

Submission and Disagreement

by Coty Pinckney 7/17/08

In Sunday's sermon, we looked at Hebrews 13:17, which reads in the NIV:

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

In discussing this verse, I said, "Submission only comes into play when there is a disagreement."

Several of you have asked (respectfully and submissively!) if this is correct, particularly considering that God the Son submits to God the Father. Surely there is no disagreement between them!

This is an excellent point, and many thanks for the input. I'll correct my statement briefly next Sunday; here let me elaborate on the idea more fully than will be possible in the sermon. Consider first *the nature of God the Son's submission to God the Father*:

The Son is indeed in submission to the Father, from all eternity, to all eternity. 1 Corinthians 11:3 tells us that "the head of Christ is God," and that this headship/submission relationship is similar in some ways to the relationship of husband to wife. Note that this statement is not limited to a particular point in time, such as during the period of Jesus' life on earth. Paul makes a general, timeless statement.

We see this underlined later in the same letter. In 1 Corinthians 15:28, Paul says that at the last day, when all things are subjected to the Son, "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." (Note that the verb translated "be subject to" is the same word translated "submit" elsewhere.)

What does this submission mean, if the Father and Son don't disagree about how to proceed?

Two Old Testament Scriptures are especially helpful here. First, Psalm 40:8 (which the author of the book of Hebrews applies to Jesus in Hebrews 10:5-10): "I delight to do your will." Second, Deuteronomy 8:3, which Jesus quotes to counter Satan's temptation: "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." God the Son exists continually in an attitude of joyful submission to God the Father. Equal in essence, equal in power, equal in might, He takes great delight in doing whatever God the Father wills. He has a role as God the Son which differs from the role of God the Father (and from the role of God the Holy Spirit); this role, this ordering, requires that He follow the Father's lead; and this following is His great joy. It can even be called His sustenance.

So God the Son submits to God the Father in that He continually has an attitude of joyful submission to the leadership of God the Father.

What then are the implications for submission among us?

Just as in the Godhead, in human relationships we can and should have an attitude of joyful submission to those

in authority over us – children to parents, wives to husbands, employees to employers, those in the church to elders, all of us to the government. We should delight to do their will – as long as that will does not involve sin.

How, then, should my statement about submission and disagreements be revised? In this way: "You are not submissive unless you obey joyfully and willingly when you disagree with an instruction from your head." In this life, then, disagreements provide the critical test of submission.

In that light, let me rework the illustration I used in the sermon:

Suppose I tell my thirteen-year-old son Joel, "You must drink this Sonic strawberry limeade I bought for you!" Is that a test of his submission? No. He will indeed drink it joyfully and willingly – and such an attitude is consistent with his submission to me – but he would have drunk the limeade that way regardless of my command.

But suppose I say, "Joel, would you please clean out the kitty litter?" Joel does not have a particular fondness for cleaning the kitty litter. He does not naturally choose to take on that task himself. His preference would be for someone else to do it. But if he picks up the trash bag and the scoop and joyfully and willingly cleans out the litter, that proves that he is submissive to me.

Furthermore, when he does that, he is imitating the relationship of God the Son to God the Father. And that brings glory to God.

James 4:6-7 says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God." We naturally want to exalt *our* power, *our* opinions, *our* status, *our* positions. God instead tells us in His Word and shows us in the very nature of the Trinity that we are to submit joyfully to those who rightly are heads over us. Yes, each of us is important, each of us has a valuable role, each of us is loved before the foundation of the world, each of us will be perfected, each of us will be the object of God's great delight; *and*, each of us humbly accepts the role God gives us, now and in eternity, as we, like our Savior, delight to do His will.

So do you have that attitude of submission, accepting and delighting in your God-given role? Do you recognize God's pattern of order, of headship and submission? That is, do you live on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God?

[For an excellent discussion of the submission of God the Son to God the Father, and the implications for human relationships, see Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Crossway, 2005), p. 72-85 and 137-151. For a wonderful example of joyful submission, see this post by Pam Bloom on today's Desiring God blog:

http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/1316_a_letter_to_my_husband_jon_bloom/ }