

God the Father

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Patrology - The Doctrine of the Father

Introduction

Since the Church began, genuine New Testament believers have believed in one God Who is three distinct Persons. In fact, even during the Old Testament times, prior to the cross, when God the Son became flesh, He required that men believe in His deity for salvation. "I said, therefore, to you, that you will die in your sins. For, if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." (John 8:24). During the Church's history, many defenses have been written regarding the deity of the Son and Spirit. But there is a third Person in this godhead. We know who He is. He is the Father. We pray to Him. We thank Him. But we know very little about Him.

Many volumes have been written expounding the Biblical doctrine of the Son or the Spirit. Little has been written to expound the doctrine of the Father. It is a common mistake to equate Theology proper with the doctrine of the Father. Theology proper is the doctrine of God's nature, essence and attributes. Look back at that last sentence. Who was I writing about? God, you answer. In your mind, who is that? Many equate the title "God" with the Father. Theology proper is Trinitarian. It is the truth about the nature of God, that which is true of all three Persons of the Godhead. The singular nature, essence and attributes absolutely and completely belong to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Son involves a study of His deity, His humanity, but also of His work both before and after He became flesh. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is studied in a similar manner. When mention of the Father is made, little is said of His work. Many passages which refer to the entire Trinity are misapplied to only the Father. The result is an inaccurate understanding of the Father and His work, both past and present. It also results in harm to a clear understanding of the Trinity.

As we study the doctrine of the Father, we will need to understand His deity and relationship to the essence, nature and attributes. We will want to understand His relationship to the other Persons of the Trinity. We will seek to find what the Bible says about His work in eternity and His work through time into the future. We should understand our proper response and relationship to Him as the Father.

The background of Trinitarianism

Trinitarianism is not a New Testament truth, but it is only plain in the New Testament. With the plain revelation of the New Testament, the Old Testament trinitarian statements can be clearly seen. What are some of the clear New Testament statements?

In Matthew 28:19-20 three Persons are connected with one singular name. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share the one name which is God's, for all three are God.

Revelation 1:4-5 reveals grace and peace coming from all three Persons of the godhead. The Father is the "One being and the One Who was and the One Who is coming." The Spirit is described as "the seven Spirits Which are before His throne." This relates the Spirit and God's seven attributes, expressed through Him. Finally the Son is "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead ones and the ruler of the kings of the earth." The three are equally the source of this grace and peace.

Paul sandwiched the Father between the Son and the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 13:14. He distinguished the three Persons, but set them on a level of equality, each providing a benefit equally important to the believer. "The grace from our Lord Jesus Christ and the love from God and the fellowship from the Holy Spirit, is with you all."

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Jesus described His relationship with Father and Son as equality and oneness. John, born along by the Spirit, made certain we understood the significance of Christ's claim "My Father..." (John 5:17) by stating, "but He also said God is His uniquely own [ἰδιον] Father, making Himself equal with the God." Neither John, writing 60 years later, nor Jesus, at the time this event occurred, made any attempt to correct this notion. If anything, Jesus defended this idea, stating that He did what He saw the Father do (v. 19). Here was a man claiming to have seen the Father. That, too, was a claim to deity, for to this point, "no one had seen God at any time; the unique kind of God [some manuscripts read "Son"], the One being in the bosom of the Father, That One has declared [or "rehearsed"]." (John 1:18). When Christ described the security of His sheep in the hand which was both His and the Father's, He stated, "I and the Father, We are one." (John 10:30). The Jews understood His words, "that you being a man, make yourself God." (v. 33). Jesus never denied this fact. Rather, He pointed out that if He indeed performed the works which the Father had given Him to do, then they should believe that He is God, even "that the Father is in Me, and I in Him" (John 10:34-39). While we usually use these verse to defend the deity of God the Son these verses equally indicate the deity of the Father. Both the Father and the Son are one essence, the "one thing" of John 10:30. They are one Deity, one God, not two.

Now, don't confuse these two Persons. Some people see the word God and they think of Person rather than deity, or nature and quality of being God. There are three distinct Persons, Who are equally one God, sharing completely in the one essence, attributes and nature which make up that one God. There are various errors which have been and are taught regarding the Trinity. Some have taught that "One God" means that there is only one Person. This One Person is like an actor who plays various parts. Modalism is the name given to this teaching and it is wrong. It is not Biblical. The Spirit could descend upon the Son (Matthew 3:16). The Father could speak from heaven while the Son stood beside the Jordan (Matthew 3:17). The Son could ask the Father to send the Spirit, and both the Father and Son could send the Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26). The Son communicated with the Father, asking and thanking Him for various matters (John 11:41; 17:1 ff.). If there are not three distinct Persons, we either have a deranged schizophrenic Being or perhaps one who is intentionally deceiving us. This is not the case, for these Three are One God. They are not three Gods. That would be Tritheism. That too is wrong. Trinitarianism is the Biblical teaching that Three Distinct yet inseparable Persons are one God.

God's essence is spirit (John 4:24), therefore, the Persons do not face the limitations we face in a human nature. If the Trinity were human the Three distinct Persons would have to take turns using the human body. But God's infinite spirit essence makes it possible for the Three to completely possess and use Their essence. In human terms we could liken it to the Father eating cake, while the Son dribbled a basketball and the Spirit wrote a letter, all with the same hand at the same time. In human terms, this would be impossible. But God is not human. God is spirit.

God is infinite in spirit. God created many spirit beings, Cherubs, Seraphs, and Angels. These beings like, God possess a nature which is spirit. They are not physical beings, though they can temporarily materialize. But the spirit essence of these beings is finite. It is limited. They are not omnipresent and there are no trinitarian created spirit beings. There is only One God (Deuteronomy 6:4) and beside God, there is no other god (Deuteronomy 4:35; 1 Kings 8:60; Isaiah 44:6, 8; 45:5, 18, 22; Joel 2:27; et al).

The Father and Theology Proper [The Study of Deity]

Theology Proper is the study of God, not the Persons, but of the nature of their being God or Deity. It is almost looking at their makeup as impersonal. In John 1:1 the Greek word θεος [Theos -God] has two uses. "In a quality of beginning the Word was existing and the Word was facing the God [another Person-the Father] and the Word was God [Deity]." The first occurrence of Theos has a definite article and is referring to the Father. But the second occurrence is not referring to a Person but the impersonal nature. An expanded and explanatory translation of this final clause could read, "And the Word was eternal, infinite, indivisible, simple spirit, good, holy, love, omniscient, omnipotent, righteous, truth." In other words, all that is true of the nature of being deity, is true of Him. If I were with a very notable person, let's say the president, we could use the language of this verse to say, "At a point in time, Tim was, and Tim was facing the Man [in this case the president], and Tim was man." Do you see how I used "man" with two different emphases? The first is a specific noun referring to this notable person. The second is a generic use referring to the nature of being "human" or "male". When we consider Deity, or the nature of being God below, unless otherwise stated, I will be using the term "God" to refer to that nature, not to the Person of the Father specifically. The following descriptions will be related to the Father to demonstrate His deity.

The Essence

God's essence is spirit (John 4:24). In this verse the Son was speaking of the Father. However, the Son used the name God [*theos*] without a definite article, therefore, He was referring in general to the nature of deity, while speaking of the requirement of the Father. This essence, which is shared by all three Persons of the Trinity has a form though no one has seen it, because of its immensity (Jh. 5:37). That essence is self-existent. Therefore, the Father, just as the Son and Spirit, is self-existent. The Father has life in Himself (John 5:26; 6:57). That spirit essence is infinite (1 Ki. 8:27), immense, and unchanging.

The Attributes

There are seven attributes, qualities which describe how God functions or what God is able to do. Distinct from God's essence and nature, attributes are the basis of God's actions. Those attributes are all-knowingness, all-powerfulness, goodness, holiness, love, righteousness and truth (Isaiah 40:12-14; Jeremiah 32:17; Mark 10:18; Leviticus 11:44; 1 John 4:8; Psalm 145:17; 2 Chronicles 15:3-6). Because the Father is God, He to stated to possess each of these attributes.

He is all-knowing. He knows what one needs before one even asks (Matthew 6:8).

He is all powerful, called the Almighty one (2 Corinthians 6:18).

He is good. While spoken by Christ in Mark 10:18, Christ was asking whether this man was calling Him God. 1 Timothy 1:11 does describe the Father.

He is holy. The Son called Him Holy Father (John 17:11).

He is love. He is said many times to love the Son as well as to love believers (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; John 3:16).

He is righteous. The Son called Him righteous Father (John 17:25).

He is truth. The Son called Him the one true God, a description shared by the Father and Son (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20).

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The Nature

The nature of God is the combined attributes and essence. The nature belongs to all three Persons of the God-head not the Father alone. The nature states that which is true of God's attributes and essence. God is immutable [unchanging], free, sovereign, infinite, eternal (Malachi 3:6; Isaiah 40:13; Romans 9:18-23; Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 57:15). Each of these can be applied also to the Father.

The Father does not change (James 1:17).

The Father is free (Ephesians 1:5, 9).

The Father is sovereign

The Father is infinite

The Father is eternal

The Prerogatives of God

A prerogative is defined as "a special right or privilege"¹. A prerogative is that to which God alone is entitled. God alone is entitled to worship, is able to forgive sin, bestow reward and be the object of faith (Revelation 19:10; Mark 2:6-7; Hebrews 11:6; Mark 11:22). These express some of the prerogatives of God.

The Father is worthy of worship (John 4:23).

The Father forgives sins (Matthew 6:14).

The Father rewards (Matthew 6:6).

The Father is an object of faith (Romans 4:24).

The Work of God the Father

In establishing deity, there are also works which are unique to God. These are works which no one else does. They are distinct from prerogatives because they are based upon God's nature, where as prerogatives are based upon God's position over all things.

He created (1 Corinthians 8:6).

He works even on the Sabbath (John 5:17).

His works were completed from the foundation of the world (Hebrews 4:3). Because the Father knew the Son as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, long before the Son became man and was slain, He could relate to the work of Christ as though it was accomplished and we too benefit from that finished work by rest at the throne of grace (1 Peter 1:19-20).

He resurrected the Son (Romans 6:4).

He reveals truth or some of His mind to mankind (Matthew 16:17).

Eternity

Eternity describes that which is not bound by time. It can refer to that which has no beginning or end as is true of the Godhead. It may describe that which has its effect outside of time such as the eternal covenant between the Father and Son. God dwells in eternity (Isaiah 57:15). God operates in time and space but exists far beyond the bounds of time and space.

¹ Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary p. 541.

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The Persons of the Trinity

In eternity, prior to the exist of any other intelligent beings, the three Persons of the Godhead existed in their perfect oneness. There was interaction, and the exercise of the various attributes on behalf of one another. He shared glory with the Son before the foundation of the world (John 17:5). The Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). Most notable of God's works in eternity is the decree.

The Decree

The decree describes the plan which the three Persons of the Trinity determined to bring about in time. That decree was determined by all three Persons but the decree is described as being the Father's. He is the source of all things (1 Corinthians 8:6).

The New Testament uses the preposition *ek* to describe the Father being the source of these things within the plan. He is not the source of the Son or Spirit but of the creation. Each Person has a relationship to the Creation but because the plan which the Father, Son and Spirit determined to enact was the Father's He is the source. (John 10:32; 1 Corinthians 11:12).

Christ's suffering and death was according to the will of the Father (Acts 4:28).

The Father foreknew the Son as the lamb slain (1 Peter 1:20).

The Father's will was to take Paul as His apostle of grace (Galatians 1:4; Acts 22:14).

The Father had a will for David which was accomplished before David died (Acts 13:36).

The Father purposed to govern our lives by grace in Christ. (Ephesians 3:11).

The Father purposed to bring us to salvation (2 Timothy 1:9). Note in these last two, it is one distinct from Jesus Christ in whom the purpose was made.

The roles of the three persons

The Father is the originator or planner.

The Son is the provider, the one who acts as the basis of the plan.

The Spirit is the applicator or implementor, the one who applies what is planned by the Father and provided by the Son.

Example of the Decree and salvation: 1 Peter 1:2 The Father foreknew (it was His plan with which He was previously acquainted). The Spirit applied it by setting us apart. The Son provided for it by the shedding of His blood which is sprinkled.

- Hebrews 9:14 - The blood of Christ, offered through the Spirit, presented to God.

Example from Regeneration: The Father planned regeneration, even planning to indwell believers. The Son is the basis of regeneration by His death and life. The Spirit applies regeneration by joining each Person of the Godhead to the believer.

Example of Position: The Father planned for the Grace believer to have a position. The Son is the basis of that position by His death and life and being the person in whom the position is based. The Spirit applies this to the believer by placing the believer into the Son.

Example from Creation: The Father planned the creation. The Son spoke the creation into existence. The Spirit arranged or polished the creation.

In Time

John 1:18 (cp John 5:37) must be kept firmly in mind. When God the Son became flesh and temporarily existed² among men, no one had yet seen the Father. It was the Son who led Him out to be seen. He was seen through the Son, because the Son demonstrated the character which is God's. When people saw the Son, they were also seeing the Father, because it is the absolute nature belonging to the Father, Son and Spirit which the Son exhibited. If the Father had become flesh rather than the Son, the same character would have been seen.

Since the Father had not been seen to that point, it is the Son whom we find appearing to men throughout the Old Testament, such as the appearance to Moses on the Mountain or the to Jacob in the wilderness.

The Past

Creation -

All three Persons had a part in creation. While most references to creation speak of the Son creating, the statement in Genesis 1:26, "let Us" refers to all three. 1 Corinthians 8:6 also refers the ultimate source of all things to the Father.

Adam and the Fall

God said that Adam had become like one of "us" (Genesis 3:22). "Us" indicates the Trinity and therefore includes the Father.

Noah and the Flood

Mankind and Babel

When Noah and his family disembarked from the ark, they all had an experiential knowledge of God (Romans 1:21). But mankind eventually came to disapprove of such knowledge (Romans 1:28). They refused to worship God as God but instead substituted created things and made them the object of worship. This is the entire Trinity. As a whole the Trinity determined, "Let us go down and confound their language" (Genesis 11:17).

Abraham and the Covenants

He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who covenanted with them (Acts 3:13). The Son appeared to these men, but all three Persons were involved.

Moses and Israel

He would save Israel by another who is also Jehovah (Hosea 1:7).

He was King of Israel during the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:6). He distinguishes Himself from the Son "His Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts."

Both the above passages identify two with the name Jehovah.

² [literally, "tenting out"]

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The Kings and the Earth

As the Most High, He rules over the kingdoms of men and gives those kingdoms to those He chooses (Daniel 4:17, 25-26). He sets over the kingdoms of men those He chooses.

He laughs and scoffs at the nations in their attempts to throw off His rule (Psalm 2:4). He will give the kingdoms of the earth to the Son as an inheritance (Psalm 2:8-9).

The Son and His Incarnate Life

He and the Spirit sent the Son (Isaiah 48:16). "And now Jehovah God and His Spirit has sent Me."

He was a Father to the Son in His humanity (2 Samuel 7:14; Hebrews 1:5).

He shared an intimate knowledge with the Son (John 10:15)

He gave men the True Bread who is Christ (John 6:32).

He sent the Son (John 5:30).

He gave the Son works to accomplish (John 6:36).

He testified concerning the Son (John 5:37).

He displayed to the Son (in the realm of His human nature) all things which He does (John 5:20)

He had a will for the Son to accomplish (John 5:30).

He gave some people to the Son (John 6:37, 44, 45, 65).

He taught the Son's humanity what to say and do (John 12:50; 8:28, 38).

He heard the Son's communication (John 10:41-42; 5:37; 8:18).

He gave the Son to have life in His human nature (John 5:26).

The Son and His Cross

The Father could have saved the Son from His hour (John 12:27). However, the God-head had determined to provide salvation through the death and resurrection of the Son and therefore, the Father did not do this but allowed Him to undergo the hour. The Father was pleased to bruise Him by laying upon Him the perversities of Israel (Isaiah 53:10, 5).

The Father separated Himself from the Son's human nature while the Son hung upon the cross (Mark 15:33-34). Prior, the Son was never alone (John 8:16, 29).

He loved the Son for laying down His life for us (John 10:17).

The Son and His Resurrection

He raised up Jesus (Romans 4:24; 10:9; Ephesians 1:20; Acts 3:15). The resurrection was done by all three Persons though the Father is most often associated with the work.

The Son and His Ascension

He set Him at His own right hand far above all angels (Ephesians 1:20-21).

He has put all things under Christ's feet (Ephesians 1:22).

He told the Son to sit at His right hand (Hebrew 1:13).

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He granted the Son to be glorified with the glory He had with the Father before the world (John 17:1-3).

He determined all should honor the Son like Him (John 5:23; 8:54).

The Present

He has made the Son, Lord and Christ as part of the Son's resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:36). This indicates that these titles changed emphases from those during Christ's earthly ministry. Several passages in Acts connect Jesus' death and the Father's act of raising Him and exalting Him (Acts 3:23-24; 3:15a-15b; 4:10a-10b; 5:30b, 31, 30a; 10:39-40; 13:29-30). In addition Philippians 2:8-10; Ephesians 1:22-23 demonstrate that Peter's idea "made Him both Lord and Christ" is subsequent to His death and connected with His resurrection. Therefore, "Lord" and "Christ" are used with a new meaning. Lord emphasizes His position over the body and absolute authority today waiting for all enemies to be placed under His feet. Christ focuses on His resurrection and being the character of the body, the one Who gives distinction to the very body.

The Son and His Work

The Son asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit to remain with believers during this present dispensation (John 14:16).

The Holy Spirit was the promise from the Father (Acts 2:33; Galatians 3:14). He was given as an earnest (Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26)

The believer is translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love (2 Timothy 4).

The Son as Priest

A priest is a go-between between God and man.

The Son as Intercessor

The Son in His human nature intercedes to the Father (Romans 8:27).

The Son's intercession is so that we might experience the work of the Father and be conformed to the Son's image (Romans 8:28-29).

The Son as Advocate

The Son is in the presence of the Father as our Advocate as the One with Whom the Father is satisfied (propitiated) (1 John 2:1-2).

The Father chastens His sons because He loves them (1 Corinthians 11:30 ; Hebrews 12:6).

The Father judges no one (John 5:22). He has committed all things to the Son.

The Believer's Position

The Father placed believer where He desired them to be (1 Corinthians 12:18).

The Father joined the members in the body so that those members which don't appear to be as beautiful are actually more necessary (1 Corinthians 12:24).

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The Father is the one who has graced the believer in Christ, the One who is loved (Ephesians 1:6).

The Father is the one who logically imputes the believer to be in Christ (with Ephesians 1:6; Romans 4:3-6, 17; Ephesians 2:4-6).

Therefore, the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit is literally an initiating of a new way of thinking in the mind of God the Father. The Spirit indicates that it is time to count this believer to be in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:30 states that we are in Christ out of God the Father and He (Christ) has been made for us wisdom: righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Three truths which are all true in Christ. The Father counts them true of us.

Righteousness is logically counted to us by God the Father.

Sanctification is accomplished in Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:2; Hebrews 2:11

Redemption is applied in Christ. Ephesians 1:7.

The Father is the one to whom the believer is alive in Christ (Romans 6:10-11).

The Father has given children to the Son (Hebrews 2:13).

The Father holds the believer firmly (John 10:29).

The Father is also the place of the believers position (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Colossians 3:4). As the believer is in Christ, he is also in the Father. The believer's life is hid with Christ in God.

The Believer's Regeneration

The Father is the source of the believer's new birth (1 John 5:1, 2). The believer is born from the Father. Because He indwells in His His people, He is our God and He is our Father and we are sons and daughters to Him (2 Corinthians 6:16b-18).

The Father's indwelling constitutes the believer's new nature (John 14:11, 20; Ephesians 4:6; 5:1-2).

The Father's seed, that which a father contributes to a child's conception, remains at ease in the believer (1 John 3:9). This seed constitutes the believer a child of God. The believer is not adopted into God's family but is born.

The Father's greatest promises allow the believer to be a partaker in the divine kind of nature (2 Peter 1:3-4). The believer can use that new nature, that seed from the Father, so that he lives like one who is born from God.

The Father's nature and the Son's life allow the believer to exhibit the fruit of the light which is in all goodness, righteousness and truth (Ephesians 5:9).

The Believers Communication

The believer is to ask the Father in Christ's character (John 15:16; 16:23, 26).

The believer is to worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

The believer is to give thanks to the Father at all times (Ephesians 5:20).

The Future

The Rapture of the Church and the Marriage of the Son

Christ will present all believers blameless before the Father (1 Thessalonians 1:13).

The Twenty-four Elders and their worship

He sits upon a throne surrounded by 4 Cherubs (Revelation 4:2-3).

He is worshipped by the Cherubs and the 24 elders (Revelation 4:8-11; 5:13).

The Earth-dwellers and the Tribulation

He, along with the Son, is the source of wrath (Revelation 6:16-17).

He does not judge but has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22).

He sends the Son in the judgment of the Second Coming, for He alone knows the day and hour of the return (Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7). This refers to the Son's humanity. The Son in His deity knows all, but in the realm of His human nature, He has limitations.

The New Jerusalem and the Kingdom

He is on the New Jerusalem with the Son while the Spirit is poured out upon all flesh on the earth (Hebrews 12:22-24).

He is

The Trinity and the Day of God

The Son will turn all authority over to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28).

The Son delivers the kingdom to God even the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

The Son submits by turning the Kingdom over to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Then God may be all things in all ways (v. 28).

The Trinity will for the first time in human history be visibly in unity.

This will be the day of God (2 Peter 3:10-11). The Day of God follows the Day of the Lord which is the Day for the Son in the realm of His humanity to judge and to rule the world.

The Son's kingdom has no end (Luke 1:3; Isaiah 9:7). Therefore, the Son's kingdom which is turned over to the Father continues with not just the Son ruling but all three Persons of the God-head ruling. Therefore, it is the Day of God!

Our Relationship and Response to God the Father

The Father seeks people who will worship Him by means of their spirits rather than with their bodies and souls (John 4:24).

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The Father is the Person of the God-head Who works or operates [ενεργεω] in the believer so that the believer may use the spiritual gift given by the Holy Spirit as a ministry under Christ's Lordship (1 Corinthians 12:6). Paul exercised his spiritual gift and his ministry as the steward of the dispensation of grace by the power which operated in him (Ephesians 3:7). Paul used what was available to him as one who shares in the divine kind of nature to serve God through his ministry to other believers. When Paul labored [κοπιω - sweat and toil] on behalf of others, so that they might mature in Christ, he did not rely upon his human power, mental acuteness or savy speaking. Paul operated by God's operation or energizing (Colossians 1:28-29). Paul directed to those over whom he labored the nine attitudes which make up the singular fruit of the Spirit.

The Father energizes or operates in us by means of His power (Ephesians 1:19). In the context, this operation appears to be for the purpose of believer using the new nature in relation to other believers in the body of Christ (vv. 21-22). The new nature is seen in the Fruit from the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). That nature allows us to live as members of the body, with the attitudes that are consistent with being a part of the body.

The Father energized in the raising of the Son out from dead ones (Ephesians 1:19-20). When the believer was placed into Christ by the Spirit's baptizing work, God exercised this kind of power in raising the believer positionally from dead ones with Christ (Colossians 2:12).