



The Godhead Debate

The Divinity of Jesus Christ



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One question sweeps throughout the entire Seventh day Adventist denomination:

How is Jesus God?

You might think: obviously He is - so why is there a debate?

The Seventh day Adventist denomination began as a non-trinitarian movement, and only gradually over the span of almost a century did the trinity teaching become normative. Yet in recent times, it has become challenged more and more in the Adventist church.

The pioneers of Seventh day Adventism believed in the full deity of Christ and His preexistence before being born of Mary as the Son of God and Son of Man. A trinitarian belief was not necessary for them; neither is it for today's Father-Son believers, because the difference in opinion is not *if* Christ is God, it is: *How* is Jesus God? - Is He divine because He *inherently* possesses all divine attributes (being a part of the Godhead), or is He fully divine because He *inherited* divinity from God His Father in eternity?

General objections

Trinitarians though don't accept the inherited divinity logic of the early pioneers and today's Father-Son believers, and therefore tend to state that denying the Trinity is equal to denying the divinity of Christ.

Another argument goes like this: "*God is love.*" (1. John 4:8) For love to be love, it must have a way to be expressed. Love cannot be love if there is no object by which love can be shown. God therefore must be more than one person.

Is that true? Does the Bible define love in that way?

Also, is discussing this issue a hindrance to our job of proclaiming the Three Angels Messages, as it is claimed now and then? Well, the Three Angels Messages are messages of character change, so, we will investigate that... .

Can we find an answer to the question: *How* is Jesus God? How do we differ in the method of measuring divinity? Does God give us clues as to how we should?

And how does Satan think about it?

The Trinitarians do it in these (simplified) two steps:
a) show that the words used for God have a pluralistic nature to them. On that basis the question is asked: who then are the members of the Godhead?

b) This is determined by collecting all the verses from the Bible which speak about divine characteristics, and then sorting them to those whom the Bible calls God. Those who **possess them all** are considered being a part of the Godhead. These are God the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Easy, right?

The Father-Son believers do it in these (also simplified) two steps: a) Phil. 2:6 states that Christ is equal with God. No need then to doubt or be in need of proving that. So how is He equal?

b) The equality of Christ's deity is expressed in **relational terms** towards God the Father. That to them is the defining characteristic of how Christ is deity. For example:

"All things are delivered unto me of my Father: (...)" (Matt 11:27)

"For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." (John 5:26)

In summary: the Trinitarian accepts Christ's divinity because of Him **inherently possessing** all divine attributes. The **display of** His divine powers establishes who He is. The Father-Son believer accepts Christ's divinity because of the **inheritance** through a true and real relationship Christ has towards God. **Stating** the relationship establishes who He is.

What about Satan and divinity?

What does Satan think divinity is all about? He wanted to be like God, so he must have had an idea about it. So how did he measure it?

What he desired most about God was His power and position as creator and decision maker. Everything that outwardly manifested from God, he desired to be or have - except His character. He thought that character is something that comes inherently out of a person itself; if the person is righteous, the decisions will be righteous. Lucifer saw his wisdom as something he possessed inherently and not as something given from God; that he had life in himself, and therefore any relational dependence on God is unnecessary.

When he approached Christ in the desert to tempt Him to show His divinity, what did he demand as a sign of it? *“If you are the Son of God command that these stones become bread.”* (Mt. 4:3)

He demanded an ***outward display of power***. What did he question? Christ’s ***relationship and submission*** to God. “If you are... show it.” But what did Christ do? He said: “It is written... .” Where did Christ put His trust? Not in a power display, but into what was spoken to Him earlier:

“You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” (Mt. 3:17)

Christ doesn’t do anything of Himself:

“For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.” (John 12:49-50)

Satan had questioned the Father’s words, but Christ trusted in it - Christ’s strength was His certainty and faith in His relationship to God. He believed those words and thereby overcame Satan’s temptation.

The rejection of the principle of inheritance occurred at the beginning of the great controversy, before earth had even been created:

“They had come to exalt themselves, and they forgot that their beauty of person and of character came from the Lord Jesus. This fact the angels would obscure, that Christ was the only begotten Son of God, and they came to consider that they were not to consult Christ.” (Lt. 42, 1910.3)

The aim of the [fallen] angels is to fight against the relation of Christ to His Father. They desire His power and to be able to display it whenever they pleased. But they do so without wanting to receive it from or be responsible to anyone else.

What did Satan say about the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, when he approached Eve?

“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:5)

Satan directed Eve to think about the fruit in a specific way. How did she think about it?

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food (outward appearance), and that it was pleasant to the eyes (again), and a tree to be desired to make one wise (gaining the special value of the desired object for yourself, knowing good and evil, becoming able to judge it for yourself), she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” (Gen 3:6)

This kind of judging by the outward appearance and desiring the special attributes of that object for oneself, becoming a decision maker, is the “gift” we received from Satan; it is part of the sinful human nature we possess. Eve could have rejected it. But she unfortunately didn’t.

“The Bible teaching of God is the only teaching

that it is safe for human beings to follow. We are to regulate our faith by a plain, “Thus saith the Lord.” The knowledge of Himself that God desires us to gain from His Word will, if brought into the daily life, make men and women strong to resist evil and fit them to represent Him.” (Ms 132, 1903.36)

Beyond the knowledge of God having a salvational aspect to it, how does God want us to look at Him? Notice the lesson He gave to Elijah:

*“And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire **a still small voice.**” (1 King 19:11-12)*

God displays here first our outward expectations. It is simply our (fallen) natural way of looking unto

God that He meets. Someone strong, someone who can save us. He grants us that - but He does so in order that we then can look unto the aspects which are really crucial: His spoken (or whispered) words and His character.

Final Conclusion

Our wish is to make us all think about the framework we operate in. We all have reasons to believe what we do. If that framework is unconsciously wrong, wouldn't it be a good idea to rethink and correct it if necessary?

“There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make an error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation.” (Review & Herald, Dec. 20th, 1892)

“But we are not safe when we take the position that we will not accept anything else than that upon which we have settled as truth.” (Review & Herald, June 18th, 1888)

To us it looks like God doesn't want us to find Him by reflecting Satan's way of thinking about divinity - measuring the abilities and attributes by outward observation. But since this is the way we are searching Him, He reveals Himself through this way to meet our fallen nature - and then leads us to His way of looking at who (and how) He really is. We think that by establishing the begotten Son truth in the pioneers of our movement, He wanted to set us on the right path - and not get stuck on the outward display of His power. Aren't we to be the third Elijah? Yes. How? By knowing God not by the power He manifests, but by the still small voice of His character. Why? Knowing the name (character) of God comes with a blessing:

“And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.” (Gen. 32:29)

What characteristics are included in the name of the Lord?

*“And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting (or overseeing) the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.**” (Ex. 34:5-7)*

What do you desire God to be? How do you judge/measure Him in the hour of His judgement? These things have an effect, for the God we behold we are changed into:

*“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, **are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.**” (2. Cor 3:18)*

Can you see the **relational** aspect of how we receive the character change from God? And is a visible outward display of love necessary for love to be love? No. Necessary for us to comprehend, for sure. Isn't that why He blessed His Son with *‘all things’*?

One might say, well, Christ displayed the **relationship and submission** to the Father here on earth for us, this being a part of the plan of salvation. Because we can be saved only by accepting a relationship and submission to God.

Whilst being true that without both we cannot be saved, if that concept only was displayed here on earth as a solution to sin, why withhold it beforehand from the angels? Wouldn't it be better if they had known it, in order that the sin problem wouldn't have occurred in the first place?

God didn't withhold it from them. In fact, everything in the entire universe is build upon that principle of relationship and submission to God - even without the sin problem being there at all. And that principle is upheld in the begottenness and inheritance of the Son of God, whom the Father has upheld to all the

universe as worthy to be worshipped:

*“In these words is set forth the great principle which is the **law of life for the universe**. **All things** Christ **received** from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, **the Father’s life** flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.” (DA 21.2)*

“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.” (1. Cor 8:6)

“It was for the purpose of giving to man a perfect representation of the character of God that Jesus came to our earth.” (GCDB March 6, 1899)

We think that having a correct view about God is an essential part of proclaiming the Three Angels Messages. “Fear God”, are the first words of it.

Which God?

For more information and study material about Father & Son, please visit us on
www.maranathamedia.com

or watch the Theos Series on Youtube:
<http://bit.ly/TheosSeries>