

Equal or Coequal with God?

Trinitarianism asserts that the Son of God is coequal with His Father God and use these two statements as support: “making himself equal [*isos* 2470] with God” (Jhn 5:18); “thought it not robbery to be equal [*isos* 2470] with God” (Phl 2:6).

The Greek adjective *isos* is where our English *isosceles*—a triangle with two equal sides or legs—is derived along with *skelos* the Greek word for “leg.” It means “agreed,” “equal,” or “like” as it’s used in five other places in the New Testament: two groups of people being paid the same amount, “These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast **made them equal [*isos* 2470] unto us**, which have borne the burden and heat of the day” (Mat 20:12); the agreement of eyewitness testimony, “For many bare false witness against him, but **their witness agreed not [*isos* 2470] together** ... But neither so did **their witness agree together [*isos* 2470]**” (Mar 14:56,59); receiving a like favor in return, “And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, **to receive as much [*isos* 2470] again**” (Luk 6:34); receiving a like gift from God, “Forasmuch then as God gave them **the like [*isos* 2470] gift as he did unto us**, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” (Act 11:17); the heavenly city of Jerusalem having equal or like dimensions, “And the city lieth foursquare, and **the length is as large as the breadth**: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. **The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal [*isos* 2470]**” (Rev 21:16).

To understand in what way Jesus is “equal [*isos* 2470] with God” (Jhn 5:18; Phl 2:6), it must first be acknowledged that the Greek *theos* for “god” is simply a position of authority and not a kind of being. The Father is God because of His status as the highest ranking authority over all, including over His Son Jesus Christ. That *theos* isn’t a kind of being is evident by Jesus and Paul both using this word for different kinds of beings: “Is it not written in your law, I said, **Ye are gods [*theos* 2316]**? If he called **them gods [*theos* 2316]**, unto whom the word of **God [*theos* 2316]** came” (Jhn 10:34-35); “For though there be that are called **gods [*theos* 2316]**, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be **gods [*theos* 2316] many**, and lords many,) But to us **there is but one God [*theos* 2316], the Father**” (1Co 8:5-6). Since a kind of being and a position of authority are two different things, the Son can be “equal to” or exactly like His Father as a being yet “not equal to” Him in position of authority.

The Son was begotten in the exact likeness of His Father as the same kind of divine being, “For God so loved the world, that he gave **his only begotten Son** ... the name of **the only begotten Son of God**” (Jhn 3:16,18). As the same kind of being, He had all power and ability to create everything from nothing: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (Jhn 1:3); “God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:9); “all things were created by him, and for him” (Col 1:16); “by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1:2).

As a human son is equal with his father in humankind but not in authority, so it is with the Son of God and His Father. In His statement “but said also that **God was his Father**, making himself **equal [*isos* 2470] with God**” (Jhn 5:18), Jesus Christ’s claim of equality with God was consistent with His earlier claim of having been begotten of God as His Son, “his only begotten Son ... the only begotten Son of God” (Jhn 3:16,18). He was equal with God by virtue of having been fathered by God.

When it was said, “thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (Jhn 10:33), it wasn’t that He claimed to be God Himself, but God’s Son sent into the world, “Say ye of him, whom **the Father** hath sanctified, and **sent into the world**, Thou blasphemest; because I said, **I am the Son of God?**” (Jhn 10:36). Like Adam, all men originate from the earth, but He originated from God and was sent to the earth from heaven, “The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven” (1Co 15:47).

Dictionary.com defines the adjective *like*: “of the same form, appearance, kind, character, amount, etc.” This is how Paul used *isos* here: “Who, being **in the form of God**, thought it not robbery **to be equal [*isos* 2470] with God**: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him **the form of a servant**, and was made in **the likeness of men**” (Phl 2:6-7). While in the form of God, He was like God. But took on the form of a servant and became like man. This isn’t about equality in authority.

Trinitarianism, on the other hand, teaches that “equal [*isos* 2470] with God” means *coequal*: “equal with another or each other in rank, ability, extent, etc.” as defined by Dictionary.com. It denies the way in which He actually is equal with God—begotten as the same kind of being—and confesses a way in which He is not equal—co-equal in position of authority.