

The Trinity Defined and Refuted (2)

Coequal

by Sean Finnegan

According to the definition of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and holy spirit are coequal, coeternal, and coessential. In this article, coequality will be discussed and compared to the Scriptures to see if this concept is biblical. First, it is necessary to mention how the Trinity speaks to the issue of equality within the Godhead:

“The Christian idea of the Trinity may be summed up in the familiar words: ‘The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. The Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, **the Glory equal**, the Majesty co-eternal. And in this Trinity **none is afore or after other: none is greater or less than another**, but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and **co-equal**.’”
(Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings, *Trinity*, by W. H. Griffith Thomas, pg 949).

“It [the Trinity] signifies that within the one essence of the Godhead we have to distinguish three ‘persons’ who are neither three gods on the one side, not three parts or modes of God on the other, but **coequally** and coeternally God.”
(Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology, ed. Harrison, Bromiley, and Henry, *The Trinity*, by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, pg 531).

The equality of the three persons of the Godhead is a necessary element of the concept of the Trinity. However, the discussion of equality between divine persons is far from straightforward. The following are biblical reasons some use to argue that the Son should be considered as coequal with the Father.

John 5:17-18

But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

Jesus had just cured the lame man on the Sabbath, and the Jews (presumably the religious leaders) were irritated by Jesus to the point of confronting him. His response was that he and his Father work on the Sabbath (i.e. healing). The Jews understood the implication to mean that Jesus was claiming equality with God. Often times (especially on radio programs), the speaker stops here without reading the next verse.

John 5:19-21

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless *it is* something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and *the Father* will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

Jesus' response is firstly a denial of ultimate equality with God. In other words, the Son can do nothing on his own; he is able to do only what his Father empowers him to do. Secondly, Jesus clarifies the equality he does have with God in regards to resurrection. Since the Father has conferred upon Jesus the right to resurrect and judge, they are functionally equal with regard to this. This equality falls far short of the required "coequality" of the Trinity.

John 10:30-31

"I and the Father are one."

The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.

It is said that since Jesus and his Father are one, they share the same substance and are equal. However, again looking at the preceding verse clears up much of this misinterpretation.

John 10:27-29

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

"My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand.

The context focuses on how Jesus is the good shepherd (in contrast to the bad shepherds of Ezekiel 34). Jesus had just said that, as the shepherd, he keeps the sheep so that no wolf or thief can snatch them. The next verse says that also the Father (who is greater than all) keeps the sheep so that no one can snatch them out of His hand. Thus, the Son and the Father are one in that they are both working to keep the sheep. This has nothing to do with substance or equality. Furthermore, it is clear that the Father is greater than all because he gave the flock to the Son. In addition, we are to have the same sort of oneness that the Father shares with the Son:

John 17:20-22

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

The oneness that the Father and Son share is to be shared by the disciples as well. If the oneness spoken of is a oneness of substance, then this statement is either impossible or meaningless. It is impossible for you and me actually to share the same substance (i.e. the same human body). It is meaningless to say we should be one in substance if what is meant is sharing humanity because that is shared no matter what. The oneness in the context is unity (love of the brethren).

Now that we have taken a look at a couple of the Scriptures used to show that the Father and the Son are coequal, we will turn to consider a few Scriptures that indicate an inequality: the Father is greater than the Son.

John 14:28

"You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

In this text, Jesus clearly states that he is not equal with the Father. There is nothing in the context that would modify or change this basic statement.

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.

Here, an ordering is made clear: God is the head of Christ. To be the head implies an inequality in responsibility. Jesus demonstrated this subordination many times by his words and actions, always putting his will in subjection to the Father's (John 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:10, 31).

1 Corinthians 15:23-28

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

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.

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.

At the end of Jesus' rule (the millennium), he will hand the Kingdom over to his Father. Therefore, for all eternity, the Son will remain in subjection to the Father. If the two are coequal, then why should one be over the other for all eternity? This is an important point because even in Jesus' exalted Kingdom glory, he is subservient to his Father.

So, why does anyone continue to believe that the Father, Son, and holy spirit are coequal? There are two solutions that advocates of the Trinity have adhered to over the centuries. The first solution, which is more popular today, is known as the doctrine of the kenosis. The word, "kenosis," is taken from the Greek word used in Philippians 2:7 translated "emptied." The theory states that when the Son of God became human, he emptied himself of various divine prerogatives. Perhaps he did this so that his divinity would not overwhelm his humanity. Thus, when we see Jesus doing or saying things that contradict the understanding that he is fully God, the Trinitarian is free to say that for a time Jesus had limited his divinity (i.e. while on earth he was not all powerful, everywhere present, or all knowing). This doctrine is not really orthodox (the official teaching of the historic Church) because it implies that Jesus was not really God for 30+ years. In fact, many Trinitarians have gone to great lengths to show how this kenosis doctrine is wrong. The official understanding is not that Jesus lost any of his divine attributes during his human life but that his humanity veiled those attributes. In other words, Jesus was still fully God in all ways, but his humanity made that divinity invisible to the naked eye. For more information on why the kenosis doctrine is wrong (from a Trinitarian perspective) go to <http://kenosis.info>

Another solution for the apparent inequalities mentioned in John 14:28; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:28 is the doctrine of the dual natures of Christ. In this scheme, anytime Jesus does something miraculous (like knowing someone's thoughts, walking on the water, or raising the dead), it is a

deed of his divine nature. Anytime Jesus manifests distinctly human characteristics (like not knowing who touched him, sleeping, dying on the cross), it is a deed of his human nature. However, the issue with this strategy is that Jesus is only one person (he has only one mind), and the natures cannot be separated from him. Otherwise said, there was not a human mind and a divine mind; there was just one mind. So, when it comes to saying that Jesus did not know something (Matthew 24.36), it cannot be argued that only in his humanity he did not know, but in his divinity he did know. This splits the ego of Jesus into two (this is explicitly denied by later Trinitarian creeds). We are left with a conundrum: did Jesus know when he was coming back or not? He cannot both know and not know at the same time (that would be a contradiction). More on this can be found in the article "Is Jesus Both God and Man" (www.kingdomready.org/topics/god.php). Thus, it is clear that Jesus is not equal to the Father in knowledge.

We conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity requires equality between all members. If one is able to show from the Bible that any of the three is not equal (i.e. greater or less than) the others, then the Trinity would be defined as unscriptural. This is precisely what occurs when Jesus explicitly states, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). The Trinity and John 14.28 cannot coexist as truth in the same world. One of the two must be in error. The Trinity requires equality between Father and Son, whereas the Bible plainly states an inequality. The two methods of coping with this (1) that Christ emptied himself when he became man, and (2) that this is only talking about Jesus' humanity, not his divinity have been considered and refuted. If I have missed something here, please email me so that I can be more informed about this matter. Next, we will examine the claim that the Father and Son are coeternal.