

THE GODHEAD:
THE PERFECT MODEL FOR GROUP RELATIONSHIPS

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We are blessed to have the Savior available to us as the perfect model of what we should be as individuals. This part of the gospel message is familiar to us all. We are likewise blessed to have the Godhead available to us as the perfect model for group relationships. This part of the gospel message is not as familiar to us. Since our salvation requires our perfection both as individuals and as members of groups it is essential that we have available to us and that we use both perfect individual and group models as we attempt to work out our salvation. This essay discusses the Godhead as the perfect model for us to follow in our group relationships.

The nature of the Godhead and the scriptural citations in this essay represent, I believe, generally accepted Latter-day Saint doctrine. Nothing new is intended here. The isolation of four characteristics of the relationship among the members of the Godhead and the application of those four characteristics to other groups seems to me to be less recognized among us and worthy of greater attention.¹

First, a few comments about the Savior as our model for individual perfection. It is our common practice to turn to Matthew's writings where the Savior invites us to be perfect, "even as [our] Father in Heaven is perfect" (5:48), or more explicitly in the Americas, "even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (3 Nephi 12:48). But in addition to his attention to this model for individual perfection, Jesus prayed that his disciples would be part of the perfect eternal group, "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21). He thus offered the Godhead as the model for group perfection.²

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS

Four characteristics of the Godhead seem to tie them together as the perfect group. Four characteristics of the Godhead seem to tie them together as the perfect group. A first is their unity. This characteristic includes a common nature and common purpose. The titles of "father" and "son" indicate their common nature—they are the same specie. In his Intercessory Prayer the Savior emphasized his common purpose with his Father: "as thou, Father, art in me... Even as we are one" (John 17:21, 22). He said, "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" (John 5:19). And "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (John 8:28). In the Americas, Jesus stressed his complete

unity with his Father: “I am in the Father, and the Father in me” (3 Nephi 9:15; also John 10:30).

A second characteristic of the Godhead is their equality. Equality is a fair distribution of whatever is possessed so that one in the group does not have an inequitable portion compared to the others in the group. Jesus said, “All things that the Father hath are mine” (John 16:15). But in spite of this total distribution Jesus could still say that “my Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). It is apparent that “equality” in this gospel context is not synonymous with “identical.”

A third characteristic of the Godhead is their identical spiritual or character qualities. Love, for example, is a quality of godliness shed forth from the Father upon Jesus from “before the foundation of the world” and also upon the disciples of Christ in mortality: “and [thou] hast loved them as thou hast loved me” (John 17:24, 23). Of himself Jesus said that “greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Love is one of the qualities of godliness reemphasized in the restored gospel for those who desire to become like God (*Doctrine and Covenants* 4:5). Other spiritual qualities of the Godhead, which we are admonished to develop, for example in section four of the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, are those without which “God would cease to be God” (Alma 42:22; also Enos 1:6 and Ether 3:12).³

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A fourth characteristic of the Godhead is the different callings or roles which they fill. Each is content with his own calling, and assists others to fulfill their callings, but does not invade or usurp the callings of others. For the members of the Godhead their roles are conditioned in part by their physical characteristics (*Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22-23). Examples of the different roles include Jesus’ teaching on the unique role of the Holy Ghost: “whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him” (Matthew 12:32). The Holy Ghost responds to the direction of the Father (John 14:16, 26), since the Father alone presides in the Godhead—the glory is his forever, a calling that Lucifer, to his damnation, fought against. Jesus, however, recognized this particular calling of the Father, which is one of the reasons he qualified in premortality for his calling as savior and redeemer of mankind and thereafter continued in his position “at the right hand of God” (Moses 4:1-4; Isaiah 14:12-14; Acts 7:55-56; *Doctrine and Covenants* 76:23). The Father supports the Son but does not impose on his son’s jurisdiction (John 8:54; Matthew 3:17; Joseph Smith-History 1:17). Jesus is the only member of the Godhead who could offer himself as a sacrifice for sin (John 14:6; Helaman 5:9).

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It is important to note that these four characteristics require a careful description. The first and third—“unity” and “qualities”—emphasize the *sameness* of the members of the group. Each member must possess them to their fulness for the group to properly function. The second and fourth—“equality” and “callings”—emphasize the *differences* between the members of the group. This is difficult to understand in the case of “equality” since that word is usually taken to mean all are identical. But in this gospel application “equality” does *not* mean identical. In the case of callings the difficulty arises in assisting another in his calling but not to the extent that one dominates the other to the point of usurping his calling. Thus, both individuality and commonality are essential to the proper functioning of the group.⁴

EXAMPLES

Surely one of the finest examples of the proper relationship among members of the Godhead is found in the last hours of Jesus’ mortal life. As he prayed to his Father he spoke of their unity in premortality and mortality (John 17:2, 4-9, 11-12, 18, 21-26). He reported his success in his particular calling, one which his father had given him (John 17:1, 4, 6, 8, 12, 14, 18, 22, 25-26). Just a few hours earlier he had talked about the role the Holy Ghost (John 14:26; 15:26). Similarly when Jesus appeared in the Americas he prayed to his father (3 Nephi 17:15, 21; 19:27-29) and apologized when the saints prayed to himself, something that might have appeared to be a usurpation of his father’s presiding position (3 Nephi 19:18, 22). The Holy Ghost was present to facilitate communication between heaven and earth and to provide guidance to the Nephites in their prayers (3 Nephi 17:24; 19:22, 24). The glory and richness of these group relationships defied verbal description (3 Nephi 19: 32, 34).

Consider three examples of groups in which the perfect model of the Godhead can be applied in our own lives. First, in presiding councils such as bishoprics all members of the bishopric must be unified in their purpose. All have equal authority to act in the name of the Lord when given the rights, powers, and privileges pertaining to their particular stewardships within the bishopric. Each member of the bishopric must seek to develop divine qualities, but their callings differ. The bishop, by virtue of the keys given to him, presides over the bishopric and the ward, gives overall supervision, delegates appropriately to others who act in his name. The counselors respect the presiding authority of the bishop, serve with full authority in the areas delegated to them, assist one another but limit the exercise of their authority to those over whom they have been given stewardship.⁵

Second, a Zion church as a whole applies the same principles. It is to be unified: “If ye are not one ye are not mine” (*Doctrine and Covenants*

38:27). Church members are to share equally in the resources of the kingdom, but their equality is not sameness; it is modified according to family, circumstance, wants, and needs (*Doctrine and Covenants* 51:3). The Church is to exemplify divine qualities: “For this ZION—THE PURE IN HEART” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 97:21). It is to operate with each member properly exercising his or her own calling (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; *Doctrine and Covenants* 107:99).

Most significantly, the principles taught in perfection by the Godhead are to be followed in the family. Notice how they appear in the “Proclamation on the Family.” Unity is founded on the fact that individually “all human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God.” And each individual is part of the divine family, “a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents.” A divine purpose is given: “His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life... We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”⁶

Within the family equality is to prevail: “Fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.” An obligation on the children to share equally in contributing toward a successful family is implied in the statement that the parents are “to teach them to love and serve one another.”

Divine qualities are to be developed. “Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Qualities of “faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work” lead to successful marriages and families.

Callings differ. “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose... By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.”

CONCLUSION

While an examination of mortal families, from Adam to the present, and other groups, both within and without the Church, can suggest models for successful group relationships, the only perfect model, because it is composed of perfect individuals, is to be found in the Godhead. I believe that the four characteristics presented above describe the foundation for the divine success, and will provide the foundation for our own success to the extent we understand and follow them. ∞

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ENDNOTES

1. Over a period of years the topic of this article gradually emerged as I pondered and taught from the Standard Works. The notion that we must look to divinity as our only perfect example in all things progressively became more and more compelling to me. The idea is so simple, but far too infrequently used. The primary function of the four Gospels, then, became to describe the only perfect life in mortality—how actually to be a perfect mortal. The perfect intellect became that of God, something I tried to suggest in the last issue of *Perspective*. And the perfect model of group behavior became that of the Godhead. I began to emphasize divinity as our practical model whenever I could, for example, in the class I periodically teach on the Gospels. With this same motivation I wrote this essay. Then, having heard of the book on councils by M. Russell Ballard—*Counseling with our Councils*, Deseret Book Company, 1997—I borrowed a copy from our ward bishop, Jim Gordon, intending to consult it regarding bishoprics. I am impressed by the excellence of the book and recognize the authority of Elder Ballard’s calling, and I also feel grateful for some confirmation of the thoughts that had been independently presented to my mind. I offer this essay in affirmation of what Elder Ballard has written, and with a belief that it will provide some additional insight for our successful participation in groups.
2. Elder Ballard uses The Grand Council in heaven as the model for all other councils. His use of “council” is somewhat analogous to “group” as used in this essay (5-6, 119).
3. Insightful divine instruction that distinguishes the qualities of godliness that do not change from the person who does, thus permitting the scriptures to say that God “is the same yesterday, today, and forever,” is found in *Doctrine and Covenants* 20:8-12.
4. These four characteristics are embodied in Elder Ballard’s book. For example, unity (60-64, 127-28); *equality* (54-56, 118); *qualities* (35-36, 57); *callings* (8, 70, 23, 120).
5. Elder Ballard devotes a chapter to “Ward and Branch Councils” (96-116).
6. Elder Ballard devotes a chapter to “Family Councils” in which he presents the full text of the “Proclamation on the Family” and emphasizes its importance, but he does not analyze it in any detail (147-60).