

Submission — I. Jesus and submission

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It will be news to no one here this morning that the topic I am taking on in these two sessions is a controversial one. And it is controversial, not just as an academic debate, but because there has been real and substantial harm caused by some who have used the doctrines of headship and submission to justify oppression, abuse and even violence. Of course there have been others who have acted in exactly the same ways without any knowledge at all of these biblical doctrines, but that does not excuse and must not be used to cover the fact that some people—and in this instance it is by definition always men—have appealed to the biblical doctrine of submission as a license for behaviour that everyone of us would want to condemn. And some women have been told, or have convinced themselves, that this doctrine requires them simply to endure it.

Even if she had done nothing else, Rosie Batty's tenure as Australian of the Year in 2015 did us all a great service by bringing the issue of domestic violence from the shadows and into the bright light of day. Our marriages and families, our homes, should be the context in which love and care and generosity flourish; safe-havens where there is no need to be afraid or to prove yourself or hide. Human sinfulness works out its consequences in these contexts too, of course. None of our marriages or families or homes are perfect or ideal. That's because none of us are perfect or ideal. But there is never, ever, any excuse for oppression, abuse or violence. There is never, ever, any excuse for domination, for bullying, for mental, emotional or physical abuse. And whenever people have tried to provide one by appealing to the word of God, they not only misuse the word of God, but they dishonour the God whose word it is.

However, the reality of such an appeal has led some to draw a causal connection between the biblical doctrines of headship and submission and the practice of domestic violence. A series of columns in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in February and March last year attempted to do just that. In them can be found the quote, 'If submission is the theory, then battering is the practice'.¹ It would be very easy to dismiss this as caricature in the service of a wider agenda. But what about when it is presented in a more thoughtful, nuanced form? The editorial summary of an article posted on ABC's *The Drum* webpage by Johanna Harris Tyler in March last year suggested '[t]he distorted biblical doctrine of female submission in marriage won't always lead to domestic abuse, but it does provide the breeding ground'.² The abuse of a doctrine or principle does not negate the truthfulness of that doctrine or principle, of course; but should we be concerned that human sinfulness is more likely than not to abuse this principle in this way? Do we need to be more active in seeking to protect people from such abuse, not least by taking the time to explain carefully what headship and submission do and do not mean?

That is, I take it, at least part of the reason why we are addressing this issue this morning. What I consider the very best of the articles published in the *Herald* last year on this topic insisted 'We must counter every attempt to twist the Bible's teaching on marriage to condone physical, spiritual and emotional abuse, and ensure women know there is no biblical injunction to stay with an abusive husband'.³ I'm sure that's right, and part of doing that is a day like this, exploring the Bible's teaching in a sustained way together. But I want to begin by laying bare my assumptions, assumptions I share with most of you I'm sure. That's

¹ J. Baird, 'Submission is a fraught mixed message for the church', *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 February 2015 online at <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/submission-is-a-fraught-mixed-message-for-the-church-20150212-13d9nw.html> (accessed 24/12/15); and 'Doctrine of headship a distortion of the gospel message of mutual love and respect', *Sydney Morning Herald* 27 February 2015 online at <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/doctrine-of-headship-a-distortion-of-the-gospel-message-of-mutual-love-and-respect-20150226-13q2xc.html> (accessed 24/12/15). The quote from Rev Dr Margaret Mayman of Pitt Street Uniting Church found in 'Submission is a fraught doctrine'.

² J. H. Tyler, 'Submission to your husband is a dangerous doctrine', online at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-09/harris-submission-to-your-husband-is-a-dangerous-doctrine/6290304> (accessed 23/12/15).

³ S. Colyer, "'Submission' to my husband allows us both to flourish in our marriage', *Sydney Morning Herald* 8 March 2015 online at <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/submission-to-my-husband-allows-us-both-to-flourish-in-our-marriage-20150308-13y83i.html> (accessed 23/12/15).

because the assumptions we bring to a discussion like this are very significant. None of us comes with a blank slate, with no thoughts or preconceptions about the Bible, or human relationships, or terms such as ‘headship’, ‘submission’, ‘equality’, ‘order’ and the rest. And what we bring to this discussion inevitably shapes what we see in the Bible and how we respond to it. So let me just outline briefly three methodological assumptions.

1. Three Methodological Assumptions

1. *The Bible — the whole Bible — is the word of the living God.* While the human authors of each biblical book were consciously, actively and creatively involved in their production, while they brought their own personalities and backgrounds and contexts to bear on the things they were writing, the work of God’s Spirit in and through them ensured that the words they wrote were in the end the words God wanted written for us. It is not just the words of Jesus in the Gospels that are God-breathed, but the words of Paul and Peter and John and the writers of the Old Testament as well.

This has a number of consequences, two of which are most important for our discussion. The first is that we come to the Bible with a fundamental confidence in its coherence. The one living God stands behind it all and he is not self-contradictory. It is not beyond his wit and power to superintend the writing of the whole Bible in such a way that, despite the period of time over which it was written, and the variety of authors and circumstances in which each part was written, when read attentively the Bible is not self-contradictory or incoherent. This is, of course, a long-standing Christian conviction. Article 20 of the 39 Articles of Religion, the confessional statement of Elizabethan Anglicanism, declares ‘... it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God’s Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another’.

The second consequence is that, precisely because the Bible is the word of the living God, it carries the authority of God. The teaching of the Bible has final

authority in all matters of faith and life. That doesn't mean there are no other authorities or no other voices worth listening to. It would be just as arrogant to ignore the voices of those who have read the Scriptures before or alongside us, as it would be to listen solely to those voices and not allow them to be corrected by what the words of Scripture actually do say. But the *final* authority in discussions such as this, the authority that cannot be trumped by experience or reason or tradition, belongs to the teaching of the Bible precisely because it is the word of the living God. That's my first methodological assumption: the Bible — the whole Bible — is the word of the living God. And it is one, as I've said, I am sure I share with most people in this room.

The second methodological assumption is this:

2. *The God who has given us this word is good and seeks our welfare.* The goodness or benevolence of God is the consistent testimony of Scripture. David wrote in Psalm 34, 'Oh taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him' (Ps 34.8). This testimony finds its focus, of course, in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in particular his atoning death. 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (Jn 3.16). '... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rms 5.8). 'In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1 Jn 4.10).

The cross, together with the resurrection and ascension which follow it, shows us the goodness of God and his benevolence towards us. His love for the world is not overturned by human sinfulness and all it has brought into the world. His goodness is not somehow derailed by our sin or by the convulsions of life and the world as we have made it to be. His goodness will prevail. His right and good and life-enhancing purpose will triumph. It is in this context that his wrath and promise of judgment are properly placed and seen as facets of his goodness. He will bring about 'a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet 3.13), where every tear will be wiped away (Rev 21.4) and where all things

are properly ordered to his Christ (Eph 1.10; Phil 2.10–11). And on that day his people will praise not only his glory and power, but also his wisdom and goodness.

The obvious corollary of all this is that the word which God gives us is itself part of his goodness towards us. This too is the consistent testimony of Scripture. Moses reminded the children of Israel that the words he had given them were ‘no empty word for you, but your very life’ (Deut 32.47). The writer of the Book of Proverbs included this saying, ‘Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord’ (Prov 16.20). The Psalms are full of testimony to the goodness of God’s word because it comes from God: ‘The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes ...’ (Ps 19.7–8). ‘I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life’ (Ps 119.93). ‘Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’ (Ps 119.105). And when we arrive in the New Testament, the apostle Paul wrote of how ‘whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope’ (Rms 15.4). And most famously of all: ‘All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness ...’ (2 Tim 3.16). God is good and he is committed to our good, and so we should expect his word to be good and life-giving and nourishing, however much it might clash with the values of any particular time and culture. Confidence in God and confidence in the goodness of what God has to say in the Bible are inextricably linked. I don’t come to the Bible suspicious that God wants to make my life miserable but instead I come expecting to hear of Christ and how life is best and most fruitfully lived now in response to his mercy. Once again I expect most of us have this in common.

My third methodological assumption is perhaps a little more controversial, at least in some quarters:

3. Differences in understanding what the Bible is teaching are not the result of a defect in the Bible (a lack of clarity, the cultural imprisonment of the Bible writers, etc.) nor the secondary character of the topic under consideration, but stem from issues to do with us as readers. It is sometimes suggested that the very existence of contrasting and competing interpretations is evidence that the Bible is not clear or that it is ambiguous or that the issue we are discussing is not a 'first order issue'. Since this is the case, we can make up our own mind and all views are valid. But that is not how the later Bible writers treated the earlier Bible writers. It is not how the Lord Jesus treated the Old Testament. He treated the Old Testament as saying something definite, having a meaning that was accessible and that ought to settle the debates in a single direction. His appeal to Scripture against the Satan in the wilderness or the Pharisees and scribes in Jerusalem, his insistent question 'Have you not read?', make no sense otherwise.

But why then is there disagreement? There are a variety of reasons. Sometimes we are unwittingly forcing another agenda upon the Bible, asking questions it was never designed to answer. Sometimes we fill biblical silences with our own ideas or historical reconstructions which demand a particular understanding of the text. Sometimes our prior convictions predispose us to overlook some of what is said or reimagine what is said. Sometimes the pressure of the context in which we read is so strong it blinds us to important aspects of what is being read. It is a wonderfully enriching and enlightening experience to read the Bible in the company of those from another culture or another time who are, like us, seeking to faithfully understand and believe and obey it. They can sometimes see what we do not, and perhaps cannot see. It's one of the reasons why there is great truth in the observation that attentive reading happens *in fellowship* not *in isolation*. And yet the goal is not consensus but truth. And since none of us is infallible, and that is not changed when there are many of us, there are times when old views or new ones need to be challenged as we carefully weigh what is said in a particular passage in its context and in the wider context of the Bible as a whole.

In a sense, differences of opinion are what we ought to expect, even differences in what we are convinced the Bible is saying. We ought not to see this as failure. It

is rather a stimulus to think hard and not just to accept what everyone around us thinks, an opportunity to look again and to read more attentively. And I want to ask, if this really is the word of God and not just the words of men, and if the God who has given it to us wants us to flourish even in the midst of a fallen and broken world, what is the good word that he is saying to us? Just how is this word ‘a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’ without which I might stumble in the darkness? How does this teaching equip me for ‘every good work’ (2 Tim 3.17)?

So with that huge amount of throat-clearing, I want to turn to the subject of submission. And I want to do it, not through a step by step biblical theology of the concept — though that would be a perfectly appropriate way to do this — but by turning our attention to the centre of the Bible, to Jesus Christ, to what submission means in *his* case, and then, in the second session, to look at the Christian and submission. If the Christian life is really all about being conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rms 8.29), if God’s will for the Christian congregation is that we together should ‘reach the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to become mature, attaining to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ (Eph 4.13), then this is not a bad place to start: Jesus and submission.

2. The earthly submission of Jesus

Throughout the Gospels two parallel truths about Jesus are emphasised: his unique Lordship and his faithfulness to the commission he received from God. His Lordship is exercised over nature, over disease, over the demonic world and over death itself. He calms the storm; he heals the lepers, the blind and the lame, and the woman with the flow of blood; he frees those possessed by demons, silencing the demons and consigning them to oblivion; and he raises the widow of Nain’s son, Jairus’ daughter, and, of course, Lazarus. Nothing is able to stand against him. His sovereign control is even a feature of the accounts of his arrest, interrogation, trial and crucifixion. He is not defeated or overcome. He gives himself over and stands with a commanding silence before the Chief Priest, Herod and Pilate. As he himself put it, ‘I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one

takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (Jn 10.17–18). When his disciples put up a token resistance in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus rebuked them: 'Put your sword back in its place ... Do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?' (Mtt 26.52–54).

The Lordship of Jesus testifies to many things — his identity as God's Christ, his oneness with the Father, and much more — and in each instance it demonstrates his uniqueness. He is the Messiah, the anointed One, whose role in God's great eternal purpose is unique to him. He is the one in whom all the promises of God are 'yes' (2 Cor 1.20). His relationship with the Father is something he invites us all to share, to be able to call on God as 'Abba, Father' just as he did (Rms 8.15), but this relationship is ours by adoption and grace, not by nature and right as it is in his case. He is unique. Now that might give us a reason to be a little wary about too direct a line between the behaviour and actions of Jesus and our own. For all the genuine intimacy with Jesus and his Father made possible by the ministry of the Spirit, he remains Lord in a way that we do not. On the last day all will fall before *Jesus Christ* and acknowledge *him* to be Lord, not you or me. When we point to Jesus as our example, as we surely can, we need to keep that in mind.

The other parallel strand is Jesus' consistent faithfulness to the commission he has received from his Father. He stands in stark contrast to Adam (Rms 5.12–21), who was created for fellowship with his Maker but failed dismally when faced with the enticing lie of the evil one in the Garden. He stands in stark contrast to the nation of Israel, who were redeemed by God from Egypt and given a mission in the world (Exodus 19.4–6) but displayed throughout their history a propensity towards rebellion and defection and idolatry. Jesus, when faced with the lies of the Satan in the wilderness, quoted Deuteronomy 6 — 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Mtt 4.3–4).

It is shown in the way Jesus himself made use of the little word 'must' or 'it is necessary' (*δεῖ*) in connection with his ministry. As early as Luke 2, when still only

12 years old, Jesus told his mother ‘I must be in my Father’s house’, referring to the Temple (Lk 2.49). He would later speak about his priority of preaching the gospel in the same terms: ‘I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent’ (Lk 4.43). His ministry involved reaching the lost sheep of the house of Israel — he told Zaccheus ‘I must stay at your house today’ (Lk 19.5) — as well as a wider ministry to gather sheep ‘who are not of this sheepfold’ (Jn 10.16). But the language of necessity in Jesus’ ministry had a particular focus on his journey to Jerusalem (Lk 13.22) and all that would happen there. Jesus spoke in these terms from the time of Peter’s confession of him as the Christ: ‘From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life’ (Mtt 16.21).

There is a certain necessity to these things. He is constrained by them. But why ‘must’ these things be so if he is Lord? At one level the answer is given by Jesus himself in the passages I’ve already quoted. This necessity had to do with the fulfilment of what had been prophesied about him in the Old Testament. The testimony of the Old Testament to Jesus is clear in the way he fulfilled the prophetic words about the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, and the new covenant with its central blessing as the forgiveness of sins. Precisely because he was the one they spoke about, he had to be about these things and he had to die — in Jerusalem, in this way — in order to effect the salvation of his people. But the prophets themselves were servants and not masters. They spoke the words they were given — ‘Thus says the Lord’ — and made clear God’s agenda and his perspective. So the explanation for the necessity of these things lies even deeper in the eternal purpose of God and the relation of the Father and the Son.

A unique window into the deeper necessity to which Jesus submits himself is given by his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to his arrest. After encouraging his disciples to ‘pray that you will not fall into temptation’ (Lk 22.40), Jesus withdrew from them and prayed himself. ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done’ (Lk 22.42). You may be aware

that this prayer raised very significant questions for Christians in the early centuries after the resurrection. How does Jesus' will relate to the will of God, especially since he is God incarnate? The answer they came up with, thanks to men like Maximus the Confessor in the early seventh century, was that in the very person of Jesus we find the perfect relation of the divine will and a human will. He is fully God and fully man and so in the personal union of the divine and human natures we find a human will perfectly submitted to his divine will. There is no conflict, no deliberation. His human will is never pitted against his divine will or vice versa. He feels the genuine horror of his approaching death and all associated with it — that is part of his genuine humanity — but it is always a matter of 'not my will but yours be done'.

What happens in the Garden of Gethsemane proves to be a particularly focussed example of what had been going on throughout Jesus' life. In John's eyewitness account of Jesus' ministry we hear Jesus repeatedly insist, 'I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me' (Jn 6.58). 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me' (Jn 7.16). The consistent pattern of Jesus' life was one of obedience and the alignment of his will with the will and eternal purpose of God. He did not overturn the Law of God but fulfilled it. He did not take the easy way out when tempted in the wilderness and he did not acquiesce to the distorted theology and practice of the Pharisees and others in order to avoid conflict and the suffering of the cross. His perfect obedience and the conditions in which it was exercised are critical to his ministry now as our great High Priest (Heb 2.14–18; 4.14–16). He knows what it is to obey under pressure. He knows what it is to live in perfect submission to the will of God when that puts you on a collision course with those who exercise power in this world. His perfect obedience is also the critical context of his perfect sacrifice as the blameless and righteous one who gives himself in the place of those who are blameworthy and unrighteousness (1 Pet 3.18). What theologians have traditionally spoken of as Christ's active obedience — his perfect fulfilment of the will of God throughout his life — and his passive obedience — his perfect sacrifice of himself for the sins of the whole world in accordance with that same will — are

both grounded in the identity of Jesus as the incarnate Son and ultimately in the eternal relationship of the Son and the Father. This is indicated by Jesus' repeated reference to being 'sent' (Mtt 15.24; 21.36; Lk 4.18, 43; Jn 3.16, 34) and to 'the one who sent me' (Mtt 10.40; Jn 4.34; 5.23, 24, 30, 37; 6.38, 44, 57; 7:16 etc.).

Which takes us to one of the most controversial aspects of the academic debate about Jesus and submission, namely, to what extent is the undeniable and even necessary submission of Jesus to the will of his heavenly Father during his earthly life and ministry merely a feature of his incarnate life, part of his condescension for our benefit? Or are we to understand that this is part of the eternal relationship of the Father and the Son? Is the submission of the Son purely economic — a feature of the economy of creation and redemption, and so only for a time — or is it eternal?

2. The eternal submission of the Son

The chief problem with any suggestion of an eternal relation of obedience or submission of the Son to the Father is that it seems to come dangerously close to the archetypal Christian heresy, the heresy of Arianism. In the early fourth century, Arius, a clergyman in Alexandria, suggested that Jesus is not God in the same way the Father is: the first and preeminent creature accorded a divine status perhaps, given the honorific title 'Son of God' perhaps, but not of the same substance of the Father, not eternal and not equal. In his very being he is subordinated to the Father. It was one of the most significant theological controversies of the early church and it was settled by the creed of Nicaea and the long advocacy of its key term 'of one substance' (*ὁμοούσιος*) by the great theologian Athanasius of Alexandria. It was Athanasius who insisted that 'the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father, except His being said to be Father'.⁴ Any suggestion that there is even the slightest inequality between the Father and the Son falls foul of the Creed of Nicaea and so is heretical. After all, did not Paul write that 'because he was in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage'

⁴ Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos*, III.xxiii(4) [NPNF2, IV.395]

(Phil 2.6)? The affirmation at the very heart of this statement is that the Son has from all eternity been equal with the Father. Did not Jesus himself repeatedly teach 'I and the Father are one' (Jn 10.30) and 'I am in the Father and the Father in me' (Jn 10.38; 14:10)? To separate out some kind of hierarchy of being, to hold an ontological subordination of the Son to the Father, is excluded by Jesus' own words. In his High Priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus spoke of a glory he shared with his Father 'before the world began' (Jn 17.5).

We do not have the time this morning to go back over that debate and its resolution in any detail, nor to spend any time on the modern version of it, in which the Doctrine Commission of the Diocese of Sydney has played a significant role. I do remember, though, sitting under a palm tree in Egypt trying to explain to a bishop why the conclusions arrived at in that report were not in fact Arian as some had mischievously claimed. There has been quite a deal of misrepresentation and caricature in the modern debate, just as there was in the earlier one. The debate itself shows no sign of easing off any time soon, with books of varying quality being published at a steady rate over the past few years. The obvious implications of the view that perfect equality can co-exist with permanently different roles — implications for other debates over the ministry of women, for instance — have ensured continued passionate interest in the subject. However, it is important to consider very briefly three aspects of the eternal relation between the Father and the Son, three aspects which arise from the Bible's own witness to the eternal life of God. And that's because they help us as we seek to understand where the earthly obedience of Jesus is ultimately anchored.

We've already hinted at the first of these. The relation of the Father and the Son is one of complete unity and absolute equality of being. Athanasius was right. We can say everything of the Son that we say of the Father except call him Father. He is not inferior to the Father. The Father is not superior to Him. The early church recognised it was not enough to say the Son was like the Father. It was not enough to say he was of a similar substance to the Father. It was not even enough to say he was in the closest possible relationship to the Father, if that is all you

say. He is of the same substance as the Father. He is completely and absolutely equal to the Father. Any talk of the obedience of the Son to the Father must be placed firmly in that context. It cannot be about value or a superior and inferior position. That cannot be because there is not the slightest difference between the Father and the Son at this level of being. The triune God is not made up of parts, some more truly God than others. He is God all the way through and he exists eternally as Father, Son and Spirit.

This is clear at a number of points in the New Testament. We've already touched upon Philippians 2, which is one of the most direct affirmations of this truth. Paul wrote to the Colossians with a similar confession: 'The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him ... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him ...' (Col 1.15–16, 19). John's Gospel begins with the bold declaration 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God' (Jn 1.1). And it is this Word that became flesh and dwelt among us, showing us the glory of the only Son from the Father (v. 14) and precisely because he has been from all eternity 'at the Father's side', he perfectly exegetes God to us (Jn 1.18). It is God who is the sure witness to himself, to echo the words of Hilary of Poitiers.⁵ This testimony can be multiplied in the Gospels, Acts, the letters and the Book of Revelation. For instance, the unity and equality of all three members of the Godhead is shown in the single name into which men and women from all nations are to be baptized: 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Mtt 28.19). The fact that the Holy Spirit can be described in a single verse in Romans 8 as both 'the Spirit of God' and 'the Spirit of Christ' further points in this same direction.

Yet this is not all that the New Testament teaches about the eternal relation of the Father and the Son. This relationship of unequivocally equal persons is also asymmetrical. It has a defined pattern or direction that is not reversible. The

⁵ Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, 1.18 [NPNF2, IX.45]

Father and the Son are not two Fathers or even two brothers who might be interchanged. The Father is always the Father and the Son is always the Son. They are involved together in all God's work of creation and redemption. We are bound to talk both of the simplicity of God *and* the perichoresis of the persons: Jesus said both 'I and the Father are one' (Jn 10.30) and 'I am in the Father and the Father in me' (Jn 10.38). But, to take the most obvious example, the Father sends the Son, the Son never sends the Father. The relation is not reversible. Another way of saying this is to say that this relation of equals is an ordered relation of equals. But this order is not imposed. It is not coerced. Rather, the asymmetric relation of Father and Son flows directly out of the identity of the Father as Father and the Son as Son and out of their unity in the Spirit. Once again it is critical to notice that this is not about value, as if the Father as sender is more valuable than the Son as the one who is sent. There is not the slightest hint of a distinction of value in the New Testament or of one being superior and one being inferior to the other. This notion of value is something imported into this discussion from elsewhere.

The third thing to say about the relation of the Son and the Father in eternity, which shapes the relation of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, and his Father during his earthly ministry, is that it is a relationship characterised very deeply by other-centred love. There is no domination or demand that the Son submit. The Father's love of the Son and concern for his honour and glory is a feature of the New Testament witness. 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Mtt 3.17). 'This is my beloved Son, listen to him' (Mk 9.7). It is the Father's eternal plan to put all things under the feet of the Son (Eph 1.22) and it is the Son's final desire to hand all things to the Father so that God might be all in all (1 Cor 15.28). It is this other-centredness, the Father's love of the Son and the Son's love of the Father that keeps God's passion for his own glory from being a kind of cosmic narcissism. Far from seeking to dominate or manipulate the Son for his own purposes, the Father's unerring desire is that all might recognise the Son as Lord (Phil 2.9–11). Jesus told his disciples just prior to his ascension that 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Mtt 28.18). The relation of the Father and Son is

not characterised by the exercise of power or coerced submission but from all eternity it has been characterised by the free giving of one to the other. And that is the context in which the headship of the Father and the submission of the Son is to be found. The love does not negate the order and the order does not negate the love. Indeed, the other-centred love gives the expression of order a particular shape — it is not about value and it is not about power. Conversely, the order is itself an expression of love — the loving headship of the Father who subjects all things to the Son and the loving, humble obedience of the Son who always does the Father's will.

With these three features of the eternal relation of the Father and the Son in mind — complete unity and absolute equality of being, an asymmetry which means the relations are not reversible, and the love which characterises this relation from all eternity — the difference should be obvious between the submission we have been talking about and the ancient heresy of Arianism. When the New Testament speaks of the Son's decision in eternity to empty himself by taking the form of a servant and 'being obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross' (Phil 2.5–8), and when Jesus speaks of being 'sent' and of speaking the words given to him by his Father (Jn 17.8) and doing the works directed by his Father (Jn 14.31), all of this is an expression of the loving common mind of the Father and the Son. It is an expression of the relation that exists from eternity and which is on display at the end as well. But it does not suggest superiority and inferiority. It does not suggest a hierarchy of being in the triune life of God.

3. Two critical conclusions

The submission of the Lord Jesus to the will of his Father during his earthly life is anchored in the eternal relation of ordered other-centred love between the entirely and unequivocally equal members of the Trinity. That eternal order, involving both headship and submission, is critical to what it means for him to be the Son and for the Father to be the Father. If it were not, then we would need to raise questions about whether God as he really is has been revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus. Would he really have exegeted God for us, as the

opening chapter of John's Gospel teaches? Is Jesus' obedience and his willingness to submit himself to the will of his Father simply an act for our benefit or does it present the life of God to us in such a way that challenges our preconceptions and has massive consequences for how we live as those who are being conformed to his image? What we see in Jesus' life is the Lord as a servant, the one by whom and for whom all things were made laying down his life for creatures out of love.

It is important then to see the two critical and powerfully counter-cultural conclusions that arise from all of this, conclusions that we'll need to take into our discussion of the Christian and submission in the next session. Given all that we have seen the Bible testifies about the relation of Jesus and his Father, we must insist, firstly, that the relationship of headship and submission as Jesus exemplifies it is not at all about value. It does not imply that Jesus is somehow inferior because he submits to the will of the Father. That would be the ancient Arian heresy. The testimony of Scripture is clear that from eternity the Son shares a complete equality of being with the Father. His submission is *the appropriate filial expression of other-centred love*. He is not demeaned by this submission. And what we'd see if we had time to explore it, is that the Father's 'headship' is *the appropriate paternal expression of other-centred love*, not detracting from the integrity or value of the Son's life and love but honouring it and protecting it and rejoicing in it: 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'.

The other conclusion is quite simply that it's not about power either. It is not about domination or the tyranny of the Father or coercion or abuse. The Son is not forced against his will to submit, nor is he manipulated in some way or other to bring about this submission. At every point in his life, even as he takes upon himself the sin of the world and bears the curse and exhausts the punishment we all deserve, he remains 'the beloved Son'. The submission of the Son provides the opportunity for him to be honoured and for his glory, the genuine glory of the God who loves to such an extent, to be seen by those who look with the eyes of faith. And one day even those who refuse to look will not be able to avoid seeing it.

A submission of one entirely equal to the one to whom he submits; a submission that is not at all about value, superiority or inferiority, and not all about power or domination or control — that's what we see in Jesus. And what he has to show us in this is so subversive of the way we operate in our sinfulness that we need to think again about submission in the life of the Christian. But that's the next session.