

Can Man Become God?

Peter Ditzel

The Bible teaches that our relationship to God is one of sons born to their Father (see "The Sons of God") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/sonship.htm>). This fact raises the question of whether the ultimate human potential is to be God. Does our being sons of God mean that we are (or are to be) members of the Godhead on a footing with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? After all, the Bible indicates that we are brethren of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:12-17), and Jesus is God. Are we also to be God?

Writers have tried to answer these questions from various approaches. I intend in this article to answer whether the natures of God and man allow for man to become God, examine the terms father and son in connection to God and to families, and briefly look at the use of *elohim* in Scripture. This approach will, I believe, decisively answer the questions we've posed and leave us with the Bible's teaching on the relationship of the sons of God to the Godhead.

God is Unique

I don't want to rehash the teaching of the Trinity, which I discuss in "Why Christians Believe in the Trinity" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/trinity.html>). The teachings of some who believe that man can become God, however, force me to address it at least briefly.

This quote is from the Mormon-operated Brigham Young University: "Most people are accustomed to using the term 'God' to identify only one being, the Father." I want to stop right here and point out that this is a straw man. What it says is simply not true. Most people, taken globally, don't think of God in biblical terms at all. If by "people" the author means Christians, the statement is still not true. Christians identify God with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Continuing: "But the scriptures sometimes use the term to designate others as well. In this sense, while the faithful worship only one God in spirit and in truth, there exist other beings who have attained the necessary intelligence and righteousness to qualify for the title 'god.' Jesus Christ is a God and is a separate personage, distinct from God the Father" ("Godhood") (<http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Godhood>).

Copyright © 2016 wordofhisgrace.org

Permission is granted to reproduce this article only if reproduced in full with no alterations and keeping the copyright statement and this permission statement intact. Unless otherwise noted, Bible references are from the World English Bible (WEB).

As this Mormon article explains,

From the Prophet's account of the First Vision and from his other teachings, we know that the members of the Godhead are three separate beings. The Father and the Son have tangible bodies of flesh and bones, and the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit (see D&C 130:22).

[<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/130.22?lang=eng#21>]

Although the members of the Godhead are distinct beings with distinct roles, they are one in purpose and doctrine. They are perfectly united in bringing to pass Heavenly Father's divine plan of salvation.

"Godhead"

(<https://www.lds.org/topics/godhead?lang=eng>)

These quotes speak of God as consisting of three, distinct "personages." But their teaching doesn't stop there. You and I, they believe, may also become gods. Mormon teaching in this regard is neatly summed up by this couplet composed in 1840 by Lorenzo Snow, fifth president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: "As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be" ("Godhood") (<http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Godhood>). Worldwide Church of God founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, was more plain-spoken:

The false Trinity teaching does limit God to three Persons. But God is not limited. As God repeatedly reveals, his purpose is to reproduce himself into what well may become billions of God persons. It is the false Trinity teaching that limits God, denies God's purpose and has palpably deceived the whole Christian world.... IN OTHER WORDS, GOD IS NOW A FAMILY of Persons...."

Mystery of the Ages, softcover edition, [Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1985] 37, 42

Does the Bible allow for the possibility for man to become God? Does it teach that God is a family? Does it teach that there is more than one god and we can become one of these gods? The answer to this last question is so clear in Scripture that it should never even be a question to anyone who has read the Bible.

The Bible explicitly states there is only one God: (Deuteronomy 4:35; 6:4; Malachi 2:10; Mark 12:29, 32; Romans 3:30; Galatians 3:20; and

1 Timothy 2:5). Notice how Paul refers to "one God, the Father" in two Scriptures (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6) and "one God...the man Christ Jesus" in another Scripture, proving that the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) are the one God. It is because of these clear statements in Scripture that the Trinity doctrine does not teach three gods but one God. And it is because the Bible names three Persons in numerous places that the Trinity doctrine says that God is three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Again, this is not three gods. What is meant by "Person" in speaking of the Trinity is that which has the attributes of personality. These Persons have an I-you relationship, but they are not independent consciousnesses. If they were, there would be three gods (and maybe the possibility of adding more), but they are not. While the Bible shows their personality, it teaches their unity.

If we were to enter into the relationship that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have, it would have to mean one of two things. *a*. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not one God but three gods and we become even more gods. We have just seen the Bible's claim that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three gods but one God, so choice *a* is entirely out of the question.

The remaining choice, choice *b*, is that God is, indeed, one God, and we enter into the one God. Perhaps, unlike the Mormon and Armstrong teaching that depends on multiple gods, our being God's sons means that we become Persons of the one God. To see if this is possible, we must see if God has any attributes that are unique to Him; attributes that we can never meet. Let's look at just two attributes of God:

1. God is eternal and non-created. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Obviously, this is referring to everything. John 1:3 verifies this: "All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made." Thus, if God made everything, then He must have been before everything. This means He was not created and, therefore, is eternal.

We, on the other hand, have a beginning; we are created. The very statement, "Man can become God," contradicts the nature of God. "Become" implies a point in time when something happens. How can anyone become something

that has always existed? For created man to become the God who has always existed is a logical impossibility.

2. God is immutable. Malachi 3:6a says, "For I, the LORD, don't change" (see also Psalm 102:26-27; Hebrews 6:17-18; James 1:17). He cannot change. People becoming God would, however, change God. At a minimum, it would change the number of Persons in the Godhead. This is contrary to God's nature of immutability. It is logically impossible for the immutable God to grow as a family. We should also realize that people do change; we are mutable. Therefore, it would be impossible for mutable people to become Persons of the immutable God.

The Father and the Son

An understandable mistake we can make regarding the Persons of the Trinity is to understand the names "Father" and "Son" in terms of a family relationship. For humans, fathers and sons are independent consciousnesses who are members of families. The human father is alive prior to the son, procreates the son, and, hopefully, cares for the son after his birth. The son is conceived by the father, and he is genetically descended from the father.

In the Trinity, however, "Father" and "Son" have different meanings from those in human families. There was no time that the Father existed when the Son did not also exist. The Father did not procreate the Son. The Son is not descended from the Father. They are not independent consciousnesses. The Father and the Son are one (John 10:30), they are both God (John 1:1), and yet the Son was with the Father (John 1:1), implying distinctness. The Father and Son (and the Holy Spirit, though I don't speak of the Holy Spirit here because "Holy Spirit" is not a term associated with families) are equally God. Yet, they have their roles. The Father is the Planner, and the Son does the Father's will.

Speaking of the relationship of the Son to the Father, Hebrews 1:3 says that the Son is the "radiance [*apaugasma*—"the off flash"] of the glory, and impression [*charaktēr*—"impression (such as the image on a coin)]," of his essence [*hupostasis*—"substance," "foundation"]." It is because of this relationship of the One who orders and the One who obeys, the One who shines glory and the One who flashes back that glory that the Bible uses the terms Father and Son.

***Elohim* Does Not Support the God Family Idea**

Herbert W. Armstrong wrote,

Let me try to make this most wonderful truth of all time
PLAIN!

First, go back once again to the very first words in God's revelation of knowledge to us: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

God inspired Moses to write those words in Hebrew, not in the English words above. I repeat, the Hebrew name translated "God" is *Elohim*. It is a uniplural word, like the words *family, church, group, team*. One family, but composed of more than one person. ONE church, but composed of more than one member. ONE group, but unless composed of more than one person, it would not be a group. *One* athletic team, but composed of two, five, six, nine, eleven or more players - besides a number of substitutes.

The Incredible Human Potential, softcover edition,
[Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1978] 61

The problem with what Armstrong is saying here is that it is completely fabricated. *Elohim* is not a uniplural word and no Hebrew scholar has ever treated it as such. *Elohim* is plural in form but it is the verb that it takes that determines whether it is singular or plural in meaning. For example, in English, "mathematics" is plural in form but usually singular in construction. We would say, "Mathematics is difficult." Yes, there may be an etymological reason why it is plural in form, but what is important is that it is now singular in use, referring to the discipline called "mathematics."

There may also be an etymological reason why *elohim* is plural in form. In fact, when *elohim* refers to plural things, such as false gods, people, and angels, it takes a plural verb. But what is important is that, when the Bible refers to the true God, it has *elohim* take a singular verb. Again, *elohim* is not a uniplural or a collective noun. It is plural in form and either plural or singular in use depending on the verb it takes. When referring to the true God, it takes a singular verb. Thus, when it refers to the true God, *elohim* neither means many Gods, nor does it mean God as a family. It means the one God, singular.

But the Bible does call believers sons of God, and sons are members of a family, right?

Difficult Analogies

To try to make analogies between our relationship to God as sons and our relationship to our human parents as sons and daughters is difficult because God is unique. Nevertheless, the following comparison, while by no means perfect, might help us comprehend this concept. To say that we have a standing as sons of God that puts us on a par with the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is like saying that a child has a relationship to his or her parents that is the same as the relationship between the parents. In other words, it is like saying that because a child is a member of the family, he or she enters the marriage. This is confusion and absurd. A child's relationship to his or her parents is not the same as the relationship between the husband and the wife. Similarly, a born-again Christian's sonship relationship to God (or to any Person of the Trinity) is not the same as the relationship between the members of the Trinity. This is true even though Jesus is called the Son and He is our Elder Brother. His sonship is on a different level than ours. Our relationship to God is from outside the Trinity; Jesus' is from within it.

What about Ephesians 3:14-15? These verses say, "For this cause, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." Is this verse saying that every creature, or every human, or every human and angel, or every believer and angel is a part of a family of God? Is it saying that every family draws its name ultimately from the Father? Is it saying that God is the Father of every family? Each one of these views has commentators who advocate it, and there are commentators who advocate even other opinions.

One thing is plain: this is a Scripture that is too unclear to base a doctrine on. Nevertheless, I will make a couple of points. The word translated "family" is *patria*, which really means "paternal descent." According to classical Greek, *pasa* ("every," "all" [or "the whole"]), when it has the definite article, should be translated "every" as it is in the version I've quoted. But the New Testament can deviate from classical Greek, as in Ephesians 2:21, where *pasa* also has the definite article but must be translated "all" to make any sense. Thus, Ephesians 3:14-15 can be translated, "For this cause, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family [or

those whose paternal descent is from the Father, or, in other words, those who can call God Father] in heaven and on earth is named." Who are those who can call God "Father" but those who are His sons. But remember that the verse is not speaking of a God family but of a Father-son relationship that we already know exists.

Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34-38

Those who believe that humans are to be God commonly cite John 10:34-38:

Jesus answered them, "Isn't it written in your law, 'I said, you are gods?' If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture can't be broken), do you say of him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You blaspheme,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?' If I don't do the works of my Father, don't believe me. But if I do them, though you don't believe me, believe the works; that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

Jesus is here quoting Psalm 82:6 from the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX). "You are gods" in that version is from the Greek, *theoi este*. The word translated *theoi* (gods) in the Greek is translated from *elohim* in the original Hebrew of this passage. This is one of those places where *elohim* takes a plural verb, so it is plural and not referring to the true God. Scholars have usually understood its use in this verse to mean "judges" because of the context (see especially Psalm 82:2). Even the Greek word, *theoi*, can mean judges, so there is no discrepancy between the Hebrew and Greek versions.

The Jews had claimed that Jesus had blasphemed because, by His words, He made Himself equal to God (John 10:33). Jesus' refutation of this accusation is two-fold. I'll state the second part first to help make His refutation clearer. Part of the Jews' accusation was that Jesus was bearing witness of Himself. Jesus essentially says, No, I am not bearing witness of myself. The Father is bearing witness of me because He sanctified and sent me (verse 36), and this, in turn, is witnessed by the fact that the works that I do are obviously godly (my Father's) (verses 37-38).

With this in mind, when we look back on the first part of Jesus' refutation, it should be a little clearer. He is saying that, not only is it

wrong for the Jews to say that He is bearing witness of Himself, but it is also wrong for them to pick on His saying that He is the Son of God (*theou*, which would be *elohim* in Hebrew). Why? Because Psalm 82:6 records that God says to those to whom the Word of God was given, "I said, you are gods [*theoi*, which would be *elohim* in Hebrew]." If God called those to whom the Word of God came *theoi* or *elohim*, it is not blasphemy for Jesus, whose works prove Him to be sent by God, to call Himself the Son of *theou* or *elohim*.

Even though God's intent in Psalm 82:6 is to call men judges, not gods, Jesus' argument concerns the words, whatever their translation. The Jews did not consider it blasphemy for men to be called *theoi* or *elohim* in this verse, so they should not consider it blasphemy when Jesus uses such words for Himself, especially as God witnesses through Jesus' works that He sent Him. Thus, neither Psalm 82:6 nor John 10:34-38 are evidence for man becoming gods or for man entering the Trinity.

God's Love for His Children

Still, there is something that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have within the Trinity that God shares with us. That something is love. Since God is love, the Persons of the Trinity must love (John 3:35; 5:20; 1 John 4:7, 16). The Bible teaches us that God loves us. He loves us so much that Jesus gave His life for us. He loves us so much that He regenerates us as His sons. We, therefore, share the love of the Trinity, and, we become one with the Trinity in love (John 17:21-23, 26), but we do not become one with the Trinity in substance. We do not become God.

John writes, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is" (1 John 3:2). By spiritual regeneration, we are now God's offspring (*teknon*, the word used in this verse) and His sons (*huios*, Romans 8:14 and other Scriptures). But, as I explain in "The Sons of God" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/sonship.htm>), we are still waiting for "open recognition as sons" (Romans 8:23, *Weymouth New Testament*), the very thing John here refers to as "not yet" being "revealed what we will be." He is not alluding to some hidden mystery of our becoming gods or members of the Godhead. He is writing about the revelation to all the creation, through our glorification at our resurrection, that we are the sons and heirs of God. We will not be God, we will not be gods,

but we will be God's sons and heirs, and I think you will agree that that is an awesome enough prospect for anyone.