The Father and the Son
– The Roles of Jesus Christ –

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(From Christ and the New Covenant [1997] p.179-195)

The first Article of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reads, "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." That doctrine is enhanced in section 130:22 of the Doctrine and Covenants: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit." The Prophet Joseph Smith added, "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods."\(^1\)

This doctrine reaffirms what is clearly taught in all of the biblical experience, both Old Testament and New, about the separate and distinct nature of these three divine beings. The account written by Matthew of the baptism of Jesus makes an unequivocal case for the separation in both place and performance of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Of Christ's baptism at the hands of John, he recorded: "Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17; for additional commentary from the Father on the baptism of his Son, see 2 Nephi 31:11-15).

Of course, the most compelling evidence in modern times comes from the Sacred Grove, wherein Joseph Smith, under the revelatory influence of the Holy Ghost, saw the Father and Son in celestial splendor. He later wrote, "When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other-This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Joseph Smith-History 1:17).

The Book of Mormon makes an additional contribution to our understanding of the Father and Son as separate and distinct beings, the most pervasive of which are Christ's urgent and longing prayers to his Father recorded in 3 Nephi. These are moving supplications from a Son to his Father that establish firmly and forever that these two are separate and distinct individuals who communicate and converse with each other just as any other Father and Son would.

Unity of the Godhead

Having stressed the distinctiveness of the members of the Godhead and affirmed the fundamental and essential doctrine behind it, we can now note a clear and consistent theme running through the Book of Mormon that indicates important ways in which the Father and the Son are united for their common purposes and virtually synonymous in their interchangeable roles and functions. Indeed, their unity is the primary fact of their relationship; their distinctiveness seems to exist only in their corporeal separateness.

This unity between the Father and the Son catches the eye of the reader even before entering the Book of Mormon text. The title page of the Book of Mormon describes one of the purposes of this scripture as "the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD." Following that, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, the three latter-day witnesses of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, conclude their marvelous testimony with this conspicuous phrase: "And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen."

Many such declarations then appear throughout the Book
of Mormon. In Nephi's foundational sermon on the "doctrine of Christ," the sermon in which Nephi recorded the distinct utterances of the Father and the Son regarding Christ's baptism, he concluded with this declaration about the necessity of remaining "steadfast in Christ":

And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this i the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen. (2 Nephi 31:21)

When Amulek testified to Zeezrom about the nature and role of Christ-including Christ's physical distinction from the Father—he concluded with this bold assertion about the universality of the Resurrection:

[All] shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. (Alma 11:44)

In his introductory message to the Nephites upon his appearance in the New World, the Savior made an urgent appeal for unity among the members, particularly regarding the doctrine of baptism. To emphasize this need he noted the unity of the Godhood:

After this manner shall ye baptize in my name; for behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one. . . . The Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one" (3 Nephi 11:27, 36).

For one final example we note Mormon's last words, in which he gave this testimony of the Savior to any who will hear his voice:

Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, and that he was slain by the Jews, and by the power of the Father he hath risen again, whereby he hath gained the victory over the grave; and also in him is the sting of death swallowed up. And he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead, whereby man must be raised to stand before his judgment-seat. And he hath brought to pass the redemption of the world, whereby he is found guiltless before him at the judgment day hath it given unto him to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom, to sing ceaseless praises with the choirs above, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, which are one God, in a state of happiness which hath no end" (Mormon 7:5-7).

The doctrine of Christ with roles as a Father as well as as a Son was the source of some confusion and contention in Book of Mormon times. One of the most skillful and cunning of adversaries in the Book of Mormon (until his conversion) was Zeezrom. He used the complexity of this doctrine to try to trap new missionary Amulek.

With a skillful line of reasoning indicative of his training in the law, Zeezrom asked a series of questions leading to his ultimate question and potentially troublesome snare: "Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?" (Alma 11:38)

Amulek, fearless and forthright in his answer, responded with a boldness worthy of his interrogator:

Yea, he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last; And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else. (Alma 11:39-40)

This relationship among members of the Godhead deserves some brief consideration.

**Christ in the Role of Father**

There are obvious ways in which Jesus, as literal offspring of the Father, is one with Him. For one thing, he is the spiritual son of God, the firstborn of the Father's spirit children. Following that, he was to become the physical son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father in the Flesh. And as the Book of Mormon prophet Abinadi makes clearly, Christ is the Son of God because he subjected his will to the will of his Father (see Mosiah 15:2-7). No extensive explanation of these roles for Christ-as-Son is required for those who have read the exhaustive scriptural references to such in the Standard Works.

But what may at first seem less obvious is also taught in the scriptures—that there are ways in which Christ is so united with his Father that in some assignments he rightfully plays a fatherly role and rightfully bears the title of Father in doing so.

This fundamental-and admittedly deep-doctrine of the Son-as-Father is illuminated more definitively in the Book of Mormon than in any other revelation ever given to man. Repeated references in this sacred record teach that, under the direction of and with authority given by the Father (Elohim), the Son (Jehovah/Jesus) may act as the Father in several ways.

First and foremost, as Abinadi taught, Christ was "conceived by the power of God" (Mosiah 15:3) and therefore has the powers of the Father within him. In addition to that divine lineal relationship, Christ also acts as the Father in that he is the Creator of heaven and earth, is the father of our spiritual rebirth and salvation, and is faithful in honoring-and therefore claiming the power of-the will of his Father above that of his own will. Because of this inseparable relationship and uncompromised trust between them, Christ can at any time and in any place speak and act for the Father by virtue of the "divine investiture of authority" the Father has given him.²

Let us consider briefly the contribution the Book of Mormon makes toward our understanding of this divine unity.

**Christ As Heir of the Father**

The first of these relationships—the power and authority of Christ's literal inheritance from the Father, both physically and spiritually, as his firstborn and only begotten child in the flesh—was noted by Abinadi. To Christ more than any other in time or eternity it is said, "All that [the] Father hath shall be given unto him," (D&C 84:38) including authority to act
for the Father under the Father’s direction.

Christ As Father of Creation

Without attempting to be exhaustive, we should note at least several major Book of Mormon teachings on Christ-as-Creator.

King Benjamin said of the coming of Christ,

For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay. . . .

And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary. (Mosiah 3:5, 8)

He concluded with this exhortation:

Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. (Mosiah 5:15)

The power of that message had such an impact on the people that they cried aloud with one voice,

O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men. (Mosiah 4:2)

Speaking by direct revelation to Alma, the premortal Christ indicated that he is at liberty to "freely forgive" those who believe in his name and enter his Church through the spirit of repentance and the waters of baptism:

For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him who believeth unto the end a place at my right hand. (Mosiah 5:15)

When Alma the Younger experienced his great conversion, he found himself "born of the Spirit," and he said of that process,

I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers; but now that they may foresee that he will come, and that he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all.

Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. Yea, even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God. (Mosiah 27:24, 30-31)

Samuel the Lamanite prophesied "that ye might know of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning" (Helaman 14:12). The Savior himself made this triumphant announcement as he appeared to the Nephites in the New World:

Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name. (3 Nephi 9:15)

Clearly, Christ—under the direction of his Father—is the Father of creation, the Creator of heaven and earth and all things that in them are.

Christ As Father of Salvation

Another way Christ is designated as Father in the Book of Mormon is in his role as Father of the Redeemed and Father of the Resurrected.

In his pivotal and doctrinally deep revelation to the brother of Jared, Christ said,

Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters" (Ether 3:14).

It is in this role of providing rebirth, of giving new life—eternal life—that Christ is literally the Father of our salvation.

King Benjamin understood that doctrine when he said to those who had received his sermon, expressed belief in Christ, and had covenanted to do the will of God and keep his commandments,

Because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. (Mosiah 5:7).

In his magnificent pre-advent sermon on Christ, Abinadi expanded this concept, speaking specifically of the "seed" of Christ:

"Who shall declare his generation? Behold, I say unto you, that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed. And now what say ye? And who shall be his seed?

"Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord-I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God.

"For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. And now, are they not his seed?" (Mosiah 15:10-12)

Of course, Alma was one of the great examples of one who claimed the eternal life Christ extends to the penitent, including the rebirth that is involved. Following the three days of his unconsciousness, during which he went through the cleansing of repentance, he said to those who had fasted and prayed for him,

I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed
of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit.

And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;

And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they cannot come to the kingdom of God, . . .

Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God. (Mosiah 27:24-26, 28)

Later, in recounting that painful personal experience to his son Helaman, Alma said of his moment of greatest anguish,

I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pain no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! . . .

My limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors; for because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I have is of God. (Alma 36:18-20, 23-26)

This profound personal experience of spiritual rebirth is, of course, what led Alma to plead for it among others. To his brethren at Zarahemla he asked, "Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" (Alma 5:14) Much of the Book of Mormon is directed toward provoking such a rebirth in its readers.

**Submitting the Will of the Son to the Will of the Father**

One Book of Mormon prophet-Abinadi-was put to death for teaching, among other things, that Christ could appropriately be called both the Father and the Son.

Before the reader ever gets to the actual account of Abinadi's ministry, Limhi alludes to that experience in his teaching to his people.

Of Limhi's father Noah, and Noah's unholy court, Limhi said,

A prophet of the Lord have they slain; yea, a chosen man of God, who told them of their wickedness and abominations, and prophesied of many things which are to come, yea, even the coming of Christ.

And because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth-

And now, because he said this, they did put him to death" (Mosiah 7:26-28).

Limhi then introduced Ammon to the record of Zeniff, which contained an account of Abinadi's teachings to Noah. In those teachings Abinadi introduced a fundamental consideration about the relationship of Christ's Fatherhood and Sonship, stressing that "[A] God himself shall make [atonement] for the sins and iniquities of his people," that "[A] God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth," and that "[A] God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people" (Mosiah 13:28, 34; 15:1).

With that introduction Abinadi undertook a deep discussion of Christ in the roles of both Father and Son. Its complexity requires that it be quoted completely.

And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son-

The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son-

And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.

And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people.

And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he shall be led, yea, even as Isaiah said, as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father.

And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men-

Having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice. (Mosiah 15:2-9)

While that is the most thorough and challenging statement of the Father-Son role played by Christ, particularly as it involves the issue of the flesh versus the spirit, it is not the only reference to it in the Book of Mormon. Lehi said, in his great discussion of the Fall and the Atonement,

How great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring
to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise." (2 Nephi 2:8.)

Later in that same sermon, he spoke of "the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom"—this as opposed to "the will of [the] Holy Spirit," which directs us to choose eternal life and be faithful to the commandments. (2 Nephi 2:28-29.)

At the time of Christ's annunciation of his own birth in the Old World, he said to Nephi,

Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfill all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given. (3 Nephi 1:14)

Intriguingly, the "me" in Christ's reference to himself—his spiritual self—is identified with the Fatherly role, while his flesh is linked with his role as the Son. That is the very doctrine Abinadi taught—that the Father (the spirit) in Christ gave direction and had to be obeyed, while the Son (the flesh) in Christ had to yield and obey. (See also D&C 93:4.)

An overly simplified model of this doctrine as Abinadi gave it might look like this:

### Christ in the Roles of

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<th>Son</th>
<th>and</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Was born into mortality</td>
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<td>• Was an heir of immortality</td>
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<td>• Dwelt on the earth in the flesh</td>
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<td>• Subjected the flesh to the Spirit and was slain</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>• Saw the spirit triumph over the flesh and broke the bands of death</td>
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**–Ultimately–**

| • The will of the Son                   | was swallowed up in                      | • The will of the Father            |

Christ, in addition to being both the spiritual and physical Son of God (which in and of itself gave him unarguable, rightful claim upon his Father's virtues), and in addition to acting with divine investiture of authority (both to speak and act in his Father's stead), claimed a major portion of this divine, fatherly power through the fundamental gospel principle of obedience. By his obedience Christ showed the way to godhood to those of us who, although spirit children of God, are not physically begotten of Him and are not invested with the totality of his divine power.

By this doctrine Christ teaches us as mortal men and women that we can be one with the Father in a crucial, fundamental, eternally significant way: We can obey him. We can subject the flesh to the spirit. We can yield our will as children to the will of our Heavenly Father.

It was such yielding and such obedience that brought the mastery of Gethsemane, the victory of Calvary, the triumph of redemption. Surely one of the crucial moments in those awe-filled hours-moments leading to Christ's perfection, fulfillment, and eternal majesty—was the moment the Son in flesh yielded to the Father in spirit, saying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done"—"The will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father." (Luke 22:42; see also D&C 19:16-19.)

So must we all bend "the will of the flesh" to the "will of the Holy Spirit," to use Lehi's language. Because that same issue faces each mortal being and is with everyone throughout mortality, it should not be surprising that it would be among Christ's most exemplary moments.

Christ's final triumph and ultimate assumption of godly powers on the right hand of his Father came not because he had a divine parent (although that was essential to the victory over death) and not because he was given heavenly authority from the beginning (although that was essential to his divine power) but ultimately because he was, in his own mortal probation, perfectly obedient, perfectly submissive, perfectly loyal to the principle that the spiritual in his life must rule over the physical. That was at the heart of his triumph, and that is a lesson for every accountable man, woman, and child who ever lives. It is a lesson for which Abinadi—and Christ—were willing to die. It is the lesson for which virtually every prophet has given his voice and his life: spirit over flesh; discipline over temptation; devotion over inclination; "the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father.

**Notes**


2. This doctrine outlining the relationship between the Father and the Son is of such significance that in June 1916 the First Presidency issued a definitive doctrinal statement on this subject. See The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by The First Presidency and The Twelve,” *Ensign*, April 2002, pp. 13-17.