

“The Head of Christ is God”

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Although the title above is a direct quotation from a very plain and clear New Testament Scripture (I Cor. 11:3), many refuse to accept the Truth contained therein. In fact, entire books have been written about the Godhead with I Corinthians 11:3 completely ignored. Why is this plain teaching so controversial?

Are God the Father and God the Son equal in every single way? Now that Jesus is back in Heaven, is He no longer subordinate to God the Father? Is there not a difference in authority? May the reader understand that this writer fully believes in the Deity of Christ and the propriety of worshiping Christ in ways that are clearly authorized by the Scriptures (e.g., singing to Him and meditating on His sacrifice during the Lord’s Supper – Eph. 5:19-20; I Cor. 11:23-29). However, this writer also believes that there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the Godhead that should not exist. An example of such is the very common belief that Jesus is now equal with God the Father in every single way. Is that what the New Testament teaches?

First of all, why is this subject important to understand? It is important because: 1) It is a part of God’s revealed Word that He expects us to study and understand (Eph. 3:4; 5:17); and 2) if people do not understand this, they may incorrectly conclude that all Three Godhead Members are equal in every possible way. Such misunderstandings have caused people to do things in worship that the Scriptures do not authorize. What does the Bible teach?

BEFORE THE INCARNATION

Was Jesus under God’s authority before Jesus became a man? First consider the pattern of God accomplishing things through Jesus after Jesus came to earth: 1) in revelation: “God...hath...spoken...by His Son” (Heb. 1:1-2; cf. Jn. 17:8); 2) in reconciliation: “God...reconciled us...by Jesus Christ” (II Cor. 5:18; cf. Eph. 1:5; I Th. 5:9); 3) in the resurrection: “He...shall raise up us also by Jesus” (II Cor. 4:14); and 4) in the judgment: “God shall judge...by Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16; Acts 10:42; 17:30). This is a clear pattern, indicating that the Second Person of the Godhead carried out the will of the First Person, being in submission to Him. However, the same type of language is also used of the Second Person before He came to earth! For example, Jesus actively fulfilled the Father’s will in creation: “God...created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:9; cf. 3:11; Jn. 4:1-2; Heb. 1:1; I Cor. 8:6). This statement is exactly like those above, which indicate the pattern of God having a plan that Jesus was sent to execute. Jesus taught that he who sends is greater than he who is sent (Jn. 13:16; 14:28). Jesus was sent by God to become a man (Jn. 3:17; 17:8, 25; I Jn. 4:14). That is why the writer of Hebrews used the word “Apostle”

when referring to Jesus, which means “one sent” (Heb. 3:1). There are also several Old Testament passages which seem to indicate that the Second Godhead Member may have been sent by God as a divine “Angel” (Messenger) at various times during the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 31:11-13; Ex. 3:2-ff; 13:12; 14:19; 23:20-23; Josh. 5:13-15; Jdg. 2:1-4; 1 Cor. 10:4). However, no man hath seen God at any time (Ex. 33:20; Jn. 1:18; 6:46; I Jn. 4:12), and the Bible reader never reads of God the Father being “sent” anywhere by anyone! The pattern seen in the Second Person is one of submission to the authority of the First Person, including the time before Jesus’ incarnation.

Someone may wonder about Philippians 2, which says that Jesus was “*equal with God*” before His incarnation. First of all, the phrase “*equal with God*” does not inherently mean equal in every possible way. The discussion of John 5:18 in the next section will hopefully make that clear. What is being emphasized in Philippians 2 is the “*form*” of the Second Person, both before and after He became a man:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal 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: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

The teaching here regarding equality with God is that Jesus was, in eternity past, in the glorious “*form*” of Deity (glory like that of the Father), but willingly changed His “*form*” into the humble form of man. This does not mean that God was not over Jesus in authority before Jesus came to earth, and aforementioned passages would indicate otherwise. Please see this table comparing the times before and after Christ’s incarnation:

"EQUAL WITH GOD" (Phil. 2:6; Jn. 5:18)		
	BEFORE JESUS' INCARNATION	AFTER JESUS' INCARNATION
1ST PERSON OF GODHEAD	100% DIVINE, 0% MAN; ABOVE ALL IN AUTHORITY	100% DIVINE, 0% MAN; ABOVE ALL IN AUTHORITY
2ND PERSON OF GODHEAD	100% DIVINE, 0% MAN; GLORIOUS FORM OF GOD (Jn. 17:5,24; Phil. 2:6-8); EQUAL WITH GOD'S <u>NATURE</u> IN EVERY SENSE (NO HUMAN NATURE). Sent by God - (Gen. 31:11-13; Ex. 3,13,14,23; Jdg. 2; 1 Cor. 10:4; Jn. 3:17; 13:16)	THE DIVINE MAN; HUMBLE FORM OF MAN ; HUMAN NATURE, LOWER THAN ANGELS (Isa. 53:2; Heb. 2:9-16; Lk. 20:36); BUT STILL "EQUAL WITH GOD," BEING DIVINE (Heb. 1:6-9; Jn. 5:18; cf. Jn. 14:28)
3RD PERSON OF GODHEAD	100% DIVINE, 0% MAN (Was sent - Psa. 104:30)	100% DIVINE, 0% MAN (Sent by God/Jesus-Jn. 14-15)
ANGELS	LOWER THAN GOD, HIGHER THAN MAN	LOWER THAN GOD, HIGHER THAN MAN
MAN	LOWER THAN GOD & ANGELS	LOWER THAN GOD & ANGELS

In Jesus' prayer of John 17, He requested to have the same glory He had before He came to earth (17:5, 24). God has now highly exalted Jesus to glory, yet Jesus is in subjection to His Father (Jn. 17; I Cor. 11:3). How can Jesus have the same glory as before the incarnation, but be in subjection now in Heaven? Apparently it is because the Second Person was subject to the First Person of the Godhead before He came to earth. That is what is indicated when all the Scriptures are examined.

DURING JESUS' MINISTRY

When Jesus was on earth, His claim that He was the Son of God implied that He was "*equal with God*" (Jn. 5:18). What is meant by "*equal with God*" in that context? Jesus was rightfully claiming His divinity. The Jews were dishonoring Jesus (Jn. 5:16), and Jesus was teaching them that if they honored the Father, they should also honor Him, because Jesus would be their Judge on the day of resurrection (Jn. 5:22-29). Jesus was (and forever will be) divine, as is God the Father. However, even though Jesus was equal with God in some ways, He was not equal with God in every way. In the same chapter, Jesus expressed His subordination to His Father. He said that the Father was the one who had given Jesus authority to judge, and He also said these words:

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise...I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (Jn. 5:19, 30).

Some claim that John 10:30 proves that Jesus and the Father are equal in every way. While Jesus was on earth He said, *"I and my Father are one"* (Jn. 10:30). Jesus and the Father were one in nature, one in mindset, and were united in will and purpose. However, they did not have the same authority. Consider the fact that in the same book John records Jesus praying for all of His followers to be *"one"* (Jn. 17). Does that mean that all of Jesus' followers have the same authority? All Christians are equal in some ways, but not equal in all ways. For example, there are some called *"elders"* who have *"the rule over"* the local congregations with whom they worship (1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:7, 17). Since Jesus said Christians are all to be one, does that mean that every Christian has the same authority as elders? Being united as *"one"* in mind and purpose does not mean Christians are all exactly the same in every way, and neither does it mean that the Father and His Son are the same in every way, or equal in authority.

Please notice Jesus' own words from the same Book of John: *"...my Father is greater than I"* (Jn. 14:28). If Jesus were equal with His Father in every way, why would Jesus say that His Father was greater? They were equal in some ways, but not all ways. Besides the difference in authority, there was also unequal knowledge. There was at least one thing the Father knew that the Son did not. Jesus said, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father"* (Mk. 13:31-32; cf. Lk. 2:52).

AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION

The Father was over the Son in authority before Jesus' death on the cross, but what about when Jesus returned from the grave? When Jesus said He had been given all authority in heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18), that did not mean that Jesus was over God the Father in authority, or even equal with the Father in authority in every way. It was the Father who gave His Son that authority, and the Father was excepted in that statement. After Jesus had returned from the grave, He said all authority has been given to Him, but He also said that God the Father was His God (His Supreme Ruler). *"Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God"* (Jn. 20:17). Therefore, God the Father was still the God (Ruler, Head) of Jesus, even though Jesus had been given the *"authority"* mentioned in Matthew 28:18.

FROM JESUS' ASCENSION TO THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

The reader will recall the pattern of God accomplishing things through the submissive Second Person of the Godhead: 1) in creation: *"God...created all things by Jesus*

Christ" (Eph. 3:9; cf. 3:11; Jn. 4:1-2; Heb. 1:1; I Cor. 8:6); 2) in revelation: "God... hath...spoken...by His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2; cf. Jn. 17:8); 3) in reconciliation: "God...reconciled us...by Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 5:18; cf. Eph. 1:5; I Th. 5:9).

The same pattern will be seen in the following future events: 1) in the resurrection: "He...shall raise up us also by Jesus" (II Cor. 4:14); and 2) in the judgment: "God shall judge...by Jesus Christ" (Rom. 2:16; Acts 10:42; 17:30). All of this indicates that God is still the Head of Christ, even though Jesus is back in Heaven in His former glory. Again, He who sends is "greater" than He who is sent (Jn. 13:16; cf. Jn. 3:17; Heb. 3:1; I Jn. 4:14).

Nothing stated so far could be any clearer than this: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (I Cor. 11:3). First Corinthians was written after Jesus was back in Heaven, yet it teaches that God is still the Head of Christ. It was not written in the past tense, as if the head of Christ *was* God. It is not as if that were only true before Jesus returned to Heaven. The term "head" implies someone who is over another in authority. Think of a head being positioned above a body that tells the body's members what to do. The plain teaching is that just as Christ has authority over the church and man has authority over the woman, God has authority over His glorified Son in Heaven. Note that a father and mother are both equally parents, but the father is the head of his wife, having God-given authority over her (cf. I Cor. 11:3). In a similar way, Members of the Godhead are all Deity (Mt. 28:19), but the Father is the Head, above all (Eph. 4:6).

AFTER THE JUDGMENT DAY

It seems that some have misunderstood what Paul taught here in First Corinthians 15:

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:24-28).

The fact that it says, "...then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him..." does not mean that God is not the Head of Christ now. In these same verses Paul explained that God was the one who had the power to give Christ His current authority, and that God is an exception to that authority. To be even clearer, in chapter 11 Paul wrote that God is the Head of Christ (I Cor. 11:3). The only harmonious teaching is that Christ is subject to God now, and He will be subject to God "then" also.

While Jesus was on earth, a request was made to Him that Jesus said only the Father could fulfill: "...Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said...to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father" (Mt. 20:20-23). Only the Father will have the authority to grant such. This is one reason why Christians address the Father in their prayers of supplications and thanksgivings. The Father is the Provider, the one with ultimate authority to give every gift (Jas. 1:17; cf. Mt. 6:9-ff; 7:7-11; Lk. 11:1-ff; Jn. 16:23; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6; Rev. 8:3-4). In fact, even though Jesus is back in Heaven, He is still praying to the Father! He is pleading with the Father on behalf of Christians (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1; cf. Jn. 14:16). The very fact that Jesus pleads with the Father indicates that the Father is still the one with the final authority!

CONCLUSION: WHO IS TRULY THE ONE GOD ABOVE ALL OTHER BEINGS?

In First Timothy 2:5, the Father is called the one God, and Jesus is called a man. Although Jesus is the divine man, passages like these accentuate significant differences between the Father and Son. Keep in mind that First Timothy was written well after Jesus had returned to Heaven. "*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (I Tim. 2:5; cf. Jn. 1:14; I Cor. 15:47; Eph. 4:6; Phil. 2:6-8).

Jesus and the Holy Spirit are divine (and can rightfully be called God), so why did Jesus call the Father "*the only true God*" separately from Himself? "*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*" (Jn. 17:3; cf. 4:23-24). Why did Jesus not say in His prayer, "That they might know us, who both comprise the only true God?" Did Jesus simply mean that the Father was the true God when compared to idols? If so, why did Jesus say that God was also His God? (Jn. 20:17). Paul often referred specifically to the Father as the "*one God*" or "*true God*" separately from Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who were also mentioned in the same context (I Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:6; I Thess. 1:9-10; I Tim. 2:5; cf. Mal. 2:10; Acts 3:13; I Jn. 5:20; Jude 4). Here is an example of such in the context of idol worship:

...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be 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... (I Cor. 8:4-7).

When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Thessalonians, he contrasted idols with God the Father, and described Him as the true God: "*...how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven...*" (I Thess. 1:9-10).

Do any of these passages mean that Jesus cannot rightfully be called “*God*”? No, they do not! Paul Himself described Jesus as “*God...manifest in the flesh*” (I Tim. 3:16; cf. Mic. 5:2; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; 40:3; Mt. 1:23; Jn. 1:1; Heb. 1:8). So where is the harmony? The harmony is found in that God the Father is the “*true God*” compared to idols, but He is also truly the God of Jesus Christ, His divine Son (John 20:17; II Cor. 11:31; Eph. 1:3; 4:6; I Pet. 1:3; Heb. 1:9). Therefore, the Father is the only one who can truly be called “*God...of all*” in the ultimate sense (Eph. 4:6). Although Jesus and the Holy Spirit are divine, neither of them possesses this distinction. Only God the Father is the “*one God*” who is “*above all*” (Eph. 4:6), which includes His authority over Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who had been mentioned in the previous verses of Ephesians 4 (Eph. 4:4-6; cf. Jn. 13:16; 14:28; I Cor. 11:3; 15:27-28).

Though the term “*God*” is mostly used of God the Father, both Jesus and God the Father are at times called “*God*” or “*Lord*.” However, a critical difference is that Jesus is never called “*the God*” of God the Father or “*the Head*” of God the Father. The Bible never says that Jesus sent the Father anywhere on any mission. Jesus is our Divine Brother (Mt. 28:10; Jn. 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:9-18), and God is our Divine Father. The term “*Father*” indicates authority over all His children, including Jesus. When all the evidence is considered, the Bible clearly teaches that God the Father is the Supreme Ruler over Jesus and all others.

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