

Understanding the Nature of the Godhead

Introduction:

The Trinity is one of the most difficult subjects to grasp within Scripture. However, it is undeniably in Scripture that there is one God, but that the one God has three aspects, or persons, within this one God. This sounds very strange, but, as we will see, the plurality of God is hinted at within the Old Testament and is further revealed in the New Testament. In fact, the idea of there being three infinite beings composing one God is *consistent* with Scripture, not something out of the blue. It is actually quite common throughout the Bible for something to have multiple aspects yet still be considered as one. While we might not be able to come to a complete understanding of the Godhead, we will try to understand better the Godhead by analyzing Scripture.

I. What the Godhead is and is not.

A. In order to help us understand the Godhead, let us first analyze a few different false ideas of the Godhead in order to grasp what the Godhead is *not*.

1. The Godhead is *not* tritheism. This amounts to polytheism. It is not like three chains in a link. In polytheism, the gods do not agree and are not unified. They take away from each other, thus limiting each other.
2. The Godhead is *not* modalism. Modalism is the idea that there is one person in God who is playing three roles, like one actor playing different roles in a play, or how one man is a father, a son and an uncle at the same time.
3. The God of the Bible is *not* Islamic monotheism. This says that there is only one person in God and any other view is blasphemy. The Bible affirms the deity of both Christ and the Holy Spirit.
4. The Godhead is *not* binitarianism. This states that God and Jesus are persons but the Holy Spirit is an influence, not a person, that they use. The Holy Spirit in Scripture is

not an influence or an “it” but is referred to as “he” and carries the same divine attributes as both God the Father and God the Son.

5. The Godhead is *not* nestorianism. This states that Jesus was not God but a person used by God. Scriptures teach us that Jesus needed to be both God and man. (Psalm 110:1)

6. The Godhead is *not* adoptionism. This states that Jesus was only a man until his baptism and then God adopted him into the Godhead because Jesus the man proved himself worthy enough to become God.

7. The Godhead is *not* subordinationism. This is the idea that Jesus is subordinate to the Father and is less than the Father. Scripture teaches that Jesus is equal with the Father and the Father has given all things into the hands of the Son.

B. The Godhead cannot be the things listed above. From what we read in Scripture, the Godhead is made up of the following.

1. God is a Tri-unity. There are three persons within one essence of God. But God cannot be divided into multiple parts.

a. The Godhead is similar to a triangle. There are three different corners that make up one triangle. If one of the corners is removed, it is no longer a triangle.

b. Mathematically the Godhead is not 1+1+1 but rather 1x1x1.

2. We say that the Godhead is three persons because we define a person as someone who can think, will/choose and feel.

a. The Father can think (Matt. 6:32), will (Matt. 6:9-10) and feel (Gen. 6:6).

b. The Son can think (Jn. 2:24-25), will (Jn. 10:18) and feel (Jn. 11:35).

c. The Spirit can think (Jn. 14:26), will (1 Cor. 12:11) and feel (Eph. 4:30).

Conclusion: In one of the greatest Biblical mysteries, God has revealed himself to be more than one yet one. While we will not fully understand this, in the following sections we will see that this is not a contradiction of reason.

II. The Deity of Father, Son and Spirit are affirmed in Scripture.

A. The deity of God the Father is perhaps the easiest to see in Scripture.

1. God the Father is the God who speaks through the Old Testament, though many times there is hinting at the multiple persons within the Godhead (more on this later).
2. Jesus addressed the God of the Old Testament as God the Father in his ministry, this being the God that the Jews recognized to be the one true God (Matt. 6:9, 11:25-27; John 4:23, 5:45; Luke 23:34).
3. Paul references God the Father, and recognizes his deity as being separate from Jesus (1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; Rom. 15:6) as does John (1 Jn. 2:22).

B. The deity of Jesus Christ is seen in Scripture as well.

1. The Messiah is God (Is. 9:6; Ps. 110:1; Ezek. 16:62-63; Zech. 12:10)
2. Jesus and the Father are one (Jn. 1:1-3, 10:30-38, 12:44-45, 14:7-11; Mk. 9:37).
3. Jesus has the authority of God (Jn. 5:19-29, 16:13-15; Mk. 2:5-12).
4. Jesus was before Creation (Col. 1:15-20).
5. When inspired writers of the Old Testament wrote of God at times they wrote of Jesus (compare Ps. 45:6 with Heb. 1:8).

C. The deity and nature of God is seen in the Holy Spirit. An assumption was made by many Old Testament readers that the Spirit of God was the same as God the Father. The further revelation of the New Testament teaches that this is not true. While together with Jesus they make up the Godhead, they are, in fact, two persons within the one essence of the Godhead.

1. The Spirit of God is God (2 Samuel 23:2-3; Ps. 51:11; 1 Cor. 3:16; Acts 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).
2. The Holy Spirit has eternal attributes (Heb. 9:14), including omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10-13) and omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-12).
3. Paul finishes his letter by referring to the Holy Spirit on equal terms as God the Father

and Jesus the Son (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Conclusion: The deity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is clearly taught in Scripture. In order to help us, we will now examine the most ambiguous of the Godhead: The Holy Spirit.

III. The Nature of the Holy Spirit.

- A. The Holy Spirit is not a New Testament invention. (Acts 7:51-53; Mark 12:35-37)
- B. The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit or the Spirit of God in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:2; Neh. 9:20; Job 33:4; Is. 40:13). In fact, all three of the Godhead – God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit – are referred to as being separate even in the Old Testament (Is. 48:16).
- C. The Holy Spirit is referred to as “he” and teaches (Jn. 14:26; 16:7, 13).
- D. The Holy Spirit councils the first church (Acts 15:28).
- E. As we have seen, the Holy Spirit is omniscient, omnipresent, but he is also omnipotent, having the power of God (Lk. 1:35).
- F. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin (Jn. 16:8-11 (also referred to as “he”)).
- G. The Holy Spirit has intellect (1 Cor. 2:10-11) and can be grieved (Eph. 4:30).

Conclusion: The above points illustrate the fact that the Holy Spirit is a part of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit has the power of God. The Holy Spirit is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. While the Holy Spirit is separate from God the Father and from Jesus the Son, all three make up the Godhead and are one.

III. The Godhead is one.

- A. God is one in the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4) and other places (Is. 43:10-11; Jam. 2:19).
- B. The Holy Spirit is mentioned as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ all at once (Romans 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 2:14-16).

Conclusion: It is clear in Scripture that God is one. The fact that God is one yet exists in three persons is not a contradiction. We will examine how they are in three persons yet one in the following sections,

and how Scripture is consistent with the acknowledgment of there being a plurality yet one.

IV. Though one, the Godhead is three separate persons.

A. The persons of the Godhead interact with each other and therefore cannot be the same person (modalism).

1. Jesus prays to God the Father (Matt. 26:42).
2. The Spirit intercedes for us according to God's will (Rom. 8:26-28).
3. God the Father speaks to Jesus (Matt. 17:5).
4. God the Father gave all things to Jesus (Matt. 11:27, 28:18; Jn. 5:25-27).
5. God the Father sent Jesus (Jn. 7:28-29, 17:25).
6. Jesus received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured him out (Acts 2:32-33).
7. The Spirit leads Jesus (Matt. 4:1).

B. All three members of the Godhead are present at one time in various places.

1. The Holy Spirit and God the Father and the Son are present in the person of Jesus (Lk. 1:35).
2. All three present at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16-17).
3. All three present at the crucifixion and atonement (Heb. 9:13-14).
4. All three present at the resurrection.
 - a.) God the Father raised Jesus (Acts 2:32).
 - b.) Jesus was not only himself resurrected but has the power and authority to do so (Jn. 10:17-18).
 - c.) Jesus was raised by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:1-4).
5. Peter mentions all three in unison (1 Peter 1:2), as does Paul (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6), Jude (20-21) and Jesus (Matt. 28:19).

Conclusion: Christians agree with the *Shema* that the Lord our God is one. Although the Lord our God

is one, the one God is made up of three persons in one essence. In the following section we will see that the Old Testament hints at the plurality of God, and later we will see that the idea of multiple objects making up one object is not uncommon in Scripture.

V. The plurality of God is hinted at in the Old Testament.

A. The best examples are found in the book of Genesis, which Jews, Muslims and Christians agree is an inspired book.

1. Man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26).
2. Man becomes like God (Gen. 3:22).
3. God confuses man's language (Gen. 11:7).
4. The Lord rains fire from the Lord (Gen. 19:24).

B. The plural is used in various other places.

1. When God commissions Isaiah (Is. 6:8).
2. When David speaks of multiple Lords, one of whom is ultimately the Messiah (Ps. 110:1).
3. When the Lord speaks of God (Amos 4:10-11).

C. In the *Shema*, we read that the Lord our God is one. The word for “one” is *echad* which is not exclusively used to mean one in isolation and number, but is at times used to mean one in unity. This same word is used when we read that a man and his wife become one flesh (Gen. 2:24) or when Pharaoh had two different dreams but Joseph reveals that they are one (Gen. 41:25-26).

Conclusion: These passages make very little sense and must have been confusing to a Jewish mind. But the revelation of the New Testament makes these passages much clearer. While God is one, there are three persons in one essence. The New Testament concept of the Trinity is not out of line or inconsistent with Scripture, but actually provides greater clarity and depth on Old Testament passages.

VI. Multiple things regarded as one is not uncommon in Scripture.

A. Throughout the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the notion that one thing can be made of many is quite common. It is also common outside of Scripture. For example, one tree is made of many branches, one shirt of multiple threads, one book of many pages, etc. The Bible itself is made up of many books and many stories but is the complete revelation of God's gospel to mankind.

1. There are a variety of gifts but one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-7).
2. A crowd gathered as one man (Neh. 8:1).
3. God is glorified with one voice of many people (Rom. 15:6).
4. The church is one body with many members (1 Cor. 12:12-14).
5. One tribe wanted to merge with another to become one people (Gen. 34:16).

B. Perhaps most bewilderingly is the account of the three angels that visit Abraham in Genesis 18. We read that the Lord appeared to Abraham (vs. 1) but what Abraham saw was three men (vs. 2). Yet Abraham bows to them and refers to these three men in the singular by speaking to them as God and calling them “Lord” (vs. 3). Yet when the Lord speaks, we read that “they” speak (vs. 5). In verse 9 “they” speak but in verse 10 “the Lord” speaks. Then God refers to himself in the third person (vs. 19), hinting at the plurality of the person of God. Finally, the men leave, but the Lord remains (vs. 22) and speaks to Abraham about the wickedness of Sodom. We read in 19:1 that two angels entered Sodom. So, it could be said, that two angels left and one remained and spoke to Abraham. If so, then Abraham spoke to God when he spoke to one angel and also to three.

Conclusion: The notion that the Godhead is made up of three persons is not offensive or brash. This notion instead grants readers a greater appreciation of the God of the Old Testament, thus providing a greater appreciation of the God of the New Testament, because they are one and the same. The Trinity is not inconsistent with God's revealed word. It is a greater revelation of a wonderful mystery.

VII. The role of the Godhead in the plan of Creation and Redemption.

A. The three persons of God's one essence at times work together, such as in Creation.

1. All things come from God the Father (Gen. 1:1; 1 Cor. 8:6).
2. Jesus took part in Creation (Jn. 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:1-2).
3. The Holy Spirit was involved in Creation (Job 33:4; Gen. 1:2).

B. The three persons of God's one essence have different roles in God's act of Redemption.

1. The Father planned salvation (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 1:3-6).
2. Salvation was accomplished by the Son (Eph. 1:5-9; Jn. 17:4, 19:30).
3. The resurrection of Jesus involved all three (see section IV point 4).
4. Salvation is applied to believers by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14, 4:30; Jn. 3:5; Tit. 3:4-7).

Conclusion: All members of the Godhead were involved in Creation and are currently involved in Redemption. At times they work together and at times they have different roles. Even when they have different roles, they work in total and perfect unity to accomplish the will of God.

Conclusion:

The nature of the Godhead is a difficult subject to grasp. It is made up of three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. All three are eternal deities and are omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. The Holy Spirit is one of these three persons and is not merely the influence of God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit is referred to as “he” and is as eternal and all knowing and all powerful as God the Father and God the Son. Together they work in total and complete unity to accomplish the will of God. As we have seen, the notion of a non-polytheistic yet plural God is found both in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. It is not contrary to Scripture or even to human logic and reason, but is acceptable, explainable and consistent with Scripture.