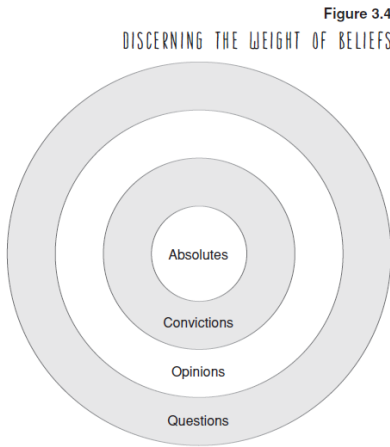


How the Trinity Relates to the Roles of Husbands and Wives

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1. Introduction

1.1. How important is this topic?



1.2. What's the controversy?

- immanent (or ontological) Trinity: essence
- economic Trinity: function
- complementarianism
- egalitarianism

2. Does the Son submit to the Father eternally?²

2.1. Reasons That the Son Submits to the Father Eternally

2.1.1. The Son always submits to the Father.

- The Son submitted to the Father *before creation* (Rom 8:29–30; Eph 1:3–6, 8b–12; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9).
- The Son submitted to the Father *in the act of creation* (Heb 1:2; John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6b; Col 1:16).

¹ Erik Thoennes, *Life's Biggest Questions: What the Bible Says about the Things That Matter Most* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 35–37.

² This section relies heavily on Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware's opening statement in a 2.5-hour debate versus Tom McCall and Keith Yandell on the question, "Do relations of authority and submission exist eternally among the Persons of the Godhead?" (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, October 9, 2008). I live-blogged the event for the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding: <http://andynaselli.com/trinity-debate-ware-grudem-vs-mccall-yandell>.

- The Son submitted to the Father *before his earthly ministry* (John 3:16–17; 8:42b; Gal 4:4; 1 John 4:9–10).
- The Son submitted to the Father *during his earthly ministry* (John 8:28–29; 4:34; 5:19, 30; 6:38; 10:18; 12:49; 15: 10; 17:4).
- The Son has been submitting to the Father *since he ascended into heaven*.
 - The Son intercedes to the Father on behalf of his people (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 9:24b).
 - The Son did not pour out the Holy Spirit until the Father gave the Holy Spirit to the Son (Acts 2:33).
 - The Father gave the Son what the Son revealed to John in the book of Revelation (Rev 1:1a).
 - The Son sits at the Father’s right hand (Ps 110:1; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33–34; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; Heb 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22).
- The Son will submit to the Father *after the final judgment* in order to glorify the Father (1 Cor 15:24–28; Phil 2:9–11).

2.1.2. The Father is the head (i.e., authority) of the Son (1 Cor 11:3).

2.1.3. The names “Father” and “Son” are eternal.

2.1.4. Most theologians throughout church history affirm that the Son submits to the Father eternally.

2.1.5. Conclusion: The Father and the Son are eternally (1) equal in essence and (2) distinct in roles.

2.2. Objections to the Son’s Submitting to the Father Eternally

2.2.1. People cannot be both equal in essence and necessarily unequal in function.

2.2.2. The Son’s eternal functional subordination contradicts *homoousios* (i.e., that the Father and Son are of the same substance or essence).

- If the Son submits to the Father *eternally*, then the Son submits to the Father *necessarily* in all possible worlds.
- If the Son submits to the Father *necessarily* in all possible worlds, then the Son submits to the Father *essentially* in all possible worlds.
- Therefore, the Son has a property that the Father does not have (submission) and is of a different essence than the Father rather than *homoousios*.

2.2.3. Head means source, not authority.

3. How does the Son's submitting to the Father eternally apply to the roles of husbands and wives?

3.1. The roles of a husband and wife reflect the eternal roles of the Father and Son with reference to authority and submission.

husband : wife :: the Father : the Son

3.2. A husband is the head of his wife.

- 1 Cor 11:3. But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and *the head of the woman is man*, and the head of Christ is God.
- Eph 5:23. For *the husband is the head of the wife* as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

3.2.1. A husband is responsible to exercise headship by lovingly leading his wife (Eph 5:25–33).

3.2.2. What a Husband's Headship Doesn't Mean

- Headship doesn't mean that a husband is inherently better than his wife (1 Pet 3:7; Gal 3:28).
- Headship doesn't mean that a husband may selfishly treat his wife in a harsh or domineering manner (Col 3:19).
- Headship doesn't mean that a husband may selfishly abdicate his leadership to his wife.

3.3. A wife is responsible to submit to her husband.

- Eph 5:22–24, 33; Col 3:18; Titus 2:4–5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5–6

3.3.1. A wife submits by gladly following her husband.

3.3.2. What a Wife's Submission Doesn't Mean

- Submission doesn't mean that a wife may grudgingly follow her husband.
- Submission doesn't mean that a wife should mindlessly follow her husband.

4. Conclusion

1. The Father is the head of the Son, and the husband is the head of his wife.
2. The Son submits to the Father, and the wife should submit to her husband.

5. Recommended Reading

1. Ware, Bruce A. *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2005. See esp. pp. 46–51, 72–85, 98–99, 137–47.
2. Grudem, Wayne. *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004. See esp. pp. 25–48, 201–11, 552–99. Available online as a [free PDF](#).
3. Cowan, Steven B. "The Metaphysics of Subordination: A Response to Rebecca Merrill Groothuis." *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 14, no. 1 (2009): 43–53.