

John 5:15-29, Part 2

I know there was one other time when I mentioned Kellyn's "Trinitarian rebellion" in a sermon. When she was very young, when the subject of the Trinity would come up, Kellyn would get rather defiant about the topic. When she could not understand the three persons in one God concept, instead of just saying she did not understand, she would get all perturbed. We still tease her about it sometimes. I mean, after all, who among us fully understands the concept of the Trinity, right?

Functional Subordination

Equal in essence, submissive in role.



- Father/Son (John 5, 1 Cor. 11)
- Husband/Wife (1 Cor., Eph. 5)
- Christ/Disciple (John 14:15)
- Parent/Child (Eph. 6)
- Government/Citizen (Romans 13)
- Elder/Congregant (Hebrews 13)
- Employer/Employee (Eph. 6)

That's what makes this chapter in John somewhat challenging because Jesus is describing his relationship with his Father and how they relate and what their roles are. Last Sunday I introduced a theological term called Functional Subordination. The simple definition is that the Father and Son are fully equal in their essence as God but the Son is submissive in his role. We saw how all human relationships are modeled after the functional subordination of the Son to the Father.

But after church someone mentioned to me that they did not like the term subordination as it implies inferiority. I know that I made sure to clearly state, in many different ways, that the Son is in no way inferior to the Father. But then I looked up the definition of subordinate and submissive and here's what I found.

Subordinate

- to place in a lower order or rank.
- to make secondary
- to make subject, subservient, or dependent

Submissive

- inclined or ready to submit or yield to the authority of another; unresistingly or humbly obedient:
- marked by or indicating submission or an instance of yielding to the authority of another:

I must say that based on these definitions, I do prefer the word submit. I really like the second half of the first definition: "unresistingly or humbly obedient." I would add the word completely and make it "unresistingly, completely and humbly obedient." In fact, I want to change the term to Functional Submission with this definition. *The Father and Son are fully equal in every way yet the Son is unresistingly, completely and humbly obedient to his Father.* I'm not asking the theologians to change their term for my sake, but for our sake, it little ol' Viroqua, this is how we will define the terms.

This is a useful and I think accurate definition for the Father/Son relationship. However, it is not accurate when if applied to human counterparts. As believers we are called to be unresistingly, completely and humbly obedient to Christ but wives are not called to be unresistingly, completely and humbly obedient to their husbands. This is not how the government/citizen or employer/employee relationships are to function. There is to be a submission of roles but not to the level that we submit to Christ or that the Son submits to the Father.

The challenge with these definitions is that just like the word trinity is not found in the Bible, neither is the term functional subordination or functional submission in the Bible. However, in both cases, the concepts are fully Biblical. So even with our revised term and definition, I am not saying that these are perfect or complete. But they are a good place to start so that we can grasp and apply these vital truths. Fair enough?

With that as a backdrop, let me read the passage we started studying last Sunday. If you recall, the context was that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because he claimed to be God. What follows is his defense of his deity.

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.

Jesus' big idea comes from verse 19. *Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.* Then he gave supporting arguments, if you will, to support. We know this because most of his statements begin with the word 'for' which is another way of saying 'because.' The first two we covered last Sunday.

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

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

3. *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.* (20)

This is the third of six because/for statements. I don't think we are supposed to see them as separate statements but rather that they were intended to build upon one another like bricks in a wall. In the first statement, Jesus said that he is working as his Father is working. Think of that as the foundation block. We are not yet told what they are doing but just that they are both working. In itself it is a statement of deity as he is making himself equal with his Father, stating that they are both lord of the Sabbath. If the Father works on the Sabbath, then it is right for the Son to also work on the Sabbath.

The second statement builds on that foundation by broadening the working. Not only are Father and Son both working, but the Son is doing the same work as the Father. Now in Jesus' third statement, we see that this is so much more than the Son merely mimicking the Father. *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.* Here Jesus tells us why he and his Father are working and why the Son does whatever the Father does. The Father loves the Son.

Here we enter into one of the most wonderful and complex truths in Scripture, namely the eternal love relationship within the Godhead. It truly is beyond our comprehension. We know what love is like. We know how the emotion feels. We know how to love with our actions. Some of us have loved people for well over fifty years. But no matter how deep and long your most loving relationships, this is not even a drop in the ocean compared to the eternal love relationship between Father and Son. It is perfect. It has never had a bad day. It has never waned. It did not have a beginning. It just always was. And it always will be. There is not a moment or emotion or action by either that was ever less than perfect. In the absence of sin, love will always be perfect.

But this love between the Father and the Son is the same love that they pour out on us. It's the same. Isn't that a staggering thought? Yet far too many believers do not accept this truth. One thing or another gets in their way of fully resting in this infinite love.

Karen and I were saddened to see the blog post from her former college roommate this past week. I've shared her story in the past. She was saved during her freshman year. She earned a Master's degree in Missions from Wheaton College and then she spent thirteen years on the mission field. Now she has completely rejected her faith, makes jewelry and belly dances. Here are some excerpts from her blog post.

I fought fiercely at first against the idea of the Bible's complete accuracy, because it seemed crazy for such an ancient book to have been preserved without any errors, but in the *warm, supportive circle of my new friends*, my resistance was subtly eroded. *I was desperate to be accepted* by my new friends, so I learned to silence my knower, silence my objections. Slowly, imperceptibly, my beliefs shifted to line up with the group, and *were reinforced over and over again by positive affirmation.*

Was I brainwashed? Sometimes it feels like it. But it wasn't in a cultish way, by one megalomaniac of a group leader with a charismatic personality. It was *just by the steady*

pressure of a group of loving people, people who were earnestly seeking a connection with the divine.

Acceptance came via conformity, and there's a lot of power in group earnestness. I wanted acceptance. So over time, I took on board the belief that Jesus was the only way to God. It's been eleven years now since I left the church. My spirituality looks very different. I've explored many things and pieced together my own truth. I'm a lot less sure about how the universe works, and a lot more sure that we are deeply loved and connected.

I gave away my own biases by italicizing certain parts. This is what hit me as I read the full blog post. She was desperate for acceptance. She said so many times and in different ways. It's what drove her all of the time. She was desperate for love. She believed she was finding love in God but in reality, her love and acceptance was coming from other people. Sadly, she never did come to know that the Father was waiting to offer her this infinite love. The same love with which the Father and Son have loved each other for all eternity.

One of the strangest statements was in her conclusion. "I'm a lot less sure about how the universe works, and a lot more sure that we are deeply loved and connected." If she rejects the Bible or any other religious book for that matter, how does she know that we are deeply loved? And who is initiating this love? What entity is loving her and all people? She is left with nothing but her own opinions and feelings. But she is right in this sense because there are only two options. Either you accept the Word of God as reliable and authoritative over all of your life or else you reject it altogether. If you claim to accept the Bible but reject certain parts that you don't like, you have become judge and jury over the Scriptures. You might as well reject all of it at that point.

4. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. (21)

Let's not forget that Jesus is proving his deity here. He is laying out reasons why he is equal to God. He is doing more than that in his teaching but he is not doing less than that. The question of his deity is what initiated this teaching. Up until this point Jesus has expressed his relationship with the Father in terms of submission and love but now he moves into statements of ultimate power.

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. You can't get a much more clear statement of deity than this! We know all about Lazarus and other people that Jesus raised from the dead. That in itself is ultimate power from God alone. However, this raising from the dead is not physical death but spiritual death. This is salvation. We know this because the rest of this passage uses life and death language and is clearly referring to salvation.

Verses 24-25 make this clear.

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.

Too often we forget that we started as dead people—spiritually dead. What Paul taught in Ephesians 2 is identical to what Jesus taught here in John.

Ephesians 2:1,4-5

And **you were dead** in the trespasses and sins...**but God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive** together with Christ.

For as the Father **raises the dead** and gives them life, so also **the Son gives life** to whom he will.

Only God has the power to make a spiritually dead person alive. This is yet another powerful proof of the deity of Jesus Christ. But there's even more proof!

5. *[For] 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. (22)*

If the Son has the authority to raise a spiritually dead person to life then it makes sense that he would also have the authority to judge. They are two sides of the same coin—judgment on one side and life on the other. Jesus described this judgment in some detail.

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.*

This is the final judgment described in Revelation 20.

11 *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Let me draw out some applications of these truths.

1. Have you passed from death to life?

Have you heard the word of God and believed in Christ alone for your salvation? Have you been raised to life by Jesus? Have you passed from death to life? Will you be raised to the resurrection of life or the resurrection of judgment? Will your name be found written in the book of life? The Bible consistently presents only these two options. And there is only one thing that separates the two options that both have eternal consequences—*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.* It is simply a matter of belief in Christ. It's simple but it isn't easy.

Last week I talked with a man who grew up in the church hearing the gospel every single Sunday but he did not get saved until he was 39 years old. I asked him what held him back all those years. Without missing a beat he said, "My pride." How true that is. Pride in one form or another is what keeps everyone outside of the kingdom because you have to surrender your pride in order to receive this free gift. If that in any way describes you this morning, please do not let one more day pass until you take this step of faith. The rest of these applications don't apply to you unless you have placed your whole faith in Christ alone for salvation.

2. Can you defend the deity of Christ?

Prince died on Thursday at his home in Minneapolis. I was never a fan of his music. I never knowingly listened to one of his songs but it wasn't until after he died I learned that he was a devout Jehovah's Witness.¹ He would actually go knocking on doors to hand out the Watchtower magazine. You probably know that Jehovah's Witnesses vehemently deny the deity of Christ. More than any other belief, it is what makes them a cult. This is what separates Biblical Christianity from every other Christian cult or other religion. So sadly, Prince did not pass from death to life.

Had Prince knocked on your door would you have been able to defend the deity of Christ to him? Now you don't have to be able to defend the deity of Christ to be saved. You do have to believe in it, however and it should be the most basic part of your belief that you could present and defend to anyone at any time. Are you prepared to do so?

3. Are you honoring the Son?

The chief purpose of granting all judgment to the Son is so that he may be honored as God. *[For] 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.* In acknowledging that the Son has the authority for final judgment of every person who has ever lived, you are making him equal with God. You are declaring that he is God. That all may honor the Son. It's an unusual way of looking at it but judgment is meant to lead to worship. Worship is the ultimate goal.

No one likes to think about hell and final judgment and we certainly don't tend to turn this subject into worship. But that is exactly what Jesus said here. His right to final judgment is to result in our honoring him as God. It is part of our worship.

4. Is humility your daily goal?

Christ's ultimate power was bound up with his ultimate humility. Jesus' authority to grant eternal life and judge all people is bound up with his complete submission to his Father. It never ceases to be a staggering thought that the Almighty Creator of the universe would operate in such utter humility. Jesus has been eternally, functionally submissive to his Father. He humbled himself by becoming a man. He humbled himself by serving his disciples and washing their feet. He humbled himself by dying in our place. The one who seemingly should be least concerned about humility demonstrated it the most. Pride continues to be our obstacle to our relationship with God and with each relationship in our lives. Humility must be our number one daily goal. Pray, "Lord, humble me. Kill my pride."

5. Are you eagerly awaiting your inheritance?

We have been saved but we are not yet experienced our full salvation. This is why the Bible refers to it as an inheritance. It is often referred to as the "already but not yet." We already have salvation but we do not yet have it in its full measure. That won't happen until the final judgment described here in chapter five and Revelation 20. But are you eager for this full inheritance? While you wait, are you storing up treasures in heaven or will you enter the kingdom by with all of your works burned in the purifying fire?

6. Do you experience the infinite love that the Father and Son have for you?

Do you experience this love? Not that you would experience it every moment but do you know it what it feels like? Do you know it's depth and length and width and breadth? Are you more desperate for Christ than you are for acceptance from people? Are you able to rest in this infinite love? When all else is stripped away, is Christ sufficient in your life?

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¹ <http://time.com/4303703/prince-dead-jehovahs-witness/>