

FATHER AND SON

The Beauty and Wonder of the Relationship
Of God the Father and God the Son

Phillip F. Foley

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
1 EQUALITY, ONENESS, AND DISTINCTION OF THE FATHER AND THE SON.....	5
The Trinity Defined.....	5
The Equality of the Father and the Son: The Deity of the Son.	7
The Oneness of the Father and the Son.	11
The Distinction Between the Father and the Son.	14
2 DIVINE ORDER BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE SON.....	21
The Father Initiates and Plans, and the Son Carries Out the Father's Plans.	21
The Father Sends and the Son Comes.....	27
The Father Gives and the Son Receives.....	31
The Father Commands and the Son Obeys.	33
The Father Is the Head and the Son Submits.	38
3 THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIVINE ORDER BETWEEN.	56
THE FATHER AND THE SON	
Distinct Patterns.	56
These Patterns are Seen in the Most Exalted Passages of Christ.....	58
These Patterns Reveal How the Father and the Son Each Personalize Their One Nature.	60
These Patterns Reflect Upon Their Names: Father and Son	62
These Patterns Display the Son's Mission: To Reveal the True God.	64
These Patterns Are Taught Consistently in the Bible Which Is Our Only Source of Knowing God.....	65
4 PRACTICAL APPLICATION.....	67
Unity.	67
Love.....	68
Giving and Receiving.....	69
The Proper Use of Authority.	69
The Proper Response to Authority.	71
CONCLUSION.....	75

INTRODUCTION

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. John 17:3

Eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ. Jesus is referring to an intimate knowing where one enters into a relationship with the eternal God, not merely knowing some facts about God. Interestingly, Jesus connects knowing God to how the Son exists in relationship with the Father: “Jesus Christ whom *You have sent*.” Eternal life is knowing something of the wonderful relationship between the Father and the Son. This is clearly something God wants us to know. Yet, how many of us have ever seriously contemplated how the Father and the Son relate to one another?

Their relationship is one that is both fascinating and complex. The Scriptures present the Father and the Son as equal in essence yet distinct in person. The Son is equal to the Father in His being, but He is not the Father. He is a distinct person from the Father. Thus there is equality and distinction between them. Heretical errors are made if this delicate balance is not maintained. For example, an overemphasis of the deity of the Son, which blurs any personal difference from the Father, leads to the error of modalism. However, over stressing the distinction of the Son from the Father leads to the errors of subordination-ism and/or tritheism.¹

The biblical testimony also emphasizes a divine order between the Father and the Son. They relate to one another in noticeable patterns. These patterns reveal something of the beauty and wonder of their relationship. They relate to one another in perfect unity, infinite love, and amazing humility; always exalting the other and preferring the other. Their relationship is like no other. The goal of this study is to examine more closely the glorious relationship between the Father and the Son, which in turn will help us know God and experience eternal life.²

Terminology

Since discussions on the Trinity are often clouded with confusion over the use of terminology, it would be helpful to define some of the more significant terms right from the beginning.

Being/Essence/Nature are words that are often used synonymously.³ They refer to the

¹ For a definition of these terms, see below.

² How the person of the Holy Spirit relates both to the Father and the Son will be taken up in a future study.

³ Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 53-54; Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2004), 498-500.

intrinsic properties that characterize or identify something.⁴ There are certain intrinsic properties or attributes of God that characterize what He is like and who He is in His being.⁵ God is one in His essential nature; God is only one being.⁶ These terms, therefore, refer to what is one in God as opposed to what is three in God. God is one in His being/essence/nature; He is three in His persons. These terms must not be confused.

Person is defined as the composite of characteristics that make up an individual personality.⁷ It is the word used to describe how the Father and Son are distinct. They are not two separate beings; they are two distinct persons who share one nature.⁸ What distinguishes the persons of the Trinity is the individual way they each personalize their one nature.⁹ The difference between *person* and *being/essence/nature* is that *person* is concerned with the *way* someone is; *nature* is concerned with *what* someone is.¹⁰

What makes God unique is that there are certain properties that characterize His nature which all three persons share identically (e.g. holiness, omniscience, omnipotence, immutability). However, there are also certain qualities that characterize each one of the persons individually, which is what makes them distinct from the other persons.¹¹ One of the goals of this study is to identify some of those qualities that make the Father and the Son distinct from one another.

Order means to arrange in a proper, given, prescribed, or orderly way.¹² It refers to how the Father and Son relate to one another in discernable patterns. There is an ordering of activities

⁴ Webster's II: *New College Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 384.

⁵ J. Scott Horrell, "Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 2004), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3817/is_200409?tag=content;coll (accessed March 6, 2009).

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 238.

⁷ Webster's II, 820.

⁸ Letham, *Trinity*, 140.

⁹ Andreas J. Kostenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 112.

¹⁰ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 59, quoted in Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 112.

¹¹ Bruce Ware, "Do Relations of Authority and Submission Exist Eternally among the Persons of the Godhead?" Trinity Evangelical Divinity School debate, October 9, 2008, <http://henrycenter.org/media.php?link=all> (accessed July 27, 2010).

¹² Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 49; Letham, *Trinity*, 179.

in how the Father and the Son relate to the world and one another.¹³

Role is the characteristic and expected behavior of an individual.¹⁴ The Father and Son perform specific tasks in relation to one another. By their own innate personal disposition, they relate to each other in discernable patterns or roles. They complement one another in all they do.¹⁵

Our Course of Study

The first chapter will briefly explore the biblical teaching of the deity of the Son (against subordinationism).¹⁶ It will analyze how the Father and Son are one (against tritheism).¹⁷ It will also consider the distinctions between the Father and the Son (against modalism).¹⁸ This chapter is foundational to interpreting the divine order between the Father and the Son for it sets the parameters for this order.

Chapter two will explore the biblical patterns of how the Father and Son relate to one another. There is a distinction of roles between them. There are certain things the Father is inclined to do and others the Son is inclined to do. Five patterns will be observed of how they interact with one another.

Chapter three will summarize the findings of the divine order between the Father and the Son and analyze its theological implications. The Father and Son always work together in unity, delight, and love, with a desire to exalt the other. In this section the following questions will be examined: Does this order imply an inclination or disposition of the Father and Son to act the way they do? Are these patterns reversible? Is this order eternal: have the Father and Son always related to each other this way? How do these patterns reflect their names: *Father* and *Son*?

¹³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 248-249.

¹⁴ Webster's II, 960.

¹⁵ J. Scott Horrell, "Complementarian Trinitarianism: Divine Revelation Is Finally True to the Eternal Personal Relations," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, New Orleans, LA, November 20, 2009).

¹⁶ Subordinationism is the erroneous belief that the Son is inferior or subordinate in *being* to God the Father. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 245. In its extreme form, Arius taught that the Son was created. Another form of this teaching is that the Father is the origin of the deity of the Son, which would make the Father superior in being to the Son. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 399.

¹⁷ Tritheism is the erroneous teaching that there are three distinct persons who are each separately and equally God. If this were true there would be three Gods. Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 75; Grudem *Systematic Theology*, 248.

¹⁸ Modalism is the teaching that there is one God and one person who is God who appears in three different forms or modes. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 242. It emphasizes the unity of God to such an extent that it blurs or denies the personal distinctions between the three persons of the Godhead that are evident in so many places in Scripture. Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 75; Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 179.

The final chapter will consider how the relationship of the Father and the Son has practical application on our relationships in the world. From their relationship much can be learned as to how we are to interact with one another.

Chapter One

EQUALITY, ONENESS, AND DISTINCTION OF THE FATHER AND THE SON

The equality of the Father and Son in being, unity in will and work, and their individual personal identities are equally affirmed in the New Testament. They display distinct roles between them, yet they are also characterized by loving unity as they accomplish their one purpose.

This section will affirm from Scripture the equality of the Father and the Son. Each person is fully God, equally God, and eternally God. It will also examine the unity of the Father and the Son. There is one God. The persons of the Godhead work together in perfect unity with one unified purpose. Finally, it will assert the distinction of the Father and the Son. They are distinct persons, with different roles.

The Trinity Defined

In examining the relationship of the Father and the Son, it is affirmed that “there is one and only one God, eternally existing and fully expressed in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each member of the Godhead is equally God, each is eternally God, and each is fully God—not three gods, but three Persons of the one Godhead. Each person is equal in essence as each possesses fully the identically same, eternal divine nature, yet each is also an eternal and distinct personal expression of that one undivided divine nature.”¹⁹ From this definition Christians believe in one God, who exists in three persons, and each person is fully God.²⁰

One God

The Bible consistently teaches there is one and only one God. “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” (Deut 6:4). “Thus says the Lord, ... ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me’” (Isa 44:6). There are no other gods; there is only one. “Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none” (Isa 44:8). “I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God” (Isa 45:5). “There is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other” (Isa 45:6). The Bible is very emphatic that there is

¹⁹ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 69.

²⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 110; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 231.

one and only one God. In the New Testament, Jesus, quoting Deuteronomy, said, “The Lord our God is one Lord” (Mark 12:29; cf. Mark 12:32). Paul writes, “There is no God but one. ... There is but one God” (1 Cor 8:4, 6). He also writes, “God is one” (Gal 3:20), and, “There is one God” (1 Tim 2:5). James adds, “You believe God is one. You do well” (Jas 2:19). Thus Christians affirm there is one and only one God. Christians, therefore, are monotheistic.

Three Persons

Christians also believe there are three persons who are God. Thus the Son is fully God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. The apostle John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). John describes the Word (whom he identifies as the Son, cf. John 1:14) as being God. The Son is fully God. He is not a lesser god than the Father, which is the error of subordinationism. He is exactly equal to the Father for they share the one undivided divine nature.

But John also describes the Son as being with God. The preposition translated “with” is *προς*. It “may mean ‘with’ only when a person is *with* a person.”²¹ The Word, who is God, is distinguishable from God, and thus is a separate person within the Godhead.²² The Word is not the Father. He is the Son. Christians do not believe the Son is the Father, or that the Father is the Son. There is not one God who wears different masks or who carries out different roles. This is the error of modalism, which teaches there is one God who has different modes in relationship to man. Instead Christians believe the Son is distinct from the Father, and the Father is distinct from the Son. They are two separate persons who share the exact same nature.

Christians do not believe, however, that there are three separate Gods. This is the error of tritheism—three separate Gods that appear so much alike they are considered one God. There are not three Gods; there is only one God. The Son is not another God. He is one with the Father (cf. John 10:30). So Christians believe in one God—one undivided being, eternally existing and fully expressed in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The three persons share the one undivided divine nature. This is what makes them one. The author of Hebrews writes that the Son “is the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Heb 1:3). The Son shines out all that makes God glorious because all that is in God’s nature He possesses. The Son, along with the Father and the Spirit, share equally and fully the one undivided divine nature. Each person, however, has a distinct personal way of expressing that nature.

In attempting to understand God from the Scriptures the three errors of modalism, subordinationism, and tritheism must be continually guarded against. God is one in essence or nature and three in person.

²¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 116.

²² R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 45.

The Equality of the Father and the Son: The Deity of the Son

In answering the error of subordinationism, the Bible emphatically teaches that the Son is fully God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

The Son Is Uncreated and Thus Is Eternal

John writes, “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). John’s Greek in this verse is profoundly simple, and yet amazingly precise. John does not say, “In the beginning is the Word.” No, he is very careful to say, “In the beginning *was* the Word.” John is emphasizing that the Word is eternal for He had no beginning.²³ He has always existed, for at the beginning of creation He already was. There was never a time the Word was not. He has always existed because the Word was God. This is why He is worshiped as God. So the very first thing John affirms about the Son is that He is eternal. He has always existed. He has no beginning. He is uncreated.

The Son Is Distinct from the Father

Though the Word is eternal and uncreated, and therefore God, at the same time “the Word was with God” (John 1:1). Here John emphasizes a distinction within the Godhead. The Word was with (literally: face to face with) God in a living, intimate relationship.²⁴ The Word is not an attribute of God or a power emanating from Him, but a person in the presence of God.²⁵ He was another, yet not another God. There is more than one person who is God, yet there is only one God. John will later introduce these two persons as the Son and the Father. His point here is that the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. They are two distinct persons, along with the Spirit who make up the one God.²⁶

What the apostle wants his readers to understand right at the beginning of his gospel is the incredible relationship of the Father and the Son. He will unfold the beauty, intimacy, and unity of this relationship like no other. Even in verse two John gives a hint of this glorious

²³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1971), 73.

²⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 32.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1941), 87; Loraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1947), 80; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898), 444; R. A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1898), 20.

relationship. “He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:2). In the beginning God was not alone. The Word was *with God*. The Son was with the Father and the Father was with the Son and together they were enjoying intimate fellowship and perfect love.

The Son Is God

John affirms the Son’s deity as forcibly as possible: “the Word was God” (John 1:1). The way John structures this last phrase in the Greek is to emphatically stress the deity of Christ, for the word order is, “And God was the Word.” John could not have said it more powerfully or convincingly: the Word is fully God and has always been fully God. There was never a time when the Word was not. He has always existed and He has always existed as God.

John wants his readers to understand who Jesus truly is, for it is only when a person understands who He is that he can have life in His name (John 20:31). John’s gospel reaches its pinnacle with Thomas’ declaration to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). The greatest skeptic gives the clearest confession of who Jesus is: He is my God!²⁷

The Son Does the Works of God: He Is the Creator

If the Son is God, He should be able to do things that only God can do. John, therefore, gives evidence of the Son’s ability. “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3). Again, the apostle is very precise in his language. He says “all things came into being through” the Word. To clarify what he means by *all things*, he states negatively, “and apart from Him nothing [not one single thing!] came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3). So the apostle is very exact by what he means by *all things*. He means everything, for apart from the Son nothing exists. This would include everything that is seen and unseen. If it has come into being, it was created by the Son. The only thing excluded from this is God Himself, because God has never come into being; He has always existed. (In the beginning *was* the Word.)

²⁷ John is not alone in his assessment of the deity of Christ. Other New Testament authors affirm the Son is God, co-equal with the Father. The apostle Paul asserts the deity of Christ by calling Him God: “From [Israel] is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen” (Rom 9:5). Paul is declaring that Christ, who is over all God, be praised forever! If He is over all things then He is God, and if He is God then He is blessed forever. Paul told Titus that Christians ought to be “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Tit 2:13). In the greeting of his second letter, Peter writes, “To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1). Both Paul and Peter emphasize that Christ Jesus is our God and Savior.

The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 45, and by divine revelation informs us that it is the Father speaking of the Son. “But of the Son [God] says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom’” (Heb 1:8; cf. Ps 45:6). God the Father calls His Son *God*. If the Father declares the Son to be God, then He must truly be God for God cannot lie.

This means the universe in its entirety owes its origin to God through the agency of the Word. This would include the spiritual realm as well. Paul says of Christ, “For by Him *all things* were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—*all things* have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col 1:16-17). Everything that is visible and invisible has been created through the Son and for the Son. The Son is the agent through which creation came into being. He is therefore supreme over all creation. “He is before all things” (Col 1:17). He existed before them and has preeminence over them.

The Son Is Self-Existent

John has already shown that the Son is eternal. He is uncreated; He has always existed, and He has always existed as God. The apostle then says, “In Him was life” (John 1:4). The Son has life in Himself. All created things receive life from God. Only God has life in Himself. Paul proclaims that “God gives to all life and breath. ... It is in Him that we live, move and exist” (Acts 17:25, 28). Everything exists because of God and depends on God for its continual existence. God, on the other hand, is not dependent on anything: in Him is life. Since the Son has life in Himself, He exists by necessity of His own being. He is the uncaused cause, the self-existent one. He has no origins and is not dependent on anyone or anything for His existence.

This means He has no needs. Paul says, “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:24-25). God is the one who gives life to others and sustains them. This is who the Son is: the eternal self-existent God who brought all things into existence.

The Son Is Worshiped as God

The Bible is adamant that only God is to be worshiped. Idolatry is constantly condemned in Scripture. God is the only one uniquely worthy of worship, for there is no one like God. “I am the Lord your God. ... You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex 20:2-3). God will by no means share His glory with another (Isa 42:8). He is a jealous God. He will not allow another to receive the honor that is due His name.

Jesus, however, was worshiped by men and freely accepted it (cf. Matt 14:31-33; 28:9, 16-18; Luke 24:52). When Jesus healed a man born blind and revealed to him who He was, that man worshiped Him (John 9:38). Jesus is the Light of the world; He opens people’s eyes so they see Him for who He really is. When this happens the only proper response is to worship Him.

Jesus did not recoil from this man's worship (John 9:39). He did not stop it or put an end to it, even though the Bible is very clear that we are to worship God and God alone. Jesus accepted worship because He is worthy of it.

Contrast this to Peter's response when Cornelius tried to worship him. "When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, 'Stand up; I too am just a man'" (Acts 10:25-26). Peter refused worship because he was just a man. When the people worshiped King Herod, God struck him dead "because he did not give God the glory" (Acts 12:23). When Paul and Barnabas were at Lystra, and the people attempted to offer sacrifices to them thinking they were gods, "they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you'" (Acts 14:14-15). It horrified them that men were attempting to worship them.²⁸ When the apostle John attempted to worship an angel, he said to John, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God" (Rev 22:9; cf. 19:10). Jesus Himself recognized that only God is to be worshiped. When Satan tempted Jesus to worship him, Jesus rebuked him and said, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only'" (Matt 4:10). According to Jesus Himself, God is the only one worthy of worship, and yet, Jesus freely received worship because He is God.

Not only does He receive worship, but the Father commands such worship of the Son. Hebrews tells us, "And when He [God the Father] again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him'" (Heb 1:6). Angels know they are to worship God alone. But here the Father commands angels to worship His Son. This is the same God who said in Isaiah, "I am the Lord; that is My name! I will not give My glory to another" (Isa 42:8). Yet here He commands angels to worship the Son because He deserves such worship since He is God.

In the end, Jesus will be worshiped universally, equally with the Father. "And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, *and* to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.' And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders fell down and worshiped" (Rev 5:13-14, emphasis added). Jesus is ascribed blessing, honor, glory, and dominion identical to the Father. There cannot be the slightest doubt that the Lamb is to be reckoned with God and as God. Praise of Him will become universal. Every created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and in the sea will worship the Father and the Son equally. Every knee will bow to Jesus and every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Phil 2:10-11; cf. Isa 45:22-23). John is not dealing here with a being of obscure importance. He is showing that in the end, every created thing,

²⁸ Peter, Paul, and John all recognized that only God was to be worshiped. All of them also claimed that Jesus was God and thus was worthy of worship.

wherever found, will recognize the superior worth of the Lamb, and they will fall down and give Him His due.

Summary

It is evident from these scriptures that Jesus is God Almighty come in the flesh who is worthy of all praise and glory. The Son is exalted above all. It is proper to worship Him because of who He is: our great God and Savior. He is the eternal God, without beginning, the Creator of all things, who humbled Himself to become a man to die for sinners.

All divine names and titles are applied to Him. He is called God, the mighty God, the great God, God over all; Jehovah; Lord; the Lord of lords and King of kings. All divine attributes are ascribed to Him. He is declared to be omnipresent, omniscient, almighty, and immutable, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is set forth as the creator and upholder and ruler of the universe. All things were created by Him and for Him; and by Him all things consist. He is the object of worship to all intelligent creatures, even the highest; all the angels (i.e., all creatures between man and God) are commanded to prostrate themselves before Him. He is the object of all the religious sentiments; of reverence, love, faith, and devotion. To Him men and angels are responsible for their character and conduct. He required that man should honour Him as they honoured the Father; that they should exercise the same faith in Him that they do in God. He declares that He and the Father are one; that those who had seen Him had seen the Father also. He calls all men unto Him; promises to forgive their sins; to send them the Holy Spirit; to give them rest and peace; to raise them up at the last day; and to give them eternal life. God is not more, and cannot promise more, or do more than Christ is said to be, to promise, and to do. He has, therefore, been the Christian's God from the beginning, in all ages and in all places.²⁹

The Oneness of the Father and the Son

If the Son is fully God, yet not the Father, how is this reconciled with the teaching that there is one God? If there are not two (or three) Gods, how are the Son and the Father one?

Jesus emphatically states, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). John cannot mean they are one and the same person for John has already made distinctions between their persons: the Word was *with* God. John has shown the Son praying to the Father, being sent by the Father, being obedient to the Father, hearing the Father, and talking to the Father. Therefore they are not the same person. Then how are they one? They are one in nature or being.³⁰

²⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), 382.

³⁰ D. A. Carson, *John*, 394-395; Bruce B. Barton et al., *John*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 217; John MacArthur, *John 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 443; John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1989), 203.

The nature of God is the intrinsic properties or attributes that characterize what He is like.³¹ God has revealed Himself with certain attributes that describe His nature.³² These attributes distinguish God from all others. He is holy, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, immutable, eternal, and so forth. These characteristics are attributed to God alone, and thus reveal the nature of God. This nature is equally shared by the Father and the Son.

The Son Shares the Same Nature with the Father

The Son Exists as God

Paul says Christ *existed* in the form of God (Phil 2:6), which is contrasted to Him “*taking* the form of a bond-servant” (Phil 2:7, emphasis added). Before the Son ever became a man, or took on the form of a slave, He already existed in the very form of God. His very existence was that of God Himself. He has the nature of God.

Since this is true this means the Son is equal with God, which is what Paul emphasizes. The Son “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” or held on to (Phil 2:6). The word *equality* means exactly equal.³³ For example, it is used of men getting the exact same wages even though some had worked only one hour and others twelve hours. They were made equal (Matt 20:12). The Son is exactly equal to the Father. This is interesting because in Isaiah God says, “To whom then will you liken Me that I would be His equal?” (Isa 40:25). There is no one equal to God, yet Christ is, which means He is God. They are equal in nature for that is what they share in common.

The Son Is the Exact Representation of God’s Nature

Speaking of the Son, the author of Hebrews declares, “He is the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Heb 1:3). The word *nature* means God’s essential being or essential existence.³⁴ The Son is the exact representation of God’s essential being. *Exact representation* comes from the Greek term used for the impression made by a die or seal.³⁵ When pressed into wax a seal leaves an exact impression of itself. Jesus Christ is the perfect,

³¹ Horrell, “Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity.”

³² Robert A. Morey, *Here Is Your God: A Study in the Nature and Attributes of God* (Southbridge, Massachusetts: Crowne Publications, 1989), 35.

³³ Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1980), 550.

³⁴ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1954), 35.

³⁵ Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 9:420-421.

personal imprint of God's nature.³⁶ In Christ God is seen. He is the visible representation of the invisible God (cf. John 1:18). The glory of the Father is invisible until it shines forth in Christ. His majesty is hidden until it shows itself impressed on His image.³⁷ The Son radiates God's glory. He alone displays the full splendor of God because He is God.

The Son Is the Exact Image of God

Paul says that Christ "is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4). Paul's emphasis in these verses is that it is only through Christ that the Father makes Himself known. The Son is able to make the Father known because He has identity of essence with the Father. He alone is the perfect image of God, which is what makes Him glorious. The likeness of God is fully present in Christ so that those who have seen the Son have seen the Father (John 14:9). It is in Christ alone that a person sees God's righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power, love, grace, and mercy.

All the verses in this section emphasize that the Son shares the same nature or being as God Himself.

The Son Has All the Fullness of Deity Dwelling in Him

"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col 2:9; cf. 1:19). All the fullness of deity, all that God is, abides in Christ. The word *deity* is a term that emphasizes God's essence or being, rather than person.³⁸ All that God is in being, the whole fullness of God, "not a partial possession of isolated glories ... but the entire assemblage of all" that God is, dwells in Christ.³⁹ He is absolute and perfect God. The fullness of God dwells absolutely and wholly in the Son.⁴⁰ The word *dwells* is in the present tense which indicates that the essence of deity continually abides in Christ: the Son is fully God and has been forever. God is wholly found in Christ. He has manifested Himself to us fully and perfectly in His Son.⁴¹

From these verses it is seen that the Father and the Son are one; they share the exact same nature. Since this is true, every attribute related to God can also be attributed to Christ. It has already been shown above that the Son is eternal and has life in Himself. He is also omnipresent (Matt 18:20; 28:20; John 14:23); omniscient (Matt 11:21-23, 27); omnipotent (Mark 1:29-34; Luke 8:22-25; John 10:17-18; 17:2; Phil 3:21; Col 1:17); and immutable (Heb 13:8).

³⁶ John MacArthur, *Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 16.

³⁷ John Calvin, *Hebrews*, vol. 22, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 35.

³⁸ John Eadie, *Colossians*, vol. 4, Greek Text Commentaries (1884; reprint, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 137.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ John MacArthur, *Colossians and Philemon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 52.

⁴¹ John Calvin, *Colossians*, vol. 21, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2003), 182.

The Father and the Son Abide in One Another: Mutual Indwelling

There are a number of places where Jesus emphasizes that He abides in the Father and the Father abides in Him. For example, Jesus said, “I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me” (John 14:10; cf. 10:38; 14:11; 17:21). Schnackenburg suggests that this mutual indwelling is “a linguistic way of describing ... the complete unity between Jesus and the Father”⁴² (cf. John 10:30). There is a perfect and intimate union between them since they together share and abide in the one nature of God. Thus, when Jesus speaks, He speaks the words of the Father (John 14:10). The works Jesus performs are actually the works of the Father that He does through the Son (John 14:10). They have a unity of divine action. There is one singular action “of the Father *through* his obedient, incarnate Son.”⁴³

This is not an identity of persons, for Jesus does not say they are one and the same person. Nor does this obliterate all distinction between them. The words and works of the Son are given to Him by the Father.⁴⁴ The Father and Son are also distinguishable (the Word was *with* God; the Son prays to the Father; the Father sends the Son, while the Son obeys), yet they are one.⁴⁵

The Distinction Between the Father and the Son

The error of subordinationism, which teaches that the Son is less divine than the Father, that He is a little “g” god, has been shown to be false. The Scriptures are unrelenting in their teaching that the Son is fully God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. He is called God, does the works of God, displays the attributes and glory of God, and thus is worshiped as God. God, who will not give His glory to another (Isa 42:8), shares His glory with His Son because He is fully God (John 17:5; Heb 1:6; Rev 5:11-14).

The error of tritheism, which teaches there are three gods so much alike they appear as one, also has been shown to be false. The Scriptures declare that the Father and the Son are one (John 10:30). The Father and Son share the exact same nature and thus have the same attributes. The Son exists in the form of God and is equal to God (Phil 2:6). He is the exact representation of God’s nature (Heb 1:3), and He is the perfect image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). The Father and Son are one in being.

⁴² R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 3, trans. K. Smyth et al. (Burns and Oates, 1968-82), 69, quoted in D. A. Carson, *John*, 494.

⁴³ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 127.

⁴⁴ D. A. Carson, *John*, 494.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 568.

From this evidence it may be tempting to conclude that there is no difference between the Father and the Son; that there is one God who simply carries out different roles in relation to man. This is the error of modalism, which must deny the personal relationships within the Trinity that are so evident in so many places in Scripture.⁴⁶

In the following section the distinction between the Father and the Son will be examined. A difference cannot be made between them in regards to their being, nor their attributes. What distinguishes them is their persons and how they relate to one another.

The Father and Son Are Distinct Persons

As was seen above, John highlights this distinction when he states, “The Word was *with* God” (John 1:1, emphasis added). John will introduce these two persons as the Son and the Father—the names they use most often to speak of each other (John 1:14, 18).⁴⁷

The apostle’s emphasis in John 1:1 is to stress the deity of the Word and the distinction between the Word and God. “The Word was God.” The Word is everything that God is in His nature. He is God, but at the same time He is distinct from God: He was *with* God. John is careful to omit the article before the word *God* in the last phrase because he does not want to so identify the Word with God “that no divine being could exist apart from the Word.”⁴⁸ The Word, who is the Son (cf. John 1:14), is a distinct person from God (whom John will reveal as the Father) (cf. John 1:18). The Father and the Son are two distinct persons, along with the Spirit who constitute the one God. So in the very first verse of his gospel, John masterfully underscores the equality and distinction between the Father and the Son. They are distinct persons who are both fully God (John 1:14, 18).

Since they are distinct persons, they relate to one another. John, more than any other New Testament author, unfolds the glorious, intimate, loving relationship between God the Father and God the Son. How is this seen?

The Father and Son Talk to One Another

Jesus prayed to the Father. “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name” (John 12:27-28). Jesus became troubled for the hour of His glorification had come, which would take place through His suffering, death, and resurrection (cf. John 12:23, 24, 32). He would be facing the wrath of God for the sins of men.

What sustained and motivated the Son to go to the cross was the glory of the Father (John

⁴⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 242.

⁴⁷ This will be shown below.

⁴⁸ D. A. Carson, *John*, 117.

12:28). The Father would be exalted in His death for it would display His excellencies to an immeasurable degree. God's infinite righteousness (Rom 3:25), great love (Rom 5:8), rich mercy (Eph 2:4), and amazing grace (Ps 2:12) are all exhibited at the cross. The Son's death would show why the Father is supremely worthy of all glory because it displays His infinite excellencies. This is what sustained the Son to go through the agony of the cross: "Father, glorify Your name."

The Father then responds to the Son's request, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:28). Since the Father and the Son are distinct persons, they talk to one another. They have conversations. This is seen again in John 17 where the Son prays to the Father (John 17:1). The Son spends the whole chapter talking to the Father. He is not talking to Himself, but to another. The personal pronouns the Son uses (I/You/Me) clearly distinguish the Father from the Son as distinct persons. "I glorified *You* on the earth, having accomplished the work which *You* have given *Me* to do" (John 17:4, emphasis added; cf. Mark 1:11).

The Father and Son Hear One Another

They are good listeners. "Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me'" (John 11:41-42). Jesus knew the Father heard Him, for He always heard the Son. The obvious implication is that the Father not only heard the Son but answered His requests so the Son would be exalted. He is exalted when people believe He was sent from the Father.

Not only does the Father hear the Son, the Son hears the Father. "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30). The Son did nothing on His own initiative. Whatever the Father spoke, the Son heard and did it. Contrast this to the Jews in Jesus' day. "And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form" (John 5:37). The Jews had never seen God nor heard His voice, but the One who was sent from the Father, He heard Him and saw Him. The Son, therefore, had a unique relationship with the Father. He alone had seen and heard God. Thus, He alone could make Him known, which is what He came to do (cf. John 1:18).

The Father commanded Jesus "what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49). Clearly this meant the Father communicated to the Son what He wanted said. Jesus only spoke what the Father told Him (John 12:50). Thus the Scriptures reveal that the Father and Son communicated to one another, which means they are distinct persons. The Son is not the Father for the Son heard the Father's voice and obeyed His commands.

The Son Does What the Father Does

“The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). Whatever the Son saw the Father doing, He did. The Son, therefore, did the works of God, which was a claim to deity. He is God, yet He is not the Father, for He can see what the Father is doing.

The Son Sees the Father and Makes Him Known

No one has ever seen God, but the only begotten God—the Son—He has seen Him and thus He came to make Him known (John 1:18; cf. 3:11, 32; 5:19; 8:38). The Son came into the world to reveal the Father and explain Him. The Son, thus, is in a unique relationship with the Father. The only way to know God is through the Son because He alone has seen God and can make Him known (cf. John 14:6).

Jesus told the Jews, “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father” (John 6:46). The Son has seen the Father; thus He can reveal Him. But if the Son has seen the Father, then the Son is not the Father. They are two distinct persons in intimate relationship.

Each Knows the Other

“I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me” (John 7:29). The Son has intimate knowledge of the Father because He was from the Father and the Father sent Him (cf. John 8:55; 10:15; 17:25). Jesus is claiming to have a distinct knowledge of the Father, which is why He is able to make the Father known to others. He, who was in the bosom of the Father, came into the world to explain Him (John 1:18). The word *bosom* “conveys an aura of intimacy, mutual love and knowledge.”⁴⁹ It is an intimacy that makes it possible for Jesus to make the Father known.

The reason the Son knows the Father is not because He is the Father but because He enjoys deep relations with the Father.⁵⁰ Notice how deep this relationship is: “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt 11:27). Jesus is contending that He has a relationship with the Father like no one else. Jesus calls God, “My Father” (Matt 11:27), not “the Father”, emphasizing the unique affiliation He has with the Father. The Son alone knows the Father, which is why He is able to reveal Him.

⁴⁹ D. A. Carson, *John*, 135.

⁵⁰ Horrell, “Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity.”

The Father has perfect knowledge of the Son, which is understandable since He is omniscient. The Son, however, also has perfect knowledge of the Father, which means He too is omniscient. The knowledge Jesus speaks of here is not merely factual knowledge, but it is an intimate personal knowledge. He knows everything about the Father and the Father knows everything about Him. In contrast, people can have some knowledge of God, but their knowledge is imperfect. Jesus knows the Father as He really is and the Father knows the Son as He really is.⁵¹

Each Desires to Make the Other Known

The Father testified of the Son (John 5:37; cf John 8:18). He did this by giving the Son works to accomplish which confirmed who He was, that He came from the Father (John 5:36). Thus, when the Son did the works of the Father—works that only God could do—this demonstrated who He was, which is what the Father wanted.

The Son, on His part, desired to make the Father known. “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world” (John 17:6; cf. 17:26). The Son made the Father’s name known to the men the Father had given Him. Manifesting the Father’s name is another way of saying He revealed His glory, for God’s name embodies His character. To reveal His name is to make His character known.⁵² The Son desired that His people know the Father as He knows the Father (John 17:25-26). Thus, because the Father and Son are distinct persons, they can make each other known.

Each Loves the Other and Delights in Glorifying the Other

The Father loved the Son by continually disclosing to Him all things that He Himself was doing (John 5:20). Since the Son did what the Father did (John 5:19), when the Father showed Him these greater works (John 5:20), this resulted in people marveling at the Son. In other words, the Son was glorified and honored, which was the intent of the Father.

In the context of this passage, Jesus had healed a man who had been ill thirty-eight years (John 5:9). Jesus claimed that He would do greater works than these so all would marvel at Him. John describes what some of those works would be. “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:21-22). Jesus is describing works that only God Himself can do. Thus when Jesus does these works it will demonstrate who He is, which is why people will marvel. They will be amazed at the Son. The result is that

⁵¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 294.

⁵² D. A. Carson, *John*, 558.

they will “honor the Son even as they honor the Father” (John 5:23). The Son will be worshiped like the Father, which is what the Father desires (cf. John 8:50, 54; 13:32; 17:1, 5, 22, 24). He delights in glorifying the Son.

The Son, conversely, loves the Father and desires to glorify the Father. He demonstrates His love by doing nothing of Himself (John 5:19). Jesus was not self-centered or self-seeking. He only did what the Father was doing (John 5:19). He did nothing on His own initiative (John 5:30). He did not seek His own will but only the will of the Father (John 5:30). He always did what was pleasing to the Father (John 8:29).

What pleased the Father was that the Son die on the cross (cf. Isa 53:10). So when the Father determined that His Son go to Calvary, that is where the Son willingly went, because this would glorify the Father the most. “So that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here” (John 14:31). The Son obeyed the Father’s commands, which included going to the cross. (This was where He was going.) The cross exhibits the Father’s glorious attributes like nothing else could. At the cross are seen infinite wrath (Matt 27:46) and infinite mercy (Luke 23:34, 39-43), infinite righteousness (Rom 3:25) and infinite love (Rom 5:8), infinite holiness (Hab 1:13) and infinite grace (Eph 2:5, 8). So the Son went to the cross to glorify the Father because of His love for the Father.

It is clear from this biblical revelation that the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. They are two distinct persons who talk, hear, see, know, love, and glorify one another. They live together in perfect harmony, love, and joy, each desiring to exalt and glorify the other.

The Father and Son Have Distinct Names: *Father* and *Son*

God has revealed Himself to us as the *Father*, and the *Son*, and the *Holy Spirit*. There are many other names God uses for Himself, but these designations “seem especially to be the New Testament way of expressing God’s ultimate relations.”⁵³ They best describe the deepest personal relations within the Godhead for they are the names they call one another.⁵⁴

⁵³ Horrell, “Complementarian Trinitarianism.”

⁵⁴ Millard Erickson states, “The terms *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit* are not the exclusive biblical designations of the three persons of the Godhead. ... This is especially true of Paul, who uses the names God, Lord, and Spirit, even more frequently than the Father-Son terminology.” Millard J. Erickson, *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 2009), 117. He then quotes Warfield, “It remains remarkable, nevertheless, if the very essence of the Trinity were thought of by him [Paul] as resident in the terms ‘Father,’ and ‘Son,’ that in his numerous allusions to the Trinity in the Godhead, he never betrays any sense of this.” B. B. Warfield, “Trinity,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1960), 5:3020, emphasis added. It is evident that there are many other names used of the persons of the Godhead. Paul, however, is speaking from the perspective of a worshiper. Even Warfield recognized this: “[Paul] designates the Persons of the Trinity therefore rather from his relations to them than from their relations to one another.” Ibid., 3019, emphasis added. The point we are making

For example, there are approximately 123 references to God as Father in John's Gospel. Out of these, there is a staggering 111 times where Jesus refers to God as the Father or (even more personally) as His Father.⁵⁵ Jesus always addressed God as "Father."⁵⁶ In the few instances in the New Testament where there is a direct word from the Father, He consistently refers to Jesus as His Son. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17; cf. 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35; 2 Pet 1:17).⁵⁷ Thus the names *Father* and *Son* are found on the lips of God and seem to be the intimate, personal names they call one another.

Surely these names indicate their oneness of nature. It asserts the equality of the Son with the Father. Whatever the Father is the Son is also.⁵⁸ But their names also reveal their personal way of being God.⁵⁹ They reflect how the Father and Son relate to one another. The Father, because He is the *Father*, relates to the Son as a father. The Son, because He is the *Son*, relates to the Father as a son. Thus their names imply distinctions between them and reveal personal dispositions to which each of them is inclined.⁶⁰ These personal dispositions are seen in distinct patterns, which will be examined more closely in the following section.

is: from their relations to one another, the names *they* choose to call one another are *Father* and *Son*. This is not speaking of the *essence* of the Trinity, but how the Father and Son relate to one another as *persons*.

⁵⁵ See John 2:16, 4:21, 23; 5:17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 36, 37, 43, 45; 6:27, 32, 37, 40, 44, 45, 46, 57, 65; 8:16, 18, 19, 28, 38, 49, 54; 10:15, 17, 18, 25, 29, 30, 32, 36, 37, 38; 11:41; 12:26, 27, 28, 49, 50; 14:2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 28, 31; 15:1, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 23, 24, 26; 16:3, 10, 15, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25; 18:11; 20:17, 21.

⁵⁶ The only exception to this is Matthew 27:46; cf. Mark 15:34.

⁵⁷ There are also four quotes of the Old Testament where the Father refers to Him as His "Son" (Matt 2:15; cf. Hos 11:1; Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5; cf. Ps 2:7). The only exception to this is found in Matthew 12:18 where the Father says, "Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased," a quote from Isaiah 42:1.

⁵⁸ Warfield, "Trinity," 5, 3020.

⁵⁹ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 126.

⁶⁰ Horrell, "Complementarian Trinitarianism."

Chapter Two

DIVINE ORDER BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE SON

The biblical expressions used to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son are both abundant and diverse. From this language it is necessary to affirm a distinction of roles between the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son each perform different tasks and activities in accomplishing their common plan, yet they carry out this work in complete harmony and with unity of purpose. “These roles would *not* seem to be mutually exclusive, for as triune God all divine activity is shared. But equally evident is that there is eternal distinctiveness in this shared activity in which all members of the Godhead freely express their inclinations.”⁶¹ There are certain things the Father is inclined to do; others the Son is inclined to do; and still others the Spirit is inclined to do. Each of them is wholly free to be what they are, yet by innate personal disposition each chooses to relate to the other in ways which God has revealed in Scripture.⁶²

This chapter will explore five patterns of how the Father and Son relate to one another: 1) the Father initiates and plans, and the Son carries out the Father’s plans; 2) the Father sends and the Son comes; 3) the Father gives and the Son receives; 4) the Father commands and the Son obeys; 5) the Father has authority over the Son, and the Son submits.

This order does not affect their *being*. The members of the Trinity are one in being. They share the exact same nature or essence. Each one of them is equally, fully, and eternally God. The divine order is how the *persons* of the Godhead relate to one another.

The Father Initiates and Plans, and the Son Carries Out the Father’s Plans

The Example of Creation

Paul writes, “There is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (1 Cor 8:6). Paul is asserting that the Father and the Son are both fully and equally God. The Father is God. The Son is Lord. The name *Lord* is used over 6800 times in the Old Testament of God. It is the most personal name of God: Yahweh. Even more decisively, Paul unmistakably applies Deuteronomy 6:4, the most foundational of all monotheistic texts, to Jesus.⁶³ He is identifying

⁶¹ Horrell, “Complementarian Trinitarianism.”

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 38.

Jesus as the Lord (not a different Lord), who is one with the Father. Thus, Paul is declaring the deity of the Son and His equality with the Father. They are both God and can do things that only God can do, which is create.

The apostle states that all things are from the Father and all things are by the Son. The word *from* translates the Greek preposition ἐκ which emphasizes *source* or *origin*.⁶⁴ The Father is the originator or the planner of all things. To Him is attributed the beginning of activity.⁶⁵ Everything is *from* Him. But it was the Son who carried out the plan of the Father for all things are by Him. The word *by* translates the preposition διὰ which is often rendered *through*.⁶⁶ Thus, Paul emphasizes that everything is from the Father and through the Son. The Father is the originator, the beginning of all things; the Son is the great agent through which all things came into being.⁶⁷

Interestingly, nearly every passage in the New Testament that speaks of the Son's part in creation uses the preposition διὰ. The apostle John, speaking of the Son, writes, "All things came into being through (διὰ) Him. ... He was in the world, and the world was made through (διὰ) Him, and the world did not know Him" (John 1:3, 10). Paul speaking of the Son says, "All things have been created through (διὰ) Him and for (εἰς) Him" (Col 1:16).⁶⁸ The author of Hebrews writes, "In these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through (διὰ) whom also He made the world" (Heb 1:2).

This last passage is extremely insightful as to how the Father and the Son worked together in creation. The Father created all things through the agency of His Son. The Son is God's exclusive agent in creation. The Father, however, is the one who takes the initiative in creation.⁶⁹ He is thus seen as the planner, originator, and source of creation, while the Son is

⁶⁴ Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 189-190.

⁶⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 126.

⁶⁶ This is how it is translated at the end of the same sentence: "We exist through (διὰ) Him" (1 Cor 8:6).

⁶⁷ Stephan D. Kovach and Peter R. Schemm, "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, September 1999, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3817/is_199909?tag=content;col1 (accessed March 2, 2009).

⁶⁸ In Colossians 1:16, Paul uses three separate prepositions to describe the Son's role in creation. He does this to make clear what "firstborn of all creation" means (Col 1:15). Besides the two prepositions mentioned above, Paul also uses ἐν. At the beginning of this verse he writes, "For by (ἐν) Him all things were created." ἐν does not denote source but agency. Christ is the agent by whom creation came into being. Herbert M. Carson, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 43; John Peter Lange, *Colossians*, vol. 11, trans. M. B. Riddle (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), 22. Another view is that ἐν denotes Christ as the "sphere" in which creation takes place. Using ἐν shows that the conditioning cause of the act of creation resided in Christ. Geoffrey B. Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 31; H. C. G. Moule, *Colossians and Philemon Studies* (London: Pickering and Inglis LTD., nd.), 76. All of these men agree that ἐν does not express source.

⁶⁹ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 50, make a similar case for John 1. The Father is the initiator of creation and the Son is the divine agent through whom He creates.

seen as the executor of all things. He is the one who spoke all things into existence by His omnipotent power, yet He was simply carrying out the Father's grand design.

There is one text that refers to the Son's part in creation where no preposition is used. Jesus says that He is "the Beginning of the creation of God" (Rev 3:14). This passage stresses the Son's relationship to creation. Many commentaries take *beginning* (ἀρχή) to mean origin or source,⁷⁰ but it also has the idea of ruler or prominence.⁷¹ Either meaning would rule out any idea that the Son was created. Instead what is underscored is that the Son is the originator of creation or He has prominence over creation because He is the one who brought it into existence!

This does not contradict what was seen above about the Father being the initiator or origin of creation for the Son is said to be "the Beginning of the creation of God" (Rev 3:14, emphasis added). He is the source of God's creation. In other words, it is the Father's creation that the Son brought into existence. The Son is the moving cause of God's creation⁷² or the originating instrument of God's creation.⁷³ Thus the Son is seen as the Creator. Amazingly, though, when He called everything into existence by His omnipotent power, He was following the plan of the Father.

The Father and Son are truly remarkable in how they work together. The Father enjoys initiating and planning. Creation distinctly displays His infinite wisdom and glory. But, though the Father planned all of creation, in humility He turned it over to His Son to bring into existence. The Father wanted the Son to share the glory of being the Creator, and the Son is worshiped for it. The Son on His part, did not act on His own or do His own thing, but in humility gladly carried out the decree of the Father so the Father would be worshiped. "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Ps 19:1).

Thus a wonderful relationship between the Father and the Son is seen. The Father initiates and plans. The Son executes and carries out the purposes of the Father. Both are identified as

⁷⁰ Alan Johnson, "Revelation" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1981), 12:457; John Peter Lange, *James-Revelation*, vol. 12, trans. Evelina Moore and ed. E. R. Craven (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), 133; R. C. H. Lenski, *St. John's Revelation* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 153; John MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 134; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1973), 82; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 303; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 90.

⁷¹ David Guzik, "Study Guide for Revelation 3," Enduring Word, Blue Letter Bible, 7 Jul 2006. 2010. http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=8105&commInfo=31&topic=Revelation&ar=Rev_3_14 (accessed June 30, 2010); Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), 478-484.

⁷² Morris, *Revelation*, 82; *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, new modern ed., vol. 6 (United States: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 914.

⁷³ Jamieson, Robert; A.R. Fausset; and David Brown. "Commentary on Revelation 3," Blue Letter Bible, 19 Feb 2000. 2010. http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=7&contentID=3099&commInfo=6&topic=Revelation&ar=Rev_3_14 (accessed June 30, 2010).

God, for both are doing works that only God can do, yet distinct roles are seen in how they relate to one another. They have different inclinations which they enjoy doing. The Father is the originator and designer. The Son willingly and joyfully implements the plans of the Father. They are equal in being, yet they have distinct roles in how they relate to one another and carry out their plans.

It is also noted that the roles the Father and Son have are from before creation. Sometime in eternity past the Father planned creation; the Son then carried out the Father's decree. Nowhere does Scripture indicate the Son created through the Father. Their roles are never reversed. The Father is always seen as the originator and the Son the active agent. These different functions of the Father and the Son are simply a reflection of an outworking of an eternal relationship between them.⁷⁴

The Example of Redemption

This same pattern is seen in regards to the plan of redemption. The Father originates and designs, and the Son implements and accomplishes the Father's plans.

Ephesians 1:3-14

The apostle Paul unfolds God's master plan of salvation (Eph 1:3-14). In one incredible sentence, Paul moves from eternity past to eternity future, showing how God is working all things according to His purpose (Eph 1:11). Paul's intention in this text is to teach something about God. He clearly distinguishes the role and work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in redemption.

The Father, in this passage, is viewed as the one who initiated and decreed redemption. He is the divine fountainhead from which all else flows. Thus, Paul specifically praises God the Father for doing this. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:3).⁷⁵ Paul easily could have praised the Son and even the Spirit for their part in redemption. But the Spirit directed the apostle to purposely praise the Father, for it is the Father who has blessed His people with every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). The Father is the one who chose a people before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). Before anything existed or was ever created, the Father had already elected a people to be His. The Father's decree therefore reaches back into eternity past.

The Father is the one who "predestined us to adoption as sons" (Eph 1:5). *Predestined* means to foreordain,⁷⁶ to determine beforehand or mark out beforehand.⁷⁷ What Paul means is that

⁷⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 251.

⁷⁵ See 1 Peter 1:3 where Peter also praises the Father for initiating salvation.

⁷⁶ Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1973), 5:456.

the Father determined beforehand how He would adopt the people He elected to be in His family. In other words, the Father made sure the ones He chose would become sons; He predetermined how this would come to pass.

The Father did all these things “according to the kind intention of His will” (Eph 1:5). This was all in keeping with His good pleasure, what He delighted to do. This was all “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph 1:6). It magnified the Father’s grace which He freely bestowed on His people in Christ. Thus all praise and glory and honor go to the Father for what He has done for His people.

Paul goes on to emphasize that it is the Father who “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11).⁷⁷ All things in heaven and on earth, from creation to eternity are brought about according to the counsel of the Father’s will. Not only does He purpose all things, the Father works out His plans. He makes sure they get accomplished. Everything that the Father has designed will occur, because He is carrying out all things just as He planned them to be.⁷⁹ This highlights the Father as the wise designer and architect of everything that happens.⁸⁰

Contemplating the amazing things the Father has done leads the apostle to worship. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:3); “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph 1:6; cf. Eph 1:12, 14). The Father is worthy to be worshiped because His design of redemption reveals His great love (Eph 1:4), kindness (Eph 1:5, 9), the riches of His grace (Eph 1:6-7), and His incredible wisdom (Eph 1:8-9). It magnifies His greatness and it underscores His disposition to design, initiate, and direct.

The Father, however, in His planning and initiating did not leave out the Son, nor did He take all the glory to Himself. Instead it was the Father’s inclination to exalt His Son by carrying out all His purposes through His Son. Thus the whole plan of salvation is centered in Christ. Every spiritual blessing is rooted in Christ (Eph 1:3). His people are chosen in Christ (Eph 1:4). The Father predestined them to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:5). They are freely given His grace through Christ (Eph 1:6). They have redemption and forgiveness of sins in Christ (Eph 1:7). Their inheritance is in Christ (Eph 1:11); their hope is in Christ (Eph 1:12); and they are sealed with the Holy Spirit in Christ (Eph 1:13). The Father purposed everything in Christ (Eph 1:9), and summed up all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). The Father’s kind intention was to exalt the Son and make Him central in all things. This is the Father’s

⁷⁷ Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 541.

⁷⁸ Though the Father is not specifically mentioned by name (Paul uses pronouns), by closely following Paul’s argument, it is evident that the apostle is speaking of the Father in this verse. His people are predestined (cf. verse 5) to receive an inheritance according to the Father’s purpose. The Father is determined to give His adopted sons an inheritance in Christ. Henry, vol. 6, 354; John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 31; E. K. Simpson, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), 34; Ware, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 51; A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), 26.

⁷⁹ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 52.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

inclination. He decreed all things, and at the center of His decree is the exaltation of His Son.

So though the Father in His infinite wisdom orchestrated and initiated redemption, He accomplished it all through His Son. It is the Father's plan, His will, and His purpose, yet He chooses to work through the Son. The Father determined everything, but instead of accomplishing it Himself, He handed over everything for another to carry out. What incredible humility is seen in the Father to prefer and exalt His Son.

The Son's disposition was to achieve the Father's will, which He delighted to do. If some were chosen *in* the Son before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), this means the Son was willing to carry out the Father's plan before anything was ever created. The Son's work at Calvary simply reflected the Son's determination in eternity to fulfill what the Father had decreed. If the Father predestined some to adoption as sons *through* Jesus Christ (Eph 1:5), this implies the Son was willing to fulfill the Father's plan in eternity past, for if the Son was not willing, the Father's plan would not be accomplished. Redemption is found only *through* the blood of Christ (Eph 1:7). The Son therefore had to be willing in eternity to humble Himself, take on the form of a man, and die a violent death or the Father's plan of redemption through His blood would not have been realized. The extent of the Son's obedience to carry out the Father's will is truly incredible. The Son did this so the Father would be exalted.

As with creation above, this divine order of redemption between the Father and the Son is not reversed. The Son is never seen planning and initiating while the Father carries out His plans.⁸¹ The Father, as Father, has an inclination to plan, initiate, and glorify His Son through His plans, and the Son, as Son, has an inclination to submit, obey, and joyfully carry out the Father's plans to the glory of the Father.

Romans 1:1-3

This same pattern in regards to salvation is seen in Paul's letter to the Romans. He begins his letter by calling the gospel "the gospel of God" (Rom 1:1). Paul is specifically thinking of God the Father for it is what "He promised ... concerning His Son" (Rom 1:2-3). It is God the Father's gospel, yet it is all about the Son. This suggests the source of the gospel (and salvation and redemption) is from the Father, yet it is centered in the Son.

Galatians 1:3-4

The same model is observed again in Paul's letter to the Galatians. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal

⁸¹ Wayne Grudem, "Do Relations of Authority and Submission Exist Eternally among the Persons of the Godhead?" Trinity Evangelical Divinity School debate, October 9, 2008. <http://www.henrycenter.org/media.php?link=all> (accessed July 27, 2010).

1:3-4). The Son gave Himself for our sins and rescued us according to the *will* of the Father. It was the Father's will the Son was accomplishing.

2 Timothy 2:9

In this verse the apostle describes how God saved His people. "God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." Here again it is affirmed that God the Father saved and called a people according to His *own purpose* and grace. The Father determined to save a people and grant them favor. To make it evident Paul is speaking of the Father, he mentions that this favor was given to His people in Christ Jesus. Thus the Father purposed to accomplish redemption through His Son, which means the Son agreed to carry out the Father's plan. His plan was purposed "from all eternity," literally "before times eternal."⁸²

Therefore, the consistent testimony of the New Testament is that the Father initiated and planned redemption in eternity past, and He determined it would be accomplished through His Son. The Son's inclination and delight was to accomplish the Father's plan, which He determined to do in eternity past. The Father initiates; the Son executes. This is how they work together, always in perfect harmony, unity, joy, and love. We conclude, then, that the work of the Son in both creation and redemption is ultimately and rightly seen as the work of the Father that is done through the agency of the Son according to the design and will of the Father.⁸³

These distinctions in how the Father and Son relate to one another in creation and redemption are also observed in the "sending/coming" language between the Father and the Son.

The Father Sends and the Son Comes

When looking at the relationship of the Father and the Son, over fifty times the New Testament records that the Father sent the Son.⁸⁴ There is not one example of the Son sending

⁸² Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1957), 129; George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 375.

⁸³ Bruce Ware, "Equal in Essence, Distinct in Roles: Eternal Functional Authority and Submission among the Essentially Equal Divine Persons of the Godhead," *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13/2 (Fall 2008): 50.

⁸⁴ See Matt 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; 10:16; John 3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21; Acts 3:20, 26; 1 John 4:9, 10, 14 where the verb ἀποστέλλω is used. See also John 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 37; 6:38, 39, 44; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 12:44, 45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; Rom 8:3 where the verb πέμπω is used. Both verbs are translated "send." Πέμπω is a more general term, while ἀποστέλλω suggests official or authoritative sending. The words, though, are often used interchangeably. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 499.

the Father. The Son on the other hand, is said to come from the Father (at least twenty-three times in John alone).⁸⁵ Again, this is never reversed: the Father is never said to come from the Son. So there is a distinct pattern: the Father sends and the Son comes.

The Father Sends the Son to Accomplish His Saving Mission

The Father's mission is the plan of redemption. Thus the Father sends the Son to save the world. "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17; cf. Acts 3:20, 26; 1 John 4:14). Because the Father had chosen some before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), His design was to send His Son to rescue them and give them eternal life (John 3:16). The love of the Father is manifested in sending His Son so that His people might live through Him (1 John 4:9). God "loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). The Son was sent by the Father "as an offering for sin" (Rom 8:3). Therefore the specific reason the Father sent the Son into the world was to be an offering for the sins of His people to satisfy His wrath, so the people He had chosen could be forgiven and have eternal life. This was a display of God's infinite love and mercy for sinners.

It is the Father who sent the Son because it is the Father's decree to save sinners (as was seen above in Ephesians 1). Thus, it is the Father who initiates the coming of the Son. "I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me" (John 8:42; cf. 7:28). Jesus did not come of Himself; the Father sent Him to accomplish His will. When Jesus says that He did not come on His own initiative, He does not mean He did not want to come or that He was forced to come. He simply means He did not initiate His coming. It was the Father's idea to send the Son into the world, and the Son gladly submitted to the Father and came to fulfill His mission. The Son's willingness to come reflects His disposition to do the Father's will and accomplish His plans.

The Father Sends the Son to Glorify Him

The Father's objective in sending His Son is not only to accomplish His decree through the Son, but also to glorify and exalt the Son. So, the Father testifies of the Son (John 5:37; cf. 8:16, 18). He does this by giving the Son works to do that no one but God could do. "The works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me" (John 5:36). The Son is glorified when men believe in Him whom

⁸⁵ The "coming" of the Son is seen in such statements as: "He had come from God" (John 13:3; cf. 3:2); "I came forth from the Father" (John 16:27, 28; cf. 8:42; 17:8); "I have come in My Father's name" (John 5:43); "I am from [God]" (John 7:29); "He who descended from heaven" (John 3:13); "that which comes down out of heaven" (John 6:33; cf. 6:38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58); "He who comes from above" (John 3:31); "I have come into the world" (John 18:37; cf. 3:19; 6:14; 9:39; 11:27; 12:46; 16:28).

the Father sent. “The work of God [is] that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29; cf. 5:38; 11:42; 12:44; 17:21, 25). This honoring of the Son is one of the main purposes of the Father sending Him into the world. His plan of redemption is not only to save His people, but to do this through His Son so He is glorified. Thus, it is seen that the Father is the architect of redemption, but instead of accomplishing it Himself, He carries it out through His Son, which exalts the Son.

The Son Came to Accomplish the Father’s Will

“Therefore, when [the Son] comes into the world, He says, ‘... Behold, I have come ... to do Your will, O God’” (Heb 10:5, 7). Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34; cf. 5:30; 6:38). The Son, in humility, came into the world to do the will and work of the Father who sent Him. This was His food, which signifies this is what sustained Him, fueled Him, and gave Him enjoyment. The Son being the Son expresses His personal disposition as God by desiring to do the Father’s will.

It was the Father’s will to give a people to the Son whom He would rescue and save. “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day” (John 6:39). The will of the Father is centered in His Son. Everyone who beholds the Son, who sees His glory and believes in Him, has eternal life, and the Son Himself will raise him up on the last day (John 6:40). Thus the will of the Father is to exalt the Son and magnify Him by accomplishing all things through Him. The will of the Son is to obey the Father by accomplishing His decrees.

The Son Came to Speak the Father’s Words

“For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak” (John 12:49; cf. 8:26; 14:24). Remarkably, the very words that Jesus spoke were not His own. He only spoke what the Father commanded Him. Even His teaching was not His own. It was the Father’s who sent Him (John 7:16). The Son came to exalt the Father and carry out His agenda. This is His inclination as Son.

The Son Came to Do the Father’s Works

The Father gave the Son work to accomplish (John 5:36) and the Son accomplished that work (John 17:4). These works testified that the Father sent the Son. So the purpose of the works that the Father gave the Son to accomplish was to glorify the Son. The Father gave the Son greater works to do so people would be in awe of Him and give Him honor—the same honor they give the Father (John 5:21-23). These works display that the Son is God for He does

things that only God can do. Yet, these are not His works that He is accomplishing, but the works of the Father. The Son performs these works as a son who is obedient to his father.⁸⁶ Their relationship is characterized by equality and obedience.

The Son Came to Explain the Father

“No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained (ἐξηγήομαι) Him” (John 1:18). From the verb ἐξηγήομαι is derived the English word *exegesis*. The Son alone is qualified to be the interpreter or exegete of God.⁸⁷ God remains invisible and thus unknowable apart from the Son. God sends forth His Son into the world as the true light to enlighten men to the truth of God (John 1:9). Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). This is an astounding statement in light of the fact that no one has ever seen God (John 1:18). The Son has made the invisible God visible.⁸⁸ Because of His unique position of dwelling in the Father’s bosom, the Son is capable of making the Father known. He has unmatched intimacy with the Father which enables Him to reveal the Father in an unprecedented way.⁸⁹ Since He was with God in the beginning (John 1:1), and in the Father’s “bosom” (John 1:18), He has intimate knowledge of the Father which He fully discloses to humanity. Fullness of grace and truth were revealed only in and through Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 17).⁹⁰

There is no other way to know God other than through the Son. He is the sole access to God. He is the only door to the Father (John 10:7-9). No one comes to the Father but through Him (John 14:6).

The Son Came to Glorify the Father Who Sent Him

“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (John 7:18). The Son did not come to display His own glory, even though as God He could have. Instead He only sought the glory of the One who sent Him. He came into the world in His Father’s name (John 5:43). The Son did not come with His own agenda or for His own praise. He came on mission from the Father. Jesus said, “I proceeded forth and have come from God” (John 8:42). “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world” (John 16:28). “I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). The sole reason the Son came into the world was to fulfill the will of the Father who sent Him. He came on

⁸⁶ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 118.

⁸⁷ William Hendrickson, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 90.

⁸⁸ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 70.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

special assignment from the Father. It is clear, therefore, that He willingly agreed to carry out the Father's plan before He ever came into the world.

Summary

This divine order of sending and coming is never reversed. It is the Father who sends the Son into the world to accomplish His will. It is the Son who joyfully and willingly comes to fulfill the Father's plan. There is no text of Scripture that indicates any other order, such as the Son sending the Father. This divine order is consistent from what we have seen above. The Father initiates, plans, and wills to accomplish all things through His Son. The Son delights to carry out the Father's plans. However, this does not reflect on the equality of their being, for they are equal in nature. They simply relate to one another in these distinct patterns. The Father is God sending; the Son is God sent.

The Father Gives and the Son Receives

As was seen above, the Father sends the Son into the world to accomplish His mission. The Father plans the mission and then provides all the resources for it, because He is the originator of all things. He determines, however, to accomplish all that He does through His Son, and He gives the Son everything He needs to get it done.

The Father is constantly giving to the Son. This is His disposition. "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" (Jas 1:17). The Son on His part delights in executing the Father's plans, so He receives what the Father gives Him and accomplishes His will.

What does the Father give to the Son?⁹¹ Because the Father loves the Son and desires to exalt Him, He "has given all things into His hand" (John 3:35; cf. 13:3). The Father freely dispenses "all things" to His Son (Matt 11:27; cf. Luke 10:22). This includes giving Him all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18). The Son has the right to reign because the Father has given Him sovereignty and dominion and authority to reign. It is the Father who installs His Son as King over the earth (Ps 2:6). It is the Father who gives the nations to the Son to reign over (Ps 2:7-8; Rev 2:27). It is the Father who gave the Son authority over all flesh (John 17:2). It is the Father who puts Christ as head over all things and who puts everything in subjection under His feet (Eph 1:22). Thus, it is seen that the Father gives to the Son to exalt and magnify Him and accomplish His purposes through Him.

It is the Father's prerogative to judge, but He gives that distinction to the Son, so all will honor the Son as they honor the Father (John 5:22-23). Everything the Son has is from the

⁹¹ The following verses all examine the Greek verbs translated "to give" (δίδωμι and παραδίδωμι). These occur about 34 times pertinent to Father-Son relations. J. Scott Horrell, "The Eternal Son of God in the Social Trinity," in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective*, Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville, Tennessee: B and H Publishing Group, 2007), 63.

Father (John 17:7, 10). The Father gives the Son a name (John 17:11-12), which is above every name (Phil 2:9). The Father gives the Son work to do (John 17:4), and words to speak (John 17:8). The Father gave to the Son to have life in Himself (John 5:26). The Father not only gives the Son a realm to rule over (Luke 1:32), but people to rule. “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me” (John 6:37; cf. John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 9, 24). The Father gives the Son suffering. “The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). Finally, because the Father loves the Son, He gives Him glory (John 17:22, 24; 1 Pet 1:21).

This giving of the Father to the Son emphasizes the Father’s role of initiator, planner, and originator of all things. He is the divine fountain head from which all else flows. This giving also highlights something about the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Father not only gives to the Son, but He initiates the giving of the Son. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). “It is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ... I am the bread of life” (John 6:32, 35). “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all” (Rom 8:32). It was the Father’s plan to give His Son for the sins of His people. The Son, on His part, willingly and obediently came to carry out the Father’s will.

What does the Son give the Father? In contrast to the thirty plus verses that speak of the giving of the Father to the Son, there are only four places where the same verb is used of the Son giving to the Father. He gives the Father thanks (Matt 26:27; cf. 1 Cor 11:24). He gives the Father His spirit when He dies (Luke 23:46). And He hands over the kingdom to the Father at the end of all things when He has accomplished the Father’s purposes (1 Cor 15:24).

Instead of giving back to the Father, the Son receives what the Father gives Him and gives it to others. For example, the Father gives the Son and the Son in turn willingly gives Himself for His people (Gal 2:20; Mark 10:45). The Son gives the food that endures to eternal life, which is Himself (John 6:27). He gives His flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). He gives Himself for our sins (Gal 1:4; 1 Tim 2:6; Tit 2:14). He gives eternal life to His sheep (John 10:28; cf. 17:2). He gives the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). He gave His people an example to follow (John 13:15). He gave His people a new commandment to love one another as He loved them (John 13:34). He gives His people peace (John 14:27). He gives His people the words of the Father (John 17:8, 14), the glory the Father had given Him (John 17:22), the keys to the kingdom (Matt 16:19), and eventually authority over the nations (Rev 2:26).⁹²

It is evident in the activity of giving that the Father and the Son are discernibly not the same. This giving is predominately in one direction: from the Father through the Son to others. The Father, because He is the initiator and source of all things, constantly gives good gifts to the Son. The Son, because He is the executor of the Father’s plans, receives what the Father

⁹² There is one thing the Son has received that He does not give: the name the Father had given Him (John 17:11-12). “Jesus bears the name of the Lord. But he bears it as the Son who has received his Father’s name.” Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 174. He reveals the Father’s name to the disciples, but He does not give it to them. He alone, with the Father, retains the glory of the singular name. Ibid. His name He will not give another (cf. Isa 42:8).

gives Him to accomplish the Father's will. They work together in perfect unity, harmony, and love, each delighting to accomplish the one purpose of God, yet each fulfilling distinct roles in realizing that purpose.

The Father Commands and the Son Obeys

This is another pattern in the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Father who sent the Son gave Him "a commandment as to what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49). Jesus did not even speak on His own initiative (John 12:49). He only spoke what the Father commanded Him to speak (John 12:50). The Father is thus seen as the source of the Son's message.

Commanding-Obeying Is Done in the Context of a Loving Relationship

The Father and Son love one another and desire to glorify each other. "So that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here" (John 14:31). The reason the Son obeyed the Father was not because He was forced or coerced to obey. He did exactly as the Father commanded Him to demonstrate to the world He loved the Father. Jesus did not veer to the right or to the left. He did nothing on His own initiative. He did exactly as the Father commanded Him and that command included the cross, for that is where He was going (John 14:31).

"I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10). His love for the Father moved Him to joyfully obey the Father's commands and carry out His will. He delighted in the Father.

As has been seen in their relationship, the Father is consistently portrayed as the initiator, planner, and sender; the Son is always seen as the executor of the Father's plans, joyfully coming from heaven to carry them out and accomplish them. Thus, this commanding/ obeying language is in harmony with how the Father and Son relate to one another.

Commanding-Obeying Reflects Their Eternal Relationship

There are some who object that the Son's submission to the commands of the Father represents an eternal relationship between the two, because it suggests (at least to them) a ranking or hierarchy within the Trinity, which in turn suggests inequality. They would argue that one member of the Trinity cannot have an eternal authority over another member of the Trinity (which "commanding" and "obeying" would emphasize) because then they would not be equal. Thus the deity of Christ would be jeopardized. Consequently, they would contend this commanding-obeying language relates only to when the Son became incarnate. For example, one man states, "If we must talk of subordination it is only a functional or economic

subordination that pertains exclusively to Christ's role in relation to human history."⁹³ Another writes, "To eternally subordinate the Son to the Father would make him less than God."⁹⁴ One can see their concern. They do not want to diminish the deity of Christ and rightly so. But, if the Bible teaches that this commanding-obeying language reflects the Father and Son's eternal relationship, then it must be accepted as true. Preconceived ideas of what equality means should not determine what the Bible teaches.

There are others who disagree with these men. For example Robert Letham writes, "We may rightly say that the Son submits in eternity to the Father, without in any way breaking his indissoluble oneness with the Father or the Holy Spirit, and without in any way jeopardizing his equality."⁹⁵ Letham believes this because the Son's "obedience on earth did not curtail his deity."⁹⁶ If, in obedience to the Father, the Son can become a man and still be God—equal to the Father, then in eternity He can obey the Father and still be God, equal to the Father.

Letham presents a strong case, but is this seen in Scripture? Is this commanding-obeying language reflected in the Father and Son's eternal relationship? John 12, that we looked at above, seemed to imply this. The Father gave the Son instructions—a commandment—before He sent Him into the world. So the Son knew why He was being sent. The Son willingly came into the world and submitted to speak what the Father commanded Him because of the benefits of that commandment: eternal life to those who listen (John 12:50). This commanding-obeying took place some time in eternity.

There are also other passages that teach this more directly; the clearest possibly is Philippians 2:5-8. In this passage, the apostle Paul describes the Lord Jesus in some of the most exalted terms; his concern, however, is a practical one. He is exhorting his readers to have the attitude of Christ (Phil 2:5). Negatively, this means doing "nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but," positively, "with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves" (Phil 2:3). This was the attitude Christ Himself had. He was not selfish; He did not seek empty glory; He was humble and regarded others more important than Himself. The apostle unveils how the Son had this attitude.

The Son Did Not Use His Position of Who He Was for His Own Advantage

"Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil 2:6). Paul magnifies who Christ is to help his readers understand the greatness of what He did and the attitude He had, which they were to have.

⁹³ Gilbert Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 40/1 (March 1997): 60.

⁹⁴ Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 127.

⁹⁵ Letham, *Trinity*, 402; Kovach and Schemm, "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son."

⁹⁶ Letham, *Trinity*, 403.

Christ Jesus is fully God. The apostle could not have said this any clearer. “He existed in the form of God” (Phil 2:6). This is contrasted to the next verse where the Son took “the form of a bond-servant” (Phil 2:7). The Son *existed* in one form and *took* on another. Before He ever became a man (which the apostle describes as “taking the form of a bond-servant”), He existed in the very form of God. His very existence was that of God Himself.

Since Christ is God, He is co-equal with God, which is what the apostle highlights. “He did not regard *equality* with God a thing to be grasped” (Phil 2:6, emphasis added). The word *equality* means exactly equal.⁹⁷ The Son is exactly equal to the Father. They share the same nature. This is who Jesus Christ is. As God, He could do whatever He pleased. But here is what is amazing about our God and what Paul is underscoring here: what pleased the Son was to exalt another. His delight was to humble Himself and consider another as more important.

Paul’s point is that even though the Son is all glorious, He was not self-centered or self-seeking. Though He existed in the form of God, He “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Phil 2:6). Instead, the Son emptied Himself. In other words, the Son did not regard His equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage.⁹⁸ He refused to use for His own gain the glory He had from the beginning.⁹⁹ The Son was not concerned about promoting Himself or His own agenda.

The Son Emptied Himself

The apostle has set up a great contrast (Phil 2:7). He has explained who Jesus is: fully God, co-equal with the Father. He is a person with all knowledge, all power, all glory, who can do whatever He pleases according to His will. But instead of exalting in who He was, He chose for the sake of unity to love another, prefer another, honor another, and carry out His will. Thus He emptied Himself (Phil 2:7).

The emphasis of the Greek text is that Jesus Himself did this. No one forced Him to do this. This was what He wanted to do. Because of His love for the Father and desire to please Him and do His will (because He had the same mind, the same love, was united in spirit, and intent on one purpose [Phil 2:2]), Jesus willingly emptied Himself.

The Son did not and could not empty Himself of being God. God cannot stop being God. The Son emptied (κενόω) Himself (Phil 2:7).¹⁰⁰ When the Son emptied Himself, He took on the form of a slave (Phil 2:7). Being found in appearance as a man, the Son veiled His glory.

⁹⁷ Cf. Matt 20:12.

⁹⁸ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 215.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁰⁰ This is a problem text and many commentators disagree over what the Son emptied Himself of. O’Brien gives a good survey of the different views. See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 218ff. Fee argues that Christ emptied Himself of nothing since κενόω needs no genitive qualifier. “Christ did not empty himself of anything; he simply, ‘emptied himself,’ poured himself out. This is metaphor, pure and simple.” Fee, *Philippians*, 210. The writer of this paper agrees with Fee’s interpretation.

Paul had already commanded his readers not to do things from *empty conceit* (κενοδοξίαν) in verse three—a word that literally means empty glory.¹⁰¹ Instead of attempting to get glory for themselves, which would be all vanity, the Philippians were to have the attitude of Christ. Unlike Paul’s readers, Christ could not do anything from empty glory because He already was all glorious. Yet, amazingly, He did not outwardly display His glory when He became a man and took on the form of a slave. He who had the greatest glory and the most exalted reputation, made Himself of no reputation. He came to this earth, not as Lord (even though He is Lord), but in the form of a slave. He came to the earth He created, but no one knew who He was.¹⁰²

In becoming a man the Son did not exchange the form of God for that of a slave; instead He displayed the form of God *in* the form of a slave, clearly showing what His character was like and what it meant to be God.¹⁰³ A slave is one with no rights or privileges, but who exists to wholly give himself to another’s will. He disregards his own personal interests to do the will of his master. This is what the Son came to do. He came not to do His own will but the will of the Father who sent Him. He did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. This was complete self-renunciation. He is God, yet He came to serve God and do His bidding. He was self-giving for the glory of another. The Son came to reveal the true God and what was seen was not what one would have expected: divine selflessness, infinite humility, preferring of the other, perfect love and unity, having the same mind, and intent on one purpose. This is the true God!

The Son Humbled Himself

When God became a man, surprisingly He humbled Himself (Phil 2:8). One might have expected Christ to display His glory (which is what He will do when He comes the second time). But the Son did not come to make a name for Himself. Instead He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, but not just any kind of death; a humiliating, violent, cursed death: death on a cross.

Why would God do this? Why would the God of all glory, who was worshiped and adored in heaven, give all that up and empty Himself and take on humanity, live in obscurity, and suffer a violent death at the hands of men He created? Some might say He did this because of His love for sinners. This may be true, but this is not what Paul underscores here. He says He

¹⁰¹ This word comes from two Greek words: empty (κενός) and glory (δοξά).

¹⁰² Erickson argues that the Son emptied Himself of His equal authority with the Father, not His glory. “I conclude that the interpretation that Jesus actually gave up equal authority with the Father and took on an obedience to him that was not previously present is superior to the view that he merely gave up equal honor and glory. This is underscored by the fact that nothing is said about honor and [glory] in this passage.” Erickson, *Who’s Tampering*, 120. As has been shown above, glory is mentioned in the passage where Paul uses the word “empty glory.” Men who have no glory vainly try to get it; Jesus who has all glory, did not display it. What is actually not mentioned in this passage is authority; it has to be read into the text.

¹⁰³ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 224.

became *obedient* (Phil 2:8). The reason the Son did this was because someone else wanted Him to do this. He was doing this for another. He was doing this in obedience to the Father. Instead of being selfish and doing His own thing (since He is God and can do whatever He wants), and instead of displaying His splendor (which He could do since He is all glorious), He was humble, veiled His glory, and desired to do whatever the Father wanted Him to do. He regarded the Father as more important than Himself.

The thrust of Paul's argument in this passage is that this was the Son's attitude before He ever became a man. This was His attitude *as God*. While the Son was God in heaven, it was His mind-set not to take advantage of who He was, but to glory in another and do the will of another. This is who He is and how He acts.

Paul is, therefore, grounding his exhortation to his readers—to live as Christ did—on the way the Son conducts Himself as God. Existing in the form of God, the Son did not use His status of equality with God for His own advantage, but emptied Himself taking the form of a slave. He did this in obedience to the Father. He regarded the Father as more important than Himself even though He was of equal glory with the Father.

This was the Son's attitude toward the Father in eternity. "His determination not to exploit his true and real status for his own advantage was made in eternity. His self-emptying on earth flowed from his refusal to pursue self-interest in eternity. His human obedience reflects his divine submission. ... [And] since his obedience on earth did not curtail his deity, neither does his self-effacement in eternity" affect His deity.¹⁰⁴ The Son is truly wonderful.

Summary

This order of commanding and obeying is never reversed. The Scriptures never show the Son commanding the Father and the Father obeying the Son. The Father, because He is the Father, commands and directs the Son. The Son, because He is the Son, obeys and does the Father's will. This is the consistent pattern that God has unveiled in His word.

The Father Is the Head and the Son Submits

As has been noted the Father's inclination is to initiate and plan all things and accomplish His plans through His Son. The Son gladly and willingly fulfills the Father's decree. The Scriptures also convey this from another perspective: headship and submission. The Father leads and directs; the Son submits and obeys.

¹⁰⁴ Letham, *Trinity*, 403.

The Father Is the Head of Christ

The apostle Paul states very clearly, “God is the head of Christ” (1 Cor 11:3). Some take this to mean the Father is the head of Christ only in the incarnation.¹⁰⁵ Others see this as part of their eternal relationship.¹⁰⁶

Before it is determined which of these views is more accurate, a more fundamental question must be answered. What does the word “head” mean? Two main views are taken. Some see the word *head* to mean *authority*,¹⁰⁷ while others insist it means *source*.¹⁰⁸ Both sides are insistent their definition is correct and that the opposite definition is incorrect.¹⁰⁹

How the apostle Paul uses this word in his other writings is helpful in understanding its meaning here. In Ephesians 5 Paul writes, “The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body” (Eph 5:23). *Head* cannot have the meaning of “source” in this verse because there is no sense in which husbands are the source of their wives.¹¹⁰

To clarify what he means Paul compares the husband’s headship over his wife with Christ’s headship over His church. Christ is the head of the church, which is His body (Eph 5:23). By using the analogy of the body, the apostle helps us understand the meaning of *head*. It is the head that directs and governs the whole body. Thus, the head has authority over the body. Since Christ is the head or authority over the church, “the church is *subject* to Christ” (Eph

¹⁰⁵ John Calvin, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, vol. 20, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2003), 353; Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 503; Henry, vol. 6, 452; *Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, vol. 5 (Pasadena, California: Thru the Bible Radio, 1983), 50.

¹⁰⁶ Frederick Louis Godet, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. A Cusin (1886; repr., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1971), 111; Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 45-48; Charles Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), 206; John Peter Lange, *Romans and Corinthians*, vol. 10, trans. Daniel W. Poor (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1960), 223; W. Harold Mare, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1976), 257; Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 72, 77.

¹⁰⁷ Calvin, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 353; Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 544ff; Henry, vol. 6, 452; Lange, vol. 10, 223; John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 253; McGee, vol. 5, 49; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), 127; *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 294.

¹⁰⁸ Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping,” 61; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 503; Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 423.

¹⁰⁹ Bilezikian emphatically states, “*Head* is never given the meaning of authority.” Instead he sees it to mean “source of life.” Gilbert Bilezikian, “I Believe in Male Headship” (Christians for Biblical Equality International, n.d), <http://www.cbeinternational.org?q=content/i-believe-male-headship> (accessed April 27, 2010); Grudem just as emphatically states, “Ancient Greek literature [has] produced no convincing examples where *kephale* meant ‘source.’” Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of *Kephale* [“Head”],” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), 425-26.

¹¹⁰ The only possible exception of this is Adam and Eve, where God formed Eve out of Adam’s body (cf. Gen 2:21-23). Paul, however, does not have Adam and Eve in view in this passage, but husbands and wives.

5:24, emphasis added). Paul's use of the word *subject* in connection with the word *head* makes sense only if head means *authority*. Therefore, it is evident in this passage that head means authority to which others are subject. It does not mean source.

In Ephesians 1:22, Paul states that God "put all things in subjection under [Christ's] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church." Understanding this to mean God gave Christ as *source* over all things, does not make sense. Christ is the head over all things, which means He does as He pleases. Everything else is under His feet in subjection to Him. Head in this verse means *one in authority over* because Paul is emphasizing the exaltation of Christ and all things being in subjection to Him. Headship and subjection go together and help us understand what head means. The predominant idea of this word is one in authority to whom subjection is due.¹¹¹

This definition fits well within the context of 1 Corinthians 11. Paul is describing how men and women who are saved are to relate to one another in the church. God has an appointed order for harmony and unity. Authority and submission, however, are not simply part of the church; they pervade the entire universe. It is a reflection of God Himself: the Father is the head or authority over Christ even though the Son is fully God and equal in essence to the Father.

Interestingly, Paul does not qualify this statement. He does not say the Father is head over Christ only in the incarnation. He simply states God is the head of Christ. Thus, he could be teaching that the Father and Son have always related to one another in this way. The Father has an eternal headship or authority over the Son.¹¹² If this is true, this would simply confirm the pattern we have seen in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Some object to this conclusion for they see it leading to the heresy of subordinationism.¹¹³ But this would be heresy only if one asserted there was a difference in essence between the Father and the Son. What is being discussed is a difference in their persons and in particular how the Father and Son relate to one another. The point is not that the Son is essentially inferior to the Father, but that He willingly submits Himself to the Father's authority.¹¹⁴

The Father's disposition is to initiate, plan, command, and lead. The Son's disposition is to obey, submit, and execute the Father's will. They both enjoy doing what they are inclined

¹¹¹ Grudem cites (besides the verses listed above), at least eighteen other passages in the Bible and thirty other examples from ancient Greek literature where the word head has the meaning "authority over/ruler." Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 544ff.

¹¹² Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 11 after the resurrection. If the Son submitted to the authority of the Father only during the incarnation, one would have expected Paul to use the verb *was*.

¹¹³ Catherine C. Kroeger, "The Classical Concept of Head as 'Source,'" in *Equal to Serve: Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 283; Kevin Giles, "The Father and the Son Divided or Undivided in Power and Authority?" (Christians for Biblical Equality International, n.d.), http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/free_articles/trinity.shtml (accessed March 4, 2009).

¹¹⁴ Schriener, "Head Coverings," 128.

to do. This does not in any way imply inequality, for they are equal in being. They simply relate to one another in their persons in these distinct patterns.¹¹⁵

The Father's authority over the Son is seen in a number of different ways.

The Father Sends the Son into the World to Accomplish His Work

The language of sending/coming that was discussed above clearly implies an authority/submission relationship. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater

¹¹⁵ Giles cannot conceive of an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father for "once the word *eternal* is added to the word *subordination*, you have ontological subordination." Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 28. Thus, the Son would be the "Father's 'inferior' in some way." Ibid., 57. What Giles fails to see is that this is a discussion about how the Father and Son relate to one another in their *persons* not their *being*. Unfortunately, Giles consistently confuses these terms. For example he says, "The Son's eternal subordination defines his *person*. It is what is 'essential' to his *being*." Ibid., 22, italics added. If subordination defines His person, then by definition this is how He is distinct from the Father. It does not affect His being, which is identical with the Father. In another place Giles writes, "Once the word *eternal* is used, it indicates that the subordination ascribed defines his person. If the Son of God is *eternally* subordinated in function ... then in his *being/essence/nature/substance* he is in some way less than the Father." Ibid., 57. If a word eternally describes the Son's person, how does this affect His *being*? It can only affect His being if one confuses the terms. Giles says, "His subordination defines his person. As the Son he is subordinated to the Father—subordinated in his person or *being*." Ibid., 59. Clearly Giles uses these terms interchangeably. "If the person and work of Christ cannot be divided, then also the being and function of Christ cannot be divided, for these two pairings are synonymous." Ibid., 294. For Giles the words *work* and *function* are synonyms, and so are the words *person* and *being*. This confusion of the terms of who God is leads Giles down the path of modalism. In his zeal to protect the deity of Christ he blurs the personal distinctions between the Father and the Son and thus destroys the beauty and wonder of their relationship.

Erickson makes a similar mistake. In answering those who hold to the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, he asks, "If we are dealing with a person, the Son, who is eternally and necessarily subordinate to the Father, don't we have to ask whether the nature (or "essence," "being," or "substance") of the Son is not somehow different and lesser than that of the Father?" Erickson, *Who's Tampering*, 175. The answer is: no, for how the Son relates to the Father in His person does not affect His nature, which is identical with the Father. See also Alan Myatt who gives a similar argument in his paper "On the Compatibility of Ontological Equality, Hierarchy and Functional Distinctions," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, New Orleans, LA, November 20, 2009).

This confusion of terms is not restricted to those who hold to an egalitarian view of God. Grudem writes, "Within the *being* of God, you have both equality and authority." Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 48, emphasis added. The word *being* is often used synonymously with the words *nature* and *essence* to describe what the Father and Son equally share. They each possess fully the identically same eternal divine nature. Thus to argue that within the *being* of God there is both equality and authority/submission could imply there is a difference in the Father's nature from the Son's nature. To avoid being misunderstood, it may be best not to use the word *being* to describe how the Father and Son are different.

Ware has attempted to bring some clarity to this confusion. He argues, "We affirm that some properties that are distinct to each Person are essential to their personal identities, and we also affirm, without conflict or contradiction, that all properties true of the divine essence are possessed fully and eternally by each of the three divine Persons without exception and without qualification." Ware, "Do Relations of Authority and Submission Exist Eternally among the Persons of the Godhead?" Each person has some properties that are distinct to them. This is what makes them different and distinguishable. The patterns given above reflect what some of these distinct properties are, but this does not mean the Father and Son have different natures, for they share the exact same identical divine nature.

A possible example of this may be seen in identical twins. It may be impossible to distinguish any physical differences between identical twins by casual observation, but one thing that makes them discernible is their personality. The Father and Son each personalize their identical divine nature in distinguishable ways.

than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him” (John 13:16). Jesus gave this simple illustration which His listeners would have understood: a slave is not greater than his master, nor is he equal to his master. The master is somehow greater than his slave. Paralleling this, the sender is greater than the one sent. How is the master greater than the slave? He is not necessarily greater in being. As a matter of fact, the master and slave could be totally equal in nature (e.g. they are both men). The way the master is greater is in his authority. Thus he commands his slave and the slave submits to his master’s commands. This is also true of the one who is sent. He may be equal in being to the sender, but by virtue of being sent it is clear he is under the authority of the sender.

As was noted earlier, over fifty times the New Testament speaks of the Father sending the Son.¹¹⁶ There is not one instance of the Son sending the Father. What this emphasizes is the Father’s authority over the Son and the Son’s submission to the Father. This is why Jesus could say, “I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28; cf. 10:29). Jesus does not mean greater in being, which is how modern Arians (e.g. Jehovah Witnesses) would take this. If someone were to say, “My pastor is greater than I,” no one would take this to mean that his pastor is more of a human being than the person who said this. It should not be presumed, therefore, the *greater than* category refers to being, apart from looking at the context.¹¹⁷ This person’s pastor may be greater than him in knowledge, in ministry experience, in fruitfulness, in age, or in many other ways: only the context of the discussion could clarify what is meant by greatness. The same is true here. The Father is not greater in being than the Son for John has clearly taught the Father and Son are equal in being (John 1:1; 10:30). The Father is greater in authority because He sends the Son.¹¹⁸

Kostenberger and Swain point out, “When sender and sent one are father and son (at least in the case of the triune life), we are dealing with a relationship between equals.” This is not a relationship between superior and inferior, where the will of the former is imposed on the latter. They are equals, thus “the action to be undertaken must be understood as a common

¹¹⁶ See page 55.

¹¹⁷ D. A. Carson, *John*, 507.

¹¹⁸ Erickson argues that those holding to the “gradational-authority view” make an assumption that it is the Father who makes ultimate decisions and initiates actions. Those holding to the “equivalent-authority view” make an assumption that it is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who jointly make ultimate decisions and initiate actions. Erickson, *Who’s Tampering*, 122. This second view is taken from B. B. Warfield who states, “These relations of subordination in modes of operation may just as well be due to a convention, an agreement, between the Persons of the Trinity—a ‘Covenant’ as it is technically called—by virtue of which a distinct function in the work of redemption is voluntarily assumed by each.” B. B. Warfield, “Trinity,” 3021. There is, however, no biblical evidence for this covenant, yet this “assumption” becomes a major argument for Erickson’s view. On the other hand, the “assumption” that it is the Father who makes ultimate decisions and initiates actions in their relationship has much biblical support as has been shown in the verses above. The Father is the one who initiates and plans creation (1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:2) and redemption (Eph 1:3-11; Rom 1:1-3; Gal 1:3-4; 2 Tim 2:9). The Father then sends His Son to accomplish His plans. The Son did not even come on His own initiative (John 8:42). The one who sends is greater than the one sent. The Father is the one who sends the Son because He has the authority to send Him. The Son on His part does not come begrudgingly or under compulsion. On the contrary, He wants to come for He always desires to do the Father’s will (John 8:29).

cause ... because it is family business.” Nevertheless, “equality and engagement in a common cause in no way rule out the relationship of command and obedience that holds between a father and son.”¹¹⁹ They are equals because they are Father and Son—they are of the same essence. But there is still an order between them because they are Father and Son. Thus their names emphasize both equality of nature and order between them.

The Father determined to send the Son in eternity to accomplish His plan of redemption. This means He has eternal authority over the Son. The Father is God sending and commanding; the Son is God sent and obedient.¹²⁰ The Father does His work and speaks His words through His Son. The Son, in loving obedience to the Father (John 14:31), comes to accomplish His will.

There are some who emphatically disagree that the Father eternally has authority over the Son for in their mind this means the Son is not equal to the Father, and thus not fully God. Giles writes, “If the divine three are equal in power then they must be equal in authority and vice versa.”¹²¹ To Giles authority is a divine attribute which all three members of the Godhead possess equally.¹²²

Even though authority and power are at times used synonymously, the Scriptures do make a distinction between them. Power (δύναμις) has to do with inherent power or ability.¹²³ Authority (ἐξουσία) is the right to do something or the authority to act.¹²⁴ The inherent power (δύναμις) of the Father and the Son is exactly the same. They both have omnipotent power. Their authority (ἐξουσία), however, is distinct.

An example of this is seen in Acts 1:7. The apostles ask the risen Christ if this was the time He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus responds to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by *His own* authority” (ἐξουσία) (emphasis added). Clearly, the Father has an authority that is distinct from the Son’s. The Father’s functional authority is actually over the Son, which He delegates to the Son so the Son has the right to act.

The Father Delegates His Authority to the Son

Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18). The risen Christ has been given authority to reign over all things by the only one who could give it to Him: His Father. The Father “has given all judgment to the Son” for He alone has the

¹¹⁹ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 122.

¹²⁰ D. A. Carson, *John*, 508; Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 71.

¹²¹ Giles, “The Father and Son Divided.”

¹²² Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 53.

¹²³ Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), 285.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 562, 566.

authority to give Him all judgment (John 5:22). The Father “gave Him authority over all flesh” that the Son may give eternal life to the ones the Father had given Him (John 17:2). Jesus received authority from His Father to rule the nations (Rev 2:26-27).

The pattern is consistently the same: the Father delegates His authority to the Son so the Son will be exalted. Never is this reversed. Never are we told that the Son gives authority to the Father. This is simply a reflection of how the Father is the head over the Son and how the two persons relate to one another.

The Father Uses His Authority to Install His Son as King

The psalmist makes a distinction between God the Father and His Anointed, who is the Son (Ps 2:2, 7). “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed” (Ps 2:2). The reference to “His Anointed” indicates the influence this LORD has over the one He anoints for the work He wants Him to do.¹²⁵

The Father in His fury declares to men who do not want Him or His Son ruling over them, “I have installed My King” (Ps 2:6). Here we see the absolute authority of God the Father over His creation. It does not matter what man devises, God’s plans will be established. He *has* installed His king. No one can stop God from doing what He wants. The Son is reigning. Everyone in this universe will sooner or later be subject to Him (cf. Phil 2:9-11). The psalmist is emphasizing the authority of the Father over His creation, and incredibly, even His authority over His King whom He installs over the nations.¹²⁶

The Son declares what the Father has decreed for Him. “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware’” (Ps 2:7-9). Here we see the Father’s decree—what He has determined to do. He will subject the nations to Himself by sending His Son to rule over them. The Son will reign with a rod of iron to the very ends of the earth because the Father has determined it. This is the Father’s decree, not the Son’s.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Bruce Ware, “Equal in Essence,” 45.

¹²⁶ It should be noted that there is a distinction in the Father’s authority over His creation and His authority over His Son. The former is the authority of the Creator over His creatures. They are two distinct classes, one greater in being than the others. The latter is the authority of a father over his son. They are of the same status, equal in being.

¹²⁷ The phrase, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You,” more than likely means: “This day I have declared and manifested You to be My Son, by giving You kingly dignity and placing You on Your throne.” J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1878), 117. Paul sees the fulfillment of this verse in the resurrection (cf. Acts 13:33). Jesus was “declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:4). The resurrection proved who the Son was. He did not become the Son at that time. Now the Son sits at the right hand of the Father waiting until all His enemies are made His footstool. Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991), 69-70; John Peter Lange, *The*

It is again observed that the Father is the head, the leader, the initiator, and planner. Yet, because He loves the Son, He accomplishes all things through Him so the Son is exalted. The Son on His part delights in submitting to the Father and fulfilling His decree and thereby exalts the Father (cf. Phil 2:11).

The last part of the Psalm shows the proper response to these truths. “Worship the LORD. ... Do homage to the Son” (Ps 2:11, 12). Bow before the LORD and His Anointed!

What is portrayed in this passage is the equality and distinction of the Father and the Son. Both are worshiped equally because they are both fully and equally God. They have one common goal and plan, but each has a different part in accomplishing that plan. The Father is the leader, planner, and initiator. He has authority over the Son. It is the Father who decreed to send the Son. It is the Father who puts the Son in the place as King over the nations. It is the Father who glorifies the Son. Therefore, the Father is seen as the head of the Son. Yet the Father in humility and love delights to use His authority to magnify the Son. As for the Son, His inclination and delight is to willingly carry out the Father’s decree.

These roles are never reversed. Never do the Scriptures display the Son directing, leading, and having authority over the Father or the Father submitting to the decrees of the Son. It is always from the Father through the Son, and this is eternally true.

The Father Uses His Authority to Exalt the Son

Paul says of the Father, “These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Eph 1:19-21). According to Paul, it was the Father who raised the Son from the dead, and then seated Him in the most exalted place—at His right hand, far above all rule, authority, power, dominion, and every name that is named. The Father honors the Son by putting Him in the most exalted place, right next to Himself.

The Scriptures are consistent in declaring the Father raised the Son from the dead.¹²⁸ The Father did this to vindicate Him and declare to all that He is indeed the Son of God (cf. Rom 4:1).

Interestingly, there are two places where Jesus prophesies that He would raise Himself from the dead (John 2:19-21; 10:18). These verses underscore two truths about the Son. First, if He can raise Himself from the dead, then He has omnipotent power and He is God. Second, it reveals how the Father and Son work together in all that they do. They have complete unity of

Psalms, vol. 5, trans. Charles A Briggs et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), 60.

¹²⁸ See Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:33, 34, 37; Rom 4:24; 6:4; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:15; 2 Cor 4:14; Gal 1:1; Col 2:12; 1 The 1:10; 1 Pet 1:21.

will and action, yet without confusion of their persons or how they relate to one another.¹²⁹

John 10 reveals how the Father and Son worked together in the resurrection. Jesus emphatically states that He Himself will lay down His life on His own initiative (John 10:18). The Son had complete freedom to give up His life. No one made Him do this. He had authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again (John 10:18). But then Jesus adds, “This commandment I received from My Father” (John 10:18). “This commandment” refers to His laying down His life and taking it up again.¹³⁰ It was the Father’s will that the Son lay down His life and take it up again. The Son, motivated by His love for the Father and His desire to do the Father’s will, willingly laid down His life on His own initiative. Earlier Jesus said, “I can do nothing on My own initiative” (John 5:30). His point there was that He only sought to do the will of the Father who sent Him. His point here is that even though He is doing what the Father wants Him to do, no one is forcing Him to do this. It is what He desires to do. His initiative is to do the Father’s initiative. Thus He used His authority and power to lay down His life and to raise it up again.

The Son is God and therefore has the power to raise Himself from the dead. But He does this at the command of the Father. He willingly desires to fulfill the Father’s command and thus raises Himself. Therefore, from one perspective, the Son raised Himself; but from another perspective it was the Father who raised Him because it was a command of the Father that the Son was fulfilling. The two work together in complete unity, but it is a unity of command and obedience.¹³¹ There is a harmony of order: from the Father through the Son. They work together fulfilling the one purpose of God.¹³²

¹²⁹ Horrell, “The Eternal Son of God in the Social Trinity,” 53.

¹³⁰ Hendrickson, *John*, 115; Morris, *John*, 513; Ryle’s *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1956), 16.

¹³¹ D. A. Carson, *John*, 389.

¹³² Erickson states, “Augustine suggests that what is said of one member of the Trinity can also be understood of the others.” Erickson, *Who’s Tampering*, 134. He understands this to mean “every action is an action of the triune God.” Ibid., 208. Thus, “The various works attributed to the different persons of the Trinity are in fact works of the triune God.” Ibid., 135. Erickson then gives examples of what he means. “It was the Son who died on the cross, but in a very real sense, the Father and the Spirit also suffered. ... Similarly, the intercession is not simply that of the Son or the Spirit with the Father. In a very real sense, it is intercession with the entire Godhead. ... [T]he sending of the Son to earth was done by the Father but on behalf of the Trinity. In a very real sense, all of them sent the Son.” Ibid., 135. Erickson concludes this section by stating, “This means that those passages that speak of the Father predestinating, sending, commanding, and so on should not be taken as applying to the Father alone but to all members of the Trinity.” Ibid., 138.

Erickson has taken the principle of mutual indwelling and unity of action and applied it beyond what Scripture does. The Scriptures affirm that the Father and Son mutually indwell one another and that they work together in unity in all that they do. But the Scriptures also affirm, as has been seen in multitudes of verses above, a distinction between the persons of the Trinity and how they relate to one another. To conclude that what the Father does is in reality what all the members of the Trinity do together is to go beyond biblical revelation. Erickson leaves us with a god in which there is no distinction in the persons for when the Scriptures say the Father did something, it really means all three persons did it. We are left with one god who acts.

¹³³ When Giles rejects the thought that the Father eternally has authority over the Son because this “would contradict [Paul’s] teaching that Christ now reigns as Lord, the head of every ruler and authority,” he fails to mention what Paul

The Father then puts all things in subjection to the Son. “And [the Father] put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22).¹³³ The Son does not put things in subjection to Himself. This is the authority of the Father because all things are in subjection to the Father. The only way the Father can give Christ as head over all things is because the Father is the head over all things, including being the head of Christ. The Son has authority because He is under the Father’s authority. The Father, however, uses His authority to glorify the Son to the most exalted place.

In another place, Paul writes, “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11). It is the Father who exalts the Son over all creation and who gives Him the name above every name.

The Father gives the Son a name appropriate to His exaltation. It is a name that manifests His supremacy, which signifies that He is exalted above everything else. The name the Father gives Him is Lord, which is equivalent to saying Jesus is God.¹³⁴

Paul is quoting from Isaiah 45. “Is it not I, the LORD [Yahweh]? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance” (Isa 45:21-23). The Lord declares three times that there is no other God besides Him, and that to Him alone every knee will bow and tongue confess who He is. God the Father will have everyone say this to Jesus. Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord—Yahweh. The unshared, matchless name of God will be the Son’s name for eternity. The Father bestows on Him this name because He has the authority to do so. He does this because He loves to glorify the Son. He is pleased with the Son and wants Him honored.

The Son receives incredible glory for every knee will bow to Him, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord. Amazingly, though, when the Son is magnified, the Father also is exalted: “to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11). This glorifies Him because He is the one who decreed all this and who initiated redemption through His Son. So it glorifies the Father that all things turn out exactly as He has masterfully orchestrated. But it also glorifies Him because it displays the unity and the one purpose of the Godhead. They work in unity and love, doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility each regards the other as more important than Himself.

plainly states: It was the *Father* who “put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him as head over all things” (Eph 1:22). It was also the Father who gave Him the name *Lord* (cf. Phil 2:11). Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 112.

¹³⁴ Steve Fernandez, “The Father’s Exaltation of the Son,” sermon on Philippians 2:5-11, http://www.cbcvallejo.org/sermons-online/?sermonsite_action=view_sermon&sermonsite_sermonid=379_07 (accessed April 12, 2010).

From these passages it is seen that the Father has authority over the Son. They equally share the one undivided divine essence and are one, yet they relate to each other in distinct patterns. The Father's disposition is to lead. He is the head of Christ, thus He sends, gives, and exalts the Son. The Son's disposition is to execute, thus He comes, receives and exalts the Father. This divine order is never reversed.

The Son Submits to the Father

Even though the Son is exactly equal in nature to the Father, He gladly submits to the Father and carries out His work because He loves the Father. Paul writes, "When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

The word *subjected* that the apostle uses here is ὑποτάσσω. The root word τάσσω means to arrange or appoint; then the preposition ὑπο is added, so that it means to arrange under or place under, to subordinate or subject.¹³⁵ This word is consistently used in the New Testament of someone placing himself voluntarily under the authority of another. For example, it is used of God's people being subject to governing officials (Rom 13:1; cf. Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13), of wives submitting to their own husbands (Col 3:18; cf. Eph 5:22; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1), of slaves being subject to their masters (Tit 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18), of young men being subject to their elders (1 Pet 5:5), and of Christians submitting to God (Jas 4:7). In each one of these cases the Christian is commanded by God to submit to the one in authority over them for this authority is from God. However, God leaves it up to the person to voluntarily do this. The ones in authority are never told to make those under them submit, for then it would be forced and no longer submission but subjugation. Thus submission (ὑποτάσσω) is seen as a voluntary act of putting oneself under the authority of another who is over them.

Because the Father is the head of Christ and thus an authority over Him, the Son submits to Him. The Son, who is equal to the Father, voluntarily puts Himself under the authority of the Father and obeys Him. His submission is not forced or coerced. Instead, He lovingly, willingly, and delightfully submits to the Father. This is what He is inclined to do, which is why He gladly does the Father's will.

There is not one example given in Scripture where this order is reversed: the Father is never said to submit to the Son. The Son always submits to the Father. One can only marvel at the amazing condescension and humility of the Son, who, though equal to Father, would willingly submit to Him.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Friedrich, vol. 8, 27ff, 39ff.

¹³⁶ Erickson argues that if one holds to the eternal authority of the Father over the Son, then the Father's decision to send the Son and the Son's obedience in coming "were not free actions in the fullest sense. ... Neither the Father nor the Son was free as to whether the Son was to be sent." Erickson, *Who's Tampering*, 223. For God, freedom means to do whatever He desires, and He is most free when He carries out His desires. The Son always chooses to obey the Father for this is His

The Son Submits Willingly and Gladly Because He Loves the Father

The Son did exactly as the Father commanded Him to show the world that He loved the Father (John 14:31). Love motivated Him to submit and obey. He always did the things that were pleasing to the Father (John 8:29). It was His delight to obey the Father and carry out His will. “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again” (John 10:17). The Son was not forced to lay down His life. He willingly did this to fulfill the Father’s decree and the Father loved Him for this.

The Son Submits During the Incarnation

There is abundant evidence in the New Testament showing the Son submitted to the Father when He was on earth. He sought in all He said and did to obey the Father, in full submission to His will. Thus, there are statements like, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). Jesus asserts He is able to do whatever the Father does—a claim to deity. He is equal with the Father. Yet, we also see His humility, love, and obedience to the Father for He does nothing of Himself. He does not act on His own. He was not self-centered or self-seeking. Instead, the Son submitted Himself to do only what the Father was doing. “I can do nothing on My own initiative. ... I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30). The degree of Jesus’ submission is incredible. Jesus did not have His own agenda or seek His own initiative. He sought only to do the Father’s will, the one who had sent Him on His mission. These are astounding statements considering the Son is equal with the Father. He is God, yet He obeys God. He never acted independent of the Father, not even partially. He always submitted to the Father. “Perfect Sonship involves perfect identity of will and action with the Father.”¹³⁷

In another place, Jesus stated, “I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me” (John 8:28). He spoke only what the Father wanted Him to speak. Now that is submission! “I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me” (John 8:42). The Father initiated the coming of the Son. The Son gladly submitted to the Father and came to fulfill His mission. One might think that if He is God, then He would not be under anyone’s authority. But God He is, and as the Son He submits.¹³⁸

greatest desire. “I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (John 8:29). Thus the Son is freest when He submits to the Father and carries out His will for this is what He longs to do. The Father’s great desire is to sum up “all things in Christ” (Eph 1:10). Thus the Father is freest when He sends His Son to accomplish His purposes for this is what He desires to do. Thus Erickson’s statement is simply not true.

¹³⁷ D. A. Carson, *John*, 251.

¹³⁸ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 74.

It is plain from the above texts that the Son submitted to the Father during the incarnation. It is amazing that He would do this, that one equal in being and nature would willingly and gladly submit Himself to the authority of another. And the Christian glories in the Son for doing this, for apart from His submission there is no redemption.

If Christ submitted in His incarnation and this did not affect His equality with the Father, then He could submit for all eternity to the Father and it would not affect His deity and equality with the Father.

The Son Submits in Eternity Past

Most evangelicals are willing to concede the Son submitted to the Father during the incarnation, but some do not believe He submitted before or after. For example, Gilbert Bilezikian states, “Because there was no order of subordination within the Trinity prior to the Second Person’s incarnation, there will remain no such thing after its completion. If we must talk of subordination it is only a functional or economic subordination that pertains exclusively to Christ’s role in relation to human history.”¹³⁹

However, as has already been shown, there is abundant evidence for the Son’s submission in eternity past. The Father is the source of creation, but He created everything through His Son (1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:2). Thus the Son is the active agent who carried out the Father’s plan. The Son had to agree to carry out the Father’s plan before anything ever existed. Going back even further than creation, before the foundation of the world, the Father planned redemption and centered its accomplishment in His Son (Eph 1:3ff). The Son, in eternity, agreed to accomplish the Father’s plan for in time He did it. The Father is the one who sent the Son into the world to accomplish His mission. The Son willingly submitted to the Father’s will before He ever came into the world. He then demonstrated His obedience by coming into the world to carry out the Father’s decree. This same pattern of submission to the Father continues as we look toward the future.

The Son Submits after the Resurrection and Ascension

From the resurrection onward, when the Son returns to glory—the glory He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5)—God’s word consistently reveals the submission of the Son to the authority of the Father.

¹³⁹ Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping,” 60.

The Son Submits to the Father after the Resurrection

In Acts 1 the apostles were wondering if this was the time when the Lord would bring in the glorious kingdom. They asked, “Lord, is it at this time *You* are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6, emphasis added). Observe His divine response, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the *Father* has fixed by *His own authority*” (Acts 1:7, emphasis added). The Father, by His own authority, has fixed the time when the Son will restore the kingdom. The word *authority* (ἐξουσία), as has been shown, means the right to act; the right to do as one pleases. The Father is the one with ultimate authority, and the Son will not override the Father’s authority. The Son will wait until the time set by the Father. Then, in submission to the Father at the proper time that the Father has fixed, the Son will return to the earth and establish His glorious kingdom. Thus it is evident the Son after the resurrection continues to submit to the authority of the Father.

The Son Sits at the Right Hand of the Father

After the Father raised the Son from the dead, He exalted Him to His right hand (Acts 2:32-34). Jesus was lifted up to the highest place. The right hand of the king was the place of prestige and recognition, blessing and honor, authority and power. Christ was given sovereignty and dominion and crowned with glory. This emphasizes both His equality with the Father and the divine order between them.

The Son alone is raised to this position. There is no one equal to Him. Thus He is worshiped equally with the Father (cf. Rev 5:12-14). The Father shares His throne with no one but the Son (Rev 22:3). Together they rule forever.

Yet, even in this most exalted position there is still divine order between the Father and the Son. It is the *Father’s* throne that the Son shares. The Son is consistently said to be at the Father’s right hand. (There are at least eighteen other New Testament references.)¹⁴⁰ Nowhere is this pattern reversed. The Father is never said to sit at the Son’s right hand. There are no examples of the Son giving the Father authority to sit with Him on His throne. On the contrary, the Father is always seen as the one with ultimate authority and the Son, though exalted to the highest possible place and equal to the Father, always defers to the Father’s authority.

Revelation 3:21 helps us understand this order. Jesus said, “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” Christians will sit with Jesus on His throne. With Him, they will rule the nations (cf. Rev 2:26-27), but He will still have ultimate authority. In a similar way, Christ sits with His

¹⁴⁰ See Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42; 22:69; Acts 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22.

Father on His throne, but the Father still has ultimate authority that the Son submits to.¹⁴¹

The background to all these verses about being exalted to the Father's right hand is a Messianic promise found in Psalm 110. "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'" (Ps 110:1). Peter quotes this verse and then asserts it is God the Father speaking of God the Son: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that *God* has made *Him* both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36, emphasis added). The author of Hebrews agrees that this is the Father speaking to the Son. "But to which of the angels has [God] ever said, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'?" (Heb 1:13). The Father and Son are both viewed as divine in nature. They are equal in being; they are both Lord. Yet one Lord sits at the right hand of the other Lord. The risen and exalted Son, while being fully God, sits in a position that acknowledges the Father's greater authority.¹⁴² Yet, amazingly, the Father uses His authority to glorify the Son by putting all His enemies under Him.

The Son Intercedes to the Father for His People

This is another example of the Son's submission to the Father after He returned to glory. Paul declares, "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom 8:34; cf. Heb 7:25). Christ Jesus, who has been exalted to the right hand of God, is right now interceding for His people. The Son, being God, can answer prayer directly.¹⁴³ Yet here He is seen interceding to the Father on behalf of His people. Why does He do this? Why doesn't He simply act Himself? He does not take action because He chooses to put Himself under the Father's authority and accomplish the Father's will even while in glory with the Father.

Interestingly, this is exactly how the Son taught His disciples to pray. "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:9-10). Even while the Son is in heaven, exalted to the highest most glorious

¹⁴¹ A similar example is given in Matthew 20. The mother of James and John came to Jesus with a request. She asked, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left" (Matt 20:21). She was not asking that they would have equal authority with Jesus, but only that they would be second to Him in authority. Jesus responded to James and John, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father" (Matt 20:23). The Father, by His authority, determines who sits at Jesus' right hand in His glorious kingdom. Thus even in the future the Son will continue to submit to the Father's authority. This is amazing submission considering the Son will be reigning over the entire universe. Yet, even from this exalted position of highest authority, He still submits to the Father who alone determines who sits at His right and His left.

¹⁴² Ware, "Equal in Essence," 50.

¹⁴³ An example of this is seen 2 Corinthians 12 where Paul implored the Lord Jesus three times to remove a thorn in the flesh, and the Lord's answer each time was no. He said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). See also Acts 7:59 where Stephen prayed directly to the Lord Jesus, and John's prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

place, He does not command the Father. Instead He intercedes to the Father that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The word Paul uses for *interceding* (ἐντυγχάνω) in Romans 8:34 is not a very common word for prayer.¹⁴⁴ It is often employed in contexts when bringing a request or petition before someone of greater authority. For example, the Jews appealed to governor Festus to do away with Paul (Acts 25:24), and Elijah pleaded with God against Israel (Rom 11:2). In both of these instances requests are made to someone in a higher authority.¹⁴⁵ This is the meaning implied in Romans 8. The Son is appealing to the Father because He is under His authority. He thus petitions the Father and asks Him to protect His people. The Son never orders the Father; rather, He brings requests; He intercedes. The Father, on the other hand, is never said to intercede to anyone, and this is appropriate in a relationship in which the Father is in authority over the Son.¹⁴⁶

The Son Hands Over the Kingdom to the Father

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is addressing the certainty of the resurrection, which will happen because Christ was sent to conquer all of God's enemies, including death. He writes:

Then comes the end, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:24-28)

This climactic passage ends history and ushers in the eternal state. It is the final glimpse, therefore, of the relationship between the Father and Son before eternity begins. Paul emphasizes two astonishing truths in this passage which almost seem contradictory: the supremacy of Christ over all things, and the submission of the Son to the Father. Both statements are true, and both are glorious.

The supremacy of Christ in this passage is virtually unparalleled. Paul presents Christ as the victor, the champion, and supreme conqueror. He completely obliterates all of God's enemies.

¹⁴⁴ Besides the passages mentioned above, ἐντυγχάνω is found only in Romans 8:27 where the Spirit is said to intercede for the saints. This is significant, for it appears that the Spirit—who is co-equal and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son—also submits to the Father in prayer.

¹⁴⁵ Grudem gives further examples of this meaning in literature outside the New Testament. He cites, among others, Wisdom 8:20, "I asked the Lord, and made petition to him"; 3 Macc. 6:37, "They requested the King, that he send them back to their home"; and Josephus, *Antiquities* 12:18; 16:170, "[T]he Jews in Cyrene petition Marcus Agrippa concerning people in their land who are falsely collecting taxes." Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 413.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 413.

Everything will be under His rule. He will be head over all and everything will be in subjection to Him.

This is accomplished by Christ Himself destroying all of God's enemies. Not one is left standing. All rule and all authority and power will be abolished by the Son (1 Cor 15:24). Every enemy against God, Christ will destroy. Christ must reign until He has put all His enemies under His own feet (1 Cor 15:25). Every enemy will be under the Son, and He will put them there. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death (1 Cor 15:26). Christ will be ruler over all.

Amazingly, in a passage that describes the greatest exaltation of the Lord Jesus, Paul also describes Him in terms of submission to the authority of the Father.

As has been seen, it was the Father by His authority who sent the Son into the world to accomplish His will. The Son's mission was to save God's people whom He had chosen, and destroy all of God's enemies. The Son gladly came into the world to accomplish this purpose. As this passage indicates, the Son is greatly glorified while carrying out the Father's will. It was the Father who determined that His kingdom would be established and advanced by His Son. It is the Son who is given center stage.¹⁴⁷ The Father loves the Son and wants Him to be marveled at, so He uses His authority and power to honor the Son.

The Father does this by subjecting all things to the Son. "For He [the Father] has put all things in subjection under His feet" (1 Cor 15:27). To make it even clearer that Paul is speaking of the Father, he writes, "Then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One *who subjected all things to Him*" (1 Cor 15:28, emphasis added). The Father uses His authority to magnify His beloved Son by putting all things under Him.

The Father, however, is not subject to the Son even though everything else is. He is "excepted" (1 Cor 15:27). The word *excepted* literally means to be outside of. Jesus used this word when He rebuked the Pharisees because they appeared clean on the "outside" (cf. Matt 23:26). The Father is outside the subjection to the Son for He is the one subjecting all things to the Son. He is the authority over the Son who exalts Him.

At this point the reader may have noted a tension in this passage. Paul has described the supremacy of Christ. He destroys all of God's enemies and puts them under His own feet (1 Cor 15:25). But then Paul declares the Father was the one who subjects all things to the Son (1 Cor 15:28). So which is true? Does the Son put all things under His own feet, or does the Father subject all things to the Son? Both statements are true, which underscores the equality of the Father and the Son.

This is similar to their other works, like creation. The Father created the world, though He did it through His Son (Heb 1:2). The work, therefore, is sometimes ascribed to the one and sometimes to the other. The same is true here.¹⁴⁸ The Father subdues His enemies *through* His Son.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Letham, *Trinity*, 418.

¹⁴⁸ Charles Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 331.

¹⁴⁹ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 759.

From one perspective the Son puts all things under His own feet. He conquered death. He defeats the enemies of God. But from another perspective the Father subjects all things to the Son. It was the Father who sent the Son into the world. It was the Father who raised the Son from the dead. It was the Father who gave the Son authority to act and rule. So, when the Son subjects all things to Himself, He is simply accomplishing the work the Father sent Him to do. Ultimately, then, it is the Father who works through the Son to accomplish His purposes. They work together in unity though they have distinct roles.

Amazingly, when the Son is subjecting all things to Himself, He is actually doing this in *submission* to the Father. Thus, we see the glorious supremacy of the Son over all things and at the same time the loving submission of the Son to the Father. The supremacy of Christ and the submission of Christ exist side by side.

Once the Son accomplishes the Father's mission and all the enemies of God are destroyed and Christ is supreme over all, it would appear that only two powers will remain in existence: that of the Son and that of the Father who gave the Son this sovereign position.¹⁵⁰ What will happen then? Will the Son attempt to overthrow the Father? This is what the devil did when he was given authority, and this is what man did when he was given authority. Is the Son like them? No, the Son will demonstrate to all of creation His loving submission to the Father by handing over the kingdom to Him (1 Cor 15:24). Even at the highest point of His glory, the Son subjects Himself to the Father, "choosing even in His majesty as Lord of all to be dependent upon the Father wholly and forever."¹⁵¹ The Son in this exalted place never sees Himself in competition with the Father. He does not attempt to usurp the Father. He is not a rival God; God is not against God. Instead, because of His great love for the Father and His desire to magnify Him, the Son voluntarily surrenders His authority and prerogatives to the Father. He does this because He was simply carrying out the will of the Father to begin with. Then, the Son Himself will be subjected to the Father, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).

The last phrase in verse 28, "so that God may be all in all," emphasizes the purpose of why the Son will hand over the kingdom to the Father and why He will subject Himself to Him. It is so that God as God will reign supreme over all things with no rivals or threats to His throne. Ever since the fall of man (and the fall of the devil) there have been contenders to the reign of God. The Father, through the agency of His Son, destroys every adversary against Himself and brings things back to the way they should be so that God the Father alone reigns unchallenged.¹⁵² God alone will be supreme in every place and in every way for there will be no enemy and no challenger to His rule.

¹⁵⁰ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 366.

¹⁵¹ Lange, vol. 10, 321.

¹⁵² Kovach and Schemm, "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son"; Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 49.

When the Son hands over the kingdom to the Father, this does not mean He will possess it no more. He will possess it as He did with the Father from all eternity.¹⁵³ The Father will reign over the entire created universe, while the Son will be at His right hand reigning with Him.

This passage ends where eternity begins. The last picture seen is the Son gladly submitting to the authority of the Father, which apparently will continue for all eternity.¹⁵⁴ This is in keeping with His submission to the Father both in the incarnation and in eternity past.

In an attempt to guard the full deity of the Son, many have sought to eliminate the idea of eternal submission in this passage. For example, Calvin, and many who have followed after him, distinguish between the divine and human nature of Christ and ascribe what is said here to His human nature only.¹⁵⁵ This, however, divides the person of Christ. Letham well summarizes the problem: "It is as if in attempting to guard against any diminution of Christ's full deity, [Calvin] has momentarily lost his grasp of the union of the two natures of the incarnate Christ."¹⁵⁶ In the Son is united both submission and equality which is so beautifully brought out in this text.

It is in the authority of the Father and the submission of the Son that is seen the beauty of their relationship. They work in unity and as one, yet each has a distinct role that they fulfill. This is done in complete harmony, with perfect joy and love for the other, and with a desire to exalt and glorify the other. The Father and Son are truly glorious in how they relate to one another.

¹⁵³ Lange, vol. 10, 321.

¹⁵⁴ Paul A. Rainbow, "Orthodox Trinitarianism and Evangelical Feminism," (The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, n.d.), 7, <http://www.cbmw.org/Resources/Articles/Orthodox-Trinitarianism-and-Evangelical-Feminism> (accessed March 4, 2009); Ware, "Equal in Essence," 51.

¹⁵⁵ John Calvin, vol. 20, 32.

¹⁵⁶ Letham, *Trinity*, 256.

Chapter Three

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIVINE ORDER BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE SON

The above section examined biblical evidence for an eternal divine order between the Father and the Son. This section will summarize those findings.

Distinct Patterns

There were a number of well-defined patterns that emerged between the Father and the Son that were reinforced throughout this study. The most consistent order was:

From the Father Through the Son

The Scriptures affirm the Father as the planner, initiator, originator, and source of all things. From Him all things flow. The Son was seen as the great agent of the Father; the executor of the Father's plans, who carried out His will. Through Him all things are accomplished. When the Son carried out the decrees of the Father, He was greatly exalted, which was the Father's desire. However, praise did not end at the Son, but redounded back to the Father, which was the Son's desire because it was the Father who initiated and planned all things to begin with. There is a distinct pattern of how the Father and Son work together in all that they do: from the Father and through the Son, which results in glory and praise first to the Son and then back to the Father.

This pattern was observed in creation. All things are from the Father and through the Son (cf. 1 Cor 8:6). The Father is the source of all things, yet it was the Son by His omnipotent power who created all things. Thus the Son is magnified for being able to call all things into existence out of nothing. However, in creating all things, the Son was simply carrying out the decree of the Father. Thus the Father is rightly praised for being the wise architect of all these things. Accordingly, they are both seen as God and praised as God for they are doing things that only God can do, yet there is a distinct order in how they accomplish their one plan: from the Father and through the Son, which results in praise to the Son and then back to the Father.

In redemption the same pattern is detected. Paul specifically praises the Father for initiating salvation (Eph 1:3). The Father planned how redemption would be accomplished, and incredibly resolved to achieve it through His Son. The Son willingly, obediently, and delightfully came to fulfill the Father's plan. Thus, the Father initiates redemption but accomplishes it through His Son which exalts the Son. The Son comes and implements the Father's plans, which magnifies the Father. There is a definite order that is consistently seen:

from the Father through the Son, which results in glory to the Son, who reflects glory back to the Father. They are both praised and glorified for the part that each one of them does in the one purpose of God.

Not only does the Father initiate and plan all things, but the Bible presents Him as the head of Christ, the authority over Him. Consequently, He commanded the Son and sent Him to accomplish His mission (cf. John 8:42). There is a pattern of the Father giving to the Son so the Son can fulfill the mission He was sent to accomplish. The Father gives all things to the Son (cf. Matt 11:27), including His authority (cf. Matt 28:18; John 17:2), so the Son could fulfill the work the Father sent Him to do. In accomplishing this work, the Son is honored like the Father is honored (John 5:20-23), which was the design of the Father. So, though they are in a relationship of authority and submission, the Father exercises His authority in such a way that the Son is glorified.

The Son on His part willingly and voluntarily submitted to the authority of the Father, obeyed His commands, and came to accomplish the Father's will (John 5:30; 12:49). He received what the Father gave Him and used it to accomplish the Father's purposes. Because He loved the Father, He came to glorify the Father by speaking the Father's words and doing the Father's works (John 17:4). The Father responds to the Son's obedience and love by highly exalting Him and bestowing on Him a name which is above every name (Phil 2:9). When the Son is exalted to the highest place and all creation sees Him as Lord (the very name of God), this will result in the *Father* being glorified (Phil 2:11), for He is the one who initiated and orchestrated all these things.

Thus, there is seen a distinct pattern in how the Father and Son relate to one another. All things are from the Father and through the Son. This results in the glory of the Son, which then redounds to the glory of the Father. This is how the Father and Son relate to one another.

Unity and Delight

In their relationship there is unity and delight as each carries out His respective role. Even though the Father's inclination was to plan, initiate, and orchestrate all things, His great delight was to accomplish all of those through His Son. He did not leave out the Son in His planning but actually centered all things to be brought about through the Son (cf. Eph 1:10). The Son's inclination was to carry out His Father's plans. He always did the things that were pleasing to the Father (John 8:29). It was His joy to do the Father's commands because His will was to do the Father's will.

Incredibly, as they carry out these respective roles, the Father and the Son are never in conflict of purpose; they are never jealous over one another's position or work; they are never prideful over their own position or work; they are always in perfect harmony, always loving the other, always delighting in accomplishing the unified purpose of God. In their relationship love abounds, fellowship overflows, and envy and pride are not known. There are no power plays;

there is no jockeying for position. Each divine person delightfully accepts His role and each works together for one unified common purpose.¹⁵⁷

Love and Exaltation

The Father and Son's relationship is centered in love and a desire to exalt the other. The Father's joy was to exalt the Son. Therefore, even though He decreed all things (creation and redemption), He carried out all things through His Son so the Son would be marveled at. The Father constantly gave to the Son—words, works, authority, judgment, nations, and people—so the Son would be magnified and honored like the Father. The Father subjected all things to the Son, raised Him from the dead, exalted Him to His right hand, put Him as head over all things, and gave Him a name above every name—the name of God Himself—so every created thing would acknowledge who He is and bow before Him. The Father was pleased with His Son and wanted everyone else to be pleased with Him also (Matt 3:17). Thus He glorified Him: "It is My Father who glorifies Me" (John 8:54).

The Son, likewise, had great pleasure in exalting the Father and thus fulfilling His decrees. He did not seek His own glory, but the glory of the one who sent Him (John 7:18). He loved the Father and thus He did exactly as the Father commanded Him (John 14:31). He freely fulfilled His desire which was to obey the Father. He therefore used His authority and power not to exalt Himself or carry out His own agenda, but to do the Father's will (John 5:30). This is why in the end, when all things are in subjection to Him and He is exalted over all, the Son will gladly hand over the kingdom to the Father and be in subjection to Him (1 Cor 15:24-28). This is because He is not a rival to the Father. He was simply implementing the Father's decree. Once it is finished, He will show His love and delight in the Father by subjecting even Himself to the Father.

The Father and Son truly have a beautiful and wonderful relationship. Though there is a distinct order between the Father and the Son (from the Father through the Son), there is also a mutual unity, delight, love, and exaltation.

These Patterns Are Seen in the Most Exalted Passages of Christ

Some of the most exalted passages of Christ in the Bible, which disclose Him as unparalleled and matchless above all creation, equal only to God Almighty, are often in contexts where this order between the Father and the Son is emphasized. There is unity and equality between the Father and Son, yet there is also submission.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 19-20.

¹⁵⁸ C. K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 23, quoted in Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 121.

For example, as was seen in Psalm 2, the Son was exalted to the highest place—the head of the nations, ruling over them with absolute authority (Ps 2:8-9). He was worshiped equally with the Father (Ps 2:11-12). Yet the Psalm also portrays the Father as the one who put the Son in this position of authority (Ps 2:7-8). It was the Father’s decree that determined the Son would reign.

John, in his gospel, described the Son as being equal with God and in the beginning with God (John 1:1). However, in the same passage John writes, “There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man” (John 1:9). The Son came into the world because the Father sent Him. He took on flesh (John 1:14) to carry out the Father’s purpose, which was to shine the light on the Father—to explain Him (John 1:18). He came to give us insight into who God is.

In John 5, Jesus claimed to be able to do what the Father did (John 5:19), to give life to whomever He pleased (John 5:21), and to be the final judge of all (John 5:22). These are all clear marks of deity. Nonetheless, in the same passage Jesus said He only did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19); that He did nothing on His own initiative (John 5:30); and that He did not seek His own will but only the will of the Father who sent Him (John 5:30). Thus, while being equal to God, the Son is personally submissive to Him as a son is to his father. He does not assert His independence from God, but His dependence on Him. He is co-equal and coeternal with the Father and at the same time submissive to Him.¹⁵⁹

Both in 1 Corinthians 15 and in Ephesians 1, Paul described the Son as being the head over all things and everything in subjection under His feet (1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:22). Christ without a doubt will be exalted to the highest place. There will be no one above Him, with one exception: the Father. For once all things are subjected to the Son, He will hand over the kingdom to the Father who determined all things would be in subjection to Him (1 Cor 15:24, 28).

In Philippians 2, Paul gives the clearest declaration about the deity of the Son: He existed in the very form of God and is exactly equal with God (Phil 2:6). Yet in the same text He obeys God (Phil 2:8).

Paul unveils Christ in some of the most exalted terms in Colossians 1. He is the perfect visible image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). He has prominence over all creation since in Him all things were created (Col 1:16). He is before all things and by His omnipotent power holds all things together (Col 1:17). He is the head of the church and has first place in everything (Col 1:18). The Son is in a league by Himself. There is no one like Him, for He is God. However, it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him (Col 1:19). It was the Father who wanted the Son exalted. And it was the Father who worked through Christ to reconcile all things to Himself (Col 1:20). So again, equality and order are seen in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

¹⁵⁹ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 88.

Hebrews 1 may be the most glorious passage of all. The Son “is the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3). The Son is portrayed as unparalleled, matchless, and having incomparable glory.¹⁶⁰ All that is in God’s nature, Jesus possesses. He radiates all that makes God glorious because He is God. He upholds all things by His omnipotent power and is the heir of all things since He is the one who made the world (Heb 1:2). Yet, it was the Father who appointed Him heir of all things (Heb 1:2). The word *heir* emphasizes something given. It was the Father who gave Him the nations to reign over because it was the Father’s prerogative to give it to Him. It was the Father who exalted Him and gave Him preeminence because He had the authority to do this.

Thus, the same patterns are constantly unfolded in Scripture. The Father and Son are equal in being. They are both almighty God. They work together in perfect unity. However, in how they personally relate to one another, the Father is the head of Christ and the Son voluntarily submits to Him. The Father, however, uses His authority to glorify the Son. The Son in return gladly obeys the Father and uses the authority given Him for the glory of the Father. They respond this way toward one another because they intimately love one another. The Son is everywhere presented equal yet obedient to the Father. These patterns are always in this order, which implies it is their inclination to act toward one another in the way they do. The Father enjoys leading and initiating; the Son delights in submitting and executing. They work as one, yet always in this distinct order.¹⁶¹

These Patterns Reveal How the Father and Son Each Personalize Their One Nature

The Way the Father and Son Relate to One Another Defines Their Persons

The Father and Son are identified by how they each personalize their one nature. The Son’s identity is discovered not only by what He holds in common with the Father (their nature), but

¹⁶⁰ Steve Fernandez, “The Glory of the Incomparable Christ,” part 1, sermon on Hebrews 1:1-3, http://www.cbcvallejo.org/sermons-online/?sermonsite_action=view_sermon&sermonsite_sermonid=375 67 (accessed May 10, 2010).

¹⁶¹ Of course there are some passages that gloriously exalt the Lord Jesus where there is no mention of the Father. This is especially true of judgment passages where Jesus is seen to have ultimate authority (cf. Matt 25:31-46; Rev 20:11-15). Related to these are passages on the Second Coming of Christ (cf. Rev 19:11-19). These passages stress the deity of the Son. He is, after all, God and therefore has the power and glory of God. Nevertheless, they do not undermine the relationship He has with the Father. In fact, the reason why the Son is seen judging alone is because the Father “has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father” (John 5:22-23). In judging, the Son is carrying out His Father’s business.

also by the distinctive personal way in which He reveals the nature of God.¹⁶² What makes the Son a unique person is how He relates to the Father as a *son*, and what makes the Father a unique person is how He relates to the Son as a *father*. The Father's unique way of being God is as Father. He is the head, authority, initiator, planner, and source of all things because He is the Father. He therefore sends the Son, commands Him, gives to Him, and glorifies Him. This is what a loving father does. The Son's unique way of being God is as the Son of the Father. Therefore, He obeys the Father, submits to Him, carries out His will and glorifies Him. This is what a loving son does.

They Work Together as Father and Son

The Father and Son work together in perfect unity to accomplish the one purpose of God, yet there is a distinction to how that work is accomplished. They work together as Father and Son: the Father is the efficient cause; the Son is the instrumental cause.¹⁶³ The Father works through the Son. There is equality and order: the Father directing and delighting to accomplish all things through the Son; the Son obeying and delighting to fulfill the Father's decrees.

Though the Father commands the Son and the Son obeys His commands, this is not a relationship between a superior and an inferior, where the will of the former is forced upon the latter. This is not to be viewed as a military officer barking orders to a subordinate under him who has no choice but to obey, but rather as a loving father commanding his son, and a loving son who longs to do his father's will. This is a relationship between equals. Thus, when the Father sends the Son and commands Him to act, He is not imposing His will on the Son; and the Son does not obey because He is inferior or under compulsion to do so. He is not forced to obey; He wants to obey because He loves the Father and desires to glorify Him. The Son "obeys the Father because the Father's will is his will ... and because obedience to the Father is the truest *personal* expression of his *filial* unity with the Father."¹⁶⁴ The Son reveals His personal way of being God by obeying the Father and carrying out His will.

Thus, in His humanity, when the Son obeys the Father, He is simply manifesting His personal way of being God. This is because it is His personal identity as the eternal Son that determines the way He acts in His humanity. It is the person of the Son who acts through that human nature. There is just one person of Christ, thus all actions of the incarnate Christ are

¹⁶² Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 59. "Nature" is concerned with what they are. "Person" is concerned with the way they are.

¹⁶³ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 115.

¹⁶⁴ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 124.

attributed to the person. It is impossible to separate the human obedience of Christ from who He is in His person.¹⁶⁵ His obedience on earth is simply a reflection of who He eternally is.

The Son's Agency Is as *the Son* of the Father

The Son is consistently seen as the agent of the Father. He is sent by the Father to execute His plans and accomplish His will. However, the character of His agency is as *the Son* of the Father. This emphasizes their equality of nature. Thus the Son has the power to create, to raise the dead, to give life to whomever He pleases, and to execute judgment. He is equal to God, yet His work is entirely derived from the Father.¹⁶⁶ He accomplishes His work as an obedient Son who is dependent upon His Father in everything: for His words and works. Thus, in the relationship of the Father and the Son there is equality and obedience like between a father and son.

These Patterns Reflect Upon Their Names: Father and Son

God specifically chose the names *Father* and *Son* to reveal how the first two members of the Godhead relate to one another. There are many other names God uses of Himself, but these are the personal intimate names they call one another.

These names emphasize equality and order. Because they are *Father* and *Son* they are of the same nature. They equally share the one undivided divine nature. Thus, they are both equally and fully God. Yet, there is also an order between them. The Father, because He is the Father, is the head of the Son. He has fatherly authority. Therefore, He sends, gives, commands, and exalts the Son. The Son, because He is the Son, submits, obeys, and glorifies the Father.

The names *Father* and *Son* also communicate an intimate personal family relationship between the Father and the Son. It is on the basis of this intimacy that Jesus is able to reveal who God truly is (cf. John 1:18).¹⁶⁷

God purposely revealed Himself with personal names that His creation can relate to. God in His infinite wisdom created fathers and sons to help His creation understand how the Father and Son interact with one another. They interrelate much like a father and son do in a human family. A father directs, has authority, and yet loves his son. A son submits and obeys because he loves his father.

From the biblical evidence it is necessary to affirm that the Father enjoys *personal* headship or authority over the Son (between the persons), but He is *not* superior in essence, for the

¹⁶⁵ Letham, *Trinity*, 396.

¹⁶⁶ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 117.

¹⁶⁷ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 64.

Father and Son hold all things in common: one divine nature (Heb 1:3), one divine name (John 17:11), one divine power (John 5:19, 21-22), one divine identity (John 10:30).¹⁶⁸ There is equality of essence, yet a distinction of how they relate to one another.

These Patterns Are Not Reversed

This divine order is not reversed. It is from the Father, through the Son. The Father initiates and plans creation and redemption, and then accomplishes these things through the Son. The Son is never said to create or accomplish redemption through the Father. The Father sends the Son to accomplish His mission. The Son comes to accomplish that mission. There is never an exception to this order. The Father gives to the Son; the Son receives from the Father and gives to others. The giving between the Father and Son is predominately in this one direction. The Father commands the Son and the Son obeys the Father. Never does the Son command the Father or the Father obey the Son. The Father is the authority over the Son and delegates His authority to the Son. Never does the Son delegate authority to the Father. If these patterns reflect who they are, then it is understandable why they are not reversed. The Father, because He is the Father, always acts a certain way toward His Son. The Son, because He is the Son, always responds to the Father in the same way.

These Patterns Are From Eternity

These patterns reflect an eternal order. In creation and redemption, it was the Father who planned and initiated these things and it was the Son who carried them out. Thus, this order existed before the foundation of the world. The revelation God has given of Himself, repeatedly and consistently, affirms this order and nothing is given to suggest a different one.

Prior to the foundation of the world, the Son submitted Himself to the Father (in the plan of redemption). In creation, the Son submitted Himself to the Father. (He created exactly as the Father planned.) During His time on earth, the Son obeyed the Father. (He only did the Father's will.) When the Son returned to sit at the Father's right hand, He submitted to the Father. (The Father is never said to sit at the Son's right hand or sit on the Son's throne.) Right now, as He intercedes for His people, the Son submits to the Father. (The Father never intercedes to the Son.) When the last enemy, death, is destroyed, the Son will subject Himself to the Father (1 Cor 15:24-28). We conclude, therefore, that this ordered relationship between the Father and the Son which is visible throughout divine revelation corresponds to their eternal relationship, for there is never an inversion of this order. The Father has always been the loving head and authority over the Son. The Son has always lovingly submitted to and obeyed the Father.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 123.

The main contention of those who deny the eternal submission of the Son to the Father is that they claim that if the Son eternally submits to the Father then there is not equality of nature between the Father and the Son. This presupposes that equality of essence means there must also be an equality of authority between the persons—a democratic Godhead where each has an equal vote. But this is not necessarily true and according to the Bible it is actually false.

In their nature or essence the Father and Son are exactly the same. They equally possess the one undivided divine nature. This is why they can both do things that only God can do (create, forgive sins, give life, raise the dead, etc.). It is in their persons that this order between the Father and Son is seen. Interestingly, Evangelicals agree that the Son submitted to the Father during the incarnation and all agree this did not affect His deity. (He did not stop being God.) Therefore, if the Son can submit during the incarnation and He can still be fully God, equal to the Father, then He can submit at any time, for any length of time, even in eternity and still be fully God, equal to the Father. Those who hold to an egalitarian or democratic view of the Trinity have simply set up a false dichotomy: if there is equality between the Father and Son there cannot be an eternal authority/submission relationship between them. This is simply a philosophical argument that cannot be substantiated from Scripture, and has been shown to be false from Scripture.

These Patterns Display the Son's Mission: To Reveal the True God

The Son was sent into the world on a mission, which was to explain God and make Him known (John 1:18). Knowing God is equated to having eternal life. “This is eternal life, that they may *know* You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have *sent*” (John 17:3, emphasis added). John ties true knowledge of God with the Son's mission of being sent (cf. John 5:38; 6:29; 11:42; 12:44; 17:21, 25). In other words, the mission of the Son reveals who the Father and Son truly are. Apart from this knowledge there is no eternal life. This means that the way the Father and Son have revealed themselves in this mission is characteristically the way they are because the goal is to reveal their true identity.¹⁶⁹ It is in the mission of the Father and the Son that God reveals Himself and offers access to Himself. Thus, “If the goal of sending the Son and Spirit is to tell the story of who God truly is ([John] 1:18; 16:14-15) then for the missions *not* to reveal the triune identity reliably would constitute the *failure* of those missions.”¹⁷⁰

But God did not fail in His mission, for in it is revealed how the Father and Son eternally relate to one another. This is how God has made Himself known. The Father relates to the Son as a father and the Son relates to the Father as a son. These are their distinctive personal ways

¹⁶⁹ Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 172.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 172-3.

of being God. When the Father and Son engage in the mission of God “they engage personally *in* that mission *as* they eternally *are*, that is, according to their characteristic interpersonal relationships.”¹⁷¹ The goal of this mission is that we might know the only true God and enter into fellowship with them. Thus, we regard the triune mission as a necessary means to an end: that of knowing God as He truly is.¹⁷²

These Patterns Are Taught Consistently in the Bible Which Is Our Only Source of Knowing God

God has spoken plainly and clearly in the words of Scripture so that His people might know Him. God reveals Himself as He truly is for He is the God of truth (Ps 31:5; Isa 65:16; John 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:13; 17:3), who cannot lie (Tit 1:2). The sum of His word is truth (Ps 119:160). God, thus, “acts and speaks truthfully to who He is. ... [H]e does not speak falsely or with masks or anything that is not finally accurate to who He is.”¹⁷³ Thus, how the Bible portrays the relationship of the Father and the Son is how they truly relate to one another. This is who they are.

Since Scripture never contradicts the pattern of the Father and Son’s ordered relationship, there is no basis to affirm a different eternal order between them or to say there is no order at all.¹⁷⁴ To philosophize that a true equality of nature necessitates equality of order is unscriptural; it goes beyond God’s self-revelation. Instead, we believe God has truthfully revealed the eternal relationship the Father has with His Son.

Summary

The Father and the Son truly have a beautiful and wonderful relationship. They work together in perfect unity and harmony. There is no jealousy or envy between them. There are no power plays or jockeying for position. Instead there is the beauty of humility, preferring one another, and regarding the other as more important than Himself because it is a relationship centered in love.

The Father, though He is in a position of authority over the Son, uses His authority to prefer and exalt the Son. He actually delegates His authority to the Son. The Son receives authority from the Father and uses it—not to exalt Himself or carry out His own agenda—but uses it to prefer and exalt the Father and accomplish the Father’s will.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 182.

¹⁷² Kostenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 183.

¹⁷³ Horrell, “Complementarian Trinitarianism.”

¹⁷⁴ Horrell, “Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity.”

Because the Father loves the Son, His desire is to glorify the Son by having Him accomplish His plans. The Son, because He loves the Father, desires to glorify the Father; thus He carries out the Father's decrees. The Father and Son mutually delight in one another. They work together in perfect unity as each one does His respective role in carrying out the one purpose of God. There is indeed beauty and wonder in how they relate to one another.

Chapter Four

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

From the wonderful relationship of the Father and the Son much can be learned about how God wants us to relate to one another.

Unity

The Father and Son display perfect unity. Though they have distinct roles in how they relate to one another, they work together in complete harmony accomplishing the one purpose of God. The Son's joy was to carry out the will of the Father and accomplish all His plans. The Father's delight was to accomplish His plans through His Son. The apostle Paul uses the Father and Son's example of unity (Phil 2:5-11) to exhort believers to be unified (Phil 2:2).

Unity in the Gospel

Paul's desire for his readers was that they be unified in glorifying God through Christ in the gospel. "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ ... standing firm in *one* spirit, with *one* mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil 1:27, emphasis added). Stand firm in unity—a unity that is centered in the gospel.

Having a passion for the spreading of the gospel of Christ is the mission of the Christian. Jesus told the disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). The Father sent the Son to accomplish His plan of redemption (John 3:16). Jesus came from the Father to carry out the Father's decrees and in the process He came to glorify the Father. The Christian is sent by the Son on the same mission: to get out the gospel to exalt the Son to the glory of the Father. This is what Christians are to be united in.

Unity in Our Roles in Getting Out the Gospel

Just as the Father and Son have different roles in carrying out their one purpose, Christians must recognize that God has sovereignly given each of them different gifts and roles. They should not be jealous or envious over another's gifts or roles; nor should they be prideful over their own gifts or positions. Because someone is a foot and not a hand, this does not make him any less a part of the body (cf. 1 Cor 12:15). And just because someone is an eye, this does not make him better than everyone else, nor does it mean he has no need for the other parts of the body. On the contrary, without the rest of the body there would be no body (cf. 1 Cor 12:21-

22). Each member is important and each member will find the most satisfaction doing what God has gifted them to do.

God in His perfect wisdom made every member of the body important and placed each member in the body exactly where they would bring Him the most glory. For the body of Christ to work properly (which is to glorify its Head), each individual person must do their part to build up the body (cf. Eph 4:16). No matter how small and insignificant a person's part may seem, it is not insignificant to God. God has gifted each Christian so each one can bring Him glory. "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet 4:11).

Love

The Father and the Son love one another, thus they prefer each another and exalt each another (John 5:20; 14:31). This love, however, is seen in a context of authority and submission. The Son's love is seen in His willingness to *obey* the Father to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8). "The severity of what was asked of him and his willingness to obey at a cost beyond human comprehension indicate a love that is so great, so pure, so deep, and so passionate, that we can only grasp in minuscule part what this truest of all loves really is. But this much we can know: such love would never, could never, be love were it not for costly obedience."¹⁷⁵ The Son demonstrated His love by obeying the Father.

The Father demonstrated His love to the Son by exalting and honoring Him. Though the Father commanded the Son to carry out His plan of redemption which required the Son to die, in love He then exalted His Son to the highest place and bestowed on Him a name that is above every name (Phil 2:9). "The Father's love for the Son led him to give to his Son, and to none other, the greatest of all tasks, that he might then grant him the highest of all names. ... [S]uch love of the Father for the Son would never, could never, be love were it not for the wise but extraordinarily difficult command given to the Son for his ultimate glory and honor."¹⁷⁶

Christians are to exemplify this kind of selfless, humble, sacrificial love. They must "do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit" (Phil 2:3), for "where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing" (Jas 3:16). They are to look out for the interest of others and not simply their own interests (Phil 2:4). This is exactly what Christ did; He put the Father's interests ahead of His own and obeyed Him. This is what the Father did; though He

¹⁷⁵ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 101.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

made some difficult commands, He did this for the Son's exaltation and glory. In relationships of authority and submission, true love is seen in loving obedience or in loving authority.¹⁷⁷

Giving and Receiving

The Father generously gives all things to the Son. The Son receives those blessings, but does not hoard what the Father gives Him. Instead He uses them to benefit others and accomplish the Father's purposes. They are a beautiful example of giving and receiving.

Christians have many blessings from the Father. These benefits are not to be hoarded but freely given to accomplish the Father's purposes. Christians have been entrusted with the gospel (cf. 1 The 2:4). They should be eager to proclaim it. They have been given spiritual gifts. They are to employ them in serving one another (1 Pet 4:10), to the building up of the body Christ (cf. Eph 4:16). They have been given material blessings, which are to be used for the advancement of the kingdom of God (cf. Matt 6:33; Pro 3:9). Jesus Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). He should know.

The Proper Use of Authority

In this fallen world, people often abuse authority for their own selfish ends: to lord it over others, tyrannize others, and exalt themselves at the expense of those under their care. This is not how God uses authority. From His example much can be learned about the proper use of authority.

Learning from the Example of the Father

The Father has authority over the Son (1 Cor 11:3). He initiates, leads, decrees, and plans all things. Nevertheless, He does not use His authority to lord it over the Son. Instead in humility the Father consistently uses His authority for the glory of the Son because He loves Him (cf. Ps 2:7-9; Luke 1:32; John 6:37; 17:2, 11-12; Eph 1:22; Phil 2:9; Rev 2). The Father exercises His authority with wisdom, goodness, and care for the Son's benefit and exaltation. He thus is a model of how we are to use authority: for the good of those under our care to the glory of God.

Learning from the Example of the Son

The Lord Jesus was given authority from the Father (Matt 28:18; John 17:2; Rev 2:26-27). The Son did not use His delegated authority to exalt Himself, make a name for Himself, or

¹⁷⁷ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 102.

carry out His own agenda. He did not use it to lord it over those under His care. Instead the Son used the authority given Him to carry out the will of the Father. This is incredible considering the Son is equal in power to the Father and could do whatever He pleased. Yet, in love He disregarded His own interests to serve the Father. From the Son's example, it is learned that authority is not to be used to domineer or control others. In love, authority is to be exercised wisely and with thoughtfulness, seeking the well-being of those under our care, all for the glory of God.

Specific Examples of How to Use Authority

How Husbands Are to Use Their Authority

God has given the husband authority over his wife.¹⁷⁸ “For the husband is the head of the wife” (Eph 5:23). Thus wives are exhorted to be subject “to their husbands in everything” (Eph 5:24). Because God gives the man authority, this requires him to lead. A husband cannot be passive. He must use his God-given authority to accomplish God's purposes.

Husbands are to use their authority by looking to the example of Christ (Eph 5:23). The Lord Jesus exercised His authority over the church by loving her and giving up His life for her (Eph 5:25). From His example husbands are to use their authority to sacrificially love their wives (Eph 5:25, 28, 33). In love, husbands are to exercise authority with wisdom, goodness, and care for their wives' benefit and well-being, all for the glory of God.

How Parents Are to Use Their Authority

Paul instructs fathers to be careful not to provoke their children to anger (Eph 6:4) or exasperate them “so that they will not lose heart” (Col 3:21). Both of these can happen with a misuse of authority. Instead, parents are to use their God-given authority to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). They are to exercise their authority by lovingly disciplining and correcting their children, and pointing out their sinful tendencies so they can be directed to the only solution: Jesus Christ.

Parenting, however, is not all negative. Parents are to give discipline *and* instruction (Eph 6:4; cf. Pro 29:15). They are to use their position to nurture faith in their children by pointing them to Christ. Therefore, parents are to use their authority for the good of their children to the glory of God.

¹⁷⁸ John Eadie, *Ephesians*, vol. 2, Greek Text Commentaries (1883, reprint Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House 1979), 410; Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), 155; Knight, “Husbands and Wives,” 169.

How Elders Are to Use Their Authority

Elders are called to shepherd the flock of God under their charge (1 Pet 5:2). They are to use their God-given authority to care for the flock. They are to exercise oversight according to the will of God (1 Pet 5:2). This would include leading, directing, and making decisions that might affect the body. However, elders are not to lord it over the flock (1 Pet 5:3). They are not to coerce or impose unscriptural or human inventions upon the sheep, like the Pharisees did. Instead they are to lead by example (1 Pet 5:3). They are to show the sheep how to live. They are to prefer the sheep and serve them by giving them a pattern to follow. They are to lead in love. Thus, they are to use their position and authority for the benefit of those under them to the glory of God.

How Masters Are to Use Their Authority

Masters are not to use their God-given authority to threaten or lord it over people (Eph 6:9). They are not to be abusive or inconsiderate. Instead they are to use their authority to grant to their slaves justice and fairness because they also have a Master in heaven (Col 4:1). In other words, they are to use their authority for the benefit of those under them: to do what is right and fair because God Himself will hold them accountable.

How Government Officials Are to Use Their Authority

Governing officials are to use their authority to protect and praise those citizens who do good, and avenge and bring wrath on those who do evil (Rom 13:3-4). Thus, the main purpose of governing authorities is for the benefit of those under that authority.

Thus, in every case, God gives authority for the benefit of those under that authority. It is to be exercised wisely and with care all for the glory of God.

The Proper Response to Authority

The proper response to authority can be summed up in one word: submission.

The Son's Perfect Example of Responding to Authority

The Son voluntarily, willingly, and delightfully submitted to the Father's authority even though they are equal in being. His submission to the Father was perfect. He never once disobeyed. He submitted to the Father even under the most trying circumstances.

Contemplating the agony of the cross, the Son became deeply grieved to the point of death

(Matt 26:38). The agony of this trial was unequalled. So much so, that He began to sweat drops of blood (Luke 22:44), and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matt 26:39). In the end, the Son, as always, was determined to do the Father’s will and not His own. Incredibly, the Son always obeyed the Father with joy, even when anticipating the cross. “Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross” (Heb 12:2).

The Son submitted to every authority the Father put over Him: His parents (Luke 2:51), religious rulers (Matt 26:52-54), and governing authorities (John 19:8-11). Even though many of these authorities were wicked and treated Christ unjustly (cf. 1 Pet 2:21-23), the Son kept entrusting Himself to the Father, confident the Father would vindicate Him (1 Pet 2:23). Christ is an example to His people of how to respond to authority (1 Pet 2:21).

Specific Examples of How to Respond to Authority

How Wives Are to Respond to the Authority of Their Husbands

Though a wife is equal to her husband in her person and standing before God, she is called to voluntarily put herself under the leadership of her husband. She is to affirm his leadership by submitting to him (Eph 5:22-24, 33; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-6).

Her submission to her husband reflects the Son in His relationship with the Father. The Son, though exactly equal in being with the Father, gladly submits to the Father to do His will. This does not make Him less than the Father. He is still God, equal in essence with the Father. This showed His unity with the Father and His love for Him that one equal in power would gladly humble Himself to carry out His Father’s will. It is beautiful to behold.

When a wife submits to her husband it reflects Christ in her. It is a wonder to behold for it displays unity and love that one equal in being would willingly and gladly submit to her husband for the glory of God. It does not make her less of a person for doing this. Far from being weak, it actually displays her inner strength for it shows she has conquered her natural inclination to usurp authority and have her own way. When a woman submits like this it shows her love for God and it glorifies Christ because she is giving evidence of Christ in her.

A woman is to submit with respect (Eph 5:33). This means she is not to submit begrudgingly or because she has to. She shows respect to her husband whether he deserves it or not because God placed him over her. She is doing this for the Lord.

How Children Are to Respond to the Authority of Their Parents

Paul commands children to obey their parents (Eph 6:1). They are to willingly submit to their parents’ authority. Their motivation to do this is Christ and His glory for they are to obey

their parents “in the Lord.” Thus, when they obey their parents, they are obeying God. Their model is Christ. Jesus continued in subjection to His parents even though they were not perfect (though He was) (Luke 2:51).

Children are to obey their parents and honor them (Eph 6:2). Honor is a reflection of their attitude. They are not to submit begrudgingly or because they have to, but they submit showing honor even if their parents are not honorable because God has placed them over them.

How the Saints Are to Respond to the Authority of the Elders

The people of God are called to obey their leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over their souls (Heb 13:17; cf. 1 Pet 5:5). This means it is for the saints’ benefit that God places leaders over them. Thus, they are not to make it grievous for their leaders to shepherd them but let them do this with joy (Heb 13:17). Their motivation to submit, then, is the glory of God and the benefit they receive from those overseeing them.

How Slaves Are to Respond to the Authority of Their Masters

Paul commands slaves to be obedient to their masters (Eph 6:5; cf. Col 3:22; Tit 2:9-10). They are to do this “as to Christ” (Eph 6:5), “as slaves of Christ” (Eph 5:6), and “as to the Lord” (Eph 5:7). Christ is their real Lord and Master; if they love the Lord and His glory, they will submit.

Masters are to be treated with respect and honor even if they are unreasonable (1 Pet 2:18). When a person patiently endures unjust treatment from his master, God promises to give them His favor (1 Pet 2:19). He will give the strength and grace to endure through that suffering and He will rescue them.

How Citizens Are to Respond to the Authority of the Government

Citizens are to submit themselves to governing authorities recognizing all authority is from God (Rom 13:1). God places authority over people for their good and the good of society. Governing officials are a minister of God for good (Rom 13:4). Therefore, Christians must pay their taxes (Rom 13:6). They are to submit to the governing officials and be obedient to them (Titus 3:1).

Christians submit “for the Lord’s sake” (1 Pet 2:13). Their motivation is the glory of God. They do not want to give unbelievers an opportunity to reproach their Lord. They submit because they love the Lord and desire to see His name exalted.

Summary

The proper response to authority is summed up in the word submission. Believers are to submit to authorities because they know God has placed those authorities over them, whether they are good or bad. They submit because they know that ultimately submitting is for their good and the glory of God. They submit trusting that God will vindicate them and deliver them. They submit because they love God and desire to see His glory spread.

The perfect example of submission is seen in Christ. He was not here to make a name for Himself. He was not concerned with His rights. Instead, He humbled Himself and put Himself under every authority the Father put over Him. He delighted to do this for this glorified the Father.

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ came into the world to make God known. What He revealed about God is truly astonishing. He disclosed the glorious relationship He has with the Father. It is a relationship of unity and love, humility and preferment, authority and submission.

The Bible reveals an eternal order in how the Father and Son relate to one another. Though they are both fully God, since they share equally the one undivided divine nature, there is also an eternal distinction of roles between them. The Father is portrayed as the initiator, planner, originator, and leader. The Son is portrayed as the implementer and executor of the Father's plans. The Scriptures affirm the equal deity of the Father and the Son, but they never seem to acknowledge an inversion of this order between them.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, there is no basis to affirm a different order or to say there is no order at all.

This eternal order between the Father and the Son is centered in an intimate, loving, unified relationship. The Father centers His plans in His Son and uses His authority to glorify the Son. The Son gladly submits to the decrees of the Father and uses the authority delegated to Him to carry out the Father's will, which glorifies the Father. They have mutual delight in one another and are unified in carrying out the one purpose of God, but the way they relate to one another is always seen in these definite patterns.

Since the biblical testimony of the divine order between the Father and the Son is consistently the same, this implies that the Father and the Son freely express their inclination.¹⁸⁰ The Father enjoys leading and initiating. The Son delights in submitting and executing. They work as one, yet always in this distinct order because each is inclined to fulfill the role that they do.

This order, then, reveals how the Father and Son each personalize their one nature. The Father's unique way of being God is as Father. He is the head, authority, initiator, planner, and source of all things, because He is the Father. He therefore sends the Son, commands Him, gives to Him, and glorifies Him. The Son's unique way of being God is as the Son of the Father. Thus, He obeys, submits, and executes the Father's will. They work together as Father and Son in perfect unity, harmony, and love. It is a wonder to behold.

Understanding how the Father and Son relate to one another has practical application for our relations. Their relationship gives a picture of how to work together in unity and in love even though we may have different gifts or roles. Their relationship also reveals that authority-submission relationships are good. Those in authority are to use it for the good of those under their care to the glory of God. Those under authority are to submit to that authority to the glory of God.

¹⁷⁹ Horrell, "Complementarian Trinitarianism."

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

A failure to understand how the Father and Son relate to one another leads to wrong views of authority and submission in the home, church, work place, and world. Errors of passivity on one side where people abdicate their role, and aggressiveness on the other side where people go beyond their role, both lead to a host of problems. The answer is not to settle for some form of democracy which eliminates both submission and authority. God has purposely created this world with authority-submission structures and we can look to the Father's relationship with the Son to see how to carry out these relationships.

Most critically, a wrong understanding of how the Father and Son relate to one another leads to wrong views of God Himself. Insisting on eternal egalitarian roles that stand in contrast to what God has revealed in the Scriptures dishonors both the Father and the Son,¹⁸¹ and in some cases could lead to the heresy of Modalism and potentially to the worship of a false god. This is a place we do not want to go. Instead, we bow before both the Father and the Son as we marvel at the beauty of their relationship: equal in being, yet distinct in role; working together in complete unity and love as they carry out the purposes of God.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.