

## Is Submission Immanent?

### *An Analysis Of The Debate Concerning The Eternal Functional Submission Of The Son To The Father*

In 2009, during a seminary course, we were assigned to read Kevin Giles' *Jesus and the Father*.<sup>1</sup> This was the first time I had encountered the view that the submission of the Son to the Father that is so prevalent throughout the Gospels and the Epistles was a function of the incarnation and should not be assumed to be characteristic of the inner, eternal life of the Trinity. A few years later, the theological blogosphere exploded with the publication of numerous blogs and articles, followed by several key books, debating this topic and bringing to light a debate that had been building for decades with able theologians on both sides accusing each other of heresy and denying Nicene orthodoxy, of using the Trinity to justify a social agenda, and even of malicious character.<sup>2</sup>

All orthodox Christians believe that the doctrine of the Trinity entails belief in one God who exists eternally as three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All orthodox Christians affirm that, in the incarnation, the Son was obedient to the Father to accomplish redemption to the glory of God. However, as the plethora of writings regarding the Eternal Functional Submission of the Son, also known as Eternal Relations of Authority and Submission,<sup>3</sup> demonstrates, there is currently much debate as to whether this relationship of authority and submission is a function of the Trinity in the economy of salvation or if it is characteristic of the eternal relations within God Himself. Do authority structures characterize the relations of the Persons of the immanent Trinity?<sup>4</sup>

This discussion is complex and involves questions regarding the nature of God, the proper way to distinguish the Persons, the nature of Nicene terminology, and the grounding for human relationships. This paper will argue that, contrary to EFS, the submission of the Son to the Father is a temporary function of the Trinity in the economy of

salvation and does not, and indeed cannot, be said to characterize the eternal relations of the Persons.

### **An Overview Of Eternal Functional Submission**

EFS holds that the submission of the Son to the Father, and by extension, the Spirit to the Father and the Son, witnessed during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is characteristic of the inner life of the Triune God and has been for all of eternity. Though the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in being, essence, and nature, there exists within the immanent life of God a hierarchy of authority whereby the Son does the will of the Father and the Spirit does the will of the Father and the Son. These relations give the Trinity structure and make distinctions within the Trinity meaningful and real.

As is true of other views, no two theologians state EFS or argue for it the exact same way. However, they all affirm the eternal sonship and deity of Christ, the unity of the Godhead, the ontological equality of the Persons, and the extension of submission beyond the incarnation to the immanent life of the Trinity. Bruce Ware, a leading EFS proponent, has stated,

“An authority-submission structure marks the very nature of the eternal Being of the one who is three. In this authority-submission structure, the three Persons understand the rightful place each has. The Father possesses the place of supreme authority, and the Son is the eternal Son of the eternal Father. As such, the Son submits to the Father just as the Father, as eternal Father of the eternal Son, exercises authority over the Son. And the Spirit submits to both the Father and the Son. This hierarchical structure of authority exists in the eternal Godhead even though it is also eternally true that each Person is fully equal to each other in their commonly possessed essence.”<sup>5</sup>

Phrased another way, Norman Geisler has stated the position as follows,

“All members of the Trinity are equal in essence, but they do not have the same roles. It is a heresy (called subordinationism) to affirm that there is an ontological subordination of one member of the Trinity to another, since they are identical in essence; nonetheless, it is clear that there is a functional subordination; that is, not only

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Giles, *Jesus And The Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent The Doctrine Of The Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Collin Hansen, “Anathemas All Around: Charges Of Heresy Underscore Stakes Of Debate Over Trinity,” *Christianity Today*, October 10, 2008, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/Ct/2008/Octoberweb-Only/141-53.0.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Here after referred to as EFS

<sup>4</sup> Theologians distinguish between the immanent, ontological, inner Trinity and the economic Trinity. The immanent Trinity refers to God as He is in Himself while the economic Trinity refers to how God has chosen to reveal Himself in history. This concept will be developed in greater detail later.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, And Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, And Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

does each member have a different function or role, but some functions are also subordinate to others.... It is not just temporal and economical; it is essential and eternal. For example, the Son is an eternal Son; He always was related to God the Father as a Son and always will be. His submission to the Father was not just for time but will be for all eternity.”<sup>6</sup>

Bruce Ware, Wayne Grudem, Robert Letham, Michael Ovey, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III are among the most recent theologians who have not only written on the Trinity, but have specifically addressed this issue while theologians of the past, including Wolfhart Pannenberg, Karl Barth, Charles Hodge, and Louis Berkhof, have been cited as having laid a foundation, each for different reasons, upon which to build modern arguments. In what follows, the texts, theological arguments, and historical precedents used to support EFS will be presented.

#### Textual Support For Eternal Functional Submission

EFS proponents have a litany of texts to use to support the eternal submission of the Son to the Father, but an examination of several key passages will illustrate their general hermeneutic approach. In John, there are three key texts most cited by EFS proponents to argue that Jesus clearly understood Himself to under the authority of the Father. In John 5:19-30, writes,

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. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God,

and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man... I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”<sup>7</sup>

Here, Jesus argues that He is dependent and obedient, in some way, to the Father. It is the Father who sends the Son and grants Him life, judgement, honor, and ability. Christopher Cowan, on the basis of the Jewish concept of the authority of the sender, argues that this demonstrates the Father’s authority over the Son.<sup>8</sup> As this relationship cannot mean that the Son is somehow less than God, it must mean that He is functionally submissive to the Father. Further, in John 6:38-40, Jesus states,

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

Jesus teaches that it was not His will He came to do, but the Father’s.<sup>9</sup> Finally, in John 14:28, Jesus states, “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.” Once again, this cannot be an ontological degree of greatness because, as EFS proponents all affirm, the Son is fully divine, sharing in the Father’s being. Cowan argues this must then refer to the hierarchical relationship between Father and Son.<sup>10</sup>

Moving to Paul’s letter to Corinth, in discussing proper worship in the church when men and women are present, 1 Corinthians 11:3 states, “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

<sup>6</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, 4 Vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, © Copyright the Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, 1995. Used by permission.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher W. Cowan, “The Father And Son In The Gospel Of John,” In *One God In Three Persons: Unity Of Essence, Distinction Of Persons, Implications For Life*, Ed. Bruce Ware And John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 265.

<sup>9</sup> Ware, *Father, Son, And Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, And Relevance*.

<sup>10</sup> Cowan, “The Father And Son In The Gospel Of John,” 53.

the head of Christ.” Paul grounds the ordering of men and women in the hierarchy of role in the relationship between the Father and Son. As Christ is equal in nature to God but functionally submissive, women are equal to men in nature but are to functionally submit to men in the church and in the home.

Some have argued that “head” here means “source” rather than “authority,” so that it refers to the Father’s begetting of the Son and woman being created from man. However, both Wayne Grudem<sup>11</sup> and Thomas Schreiner<sup>12</sup> argue that κεφαλή, in the writings of Paul, can almost always mean authority and usually does so. Further, the text relates to authority and is the basis for women wearing head coverings in the early church as a sign of submission. Therefore, if the text teaches that women submit to men and men submit to Christ, it must teach that Christ submits to the Father. As Ware states, “That God is the head of Christ is not presented here as an ad hoc relationship for Christ’s mission during the incarnation. It is rather stated as an absolute fact regarding this relationship.”<sup>13</sup>

Of the passages cited, 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 is arguably the clearest text in Scripture, Paul writes,

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.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning Of Kephale (‘Head’): A Response To Recent Studies,” In *Recovering Biblical Manhood And Womanhood: A Response To Evangelical Feminism*, Ed. John Piper And Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2006), 425–468.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies, And The Trinity,” In *Recovering Biblical Manhood And Womanhood: A Response To Evangelical Feminism*, Ed. John Piper And Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2006), 127.

<sup>13</sup> Ware, *Father, Son, And Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, And Relevance*, 77.

<sup>14</sup> Words that are all capitalized are so in the NAU version as marking Old Testament quotations.

From this passage, Paul teaches that the Son will reign until all enemies, including death, have been subdued, after which time He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father and be subjected to Him as well. Ware writes, “There is no question that this passage indicates the eternal future submission of the Son to the Father, in keeping with his submission to the Father both in the incarnation and in incarnation past.”<sup>15</sup>

In the opening chapter of Ephesians, Paul praises God for the clearly distinct roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit. In verses 3-6, Paul states,

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

Paul goes on to state that it is in the Beloved that we have redemption through His shed blood (Ephesians 1:7-12) and it is in the Spirit that we are sealed until the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14). As Wayne Grudem argues, these texts clearly articulate the Father as the architect of salvation and as the individual responsible for election who grants wisdom (Ephesians 1:17) and who raised Christ and subjects all things to Him (Ephesians 1:20-23).<sup>16</sup>

In another classic text regarding Christ’s submission, Paul states, in Philippians 2:5-11,

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under

<sup>15</sup> Ware, *Father, Son, And Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, And Relevance*, 84.

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Grudem, “Doctrinal Deviations In Evangelical-Feminist Arguments,” In *One God In Three Persons: Unity Of Essence, Distinction Of Persons, Implications For Life.*, Ed. Bruce Ware And John Starke (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2015), 37–42.

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

While verse 6 clearly demonstrates the ontological equality of the Son to the Father, verses 7-11 demonstrate not only the Son's obedience to the Father as seen in the incarnation, but also the Father's eternal preeminence by the fact that, even when all will worship the Son, they will do so to the glory of the Father. As Ware states, "Clearly, if the Father is the one who exalts the Son, and if the Father gives to the Son his all-surpassing name, then the Father has supremacy over the Son."<sup>17</sup>

Among the many texts in Hebrews that speak of the Son's relationship to the Father, EFS proponents often cite Hebrews 1:1-3, which states,

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Ware outlines several actions in this text that are distinctive of the Father and demonstrate His logical priority and preeminence over the Son and Spirit.<sup>18</sup> It was the Father who spoke to the fathers and to us through the Son and has appointed the Son to be heir of all things and made the world through Him.

In verse 3, the Son is the glory and exact representation of the Father, reigning at His right hand. EFS proponents point out that, first, the text says that the glory is the Father's but shown in the Son. Second, the Son sits to the right hand of God. He may be co-reigning, but He is still at the Father's right hand, showing the Father's preeminence once again. Grudem, in commenting on this position of the Son, argues that, while it is true that certain passages speak of the Son on the throne, this does not contradict texts that speak of the Son at the right hand because, as we will reign with Christ but Christ still

reigns, the Son reigns with the Father, but the Father still reigns.<sup>19</sup>

A final key text that illustrates the theological method and conclusions of EFS can be found in 1 Peter 1:1-3, which states of believers,

"who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

According to Ware, this text demonstrates that it was the Father's plan carried out through the work of the Son and the Spirit, demonstrating the Father's preeminence in the relations of the Trinity.<sup>20</sup>

#### Theological Support For Eternal Functional Submission

In light of the previous textual arguments, there are theological assumptions and conclusions that both drive interpretation and are drawn from it. First, EFS proponents claim that father and son language necessarily involves authority structures. While there is certainly an element of familial relationship, EFS proponents argue that, in the mind of the New Testament audiences, father and son relationships always denote relations of authority as well.<sup>21,22</sup> Thus, if the Son is eternally the Son, which they affirm, the Son must be in eternal relations of authority. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus' many statements that the Father is greater than He and that He came to do the will of the Father attest to this structure of authority.

This is why, it is argued, it was the Son, and not the Father, who was sent. Without this understanding, they argue, there is no grounds for understanding why it was the Son who was sent and not the Father or the Spirit. These particular names must mean something and the clear pattern in Scripture is that the Father is first, the Son is second and the Spirit is

<sup>17</sup> Ware, *Father, Son, And Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, And Relevance*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Ware, "Unity And Distinction Of The Trinitarian Persons," In *Trinitarian Theology* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 27.

<sup>19</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism And Biblical Truth: An Analysis Of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 407.

<sup>20</sup> Ware, *Father, Son, And Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, And Relevance*, 78.

<sup>21</sup> Cowan, "The Father And Son In The Gospel Of John," 52.

<sup>22</sup> Bruce Ware, "How Shall We Think About The Trinity?," In *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, Ed. Douglas S. Huffman And Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), 39.

third.<sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup>As Ware states, “The egalitarian denial of any eternal submission of the Son to the Father makes it impossible to answer the question why it was the ‘Son’ and not the ‘Father’ or ‘Spirit’ who was sent to become incarnate.”<sup>25</sup> The Son was sent and not the Father because it is the Son’s role to obey and the Father’s role to command. The Spirit, likewise, was sent after the Son because the Spirit’s role is to obey the Father and the Son. Thus, the Son has obeyed in eternity and the incarnation is an extension of that obedience. Even with the Spirit, there is an order in the Scriptures such that the Father is first, the Son is second, and the Spirit is third. On this basis, Ware takes the Father’s priority so far as to say that the Father does not need the Son or the Spirit, but in His love often chooses to use them.<sup>26</sup>

This leads to a second theological argument. EFS proponents argue that, if authority structures within the Godhead do not exist, there is no meaningful way to tell them apart and no way to differentiate the works of the Persons. Some EFS proponents go so far as to accuse those who deny such structures of modalism and state that this would result in patripassianism: the belief that the Father Himself died on the cross.<sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> Because the three Persons are of the same nature, being, essence, etc. the only way to tell them apart without dividing the substance is to understand them as fulfilling different roles, not only in the mission of redemption, but in eternity past.<sup>29</sup>

Building upon this second argument, a third argument for EFS is that denying eternal relations of authority creates a dichotomy between the immanent Trinity, God as He is in Himself, and the economic Trinity, God as He has revealed Himself in creation and redemption. In what is known as Rahner’s Rule, the hermeneutic mantra for understanding the relationship between these two concepts is that “the

economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.”<sup>30</sup> God cannot contradict Himself, portray Himself falsely, or deceive. Thus, the economic Trinity tells us what the immanent Trinity is like. If there are relations of authority in the economic Trinity, these relations must be grounded in the immanent Trinity or it renders the immanent Trinity completely unknowable and creates a different god than the revealed one.<sup>31</sup> While EFS proponents grant that there cannot be too strict of a connection, nonetheless, as J. Scott Horrell writes, “Scripture’s record of God’s revelation in human history... should inform and control how we think about the eternal relations of the Godhead.”<sup>32</sup> Likewise, Ware states,

We have every reason to think that the eternal triune God is the same immanently as he is economically in this respect: God is eternally God only as he is unbegotten Father, begotten Son, and proceeding Holy Spirit... Authority and submission within the Godhead, then, are best understood as the expression of just how the Father, Son, and Spirit relate in the created order, reflecting who they really and perfectly are in eternity.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, EFS proponents argue that denying eternal relations of authority within the Godhead amounts to a weakening of meaningful distinctions between men and women at best and a denial of such at worst. As Stephen Kovach and Peter Schemm Jr. argue, those who deny EFS do so, not on the basis of the text or history, but because they “dislike” its complementarian overtones.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, Ware argues,

It is not difficult to see why some find the Son’s eternal submission to the Father an objectionable concept. For if the Son eternally submits to the Father, this would indicate that authority and submission are eternal realities. And if so, would it not stand to reason that when God creates the world he would fashion it in a way that reflects these eternal structures? And would

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Ware, “Tampering With The Trinity: Does The Son Submit To His Father?,” *Journal For Biblical Manhood And Womanhood* 6, No. 1 (Spring 2001): 8.

<sup>24</sup> Wayne Grudem, “Biblical Evidence For The Eternal Submission Of The Son To The Father,” In *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives On The Equality Of God The Father And God The Son*, Ed. Dennis W. Jowers And H. Wayne House (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishers, 2012), 243–245.

<sup>25</sup> Ware, “How Shall We Think About The Trinity?,” 275.

<sup>26</sup> Ware, *Father, Son, And Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, And Relevance*, 55.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Letham, “Eternal Generation In The Church Fathers,” In *One God In Three Persons: Unity Of Essence, Distinction Of Persons, Implications For Life.*, Ed. Bruce Ware And John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2015), 125.

<sup>28</sup> Grudem, “Biblical Evidence For The Eternal Submission Of The Son To The Father,” 258.

<sup>29</sup> Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism And Biblical Truth: An Analysis Of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions*, 433.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1970), 22.

<sup>31</sup> Ware, “How Shall We Think About The Trinity?,” 256.

<sup>32</sup> J. Scott Horrell, “The Eternal Son Of God In The Social Trinity,” In *Jesus In Trinitarian Perspective*, Ed. Dennis W. Jowers And H. Wayne House (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 47.

<sup>33</sup> Ware, “Unity And Distinction Of The Trinitarian Persons,” 53.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen D. Kovach And Peter R. Schemm, Jr., “A Defense Of The Doctrine Of The Eternal Subordination Of The Son,” *The Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 42, No. 3 (N.D.): 473.

it not make sense, then, that the authority-submission structures in marriage and in church leadership are meant to be reflective of the authority and submission in the relations of the Persons of the Godhead? But because some find the very notion of authority and submission objectionable... they clearly resist seeing this relational dynamic as true of the eternal relations within the Godhead.<sup>35</sup>

EFS proponents root gender relations, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:3, in the eternal relations of the Father, Son, and Spirit. As the Son is equal to the Father in nature but submission to in function, so men and women are equal in nature, but women are to be submissive to their husbands and to men in the church. To argue that this relationship is not eternal, it is suggested, is tantamount to denying 1 Corinthians 11:3 that man is the head of woman.

#### Historical Support For Eternal Functional Submission

At front and center of the debate is the question of whether or not EFS is compatible with Nicene, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian orthodoxy. While EFS proponents acknowledge that their view was not universally accepted in early, medieval, or post reformation church history, nonetheless, they argue that theirs was the consistent with the historical trinitarian creeds of affirming the eternal equality and unity of the God head but a differentiation of the Persons.

The challenge with citing the church fathers to answer modern questions is that these theologians were responding to the issues of their day and not to the ones in ours. The task of the historian is to analyze their arguments and make inferences as to what they may or may not have held in other areas. In spite of this difficulty, Grudem writes with confidence, "This then has been the historic doctrine of the church. Egalitarians may differ with this doctrine today if they wish,...they should also have the honesty and courtesy to explain to readers why they now feel it necessary to differ with the historic doctrine of the church as expressed in its major creeds."<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, Kovach and Schemm write, "It cannot be legitimately denied that the eternal subordination of the Son is an orthodox doctrine and believed from the history of the early church to the present day."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ware, *Father, Son, And Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, And Relevance*, 76–77.

<sup>36</sup> Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism And Biblical Truth: An Analysis Of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions*, 415–416.

<sup>37</sup> Kovach And Schemm, Jr., "A Defense Of The Doctrine Of The Eternal Subordination Of The Son," 464.

In their article, these authors present an outline of various theologians of days gone by who held to EFS in some form. While they make many arguments, the chief arguments they make are two. First, because theologians of the past espouse order in the Persons, this entails hierarchy of authority. Second, because the theologians of the past speak of obedience, this entails continuity between the immanent and economic Trinity. Whether this is in the writings of Hilary,<sup>38</sup> Athanasius,<sup>39</sup> Augustine,<sup>40</sup> Calvin,<sup>41</sup> or virtually any of the other theologians they cite, there are clear examples of belief in the proper ordering of the Trinity, the fitness of the Son to become incarnate, and the obedience of the Son to the Father.

Thus, EFS proponents argue, their position is supported by examples in Scripture of the Son submitting to the Father's will, of the order in the Trinity of the Father sending the Son and the Spirit and of His ultimate glory, and by the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity. It is fleshed out in the reality of gender ontological equality and function ordering. Further, though it has not been universally accepted, EFS is well within Nicene orthodoxy because it acknowledges the essential and eternal equality among the Persons but also differentiates them through role.

#### A Critique Of Eternal Functional Subordination

While EFS proponents have presented a comprehensive argument for the submission of the Son, they still have not proved their contention that this relationship of authority and submission is characteristic of the eternal, immanent Trinity. Instead, a temporary and missional understanding of submission better summarizes the biblical data, the theological issues, and historical perspectives.

#### Eternal Functional Subordination Rests Upon An Insufficient Hermeneutic

In overemphasizing Rahner's Rule that "the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity and the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity,"<sup>42</sup> EFS proponents are stuck without proper categories for differentiating and reconciling the various statements in Scripture regarding the Son's humiliation. In this view, if the Son is obedient in the incarnation, He

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 465–466.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 466–467.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 468–470.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 470.

<sup>42</sup> Or affirming a strong interpretation of Rahner's Rule, as Scott Harrower states. Scott Harrower, "Bruce Ware's Trinitarian Methodology," In *Trinity Without Hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene Orthodoxy In Evangelical Theology*, Ed. Michael F. Bird And Scott Harrower (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academics, 2019), 311.

must then be obedient in His eternal relation to the Father. While it is very appropriate and even necessary to affirm that the immanent Trinity cannot contradict the economic Trinity, and vice versa, it is not a contradiction to say that, in the economy of redemption, the Son voluntarily takes on obedience. The Son's temporary functional submission does not contradict the immanent equality of the Persons any more than the Son taking on humanity contradicts His being truly God. EFS proponents affirm this ontologically but refuse to affirm this functionally. As Giles indicates, the immanent Trinity is communicated accurately in the economic Trinity, but not comprehensively or exhaustively.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, Augustine offers a trifold hermeneutic framework, three rules, for sorting out the statements regarding the Son's equality to the Father and submission to Him. He argues, quite relevantly, that confusing these categories is what has "misled people who are careless about examining or keeping in view the whole range of the scriptures, and they have tried to transfer what is said of Christ Jesus as man to that substance of his which was everlasting before the incarnation and is everlasting still."<sup>44</sup> These rules, taken from Philippians 2:5-11, can be summarized as follows.

In the first rule, the Son is to be understood in "the form of God."<sup>45</sup> In this category are all passages that speak of the Son as ontologically equal to the Father. Jesus' statements that "I and the Father are one," His numerous statements that He does what the Father does, and the many statements throughout the epistles that speak of the Son's divinity demonstrate the equality of nature, essence, authority, and operation of the Son to the Father and the absolute unity of being within the Trinity.

In the second rule, understanding Jesus in "the form of a servant",<sup>46</sup> passages relating to the Son's inferiority, weakness, and obedience are to be understood according to His incarnation. Augustine puts passages that speak of the Son submitting to the Father, such as statements that Jesus came to do the will of the Father in John 6:38, that the Father is greater than Him in John 14:28, of the Son submitting His kingdom to the Father in 1 Corinthians 15:28, and that the Son did not know

when He return would be in Matthew 24:36, into this category.<sup>47</sup>

The third rule is the "from God rule," describing passages in which the Son is shown to be, not less than the Father, but from the Father.<sup>48</sup> He writes, "To avoid (confusing the first and second rule), we should apply this other rule, which tells us not that the Son is less than the Father, but that he is from the Father. This does not imply any dearth of equality, but only his birth in eternity."<sup>49</sup> Augustine assigns all passages related to the Son being sent and coming from the Father and the Son's receiving life, qualities, and instruction from the Father to this category. For him, this amounts to the eternal generation of the Son. The Son is from God in two senses. First, He is begotten in eternity from the Father and, two, He came from the Father to the earth.<sup>50</sup> Far from indicating an authority structure within God, Augustine posited that the sending of the Son was a work of the Father and the Son.<sup>51</sup> The Father sent the Son because the Son was incarnate and the Father was not.

In these rules, we find a way of framing the texts cited by EFS proponents. While they cite numerous Scripture passages in favor of their views, almost every citation, in context, speaks of Jesus in His missional role as the second Adam to fulfill the law and God's righteous demands and to rule as the son of David. It is, frankly, a considerable leap to argue that these texts apply to the eternal relationship because they themselves do not give that indication. In this role, the Father was greater than the Son, the Son is obedient to the Father, the Son will rule and hand over His kingdom to the Father, and the various Persons do fill various roles that can be emphasized, distinguished, and focused despite the co-operation of all Persons in their inseparable actions. Thus, the Father is not greater than the Son in glory, essence, or power. Rather, the Son is equal to the Father in nature, submissive as a servant in the incarnation, and from the Father in the sense that it was the Son who came and not the Father.

#### EFS Ignores The Explanatory Power Of Eternal Generation And Procession

EFS proponents argue that, if relations of authority are not the basis for differentiating the Persons, we have no way of formulating any basis for doing so or answering why it was the Son who was

<sup>43</sup> Giles, *Jesus And The Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent The Doctrine Of The Trinity*, 308.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, Trans. Edmund Hill And John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 82-87.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 105.

sent and not the Father.<sup>52</sup> However, the doctrines of eternal generation and procession provide a more adequate foundation for answering many of the questions raised by them.<sup>53</sup> This language was used by the Nicene Creed to communicate the full equality and unity of the Persons within God while providing grounds for differentiating them by stating that the Son was begotten of the Father and that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, and in greater detail, the Athanasian Creed, as well others, affirmed that the Father was eternally unbegotten, the Son was eternally begotten, and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and Son.<sup>55</sup>

As a result of eternal generation and procession, the Son is of the same essence, homoousia, with the Father because He eternally proceeds from the Father and thus all that the Father has in nature is also the Son's and the Spirit's. Though the early church and creeds, and the generations of theologians to follow, accepted their limitations in understanding how eternal generation and procession were mechanically possible, these concepts were used to maintain the absolute equality of the Persons within God while being able to legitimately differentiate them and explain how it is that the Son and Spirit are of the same nature as the Father without being separate gods. These concepts provide a more satisfactory response than authority structures for at least four reasons.

First, eternal generation and procession provide a basis for differentiating the Persons within God by understanding them according to relations of origin and personal properties rather than authority structures. The Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son. Eternal generation and procession allow us to differentiate the Persons by appealing to something within God without dividing the substance and without having to differentiate based upon an activity or to posit inferiority in either nature or role. In his

<sup>52</sup> Millard Erickson points out that, by stating we have “no way” to do so, EFS proponents set the bar so low that even if someone put forth a bad reason, it would qualify to refute the argument. Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering With The Trinity?: An Assessment Of The Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 207.

<sup>53</sup> It is acknowledged that the doctrine of eternal generation has fallen on hard times. Theologians on both sides of this debate have questioned its biblical and historical warrant. However, Fred Sanders and Scott Swain have compiled a strong defense of the doctrine that deserves a wide hearing. Fred Sanders And Scott R. Swain, Eds., *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2017).

<sup>54</sup> John H. Leith, Ed., *Creeds Of The Churches: A Reader In Christian Doctrine From The Bible To The Present.*, 3rd Ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 30–31.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 705–706.

work on the trinity, Thomas Aquinas was quite explicit that it was only on the grounds of origins and personal properties that the Persons are to be distinguished.<sup>56</sup>

Second, generation and procession provide a basis for understanding the terms “Father” and “Son” in an eternal sense by using them to explain origin and personal properties rather than authority. While it is true that the terms “father” and “son” can denote authority structures, they do not necessarily do so. An adult son, though expected to honor the father, is nonetheless not subject to obedience even though he remains a son. Further, if these terms are meant to denote authority, why is the name “Spirit” not an authoritative term? The Son is called “Son” because He is begotten of the Father and of the same essence as the Father. This is what Jesus insinuates in John 5:17-18, inciting the religious leaders to conspire to kill Him for using the term “Son” in a way that made His equal with God. As Athanasius writes in his defense of Nicene doctrine in opposition to Arianism,

Therefore let no one be startled on hearing that the Son of God is from the Essence of the Father; but rather let him accept the explanation of the Fathers, who in more explicit but equivalent language have for ‘from God’ written of the essence. For they considered it the same thing to say that the Word is ‘of God’ and ‘of the essence of God,’ since the word ‘God’ as I have already said, signifies nothing but the essence of Him Who Is.<sup>57</sup>

When EFS proponents argue that “Father” and “Son,” as applied to the divine Persons, must mean everything that such language entails for human relations, they fall into using univocal language of the Trinity that is only meant to be analogical. In other words, not everything about the terms applies across the board and the limits of analogies must be protected.<sup>58</sup> Taking the illustration too far and beyond how the text indicated was what got the early heresies in trouble. It is clear from John 5:18 how Jesus’ audience understood the terms: equality of nature.

Third, eternal generation and procession provide a basis for the ordering found in Scripture texts and

<sup>56</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Trans. Fathers Of The English Dominican Province, Vol. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1948), 203–205.

<sup>57</sup> Athanasius, “Defence Of The Nicene Definition,” In *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers*, Ed. Archibald Robertson, Vol. 4, Second (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 165.

<sup>58</sup> Scott R. Swain, *The Quest For The Trinity: The Doctrine Of God In Scripture, History, And Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 128.

in the writings of theologians throughout history. As the Father is the first in order of generation and procession, He is first, not necessarily in authority, but in logical order. Thus, all things are from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.<sup>59</sup> As Giles writes, “Divine ordering is not hierarchical. The three divine persons operate and relate in a coequal order, or we might say a horizontal order.”<sup>60</sup>

Finally, eternal generation and procession give grounding for why it was fitting for the Son to come without making it compulsory. Because the Son’s origin is from the Father as the Word, Image, Wisdom, Power, etc., and because His personal property is that of being begotten, it is fitting for Him to be the one to come. Augustine argues that the Son was sent because, in eternal generation, He is from the Father.<sup>61</sup> But, once again, this shows fitness, not obedience. What does fitness mean here? If a person is five foot four and another is six foot three, it is fitting for the taller person to go to the shelf to reach for an object on the top. It isn’t a matter of necessity or obedience, but of personal property that makes it a fitting outworking of eternal generation without separating the operations and will of the one God.<sup>62</sup>

Among EFS proponents who acknowledge eternal processions, some argue that it necessarily follows that because the Son is begotten of the Father, and is eternally Son, He eternally behaves as a son. In other words, obedience is a facet of the Son’s personal property of being begotten.<sup>63</sup> For instance, Ware, building on eternal generation, uses it to argue that submission necessarily follows. Because the Father is always the Father to the Son, who is eternally Son to the Father, the Son always acts as Son to the Father. As he writes, “Because their ontological relations are eternal and unchangeable, so are their functional relations likewise eternal and unchangeable.”<sup>64</sup> But while it is right to speak that ad extra, or economically, the missions of the Persons reflect their eternal processions, it is fallacious to reverse this pattern ad intra, or immanently, and to argue that submission characterizes the inner relations of the Trinity.

<sup>59</sup> Butner Jr., *The Son Who Learned Obedience: A Theological Case Against The Eternal Submission Of The Son*, 57.

<sup>60</sup> Giles, *Jesus And The Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent The Doctrine Of The Trinity*, 307.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, 179–181.

<sup>62</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr. And Richard Mayhue, Eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary Of Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2017), 207.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce Ware And John Starke, Eds., *One God In Three Persons: Unity Of Essence, Distinction Of Persons, Implications For Life* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2015), 237–248.

<sup>64</sup> Ware, “Unity And Distinction Of The Trinitarian Persons,” 22.

Once again, Aquinas provides a helpful explanation. While acts by the Persons flow from their personal properties, these acts are not themselves the personal properties.<sup>65</sup> He argues that mission grows out of a property but is insufficient without an effect in time.<sup>66</sup> The Son comes because of eternal generation but His submission is an act in time for a mission. Thus, eternal generation provides a means of answering why it was the who came without dividing the actions of the immanent Trinity. This leads us to a third argument.

#### EFS Divides The Substance Of God And Denies The Inseparable Actions Of The Trinity

In order for the Son to submit to the Father, there must be two wills involved, or three if one includes the Holy Spirit. Submission requires the placing of one’s own will under the authority of another, even granted that one desires to do so. However, to posit multiple wills in the Godhead is a serious issue. D. Glenn Butner Jr. has ably argued that this is the chief problem with EFS: it isn’t Arianism, but it is dangerously close to tritheism.<sup>67</sup> By positing multiple wills and separate works in the Trinity, EFS violates divine simplicity, the doctrine that God, as immaterial, is not made up of parts and cannot be divided, by dividing the substance of God and positing multiple natures in God.

Scripturally, as Jesus states in John 4:24, God is spirit. He isn’t made of matter that can be divided and is thus inherently simple. He is not the sum of His parts but is His attributes. The result is that God, as one being, possesses a singular essence, nature, will, and power. Thus, the Persons are not to be distinguished by their wills, which would be to divide the substance,<sup>68</sup> but by their personal properties. John of Damascus summarizes this point of Nicene orthodoxy well,

For there the community and unity are observed in fact, through the co-eternity of the subsistences, and through their having the same essence and energy and will and concord of mind, and then being identical in authority and power and goodness – I do not say similar but identical – and then movement by one impulse. For there is one essence, one goodness, one power, one will,

<sup>65</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1:208.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:220.

<sup>67</sup> D. Glenn Butner Jr., “Eternal Functional Subordination And The Problem Of The Divine Will,” *Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 58, No. 1 (2015): 132.

<sup>68</sup> In the language of the Athanasian creed. See Leith, *Creeds Of The Churches: A Reader In Christian Doctrine From The Bible To The Present.*, 705.

one energy, one authority, one and the same, I repeat, not three resembling each other. But the three substances have one and the same movement. For each one of them is related as closely to the other as to itself; that is to say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one in all respects, save those of not being begotten, of birth and of procession.<sup>69</sup>

A major tenet of Nicene orthodoxy has been that the indivisible will of God leads to the inseparable actions of the Trinity. Scott Swain presents a summary statement as follows, "...every divine act in the economy of salvation is an act of the One God, who internally happens to be triune, but who acts in a simply unitary way in the world."<sup>70</sup> The works are inseparable because it is always the one Being who is Trinity who is acting. The reason that multiple Persons are cited as doing the same things<sup>71</sup> is not because those things are "two person jobs," but because, since there is one will and one power and one being, all three Persons are involved in every action of the Trinity, with the Father working through the Son and by the Spirit.<sup>72</sup>

However, EFS requires that there be separate wills and separate actions such that, while there is only one will in God, this will is a unity of wills, with the Son willing to do the Father's will. But the result is that there are clearly three wills, and thus three natures, in the Trinity. With EFS, it is impossible to maintain Nicene orthodoxy in any way that the early church would recognize. This doctrine played a key role in defending the fully divinity of the Son and Spirit in the early years of the Church. But to deny such is to fall into the trap of social trinitarianism that

views the oneness of the Trinity, not as oneness of being, but of intensity of personal relationship.<sup>73</sup>

This does not mean that Persons cannot be distinguished, contrary to Grudem,<sup>74</sup> leading to some kind of modalism or that the Father and Spirit died on the cross as well. While all works are works of the one Being, in the external Trinity, each Person works in distinct ways in the outworking of their personal properties such that all things are from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.<sup>75</sup> Further, contrary to Ware's assertion that these works are separate and unique to each Person, such that only the Father wills and sends,<sup>76</sup> each works in accordance with one divine will and power, so that while the economic works reflect their personal properties and can be distinguished, they cannot be separated nor should they be the basis for differentiating the Persons within God.

However, in the incarnation, a human nature was added to the Son so that He possessed two natures, and thus, two wills. The Chalcedonian creed codified this language by positing that Christ possessed two natures, with two wills: one divine and one human.<sup>77</sup> Grudem acknowledges this need for two wills in the incarnate Christ, even calling it "necessary,"<sup>78</sup> as do most EFS proponents. In the incarnation, the Son took on a human nature, and thus a human will, that could submit to the Father<sup>79</sup> becoming obedient to fulfill His role as Redeemer, as in Hebrews 5:8 which states that He learned obedience through His suffering. A temporary, missional understanding of submission provides a way of positing submission without dividing the substance.

#### EFS Opens Itself To A Serious Challenge To Penal Substitution

A common challenge to the doctrine of penal substitution is that it is unjust. As one author has posited, the doctrine that the Father put the Son to

<sup>69</sup> John Of Damascus, "An Exact Exposition Of The Orthodox Faith," In *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers*, Trans. S.D.F. Salmond, Vol. 9, Second (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 10.

<sup>70</sup> Swain, *The Quest For The Trinity: The Doctrine Of God In Scripture, History, And Modernity*, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Among such things are that the Father, Son, and Spirit are said to give life to whom they chose to give life (John 5:12/John 6:63), raise Christ (Galatians 1:1/John 10:18/Romans 8:11), give access to the Father (John 14:6/Ephesian 2:18), and indwell believers (1 Corinthians 6:19/2 Corinthians 13:5).

<sup>72</sup> This is not, as Tyler Wittman points out, to posit that the Father works through the Son or Spirit as instruments, but because they share one will and power, all three are working in and through the others. Tyler R. Wittman, "Dominium Naturale Et Oeconomicum: Authority And The Trinity," In *Trinity Without Hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene Orthodoxy In Evangelical Theology*, Ed. Michael F. Bird And Scott Harrower (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academics, 2013), 156.

<sup>73</sup> Kathryn Tanner, "Social Trinitarianism And Its Critics," In *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions And Contemporary Issues In Trinitarian Theology*, Ed. Giulio Maspero And Robert Wozniak (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2012), 369.

<sup>74</sup> Grudem, "Doctrinal Deviations In Evangelical-Feminist Arguments," 19–28.

<sup>75</sup> Butner Jr., *The Son Who Learned Obedience: A Theological Case Against The Eternal Submission Of The Son*, 52.

<sup>76</sup> Ware, "Unity And Distinction Of The Trinitarian Persons," 24.

<sup>77</sup> Leith, *Creeds Of The Churches: A Reader In Christian Doctrine From The Bible To The Present*, 35–36.

<sup>78</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 560.

<sup>79</sup> MacArthur, Jr. And Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary Of Biblical Truth*, 207.

death for the sins of others can be conceived as “cosmic child abuse.”<sup>80</sup> The argument goes that since Jesus was commanded by the Father to die, this is akin to a human father commanding his child to die. However, theologians and apologists have responded to this argument by claiming that this challenge misses the mark because the Son was a willing participant in the decision to die. While the Father sent Him, Jesus also stated on numerous occasions that it was His will as well. For example, in John 10:14-18, Jesus states,

I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.

Jesus states emphatically that, while the commandment was from the Father, the Son was a willing participant in laying down His life. Thus, in His incarnation, the Son obeyed the Father, not out of compulsion, but voluntarily. Jesus’ life wasn’t forcibly taken, but given.

EFS proponents do not argue that Jesus wasn’t willing to die. Rather, they argue that, as obedience is a personal property of the Son, He necessarily must obey the Father. However, if obedience is a personal property of the Son, then the Son could not not obey the Father,<sup>81</sup> much like the Son could not sin because it contradicts His nature. But there is a great difference for the ethics of the atonement between the Son not being able to sin because it contradicts His nature and the Son not being able to refuse to die because it would contradict His personal properties. In EFS, because the Son could not do anything but obey, the logical conclusion is that the sacrifice of the Son was ultimately not a freely laying down of His own life. But this would amount to a person being forced to sacrifice Himself without the ability to refuse. To state it plainly: that’s murder. To state it theologically: that compromises the integrity of the atonement itself.

<sup>80</sup> Steve Chalke And Alan Mann, *The Lost Message Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 182–183.

<sup>81</sup> Erickson, *Who’s Tampering With The Trinity?: An Assessment Of The Subordination Debate*, 223.

In contrast to EFS, understanding the sending of the Son as a decision of the one God for the mission of redemption avoids separating the divine will, eliminates the objection to penal substitution, and provides ground for the Son to become the Savior/King. The one God decided that the Son would become incarnate as the second Adam to submit to the Father, and to become the sacrifice for man,<sup>82</sup> bring about the redemption and renewal of all things, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

#### EFS Needlessly Applies The Immanent Trinity To Gender

It is clear from the writings of EFS proponents that a chief concern is to give proper grounding for authority structures in the home, church, and society. As has been shown, they contend that the emphasis of missional submission is driven by a desire to erase authority structures in these areas. This is the genetic fallacy, arguing against something because of why a person believes it. There are complementarians and egalitarians on both sides of the debate so the debate must be settled a different way. In response, I offer two observations.

First, in regards to 1 Corinthians 11:3, even granting that by using the term “head” Paul had an authority structure in mind and not simply sourcing,<sup>83</sup> Augustine’s hermeneutic would understand this text as the Son “in the form of a servant.” The idea of eternal relations of authority are not taken from the text, but read into it, and unnecessarily so. It can simply be stated that, in the economic Trinity, though Jesus is truly God and co-eternal, He submits to the Father without any inferiority. Why bring the immanent Trinity into this equation at all, except for a prior hermeneutic commitment to a strong understanding of Rahner’s Rule?

Second, the Bible grounds its case for authority structures in the home, marriage, and society, not by appealing to the Trinity, but to creation.<sup>84</sup> For example, in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul uses creation to justify men’s authority in the church. 1 Corinthians serves as an illustration, rather than a grounding, for

<sup>82</sup> T. Robert Baylor, “He Humbled Himself: Trinity, Covenant, and the Gracious Condescension of the Son in John Owen,” in *Trinity without Hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene Orthodoxy in Evangelical Theology*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Scott Harrower (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academics, 2019), 179.,179

<sup>83</sup> I agree with the EFS proponents on this point. The context for the verse is on the submission of women to men in the worship service.

<sup>84</sup> Madison N. Pierce, “Trinity Without Taxis? A Reconsideration Of 1 Corinthians 11,” In *Trinity Without Hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene Orthodoxy In Evangelical Theology*, Ed. Michael F. Bird And Scott Harrower (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academics, 2019), 51.

such relationships, as in Ephesians 5:22-33, when Paul uses the relationship between Christ and the Church to argue for men's headship in the home.

### Conclusion

While EFS affirms the full deity and personalities of the Father, Son, and Spirit, it nonetheless rests upon a faulty hermeneutic, in practice divides the substance of God, and needlessly uses the immanent Trinity to argue for complementarianism. While it is not Arian, as some critics have charged, it does fit within the realm of social trinitarianism, with all the dangers pertaining thereto. It may not be entirely anti-Nicene, but it certainly isn't pro-Nicene either. Instead, understanding submission as a temporary, mutually agreed upon mission for the purpose of redemption rests upon a better hermeneutic foundation, is consistent with the history of biblical interpretation regarding eternal generation and procession, maintains the full equality and unity of the Godhead, answers a powerful objection against penal substitution, and still provides a basis, and a more scriptural one, for complementarianism. On these grounds, EFS ought to be rejected in favor of the full, eternal, and glorious equality of the Persons in nature, relation, and majesty. By doing so, we can see more clearly the glory of the Son who gave up full authority with the Father to submit Himself and to suffer for us that we might become joint-heirs with Him.

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