

BEHOLDING THE WONDER OF THE TRINITY

Bruce A. Ware, Professor of Christian Theology, Southern Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

Session Three: BEHOLDING THE WONDER OF THE SON AND THE FATHER

I. Introduction

Review: There is one and only one God, eternally existing and expressed in three divine Persons. Each is equally God, and each is fully God—not three gods but three Persons, equal in essence but different in personal expressions of the one undivided and eternal divine nature.

The Son, then, is fully God—not one-third God, but fully God. Yet, it is not the Son alone who is fully God, but he exists along with the Father and the Spirit, each of whom possesses fully also the identically same divine nature.

So, what distinguishes the Son from the Father and the Spirit is not the divine nature of the Son. This (divine nature) is also possessed equally and fully by the Father and Spirit. What distinguish the Son are the *relationships* that he has with the Father and Spirit and his particular *roles* in relation to each of them. What, then, characterizes the distinct relationships and roles of the Son in relation to the Father and the Spirit?

II. The Son in Relation to the Father

A. The Son is under the headship or authority of the Father

1 Corinthians 11:3 – But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

1. The Son's Submission to the Father during His incarnation and earthly mission

The authority of the Father over the Son is clear in the Son's incarnation and earthly mission. Consider John 8:28-29 –

²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. ²⁹ And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”

This is typical of how Jesus spoke over and over. In John 4, when the disciples asked Jesus why he was not interested in eating, Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34).

But, what about in his eternal relationship with the Father? Is this submission to the Father only true during the time of his earthly mission?

2. The Son's Submission to the Father in eternity past

Over 40 times in John's gospel, Jesus mentions the fact that the Father has sent him to accomplish the mission he is here to do. Some might be understood as a "sending" that occurred during the incarnation itself. But not all. Most speak of the Father's sending the Son into the world to accomplish his assigned mission of redemption:

John 3:16-17 – ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

John 6:38 – For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

John 8:42 – Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me."

John 10:36 – do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?

And consider the NT teaching of Christ as Creator. 1 Cor 8:6, for example, says, "yet for us 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." Or in John 1, we hear echoes of Genesis 1, where God creates by speaking. But in John 1, God creates by his Word. So, the Father creates the world by the Son, who is the Father's agent of creation.

Consider also that the Father's elective purposes before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4) include his elect being in His Son, whom He chose before the foundation of the world to be their Savior:

1 Peter 1:20-21 – ²⁰ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Revelation 13:7-8 – ⁷ It was also given to him [the beast] to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. ⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

So, it is clear that the Son obeyed the Father in heaven, in order to come from heaven and do the will of his Father. He was the Son of the Father in heaven, and he obeyed his Father in coming from heaven. Therefore, his submission to the Father existed in eternity past.

3. The Son's Submission to the Father in eternity future

A hint of the continued submission of the Son to the Father comes in Rev 1:1 –

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John.

The single clearest passage that indicates this truth is 1 Corinthians 15:25-28 –

²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be abolished is death. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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.

B. The Love Relationship between the Son and the Father

While one might think that a relationship marked by such strict and unequivocal authority and submission would not, indeed could not, also be marked by love, that fact is that this relationship is, to its very core. In fact, not only does the Son express his absolute and unqualified allegiance to the Father in strict obedience to every word and command, the Son does so out of a deep and abiding love for his Father. In short, the Son's submission to the Father, and his love for the Father, are inseparable.

John 14:31: “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that *I love the Father.*”

John 15:9-10: “*As the Father has loved me*, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and *abide in his love.*”

C. The Father's Purpose that all things be summed up in and subjected to His Son.

It is as if the Father says, I choose to fulfill my will and carry out my plans and purposes only as I do so through my Son, and never apart from my Son. It is in him that my glory is manifest, and it is through him that my work is accomplished. “Look at my Son!,” he says to us. “With him I am well-pleased!”

Psalms 2:7-9 – ⁷ “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. ⁸ ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the *very* ends of the earth as Your possession. ⁹ ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’ ”

Ephesians 1:9-10 – ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him

1 Corinthians 15:27-28 – see above

Revelation 5:1-5, 8-9 – ¹ I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. ² And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” ³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. ⁴ Then I *began* to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; ⁵ and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.”

⁸ When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

III. Applications from the Role of the Son in Re: to his Father and the Spirit

1. Marvel at the eternal submission of the Son to the Father, a submission that occurs in eternity past (eternal Son), in his earthly mission (incarnate Son) and in eternity future (raised, exalted, reigning Son). Here, then, is a stunning principle: *It is as God-like to submit with joy and gladness to rightful authority, as it is God-like to exert wise and beneficial rightful authority.* Understand that God has purposed to exhibit something of Himself in our human relationships that involve authority and submission, especially those of a husband and wife (1 Cor 11:3) – marriage not only displays Christ and the church, but it puts on display the glory of the Trinity. Embrace the privilege of showing forth the beauty of God in our relationships of authority and submission.
2. Marvel at the submission of the incarnate Son, the Son in human form, to the leading and empowerment of the Spirit. And marvel at the forthrightness of the authority of the Son over the Spirit. “He shall glorify Me,” are strong words, said not in arrogance but full truthfulness.
3. Marvel at perfect, loving, and joyous obedience of the Son. He never sinned! In all that he did, his submission to the Father was uncompromising, and his reliance on the Spirit was constant.