

The Surrender of the Kingdom and the Deity of the Son
1 Corinthians 15:20-28

DEEP WATERS: THE QUESTION AT HAND

We are going to wade this morning into deep waters. We will not be the first to swim here. Some have come and found great joy in these depths, but, regrettably, others have not fared so well. Theologically speaking we are treading the waters of the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ and the essential nature of God. We are engaging the Trinity in all God's mystery and glory and given that all eternity will not be long enough to fully understand and appreciate the reality of who and how God is, we do not and cannot expect to answer every question these verses raise in the few minutes we have together this morning.

For two millennia God-fearing, God-loving, God-exalting people have pondered and sought to understand the answer to the question, "How can the Son of God be equal with the Father and subordinate to the Father at the same time?" People read Paul's inspired assertion here that in the final triumph of God over the fallen and sinful kingdoms of the world, Christ, to whom everything in the world is subject, will himself be subjected to God, and they naturally ask the question, "How can He Who is One with the Father be subjected to the Father?"

It is a fair question. Many have asked the question. Many have attempted to answer it. I do not want to muddy the waters this morning by surveying the dialogues, council debates, books, and letters that have been written during the last 2000 years relative to the question. I am choosing only two responses to focus on. One is an ancient heresy that still circulates today and is prominently practiced by a group of people well-known in our world and even in our community. Jehovah's Witnesses practice a doctrinal heresy first articulated by a man named Arius in the 4th century AD. The other is the orthodox doctrine of the full equality of the Father and Son adopted at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, the answer to the question that is most widely held in the church today.

THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

Arius

Very little is known about the man named Arius. Few bits and pieces of his writings survive and most of what is known about him comes from the pen of the man who most ardently opposed him.

We guess that he was probably born in Libya, between *c.* 260 and 280. He appears to have had a history as an ordained deacon in the church at Alexandria. Somewhere around 319 AD he was made the priest of one of the largest churches in the city of Alexandria and it was there he began to spread his subordinationist teaching about the Person of Christ. This controversial teaching quickly spread, and while Arius sought support among other priests and bishops, a synod at Alexandria under Alexander proceeded to excommunicate him.

In September of 324 Emperor Constantine sent a representative to attempt a settlement; but the

mission failed. Accordingly an *Oecumenical Council was convened (orig. to Ancyra), met at *Nicaea in the early summer of 325, and, largely through the influence of St *Athanasius, condemned Arius. Arius spent the next few years in banishment in Illyria, but, owing to the Court influence of his friend Eusebius of Nicomedia, he was recalled from exile prob. c. 334. He returned to Alexandria, where Athanasius was ordered to receive him back into communion, but refused. Arius died suddenly in the streets of Constantinople in 336, the very year he was supposed to have been restored to full fellowship in the church.

The Arian Controversy

So what did Arius teach? What was, and is, this teaching that so upset the church and the world that even the Emperor had to get involved and it took no less than three church councils to resolve?

Arius taught that the divinity of Jesus and the divinity of the Father were essentially different. He taught that Jesus, the Son of God, was not actually God but was the first and highest creation of God who was assigned divinity but was not himself of the same essence as God. Arius' answer to the question, "How can the Son of God be fully God and subordinate to God at the same time?", the question raised by the text we are considering this morning, was that he can't. Arius thought that if the Son is subordinate to God, then the Son cannot be God because God cannot be God and be subordinate to God at the same time.

And for that teaching, Arius was rightly refuted and excommunicated.

THE ORTHODOX EXPLANATION

But, telling us what is not the answer or what is the wrong answer does not tell what is the right answer. So, let's turn to Scripture where we find the right and trustworthy answers to life's questions. Here's what we find:

The Nature of Jesus: Fully God, Fully Man, Exalted by God, Subordinate to God

First, we find that Jesus, the Son of God, was fully God and fully man.

Truth Said of Him

John 1:1-5 (ESV) *¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

John 1:14 (ESV) *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:18 (ESV) *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

Truth Pronounced by Him

John 10:30-33 (ESV) *³⁰I and the Father are one."³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone*

him. ³² Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” ³³ The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.”

Truth Demonstrated by Him

Mark 2:1-12 (ESV) ¹ And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. ³ And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. ⁴ And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” ⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ⁸ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹ “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” ¹² And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

As we continue to search out Scripture we’re going to find not only that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, but that God exalted Christ above all and that the Son is subordinate to the Father.

The Exaltation of Christ

Ephesians 1:19-23 (ESV) ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV) ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Hebrews 1:3-4 (ESV) ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The Subordination of Christ

1 Corinthians 15:27-28 (ESV) ²⁷ *For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him.* ²⁸ *When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.*

John 12:44–49 (ESV) ⁴⁴ *And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me.* ⁴⁵ *And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.* ⁴⁶ *I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.* ⁴⁷ *If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.* ⁴⁸ *The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.* ⁴⁹ *For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.*

The Orthodox Position

The orthodox, the standard understanding of Christ’s nature relative to God is that Christ was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Jesus Christ is one with God, Jesus Christ is God. The Son and the Father (and the Spirit) are one God.

TWO APPLICATIONS

The Orthodox Application to the Text

So what does that mean for our text? Keep in mind that the concept of subordination has pulsed throughout this letter. Every single time Paul has called the Corinthian Christians to unity in faith and practice he has required some measure of subordination from them. Has directed them to subordinate their factious inclinations to unity. He called them to subordinate their pride and arrogance to the gospel and to the cross. He instructed them to subordinate their sinful self-interest to love, mercy, and the consideration of others. He guided them to subordinate their religious practice to the workings of the Spirit and the good of the gospel proclamation among unbelievers. The idea of subordination is not new in this letter.

Here in these verses Paul supplies a final motivation for the subordination to which he has called the disciples of Jesus in Corinth. Submit to Christ, submit in Christ to one another because Christ, the exalted Son to whom all things are made subject by God, will himself, the representative of all mankind and the head of the church will himself be subject to God, so that in all the creation, all that exists, God will be all in all.

The kingdom of the Son merges into the kingdom of the Father in order that God's plan from eternity to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will be ultimately and finally and eternally realized. This subordination of the work of the Son into the goal of the Father expresses the oneness of the Father, Son, and Spirit in essence and purpose and Person.

In the end, nothing in heaven or on earth exalts itself above God Himself. The One God is exalted, the One God is manifested in His completeness and wholeness and essential unity. Jesus, fully God and fully man, exalted by God with a name above all names, for the sake of God's single-minded purpose for all creation, submits his kingdom to God in perfect agreement with God's eternal plan.

The Orthodox Application to Our Lives

How does this apply to us? Let me answer that first for those here who are believers and followers of Jesus. Jesus is our representative before the Father. He represents all human beings and especially the redeemed population from all the ages of the world. Through him, and through faith in him alone, human beings can be restored to fellowship with God. This Jesus, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Master and King, surrenders all He is and all He gains to the glory of God. He gives His life, He gives His death, and He gives all the glory and all the gains of His efforts and His faithfulness, He gives them over to God. He keeps none for Himself. He belongs and submits utterly, in everything to God.

Now listen, if Jesus, the one truly perfect God-man, surrenders all his efforts and all his gains to God, then what ought to be true of those less than perfect men and women like me and you who follow him with their whole hearts? If it is good and right for the Son to submit to the Father all his effort and all his gain, is it not also appropriate, and in fact, given the actions of the Son, required, that all the brothers and sisters of Christ, all the redeemed children of God, all the parts of the fully integrated body of Christ should do exactly the same thing with their lives and their gain?

Believers the word to us this morning is this: if, in fact, you are followers of Jesus, then follow him in everything, including surrendering every effort and every gain of your lives to the pursuit of God's glory, that God alone may be all in all in your life and in the world.

And let me offer this word to those here who may not have made a decision to follow Jesus Christ, to accept him as Savior, and honor him as Lord in your life. If the one person in all of human history who is perfect, who is all that God created Him to be and does all that God created Him to do, offers himself utterly and completely to God for God's glory, shouldn't you?

When you see the only person in the history of ever unfaithfully, and sinlessly doing what is right so that he gains God's favor and eternal life, doesn't that tell you something? Doesn't that tell you that the path to eternal life and God's blessing is the path Jesus took, the path where you give

your life, now and forever, totally to God? **Follow Jesus and give yourself wholly and completely to God today and live for God's glory.**