

- f. The principle of “already but not yet” was fundamental to Paul’s understanding of the fulfillment of the salvation history that has come in Christ. The coming of the messianic King meant the coming of Yahweh’s long-awaited kingdom (cf. Matthew 2:1-6; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 1:26-33), and the inauguration of the kingdom meant the conquest and overthrow of Yahweh’s enemies – the earthly and spiritual realms and forms of dominion which contradict and oppose Him. All such enemies and enmity have been condemned and conquered in the person and work of Jesus Christ, but in the manner of “already but not yet”: They are conquered and even fully destroyed *with respect to Jesus Himself*, but the same is not true for the created order, including the remainder of the human race.

The present age is characterized by kingdoms in conflict, and yet, in a very real and important way, this conflict is only *apparent*.

- The world’s kings and kingdoms – and the spiritual powers behind them – do indeed operate in opposition to Messiah’s kingdom and kingship, and do so with the seeming capacity, power, and authority to resist His rule.
- But the truth is that earthly powers are subject to His rule just as is every form and expression of “rule, authority, power and dominion” (cf. Psalm 2 with Revelation 12:1-17). Jesus’ enthronement at the right hand of the Majesty on High means that “all things are in subjection under His feet” (Ephesians 1:20-22); nevertheless, we do not presently see all things *functioning* in subjection to Him. In terms of conquest and triumph, “the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ” (Revelation 11:15), and yet the day has not yet come in which “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:9-11; cf. Isaiah 45:22ff).

This “now, not yet” dynamic of opposing entities and forces is evident in the instance of Satan’s rule (cf. Luke 10:17-19 with Revelation 2:8-11; cf. also Luke 11:14-22; John 12:23-33 and Colossians 2:8-15 with Romans 16:17-20; 1 John 4:1-4 and Hebrews 2:14-15), and so it is with the archenemy that is death. Jesus’ resurrection constitutes His own personal triumph over death, but the rest of the material creation is still subject to this enemy. Nevertheless, the creation is subject to death as a vanquished foe. Death still has its effect, but its ultimate power has been broken; it no longer holds the creation in an invincible grip. The *already* of death’s defeat and abolition in Jesus Christ is the substance of – and so insures the realization of – the *not yet* of death’s final destruction in the lake of fire.

As noted previously, this principle explains why Paul could speak of all things being in subjection under Jesus’ feet while also insisting that enemies remain to be destroyed (cf. again vv. 25, 27 with Ephesians 1:20-22). His triumph over all enmity and opposition is complete and absolute; only the full fruitfulness of that triumph remains to be realized. Even now, all things are in subjection to Jesus – *all things, that is, with the exception of God Himself* (15:27b).

Why Paul felt the need to even mention this exception has puzzled scholars, for it's patently obvious and goes without saying that Christ is not lord over the God and Father who sent Him and whose work He accomplished.

- It is certainly true that Jesus was enthroned in the heavenlies and exalted “far above all rule, authority, power and dominion and every name that is named in this age and the age to come,” so that all things are now subject to Him and His lordship (Ephesians 1:19-22).
- Paul's gospel proclaimed the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ and the Corinthians no doubt were well familiar with this proclamation. As the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus has taken His seat on the divine throne (Hebrews 1:8), but not so as to usurp the authority or lordship of His God and Father (v. 24). Jesus has been exalted to the throne of God, but at the right hand of the Father, not *over* the Father (cf. Acts 7:46-56 with Hebrews 8:1, 12:1-2; Revelation 3:21, 12:1-5, 22:1-3).

Some have speculated that perhaps there were those at Corinth who believed Jesus' ascension and enthronement meant that He had assumed the place of absolute supremacy – supremacy even with respect to His Father. Certainly the apostolic teaching regarding the kingdom and its King and even some of Jesus' own statements (cf. Matthew 25:31-46, 28:18; John 5:22; etc.) could be wrongly construed in that way. Whatever provoked Paul's qualification, he obviously felt it important to specify that Jesus' lordship has not supplanted that of His Father.

Paul was adamant here that the Son forever remains in subjection to the Father (vv. 27-28), and this has made this passage a classic proof-text of those who hold to some form of *subordinationism*. Strictly speaking, this term refers to the view which emerged early in Church history that the Son (and Spirit) is subordinate to the Father in His being and nature (ontological subordination). Those who hold this view necessarily deny the doctrine of the Trinity. But there is another version of subordinationism which is Trinitarian, but which emphasizes the Son's inherent functional (relational) subordination to the Father.

- The first position was held by the ancient Arians (and others) and today by Jehovah's Witnesses who believe that the preincarnate Logos was the first and greatest creation of Jehovah, the one true God. In that sense the Logos was *a* god (and continues to be so in Jesus Christ), but in distinction from *the* God. Christ is thus *homoiousios* – of a similar substance – with God.
- The second view upholds the Nicene *homoousian* doctrine that the Son and Father share the same substance, but also insists that the Son maintains a subordinate place relative to the Father. Though in some sense correct, this view commonly involves a *hierarchical* conception of the Trinity – a conception suited to human relations, but which doesn't do justice to the scriptural revelation of the triune God.

As with every biblical truth, the truth of the Son's subjection to the Father must be considered and understood in terms of the full scope and structure of scriptural revelation and not human notions and conventions (which often underlie and influence theological formulations). The latter approach cannot help but result in a hierarchical conception of the Father/Son relationship, for man in his natural state knows nothing of relationship that isn't hierarchical; to the natural mind which is self-referential and self-oriented, distinction between oneself and others is always a matter of comparison resulting in ranking.

Human beings instinctively view the intertrinitarian relationship through the lens of human relationships, and this means that they conceive of the Father/Son/Spirit relationship as hierarchical. But as noted in the treatment of 11:1-3, the relationship among the members of the Godhead is best expressed in terms of *perichoresis*. Again, this term refers to the dynamic of mutual interpenetration – mutual indwelling and mutual sharing in the one divine substance – of the Father, Son and Spirit. Robert Letham's comment is worth repeating:

*"It [perichoresis] follows from the homoousial [sharing in the same substance] identity of the three and the undivided divine being. Since all three persons are fully God and the whole God is in each of the three, it follows that the three mutually contain one another."* (The Holy Trinity)

The relationship between the Father and Son (and Spirit) is one of complete equality of essence and divine substance; the divine persons are homoousial. The implication is that any distinction between them must be functional, not ontological. Indeed, the Scripture is clear that functional (role) distinctions do exist among the divine persons; the problem is that these distinctions are misconceived whenever the perichoretic nature of God is not kept in the forefront as the fundamental reality which determines and governs all divine distinctions.

The mutual interpenetration of the Father and Son highlights the exhaustive intimacy between them – intimacy expressive of *one divine being* in contrast to the human "intimacy" of relational affinity between distinct beings. Again, it's absolutely critical to understand that the Father and Son are one in the sense that they fully indwell one another as one essence rather than being two persons who merely accord with one another in perspective, purpose and will (cf. John 10:22-38, 14:1-11, 17:20-23). Each one is Himself fully God; the Father and Son are not two beings who, together with the Spirit, comprise the composite deity "God."

Three things, then, are key to understanding the way in which the Son submits to the Father: Their mutual interpenetration, the full deity which each possesses, and the nature of God as love. And these three truths demand that the intertrinitarian relationship be one of *mutual submission*. First of all, submissiveness and self-giving are the very essence of love, so that the mutual love of Father and Son implies their submission to one another. To deny this mutual submission is to deny either the essential character of love or the truth that God is love.

Second, mutual submission is also necessitated by the fact that God is one while the fullness of deity exists in each divine person. For the Son to be in submission to the Father means that *God as God is in submission to Himself*. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise without setting God against Himself, thereby denying both His essential oneness and His integrity. Because God is one, the Son's submission to the Father is His submission to Himself and to the Spirit who, as the Spirit of God, is both the Spirit of the Father and of Christ (cf. Matthew 3:16-17, 12:22-28; Acts 16:6-8; Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Peter 1:10-11; etc.).

The very nature of the triune God demands that mutual submission be the fundamental quality of the intertrinitarian relationship. This doesn't, however, mean that *no* distinctions exist in the relationships between the three persons of the Godhead. The fact that Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct hypostases implies that each relationship within the Godhead is unique: The Father/Son relationship isn't the Father/Spirit relationship or Son/Spirit relationship; moreover, because the Son isn't the Father, the Father/Son relationship has distinct qualities when considered from the perspective of the Father toward the Son and vice versa.

So, for instance, the Father sent the Son into the world; the Son didn't send the Father. Likewise the Son became incarnate, not the Father. God *as God* has entered this world and taken up our humanness, but in the person of the Son, not the Father or the Spirit. So also, implied in the designations *Father* and *Son* is the fact that the Son serves the Father's purpose and will. But because the Son is as fully God as the Father is, He equally shares that same purpose and will. *When the Son submits to and fulfills the will of the Father He is doing His own will.*

In all things and in every respect, the Son is in full subjection to the Father. But this subjection is determined, defined and exercised in terms of the essential oneness of the Godhead. This means that the Son's subjection to the Father is His subjection to the *one God* and so to *Himself* as being fully God in Himself. Conversely, the Father's commission and direction of the Son is the triune God's commission and direction of Himself; it is God accomplishing His own design in the person of the divine Son (and in the Spirit sent by the Father and Son).

These considerations clarify how Jesus could insist that all authority belongs to Him while also affirming His submission to His Father. The Son's authority is God's authority which also belongs to the Father. When the Son exercises *His* authority, He is exercising *God's* authority, and so the authority of each person of the Godhead. Thus the Son's submission to the Father's authority amounts to His exercise of His own authority: *"The Son's obedience to the Father's charge does not compromise the Son's authority to act but rather establishes it... The Father commands; the Son obeys. But the Son does not obey the Father because he is inferior to the Father or 'under compulsion' to do so. He 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. In this sense, the Son is equal in authority to the Father as the Son of the Father."* (Kostenberger)