

## THE HOLY TRINITY

(Unless otherwise stated, all quotations of Scripture are from the New King James Version.)

'In no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable', Augustine, '*On the Trinity*', Book 1, Chapter 3, Paragraph 5.

### 1. What we mean when we speak of the Holy Trinity

The expression 'the Holy Trinity' does not occur in the Bible. But this does not mean that the doctrine is in any way unscriptural; neither do such words as 'substitution', 'sovereignty', 'providence' or 'incarnation'. What matters is whether or not the doctrines conveyed by these words are scriptural. We begin therefore by asking, 'What do we mean when we say that we believe in the Holy Trinity?' We then need to satisfy ourselves that this meaning is in full accord with God's word.

Basically, we mean three things. We believe :

- (a) In the unity of the Godhead. That is, that there is one God, and not three.
- (b) In the deity of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit. That is, that each of the Three can be properly described as 'God' in the fullest sense of the word.
- (c) That the Father, the Son and the Spirit are personally distinct. That is, that the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit, and that the Son is not the Spirit.

### 2. Matthew 28. 19-20

The closing verses of Matthew's gospel provide a good starting point because the concise statement of verse 19 furnishes us with our Lord's own authority for each of the three statements made in paragraph 1.

When commissioning His disciples, the Lord Jesus spoke both of the authority that was His ('All authority has been given to me') and of the task that was theirs ('Go therefore, and ...'). Happily for them, He links these two statements with the promise that '*I* (the One who has the authority) am with *you* (who have the task)'.

The Lord spoke clearly of their duty to baptise all disciples 'in ('into', literally) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. In effect this meant that converts were enlisted into the service of the Triune God. The Jews circumcised their children and proselytes 'in the name of the covenant ...denoting both entry into the covenant and commitment to it'.<sup>1</sup> That is, by circumcision Jews were brought under the authority and control of the covenant.

When Paul wrote of the children of Israel who came out of Egypt that 'all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea',<sup>2</sup> he was saying that they had identified themselves with Moses and had submitted themselves to his authority and leadership.<sup>3</sup> In a similar way, when baptised in the name of the Triune God, Christian converts identified themselves with, and expressed their allegiance to, the Holy Trinity.

First, we must understand what Jesus meant by, 'the name'. A Hebrew did not regard a name as a mere label or means of identification. A name said something about the person who carried it. To the Jews a person's name expressed what the person was. We might think for instance of the words of Abigail concerning her husband Nabal: 'as his name is, so is he: Nabal (meaning 'folly') is his name, and folly is with him'.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, the Old Testament frequently draws attention to the significance of names.<sup>5</sup> A name then often signified not so much *who* a person was as *what* he was.

The Being of God likewise found expression in His Name. Pre-eminently, in the Old Testament, 'the Name' signified 'Jehovah': 'this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God'.<sup>6</sup> In the period between the Testaments (when Jews ceased to use the word 'Jehovah', out of a curious mixture of reverence and superstition) 'the Name' became one of the popular substitutes for 'Jehovah'. When, in John 17 verse 6, our Lord said, 'I have manifested your name',<sup>7</sup> He meant much the same as that which John had said of Him in chapter 1, 'He has declared Him ('He has made Him known')'.<sup>8</sup>

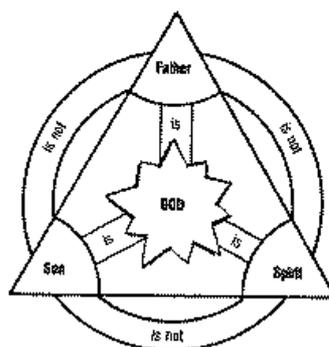
There is no mistaking the implication of His words in Matt. 28. 19; 'baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. We should note the exact words He used.

(a) 'The name'. The Saviour does not say, 'the names of the Father' etc. Nor does He say, 'the name of the Father, the name of the Son' etc. The single Name embraces the three Persons. And by speaking as He does the Lord Jesus emphasizes the divine unity. There are not three separate Beings.<sup>9</sup>

(b) 'Of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. The Three are united in the single Name. The Three together can be correctly described by the one 'name', which to Jews was the equivalent of 'Jehovah', the only true God.

(c) The repeated article 'the' emphasizes the distinction of the Persons. The Three are not passing phases or modes of one Person. There are three distinct Persons.<sup>10</sup>

These truths are well illustrated by an ancient diagram.



The Lord should be understood therefore as enlarging the name 'Jehovah' into that of 'the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. He identified the Lord God of Israel with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and, in so doing, ascribed a threefold personality to Jehovah.

And so, a gospel which more or less commences with the record of *a manifestation of the Persons of the Trinity* (at the banks of Jordan, when the Son is baptised, the Spirit descends and the Father speaks<sup>11</sup>) closes with *an affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity*.

### 3. The New Testament evidence

The New Testament contains no carefully formulated statement of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity such as we find later in the creeds of the established church.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, I know of no reference to the word 'Trinity' until late in the second century, when Theophilus of Antioch used the Greek word 'trias'. A little later Tertullian used its Latin equivalent 'trinitas'. We should not draw wrong conclusions from this.

The fact that the New Testament contains no precise definition or systematic treatment of the subject does not mean that the subject had not been carefully thought about in apostolic days. And we possess in its various books more than enough data for us to establish clearly what the early church believed.

To substantiate the truth of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity biblically, we will need to firmly establish each of the three propositions in paragraph 1 above; namely, (A) that there is one God, (B) that the Father, Son and Spirit are each properly described as God, and (C) that the Father, Son and Spirit are each personally distinct from one another.

#### A. There is one God

This is the fundamental article of faith of both the Jewish nation and the Old Testament: 'Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Jehovah', Deut. 6. 4 JND.<sup>13</sup> These words have been repeated twice every day for many centuries as part of the Jewish liturgy. The ideal attitude for a Jew was represented in the conduct of Rabbi Akiba of the first century, who in the hour of his execution continued to repeat the single word 'One'.

The Lord Himself reiterated the words of Deuteronomy 6. 4 when He summarized the law: 'The first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one"'.<sup>14</sup>

The unity of the Godhead lay at the foundation of all Paul's teaching. For example, '*there is one God*, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith', and '*there is one God*, and one mediator'.<sup>15</sup> Nor was Paul alone of course. We note the words of James, 'you believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble'.<sup>16</sup>

That there is one God is a belief therefore that Christians shared with both Jews and demons. The 'fool' says 'There is *no* God', Ps. 14. 1. Idolaters say, 'There are *many* gods', 1 Cor. 8. 6. But Christians say, 'There is *one* God'!

'Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no God', Isa. 44. 6.<sup>17</sup> We emphasize that we do *not* worship *three* gods; the Father, Son and Spirit are not three separate Beings.

## **B. The Father, Son and Spirit are each properly described as God**

### **B.1. The Father is God**

We do not need to adduce a great deal of evidence for this. It should be sufficient to refer to the many occurrences of the expression 'God the Father'.<sup>18</sup>

### **B.2. The Son is God**

Ever since New Testament days this statement has been attacked and challenged. Yet the evidence is overwhelming. We will briefly examine a sevenfold proof:

#### **(i) Passages which directly assert the Godhead of the Son.**

(a) Both the commencement and the climax of John's gospel assert the full deity of our Lord:

(i) 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God', John 1. 1<sup>19</sup>, and (ii) 'Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"', John 20. 28<sup>20</sup>.

(b) 'Who are Israelites ... of whom, as according to flesh, is the Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever', Rom. 9. 5 JND.

(c) 'The blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ', Titus 2. 13.<sup>21</sup> According to Acts 19. 27, the Ephesians had a 'great goddess' (Artemis/Diana), but, according to Titus 2. 13, the Christian has a 'great God' – Jesus Christ.

(d) 'The righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ', 2 Pet. 1.1 RV and JND.<sup>22</sup> Thus John, Paul and Peter unite in giving the title 'God' to the Lord Jesus.

#### **(ii) Passages which indirectly assert the deity of Christ.**<sup>23</sup> For example:

(a) *His eternal existence.* 'I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM'.<sup>24</sup> For the Saviour to have said, 'before Abraham, I was' would have been no more than a claim to an existence prior to Abraham – a claim such as Michael the archangel could have made. Instead, Jesus asserted His self-existence and eternal being; that He was none less than the great 'I AM' of Exodus 3. 14.<sup>25</sup>

(b) *His immutability.* 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever', Heb. 13. 8.

(c) *His omniscience.* 'If the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they *would* (not, we note, '*might*') have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes'.<sup>26</sup> Only God can know for sure that 'if' such an event happened then certain consequences would follow.<sup>27</sup> Only God knows how every man, woman and child *would have* acted *if* their circumstances had been different to what they were. We mere mortals can only speculate.

(d) *His omnipotence.* His 'name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God*', Isa. 9. 6 ESV.<sup>28</sup> The use of the title 'Mighty God' should be compared to its use in the following chapter: 'The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the *Mighty God* (which clearly refers to the Lord God)'.<sup>29</sup>

Note separately that those who, when speaking to Peter, Jesus described as 'my sheep', Peter later describes as 'the flock of God' ('shepherd {ποιμαίνω} my sheep', John 21. 16 JND; 'shepherd {ποιμαίνω} the flock of God', 1 Pet. 5. 2 JND).

(iii) **Passages which ascribe Old Testament divine titles to the Lord Jesus.**

(a) *Jehovah.*

(i) 'In the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord', Phil. 2. 10 RV; compare, 'I the Lord ... I am God, and there is none else. By myself have I sworn, the word is gone forth from my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear', Isa. 45. 21-23 RV.

(ii) 'All the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts', Rev. 2. 23; compare, 'I the Lord search the mind and try the heart', Jer. 17. 10 RSV. (iii) Compare also Matt. 3. 3 with Isa. 40. 3; Rom. 10. 13 with Joel 2. 32; Eph. 4. 8 with Ps. 68. 18; Heb. 1. 6 with Ps. 97. 7; 1 Pet. 2. 3-4 with Ps. 34. 8.<sup>30</sup> The confession 'Jesus is Lord' was the central confession of the early church, Rom. 10. 9; 1 Cor. 12. 3.

(b) *God (Elohim).* 'To the Son He says: Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of your kingdom', Heb. 1. 8-9; compare 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of your kingdom', Ps. 45. 6-7.

(c) *The Lord of hosts.*

(i) 'Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord', 1 Pet. 3. 15 RV; compare, 'The Lord of hosts, Him shall ye sanctify; and let Him be your fear', Isa. 8. 13 RV.

(ii) 'The stone which the builders rejected (the Lord Jesus), the same was made the head of the corner; and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence', 1 Pet. 2. 7-8 RV; compare, 'He (the Lord of hosts) will be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel', Isa. 8. 14.

(iii) Compare also John 12. 38-41 with Isa. 6. 3, 10; and note that John 12. 37 clearly identifies the 'Him' of verse 41 as the Lord Jesus.

(d) *The First and the Last.* 'He laid His right hand on me, saying, Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore', Rev. 1. 17; compare, 'Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no God', Isa. 44. 6.

It is worth noting that the Lord God is called 'the First and the Last' three times in the Old Testament – always in Isaiah, Isa. 41. 4; 44. 6; 48. 12, and that the Lord Jesus is called 'the First and the Last' three times in the New Testament – always in the book of the Revelation, Rev. 1. 17; 2. 8; 22. 13.

(e) *The Ancient of Days.* 'The Ancient of Days was seated ... the hair of His head was like pure wool', Dan. 7. 9; compare, 'One like the Son of Man ... His head and hair were white like wool', Rev. 1. 13-14.

(f) *'The Same'* ('The existing One who does not change'<sup>31</sup>). 'To the Son He (God) says ... You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth ... they will be changed. But you are *the same*', Heb. 1. 10-12; compare, 'Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak you will change them, and they will be changed. But you are *the same*, and your years will have no end', Ps. 102. 25-27.

(g) *'The Rock.'* 'They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ', 1 Cor. 10. 4<sup>32</sup>; compare, 'Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock', Deut. 32. 4.<sup>33</sup>

Although not a direct reference to the Old Testament, it is useful also to note also the title 'King of kings and Lord of lords', which is ascribed to God in 1 Tim. 6. 15, 16, and to the Lord Jesus in Rev. 19. 16 (cf. Rev. 19. 14).

(iv) **Passages which speak of the Lord Jesus being worshipped.**

For example, Matt. 28. 9, 17 (where He did not reject worship the worship of either the women or the eleven disciples).

Note also: 'when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, Let all the angels of God worship Him', Heb. 1. 6, which is the more pointed when read in the light of the angel's replies to John in both Rev. 19. 10 and Rev. 22. 8: 'I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant ... Worship God!'

It is interesting to note the limited use of the word 'worship' in Luke's gospel, which occurs only in Luke 4. 7, 8 and Luke 24. 52. It is, as our Lord said, the Father's purpose that 'all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father', John 5. 23.<sup>34</sup>

**(v) *Passages which record thanksgiving and prayer addressed to the Lord Jesus.***

First, the example of Stephen; 'they stoned Stephen, praying, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And kneeling down, he cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge', Acts 7. 59, 60.<sup>35</sup>

Second, the example of Paul; (i) 'there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch. Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me', 2 Cor. 12. 7-9 RV,<sup>36</sup> and (ii) 'I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man', 1 Tim. 1. 12-13.

(vi) ***Passages where doxologies are ascribed to Him.*** Peter and Paul both close their last extant letters with very similar expressions concerning the Lord Jesus; 'to Him be glory forever and ever', 2 Tim. 4. 18; 'to Him be the glory both now and forever', 2 Pet. 3. 18. John similarly says concerning the Lord Jesus, 'to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever', Rev. 1. 5, 6.

(vii) ***Passages which ascribe divine functions to the Lord.*** I do not point to His miracles, because any man can perform miracles with divinely communicated power.<sup>37</sup> I refer rather to those works and prerogatives which belong exclusively to God, such as

(a) creation, John 1. 3; Col. 1. 16; Heb. 1. 10;

(b) providence and preservation, Col. 1. 17; Heb. 1. 3;

(c) knowing the hearts of men, John 2. 25 (with 1 Kgs 8. 39<sup>38</sup>; 2 Chr. 6. 30),

(d) the forgiving of sins, Mark 2. 5-12<sup>39</sup>, and

(e) the final raising of the dead and the settling of men's eternal destinies, John 5. 21-27.

### ***B.3. The Spirit is God***<sup>40</sup>

In Acts 5, Peter implied clearly that to lie to the Holy Spirit was to lie to God, 'Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied to men but to God"'.<sup>41</sup> Equally clearly, Paul implied that to be a temple of the Holy Spirit was one and the same as to be the temple of God.<sup>42</sup> And John implied that to be born of the Spirit, John 3. 6, was to be born of God, 1 John 5. 4.<sup>43</sup>

Only God can know God in His fullness, yet 'the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God'.<sup>44</sup> There is nothing, not even in God, which baffles His scrutiny.<sup>45</sup> And the Holy Spirit is not only omniscient, but omnipresent: 'Where', David asked, 'can I go from your Spirit?'<sup>46</sup> The Holy Spirit is also eternal; 'Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God'.<sup>47</sup>

## **C. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each personally distinct from one another**

It is important to have clear in our minds the distinction between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. There is little difficulty in proving the distinction between the Father and the Son. We read frequently of the Father having sent the Son.<sup>48</sup> We also read that the Father addressed the Son,<sup>49</sup> and that the Son addressed the Father in prayer.<sup>50</sup>

However, we need to ask a question about the Holy Spirit which it is unnecessary to ask about either the Father or the Son; namely, 'Is it correct to speak of the Spirit as a Person?'

We answer an emphatic 'Yes' for the following reasons.

(i) **The way in which scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit.** Jesus claimed that the Father would give 'another Helper (or 'Counsellor')' to His disciples,<sup>51</sup> where the word translated 'another' ('allos') suggests 'another of the same kind'.<sup>52</sup> That is, the Holy Spirit is as much a Person as is the Lord Jesus. Again, the Holy Spirit is often referred to by the Greek masculine pronoun not the neuter pronoun.<sup>53</sup>

(ii) **The actions which are ascribed to Him.** He speaks (e.g. Acts 1. 16; 8. 29), referring to Himself as 'I' (Acts 10. 19, 20); He warns (Acts 20. 23); He forbids (Acts 16. 6); He appoints (Acts 20. 28); He sends (Acts 13. 4); He bears witness (John 15. 26); He prevents (Acts 16. 7); He predicts, 1 Pet. 1. 11; He groans (Rom. 8. 26); He leads (Luke 4. 1; Rom. 8. 14); He intercedes (Rom. 8. 27); He loves (Rom. 15. 3); He wills (1 Cor. 12. 11); He helps (Acts 2. 4; Rom. 8. 26); He encourages, Acts 9. 31; He knows (1 Cor. 2. 11); He shows, Heb. 9. 8; He searches (1 Cor. 2. 10); He guides (John 16. 13); He invites (Rev. 22. 17); He reveals (Luke 2. 26); He teaches (John 14. 26; 1 Cor. 2. 13); He dwells (John 14. 17; 1 Cor. 3. 16; Eph. 2. 22), He gives (Acts 2. 4), etc.

The Holy Spirit can be grieved (Isa. 63. 10; Eph. 4. 30); He can be tempted (Acts 5. 9); He can be resisted (Acts 7. 51) and He can be lied to (Acts 5. 3).<sup>54</sup>

And I note that sometimes the Holy Spirit is closely associated in an action with believers, who are unquestionably persons! For example, we have the words of James, 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us',<sup>55</sup> and of the Lord Jesus, 'the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness'.<sup>56</sup> And we have the words of John, 'The Spirit and the Bride say, Come!'<sup>57</sup>

And it would surely be absurd to baptise in the Name of a personal Father and a personal Son and an impersonal influence or energy!<sup>58</sup>

#### 4. New Testament references to the Holy Trinity

We find references and allusions to the Holy Trinity throughout the New Testament. We find, for example:

- (a) **A salutation.** 'From Him who is ... from the seven Spirits ... and from Jesus Christ'.<sup>59</sup>
- (b) **A greeting.** 'The foreknowledge of God the Father ... sanctification of the Spirit ... the blood of Jesus Christ'.<sup>60</sup>
- (c) **A thanksgiving.** 'God chose you ... through sanctification by the Spirit ... that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>61</sup>
- (d) **A prayer.** 'The Father ... His Spirit ... that Christ may dwell'.<sup>62</sup>
- (e) **A practical exhortation.** 'Praying in the Holy Spirit ... the love of God ... the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>63</sup>
- (f) **A doxology.** 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ... the love of God ... the communion of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>64</sup>

Many doctrinal statements also bring together the three Persons of the Trinity:

- (g) **Salvation announced.** 'The Lord ... God also ... gifts of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>65</sup>
- (h) **Salvation experienced.** 'The love of God ... the renewal of the Holy Spirit ... through Jesus Christ'.<sup>66</sup>
- (i) **Salvation enjoyed.** 'Love of God ... by the Holy Spirit ... Christ died'.<sup>67</sup>
- (j) **Access.** 'Through Him (Christ)... by one Spirit ... to the Father'.<sup>68</sup>
- (k) **Apostasy.** 'Partakers of the Holy Spirit ... the good word of God ... the Son of God'.<sup>69</sup>
- (l) **Unity.** 'One Spirit ... one Lord ... one God and Father'.<sup>70</sup>
- (m) **Spiritual Gifts.** 'The same Spirit ... the same Lord ... the same God'.<sup>71</sup>

Again, we find whole sections of scripture with a 'Trinitarian' structure:

(n) **Romans 1-8.** In very simple terms, the first eight chapters of Romans can be said to deal with (i) the wrath of God, 1. 3-3. 20; (ii) the work of Christ, 3. 21-7. 24, and (iii) the witness of the Spirit and life in the Spirit, 8. 1-39.

(o) **Eph. 1. 3-14.** This passage is divided into three by the expression 'the praise of the glory of His grace', v. 6, and 'the praise of His glory', vv. 12, 14. Here we read (i) of election and acceptance by *the Father* in verses 3-6, (ii) of redemption and forgiveness through *Christ* in verses 7-12, and (iii) of a seal and earnest in *the Spirit* in verses 13-14.<sup>72</sup>

(p) **Hebrews 1-3.** In chapter 1, *God* speaks, vv. 2, 5-8, 10, 13; in chapter 2, *the Son* speaks, vv. 12-13; in chapter 3, *the Spirit* speaks, v. 7.

(q) **Hebrews 10. 5-18.** (i) Verses 5-10 speak of the will of the Father; (ii) verses 11-14 speak of the work of the Son, and (iii) verses 15-18 speak of the witness of the Holy Spirit.

From the above references and passages, we should note:

(i) The wide variety of New Testament authors who contribute these.

(ii) The unstudied and natural way in which the threefold pattern is introduced in each case.

(iii) The varying order in which the three Persons are mentioned. The apostolic writers clearly did not feel compelled to follow the order 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'. Indeed, the references and passages cited provide examples of every possible combination. To these writers the order clearly wasn't significant.

Consider *the many things separately attributed to each of the Persons of the Trinity*:

	<b>The Father</b>	<b>The Son</b>	<b>The Holy Spirit</b>
<b>Is eternal</b>	Ps. 90. 2	Mic. 5. 2	Heb. 9. 14
<b>Is holy</b>	John 17. 11	Luke 4. 34; Acts 3. 14	Matt. 1. 18, 20; 3. 11 etc.
<b>Is true/truth</b>	John 7. 28	Rev. 3. 7	1 John 5. 6
<b>Creates</b>	Gen. 1. 1	John 1. 3; Col. 1. 16	Job 33. 4
<b>Searches</b>	Jer. 17. 10	Rev. 2. 23	1 Cor. 2. 10
<b>Raises the dead</b>	Acts 26. 8; 1 Cor. 6. 14	John 5. 28-29	Rom. 8. 11; 1 Pet. 3.18
<b>Is glorious</b>	Eph. 1. 17	1 Cor. 2. 8	1 Pet. 4. 14
<b>Loves</b>	John 16. 27	Eph. 3. 19	Rom. 15. 30
<b>Wills</b>	1 Tim. 2. 4	John 17. 24	1 Cor. 12.11
<b>Invites</b>	Isa. 1. 18 (Come and reason)	Matt. 11. 28 (Come and rest)	Rev. 22. 17 (Come and refresh)
<b>Gives life</b>	1 Tim. 6. 13	John 5. 21	2 Cor. 3. 6
<b>Justifies</b>	Rom. 8. 33	Gal. 2. 17	1 Cor. 6.11
<b>Sanctifies</b>	Jude 1 ('by')	1 Cor. 1. 2 ('in')	1 Pet. 1. 2 ('of')
<b>Indwells</b>	2 Cor. 6. 16	Eph. 3. 17	John 14. 17
<b>Pours out</b>	Tit. 3. 6	Matt. 26. 28	Rom. 5. 5
<b>Known by Christians</b>	1 John 2. 13	1 John 2. 3	1 John 4. 6
<b>Our source of joy</b>	Rom. 5. 11	Phil. 4. 4	1 Thess. 1. 6
<b>Our fellowship with</b>	1 John 1. 3	1 Cor. 1. 9	2 Cor. 13. 14

It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the New Testament is permeated by Trinitarian teaching.

## 5. The Old Testament

It is obvious to even the most casual reader that the Old Testament offers no developed doctrine of the Holy Trinity.<sup>73</sup> We can, however, say two things at least.

(a) At no time is the teaching of the Old Testament inconsistent with the later revelation given through the New Testament. I note, for instance that, when the Law says that 'Jehovah our God is one Jehovah' (or possibly, 'Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one'),<sup>74</sup> the Hebrew word translated 'one' can (and often does) include the idea of plurality in unity.<sup>75</sup> The idea conveyed by the word *can* therefore be that of 'one made up of more than one'.<sup>76</sup>

(b) There are several clear anticipations of the doctrine.<sup>77</sup> There are, for example, indications of the deity both of the Messiah<sup>78</sup> and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>79</sup>

There are also the passages in Genesis and Isaiah where God speaks in terms of 'us':

(i) 'Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'<sup>80</sup>;

(ii) 'The Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, to know good and evil"<sup>81</sup>;

(iii) 'The Lord said ...Come, let us go down and there confuse their language'<sup>82</sup>; and

(iv) 'I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"'<sup>83</sup>

We may wonder why it was that the full revelation of the truth about the Triune God was held back until New Testament times. We are not told but two observations may help us:

(i) I suspect that an early revelation of the Triune God might have proved dangerous. As it was, Israel showed a constant tendency to idolatry and polytheism. It was wise therefore that the fact that there is only one God should be fixed firmly in their minds before the fuller revelation of one God in three Persons was given.

(ii) It was far easier for men to grasp and to accept the doctrine of the Trinity after the incarnation of the Son and after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.<sup>84</sup>

## **6. Understanding and faith**

Not that it is possible for any human mind to grasp how three Persons can exist in one Being. We believe the doctrine of the Trinity, not because we understand it, but because the Bible teaches it. We are altogether unable to fathom the depths of the divine Being, and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity must therefore remain a sublime mystery which transcends human thought.<sup>85</sup> But God has spoken, and it is enough!

## **7. The different roles and functions of the Persons of the Holy Trinity**

In the outworking of their eternal purpose and their counsels for time, the Persons of the Godhead have adopted different roles and perform different functions.<sup>86</sup>

This must not be understood in terms of human arrangements, such as superiority-inferiority. But, although ever remaining equal with Him in nature and being, the Son and Spirit act in subjection to the Father. The Father sent the Son into the world,<sup>87</sup> and the Father and the Son sent the Spirit.<sup>88</sup> Throughout, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit co-operate in the administration of that eternal purpose which knows neither defeat nor frustration, and which will be consummated when 'God' is 'all in all'.<sup>89</sup>

It should surely fill us all with wonder and amazement that we should be the objects of the eternal purpose of the Triune God.

*'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with you all'.*

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged in one volume), page 697-698.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 10. 2.

<sup>3</sup> 'He turned the sea into dry land; they went through the river on foot', Ps. 66. 6. 'The children of Israel are the only people of whom I know who were properly baptised without even getting their feet wet!' (My comments on 1 Corinthians 10. 1-4 in *Precious Seed*. Volume 61, Number 3, August 2006.)

<sup>4</sup> 1 Sam. 25. 25.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Gen. 3. 20 (Eve means 'living'); 4. 1 (Cain means 'gotten'); 5. 29 (Noah means 'rest' or 'comfort'), 17. 17-19 (Isaac means 'laughter').

<sup>6</sup> Deut. 28. 58.

<sup>7</sup> John 17. 6.

<sup>8</sup> John 1. 18.

<sup>9</sup> 'The common name ... expresses the unity of being', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume V, page 274.

<sup>10</sup> We read therefore of the three Persons of the Godhead speaking to one another; e.g. Mark 1. 11; Heb. 1. 8; Matt. 11. 25-26; Rom. 8. 26; and acting towards each other – for example, in sending or being sent, Gal. 4. 4, 6, or in glorifying one another, John 16. 14; 17. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 3. 16, 17. Compare the mention of the three persons of the Trinity in connection with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2. 33.

<sup>12</sup> The Athanasian Creed, for example, commences: 'We worship God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal and the majesty coequal'.

<sup>13</sup> Literally, 'Jehovah our God Jehovah one'. 'The significance of this paragraph is reflected in the fact that it became the centrepiece of Jewish daily worship, the Keri'at Shema' ("Recitation of the Shema"), named for its first word', *The Jewish Publication Torah Commentary*. For the fact that Jehovah alone is God see also Deut. 4. 35, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Mark 12. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Rom. 3. 30; 1 Tim. 2. 5. See also 1 Cor. 8. 4; Gal. 3. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Jas. 2. 19.

<sup>17</sup> See also Isa. 43. 10; 44. 8; 45. 5, 14, 18, 21, 22; 46. 9; 47. 8; 55. 5.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Gal. 1. 3; Eph. 6. 23; Phil. 2. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Other passages using the Greek word for God (*theos*) without the definite article in a similar construction are always rendered 'God': e.g. Mark 12. 27; Luke 20. 38; John 3. 2; 13. 3; Phil. 2. 13; Heb. 9. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Compare Rev. 4. 11, where the same construction is used in the plural ('our') instead of the singular ('my').

<sup>21</sup> The King James Version 'fails to bring out the deity of the Lord Jesus expressed very clearly in the Greek text. The latter conforms to the rule of Greek syntax known as Granville Sharp's rule, which states that when two nouns are in the same case and connected by *kai*, the first noun, articular, the second, anarthrous, the latter always relates to the same person or thing expressed or described by the first noun and is a farther description of it', Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, page 147. For the title 'great God' in the Old Testament, see Deut. 10. 17; Ezra 5. 8; Neh 8. 6; Ps. 95. 3; Prov. 26. 10; Dan 2. 45.

<sup>22</sup> Again the King James Version 'fails to bring out the deity of the Lord Jesus expressed very clearly in the Greek text'; see note 21.

<sup>23</sup> The Lord Jesus knew that the acts of power which He had performed in the villages and towns of Galilee would have brought Tyre, Sidon and even Sodom to their knees in repentance. Note that our Lord does not say, 'If ... they might have', but 'If ... they/it would have'.

<sup>24</sup> John 8. 58. This is one of three instances where the Lord Jesus asserted His deity in discussion with the Jews; John 5. 18-19; 8. 58-59 and 10. 30-39. In each instance, the Jews understood His claim to be that of equality with God and therefore attempted to kill Him, stone Him and arrest Him respectively.

<sup>25</sup> 'He does not contrast Abraham's previous existence with His eternity of existence, but Abraham's coming into existence with His eternal being. There is a contrast between Abraham as a created being and our Lord as uncreated, the self-existent, eternal God'. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July 1962, page 221.

<sup>26</sup> Matt. 11. 21; cf. v. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Compare Jer. 38.17-18; and especially 1 Sam. 23. 12-13.

<sup>28</sup> 'Father of eternity' may well mean simply eternal; compare other names formed with word 'father': *Abi-albon*, 'father of strength' = strong (2 Sam. 23. 31); *Abiasaph*, 'father of gathering' = gatherer (Ex. 6. 24); *Abigail*, a woman's name(!), 'father of joy/exultation' = exulting (1 Sam. 25 and 1 Chron. 2. 16).

<sup>29</sup> Isa. 10. 21. See too Jer. 32. 18.

<sup>30</sup> The repeated 'for' in this passage identifies the 'Lord' of Rom. 10. 12-13 as the 'Lord Jesus' of verse 9.

<sup>31</sup> See the footnotes in JND's New Translation to Deut. 32. 39 and Heb. 1. 12.

<sup>32</sup> In his statement that 'Christ' was the 'spiritual Rock that followed them', 1 Cor. 10. 4, Paul was giving the word 'rock' a double meaning. The apostle has in mind the fact that the water which God gave Israel to drink (on at least two occasions) came quite literally from a rock, Exod. 17. 1-7; Num. 20. 1-13. But, by playing on the word, he switches the meaning *from* a literal rock *to* a well-known title of God Himself – '*the* Rock'. It is worth noting that this particular title of God occurs five times in Deuteronomy 32. It was Christ, Paul is saying, who accompanied Israel through the wilderness – and it was therefore 'Christ' who they 'tempted' there, 1 Cor. 10. 9. It was, Paul is saying, Christ who constantly provided them with water to drink, and who therefore was their true source of refreshment for forty years.

<sup>33</sup> See also Deut. 32. 5, 18, 30, 31; cf. Ps. 62. 2, 6.

<sup>34</sup> See note 24 above.

<sup>35</sup> Note how Stephen's prayers echo our Lord's own prayers in Luke 23. 34 and 46.

<sup>36</sup> Note that 'the Lord' to whom Paul prayed must have been the Lord Jesus because His 'my power' is spoken of by Paul as 'the power of Christ'.

<sup>37</sup> See also 2 Thess. 2. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Solomon prayed, 'You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men'.

<sup>39</sup> Ultimately only God can forgive sins, for ultimately all sins are committed against God.

<sup>40</sup> See further, '*The Person of the Holy Spirit: Part 1*', John F. Walvoord, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April 1940, pages 166-189.

<sup>41</sup> Acts 5. 3, 4.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Cor. 6. 19; 2 Cor. 6. 16.

<sup>43</sup> See also 2 Cor. 3. 17, 18 ('the Lord the Spirit').

<sup>44</sup> 1 Cor. 2. 10.

<sup>45</sup> 1 Cor. 2. 10, 11.

<sup>46</sup> Ps. 139 7.

<sup>47</sup> Heb. 9. 14.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, 1 John 4. 14.

<sup>49</sup> See Mark 1. 11; John 12. 28; Heb. 1. 8.

<sup>50</sup> See Matt. 11. 25-26; 26. 39, 42; John 17. 1.

<sup>51</sup> John 14. 16.

<sup>52</sup> '*Allos* expresses a numerical difference and denotes "another of the same sort"; *heteros* expresses a qualitative difference and denotes "another of a different sort". Christ promised to send "another Comforter" (*allos*, "another like Himself", not *heteros*), John 14. 16', W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, article 'Another'.

<sup>53</sup> For example, 'when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth', 16. 13; cf. John 14. 26; 15. 13; 16. 7-8. The word 'Spirit' in Greek is neuter and grammatical considerations sometimes require a neuter pronoun; e.g. John 14. 16-18.

<sup>54</sup> Note carefully that 'the Spirit' said to Peter, 'I have sent them', Acts 10. 20; cf. Acts 11. 12.

<sup>55</sup> Acts 15. 28.

<sup>56</sup> John 15. 26, 27 ESV.

<sup>57</sup> Rev. 22. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Matt. 28. 19. Again, references such as Luke 4. 14; Rom. 15. 13, 19; Gal. 2. 29 provide evidence that 'the Spirit' is personal and is not to be confused with an impersonal 'power'; else in each case we would be reading of 'the power of the power'!

<sup>59</sup> Rev. 1. 4, 5.

<sup>60</sup> 1 Pet. 1. 2.

<sup>61</sup> 2 Thess. 2. 13-14 ESV.

<sup>62</sup> Eph. 3. 14-17.

<sup>63</sup> Jude 20, 21.

<sup>64</sup> 2 Cor. 13. 14.

<sup>65</sup> Heb. 2. 3, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Tit. 3. 4-6.

<sup>67</sup> Rom. 5. 5-6.

<sup>68</sup> Eph. 2. 18. See also the reference to the three persons of the Holy Trinity at the close of Ephesians 2. Verses 20 to 22 speak of *the Lord Jesus* as 'the chief corner stone' of the church, which itself constitutes 'a dwelling place for *God in the Spirit*'.

<sup>69</sup> Heb. 6. 4-6.

<sup>70</sup> Eph. 4. 4-6.

<sup>71</sup> 1 Cor. 12. 4-6.

<sup>72</sup> We might say that this section teaches that salvation was planned by the Father, was executed by the Son and is applied by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>73</sup> Personally, I would not appeal to the plural '*elohim*' as evidence for plurality within the Godhead. I note, for example, that the plural '*elohim*' is used to describe Ba'al, Jud. 6. 31, Dagon, Jud. 16. 23-14, and even Samuel, 1 Sam. 28. 13.

<sup>74</sup> Deut. 6. 4.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, Gen. 2. 24; Num. 13. 23; Judg. 21. 6; Ezek. 37. 17.

<sup>76</sup> See *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Volume 4, pages 1217-1218. I am certainly *not* claiming that Deuteronomy 6. 4 *teaches* the doctrine of the Trinity. *But* I think it fair to say that the verse is *wholly consistent* with it.

<sup>77</sup> See the reference to all three Persons of the Trinity in Isa. 42. 1 and possibly in Isa. 48. 16.

<sup>78</sup> Isa. 9. 6; Zech. 13. 7; Mic. 5. 2.

<sup>79</sup> 2 Sam. 2. 2-3; Job 26. 13; Pss. 104. 30; 139. 7.

<sup>80</sup> Gen. 1. 26. Clearly 'our image' is one and the same as 'the image of God', v. 27. That God was not talking to angels is clear therefore, because, referring to the creation of man, declares, 'in the image of God created He him'. God never created man in the image of angels, but in the divine image alone.

<sup>81</sup> Gen. 3. 22.

<sup>82</sup> Gen. 11. 6-7.

<sup>83</sup> Isa. 6. 8.

<sup>84</sup> Indeed, very real Trinitarian experience of the early Christians' necessitated a doctrinal explanation. For that experience, see, for example, 'through Him (the Lord Jesus) we both have access by one Spirit to the Father', Eph. 2. 18.

<sup>85</sup> It has been said of the doctrine of the Trinity: 'Set out to understand it, and you'll lose your mind. But set out to deny it, and you'll lose your soul!'

<sup>86</sup> See the Additional Note to John 14. 28 in B. F. Westcott's '*Commentary on the Gospel of John*'. Consider the statement, 'Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is greater than I'. Clearly, I mean that she is greater than I am in terms of wealth, authority, status, influence, renown, etc. No-one would take me to mean that she is more of a human being than I am.

<sup>87</sup> Gal. 4. 4; 1 John 4 14.

<sup>88</sup> John 14. 26; 15. 26; 16. 7.

<sup>89</sup> 1 Cor. 15. 28.