

PRESCRIPTION FOR UNITY ONE SPIRIT, ONE LORD, ONE GOD

Having discussed the uniqueness of the body of Christ, which is the church (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 1:24), Paul next declares there is one Spirit (Ephesians 4:4). He will, in this same passage, declare there is one Lord and one Father (Ephesians 4:5-6). This is a concise declaration of the Godhead and the oneness of its members. The reader is warned that a complete understanding of the Godhead may be beyond our grasp in this life. Perhaps only the wisdom and understanding that comes in the land beyond will be sufficient to cause us to grasp this somewhat mysterious topic. Nevertheless, we ought not be discouraged in our attempts to study the Godhead. Some understanding, although likely incomplete, is certainly attainable and will draw us closer to a deeper understanding of *“Him with whom we have to do”* (Hebrews 4:13).

The Bible declares that God is one (Deuteronomy 4:35; 6:4; Isaiah 44:6,8; Isaiah 45:5,6; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:5; James 2:19). His singularity cannot be overstated and his uniqueness is beyond comparison. The Bible describes Jehovah God as a “jealous” God (Exodus 34:14) who demands that he alone be worshipped. During the period of the Bible history the idea of one God was quite odd and was held by a minority of people. Ancient civilizations worshipped a varied collection of so-called deities from human mixed demigods to the great Titans and Olympians. The idea that there could be but a single God, sovereign over all was beyond comprehension to ancient man. Perhaps it was the propensity for each region to worship a single “sponsoring” god that caused Jehovah God to call Abram and his family from Ur and Haran to a nomadic life. During their wanderings, they would learn to depend solely upon the God of Heaven and not upon the idol gods so prevalent in the old world. Perhaps as Paul penned Ephesians 4 he remembered his encounter with polytheism (belief in multiple gods) in Athens before the Council of Areopagus. There Paul remarked on the numerous altars built to various gods including one erected to the “unknown” god. There Paul proclaimed to the Athenians the God of Heaven (Acts 17:23). God demands that he be worshipped alone and without competition.

This oneness of God seems straightforward until one begins to read the New Testament. Here we find a much fuller discussion of Jesus, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit of God, both of whom are worshipped in one form or another along with God the Father. In our passage under discussion here, we discover that there is one Lord (Jesus, in this context) and one Spirit along with one God. How can this be? Are there three Gods? If so doesn't that conflict with Old Testament teaching? Have we become polytheists after all? We affirm that there is one God who is consistent with Old Testament teaching and that we are not polytheists but monotheists, proclaiming that one God to the world.

We understand that the Hebrew word translated “God” in Genesis is actually a plural word [*Elohim*] but is always used with a singular verb. This plurality is seen further in Genesis 1:26 when God says, *“Let us make man in our image”* (emphasis mine – JBE). A similar construction is found in Genesis 3:22 when God says, *“Behold, the man has become as one of us”* (emphasis mine – JBE). As God prepared to confuse the world's languages at Babel, we again find the plural statement, *“Come let us go down there and confuse their language...”* (Genesis 11:7, emphasis mine – JBE). While it is true that there are multiple celestial beings, including angels (both good and evil), living creatures and disembodied saints, it would seem very unlikely that God was addressing himself to them especially considering the Genesis 11 passage. Nevertheless, the confusion, if any exists, is eliminated by the reading of Genesis 1:1 where the text speaks of the *“Spirit of God...moving over the face of the waters.”*

In the New Testament John begins his lofty Gospel with these enduring words, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being”* (John 1:1-3). We must conclude then that Jesus existed before creation and since he will reign in the realm to come (Revelation 19:11-19) he must be eternal, a characteristic shared with the Father. Jesus is oft referred to as Lord. This is a title, not a name and is also employed of common men (Matthew 10:24; 18:25; Acts 25:26). Typically, when Jesus is spoken of as “Lord,” English translations capitalize the title. This is altogether appropriate as Peter declared Jesus to be *“both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:36). Yet another indicator of his Deity is his own acceptance of worship (Matthew 28:9; Mark 5:6). Finally, although there is much more on the subject, Jesus declared himself equal with God (Philippians 2:6).

The Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost as some translations have it, is generally a much more misunderstood part of the Godhead. Perhaps that is because we can understand the idea of a Father and a Son but not a Spirit. While it is beyond the scope of our lesson and space here, we do observe the following about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was present at the creation (Genesis 1:1) so like Jesus he is not created but eternal. He dwells within Christians (Romans 8:9-11), the same thing also said of God (1 John 4:4) and of Christ (Ephesians 3:17). That the Spirit is holy cannot be question for the Scriptures use the adjective “holy” 90 times in reference to this grand being. The Spirit was also to be the earthly replacement for Jesus (John 4:16-17) who would guide the newly birthed church into *“all things”* and *“bring to ... remembrance all that I [Jesus] said”* (John 14:26).

At least three times the entire Godhead appears at the same place and time. They were obviously together at Creation (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-4). They were all present at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17). All were present at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-8; assuming the overpowering cloud was a manifestation of the Spirit). We might also observe that all three are called Lord at some time in Scripture (c.f. Genesis 2:4-22; Acts 9:17; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 3:18). The inescapable conclusion is that there are three parts or personalities to the Godhead; The Father, The Son and the Holy Ghost.

The relationship between the three is a marvelous study which we will endeavor to teach at some point, but for now we appreciate that these three are so joined together in mission, in purpose, in intent and in deed that they can be said to be one while still presenting themselves in different ways. One excellent analogy used by my wife Bobbi is that of an apple. It has a skin, the fruit and the seeds. Each is different but each is absolutely critical to the design and functioning of the apple. Know this, there is one God and that God is worthy of all worship, praise, adoration and obedience. Three personalities make up the divine nature but there remains but one God.