

The Development of Ellen White's Understanding of the Godhead

The progression of Ellen White's unfolding understanding of the Godhead is outlined below with representative statements. This sequence of concepts shows a clear progression from the simple to the complex, revealing that Ellen White's understanding did grow and change as she received additional light.

Ellen White's later writings relating to the Trinity never required her to repudiate earlier statements. She simply wrote as specifically as her visions permitted her to do, and as further revelations made the subject clearer, her writings became more explicit.

Thus God led the church gently and gradually without, on the one hand, bypassing individual Bible study, or, on the other hand, leading them to uncritically embrace traditional Trinitarianism.

1850 Christ and the Father are personal beings with tangible form.

"I saw a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus' countenance and admired His lovely person. The Father's person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said He had, but I could not behold it, for said He, 'If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.'" - *Early Writings*, pg. 54.2

"I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person. I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, 'I am in the express image of My Father's person.'" - *Early Writings*, pg. 77.1

1869 Christ is equal with God.

"This Saviour was the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His person. He possessed divine majesty, perfection, and excellence. He was equal with God." - *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pg. 200.1

1872 Christ was not created.

"The divine Son of God was the only sacrifice of sufficient value to fully satisfy the claims of God's perfect law. The angels were sinless, but of less value than the law of God. They were amenable to law. They were messengers to do the will of Christ, and before him to bow. They were created beings, and probationers. Upon Christ no requirements were laid. He had power to lay down his life, and to take it again. No obligation was laid upon him to undertake the work of atonement. It was a voluntary sacrifice that he made. His life was of sufficient value to rescue man from his fallen condition." - *Review and Herald*, December 17, 1872, par. 4

1878 Christ is the "eternal Son".

"The unworthiness, weakness, and inefficiency of [the ministers'] own efforts in contrast with those of the eternal Son of God, will render them humble, distrustful of self, and will lead them to rely upon Christ for strength and efficiency in their work." - *Review and Herald*, August 8, 1878, Art. A, par. 4

"Search the Scriptures.' This injunction is from the eternal Son of God." - *The Youth's Instructor*, August 31, 1897

"Then look beneath the disguise, and whom do we see?—Divinity, the Eternal Son of God, just as mighty, just as infinitely gifted with all the resources of power, and He was found in fashion as a man." - *1888 Materials*, pg. 28.3

1887 Christ is the "infinite God".

"I wish that finite minds could see and sense the great love of the infinite God, His great self-denial, His self-sacrifice, in assuming humanity. God humbled Himself and became man and humbled Himself to die, and not only to die, but to die an ignominious death." - *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 5, p.1.600 [1887]

1887 Christ pre-existed with the Father from all eternity.

"As a member of the human family he was mortal, but as a God he was the fountain of life to the world. He could, in his divine person, ever have withstood the advances of death, and refused to come under its dominion; but he voluntarily laid down his life, that in so doing he might give life and bring immortality to light. ... The tongue can never describe it; the imagination cannot take it in. The eternal Word consented to be made flesh!" - *Review and Herald*, July 5, 1887, pars. 5,6

"From all eternity Christ was united with the Father, and when He took upon Himself human nature, He was still one with God." - *Signs of the Times*, August 2, 1905, par. 10

"Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore." - *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906

1888 A broader conception of righteousness by faith demands the full deity of Christ.

"If men reject the testimony of the inspired Scriptures concerning the divinity of Christ, it is in vain to argue the point with them; for no argument, however conclusive, could convince them. [1 Corinthians 2:14 quoted.] None who hold this error can have a true conception of the character or the mission of Christ, or of the great plan of God for man's redemption." - *The Great Controversy* [1888], pg. 524.2

1888 Christ is one with the Father yet a distinct person.

"Yet the Son of God was the acknowledged Sovereign of heaven, one in power and authority with the Father." - *The Great Controversy* [1888], pg. 495.1

"The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one." - *The Ministry of Healing*, pg. 422.1 [1905]

"The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father." - *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906

1890 Christ is self-existent; His deity is not derived from the Father

"The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both." - *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pg. 36.2 [1890]

"Christ is the pre-existent, self-existent Son of God. ... In speaking of his pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God." - *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 29, 1900

"He was equal with God, infinite and omnipotent. ... He is the eternal, self-existent Son." - Manuscript 101, 1897

"While God's Word speaks of the humanity of Christ when upon this earth, it also speaks decidedly regarding His pre-existence. The Word existed as a divine being, even as the eternal Son of God, in union and oneness with His Father. From everlasting He was the Mediator of the covenant, the one in whom all nations of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, if they accepted Him, were to be blessed. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." Before men or angels were created, the Word was with God, and was God." - *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906

"Jesus declared, 'I am the resurrection, and the life.' In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. 'He that hath the Son hath life.' The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life." - *The Desire of Ages*, pg. 530 (1898).

1896 The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead.

"Evil had been accumulating for centuries, and could only be restrained and resisted by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power." - *Testimonies to Ministers*, pg. 392 [1896]

"The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, in Christ's name. He personifies Christ, yet is a distinct personality." - *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 8, 1893, par. 8

"The prince of the power of evil can only be held in check by the power of God in the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit." - *Special Testimonies*, Series A No. 10, pg. 37.1 [1897]

"Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer." - *The Desire of Ages*, pg. 671 [1898]

"Christ determined that when He ascended from this earth He would bestow a gift on those who had believed on Him and those who should believe on Him. What gift could He bestow rich enough to signalize and grace His ascension to the mediatorial throne? It must be worthy of His greatness and His royalty. He determined to give His representative, the third person of the Godhead. This gift could not be excelled. He would give all gifts in one, and therefore the divine Spirit, that converting, enlightening, and sanctifying power, would be His donation." - *The Signs of the Times*, Dec. 1, 1898

"We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds." - Manuscript 66, 1899.

"The Holy Spirit is a person, for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. When this witness is borne, it carries with it its own evidence. At such times we believe and are sure that we are the children of God. ... The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God. 'For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.'" - Manuscript 20, 1906.

"The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fulness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour." - *Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 7 63.2 [1906]

1899 - The Godhead consists of three living persons.
1906

"The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order to fully carry out this plan, it was decided that Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin." - *Counsels on Health*, 1899, pg 222

"The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, powers infinite and omniscient, receive those who truly enter into covenant relation with God. They are present at every baptism, to receive the candidates who have renounced the world, and have received Christ into the soul-temple." - Manuscript 27 1/2, April 19, 1900, pg 3

"Three distinct agencies, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, work together for human beings. They are united in the work of making the church on earth like the church in heaven." - Manuscript 27 1/2, April 19, 1900, pg 7

"The work is laid out before every soul that has acknowledged his faith in Jesus Christ by baptism, and has become a receiver of the pledge from the three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." - Manuscript 57, Aug. 12, 1900, pg. 4

"But they were not left to fight the battles in their own human strength; that the angelic host coming as ministers of God would be in that battle, and also there would be the eternal heavenly dignitaries—God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit—arming them with more than mortal energy, and [who] would advance with them to the work, and convince the world of sin." - Manuscript 130, 1901, par. 52

"Our sanctification is the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the fulfillment of the covenant God has made with those who bind themselves up with him, to stand with him, his Son, and his Spirit in holy fellowship. Have you been born again? Have you become a new being in Christ Jesus? Then co-operate with the three great powers of heaven who are working in your behalf. Doing this you will reveal to the world the principles of righteousness" - *Signs of the Times*, June 19, 1901;

"When you gave yourself to Christ, you made a pledge in the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the three great personal dignitaries of heaven. 'Hold fast' to this pledge." - Manuscript 92, Sept, 1901, pg 2

"The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the eternal Godhead is involved in the action required to make as to the human agent to unite all heaven to contribute to the exercise of human faculties to reach and embrace the fulness of the threefold powers to unite in the great work appointed, confederating the heavenly powers with the human that an may become through heavenly efficiency, partakers of the divine nature, and workers together with Christ." - Manuscript 45, May 14, 1904, pg 9, 10

"There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ." - *Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 7 63.2 [1906]

"In the name of whom were you baptized? You went down into the water in the name of the three great Worthies in heaven—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." - *Sermons and Talks*, Vol. 1, Oct. 20, 1906, pg 363

"As the saints in the kingdom of God are accepted in the beloved, they hear: 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' And then the golden harps are touched, and the music flows all through the heavenly host, and they fall down and worship the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." - Manuscript 139, 1906