

Notes on John 5:26

"For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;"

Anti-trinitarians suggest that this verse proves that Jesus was given life from the Father when He was born in heaven and thus lends support to the literal Sonship of Jesus prior to His incarnation.

But is Jesus here referring to His pre-existent state? Or is He referring to His life subsequent to His incarnation?

The first thing we should note is the wording of the verse. It does not actually say that the Father gave life to the Son. It says that the Father gave to the Son to have life. If Jesus' intended meaning was that His Father gave Him life, He used rather roundabout wording to express this. Could it be that a giving of permission is indicated here?

The second thing draws our attention is the fact that Jesus is not talking about His pre-existence. He is referring to His position at that time and into the future from that time.

Let's examine the context:

John 5:19 Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

John 5:20 For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

John 5:21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

John 5:22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

John 5:23 That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

John 5:25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

John 5:26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;

John 5:27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the **Son of man**.

John 5:28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

John 5:29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

John 5:30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

These statements of Jesus are all referring to Him as the **Son of man**. As He says in verse 27, it is as the **Son of man** that He executes judgment. But it is also as the **Son of man** that He raises the dead, and it is as the **Son of man** that He can do nothing of Himself but seeks always to do the will of His Father.

All this indicates that it is as the **Son of man** that He has been given of the Father to have life in Himself, for all are in the same context.

What then does it mean to be given to have life in Himself? It has already been suggested that it could mean that Jesus was given authority to exercise that power. This thought is supported by the words that immediately follow:

And hath given him authority to execute judgment also.

There is a strong parallel between this statement and the one we are considering: so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.

- The same Greek word for "given" is used in each, and it is the same Greek tense (Aorist)
- Both refer "to the Son" and "[to] him"
- The verbs "to have" and "to execute" are parallel
- The objects of the verbs are "life" and "judgment"

The difference between the two verses is that the word "authority" is included in the latter passage.

The parallelism between the two statements strongly suggests that the word "authority" is to be understood in the first statement as well. Taken this way it would read:

so hath he given to the Son authority to have life in himself.

But this raises a question: if the Son already had life in Himself, why would He need authority to have it?

The answer seems to lie in the fact that at the incarnation Jesus emptied Himself of His divine attributes (*kenosis*), as we are told in Philippians 2:6,7:

Php 2:6,7 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

Having thus emptied Himself, Jesus, as the Son of man, exercised none of His divine powers unless authorized to do so by His Father. Thus Jesus said:

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John 10:17,18 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have **power** to lay it down, and I have **power** to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Here the word "power" is the same word (*exousia*) that is translated "authority" in John 5:27 ("authority to execute judgment").

By the direct command of His Father, He has been given authority to lay down His life, of Himself, and to take it up again. He can only do this by exercising the divine attribute of having "life in Himself".

Thus, John 10:18 strongly supports the concept that John 5:26 is talking about Jesus being given the **authority** "to have life in Himself".

The alternative concept, that the Father gave life to the Son at the time of His being brought into existence does not fit in with the context.

Further, it would not make any sense for the Son to have "life in Himself" if the life did not originate with Him. If the Father imparted to Him this life then it would not be "life in Himself" but it would be life that originated with the Father and not "in Himself".

On the other hand, if Jesus as God truly had "life in Himself", but emptied Himself of all divine attributes to become man, and then relied on the authority specifically given to Him by the Father to retain and exercise this attribute of having "life in Himself", both for His own resurrection and for the spiritual and physical quickening of those who were dead in their sins, then this statement of Jesus in John 5:26 is evidence **for** His eternal pre-existence, rather than having been literally given life when He was born in heaven as has been claimed.

This meaning is apparent in more modern translations of this text, including the ESV, NIV, NKJV, RSV, and TLV:

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has **granted** the Son also to have life in himself.

Conclusion

We have shown that the power or authority here spoken of that was "given" or "granted" to the Lord Jesus does not refer to the manner in which the second person of the Godhead exists, but rather the power and authority of which Christ here speaks is that which He exercised as the Son of Man - the Mediator between God and men.

Jesus was not saying that His divine nature was in some manner derived; nor does the fact that God is said to have "given" Him this power prove that He was inferior in His nature or that His existence was derived. Jesus' words have reference to His office as Mediator, and in this office He was subject to the Father. This subjection was voluntary, as Christ willingly laid aside His divine prerogatives to live as man among men, dependent upon the will of the Father; yet this proves nothing about His nature as God.