What Does The Term "Godhead" Mean?

One term that is often used in Biblical writing and speaking is "Godhead." Trinitarians say that the Godhead consists of one "essence" (Greek: "ousia") in three "substances" (Greek: "hypostates"), namely God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. As stated in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (under "Blessed Trinity"), "The Trinity is the term employed to signify the central doctrine of the Christian religion—the truth that in the unity of the Godhead there are Three truly distinct Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." It is important to note that the use of the term "Godhead" did not occur until the 1500s, appearing in the *Tyndale New Testament* (1525), *The Geneva Bible* (1599), and the *King James Version* (1611).

Within the Church of God, the term "Godhead" is also used. While it is not ascribed to the doctrine of the Trinity (three Beings in one), it is often use in a similar way, but to collectively refer to the two God Beings—The Father and Son—meaning one "essence" in two "substances." However, is this what the term "Godhead" really means? How does the Bible define and use the word?

In order to understand this term, we need to look at the word's Greek definitions and how they are used in the Bible. The English term "Godhead" is found only three times in the Bible (*King James Version*). All three are in the New Testament. In each case, a different Greek word is used, though all three words are related and stem from the same root. How does the Bible use these terms? Let's look at each instance.

The first time we come across the English word "Godhead" in the Bible is in the book of Acts when Paul spoke to the Athenians.

Acts 17:29 (*KJV*)

29 "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the **<u>Godhead</u>** is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."

The Greek word used for Godhead in this verse is "theios" (*Strong's* #2304). *Strong's* defines this word as "godlike, divinity." Zodhiates, in *The*

Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament, says "Theios denotes an attribute of God, such as His power." In other words, "theios" does not refer to a being; it refers to an attribute of God. For example, the *Darby* translation of the Bible renders "theios" in Acts 17:29 as "that which is divine." The *New King James Version* uses the phrase "Divine Nature."

The Greek word "theios" only appears in one other passage in the Bible, where the word is used twice but is not translated as "Godhead."

2 Peter 1:3-4 (*KJV*)

[3] "According as his **divine** [theios #2304] power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: [4] Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the **divine** [theios #2304] nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"

In Acts, this Greek word was translated as "Godhead." Here in 2nd Peter, it is translated as "divine" in both verse 3 and 4. Clearly, the word refers to an attribute of God, not to God Himself.

The second time the English word "Godhead" appears in the Bible is in Paul's letter to the church at Rome.

Romans 1:18-20 (*KJV*)

[18] "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness; [19] because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. [20] For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and **Godhead**; so that they are without excuse"

The Greek word in this case is derived from the word "theios" above. However, here in Romans 18:20 the word is "theiotes" (*Strong's* #2305). It means "divine or divinity in an abstract way." The definitions of these two Greek words are the same, meaning "divinity." However, they are different parts of speech. "Theios" is an adjective and "theiotes" is a noun. This verse is the only time "theiotes" is used in the Bible.

Once again, most other translations use a word or phrase other than "Godhead" for "theiotes" in this verse. For example, the *NIV* puts verse 20 this way: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and **divine nature** [theiotes #2305]—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." The term "Godhead" is not referring to God Beings, but to qualities and attributes of God, such as His eternal power.

The third and final appearance of the word "Godhead" is again in the writings of Paul.

Colossians 2:9 (*KJV*)

9 "For in Him (*Jesus Christ*) dwelleth all the fulness of the **Godhead** bodily."

Here, the Greek word is "theotes" (*Strong's* #2320). It comes from the same root as the other two words and also means "divinity in an abstract way." Zodhiates says this word means "God's personality, divinity, divine power, and majesty." This is the only place in the Bible "theotes" is used.

Some of the other words in this verse help clarify what Paul meant. The Greek word for "fulness" (*Strong's* #4138) means "that which is put in to fill up." The Greek word for "bodily" (*Strong's* #4985) means "physically." Paul is saying that all the attributes of God existed fully in Christ when He was a physical human being walking the earth. Other translations bring this to light. The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* states "For the entire fullness of **God's nature** dwells bodily in Christ." The *Weymouth New Testament* says, "For it is in Christ that the fulness of **God's nature** dwells embodied." Again, we see that the term refers to the nature and attributes of God.

When we look at the three scriptures that use the English word "Godhead" and the definitions of the Greek words in those scriptures, we see that the term invariably refers to God's divine characteristics, not God Beings. Even the English definition of the word "Godhead" is "divine nature" (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). The word does not mean two (or three) beings in one. It does not mean the person of God or Christ. It means the attributes and nature of God.

We need to be true to the Biblical definitions and usage of the terms we use. Using the word "Godhead" in the Catholic sense gives a false impression of what the Bible is saying and cannot be supported scripturally. It is confusing and does not portray God in an accurate manner. We need to use Biblically supported definitions. When you hear the term "Godhead," understand that it does not refer to the person of God or Christ, either individually or collectively. It refers to the attributes and nature of God.