

“The Father and the Son,”

Ensign, Apr 2002, 13

A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

From Improvement Era, Aug. 1916, 934–42; capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling standardized.

In the early 1900s, some discussion arose among Church members about the roles of God the Father and Jesus Christ. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles issued the following in 1916 to clarify the meaning of certain scriptures where Jesus Christ, or Jehovah, is designated as the Father. It is thought that a printing of this statement will be helpful to members as they study the Old Testament this year.

The scriptures plainly and repeatedly affirm that God is the Creator of the earth and the heavens and all things that in them are. In the sense so expressed, the Creator is an Organizer. God created the earth as an organized sphere; but He certainly did not create, in the sense of bringing into primal existence, the ultimate elements of the materials of which the earth consists, for “the elements are eternal” ([D&C 93:33](#)).

So also life is eternal, and not created; but life, or the vital force, may be infused into organized matter, though the details of the process have not been revealed unto man. (For illustrative instances see [Gen. 2:7](#); [Moses 3:7](#); [Abr. 5:7](#).) Each of these scriptures states that God breathed into the body of man the breath of life. See further [Moses 3:19](#) for the statement that God breathed the breath of life into the bodies of the beasts and birds. God showed unto Abraham “the intelligences that were organized before the world was”; and by “intelligences” we are to understand personal “spirits” (see [Abr. 3:22–23](#)); nevertheless, we are expressly told that “Intelligence,” that is, “the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be” ([D&C 93:29](#)).

The term “Father” as applied to Deity occurs in sacred writ with plainly different meanings. Each of the four significations specified in the following treatment should be carefully segregated.

1. “Father” as Literal Parent

Scriptures embodying the ordinary signification—literally that of Parent—are too numerous and specific to require citation. The purport of these scriptures is to the effect that God the Eternal Father, whom we designate by the exalted name-title “Elohim,” is the literal Parent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and of the spirits of the human race. Elohim is the Father in every sense in which Jesus Christ is so designated, and distinctively He is the Father of spirits. Thus we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” ([Heb. 12:9](#)). In view of this fact we are taught by Jesus Christ to pray: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” ([Matt. 6:9](#)).

Jesus Christ applies to Himself both titles, “Son” and “Father.” Indeed, He specifically said to the brother of Jared: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son” ([Ether 3:14](#)). Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also the body in which Jesus Christ performed His

mission in the flesh, and which body died on the cross and was afterward taken up by the process of resurrection, and is now the immortalized tabernacle of the eternal spirit of our Lord and Savior. No extended explanation of the title “Son of God” as applied to Jesus Christ appears necessary.

2. “Father” as Creator

A second scriptural meaning of “Father” is that of Creator; e.g., in passages referring to any one of the Godhead as “the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are” ([Ether 4:7](#); see also [Alma 11:38–39](#); [Mosiah 15:4](#)).

God is not the Father of the earth as one of the worlds in space, nor of the heavenly bodies in whole or in part, not of the inanimate objects and the plants and the animals upon the earth, in the literal sense in which He is the Father of the spirits of mankind. Therefore, scriptures that refer to God in any way as the Father of the heavens and the earth are to be understood as signifying that God is the Maker, the Organizer, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

With this meaning, as the context shows in every case, Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ the Son of Elohim, is called “the Father,” and even “the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth” (see passages before cited and also [Mosiah 16:15](#)). With analogous meaning Jesus Christ is called “The Everlasting Father” ([Isa. 9:6](#); compare [2 Ne. 19:6](#)). The descriptive titles “Everlasting” and “Eternal” in the foregoing texts are synonymous.

That Jesus Christ, whom we also know as Jehovah, was the executive of the Father, Elohim, in the work of creation is set forth in the book *Jesus the Christ*, chapter 4 [by James E. Talmage]. Jesus Christ, being the Creator, is consistently called the Father of heaven and earth in the sense explained above; and since His creations are of eternal quality He is very properly called the Eternal Father of heaven and earth.

3. Jesus Christ the “Father” of Those Who Abide in His Gospel

A third sense in which Jesus Christ is regarded as the “Father” has reference to the relationship between Him and those who accept His gospel and thereby become heirs of eternal life. Following are a few of the scriptures illustrating this meaning.

In fervent prayer offered just prior to His entrance into Gethsemane, Jesus Christ supplicated His Father in behalf of those whom the Father had given unto Him, specifically the Apostles, and, more generally, all who would accept and abide in the gospel through the ministry of the Apostles. Read in our Lord’s own words the solemn affirmation that those for whom He particularly prayed were His own, and that His Father had given them unto Him:

“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

“Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.

“And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled” ([John 17:6–12](#)).

And further:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

“I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” ([John 17:20–24](#)).

To His faithful servants in the present dispensation the Lord has said, “Fear not, little children, for you are mine, and I have overcome the world, and you are of them that my Father hath given me” ([D&C 50:41](#)).

Salvation is attainable only through compliance with the laws and ordinances of the gospel; and all who are thus saved become sons and daughters unto God in a distinctive sense. In a revelation given through Joseph the Prophet to Emma Smith, the Lord Jesus addressed the woman as “my daughter” and said, “For verily I say unto you, all those who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom” ([D&C 25:1](#)). In many instances the Lord had addressed men as His sons (e.g., [D&C 9:1](#); [D&C 34:3](#); [D&C 121:7](#)).

That by obedience to the gospel men may become sons of God, both as sons of Jesus Christ, and, through Him, as sons of His Father, is set forth in many revelations given in the current dispensation. Thus we read in an utterance of the Lord Jesus Christ to Hyrum Smith in 1829:

“Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I am the life and the light of the world.

“I am the same who came unto mine own and mine own received me not;

“But verily, verily, I say unto you, that as many as receive me, to them will I give power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on my name. Amen” ([D&C 11:28–30](#)).

To Orson Pratt the Lord spoke through Joseph the seer, in 1830:

“My son Orson, hearken and hear and behold what I, the Lord God, shall say unto you, even Jesus Christ your Redeemer;

“The light and the life of the world, a light which shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not;

“Who so loved the world that he gave his own life, that as many as would believe might become the sons of God. Wherefore you are my son” ([D&C 34:1–3](#)).

In 1830 the Lord thus addressed Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon:

“Listen to the voice of the Lord your God, even Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, whose course is one eternal round, the same today as yesterday, and forever.

“I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was crucified for the sins of the world, even as many as will believe on my name, that they may become the sons of God, even one in me as I am one in the Father, as the Father is one in me, that we may be one” ([D&C 35:1–2](#)).

Consider also the following given in 1831:

“Hearken and listen to the voice of him who is from all eternity to all eternity, the Great I Am, even Jesus Christ—

“The light and the life of the world; a light which shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not;

“The same which came in the meridian of time unto mine own, and mine own received me not;

“But to as many as received me, gave I power to become my sons; and even so will I give unto as many as will receive me, power to become my sons” ([D&C 39:1–4](#)).

In a revelation given through Joseph Smith in March 1831 we read:

“For verily I say unto you that I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the light and the life of the world—a light that shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not.

“I came unto mine own, and mine own received me not; but unto as many as received me gave I power to do many miracles, and to become the sons of God; and even unto them that believed on my name gave I power to obtain eternal life” ([D&C 45:7–8](#)).

A forceful exposition of this relationship between Jesus Christ as the Father and those who comply with the requirements of the gospel as His children was given by Abinadi, centuries before our Lord’s birth in the flesh:

“And now I say unto you, 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?”

“Yea, and are not the prophets, every one that has opened his mouth to prophesy, that has not fallen into transgression, I mean all the holy prophets ever since the world began? I say unto you that they are his seed” ([Mosiah 15:10–13](#)).

In tragic contrast with the blessed state of those who become children of God through obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ is that of the unregenerate, who are specifically called the children of the devil. Note the words of Christ, while in the flesh, to certain wicked Jews who boasted of their Abrahamic lineage: “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. . . . Ye do the deeds of your father. . . . If God were your Father, ye would love me. . . . Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” ([John 8:39, 41–42, 44](#)). Thus Satan is designated as the father of the wicked, though we cannot assume any personal relationship of parent and children as existing between him and them. A combined illustration showing that the righteous are the children of God and the wicked the children of the devil appears in the parable of the tares: “The good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one” ([Matt. 13:38](#)).

Men may become children of Jesus Christ by being born anew—born of God, as the inspired word states:

“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” ([1 Jn. 3:8–10](#)).

Those who have been born unto God through obedience to the gospel may by valiant devotion to righteousness obtain exaltation and even reach the status of godhood. Of such we read:

“Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God” ([D&C 76:58](#); compare [D&C 132:20](#), and contrast [D&C 132:17](#) in same section; see also [D&C 132:37](#)). Yet though they be gods, they are still subject to Jesus Christ as their Father in this exalted relationship; and so we read in the paragraph following the above quotation: “And they are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” ([D&C 76:59](#)).

By the new birth—that of water and the Spirit—mankind may become children of Jesus Christ, being through the means by Him provided “begotten sons and daughters unto God” ([D&C 76:24](#)). This solemn truth is further emphasized in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ given through Joseph Smith in 1833:

“And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn;

“And all those who are begotten through me are partakers of the glory of the same, and are the church of the Firstborn” ([D&C 93:21–22](#)).

For such figurative use of the term “begotten” in application to those who are born unto God, see Paul’s explanation: “For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” ([1 Cor.](#)

[4:15](#)). An analogous instance of sonship attained by righteous service is found in the revelation relating to the order and functions of priesthood, given in 1832:

“For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies:

“They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God” ([D&C 84:33–34](#)).

If it be proper to speak of those who accept and abide in the gospel as Christ’s sons and daughters—and upon this matter the scriptures are explicit and cannot be gainsaid nor denied—it is consistently proper to speak of Jesus Christ as the Father of the righteous, they having become His children and He having been made their Father through the second birth—the baptismal regeneration.

4. Jesus Christ the “Father” by Divine Investiture of Authority

A fourth reason for applying the title “Father” to Jesus Christ is found in the fact that in all His dealings with the human family Jesus the Son has represented and yet represents Elohim His Father in power and authority. This is true of Christ in His preexistent, antemortal, or unembodied state, in the which He was known as Jehovah; also during His embodiment in the flesh; and during His labors as a disembodied spirit in the realm of the dead; and since that period in His resurrected state. To the Jews He said, “I and my Father are one” ([John 10:30](#); see also [John 17:11, 22](#)); yet He declared, “My Father is greater than I” ([John 14:28](#)), and further, “I am come in my Father’s name” ([John 5:43](#); see also [John 10:25](#)). The same truth was declared by Christ Himself to the Nephites (see [3 Ne. 20:35](#); [3 Ne. 28:10](#)), and has been reaffirmed by revelation in the present dispensation ([D&C 50:43](#)). Thus the Father placed His name upon the Son; and Jesus Christ spoke and ministered in and through the Father’s name; and so far as power, authority, and godship are concerned His words and acts were and are those of the Father.

We read, by way of analogy, that God placed His name upon or in the angel who was assigned to special ministry unto the people of Israel during the exodus. Of that angel the Lord said, “Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him” ([Ex. 23:21](#)).

The ancient Apostle John was visited by an angel who ministered and spoke in the name of Jesus Christ. As we read, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John” ([Rev. 1:1](#)). John was about to worship the angelic being who spoke in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but was forbidden:

“And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.

“Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” ([Rev. 22:8–9](#)).

And then the angel continued to speak as though he were the Lord Himself:

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” ([Rev. 22:12–13](#)).

The resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ, who had been exalted to the right hand of God His Father, had placed His name upon the angel sent to John, and the angel spoke in the first person, saying, “I come quickly,” “I am Alpha and Omega,” though he meant that Jesus Christ would come and that Jesus Christ was Alpha and Omega.

None of these considerations, however, can change in the least degree the solemn fact of the literal relationship of Father and Son between Elohim and Jesus Christ. Among the spirit children of Elohim the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ to whom all others are juniors. Following are affirmative scriptures bearing upon this great truth. Paul, writing to the Colossians, says of Jesus Christ:

“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

“And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

“For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” ([Col. 1:15–19](#)).

From this scripture we learn that Jesus Christ was “the firstborn of every creature,” and it is evident that the seniority here expressed must be with respect to antemortal existence, for Christ was not the senior of all mortals in the flesh. He is further designated as “the firstborn from the dead,” this having reference to Him as the first to be resurrected from the dead, or as elsewhere written “the firstfruits of them that slept” ([1 Cor. 15:20](#); see also [1 Cor. 15:23](#)); and “the first begotten of the dead” ([Rev. 1:5](#); compare [Acts 26:23](#)). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews affirms the status of Jesus Christ as the firstborn of the spirit children of His Father and extols the preeminence of the Christ when tabernacled in flesh: “And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him” ([Heb. 1:6](#); read the preceding verses). That the spirits who were juniors to Christ were predestined to be born in the image of their Elder Brother is thus attested by Paul:

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” ([Rom. 8:28–29](#)).

John the Revelator was commanded to write to the head of the Laodicean church, as the words of the Lord Jesus Christ: “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God” ([Rev. 3:14](#)). In the course of a revelation given through Joseph Smith in May 1833, the Lord Jesus Christ said, as before cited, “And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the

beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn” ([D&C 93:21](#)). A later verse makes plain the fact that human beings generally were similarly existent in spirit state prior to their embodiment in the flesh: “Ye were also in the beginning with the Father; that which is Spirit, even the Spirit of truth” ([D&C 93:23](#)).

There is no impropriety, therefore, in speaking of Jesus Christ as the Elder Brother of the rest of humankind. That He is by spiritual birth Brother to the rest of us is indicated in Hebrews: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” ([Heb. 2:17](#)). Let it not be forgotten, however, that He is essentially greater than any or all others, by reason (1) of His seniority as the oldest or firstborn; (2) of His unique status in the flesh as the offspring of a mortal mother and of an immortal, or resurrected and glorified, Father; (3) of His selection and foreordination as the one and only Redeemer and Savior of the race; and (4) of His transcendent sinlessness.

Jesus Christ is not the Father of the spirits who have taken or yet shall take bodies upon this earth, for He is one of them. He is The Son, as they are sons or daughters of Elohim. So far as the stages of eternal progression and attainment have been made known through divine revelation, we are to understand that only resurrected and glorified beings can become parents of spirit offspring. Only such exalted souls have reached maturity in the appointed course of eternal life; and the spirits born to them in the eternal worlds will pass in due sequence through the several stages or estates by which the glorified parents have attained exaltation.

The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Salt Lake City, Utah, 30 June 1916

[illustration] Far left: Detail from *Christ and the Rich Young Ruler*, by Heinrich Hofmann

[illustration] Left: Detail from *First Vision*, by Gary Kapp

[illustration] *Christ and the Creation*, by Robert Barrett

[photo] Photo by Michael Schoenfeld

[illustration] Detail from *The Birth of Jesus*, by Carl Heinrich Bloch, det Nationalhistoriske Museum på Frederiksborg, Hillerød

[illustration] Detail from *The Premortal Christ*, by Robert Barrett

[illustration] Detail from *The Second Coming*, by Harry Anderson