Jesus – One with the Father

1. Introduction

a. As we saw when we began to look at John's gospel it has a very different focus to the synoptic gospels. Whereas the synoptic gospels focus on the coming of the Kingdom, in John's gospel Jesus' teaching focuses much more on his own identity and his unique relationship with the Father. Jesus is the eternal Son who has come to reveal the Father. Salvation comes by knowing the Father through the Son.

b. This theme is threaded all through the gospel and it is central to our passage today. In this passage Jesus heals on the Sabbath and when questioned calls God his father. This leads to the Jews persecuting him because he had broken one of their religious laws and has called God his father. To them this was both law breaking and blasphemy!

John 5:15-18 *The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.* ***16*** *And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.* ***17*** *But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."* ***18*** *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

c. Jesus then goes on to justify what he has done and by explaining his relationship with the Father enables us to see more of the nature of the unity of the Trinity.

John 5:19-24 ***19*** *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.* ***20*** *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.* ***21*** *For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.* ***22*** *The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son,* ***23*** *that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.* ***24*** *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life.*

2. The Trinity

a. Many teachers and theologians down through history have tried to explain the trinity but it is impossible to explain this spiritual truth in a logical way. The nature of "one God in three persons" goes beyond our human understanding because it is so beyond our relational experiences.

b. Let's try to imagine how close the Trinity is: There's no time or space between or among them. They move in perfect accord in thought, will, work, and purpose. They think and act in perfect harmony without separation. We cannot describe this union in concrete terms. The mystery of the Trinity proves impossible for the finite human mind to fully fathom. Christians worship the Three Persons as One God and the One God as Three Persons.

c. Speculating about the Oneness of God twists human reason into knots. We apply logic and attempt to divide the indivisible. We attempt to arrange the three persons within the Godhead, assigning greater importance to the role or work of one person

over the other. We want to categorise and to manage the Trinity according to human schemes. However, when we do so, we deny the nature of God as revealed in Scripture and venture far from the truth. The harmony in which the Three Persons exists cannot be grasped in human terms.

d. However, throughout John's gospel Jesus frequently refers to his relationship with the Father and in our passage today he reveals much about that relationship and how the triune unity functions.

3. The Father and the Son

a. A dominant theme in this passage is the way Jesus relates to God the Father. Verse 16 says that the Jews were persecuting Jesus because he had healed this man on the Sabbath. So Jesus responds with an explanation in verse 17 which leads the Jews to believe he was making himself equal with God.

b. They could see and hear the way he spoke about God as his Father and in what he said and the way he said it they saw that this man was really treating himself as equal with God. And so Jesus begins to unpack its implications. He says that

   i the Son doesn't—indeed the Son can't—go his own way but stays in perfect step with the Father;

   ii the Father doesn't go his own way but acts in perfect step with the Son.

   iii Then he gives two implications of this for us.

c. First, the Son only does what the Father does. They act in perfect synchronisation.

John 5:19–20 *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.* ***20*** *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.*

d. The most important statement in those verses is the second half of verse 19: *"Whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."* This is different from saying: Jesus chooses some things to do that he sees the Father doing and so only does what the Father is doing. It says, *"Whatever the Father does,"* Jesus does. When the Father acts, Jesus acts. This is the sort of thing the Jews heard Jesus say. And they concluded rightly: You talk like you're equal with him. You talk as if for him to act is for you to act—as if there is some kind of essential connection or union.

e. Second, in verse 22 it seems to go the other direction, that the Father acts in step with the Son.

John 5:22 *The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son,*

   i Now when you read this, you can't throw away everything you just read in verse 19 as though it suddenly stopped being true. Verse 19 says, *"The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing."* So when verse 22 says, *"The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,"* it can't mean the Son doesn't see the Father judging but goes ahead and judges anyway. And John 3:36 says clearly that if you don't believe in Jesus, *"the wrath of God remains on him."* That is, God does judge.

ii What we see here is that the Father doesn't go off on his own, without any reference to the Son, and judge the world. He judges no one like that. Another thing verse 22 seems to mean is that the Son, not the Father, is the frontline, historical decider of who comes into judgment.

iii That's the point of verse 23: *"Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him."* In other words, whether God is dishonoured with the effect that judgment falls is determined by the frontline, historical person of Jesus. If people honour him for who he really is, then God the Father is honoured for who he really is. So in that sense, all judgment is given to the Son. What people make of Jesus decides their final judgment. But that's because what they make of him is what they make of God.

iv So the Father is not the frontline, historical decider of judgment, but is in perfect step with the Son's judgment because the one who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father.

4. Two implications

a. The fact that the Son stays in perfect step with the Father, and the Father acts in perfect step with the Son has two implications for us. In the twenty-first century world of teeming pluralism, with religions and worldviews and cultures and lifestyles competing for our allegiance, verse 23 lands like a bombshell: *"Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him."*

b. In other words, if you want to know if someone in another religion, or no religion, honours God (has a true worshipful relationship with God), the test that you use to know this is: Do they honour Jesus for who he really is—as the divine Son of God, the Messiah, the crucified and risen Saviour of the world, the Lord of the universe and Judge of all human beings? If they don't, then they don't honour God. That's the first implication.

c. The second is in verse 24: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."* If we hear the message of Jesus in the Gospel of John taken in its totality—not just some distorted part of it—and, if through that message and that person, we come to trust God as the one who sent him for our salvation, two amazing things happen.

i We not only will have eternal life, but we already have it, and

ii we not only will not come into the judgment of condemnation, but have already passed through judgment and are safe on the other side.

d. Jesus has become that judgment for us. When we are united to him by faith, his death becomes our death, and his crucifixion our crucifixion, and his curse on the cross our curse on the cross, and his resurrection our resurrection. We have already "passed from death to life"! This is glorious news for all believers and should enable us to live courageous and victorious lives in the sure hope of our eternal salvation.

5. The image of the invisible God

a. The truth presented in John 5:19 is that Jesus perfectly reveals God to us. Jesus says that He only does what He sees the Father doing. In all of the earthly ministry of

Jesus, Jesus did nothing that God was not already doing, and which God would not do. Jesus imitates God and only acts in the manner that God would act.

b. The Gospel of John, more than any other New Testament book, seeks to show that Jesus was God incarnate, and therefore, can be trusted when He invites people to believe in Him for eternal life (John 3:16; John 5:24; John 6:47). Throughout the Gospel of John, we see Jesus say over and over again that if people want to know what God is like, all they have to do is look at Him. Jesus reveals God to this world.

c. It follows similarly, that God does not do anything that Jesus would not do. If Jesus only does what He sees the Father doing, then Jesus always does what the Father is doing. Therefore, whatever the Father does, Jesus also does. And if Jesus does not do something, that is because the Father does not do it either.

d. So when Jesus refuses to burn down a city because they rejected Him and His message (Luke 9:54-55), this means God would not do such a thing either. When Jesus refuses to condemn sinners, but forgives them instead (Matt 9:5-6; Luke 7:48; 23:34), this reveals that God behaves similarly toward sinners. He also does not condemn, but freely forgives.

e. If we want to know how God might behave toward a particular person, it is always helpful to think of Jesus. Consider how Jesus might act in that situation or how Jesus might respond to that person. Once this is understood, we now also know what God thinks or how God would act. Jesus reveals God to us, showing us how God behaves and acts. If you cannot imagine Jesus doing or saying something, then God would not do it or say it either. Jesus does what he sees his father doing – we do what we see Jesus doing (or not!)

John 14:9 *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?*

f. The disciples, just like many followers of Jesus, wanted to know God on a more intimate level. Yet the disciples, just like many followers of Jesus, did not realise that Jesus was fully revealing to them what God was like. So in these final hours with Jesus before He went to His death, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them clearly what God was like, and even show God to them. They wanted to see the glory of God, just as Moses did in Exodus 33:18

g. The disciples had a view of God from their Hebrew scriptures that seemed different to what they had seen in Jesus. However, Jesus makes it clear that they need to view their Hebrew scriptures through the lens of the man they have been living with for the last three years.

h. It is only in coming into relationship with Jesus and gazing on him that we can see and relate to the Father and begin to encounter the nature of the Godhead. Jesus is the image of the invisible God showing us what it means to live in full agreement with our Father.

6. Hierarchy or Unity?

a. So are the persons of the Godhead in unity or is there a hierarchy? Yes! Probably the better word to use than hierarchy is subordination. It may sound strange to speak of subordination within the Trinity. After all, Jesus and the Father are "one"

John 10:30 *I and the Father are one*

b. Subordination makes us think of a lower rank or a subservient position. To understand how there can be subordination in the Trinity, it is important to understand that there are different types of subordination. The biblical or orthodox view of the triune nature of God acknowledges a relational subordination in the Trinity but denies the heretical view of an ontological (of their nature or being) subordination.

c. What does this mean? Simply that all three Persons of the Godhead are equal in nature. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit all have the same divine nature and divine attributes. Contrary to the teaching of many cults, there is no ontological subordination (no difference in the nature of the three Persons of the Godhead). This means that the Trinity is not comprised of greater and lesser gods; rather, there is one God existing eternally in three co-equal Persons.

d. What the Bible does teach is a relational subordination within the Trinity. The three Persons of the triune Godhead voluntarily submit to each other respecting the roles they perform in creation and salvation. So, the Father sent the Son into the world.

1 John 4:10 *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and <u>sent his Son</u> to be the propitiation for our sins.*

e. These roles are never reversed in Scripture: the Son never sends the Father. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is sent by Jesus and "proceeds from the Father" to testify of Christ

John 14:26 *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you*

John 15:26 *"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*

f. And Jesus perfectly submitted His will to the Father's

Luke 22:42 *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."*

Hebrews 10:7 *'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"*

g. Relational subordination is simply a term to describe the relationship that exists among God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Essentially, relational subordination within the Trinity refers to what God does while ontological subordination refers to who God is.

   Biblically, all three Persons of the Trinity have the same essence, nature, and glory, but each One has different roles or activities when it comes to how God relates to the world. For example, our salvation is based on

   i the Father's power and love (John 3:16; 10:29),

   ii the Son's death and resurrection (1 John 2:2; Ephesians 2:6),

   iii and the Spirit's regeneration and seal (Ephesians 4:30; Titus 3:5).

h. The different tasks that we see the Father, Son, and Spirit perform are the result of the eternal relationship that exists among the Persons of the Trinity.

i. The issue of subordination within the Trinity is nuanced, and the distinction between ontological and relational subordination is fine indeed. Theologians within Christian orthodoxy continue to debate the limits of subordination and its relation to the Incarnation of Christ. Such discussions are helpful as we study the Scriptures and think through the truth about the nature of God.

7. Conclusion

a. Jesus had much more to say about the relationship between the trinity and also our relationship to each person of the Godhead. Particularly in John 14-16. We will look at this as we carry on through the gospel.

b. From what we have considered today we need to realise that the Father's desire for us to come into a relationship with the Godhead resulted in Him sending his only Son – the full expression of the nature of the Godhead in human form. It was their desire that we would see the true nature of God as we look upon Jesus and in believing that he was in very nature God come into the joy and hope of our eternal life.

John 5:24 *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life.*