

Are Jesus Christ and His Father EQUAL?

There are a few schools of thought about the nature of God. All of them represent an attempt, with varying degrees of success or failure, to wrap our puny human minds around the concept of an all-powerful, everlasting God.

They attempt to answer questions such as these: Are Jesus Christ and God the Father two co-equal members of the Godhead? If so, then how did They come to be Father and Son? And if not, then what IS the nature of Their relationship?

Were They ever equal? Are They equal now? Will They be equal in the future?

Let's examine these questions.

Jesus' Earthly Ministry

We know that when Jesus Christ came to earth as a Man, He wasn't equal to His Father. In John 14:28, Jesus said, "You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' **for My Father is greater than I.**"

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus pointed to the Father as His authority for everything He said or did. In John 14:24, He stated, "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and **the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.**"

Again, we find in John 7:16-18,

16 Jesus answered them and said, "**My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.**

17 "If anyone wills to do His will, **he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.**

18 "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but **He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.**

Here's John 4:34: "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.'" And here's John 8:28-29:

28 Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that **I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.**

29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”

Finally, Jesus explained in John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

So it’s abundantly clear that, during His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ was in no way equal to His Father. God the Father sent Jesus into the world, and Jesus dedicated His earthly life to doing the will of His Father and fulfilling the mission He’d been given.

What About Today?

When Jesus was resurrected, He still wasn’t equal to the Father. Here’s John 20:17, when Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene: “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “**I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.**”””

Jesus called the Father “My God,” as He had also done just before He died on the cross. It should further be noted that nowhere in the Bible does the Father call the Son “my God.” Only the Son calls the Father His God.

Now, as Heb. 1:8 shows us, God the Father DOES call His Son “God”: “But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.’” But He didn’t call the Son HIS God. It’s simply a statement that the Son is, in fact, also God, not that He’s equal to the Father.

1 Cor. 8:6 shows that the Father is supreme over all: “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.”

Elsewhere, we continue to see the Father portrayed as superior to the Son. Here’s Col. 3:17: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Again, we read in 2 John 1:3, “Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.”

In the greeting for each of the epistles in the New Testament, God the Father is mentioned first, and Jesus Christ second. Over and over again, we see some variation of this greeting: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:3).

These all point to the Father as being supreme, the Most High God, and Jesus Christ being subordinate to Him. But here’s the clincher: **“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3).**

Clearly, Jesus Christ is not currently equal with the Father! He has indeed “sat down at the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19; Heb. 1:3; 10:12; 12:2). He has taken His place beside the Father on His throne. But the Father is still His head.

How About in the Future?

Will Jesus Christ be equal to God the Father at the culmination of God’s plan of salvation? When He sets up His Kingdom on earth?

Well, He doesn’t take His kingdom of His own will, but receives it from the Father. Here’s Dan. 7:13-14:

13 “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, **One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.**

14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

In Mat. 11:27, Jesus added, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

What about at the final judgment? “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). Let’s continue in vv. 25-30, where Jesus added,

25 “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

26 “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,

27 “and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

28 “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice

29 “and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

30 “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

Christ will be the judge of mankind because the Father gave Him that authority, and He knows how to execute the will of His Father because They are one — of one heart and one mind.

So what about after the final judgment? What about when the plan is fully complete, all that’s physical is gone, and there remains only the new heavens and new earth?

Even then, Jesus Christ will still not be co-equal with His Father. 1 Cor. 15:24-28 couldn’t be any plainer in this regard:

24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

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

26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

27 For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.

28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Forever into the future, we will be subject to Christ, and He will be subject to the Father.

And in the Past?

Okay, so the Scriptures seem pretty plain that from His earthly ministry to the present day and even after the culmination of God’s plan, Jesus Christ will still be subject to God the Father. How about before that?

Let's go back to the very beginning.

We know from John 1:3 that the Word, Jesus Christ, created all things "and without Him nothing was made that was made."

But are we given any more details? Were Jesus Christ and God the Father co-equal at this time?

Here's Col. 1:15-17

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

This passage goes into a little more detail than John 1:3, explicitly stating that Jesus Christ created literally everything in both the physical and spiritual realms. But notice that both this passage and John 1:3 say that all things were created "through Him" and this passage adds that they were also created "for Him."

Now if someone is working through someone else, it stands to reason that the one working through the other is the superior. But this isn't mere speculation. Here's Heb. 1:1-4:

1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,

2 has in these last days **spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;**

3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

God the Father created all things through His Son, the same one whom He has appointed heir of all things. And notice also that both this passage and the one in Colossians describe Jesus Christ as being in the image of God the Father.

So far, none of this sounds like God the Father and Jesus Christ have ever been equals. Quite the opposite.

So how about when Jesus came to earth to die for our sins? If the Father and the Son didn't yet have this relationship, and if They were two co-equal beings, then how was it determined who would die and who would stay in heaven? Did they flip a coin?

We don't have to speculate because the Bible tells us how Jesus Christ came to die for us.

First, let's notice John 10:17-18, where Jesus said, "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

Well, that sounds like Jesus Christ decided the whole thing. He decided that He was going to be the one to die for us. But wait, there's more! I seem to have left off the last sentence of v. 18. Here it is: "This command I have received from My Father."

Jesus Christ had the authority to choose whether to die for us or not because He had such a command from the Father. The Father gave Him the authority to decide that.

What was the purpose of Jesus' sacrifice for us, anyway? Scripture shows that He died to reconcile us to the Father.

Here's Rom. 5:10: "For if when we were enemies **we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

Before continuing, it must be noted that in the New Testament, "God" usually refers to God the Father. It does also sometimes refer to Jesus Christ, so there can be no doubt Jesus is also God, but it usually refers to the Father as we just saw in Rom. 5:10.

Now, let's pick up where we left off. Here's 2 Cor. 5:18-21:

18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,

19 that is, that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you **on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God**.

21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

And Heb. 3:1-6 adds,

1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,

2 **who was faithful to Him who appointed Him**, as Moses also was faithful in all His house.

3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house.

4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.

5 And **Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant**, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward,

6 but **Christ as a Son over His own house**, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

This passage reminds us once again that God the Father created all things through His Son, that the Father appointed His Son as the Savior of mankind, and that the Son is the heir and ruler over everything that the Father has. This is also the essence of Christ's parable of the vinedressers in Mat. 21:33-40.

But Doesn't It Say Jesus Was Equal With God?

Now, having looked at all these Scriptures, we must not overlook this key passage in Phil. 2:5-11:

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In the Greek text, the word translated “robbery” (Strong’s # G725) means “to seize.” It’s a way of saying that Jesus did not grasp or cling to His station in heaven. He willingly came to earth to die for us, just as He willingly submitted to the Father and did die for us. And as we saw earlier, the Father had given Him the authority to refuse if He so desired.

Now “equal” is Strong’s # G2470. It means “equal, similar.” It’s true that Jesus was and is God, therefore being equal with God. But that’s not quite the whole story.

John 5:18 clarifies a little more: “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that **God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.**”

We all know that a son is not literally equal to his father, but he is the same kind as his father and is the image of his father. A human son is also a human being. The Son of God is therefore also God.

One of the best examples of this “equal but not fully equal” concept in the physical realm is found in Gen. 41. We can clearly see Pharaoh as a type of God the Father and Joseph as a type of Jesus Christ.

In Gen. 41:39-44, we read,

39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you.

40 “You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; **only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.**”

41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.”

42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.

43 And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, “Bow the knee!” So he set him over all the land of Egypt.

44 Pharaoh also said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.”

The Egyptians had to obey Joseph the same as they did Pharaoh, and Pharaoh delegated all of his authority to Joseph. But Pharaoh was still supreme. So, it seems, is the case with God the Father and Jesus Christ, according to all that we've read so far.

Now, in this light, let's turn to John 17:5, where we find, as part of Jesus' prayer to the Father, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

What glory was this? Was He co-equal with the Father before the world was? We've already seen that wasn't the case. This verse has to be understood in context with the rest of Jesus' prayer.

Here are the preceding five verses, John 17:1-4:

1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,

2 "as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

4 "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.

Again, we see that the authority Jesus Christ has is the authority given to Him by the Father. Later in Christ's prayer, in John 17:22-25, we find,

22 "**And the glory which You gave Me I have given them**, that they may be one just as We are one:

23 "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

24 "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, **that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.**

25 "O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.

So Jesus Christ will give us — us puny human beings — the glory that He has! Does that mean we'll be co-equal with Him? Or even co-equal with God the Father? Does that mean

we won't be subject to the Father and the Son? Of course not! But we will be in Their image and Their likeness, as we find elsewhere.

A Final Objection

To wrap up, let's look at one last objection to the idea that the Son is subject to the Father. Namely, that the same titles often apply to both the Father and the Son in the Old Testament.

Here's Isa. 9:6-7:

6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of [His] government and peace [There will be] no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

How can the Son of God also be the "Everlasting Father"?

Quite simple. A son can also be a father. Isaac was Abraham's only begotten son, yet he also became a father in his own right.

In 1 Cor. 4:15, Paul wrote, "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

Now, the Father and the Son share many titles, it's true. They are both God, after all. And the Son is in the image of the Father, identical to Him in nearly every way. They don't share EVERY title, though. For instance, the Father is never called the Word of God, never the Angel of YHWH, and never the Son of God.

Conclusion

In summary, it seems abundantly clear from God's own Word that God the Father and the Son of God are not co-equal, have never been, and never will be. Both are God, but Jesus Christ was, is, and always will be subordinate to His Father.

Yet the Father and the Son are also one God for two reasons. Firstly, the Father is supreme, and all authority and power flow from Him. The Son carries out His Father's will. Secondly, the Father and the Son are of one mind and one spirit, and do nothing without each other. The Father's purpose is also His Son's purpose, and the Son's purpose is also His Father's purpose.

And when God's plan is complete and man has joined the God family, the same will be true of us. We will be subordinate to the Father and the Son. Yet we will also be one with Them, of one mind and one spirit. Their purpose will be ours and ours will be Theirs.

Written by Brett Gray