



Remnant radio supplemental study notes

A Serious look at Theosis

Excerpts from
Princeton Theological Monograph Series

Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology

The closest English equivalent of theosis is "deification." In Christian theology, theosis refers to the transformation of believers into the likeness of God. Of course, Christian monotheism goes against any literal "god making" of believers. Rather, the NT speaks of a transformation of mind, a metamorphosis of character, a redefinition of selfhood, and an imitation of God. Most of these passages are tantalizingly brief, and none spells out the concept in detail.

Deification was an important idea in the early church, though it took a long time for [theosis] to emerge as the standard label for the process. The term was coined by the great fourth century theologian, Gregory of Nazianzus. Theologians now use theosis to designate all instances where any idea of taking on God's character or being "divinized" (made divine) occurs, even when the term [theosis] is not used. And of course, different Christian authors understood deification differently.

It is difficult to define theosis, but not difficult to cite several biblical passages that strongly suggest a process of heightened reflection of godly nature, which stimulated Christian deification discourse. The following grouping of biblical passages is meant to bring out the logical development of the idea:

IMITATION OF GOD:

- Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:48)
- The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12)
- Be imitators of God, as beloved children. (Eph 5: 1)

TAKING ON GOD'S NATURE:

- You ... may become participants of the divine nature. (2 Pet 1 :4)
- You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you. (Ps 82:6)
- Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? (John 10:34)

INDWELT BY GOD:

- Truly it is the spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding. (Job 32:8)
- The Spirit of truth ... abides with you, and he will be in you. (John 14:17)
- It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Rom 8:16)

BEING RE-FORMED BY GOD:

- What is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:6)
- Be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2)
- Clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:24)

BEING CONFORMED TO CHRIST:

- He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory. (Phil 3:21)
- predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. (Rom 8:29)
- All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. (2 Cor 3:18)
- When he [Christ] is revealed, we will be like him. (1 John 3:2)

FINAL DIVINIZATION OF THE COSMOS:

- The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Hab 2: 14)
- The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. (Isa 32: 17)
- When all things are subjected to him, then ... God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:28)

Although some of these passages concern the afterlife, or events connected with the return of Christ, all of them have implications for the present life of believers, suggesting an ongoing transformation, a progressive “engodding” of the believer, to use the endearing Old English phrase.

Let us look at the implications of this grouping of biblical sayings. Imitation of God leads to a reception of the character traits of God, an idea that is standard throughout most of the Bible. The idea of being indwelt by a special spirit of God is found intermittently throughout the OT, and is a central idea in the NT. This is not synonymous with theosis, but it is an indispensable element in any theology of theosis. Without the constant guidance of God, we humans always go astray. Without "encouragement," the renewal of spiritual courage in our hearts, we constantly grow faint, like Peter after Jesus was arrested. But with a strong connection to inner guidance, believers "shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles" (Isa 40:31). "We do not lose heart. ... our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). As Jesus said, "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21 NIV, KJV, TEV). This saying should not be marginalized just because it occurs in only one gospel. It is an indispensable part of the proclamation of Jesus, and is fully consistent with his teachings about an indwelling Spirit of Truth that "will be in you," (John 14:17; cf. 14:26; 17:23; 15:4) and of a "light in you." (Matt 6:23; 5:16; Luke 11:35).

What surely suggests theosis is the notion of being transformed by God, or taking on the divine nature. In the letters of Paul, in particular, this means being transformed into the likeness of Christ, who is the embodiment of God. Believers are "conformed to" and "transformed into" the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21), even having the "mind of Christ" (Phil 2:5; 1 Cor 2:16). One may, perhaps, suppress the divinizing implications of these passages, but not of those that say that believers will "become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21), and after death, "will also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:49). Theosis is central to the theology of Paul throughout (See also the deification concepts in Col 1:9, 27; 2:10; 3:10; Eph 3:19; 4:23-24; 5:1).

All of this depends upon, and revolves around, Christianity's central and unique idea: the incarnation-in Christ, God lived a human life. The incarnation is the definitive and unique doctrine of Christianity. Further, without the incarnation, there would be no theosis. Christians are meant not only to learn from the life of the divine Son, but to

reproduce the pattern of spiritual progress that he revealed, even to the point of taking on the character of God! A typical expression would be that of Didymus the Blind, who spoke of the soul's process of becoming "perfect, becoming like God." This is a staggering idea, and one that certainly needs to be connected with a mature and well-balanced theology.

This is more than just the longing for union with the divine, which is a central goal for most religions. Not all religions take it so far as to develop a concept of theosis while still preserving human personal identity, as Christianity does. But it is not always well-defined.... Despite Patristic fascination with deification, the fathers do not develop a "doctrine" of theosis. Nor do the doctrinal controversies and decisions of the Church Councils deal with the subject.

The popularity of the idea is matched by a lack of precise definition. The church fathers argue for, rather than spell out, deification..... [furthermore] simply replacing theosis with sanctification is an attempt to supplant Patristic theology with standard Reformation language. Deification was often seen as the telos (goal) of human existence and of salvation.... The first theological definition of theosis was given in the sixth century by Pseudo-Dionysius, but it is general and inexact:

"Divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God."

Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 52. Eds. Stephen Finlan, Vladimir Kharlamov, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publication. 2006) 1-5

Excerpt from **The Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics**

Deification and Ethics

One of the most distinctive aspects of the Orthodox Church is its approach to ethics. Ethics is supported not by the strength of reason but through the pursuit of deification. Orthodox Christians understand deification as the soteriological process by which Christians undergo an ethical and anthropological transformation of the whole person, becoming all that God is by grace. As such, ethics is rooted in a personal God who is wholly transcendent and yet is disclosed to the human person through personal transformation within the liturgical and ascetical life of the church. Important here is that the liturgical and ascetical life of the church does not simply contribute to an understanding of ethics but rather forms the basis by which ethics is under-taken. Consequently, ethics is primarily the fruit of an unmediated experience of God in pursuit of deification.

Consequently, knowledge of God and knowledge of the ethical life are arrived at through a non-discursive, noetic knowledge within the context of the transformation of the human person. For Orthodox Christianity, the nous is understood as the faculty of the soul that governs the person and mediates the person's relationship with God. The nous can also be described as the eye of the soul. Thus, an ethicist is one who through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, keeping vigil, prostrations, love of neighbor, and love of God undergoes purification and engages in a participatory knowledge of God through God's uncreated energies. It is through turning to God in repentance with an open heart that ethical knowledge is derived. At the same time, the importance of intellectual rigor is not to be denied in its ability to assist in the pursuit of deification or to provide clarity in ethical understanding. However, intellectual rigor can never form the foundation of arriving at ethical knowledge.

Orthodox Ethics

At the heart of ethical living is the pursuit of deification. The phrase “God became human so that humans may become gods [by grace]”—stated in various forms by important theologians including Irenaeus of Lyon, Athanasius the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas—provides the framework within the Orthodox tradition for understanding the ethical life. From the beginning of creation, a pilgrimage of growth and transformation for Adam and Eve was initiated within the divine economy. The first created humans were called to engage this

process of growth and transformation in paradise in an ascent to God, yet they failed. Despite God's ongoing effort to call back creation, a stronger remedy was required, which was the Word of God taking on human nature, human experience, and, ultimately, human death and making them life-giving.

Through God's own assumption and deification of our human nature, human experience, and death in Christ, the principle upon which humanity returns to God is established. Further, this work of Christ as the new beginning and the second Adam, fulfilling the work of the first Adam, sets in place the basis by which Orthodox ethics is understood. Through the putting on of Christ in baptism, persons are integrated back into the path of deification offered through the life and work of Christ. The ethical life, then, is characterized by the cultivation of the grace given at baptism in pursuit of deification through the liturgical and ascetical life of the church. Stated differently, the ethical life is the personal appropriation of the work of Christ. The Orthodox ethical life, consequently, is aimed at holiness through right worship and right belief within the liturgical and ascetical life of the church.

Within this context, rules, goals, and virtues are reframed within the liturgical and ascetical life of the church. The ethical life is measured with respect to one's proximity to God. Virtues are understood as the uncreated energies of God in which the fruit is deification. The virtues are the result of a synergistic relationship between the human person and God and demonstrate the health of the soul. Vice, conversely, is sickness of the soul and reveals a person's spiritual distance from God. Rules, including the commandments and canons, are boundaries between life in the Spirit and spiritual death. The goal is always deification. The result is that the exemplars of Orthodox ethics are those who have made progress in the pursuit of deification through the liturgical and ascetical life of the church and that which is ethical leads to an encounter with the Truth, who is the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ.

'Orthodox Ethics', Mark A. Tarpley, Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics, ed. Joel B. Green (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2011) 569-570.

Excerpts from
The Evangelical Dictionary of World Religions

CHRISTIAN VIEW OF DEIFICATION

Also called theosis and divinization, deification is “the central theme, chief aim, basic purpose, or primary religious ideal” of Eastern Orthodox Christianity (Clendenin, 120). The classic formulation of the teaching comes from section 54 of *On the Incarnation of the Divine Word*, by the fourth-century Christian writer Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373): “The Word of God Himself . . . assumed humanity that we might become God.” Early Christians did not have trouble describing their future hope in terms of “becoming gods” because they took Jesus’s quote of Psalm 82:6, “I said, ‘You are “gods,”’ in John 10:34, to be a reference to “those . . . who have received the grace of the ‘adoption, by which we cry, Abba Father [Rom. 8:15]’ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.6.1; cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 124). The explicit use of deification language begins to appear already in the mid-second century. Its earliest occurrences are in Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 124 (after 135 and before 164); Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autoclycus* 2.27 (ca. 180); Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), in *Exhortation to the Greeks* 1 and elsewhere; and Irenaeus of Lyons (d. ca. 202), *Against Heresies* 4.38.1–4. Clement’s deification language is heavily colored by contact with the conceptual world of Platonism, so it is ultimately Irenaeus who will contribute most directly to the development of the Orthodox doctrine. Some, however, of what is later made explicit in the Orthodox doctrine is still only implicit in Irenaeus. This is important to remember, especially since scholarly discussion of the doctrine’s history has been skewed in recent decades by a widely circulated misquotation of the preface to book 5 of *Against Heresies* that has Irenaeus saying, in language very close to what we see more than a century later in Athanasius, “If the word has been made man, it was so men may become gods.” Actually the passage in question says nothing about becoming gods, only about becoming “what He [Jesus] is Himself” (*quod est ipse*). The misquotation in the present literature appears to have originated in the linking of a loosely phrased statement of the traditional formula to Irenaeus by the prominent Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky (e.g., *The Vision of God*, 35; see Clendenin, 117, 127; Lash, 147).”

“Irenaeus does, however, use deification language when giving reasons for not blaming God that “we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, and at length gods” (*Against Heresies* 4.38.4). But again in the context he finds justification for the language in his “Christian” reading of Psalm 82:6. In Irenaeus’s mind, deification parallels Paul’s concept of our adoption in Christ (Rom. 8:15–17), an understanding that has continued in Orthodox theology down to the present time: “The meaning of theosis in the New Testament is the adoption of man” (Stavropoulos, 185).

To the ears of Western Christians, who have tended to view the work of Christ more from the perspective of how it leads to the forgiveness and rescue of sinners, rather than how it restores the divine image and/or likeness lost in the fall, the language of

deification can come across as jarring or even blasphemous when initially encountered. Such alarm, however, wanes when it is understood that the doctrine has always been carefully qualified so as to make it absolutely clear that the language implies no real ultimate confusion between mortal humans and the eternal, unbegotten God: “Although ‘engodded’ or ‘deified’ the saints do not become additional members of the Trinity.” “God remains God, and man remains man. Man becomes god by grace but not God in essence” (Ware, 125).

Another way this infinite distinction has been expressed is by saying that when 2 Peter 1:4 says we “participate in the divine nature,” it refers to participating in the divine energies (cf. Col. 1:29), but not in the divine essence or being. In terms more familiar to Western ears, it might be said that the deified come to share in God’s communicable attributes but not his incommunicable ones. Being united with Jesus in his death, we come to share in his own divine life. But it is all of him and none of us. And this distinction was perfectly understood from the beginning. Irenaeus, indeed, finds it expressed in the very passage he uses to justify calling Christians gods in the first place. For even though Psalm 82:6 says, “You are ‘gods,’” Irenaeus goes on to point out that, “since we could not sustain the power of divinity, He adds, ‘But ye shall die like men,’ setting forth both truths—the kindness of His free gift, and our weakness” (Against Heresies 4.38.4). “The same point was made by Athanasius; we partake of Christ’s divine life only because Jesus first partook of our mortal flesh: “But if death was within the body, woven into its very substance . . . the need was for Life to be woven in instead. . . . The Saviour assumed a body for Himself, in order that the body [i.e., our bodies], being interwoven as it were with life, should no longer remain a mortal thing, in thrall to death, but as endued with immortality and risen from death, should therefore remain immortal. For once having put on corruption, it could not rise, unless it put on life instead” (On the Incarnation of the Divine Word 44).

When properly understood, then, the Orthodox doctrine of deification is perfectly biblical. The Western church is used to speaking of Christians as becoming sons of God by grace without ever imagining that, in doing so, it might lead some to view these Christians as claiming equal status in the Godhead with Jesus. The same is true of the Eastern church when it speaks of becoming gods by grace. In addition to the famous passage in 2 Peter already cited, there is also much in the writings of the Bible that can be seen as supporting the language or at least the conceptual framework of the doctrine of deification. It is declared in 1 John 3:2 that “when Christ appears, we shall be like him” (NRSV), and in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” In John’s Gospel, Jesus prays that believers will be one as he and the Father are one (17:21; cf. 10:30), yet it is without in any way losing sight of Jesus’s unique relationship with God as both preexistent Word and only begotten of the Father (1:1 and 18). The Son has divine life in himself (5:26). We have it only through the Son (3:36; 6:53–54, 68; 10:28), and only as we abide in him (15:1–7). In addition to this, there is the larger teaching on humanity as creatures made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1–2) and on Christ as the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45–49)....

Unlike in the Eastern church, where the doctrine of deification has always been regarded as a controlling concept in the doctrine of salvation, in the Western church it is scarcely known. Still we do occasionally find it, as, for example, in the eighth-century Celtic theologian John Scotus Eriugena (d. ca. 877), who declares: "He [Jesus] came down alone but ascends with many. He who made of God a human being makes gods of men and women" (Prologue to the Gospel of John 21). The great Western father Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) also uses the language of deification: "For God wishes to make thee a god; not by nature, as He is whom He has begotten, but by his gift and adoption" (Sermon 166.4). On the Protestant side, we find it, for example, in the lyrics of the great Methodist hymnologist Charles Wesley (d. 1788): "He deigns in flesh to appear, / Widest extremes to join; / To bring our vileness near, / And make us all divine" ("Let Heaven and Earth Combine")....

R. V. Huggins "Christain view of deification", *The Evangelical Dictionary of World Religions*, Eds. H. Wayne House. (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2018) 153-155.

MORMON VIEW OF DEIFICATION

The doctrine of deification, with its language of "becoming gods," appears in the arena of Mormon apologetics. Although we do find occasional earlier references to the similarity between the Mormon and the Orthodox teaching on deification (e.g., Hunter), the current interest did not arise until the 1970s and 1980s, after two Mormon scholars, Philip L. Barlow and Keith E. Norman, became interested in the subject while pursuing advanced degrees. Interestingly, both seem to have made the discovery independent of each other and both while studying at Harvard. Barlow would receive his doctorate from Harvard, but Norman would go on to get his from Duke, where he would write a dissertation titled "Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology" in 1980. Already by 1975, Norman had placed some of the results of his research on deification before the LDS community in an article appearing in the first issue of Sunstone magazine. Barlow would also contribute an article on the subject to Sunstone in 1983. Even though both Norman and Barlow are of a more scholarly than apologetic temper, these two articles (supplemented more recently by Norman's dissertation, which was published in 2000 - without Norman's participation and much to his surprise upon seeing it in print--by the Mormon apologetic organization Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS]) would serve as the basis and source for the Mormon apologetic that would afterward develop.

The primary supporter of the new deification apologetic is another LDS writer who was also at Duke while Norman was there and who has since become one of Mormonism's most popular writers and apologists: Stephen E. Robinson. Robinson develops his apologetic around the famous couplet of the fifth president of the LDS Church, Lorenzo Snow: "As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may become." "Latter-day Saints," Robinson writes, "share the ancient biblical doctrine of deification (apotheosis) with Eastern Orthodoxy. Several of early Christianity's theologians said essentially the same thing as Lorenzo Snow" ("God the Father," 2:401). Robinson sees particular significance in the similarity between Snow's couplet and the traditional formula as commonly misquoted from Irenaeus: "If the word became a man, it was so men may become gods." More recently Mormon apostle Dallin Oaks similarly asserted that the LDS understanding of the future life "should be familiar to all who have studied the ancient Christian doctrine of deification or apotheosis" ("Apostasy," 86).

In reality, of course, any similarity that seems to exist between Lorenzo Snow's couplet and the traditional formula is only apparent and has to do only with a similar structuring and the use of similar words. The underlying concepts being described in the two cases, however, are infinitely different. In the traditional formula, it was the Son who became human; in Snow's couplet it was the Father. In the traditional formula, Jesus became human in order that by joining his nature with ours he might enable us to become what we never had the potential to be--it was only because Jesus had divine life within himself that we could partake of divine life through him. In Snow's couplet, God the Father had been a man and had trodden the same path on his journey to godhood that we must each now tread on our own journeys to godhood. In the traditional formula, we share in the attributes of God in some limited sense by virtue of

the fact that we were created (and re-created) in the image of God, becoming "gods" by grace only because we have been united with Christ, who is God by nature. In Snow's couplet, we do not so much become gods as grow up into the gods we already are by nature, being part of the same "species" or "race" as God: "Gods and humans," writes Stephen E. Robinson, "represent a single divine lineage, the same species of being, although they and he are at different stages of progress" ("God the Father," 2:549). We are the literal spirit children of our heavenly parents: "[We are] formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable... of evolving into a God" (Smith, Winder, and Lund, 30). Ultimately, then, "all the personal attributes which are ascribed to God by inspired men, we find in ourselves" (Charles W. Penrose, quoted in Hunter, Gospel, 107).

One of the difficulties related to this discussion is the fact that the deification apologetic was growing in popularity among LDS apologists at the same time that the LDS leadership was taking steps to suppress the memory of the traditional Mormon account of the history of the Mormon God, that is, of why and how the Father came to be human in the first place. In this process, LDS president Gordon B. Hinckley has even gone so far as to publicly deny knowledge of this traditional Mormon teaching (Ostling and Ostling, 296). The apparent goal of this effort is to transform the LDS God into something more like the traditional idea of God as an ultimate being. The traditional LDS God was only one in an apparently endless sequence of Gods in which each new generation of Gods was not essentially different from the ones that went before. As humans now both have a God and have the potential of becoming Gods themselves, so the present God, when he was "as man is," had a God and had the potential of becoming God himself. This teaching indeed goes back to Joseph Smith: "If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and... God, the Father of Jesus Christ, had a Father, you may suppose that he had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father?" (Millennial Star, 24:109-10). The most recent work actually published by the LDS Church that speaks plainly about the history of God is an institute manual titled *Achieving a Celestial Marriage* (1992), which was finally taken out of circulation in 2002: "Our heavenly Father and mother [sic] live in an exalted state because they achieved a celestial marriage. As we achieve a like marriage we shall become as they are and begin the creation of our own spirit children" (p. 1). Some observers see this shift away from the traditional view as a positive thing, hoping that perhaps the LDS Church is quietly dropping the older view and looking to the doctrine of deification as a pattern for establishing a new and more Orthodox view of God. Others, however, have been more skeptical, noting that although official LDS Church publications and public-relations materials are very careful to exclude any discussion of the history of God, less official works still contain very explicit statements about it. As recently as 1998, for example, the following passage from nineteenth-century LDS apostle Orson Pratt was approvingly quoted in a book published by the LDS Church--owned Deseret Book Company: "The Father of our spirits has only been doing what his progenitors did before him The same plan of redemption is carried out by which more ancient worlds have been redeemed" (Matthews, 115).

Where differences are admitted to exist between the LDS and the Eastern Orthodox doctrines of deification, or theosis, they are normally explained away on the LDS side by an appeal to the Great Apostasy, the time when, according to Mormon theology, the ancient church was supposed to have lost its authority and fallen away from the teachings of Christ. The general methodology used by many Mormon writers for sifting the evidence is well stated by LDS apologists Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks in the context of discussing the doctrine of deification. Mormons, they tell us, "are in an enviable position here. Given our belief in the apostasy, we fully expect there to be differences, even vast differences, between the beliefs and the teachings of the Early Church Fathers and Mormon doctrine. Any similarities that exist, however, are potentially understandable as survivals from before that apostasy. When any similarities, even partial ones, exist between Latter-day Saints beliefs and the teachings of the Fathers but are absent between contemporary mainstream Christendom and the Fathers, they can be viewed as deeply important" (76). It is curious that the authors miss the fact that the use of this formula tunas all early evidence, no matter what it is, into proof of Mormonism---either proof of Mormon doctrine or proof of the Mormon doctrine of the Great Apostasy. Any similarities between the current LDS doctrine about becoming Gods and the ancient doctrine of deification, no matter how superficial, are interpreted as fragmentary remnants of the original teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Any differences, no matter how significant, are credited to the corrupting influence of the Great Apostasy. The final determiner of what constitutes the influence of the Great Apostasy is alleged to be current Mormon teaching. Naturally, so fallacious a methodology tends to blind its users to the real import of the ancient evidence.

R. V. Huggins "Mormon view of deification", *The Evangelical Dictionary of World Religions*, Eds. H. Wayne House. (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2018) 155-157

Deeper Look

Elohim as “Gods” in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word *elohim* lies behind the word “God” in the OT. Several instances of this word are plural, which may seem to indicate polytheism. For this reason, modern English translations often obscure the Hebrew text’s references to plural *elohim*. For example, the NASB renders the second *elohim* in Psa 82:1 as “rulers.” Other translations—more faithful to the original Hebrew—opt for “gods” or “divine beings.” However, this usage does not imply polytheism.

Several different entities are referred to as *elohim* in the OT. Considering this variety provides insight as to how the term should be understood. The Hebrew text of the OT refers to the following as *elohim*: Yahweh, the God of Israel (over 1000 times); the members of Yahweh’s heavenly council (Psa 82); the gods of foreign nations (1 Kgs 11:33); demons (see note on Deut 32:17); spirits of the human dead (1 Sam 28:13); and angels (see note on Gen 35:7).

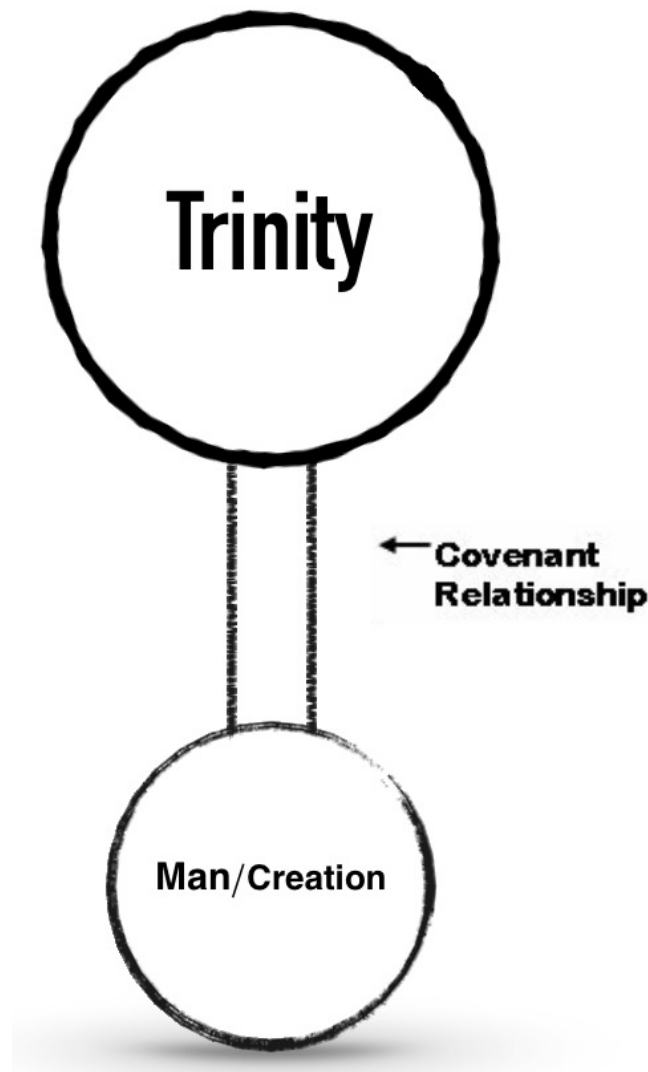
This variety demonstrates that the word should not be identified with one particular set of attributes: *elohim* is not a synonym for God. We reserve the English “g-o-d” for the God of Israel and His attributes. Despite their usage of *elohim*, the biblical writers do not qualitatively equate Yahweh with demons, angels, the human disembodied dead, the gods of the nations, or Yahweh’s own council members. Yahweh is unique and above these entities—yet the same term can be used to refer to all of them.

All beings called *elohim* in the Hebrew Bible share a certain characteristic: they all inhabit the non-human realm. By nature, *elohim* are not part of the world of humankind, the world of ordinary embodiment. *Elohim*—as a term—indicates residence, not a set of attributes; it identifies the proper domain of the entity it describes. Yahweh, the lesser gods of His council, angels, demons, and the disembodied dead all inhabit the spiritual world. They may cross over into the human world—as the Bible informs us—and certain humans may be transported to the non-human realm (e.g., prophets; Enoch). But the proper domains of each are two separate and distinct places.

Within the spiritual world, as in the human world, entities are differentiated by rank and power. Yahweh is an *elohim*, but no other *elohim* is Yahweh. This is what an orthodox Israelite believed about Yahweh. He was not one among equals; He was unique. The belief that Yahweh is utterly and eternally unique—that there is none like Him—is not contradicted by plural *elohim* in the OT.

Michael S. Heiser,
The FaithLife Study Bible, Logos bible software. 2017
Link found in cross-reference footnote on 1 Sam 28:13

Creator Creation Distinction



The illustration depicts the creator creation distinction. The circles do not overlap depicting an ontological distinction between God and his creation. Creation is not divine. Furthermore, God is not same or part of creation. Although God is different and distinct he is not distant. The two vertical lines show the covenant relationship God has with His creation. Two points will help clarify.

- 1.) God is a different kind of being. God is different from what is not God. When we say, God is different we do not mean different as a matter of degree but different in kind. The Trinity is it's own kind - one of a kind. Just as Isaiah declared, "I am God, and there is no other" (Isa 46:9a)
- 2.) God is a distinct type of being. God's distinctive nature is seen in the fact that he is a triune being of self-giving love. As Isaiah proclaimed, "I am God, and there is none like me" (Isa 46:9b).

Although God is different and distinct, he is not distant maintaining a covenant relationship of loving faithfulness with his creation. When we claim an ontological distinction between God and his creatures we mean, God is different and distinct but not distant from his creation.

The “already” but “not yet” theme

George Ladd’s definition

“The Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among human beings, and this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign.”¹

“Our central thesis is that the Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish His rule among men, and that this Kingdom which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history [already], and consummation at the end of history [not yet].”²

Thomas Schreiner on how the “already but not yet” influenced Paul’s theology. (See charts).³

Indeed, the already–not yet theme is so woven into Paul's theology that discussing it could easily launch a full-fledged treatment of Paul's theology.Here I want to note the pervasiveness of this theme in Paul's thought... If we consider, Paul's theology from the perspective of an archaeological dig, wherever we dig a shaft, we find the already–not yet, even though the precise terms in which this theology is expressed may differ. It seems, then, that inaugurated but not yet consummated eschatology belongs to the fundamental structure of Paul's thought.⁴

	Already	Not Yet
Kingdom of God	Rom 14:17; Col 1:14	Matt 6:10; 25:34
Salvation	Eph 2:8-9	1 Pet 1:5
Justification	Rom 5:1	Rom 2:13; Gal 5:5
Adoption	Rom 8:15-17	Rom 8:23
Sanctification	1 Cor 1:1-2	1 Thess 5:23
Eternal life	John 5:24-25	John 5:28-29

¹ George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament. Ed. Hagner. Rev. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 89–90.

² George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament. 91.

³ The chart on next page comes from Lars Kierspel, Charts on the Life, Letters, and Theology of Paul (Grand Rapids, Kregel Academic, 2012) 67

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, New Testament Theology: magnifying God in Christ (Grand rapids, Baker academic 2008) 29-30.



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Thomas R. Schreiner
“Already but not yet” theme
In New Testament Theology.

TERM/CONCEPT	ALREADY	NOT YET
Redemption	Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption (ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν) through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, ...	Ephesians 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (εἰς ἡμέραν ἀπολυτρώσεως).
Adoption	Romans 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption (ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα υἱοθεσίας) as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”	Romans 8:23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons (υἱοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι), the redemption of our body.
Justification/Gift of Righteousness	Romans 5:1 Therefore having been justified (δικαιωθέντες) by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ...	Galatians 5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness (ἐλπίδα δικαιοσύνης ἀπεκδεχόμεθα). (also Rom. 2:13)
Salvation	Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved (ἐστε σεσωσμένοι) through faith; and that not of yourselves, <i>it is</i> the gift of God; ... (also 2 Cor. 6:2)	Romans 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved (σωθησόμεθα) from the wrath of God through Him. (see Rom. 13:11)
Glory	2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.	1 Corinthians 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;
New Creation	2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, <i>he is</i> a new creature (καινὴ κτίσις); the old things passed away (παρῆλθεν); behold, new things have come (ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά).	2 Corinthians 5:2 For indeed in this <i>house</i> we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, (see 5:4)
Sanctification	1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified (ἡγιασμένοις) in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, ... (See 6:11)	1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely (ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὁλοτελεῖς); ...
Dead to Sin	Romans 6:2 ... How shall we who died (ἀπεθάνομεν) to sin still live in it? (Also 6:6-8)	Romans 8:13 ... but if by the Spirit you are putting to death (θανατοῦτε) the deeds of the body, you will live. (Col. 3:5, NIV “Put to death ...” / KJV “Mortify” [Νεκρώσατε] ...)

Important Application: Reading Scripture like a First Century Christian.

In 'How to read the Bible for all its worth', Gordon D. Fee explains why the concept of the "already but not yet" is significant given the self-understanding of the first Christians. He goes on to show the importance of reading from the same theological perspective as the first Christians:

The early Christians came to realize that Jesus had not come to usher in the "final" end, but the "beginning" of the end, as it were.....The early believers, therefore, learned to be a truly eschatological people. They lived between the times—that is, between the beginning of the end and the consummation of the end. At the Lord's Table they celebrated their eschatological existence by pro-claiming "the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Already they knew God's free and full forgiveness, but they had not yet been perfected (Phil. 3:7–14). Already victory over death was theirs (1 Cor. 3:22), yet they would still die (Phil. 3:20–22). Already they lived in the Spirit, yet they still lived in the world where Satan could attack (e.g., Eph. 6:10–17). Already they had been justified and faced no condemnation (Rom. 8:1), yet there was still to be a future judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). They were God's future people; they had been conditioned by the future. They knew its benefits, lived in light of its values, but they, as we, still had to live out these benefits and values in the present world.....

The hermeneutical key to much in the New Testament, and especially the ministry and teaching of Jesus, is to be found in this kind of "tension." Precisely because the kingdom, the time of God's rule, has been inaugurated with Jesus' own coming we are called to life in the kingdom, which means life under his lordship, freely accepted and forgiven, but committed to the ethics of the new age, and to seeing them worked out in our own lives and world in this present age. ⁵

⁵ Gordon D. Fee, Douglas Stuart, How to read the bible for all its worth. (Grand Rapids. Zondervan, 1993) 145-147