

I can still see and smell the pediatrician's office I would visit when I was five years old. It had a slight antiseptic smell to it. It was a very bright with an entire wall that was nothing but windows. There were teal and orange vinyl chairs where we would sit until my name was called. In the middle of the room was a large aquarium filled with fairly boring fish. This place is burned into my memory because I hated it so much. I hated it because every time I was sitting in that waiting room, I knew what was I was waiting for—a shot! That was their answer to everything. Do you have a cold? Here's a shot of penicillin for you. A sore throat? Hang on, let me fill my syringe. I even got shots for poison ivy. Every time I saw that fish aquarium, I knew I was gonna get poked in my bottom with a needle. I hated it. I remember one time I cried so hard I didn't even feel the shot.

Knowing is often the worst part about some things, am I right? So just imagine what that meant for Jesus. Every time he did something good he knew something bad was coming. He healed a man who had been an invalid for 38 years and now they want to kill him. He told the story of Namaan being healed from leprosy and they tried to throw him off a cliff. He simply told the truth and claimed to be God and they wanted him dead. Jesus knew that at every turn something much worse than a shot of penicillin awaited him.

But ironically, even their hate-filled responses help us to have confidence in Jesus. As I read this section, try and pick out one thing you did not know about Jesus.

15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. 16 And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."

18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

19 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. 21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. 22 The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

25 "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Last Sunday's message was about the meekness and majesty of Christ. Jesus is both the lion of the tribe of Judah and a lamb who was slain. He is meek and majestic. He is fully God and rules all things and he is human and surrendered his life for us. This morning we are looking at a different aspect of his meekness and majesty. And just so we are clear, meekness never means weakness. These are not frailties in Jesus but rather supreme examples of humility.

In this passage we learn that Jesus is fully God but that he also completely submits his will to the Father's will. Even his chief opponents recognized his claims of deity. *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.* Jesus makes repeated claims about his deity. Paul teaches and defends the deity of Christ in powerful ways.

This is one belief that every Christian must be able to understand and defend. If you are not absolutely certain that Jesus is fully God, then your faith will falter. It is inevitable. But let me take that a step further. In order to be convinced about it you should also be able to defend it. If someone asked you where in the Bible it says that Jesus is God, where would you go to show them? Could you give them even a single verse? My favorite verse in the end of John chapter eight. Jesus made a clear claim of divinity and immediately the Jews picked up stones to stone him. This is my favorite passage for two reasons.

First, I prefer it because it comes from Jesus' own words. This is not one of the gospel writers or the apostle Paul making this claim but rather Jesus making this claim about himself. To me that always holds more weight.

Second, it gives me more confidence due to the reaction of the Jews who tried to stone him. If Jesus had only taught this to his disciples, a skeptic would say that we might be misinterpreting Jesus' teaching, that he really did not claim to be God. Karen's best friend in high school who led Karen to the Lord and later became an atheist used to say this. So if a follower claimed Jesus

was God they might be deluded or lying. If Jesus himself claimed to be God, we might be misinterpreting his teaching. However, if Jesus claimed that he was God and we have the immediate reaction, not of his followers, but his enemies, then we can be absolutely certain about his claim.

That is exactly what we have in John chapter eight and that is what we have here in chapter five. *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.* Sabbath breaking was bad enough but the final straw was that Jesus made himself equal with God. This is what the Bible calls blasphemy. Were the Jewish leaders right to condemn blasphemy? Now obviously Jesus did not sin by making himself equal with God because he was and is God, but since the Jews did not know Jesus' identity, were they right to charge him with blasphemy? Absolutely. The Bible condemns blasphemy in no uncertain terms.

The Lord condemned Pharaoh for the sin of blasphemy

Thus says the Lord GOD:

“Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, ‘My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.’ (Ezekiel 29:3)

Likewise, King Hiram of Tyre.

“Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord GOD:

“Because your heart is proud, and you have said, ‘I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,’ yet you are but a man, and no god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god. (Ezekiel 28:2)

Nebuchadnezzar gave two options to his kingdom—“Worship me or be thrown into the fiery furnace.”

“You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” (Daniel 3:4-6)

So it was always of the highest evil to make yourself equal to God. So in the absence of knowledge about Jesus the Jews were right to condemn his blasphemy. And as I said before, their condemnation of blasphemy is the very thing that lends credence to Jesus claim. If they had not condemned Jesus that would have meant they did not think that he was making a claim of deity. Isn't that amazing, that Jesus' enemies help us prove his deity?

So the Jews leveled a charge of blasphemy against Jesus which gave him two basic options. One, he could say that they were simply mistaken and he actually wasn't trying to make himself equal to God. Or two, he could back up his claim with evidence. Obviously, he decided to back up his claim.

This past week I found myself entangled in a legal dispute over our a well that we share with three other homes. Since we were the first to use the shared well, I became the de facto well account manager and have functioned as such for over fifteen years. Two other neighbors are having the dispute but it directly affects the way I handle the shared well account. It is so complicated that I drafted a letter to an attorney. In that letter I explained my position and then laid out seven reasons to support my position.

This is similar to what Jesus did for the Jewish leaders. He laid down several reasons why he could make the claim that he was equal to God. However, in explaining his deity he appealed again and again to his humility—to the way that he submits to the will of His Father in all things. Here is his Big Idea—his summary statement, which is then followed by six sub-points supporting his statement.

BIG IDEA—Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. (19)

The first thing that should surprise about this is Jesus humility and total submission to the Father. Now if I were drafting evidence to back up Jesus' deity, this is most definitely not the place I would start. If I were Jesus, I would have went all Job on these guys.

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

3 Dress for action like a man;

I will question you, and you make it known to me.

4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

6 On what were its bases sunk,

or who laid its cornerstone,

7 when the morning stars sang together

and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

In other words, “Shut yo mouth, boy, cuz’ you don’t know what you talkin’ about!” You would think that Jesus would have appealed to the power of God when defending his own claim of deity. And this is what he actually did—we’ll get to the sub-points in a minute—but he appealed to God’s power by testifying of his submission to the Father: *the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.*

So the big idea is that *the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing* and now here are the supporting arguments. Each of these are wrapped up in the larger idea of Jesus’ complete submission to His Father.

1. *My Father is working until now, and I am working. (17)*

In effect, Jesus was saying, “If you insist on calling me a ‘Sabbath breaker’ then you must also say the same about my Father.” It’s impossible for the Father to be a Sabbath breaker. The Father

is always working, sustaining the universe. And since the Father is working, so is the Son, which is the truth from Colossians 1. *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

2. *For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.* (19)

This is like the first statement but much broader. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. If you pushed this to an extreme, you might think that Jesus is just a robot following his Father; or like a pesky little brother or sister. Karen used to follow her big sister around. One day they made pom poms and paraded around the neighborhood. Karen would follow them around but had to stay a certain distance away from the “big girls.” Is that what this means—whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise?

Obviously, that’s not what it means. We are into what is called the functional subordination of the Son. Let’s break that down, because it’s really important. The Son is clearly subordinate to the Father. He is full submission to the Father in all things. Now normally when you speak of a subordinate, it is usually someone who is inferior in some way. Again, this is what is so fascinating about Jesus’ claim to deity. He is explaining his claim to be God by telling the crowd that he is subordinate to the Father. He does only what the Father does. He always obeys the father’s will. You cannot say that Jesus is not subordinate to the Father.

But it would be heresy to say that Jesus is somehow less than the Father so theologians created this term functional subordination. Jesus is equal in essence with the Father. *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature* (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is fully God in every sense and is in no way inferior to the Father so we say that he is subordinate in function or in role. He functions in a completely submissive role to his Father. So the Father and Son are fully equal in essence but the Son is subordinate to the Father in his role.

This is clear even by the titles they have given to themselves—Father and Son. These are relational roles that have a built in subordinate foundation to the relationship. We did not create these titles—God did. So there is one more word to add to this term—eternal. The Son is in an eternal functional subordination to the Son. Jesus did not become the Son when he was born. He was always the Son to his Father. Not only is the relationship itself eternal but it has always been a functionally subordinate relationship. From before the foundation of the world, the Father purposed to send his Son to become the substitute for our sin. Here is how D.A. Carson describes the relationship.

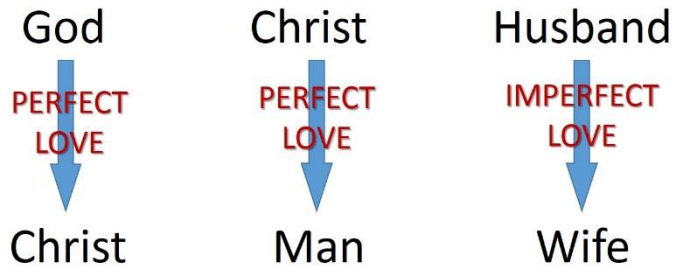
The Father initiates, sends, commands, commissions, grants; the Son responds, obeys, performs his Father’s will, receives authority. In this sense, the Son is the Father’s agent, though, as John goes on to insist, much more than an agent.¹

This is such an important truth to grasp because all human relationships are founded upon the Father-Son relationship. Here is what this looks like from 1 Corinthians 11.

“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ.” Hopefully no one in this room would disagree with this. Christ is our head, our chief, our Lord. This much is clear. Then here comes the next phrase” the head of a wife is her husband.” This part can be contentious, mostly in how it is applied. But at its core, it’s as plain as black and white. Just as Christ is the

1 Corinthians 11:3

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.



head of man, so is the husband the head of his wife. We all know that the husband/wife relationship is not identical in every possible way to the Christ/man relationship, but it is similar enough.

But for me, this next phrase ties it all together: “and the head of Christ is God.” There is it—functional subordination. Just as the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father, so is the wife functionally subordinate to the husband.

Remember, functional subordination is full equality of essence but subordination of role only. Just as the Son is equal but subordinate to the Father, so the wife is equal but subordinate to her husband. So if you want to reject the idea of wives being submissive to their husbands, you must also reject the fact that the Son is submissive to the Father and that man is submissive to Christ. You can’t pick and choose what you like or don’t like here. They stand or fall together and from our passage in John, it is unmistakable that the Son is subject to the Father.

Again, the key is how this is applied. Some husbands fail to lead in any sense so they are not following this truth. Some husbands are authoritative and overbearing and call it leadership. There are many wrong ways to apply this truth and really only one right way to apply it. But like all truths, we should never reject them just because some people misapply the truth. Truth is truth even if some twist the truth.

So now you can start to see how functional subordination is the foundation of all human relationships. It starts with our submission to Christ. Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Now here is where functional subordination stumbles a bit because even though we are to be submissive to Christ, we are not equal in essence with him. We are not God, but we are his children.

Functional subordination applies to the parent/child relationship. “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1). Are parents superior and children inferior? Are parents somehow more worthy or of greater inherent value than children? Of course not. They are equal in their personhood and worth but there is submission in roles between parents and children.

Functional subordination applies to the government/citizen relationship. “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1). Once again, government is not inherently better than its citizens but there must be a clarity of roles between the two. We covered this in great detail in our romans series. You can refer back to that if you want but it’s all a part of functional subordination.

Functional subordination applies to the elder/congregant relationship. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:7). Of course there are far more verses about how elders should lovingly shepherd the congregation than there are about the congregation being submissive to the elders. How we apply these truths is just as important as that we apply them. We can again see that church leaders are not more worthy than church members. They are of the same essential worth but they differ in their respective roles.

Functional subordination applies to the Boss/employee relationship. “Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph. 6:5-6).

I hope you can see that all human relationships are founded upon the eternal functional subordination of the Son to the Father. I encourage you to think through all your relationships and consider if you are violating any of these principles or if you need a course correction at any level. And don't forget that the functional subordination of the Son is part of how Jesus was describing his deity! Right, ponder that this week—that Christ's deity is tied up with his submission. His meekness and his majesty are inseparable.

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¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 251). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.