity of the Son of God. But the Son is subordinate to the Father. He has "life in Himself," but THIS ATTRIBUTE IS THE GIFT OF THE FATHER... This subordination is directly traced to THE DERIVATION OF HIS LIFE FROM THE FATHER. John 5:26; 6:57" (G. F. Enoch, Eastern Tidings, June 1st 1934)

"Jesus, our Lord, while in this world said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "FOR AS THE FATHER HAS LIFE IN HIMSELF, SO HATH HE GIVEN TO THE SON TO HAVE LIFE IN HIMSELF." John 14:6; 5:26. THE FATHER AND THE SON ALONE IN ALL THE UNIVERSE HAVE ORIGINAL, UNDERIVED LIFE. Every living thing, including man, derives life from God....

"What a wonderful picture! The great invisible God and Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, MAKING HIS SON THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN HIMSELF AND HIS LIVING UNIVERSE. He is the "foundation of life." From Jesus Christ life flows out throughout the entire creation, first bringing all things into being and then sustaining them all with His life-giving power. (G.F. Enoch "The Oriental Watchman and Herald of Health November 1937)

"It would seem that the apostle is endeavoring to show that Christ was indeed the very Son of God in every respect. He bore the likeness of His Father, even "the express image of His person." Man was created "in the image of God," after His "likeness" (Gen 1:26, 27); but the Son, BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER, bore the "express image of His person... THE ESTABLISHING OF CHRIST'S SONSHIP LIKEWISE PROVES HIS DEITY. The Son possesses all the powers

of the Father. Since the Father is God, the Son also is God. The Son not only "by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they [the angels]," but He possesses the very nature of His Father. He is the second person of the heavenly trinity...." (Review and Herald, May 20th, 1937 T.M.French - editor is F.M. Wilcox)

"Cumulative evidence that the Son existed with the Father before creation is abundant in the Scriptures. In the few passages we have studied here, we find that Christ was with the Father "before the world was," "from, the days of eternity," "before the foundation of the world," "before all things." HE WAS THEREFORE NO PART OF CREATION, BUT WAS "BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER" IN THE DAYS OF ETERNITY, AND WAS VERY GOD HIMSELF. (Sabbath School Lesson Study, 4th quarter 1936, Lesson 4, October 24th, 1936, pg 12 "The Godhead")

Now either these men were all heretics - false interpreters of the Scriptures and the Testimony of Jesus - or the DA 530 quote was not understood by Egw's contemporaries or even the next generation after her death as negating a pre-incarnate begetting for the Son of God. It would appear that some (e.g. Prescott, Wirth, Enoch) actually started ascribing to the doctrine of eternal generation. As I stated before I cannot find even a single reference within her lifetime of the language from the DA 530 quote being used to teach the doctrine of unbegottenism. That is a modern interpretation that came became popular in Adventism decades after her death.