

# The Trinity/Godhead

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To many, the Godhead (referred to as the Trinity in most of Christendom), is the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost combined into a mysterious single God entity. However, the Christian doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost being one is much simpler and more powerful than that.

## The Doctrine of the Godhead Defined

The doctrine of the Godhead can be summarized in a single quote from the prophet Gordon B. Hinckley: "They [the Godhead] are distinct beings, but they are one in purpose and effort. They are united as one in bringing to pass the grand, divine plan for the salvation and exaltation of the children of God... It is that perfect unity between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost that binds these three into the oneness of the divine Godhead." (Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," *Ensign*, Mar. 1998, 2.)

God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three distinct beings who are one in purpose, but not one in being. While their distinctiveness is manifest in their separate missions and presence, they are unified and inseparable in how they carry out God's plan of happiness for his children.

## Origins and Confusion of the Doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity, which states that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are one in being, arose out of the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. In fact the

Roman Emperor Constantine convoked this council to resolve disputes about this very matter, leading to the doctrine of the Trinity used by most of Christendom today.

The doctrine of the Trinity, or the Triune God, is often explained away as being a mystery and not something that can be comprehended by any human. It does indeed require great faith to accept the type of oneness of the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost as expounded by the doctrine of the Trinity—which is truly beyond human comprehension. The doctrine of the Trinity adds additional confusion by proclaiming that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are "one essence, substance or nature."

The broader question is how could a council called into being by a Roman emperor decide this so definitively, when the very reason for the council being called was disputation on this very topic?

## Questions on the Doctrine of the Trinity

The confusion about how three beings can be three beings but not be three beings but only one being—God—leads to some very important questions. Perhaps primary among them is this: How can God the Father give up himself as his only begotten son to be sacrificed for our sins? Rather circular, perhaps even nonsensical.

Why was Jesus Christ praying to himself in the Garden of Gethsemane, calling himself, father? Why did Jesus have to depart in order for the Holy Spirit to come upon his apostles if he was or had in him the Holy Spirit? Was the Father talking to himself when he proclaimed at the baptism of Jesus, "...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17)? Does the distinction between the Father and the Son in the Bible mean nothing? Is it a no-distinction distinction, and if it is, why does God in his holy word make it clear, again and again.

Such questions are certainly as valid as the doctrine that gives legitimate rise to them. Truth-seeking Christians must consider these questions, and others like it, before accepting the doctrine of the Trinity as it is presently constituted. Explaining the doctrine of the Trinity using the Bible is possible; however, to adequately defend the doctrine requires yielding to pure metaphor and the acceptance of questionable abstractions.

### **Biblical Foundation for the Doctrine of the Godhead**

The doctrine of the Godhead—the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost being three distinct beings profoundly unified in a single purpose—can be immediately understood and is expressed and implied repeatedly in the New Testament. Further study of the doctrine of the Godhead reveals the following Biblical truths that support the doctrine of the Godhead:

#### **Distinct Beings Before Christ Came to the Earth**

From Genesis 1:26 (...Let us make man in our image...) and Genesis 3:22 (...Behold, the man is become as one of us...), we can see that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, by whom the creation was carried out (Colossians 1:16), were separate beings, thus the use of the plural pronoun, "us." In John 7:29, Jesus says "...for I am from him [Heavenly Father]," and Paul says in Romans 8:29 that Jesus is the "firstborn" (also seen in Colossians 1:15). Jesus, being the Son of God, was born of God and distinct from God before coming to the earth. It may not fit perfectly the commonly held views of the monotheistic model, but the scriptural passages are difficult to refute.

#### **Distinct Beings during the Time of Christ's Ministry**

When Christ was baptized, Heavenly Father's voice was heard from heaven (Matthew 3:17). Jesus, as recorded in John 8:18, told his disciples that "...the Father that sent me beareth witness of me." Jesus in praying to the Father in John 17:3 calls for man to "...know thee the only true God, *and* Jesus Christ" (emphasis added). There are numerous scriptures from the Bible where Jesus either demonstrates or proclaims the distinction between himself and his Father during his mortal ministry. Perhaps most important to note is not only the distinction that Jesus makes, but the deference with which he makes it. Christ taught us to know two personages, himself and Heavenly Father, to whom he repeatedly defers—and invites us to do likewise.

#### **Distinct Differences in Knowledge**

Although a perfect oneness exists among the Godhead, there is also a separation of knowledge, which would not exist if there was one in essence of being. Jesus said, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32). In John 7:16 Jesus says, "My

doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." Jesus clearly demonstrates that God still reigns and has knowledge that he, the son of God, does not have.

#### **Distinct Differences in Power and Dominion**

Christ declared that he did not have the power to grant the honor of anyone sitting on his left or right hand, but that his Father in heaven alone had the dominion to grant such a request (Matthew 20:23). Jesus proclaimed, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do..." (John 5:19). Jesus said further, "...The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him" (John 13:16). In John 14:28, Jesus says, "I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I." In Revelation 3:21 Christ says "...I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." These are only a few examples where Jesus Christ proclaims that the power and dominion of Heavenly Father exceeds his own.

#### **Distinctly Different Punishments for Blasphemy**

Jesus points to a striking separation between himself and the Holy Ghost when he says, "And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. 12:32). If Jesus and the Holy Ghost were one essence, then the punishment for speaking against either would be the same. The distinction between Jesus and the Holy Ghost is also made clear in John 16:7, when Jesus tells his Apostles that when he departs the "comforter" (Holy Ghost) will come to them. Jesus told his disciples that another personage was coming to take his place, one profoundly unified with him in purpose.

#### **Distinct Beings after Christ's Death**

We read in Acts 7:55 a vision from Stephen: "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus, standing on the right hand of God." This vision came after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Paul provides numerous passages where he makes very clear distinctions between God and Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:6, 2 Thes. 2:16, 1 Tim. 2:5, 1 Cor. 5:6, and others). Paul says, "...and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3).

## Heavenly Father is the God of Jesus Christ and Jesus Worshipped God

Perhaps the most powerful testimony of the Godhead comes from those Bible passages that declare Heavenly Father as being the God of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 1:17, Paul refers to Heavenly Father as "...the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory...." When Jesus Christ was on the cross, he referred to Heavenly Father as his God in saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). On many occasions Jesus prayed to Heavenly Father as his God and Father. Jesus worshipped God as written in Matthew 4:10 when Jesus tells Satan "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." God is our God and our Heavenly Father, while also being the God and Heavenly Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. When Jesus prayed it was not God the father of himself talking to himself. Jesus and Heavenly Father are one in purpose, not one in essence or substance of being.

Because the doctrine of the Godhead is such a crucial part of the gospel and is so often misunderstood by so many Christians, much study and prayer is warranted. Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are distinct beings unified in purpose and effort, but distinct in form, substance, and nature—such is the doctrine of the Godhead.

## Angst Caused by the Doctrine of the Godhead

The doctrine on the Godhead has generated considerable consternation among Christians. This consternation has been expressed in the form of claims that the doctrine of the Godhead is polytheistic (worship of multiple gods) and diminishes the divinity of Jesus Christ. Critics of the doctrine of the Godhead point to John 10:30 where Jesus Christ declares that the Father and he are one. This and other scriptural references to "oneness" are perfectly consistent with the doctrine of the Godhead, where perfect oneness of purpose and effort is achieved among the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Just as a husband and wife become one in any decision they make together ("one flesh" according to Mark 10:18—speaking symbolically of course), God is one with Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost.

## The Perfect Oneness Scripturally Defined

The perfect oneness of the Godhead is exquisitely defined in John 17:20-21 where Jesus, praying to Heavenly Father, says: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is divine, and we praise him as our Redeemer and Savior. We worship Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and we worship Heavenly Father as the father of Jesus. Jesus Christ is in perfect oneness with our Heavenly Father and sits on his right hand. The doctrine of the Godhead, as opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity, takes nothing away from Jesus Christ as our divine Lord and Redeemer. Instead it clarifies his role as the Son of God, and the role of God the Father as his father and the father of our spirits. No metaphors, abstractions, or mysteries there. No stretching our Christian doctrines out of shape to conform to someone's idea of the perfect monotheistic model. Jesus did not do this in his time on earth, and neither do we in ours.

## Hypothesis on the Doctrine of the Trinity

In reflecting how the doctrine of the Trinity came about, one might hypothesize that in the early days of the Church there was great strife between the Christians and Jews over the nature of Jesus Christ. This was complicated by continual acts of heresy and individuals inside and outside of the church making things up as they went along. At the same time there were disagreements in the Church of Alexandria over the nature of Jesus in relationship to the Father; in particular, whether Jesus was of the same or merely of similar substance as God the Father. For these reasons, the First Council of Nicaea was held in Nicaea in Bithynia under the direction of Constantine I in A.D. 325. From this council came the creation of the Nicene Creed. The creed seemed to ignore the Biblical evidence of the Godhead and instead formulated a compromise between the spiritual and the political, rendering the doctrine of the Godhead lost for centuries until the restoration of the gospel as we know it today.

The ambiguous doctrine of the Trinity also feeds into Satan's purposes of keeping the children of God guessing and wondering about our Heavenly Father and Savior Jesus Christ. The mystery of the Trinity can create doubt,

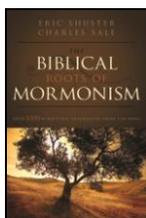
anxiety, and unnecessary questions about who we should be worshipping and our relationship to deity. While the value of faith in Christian doctrine is absolutely critical, God reserves such mystery requiring faith to more of the how instead of the who. A loving father in heaven would never leave such doubt among his children.

### Conclusion

The doctrine of the Godhead can help all Christians better understand the roles of each member of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This understanding supports the structure of prayer whereby we pray to our Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ, calling on the Holy Ghost for inspiration and guidance. Such an understanding of the Godhead brings greater meaning to prayer, to the importance of becoming close to our Savior Jesus Christ, and to the objective of returning to our Father in Heaven when our work in mortality is finished.

### About The Sword Series™

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