

**Text: Jn 5.19-23, 16.7-15**

For our communion service today, I want to talk about the Trinity, particularly, one aspect of the Trinity.

One writer called the Trinity the distinctive Christian doctrine, the one that sets it apart from all other religions. That might be so.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a complex doctrine, much of it derived from harmonizing clear revelations in the Bible.

It is a doctrine beyond our comprehension – God chose not to reveal some things about how the Trinity works. No doubt some things about the Trinity we could not comprehend, even if God spelled it out for us explicitly.

Sometimes people have gotten into theological trouble trying to say more about the Trinity than the Bible itself says. This “trouble” even led some people out of the church entirely.

The thing I want to talk about is the way the Trinity functioned in redemption.

This thing is clear, and in it we see something that provides a great theological relief for our salvation and a powerful example to us for our sanctification.

Title:

### *Subordination Saves*

I have two texts to read:

Jn 5.19-23, 16.7-15

Before we discuss these texts, I want to outline some basic facts about the Trinity, but I won't appeal to the Scriptures that reveal them due to availability of time.

## **I. The Scriptural facts concerning the Trinity (Ontological Trinity)**

### **A. Two aspects to describing the Trinity**

1. Statements about what the Trinity *is* – the relations of the three to each other (Ontological Trinity)
2. Statements about what the Trinity *does* – the relations of the three to Creation (Economical Trinity)

## B. Key facts

1. God is one: no other gods, only the one true God
2. The Father is God: all aspects of deity ascribed to him
3. The Son is God: all aspects of deity ascribed to him
4. The Spirit is God: all aspects of deity ascribed to him
5. The Father is not the Son is not the Spirit is not the Father: each are distinct persons
6. God, in these three persons, is eternal – there is no point at which all these facts are untrue
7. God is one: we do NOT believe in three Gods
8. God consists, therefore, of three Persons (this is our theological conclusion)

Now, we could say more, but these statements capture the essential description of what the Trinity *is*: Ontological Trinity.

“Ontological Trinity is the Trinity in itself, as it (or, rather, he) exists apart from the creation, as he would have existed if he had never created anything. In the ontological Trinity there is no subordination among the persons. Father, Son, and Spirit are equal; that is to say, they are equally God, equally divine.”<sup>1</sup>

## II. The effective relations within the Trinity (Economical Trinity)

- A. Remember the definition: now we are describing what the Trinity *does*  
— Economical Trinity

“The economic Trinity, however, is the Trinity in relation to the creation. ... the three persons of the Trinity take on a sort of division of labor with regard to creation and redemption: the Father plans, the Son executes, the Spirit applies.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub, 2006), 36.

<sup>2</sup> Frame, 36.

## B. The Son's subordination to the Father (Jn 5.19-23)

1. He does nothing of himself (19) [*i.e.* coming into the world, entering, and following the path of his ministry]
2. He carries out the will of the Father and does the Father's works (20-21)
3. He is appointed as judge by the Father (22)

## C. The Spirit's subordination to the Son [and the Father] (Jn 16.7-15)

1. Sent by the Son (7)
2. Speaks only what he hears, doesn't speak on his own initiative (13)
3. His ministry glorifies the Son (14)
4. The Father and Son together disclose their things through the Spirit (15)

Now, there is much more to this doctrine and many passages, but I wanted simple plain ones to establish this truth:

- The Son submits himself to the direction of the Father and does the Father's will
- The Spirit submits himself to the direction of the Son and repeats the Son's words

These functions do not imply inferiority, but voluntary subordination to accomplish a task: salvation.

"In human experience, there is functional subordination as well. Several equals in a business or enterprise may choose one of their number to serve as the captain of a task force or the chairperson of a committee for a given time, but without any change in rank. The same is true in military circles. In the days of multimember aircraft crews, although the pilot was the ranking officer on the ship, the bombardier, a lower-ranking officer, controlled the plane during the bombing run. In like fashion, the Son did not become less than the Father during his earthly incarnation, but he did subordinate himself functionally to the Father's will. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is now subordinated to the ministry of the Son (see John 14–16) as well as to the will of the Father, but this does not imply that he is less than they are."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1998), 363.

### III. The consequent results in Creation: redemption

A. Because of our sin, there is nothing we could do to save ourselves

1. Sin separates us completely from the Holy God

Hab 1.13 *Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they?*

2. Justice demands the punishment of sin: the Holy God must punish sin

B. Being unable to save ourselves, the Holy God undertook to do that work, requiring subordination

1. One had to come, to receive the wrath of the Father

Phil 2.5-8 *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

2. Having satisfied the demands of justice, the Father, Son, and Spirit raised Jesus from the dead so that the Spirit could give eternal life to those who believe

a. The Son submitted all for the purpose of redemption

b. The Spirit continues to act in subordination to apply the fruits of redemption to believers

### Conclusion:

I said at the beginning: [In the subordination] we see something that provides a great theological relief for our salvation and a powerful example to us for our sanctification.

Subordination Saves

And it gives us an example: not our will, but His be done.