

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #52:

THE GODHEAD

By John Temples

I have been asked to explain the Godhead. I will proceed to do that, explaining nuclear physics as a warmup. (Spoiler alert: we are dealing with a lofty and difficult subject.)

“Godhead” is a term found in some Bibles to designate the Deity, the true and living God. The term “Godhead” translates three slightly different forms of the Greek word *theotes*, which means “deity” or “the status, quality, or essence of God.” A closely related Greek word is *theos* (from which we get the word “theology”), which means “God” with emphasis on His personal nature.

So what is the difference between the terms “God” and “Godhead”? When the Bible writers wanted to speak of God as a Personal Being, they used *theos* (“God”). When they wished to speak of God abstractly or impersonally, emphasizing His power, nature, or “Godhood,” they used *theotes* (“Godhead”). To use a modern analogy, we can refer to our nation’s Chief Executive in two ways: “the President” or “Donald Trump.” The former is a reference to the office; the latter is a reference to the person who holds the office. Actually, the term most closely related to “Godhead” would be “the Presidency”-- designating the office only, without regard to who holds it.

The term “Godhead” is found three times in the New Testament. Here are those references from the King James Version:

- Acts 17:29--“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.”
- Romans 1:20--Paul refers to the “eternal power and Godhead” of Jehovah.
- Colossians 2:9--“For in Him [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

The KJV, NKJV, and ASV use the term “Godhead” in these passages. Most modern versions read “the Divine Nature” or “the Divine Being.” A modern synonym for “the Godhead” is “the Trinity.” “Trinity” means “a group of three closely related persons or things.” The word “trinity” is not found in Scripture, but it is an accurate term for the Godhead, which is one Divine Nature possessed equally and fully by three Persons.

So is it one God or three? One of our problems in understanding the Godhead is that the Bible emphatically declares that there is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4, Galatians 3:20, James 2:19), yet it does indeed speak of three “persons” as being God--the Father, the Son or the Word, and the Holy Spirit.

As soon as you start reading the Bible, you run into wording that suggests that God is more than one Person. The very first verse of Scripture says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). “God” in this verse is the word *Elohim*, which was the Hebrew term for any kind of deity or supreme being. But here’s the thing: the term *Elohim* is plural--it literally means “the Gods.” So why do Bible translators consistently render the word as “God,” singular? Because the verb “created” is singular! Literally translated, Genesis 1:1 reads, “The Gods, He created.”

Later on, in Genesis 1:26, we read, “Then God said, Let **us** make man in **our** image.” To whom was God speaking? To angels, you might say. But angels don’t possess creative power. God never used angels as agents in the creation. In fact, they themselves are created beings. No, Genesis 1:26 must be God the Father talking to the Son/Word and the Holy Spirit.

And of course, many passages, especially in the New Testament, refer to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, calling each of them “God.” Here are some proof texts:

- The Father is called God in many passages, such as John 6:27, where Jesus speaks of “God the Father.”
- Jesus is called God in Hebrews 1:8--“But to the Son He says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”

- The Holy Spirit is called God in Acts 5:3-4--"But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?... You have not lied to men, but to God."

So we have a classic Biblical mystery or paradox: is there one God, or are there three? The answer is, there is but one GodHEAD--one Divine Nature--but that Divine Nature is possessed fully and equally by three Persons.

I stress the words "fully and equally" in the last sentence. It's not that the Father is one-third God, the Son is another third, and the Spirit another third. The Godhead is not a committee with a division of authority. No, each member of the Godhead possesses the full nature of God. These are difficult concepts to grasp, but God has built into the natural world some things that help us understand them.

WATER HELPS US VISUALIZE THE GODHEAD

Water exists in three forms or phases: solid (snow, ice), liquid, and vapor (steam). The chemical formula for each of these is H₂O. Ice, water, and vapor are three separate physical substances, yet they are exactly the same chemically.

This analogy is not perfect, though, because the same water cannot be liquid, ice and steam at the same time, all the time. Water goes through phases, but God does not go through phases in His being. Nevertheless, this analogy is probably the best we have to help us understand the Godhead.

LIGHT CAN HELP US UNDERSTAND THE GODHEAD

Light can be divided into three primary colors; yet light is a unity.

YOU ALSO PICTURE THE GODHEAD

The Bible describes you as a triune being, consisting of body, soul, and spirit. Paul said, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and **may your whole spirit, soul, and body** be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord

Jesus Christ.” Your physical body is YOU--your soul is YOU--and your spirit is YOU. There is only one YOU, yet three manifestations of that “you.”

And think about the fact that in marriage, husband and wife are called “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5). Obviously, they remain two separate persons, but in the sacred marriage union they become “one.”

CAN MATHEMATICS HELP US UNDERSTAND THE GODHEAD?

Possibly. Here are three mathematical expressions we can relate to the Godhead (but only one of them agrees with Scripture or the rules of mathematics):

- Is the Godhead $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$? No. That would be valid in our physical realm, but the Bible emphatically declares that “God is one.”
- Is the Godhead $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$? No, that expression violates the laws of mathematics.
- Is the Godhead $\frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{3} = 1$? That would be incorrect, because it would suggest that each member of the Godhead possesses only part of the traits and attributes of deity. The truth is, each member is fully God.
- Is the Godhead $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$? That expression is valid mathematically, and is the only way to describe the Godhead in terms we can relate to.

SO WHY ARE THERE THREE MEMBERS OF THE GODHEAD?

The only real difference among the members of the Godhead has to do with function or area of labor. Indeed, since each member of the Godhead is fully and completely God, the only distinction among them has to be role or “job description”:

- In general, the Father, Jehovah, is **the Originator, the Architect, the Planner, the Designer, the First Cause**. He planned and willed the creation of the world, as well as the creation of the church.

- The Son is the **Builder/Creator** (John 1:3 says that all things were made by Him.) He made the world, and He made the church.
- The Holy Spirit is the **Lawgiver/ Energizer/Organizer**.

We can see these three divine Persons operating in their respective roles in Genesis 1:3:

- “God [the Father, acting in concert with the other two members of the Godhead] created the heavens and the earth....”
- “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters....” (*Hovering* suggests brooding, vibrating, or fluttering, implying the beginning of the laws of nature)
- “Then God said....” (verse 3). In the following verses, all the elements of creation are simply spoken into existence by God’s Word. But what--or who--is God’s WORD? “In the beginning was the Word.... All things were made through Him.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us....” (John 1:1, 3, 14). All these are references to Jesus Christ, the Son.

These Godhead members had the same roles in the formation of the church:

- The Father eternally purposed the church (Ephesians 1:4, 3:10-11);
- The Son built the church (Matthew 16:18);
- The Spirit organized, energized, and gave law to the church (John 16:13, Acts 1:8).

Think of a house:

- God the Father designed the house.
- God the Son built the house.
- God the Holy Spirit wired the house, threw the switch, and made the house livable and functional.

And that, folks, is about as close as we can come to understanding the Godhead. Just be glad that “explain the Godhead” will not be on our final exam! And rejoice

that each member of the Godhead has willed, worked for, and enabled your salvation and mine. --John Temples