
Understanding the Son's work & His relationship with the Father

Incarnation/ salvation by the Son is not a "lowly and subordinate ministry"

No heaven, or earth, or the great oceans, or all creatures living in the waters and on dry land, or plants, stars, air, and seasons, or the vast expanse of the universe, can illustrate the surpassing greatness of God's might so well as He has Himself. The infinite God, remaining changeless, assumed flesh and fought with death, freeing us from suffering by His own suffering! Even when the Apostle says that "in all these things (tribulations and sufferings) we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us,"¹ in a phrase of this kind there is no suggestion of any lowly and subordinate ministry, but rather it speaks of the good He has accomplished "in the strength of His might."²

He Himself has bound the strong man and plundered His goods³ - that is, us, who had been abased in every manner of evil - and made us into vessels fit for the Master's use, the use of our free will being made ready for any good work.⁴ Thus through Him we have our approach to the Father, Who has transferred us from the dominion of darkness to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.⁵ We must not think that the salvation the Son has won for us is the result of a slave's compulsory and subordinate service. No, He voluntarily accomplishes His plan out of goodness and compassion for His creation, fulfilling the Father's will.⁶

The work of the Father is not separate or distinct from the work of the Son

On the other hand, we must not be so dazzled by the greatness of the Lord's works that we imagine that He has no origin. What does the self-existent One say about this? "I live through the Father,"⁷ and concerning divine power He says that "the Son can do nothing of His own accord."⁸ Where is the source of His perfect wisdom? "The Father ... has Himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak."⁹ Through all these words He guides us to the knowledge of the Father; He directs our amazement at everything He has made so that we may know the Father through Him. The work of the Father is not separate or distinct from the work of the Son; whatever the Son "sees the Father doing... that the Son does likewise."¹⁰ The Father enjoys our awe at everything which proceeds from the glory of the Only-begotten; He rejoices both in His Son who accomplishes such deeds, and in the deeds themselves, and exults in being known as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "for whom and through whom all things exist."^{11 12}

¹ Rom. 8:37

² Eph. 6:10

³ Mt. 12:21

⁴ Cf. 2 Tim. 2:21

⁵ Cf. Col. 1:12-13

⁶ *On the Holy Spirit* 8.18 (SVS Press, pp.36-7)

⁷ Jn. 6:57

⁸ Jn. 5:19

⁹ Jn. 12:49

¹⁰ Jn. 5:19

¹¹ Heb. 2:10

¹² *On the Holy Spirit* 8.19 (SVS Press, pp.38-9)

The Father does not issue imperious orders to the Son as to a subordinate

When He says, "I have not spoken on my own authority,"¹³ and "As the Father has said unto me, so I speak,"¹⁴ and "the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me"¹⁵ and "I do as the Father has commanded me,"¹⁶ He does not use language of this kind because He is incapable of His own choice, or is lawless, or has to wait for a prearranged signal. He wants to make it clear that His will is indissolubly united to the Father.

We must not think that what He calls a "commandment" is an imperious order delivered by word of mouth by which the Father gives orders to His Son, as He would to a subordinate, telling Him what He should do. Instead, let us think in terms worthy of the Godhead, and realise that there is a transmission of will, like the reflection of an object in a mirror, which reaches from Father to Son without passage of time. "The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all that He Himself is doing."¹⁷

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The eternal Son with the eternal Father

First let us ask [the Arians] this question: In what way do they say that the Son is after the Father? Is He later in time, or in rank, or in dignity? As far as time is concerned, no one is so senseless as to claim that the Maker of the ages holds a second place; no interval could possibly divide the natural union of Father and Son. Even limited human thought demonstrates that it is impossible for the Son to be younger than the Father ... we cannot conceive of either apart from their relationship with each other...

... Now in addition to being impious, is it really not the height of folly to measure the life of Him who transcends all times and ages, whose existence is incalculably remote from the present? Things subject to birth and corruption are described as prior to one another; are we therefore to compare God the Father as superior to God the Son, who exists before the ages? The supreme eminence of the Father is inconceivable; thought and reflection are utterly unable to penetrate the begetting of the Lord.

By means of two words St. John has admirably contained the concept within tangible boundaries: he says "In the *beginning* was the Word."¹⁹ Thought cannot reach beyond *was*, or the imagination *beginning*. No matter how far your thoughts travel backward, you cannot get beyond the *was*. No matter how hard you strain to see what is beyond the Son, you will find it impossible to pass outside the confines of the *beginning*. Therefore, true religion teaches us to think of the Son with the Father.²⁰

¹³ Jn. 12:49

¹⁴ Jn. 12:50

¹⁵ Jn. 14:24

¹⁶ Jn. 14:31

¹⁷ Jn. 5:20

¹⁸ *On the Holy Spirit* 8.20 (SVS Press, p.40)

¹⁹ Jn. 1:1

²⁰ *On the Holy Spirit* 6.14 (SVS Press, pp.29-30)