

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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In this month's Topical Bulletin we will consider a heresy that began early in the New Testament era and is still held by many today. Therefore, the questions to be answered are: **What is subordinationism and why is it heresy?** Bible proof-passages will be supplied in putting forth the Scriptural view to be believed and held by sincere Christians.

"Subordinationism" is a doctrine held by many church bodies, such as Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science, and most liberal churches regardless of the denominational or non-denominational names on their doors.

"Subordinationism" is the unscriptural view that Christ is only God in a lesser or secondary sense when compared to the Father. "Subordinationism" ascribes to God the Father priority of essence over God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Subordinationists therefore actually *"deny the one true God [the Triune God] and teach polytheism; for since they affirm that the Son and the Holy Ghost are 'God in a lesser degree' than is the Father, they assume three distinct divine essences, or three gods, of whom one is the supreme Lord, while the others are inferior deities."* [words in italics quoted from Christian Dogmatics, John Theodore Mueller, Th. D., page 151, CPH 1934]

Thus, "subordinationism" is indeed heresy because it is contrary to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures which plainly declare: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." (Deuteronomy 6:4 KJV) "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: *this is* the first commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he." (Mark 12:29-32 KJV) "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." (Genesis 1:26-27 KJV) "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matthew 28:19 KJV) "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." (1 John 5:7 KJV)

Comment: Observe carefully the underlined words and phrases which bring out unique points to be believed concerning the true God even though human reason cannot comprehend how these things are so. Note well that there is but one true LORD God, not three. Nevertheless, there are three divine Persons that are that one true LORD God. The Holy Bible makes it clear that plurality of divine Persons does NOT negate the fact that there is but one God.

"Subordinationism" is most frequently used as an attack upon the person of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God who is also called the "Word" in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, consider the following Bible passages which follow (with comments)—

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1-3, 14 KJV)

*Comment: Notice that the only begotten Son of God was WITH GOD AND IS GOD, thereby denoting a distinct Person who is yet God, the Creator, who was made flesh. Indeed, God the Son was made man in time, being conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. Oh, “without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16 KJV) **Jesus Christ IS GOD manifest in the flesh! Jesus is God and man yet one Christ.***

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” (Colossians 2:8-9 KJV)

Comment: Note that Jesus Christ is NOT merely 1/3 of God; Jesus Christ is GOD ENTIRE! Likewise, the Father is GOD ENTIRE and the Holy Ghost is GOD ENTIRE, and yet there are not three Gods but one God.

“All *men* should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.” (John 5:23 KJV)

Comment: Identical honor is due to both the Father and the Son which indicates equality of the divine Persons.

There are a few Bible verses that subordinationists claim as “proof” of their view concerning Christ being a lesser-god than the Father. Presently, we will look at those Bible verses which subordinationists use while they ignore the context.

“*There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*” (1 Timothy 2:5 KJV)

Comment: The foregoing Bible verse does NOT say that Christ Jesus is ONLY man, but that Christ Jesus IS the one Mediator between God and men. Furthermore, the following two verses – 1 Timothy 2:6-7 – report: “Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.” Hence, the Apostle Paul preached the Christ who is the one Mediator who gave Himself for all—the same Christ whom Paul by inspiration of God subsequently in 1 Timothy 3:16 declares is “God” that “was manifest in the flesh”. ACCORDINGLY, JESUS IS TRUE MAN AND TRUE GOD, YET ONE CHRIST, OUR ONE TRUE SAVIOR.

“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come *again* unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28 KJV)

Comment: Subordinationists focus only on the fact that Jesus says “my Father is greater than I”. However, subordinationists ignore the fact that Jesus said those words in His state of humiliation, the

very period when He had “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:7-8 KJV) *So, according to Jesus’ manhood in His state of humiliation His Father was indeed greater than He; but, in His state of exaltation it is a fact that* “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11 KJV) *Hence, the ascended Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of His heavenly Father enjoying equal honor, majesty, and worship. We need to always remember:* “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (*but*) *he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.* Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.” (1 John 2:22-24 KJV) *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God anointed with the Holy Ghost without measure; Jesus is He in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily as we noted earlier from Colossians 2:8-9.*

“One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:6 KJV)

Comment: Subordinationists point to Ephesians 4:6 and declare that it plainly teaches that God the Father is above all, so He must be above the Son and the Holy Ghost. They ignore the context. Let’s look at the passage in context: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)” (Ephesians 4:4-10 KJV) Thus, in context we observe the cooperation of the three divine Persons of the Holy Trinity— the Spirit, the Lord Christ, and God the Father. And, note well that Christ “ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things” and is therefore NOT inferior to the Father or the Holy Spirit. The three divine PERSONS are but the ONE TRUE GOD as is plainly evident by looking again at 1 John 5:7 (see page 1 of this bulletin).

Accordingly, we hold to the Athanasian Creed as being a truly Scriptural presentation of vital facts regarding the one true God, the Creed which states:

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [i.e. universal] faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and

the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three Eternals, but one Eternal. As there are not three Uncreated nor three Incomprehensibles, but one Uncreated and one Incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Ghost almighty. And yet they are not three Almightyies, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord, So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none: neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.

And in this Trinity none is before or after other; none is greater or less than another; But the whole three Persons are coeternal together, and coequal: so that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped. He, therefore, that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe faithfully the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood; Who, although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ: One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; He ascended into heaven; He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give an account of their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.

This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.

Let us cling firmly to the true God— Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Let us never consider Christ Jesus to be subordinate to anyone or anything, for “we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20 KJV)

JESUS CHRIST IS OUR TRUE SAVIOR AND LORD!

m.e.l.