

Spirit and Truth

Bible studies dedicated to helping the Bible student to know and worship God as He requires His followers to know and worship Him.

The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. John 4:23,24

Lesson 2

GOD:
ONE, TWO, OR THREE?

As a child, many of us attended some form of religious instruction: Sunday school, Sabbath school, church, Scripture class, etc. At these halls of learning we were most likely told – there is a God in heaven. We may also have been told that this "one God" is actually made up of "three separate Gods." That is, one God equals three Gods and three Gods equal one God!

At best, this concept is difficult to understand, not to mention attempting to explain it. The difficulty arises when men depart from the clear statements of the Bible and substitute their own creed. This study and the following, will attempt to examine the structure of the Godhead from information God has provided in His Word and, as we have seen from our previous lesson, His Bible is the source He has provided for such purposes. In a still later study we shall examine the conclusions that some others have formed on this subject, using the Bible approach.

THE TRINITY DEFINED

The concept of a triune god is a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and is described in many of her writings. The three following extracts will serve to illustrate the position of the church concerning the Trinity.

The mystery of the Trinity is the central doctrine of the Catholic faith. Upon it are based all of the other teachings of the Church.
Handbook For Today's Catholics, p.12.

There is but one God. But, in God there are three divine completely equal persons, this is the mystery of the blessed trinity. Each of the three persons is really distinct from the other two, each is wholly God, equal to the other two. One did not come before the others, yet there is only one God.
Anthony Willhelm, "Christ Among Us" 1975.

The dogma of the Holy Trinity

The trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the consubstantial (Same substance, essence, or nature) Trinity. The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves, but each of them is God whole and entire. "The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which the Holy Spirit is, that is, by nature one God." (Council of Toledo XI [675] DS 530:26). "Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature." (Lateran Council IV [1215] DS 804).

The divine persons are really distinct from one another. "God is one but not solitary." (Fides Damasi: DS 71). "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" are not simply names designating modalities (models, modes, functions, or jobs performed) of the divine being, for they are really distinct from one another: He is not the Father who is the Son, nor is the Son he who is the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit he who is the Father or the Son. (Council of Toledo XI [675] DS 530:25). They are distinct from one another in their relations of origin: It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds. (Lateran Council IV [1215] DS 804). The divine Unity is Triune. Catechism of the Catholic Church (1995) pp.66,67

A variation on the above concept is one that portrays God as "one God," but having three facets, personalities, or functions. These three facets, of course, being Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The roll he assumes at any given time will be determined by the objective he wishes to accomplish.

This concept does nothing to simplify or add credibility to an appreciation of the Almighty God. Under this concept of God many difficulties emerge. For example --- When Jesus was on earth, who was in heaven to hear His prayers to the Father and who was the Holy Spirit given Him of the Father?

Who died on the cross, if at all he did die? And who sustained the universe should he have died? Who was the Father to whom he ascended immediately after his resurrection? All of the dialogue, described in the Bible, between Christ and the Father would be nothing more than play acting, or a form. And when the Scripture says that God gave his Only-Begotten Son, whom did he give? The one bearing the title of Son would not have been his son. This god would find it difficult to avoid an accusation of misrepresentation (lying)! Alternatively, if he is able to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the same time, as a solution to the foregoing problems, he is no longer one god, but three gods; and with that theory, we have returned to the Catholic concept.

Statements drawn from the Catholic church, such as those on pages 2 and 3 above, are often regarded as an authoritative account on the triune structure of the Godhead. When we correctly understand who the Son of God is, we will have a much clearer understanding of who the Father-God is. The Trinity has been the generally accepted view of God for so long, it is considered unequivocal and factual, yet it is impossible for the Trinity concept to convey the true understanding of the Son of God.

Have you ever seen Biblical support for this well established church doctrine? Unlikely; for God is not the author of confusion (1Cor.14:33,40), He would not have inspired the Trinity "dogma" for, it is totally contradictory and irrational. It displays a misapprehension of the Biblical concept of the Father, the Only-Begotten Son of God and the Holy Spirit.

Concerning Biblical support for the Trinity, the Catholic Church made a profound statement on this subject in an article published in Life Magazine, October 30, 1950. It reads... *Our opponents sometimes claim that, no belief should be held dogmatically which is not explicitly stated in Scripture.... As a Christian, your beliefs must come from the Scriptures. But the protestant churches have, themselves, accepted such dogmas as the Trinity, for which there is no such precise authority in the gospels.*

Many of us have seen the three names written in Scripture -- "Father," "Son," and "Holy Ghost," Due to tradition it is assumed that these are the names of the three members of a triune god, but, this alone does not prove three Gods, they are three names. To whom these names apply and what they mean, we shall learn by allowing the Bible to interpret itself. It will now be our objective to take the Bible as it reads and humbly, with prayer, ask our God to teach us about Himself. Thus we shall endeavour to avoid human tradition and receive the truth as it is in Jesus (Eph.4:21).

1. In respect to understanding God, what restriction has the Almighty placed upon our interpretation of the revelations of the Bible?

2Peter 1:16,20,21
 Acts 17:29

Note: It was the Holy Spirit that inspired holy men to write the descriptive detail of the Creator and the nature of the Godhead. Man has been cautioned against contriving their own concepts of God. For to have a false concept of God is to worship an idol, as much as the worship of gold, silver, stone, or crafted image is the worship of an idol. The avoidance of misconceptions on any Bible study may only be achieved as we surrender to the guidance of God's Holy Spirit (1Cor.2:4,5,13,14,15).

HOW MANY GODS?

2. Find the common word, in the following texts, that indicate that there is *more than one* Being in the Godhead?

Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7

Note: "Us" is plural and refers to any number of two or more. The "Godhead" is the term that embraces the Being(s) that alone make up the Deity, the combined works of Whom *created* all things. The rank, position and function of those Beings being clearly defined in Scripture.

3. When Jesus gave the Gospel commission, whom did He say were the Authorities behind it?

Matthew 28:18–20

Compare 2Corinthians 13:14

Note: Jesus clearly identifies three figures in the Godhead. Does this mean that the Godhead is made up of three separate Beings? In the next two questions, observe God's indication to Moses about Himself and then Christ's remark about "*the GOD*".

4. When God was teaching Israel about Himself and how they were to worship Him, what was the first point He made clear?

Deuteronomy 6:1–5, note v.4

Note: "LORD", translated from JEHOVAH, (Hebrew, Strong's 3068) meaning: *the self existent, or eternal* (See Q.19). Jehovah-God saw the need to ensure that His people understood that He is ONE God, not many gods. Israel had not long come out of Egypt where, for more than two centuries, they had learned of Egypt's multiple god religion.

5. When Jesus referred to "THE GOD of Israel", how many did He say there were?

Mark 12:29–31, note v.29

Note: The response of the scribe (a religious leader in Israel) was to confirm Christ's assertion that there is *one* GOD (Mark 12:32). The scribe did not misunderstand Jesus, for Jesus complemented him on his perception of truth — there is one God and NO other (Mark 12:34).

6. In a discussion concerning faith, James mentions a particular fact about God, what is it?

James 2:18, 19

Note: James states – you may believe there is *one God* and that is correct. The evil angels believed it, for before their fall from heaven they had seen Him face to face (Rev.12; Eze.28:14–16).

7. Who is intimately acquainted with "God," and especially appointed to declare Him to the fallen race?

John 1:14,18

Matthew 11:29

Note: The Only-Begotten of the Father, who is in the bosom of the Father-God, is the only One who has the intimate knowledge of all the counsels of God. Jesus tells us about God and the Godhead. No man has seen God and, without the revelations of Christ, man does not know Him (Matt.11:28). We cannot trust man's opinion. For our own protection, we would do well to search the Scriptures for ourselves..... Now, what does Jesus say on the matter?...

8. When Jesus was addressed as "Good Master," what was His first response?

Luke 18:18,19

Note: This ruler in Israel was asking Jesus the very question He wants to hear, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life." To answer this question for all men was the very reason for Him coming to this earth (Luke 19:10). While Jesus did reply to the question (vv.20-22), He prefaced His remarks with some essential ""setting straight" on who it is that is worthy of the title "Good Master."

Jesus pointed out that there is one that is "good" and that One is God. Notice that He did not include Himself under the title of God for this description. According to Jesus, the position of "God" is held by one individual not three of them. Had Jesus been a part of a triune Godhead, He would have received the salutation, for He would have been included in the "one God" that is good. Please note that, this is not to say that Jesus is not equal with God, nor that He is not good, we are simply listening to Christ's words. The relationship between the Father and the Son will be discussed in lessons 3 and 4.

9. When Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father, or spoke of Him, what terms did He use that indicate how He regarded His Father?

John 17:3

John 20:17

Note: Jesus makes clear distinction between Himself and the heavenly Father. He refers to His Father as the "only true God" and as "His *own* God." These statements alone, unmistakably, mean that He, Himself, cannot be the "only true God." There can be only ONE "ONLY TRUE GOD." Jesus always identifies Himself as the Son of God (e.g. John 10:36). It is hard for us to make the mental adjustment that these statements unavoidably hold before us. But remember, it is Jesus making these statements. He is the only One qualified to tell us who God is. If we want the truth, we must let the truth speak to us (Eph. 1:17-19).

10. How did the one God of Israel refer to Himself as He spoke with His prophet, Isaiah?

Isaiah 45:6,21; 46:9

Note: The Trinitarian concept portrays the Godhead as consisting of three separate and distinct Beings, of equal rank and power, to form what is described as *one God*, commonly known as the *Trinity*. If the Trinity were to be true, when God says — "*I am the LORD and there is no God else besides me,*" to which of the three Gods in the Trinity does this statement apply? Is it the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit? It cannot be all three combined as the statement emphatically excludes all except ONE Being.

In this part of our study we have seen that God is "one God," meaning, singular, solitary, not multiple. There are many passages in Scripture that reaffirm this premiss, as introduced by the few Bible texts we have seen here. The remainder of our lesson series will attempt to build on this foundation. We shall examine sufficient of these Bible facts to establish a clear picture of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 7:7,8). In the last lesson we shall see why the Trinity was invented.

ELOHIYM

In Genesis 1:26, the verse states, in part... "God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The Hebrew word translated "God" in this verse is ELOHIYM (Strong's 430). *This is the plural of ELOAHH (Strong's 433). Elohiym means "gods" (plural) in the ordinary sense. However, though it is a plural word, in the Hebrew, when it is used for the Supreme God, it is prefaced by the definite article "the," for example, the Elohiym - the God. To the Hebrew, this application of Elohiym is not interpreted as more than one Supreme God, it is used as a superlative for that God. That is, God is taking upon Himself a distinctive honour by referring to Himself in the plural.* Other occasions when Elohiym has been used in the singular sense may be seen in the verses used in the following three questions...

11. What did the LORD (Yahweh) say He would make of Moses in the eyes of Pharaoh?

Exodus 7:1

12. How was "Dagon," the Philistine idol identified?

Judges 16:23

13. When speaking of Baal, Elijah referred to him in a distinctive way. What did Elijah call Baal?

1Kings 18:27

Note: In each of the above three references, the word "god" was translated from "Elohiym." This is significant, for it is not used in reference to the supreme God, nor to a plurality of gods. It is used here in the singular sense, for a man and for individual pagan gods.

Where the Hebrew word is applied to the supreme God, as in Genesis 1:26, it is a superlative, by which distinguished honour is given to Yahweh. There is no question that the Jews believed God to be one LORD (Deut.6:4. More detail later in this lesson).

From a "Modern Commentary on THE TORAH," edited by W.Gunther Plaut and published by, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the following statement is given on page 5...

"The name which describes the Creator in chapter one is Elohim and throughout the Bible this is a term for gods in general and Israel's God in particular. It is a word with a plural ending (im). When it is used for pagan gods it commands a plural adjective or verb, but when denoting the one God the verb assumes the singular. Examples of this application are Genesis 1:1 and Exodus 20:3."

14. What can you find in the given text to indicate that God is a single Person?

Nehemiah 9:5,6

Note: LORD, referring to Jehovah, (a single member of the Godhead, see LORD, Lord, p.12) is identified as God (Elohiym). Verse 6 further emphasises His Supreme individuality by stating, He is God alone. This verse cannot be made to say that, the LORD God, consisting of three Beings, is God alone. It would be a self contradicting statement.

IDENTIFYING GOD

15. Amidst the confusion of many heathen gods, how does Paul single out the true God and identify Him?

1Corinthians 8:3-6

Note: When men do not know the true God they usually invent some deity, which invariably results in multiple gods. Paul, speaking to the believers at Corinth, says — "to us," that is, *us, we, who know the truth on the issue of who God is, and we, who are acquainted with and worship the true God.* "Us," the ones who know Him as *one God* and who relate to Him as to a loving *Father* (Rom.8:14,15; Gal.4:6,7). "Us," the ones who are saved (1Cor.1:18). We believe there is one God, the Father.

16. By what other names is the God of heaven known?

Exodus 6:3

Psalm 83:18

Isaiah 26:4

Jeremiah 32:18

Note: God Almighty, Jehovah, Most High, LORD, LORD Jehovah, the Great and Mighty God, are all names that command reverence and fear from the whole host of creation. Holy and reverend is His name (Psalm 111:9).

With what holy awe would the heavenly angels take the name of God upon their lips; and how careful must we, fallen sinners, be when we utter the name of the Majesty of the universe. We know not the magnitude of our blasphemy when we speak His name irreverently and use it lightly in common talk.

17. Paul, under inspiration, uses another title for the ONE GOD. What is that name by which he addresses God?

Ephesians 4:6

Note: The "Father" is an endearing term that connotes a Creator who is caring, loving, ever watchful, our Counsellor, guide and Protector. We often speak of the love of God, but fall far short of understanding that love, even to that degree which is within our ability to grasp. Note that this wonderful Father-God is Supreme, above all! He is THE God-Head.

18. Paul identifies the one true God and then mentions Jesus. In what Godhead-capacity is Jesus recognised?

1Corinthians 8:6

Compare John 10:36; 2John 1:3

Note: There is one "Lord" and His name is Jesus Christ. He is clearly identified as a Being, separate and distinct from the Father-God and is not referred to as "the God," but the "Son of God" and as the Son of God, He is "Lord."

A few other texts that differentiate between *God*, as the Father, and Jesus, as *Lord*, are supplied for reference:— Gal.1:3; Eph.1:2; Eph.4:5,6; Col.1:1,2; 1Thes.1:1; Jas.1:1; 2Pet.1:2.

LORD-GOD, Lord-JESUS

19. In Psalm 110:1 one Person is speaking to another Person. What terms are used to designate each person?

Psalm 110:1

20. The LORD identified Himself to Moses. Who is this One who says He is LORD?

Exodus 6:2,3

Compare Psalm 83:18

Note: "LORD" is translated from the Hebrew, YEHOUAH (Strong's 3068), "Jehovah" is a transliteration. The word means: *the self-existent or eternal*. Jehovah, or the LORD, is the Jewish name of God. LORD Jehovah, as in Isaiah 26:4, has LORD translated from YAHH, Hebrew (Strong's 3050), which is a contraction of 3068 and has the same meaning, that is -- *the LORD most vehement*.

"Lord," is translated from ADOWN, or ADON, Hebrew (Strong's 113), meaning: *ruler, sovereign, lord, master, owner*, is often applied to Jesus. This is not a lessening of the deity of Christ, for, as we shall see in the next two lessons, Jesus has the status of God and holds a unique relationship with His heavenly Father, the only true God.

Another form of "Lord" is ADONAY, (Hebrew, Strong's 136). This word is a more emphatic form of 113 as the name of God. It may be used singularly, or it may be followed by "God" or "Jehovah." For example, Lord God; Lord Jehovah (Deut.10:17; Joshua 7:7).

In particular, LORD and Lord refer to God and Jesus respectively. However, Jesus acts with the authority of the Mighty God and everlasting Father, and thus, many times in Scripture, "LORD" and "Lord" are used with equal reference to both the Father and the Son. This is not to confuse the issue, for Jesus has the name of the Father in Him (see Lesson 4, p.7).

In Psalm 110 a distinction is made between LORD and Lord, which is the Father-God and the Son, a distinction that sets forth the pre-eminence of the Father over the Son; this is also confirmed in 1Corinthians 15:24–28. The unique relationship that Jesus has with His heavenly Father, as alluded to here, will be discussed in the following lessons.

21. The LORD has appointed the Lord to an exclusive position. What is that special appointment?

Psalm 110:4

Compare Hebrews 5:5,6

Note: God appointed Jesus as a priest of the order of Melchisedec, a heavenly priesthood. While Aaron's calling was of the earthly priesthood, his priestly office was a model of the heavenly counterpart. Jesus was not of the line of Aaron and therefore, could not be a part of the earthly office, He was later to take His place, in heaven, as Priest and Mediator between God and man (Heb.8:4,5; 1Tim.2:5).

22. In a conversation with the Pharisees, Jesus makes reference to Psalm 110 and establishes that the Lord (Jesus) has an earthly lineage. Of what line was the Son of man a descendent?

Matthew 22:41–45

23. Being of the earthly line of David, Jesus has a right to receive, and will receive, a certain position. What is that position?

Luke 1:32,33

Note: David was the king of Israel, and Jesus is a direct descendent of David (through Mary. Luke 3:23–38). By virtue of His earthly heritage, Jesus is the rightful King of national Israel (Matt.27:11) and, as He is also the Son of God, has a heavenly heritage; He is given to be King and Ruler for ever, over spiritual Israel, the full host of the redeemed (Dan.7:13,14).

Jacob pronounced the prophecy concerning the "Lion of Judah" taking the throne of Israel (Gen.49:9,10; [Shiloh – the place where God set His name, where He dwells and where the righteous enter. Deut.12:5; Isa.2:2,3]; [Lion of Judah is Jesus Christ. Rev.5:5]). Jesus will take that throne when he comes the second time (Matt.25:31). Jeremiah, as the voice of God, also prophesied that God's people will serve the LORD God and Christ in the new earth. Here, Christ is portrayed under the title of David, indicating that He is rightful King of Israel (Jer.30:8,9).

Hence, by appointment, the Lord Jesus is both Priest and King (Zech.6:13). Christ's position, by appointment, will be treated in more detail in the following studies.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that, the "Godhead" is made up of more than one Being. Firstly, there is *the one God* – the everlasting Father – LORD God Jehovah. There is also Jesus Christ, His Son, the *one Lord*. The Bible does *not* refer to the Son as "THE God" and Jesus never refers to Himself as such, He is the Son of God. In this way we may understand both, the plurality of the Godhead and the singular, individuality of God Himself. In the plural sense, there is God and Jesus, two Beings. The God-Head, being the Head over all, is Jehovah, also known as Yahweh, He is one individual and Jehovah/Yahweh is not Christ.

To some, this may seem like a blasphemous understating of the position of Christ in the Godhead. However, when we understand the exalted office of the Son of God and that He shares the Father's glory, we would not presume to diminish Him in any way.

There is no attempt here to lessen the exalted and glorious name of Jesus. We are simply taking Scripture as it reads, and we have seen many statements, in the *Book that God wrote* (2Pet.1:20,21), that clearly show the position of the Father as one God.

So then, what is Christ's position in the Godhead? In the following studies, we shall examine this question. We shall see – who Jesus is – why He is called "Lord" in some parts of Scripture and called "God" in other parts of Scripture. What do these terms mean? As Jesus has the title and authority of God, does this make two Gods? How then do we rationalise the Bible statement that there is one God and no Trinity?

The Holy Spirit has not yet been discussed in respect to the Godhead. This is not to say, there is no Holy Spirit, for the Bible has many references to such a One. A knowledge of the Holy Spirit is part of a thorough understanding of the identity of God, and will be the subject of later lessons.

May we learn with the wisdom that God's Spirit teaches --- Precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little (1Cor.2:13,14; Isa.48:17; Isa.28:10).



For though there be (those) that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many and lords many) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we by Him. Howbeit, there is not in every man that knowledge? 1Corinthians 8:5,6,7a.



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