

SOUL FOOD

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JOHN 5 SUBMISSION AND DOING WHAT THE FATHER DOES

What does it mean to confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? In John 5:16-30 we learn exactly what this means.

In the culture in which Jesus grew up, the majority of sons did what their father did. A baker's son became a baker; a farmer's son became a farmer. Paul teaches in Ephesians that followers of Christ must imitate God. Like Father like son. The Sermon on the Mount spells out quite specifically what it looks like to live as sons of God, or imitators of God. That is the kind of functional category with which Jesus begins in John 5:17. When challenged about his "working" on the Sabbath, how does Jesus answer such a challenge? He justifies his "working" by saying that he is only doing what his Father does. His Father works even on the Sabbath, and so does he.

His questioners completely misunderstood Jesus' statement. They think the claim blasphemous, because it would make Jesus into another God—and they are quite right to hold that there is but one God. Jesus responds by saying, first of all he is functionally dependent on his Father: "the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing." Jesus is not another God; he is functionally submissive to his Father. Secondly, this functional submission is itself grounded in the fact that this Son does whatever the Father does.

Christians may be "sons of God" in certain respects; Jesus is the unique Son, in that "whatever the Father does the Son also does." If the Father creates, so does the Son. In fact, the Son is the Father's agent in creation. In the following verses, the Son, like the Father, raises people from the dead, and is the Father's agent in the final judgment.

This submission relationship that the Son experienced during his earthly ministry is quite amazing. If you heard a thirty year old man say that he only does what his Father does, what would you think? We might think that he would need to get a life and grow up. However, Jesus modeled for us how we ought to pursue the Father. If the perfect God-Man exhibited such whole-hearted submission, what does that say about our need? We must live as if Jesus were our very LIFE!