

**John 14:15-31****“The Father is greater than I”**

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.’ Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?’ Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 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. These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. 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. Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.”

As Yeshua continues to teach His Disciples at the Last Supper or Last Seder meal, a statement of profound importance for today’s Messianic people is made: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). This is a statement which is made by someone who has immediately said, “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me” (John 14:11), as well as “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Today’s Messianic people widely conclude—to which this writer is in complete agreement—that the Son’s commandments, are indeed the Father’s commandments. This does not only involve the Son’s specific instructions issued to the Disciples, but involves the commandments contained in the Torah or Law of Moses.

Yeshua’s statements at the Last Supper, included many admonitions of comfort, per the trauma that was about to transpire with His betrayal, humiliation, and execution. Yeshua is returning to the Father in Heaven, but the Holy Spirit is coming (John 14:16-19). The presence, of the Holy Spirit among them, will demonstrate the interconnectivity of Yeshua’s followers to Himself, and to His Heavenly Father. But unlike how Yeshua can just say that the Son is in the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Father is the Son, in terms of their ontological oneness of being—the oneness of the Father, Son, and Yeshua’s Disciples is a functional oneness, and entirely dependent on the Disciples’ love for God and obedience to His commandments:

“At that day you shall understand that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. It is he who has my commands and obeys them that loves me; and he who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:20-21, Montgomery New Testament).

After the disciple Judas (not Iscariot) asks Yeshua about what is going on (John 14:22), the type of unity that is to manifest between Yeshua’s Disciples, the Heavenly Father, the Son, and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, is once again noted to be contingent on their love for God and obedience to Yeshua. This will be especially imperative with Yeshua returning to Heaven:

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“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:23-26, NIV).

It is not difficult to detect how the Disciples were not totally understanding or processing the words of their Master at the Last Supper. We see many of Yeshua’s statements, and we repeat them to ourselves, or speak them to others, frequently to encourage fellow brothers and sisters in the faith when they need help. **The Disciples were getting ready to see their Rabbi brutally murdered.** As they were getting ready to witness a great tragedy—from their perspective—how would they have been able to really reason through Yeshua having told them that He was returning to Heaven, but instead they would see Him executed by the Romans? While we have doubtlessly repeated John 14:27 many times, and in many situations, it was originally given with the Messiah’s death on the tree impending: “What I am leaving with you is *shalom*—I am giving you my *shalom*. I don’t give the way the world gives. Don’t let yourselves be upset or frightened” (John 14:27, CJB/CJSB). The peace, or *shalom*, that is accessible in the words and activity of Yeshua, to be of a far greater quality, quantity, and substance than any peace that the world was capable of providing. To the Disciples, it was to provide them with a sense of well-being in the midst of a major crisis! Following this is a statement which bears significant importance on any discussion of the nature of Yeshua or Christology:

“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, **for the Father is greater than I**” (John 14:28, ESV).

That Yeshua was returning to the Father was something that the Disciples did not fully comprehend, is clear enough from John 14:28a. How to approach “for the Father greater [than] me is” (John 14:28b, Brown and Comfort),<sup>218</sup> *hoti ho patēr meizōn mou estin* (ὅτι ὁ πατήρ μείζων μου ἐστίν), has been met with much controversy over many centuries. Major issues involving the nature of the Messiah can and do abound with this statement, and it must be observed how there is no Messianic consensus at all regarding how to approach “the Father is greater than I” in the context of the discussion that Yeshua was having at the Last Supper. The statement “the Father is greater than I” gets quoted quite flippantly, particularly on social media, without any real probing of how it was originally delivered, much less with consideration for what examiners of the Gospel of John have said.

Many will and have taken Yeshua’s statement “the Father is greater than I,” as proof that Yeshua the Messiah cannot be God. Others, however, will not be so quick as to draw this conclusion, but will instead emphasize how Yeshua had just stated in John 14:24 earlier, how “the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me” (John 14:24), and conclude that “the Father is greater than I” is to be taken in light of how there is a greater power than just Yeshua speaking things about comfort, peace, and assurance. And, this Yeshua was, after all, about to be brutally executed by the Romans—so Yeshua telling the Disciples that “the Father is greater than I” was to surely be taken as a word of confirmation, that He would indeed rise from the dead, and not all would be lost. As the dialogue continues, the Messiah did say, “I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will

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<sup>218</sup> Brown and Comfort, 382.

believe” (John 14:29, NIV). The Father would be the necessary Guarantor of Yeshua’s resurrection.

Does Yeshua’s statement “the Father is greater than I” decisively mean that Yeshua cannot be integrated into the Divine Identity of the LORD or YHWH? When John 14:28 is reviewed from a small modicum of evangelical Christian resources, to be sure, it is frequently and properly stressed how John 14:28 hardly gives a Bible reader all of the information to be weighed and considered regarding the nature of the Messiah in the Gospel of John (other passages to be considered include: John 1:1; 8:58; 10:30; 20:28), much less the Apostolic Writings. It is witnessed how there are examiners who indicate, myself included, that John 14:28 and “the Father is greater than I” hardly means that Yeshua the Messiah cannot be God. Keener makes the appropriate point of how the issue present in John 14:28 concerns the subordination of the Son to the Father:

“Those who suggest, on the basis of texts such as 14:28, that John denies Jesus’ deity read them outside the broader context of John’s theological framework. In the whole of his Gospel, John plainly affirms Jesus’ deity (1:1; 8:58; 20:28) but distinguishes Jesus from the Father (1:1b, 2), a perspective that confuses modern logic...The issue is not Jesus’ nondeity, or even his distinction from the Father (which is assumed), but his subordination to the Father, which portrays Jesus as the Father’s obedient agent and therefore appeals to those who honor the Father to honor him.”<sup>219</sup>

Yeshua’s statement of John 14:28 has been widely interpreted as meaning that in His human Incarnation—especially with the Messiah’s execution by the Romans soon to occur—that the Heavenly Father is greater than the human Son. The statement “the Father is greater than I” is thus limited to Yeshua in His human Incarnation, not to His eternal glory. Others, however, consider Yeshua’s statement of John 14:28 to indicate that there is a functional subordination of the Son to the Father, but still an ontological equality of the Son and Father. It is witnessed that a number of prominent, evangelical theologians today, do advocate the permanent subordination of the Son to the Father, as something that is not limited to Yeshua’s human Incarnation, but also involves His Heavenly status.

A relatively standard and open-ended conclusion about John 14:28 is provided in the *ESV Study Bible*:

“In saying that **the Father is greater than I**, Jesus means that the Father as the one who sends and commands is ‘greater’ (in authority or leadership) than the Son. However, this does not mean that Jesus is inferior in his being and essence to the Father, as 1:1, 10:30, and 20:28 clearly show.”<sup>220</sup>

Among the commentators we have been considering for the Gospel of John, who appreciably do hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, are a few who think that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, concluding that they have different roles within the plural Godhead of *Elohim*:

- Andreas J. Köstenberger: “Jesus statement that the Father is greater than he is not meant to indicate ontological inferiority on his part. Elsewhere, Jesus affirms that he and the Father are one (10:30). Rather, Jesus stresses his subordination to the Father, which, as the NT makes clear, is not merely a part of his incarnate ministry but is rooted in his eternal sonship {referencing 1 Corinthians 15:28}.”<sup>221</sup>

<sup>219</sup> Keener, *John*, 983.

<sup>220</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Gospel According to John,” in *ESV Study Bible*, 2054.

<sup>221</sup> Köstenberger, 445.

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- D.A. Carson: “The Father in his undiminished glory is greater than the Son in his incarnate state. That is the primary thought here, for the context shows that Jesus anticipates his departure precisely because it means he will return to that glory (17:5). This does not imply that Jesus is less than fully God because ‘greater than’ does not refer to their being and essence...The difference in roles between the Father and the Son means the Father sends his Son into the world and the Son obeys (v. 31); the Father ‘shows’ him what to do and the Son performs it (5:20). The functional submission of the Son reaches back into eternity.”<sup>222</sup>

Historically throughout many centuries of Christianity, the submission represented by “the Father is greater than I” has been concluded to be something dependent on Yeshua’s human Incarnation, and not His exalted glory in Heaven. In His exalted glory in Heaven, the Father and Son are believed to be co-equal (cf. Philippians 2:6); in His humiliation as a human (cf. Philippians 2:7), the Son is subordinated to the Father. Among the commentators we have been considering, are those who would conclude that Yeshua’s subordination is limited to His human Incarnation:

- Leon Morris: “‘The Father is greater than I’ presents difficulties...The reference, however, is not to Christ’s essential Being, but rather to His incarnate state. The incarnation involved the acceptance of a certain subordination as is insisted throughout the New Testament. The saying must be understood in the light of ‘I and the Father are one’ (10:30). John is not asserting, as the Arians maintained, that Jesus was a created being. He is talking about the departure of the human Jesus from this earth to be with the Father.”<sup>223</sup>
- Colin G. Kruse: “This text has been the subject of much controversy in debates concerning the divinity of Christ and the relationships within the Trinity. However, it is unlikely that in the context of the Last Supper, as Jesus prepared his disciples for life without his physical presence, he was making statements about trinitarian and Christological matters. It is probably better to interpret this text in the light of the general statement that a messenger is not greater than the one who sends him (13:16). It was the Father who sent the Son into the world, and the Son who willingly obeyed. It was the Son who, as the incarnate Jesus, died on the cross, and it was the Father who raised him from the dead. As the sent one, Jesus could say the Father who sent him was greater than he was, but later he would ask to be restored to the full glory he had with the Father before the world began (17:5).”<sup>224</sup>

While it is safe to assume that in much of the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, that those who would adhere to (some form of) high Christology of Yeshua being God, would hold to a permanent subordination of the Son to the Father—it is also safe to assume that in much of the Messianic Jewish movement, that there is variance regarding how to interpret “the Father is greater than I” in John 14:28. In his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, David H. Stern reflects a position of “the Father is greater than I” (CJB/CJSB) as only involving Yeshua’s human Incarnation:

“Yeshua here is speaking of himself in his limited capacity as a human being. For as the Word he had glory equal to the Father’s (17:5), but as a human being he humbled himself (Pp

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<sup>222</sup> D.A. Carson, “John,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, 2184.

<sup>223</sup> Morris, *John*, pp 658-659.

<sup>224</sup> Kruse, *John*, 312.

2:6-8)—there were times when he grew tired (4:6) and things he did not know (Mk 13:32). Yet in his essence, he and the Father are One (1:1-3, 5:23, 6:62, 10:30, 14:9)."<sup>225</sup>

Issues involving whether Yeshua the Son is only subordinate to the Heavenly Father in matters of His human Incarnation and/or His Heavenly status, do involve other passages within the Apostolic Writings. This most especially includes 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, which speaks of the consolidation of all power and authority, at the commencement of the Eternal State:

"But each in his own order: Messiah the first fruits, after that those who are Messiah'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 [Psalm 8:6]. 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" (1 Corinthians 15:23-28).

With a passage like 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, there are perspective issues to be considered, just like those seen in John 14:28, which do involve the supremacy of the Messiah in the eschaton (cf. Romans 9:5; Ephesians 1:20-22). Is the subjection of the Son to the Father in 1 Corinthians 15:28, speaking of the Son in His Heavenly status, or in His human Incarnation? Given the application of Psalm 8:6 to Yeshua in 1 Corinthians 15:27, originally speaking of humanity—"You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet"—the latter is most probable. And surely also to be weighed is the better rendering of *hina ē ho Theos [ta] panta en pasin* (ἵνα ᾗ ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν) as, "that the Godhead may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28, PME).

## John 15:1-11

### "Yeshua is the True Vine"

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full."

Readers of John 15:1-11, in Yeshua's teaching about how He is the Vine and His Father is the Vinedresser or Gardener, should be able to easily pick up how there is a mutual relationship between the Son, the Father, and disciples of the Messiah. Without a born again Believer abiding in the sphere of the Messiah, then there will not only be no abundance of love or peace, but eternal punishment likely awaits (John 15:4-11). When we see Yeshua's

<sup>225</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 201.