

Brief notes on the Trinity

“And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Ex 3:5)

Preliminary matters

The word “trinity”

The term “trinity” can be used broadly to refer to something that comprises three parts or elements. For example, three cords platted together comprise a trinity of physical integrity, and the cooperation between Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet in the coming Tribulation will be a trinity of iniquity.

The biblical application of the term varies. Tertullian (c.160-230) coined the term *trinitas* from which the English word ‘trinity’ is derived – but he attached a wrong doctrine to it by denying the co-equality of the Father and the Son. Various statements of belief such as the Apostles’ Creed, Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed have sought to affirm or deny the Trinity. Our sole reference must be the Word of God.

The importance of the doctrine of the Trinity

If we deny the doctrine of the Trinity we deny the threefold cord constituting the fabric of the Christian faith, and undermine the foundation that sets Christianity apart from other faiths – *the nature of God*. Deny the doctrine of the Trinity and we become a cult that merely professes Christianity and we take the first step into idolatry. The nature of God cannot be properly known apart from the Trinity; our spiritual lives cannot be properly worked out in ignorance of it.

A full study of this subject is beyond our present intention. However we make two passing observations. First, the *relationship* between the *Persons* of the Godhead is vital in understanding God’s ways and purposes towards man, particularly the believer. This is evident in such passages as Ephesians 1 revealing the particular ministries of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Second, the *nature* of God determines man’s *approach* to Him. Cain misjudged God’s nature and, as a result his worship fell short of what God required. Since Cain, every religion of man – especially those that deny the Trinity, have erred regarding the nature of God and gone the way of Cain.

The biblical doctrine of the Trinity

The Greek philosopher Simonides was asked, “What is God?” He said he would like a day to ponder the question, after which he asked for two more days and then a further week to consider it. After the allotted time he confessed that the more he thought on it the more perplexing the matter became. The Trinity cannot be explained and neither can it be illustrated. Yet, many have tried, for example likening it to the three parts of an egg – the shell, white and yolk; “time,” which comprises past, present and future or man’s constitution of body, soul and spirit. All efforts fail! We must accept what is said about the nature and essence of God in His Word and resist all inclination to reconcile what to our finite minds appears contradictory or confusing. Job declared, “Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” (Job 11:7). For us to know what God is He must reveal *Himself* and do so to the extent that pleases *Him* – otherwise our imaginations plunge us into an impenetrable fog and we conger up all manner of shadowy images.

It is vital to faith and its wisdom to appreciate that God never seeks to explain His *existence* and neither does He seek to explain His *essence* (*substance*). “But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6).

The use of the term “Trinity”

The term “the trinity” and its companion expression “triune God,” do not appear in Scripture. The expressions the “deity of Christ,” “the sinlessness of Christ” or His “Headship” also do not appear in the Sacred Record. Yet, when we bring to bear precept upon precept and line upon line, we discover that these expressions, as in the case of the word “trinity,” galvanise and *represent* clear truths concerning the Godhead and the Persons within it *as revealed in Scripture*. We then refer to them as biblical doctrine. We do not seek to define a “word.”

The composition of the Godhead

In His being God is a Spirit (Jn 4:24). In His composition God – or more properly the Godhead is one *indivisible* Being comprising three Persons, the **Father**, the **Son** and the **Holy Spirit**. God is not two separate persons or gods comprising the Father and the Spirit or the Father and the Son (Ditheism). Zoroastrianism claims there are two opposing gods – one good the other evil. God is not three separate beings or gods as in Tritheism, i.e., some form of triad. The Hindus believe in a deity that comprises the gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the first having predominance as the creator. God is not three divine “forces” or “manifestations” of the one Being as in Sabellianism and, neither is He one Person as held by Unitarians, Muslims, Christadelphians, Jews and Mormons.

The constitution of the Godhead

As noted, the Godhead comprises an indivisible unity of *three* Persons - three in one and one in three. The three Persons of the Godhead as revealed in Scripture are coeternal in their *existence*, coequal in their *essence* and cooperative in the *execution* of their ministry.

The Trinity in the Old Testament

The unfolding of the Trinity was withheld until the First Advent of Christ who is the Second Person of the Trinity. It was only when the Son came in the fullness of time that we have the timely and explicit unveiling of the *Father*, and of the *Son* and of the *Spirit*. They comprise the Trinity, **One Being** yet a **compound unity of three Persons** having **distinctive** ministries which flow from a **oneness** of mind. The OT anticipated the Trinity by its revelation of the *plurality* and compound *unity* associated with God, which is revealed *grammatically* and *prophetically*. The first matter to establish is the plurality within the Godhead.

The plurality within the Godhead revealed grammatically

If the plurality within the Godhead (and the doctrine of the Trinity) is to have any biblical validity, then it must have its roots firmly established in biblical grammar. The following examples leave no doubt as to this revelation.

1. **Genesis 1:1**, where we have “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Here the term God is *elohiym* and is in the plural. In this passage the plurality within the Godhead is associated with unity in action and purpose given by the verb – created, intimating unity in plurality.
2. **Genesis 1:26**, in the use of the collective pronouns “us” and “our.” “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”
3. **Genesis 3:22**: “And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.”
4. **Genesis 11:7**: “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.”
5. **Psalms 110**, where we have a clear grammatical intimation of the Father and the Son as distinct Persons, noted below.

These passages indicate that God seeks *counsel* with Himself as a Being of more than one Person. The revealed plurality in the above instances dismisses the idea that these passages are mere soliloquies.¹

¹ The instance where a person talks to **himself** (not to others), revealing his inner thoughts, oblivious to any audience (as in *Hamlet* “To be or not to be.”)

The plurality within the Godhead revealed prophetically

In order to establish biblical consistency, we now look to further evidence of the *plurality* within the Godhead in another sphere of divine revelation – prophecy. The plurality within the Godhead in OT prophecy is revealed in the light of NT revelation. Scripture interprets itself. As another has said, “The New is in the Old contained; The Old is by the New explained.” The following are some examples.

1. **Psalm 2:** Jehovah declares, “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (vv 6-7). The existence of a “son” requires the existence of a “father.”
2. **Psalm 110:** This is one of many "Messianic" Psalms that foretell the Person and work of the Messiah. The First Person mentioned "Lord" (v 1) has the title *Jehovah*, the Eternal God. The Second Person, the One David calls "my Lord" who is the subject of the Psalm has a different title – *Adonai*. Adonai is a Hebrew divine title, evidence of which is seen in the total subjection David is willing to give to Him. Adonai – his personal Lord who is the Son and who will rule upon the earth a priest after the order of Melchizedec.
3. **Isaiah 9:6:** “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” This covenantal and millennial passage anticipates the coming of the Son who is the Messiah “the mighty God,” the Second Person of the Trinity.
4. **Zechariah 12:10:** Jehovah speaks of His blessing upon Israel at the time of Christ’s Second Advent. “I [Jehovah] will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me [Jehovah] whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son.” Jehovah identifies Himself as the One who was pierced and looked upon – intimating His crucifixion. He speaks of course of the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity and of the Spirit of grace, the Third Person of the plurality.
5. **Psalm 45:6-7:** “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” This passage is quoted in Hebrews 1:8 where it is attributed by the inspired writer to the Son, Christ, who has been anointed with the oil of gladness because He too loved righteousness and hated iniquity. “But unto the Son He [God] saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou [the Son] hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee [the Son] with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” It is a clear statement of the deity of Christ and the plurality within the Godhead.²

The compound unity within the Godhead

God’s plurality is a *necessary* but not a *sufficient* proof of the Trinity. Just because the terms for God in the passages above are in the plural, and the collective pronouns are connected with the actions of God, they do not of themselves do away with the claim of a number of “gods.”³ When we look further into the divine record we observe that Scripture guards against such error, first in its condemnation of “polytheism” and, second, in the revelation of the *particular* unity within the Godhead. We now take up the latter.

It is given in Deuteronomy 6:4. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.” This is one of four passages the Jews revere and it is inscribed on their phylacteries. It is part of “the *Shema*,” the sacred Jewish prayer recited

² Unitarians such as the Jews expediently translate the expression “Thy throne O God is forever and ever,” as “God is your throne forever and ever.” That is, God is the eternal throne of the Son. This rendering makes no sense in regard to the context and it is inherently insensible to the original text in Psalm 45, which states categorically that *God* has a throne which lasts forever – He is never *the* throne. The idea that God Himself is a person’s throne is utterly foreign to Scripture grammatically and morally. “Thy [God’s] throne is established of old: [God] thou art from everlasting” (Ps 93:2).

³ For instance the Mormon’s or so called “latter day saints.” It is in line with the seductive lie perpetrated by Satan in the beginning “ye shall be as gods” (Gen 3:5).

twice daily. It is their declaration of faith in one God or “monotheism” as opposed to a belief in “many gods” which we have for instance in Greek mythology. Again we have “God” in the plural *elohiym* and yet He is “one Lord” – *echad Jehovah*. The term *echad* means a *compound* unity, which emphasises oneness in Being yet recognises a distinction in Persons within that Being.

This same expression is used in the OT to reveal the compound unity in marriage between two separate persons. Adam and Eve were distinct persons but they were “one” [*echad*]. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one [*echad*] flesh” (Gen 2:24). “Two” persons become “one” yet they retain their distinct personality – and, we add they preserve their distinct ministries.⁴

Absolute unity – just one by itself

To highlight the compound unity of God, the Hebrew writer, when referring to God under divine inspiration, never once used the Hebrew word *yachid*, which means “only one” as in Genesis 22:2 (cf 12, 16). “And He said, take now thy son, thine only [*yachiyd*] son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Isaac was not a tri-part being in the sense of three *persons* in one. He was body, soul and spirit – a different constitution altogether.

The next phase in divine revelation

The Hebrew language has words for *singularity* (one element), *duality* (two elements) and *plurality* (more than two elements). In the OT we have the *plurality* within the Godhead and the *compound* unity of it. But what *number* is associated with this plurality? Is it two, three, four Persons etc? It cannot be two, because the words for God in the OT are only in the singular or plural (more than two). The Hebrew word for two (duality) has been excluded. We conclude that plurality within the Godhead in the OT comprises more than two Persons. Our study of the OT has shown implicitly that this plurality is made up of *three* Persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The revelation of the NT confirms this to be so.

The Trinity in the New Testament

There are two Greek words for “God” in the NT. Here again we must establish what the Bible teaches about God based on the grammar through which it is revealed. There are two basic Greek words used in the NT for God that relate to our enquiry.

- 1. Theos:** It refers to *essence* or *deity*, as in Matthew 1:23 and in numerous NT passages. It is the most common term for God in the NT. We have it used in Colossians 2:9 in regard to Christ: “For in Him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead [*theotes*] bodily.” It means that Christ is *theos* - very God.
- 2. Theiotes:** It refers to God from the point of view of His *attributes* - the qualities that describe Him and declare His existence in all His uniqueness as God. The use of this term is illustrated in Romans 1:20. “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 divinity [*theiotes* - God’s divine characteristics].” The existence, nature and the glory of God are evident in His work of creation.

We must follow the Greek grammar and observe both the divinity of Christ as well as His deity. Christ is not simply a “divine” Person – *theoties*, but very God – *theos*. That which was veiled in the OT is brought out into its fullness in the NT viz:

1. The *explicit* distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as **Persons** – i.e., the personality of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Another helpful illustration of the “compound unity” is in Numbers 13:23 - “a branch with one [*echad*] cluster of grapes.”

2. The *equality* in essence between the three Persons within the Godhead – the **deity** of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
3. The cooperative *exercise* in ministry between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity

It is fair to say that few deny that God the *Father* is the eternal God - *theos*. There are numerous explicit references to “God the Father” in Scripture (Jn 6:27; 1 Cor 8:6; Gal 1:1; Eph 6:23; Php 2:11; 1Thess 1:1 etc). However, many deny the doctrine of the Trinity:

- First, by claiming that the Spirit of God is not a Person – that is, they deny His personality and regard Him merely as the “divine power” or “emanation” from God (the Father). Doubtless, the Spirit of God acts, empowers and influences – judging, teaching etc. as recorded frequently in Scripture; but He does so as a Person.
- Second, while there may be agreement that Christ was a person there is a *denial that He is God* – a denial of His deity and eternal sonship. Christ is regarded a mere man – albeit a divine man. As a person Christ lived and died; *but He did so as God - theos*. God did not die, but the One who died was God! This is one of the grand mysteries revealed in Scripture. It is here that some who believe in Christ’s deity falsely claim that Christ lost or gave up His deity in order to die. When we speak of the deity of Christ we mean His *unchanging* deity. He never ceased to be deity - *theos*.⁵

The opposition to the Trinity therefore is waged on two fronts, challenging the personality of the Spirit of God on the one hand and on the other hand challenging the deity of Christ. What then is the biblical evidence for the personality of the Holy Spirit and for the deity of Christ?

The personality of the Holy Spirit

The first thing to note is the difference between *personality* and *personification*.

Personality refers to the pattern of human attributes (thoughts, feelings and actions) possessed by an individual that makes him/her unique. Personification occurs when we speak about a force as if it were a person using personal pronouns. For example, we may speak of the “howling wind,” the “merciless desert sun” or of the ocean as “she who is unforgiving to the careless mariner.” The wind cannot howl and neither can the sun be merciless because they are not living things. Nor is the ocean a person who has the capacity to know, feel and think etc. Solomon personified wisdom. “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets” (Pr 1:20).⁶

There is clear testimony in Scripture that the Spirit of God is a person and not a mere personification of a force.

1. **The personality of the Holy Spirit is revealed in that the Spirit has the attributes of a person, the capacity to feel, think and exercise His own will etc.**
 - a. **Matthew 12:31:** “And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.” There is primary merit in the claim that a force or influence cannot be blasphemed. The context adds a particular validity to it by contrasting blasphemy against two people – the Son of man (Christ) and the Holy Spirit. It cannot be a contrast between evil speaking against a person and against a force or influence.

⁵The biblical evidence for Christ’s unceasing deity is dealt with at length in the writer’s book “My Lord and My God” published by John Ritchie Christian Publications.

⁶In these instances we observe that the personification is associated with the *feminine* pronoun “she” or “her” (Pr 9:1-3).

- b. **John 16:13:** “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of [from] Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come.” Unlike a mere influence, the Holy Spirit hears, speaks and reveals. Further, it is not said here (or anywhere else in Scripture) that the Holy Spirit *cannot* speak from Himself. He has the capacity to do so. Christ spoke from Himself and also spoke as from the Father.⁷ “Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being His counsellor hath taught Him?” (Isa 40:13). His ministry today in regard to the Godhead is to magnify the Son as revealed to Him according to the cooperative and coequal divine counsels. A force or influence cannot speak from itself; neither can the rhetorical question be asked of it, “who hath directed, advised and taught it?”
- c. **1 Corinthians 2:10-11:** “But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”
- i. The Spirit of God has the personal capacity to “know” and to “search” the deep things of God, which speaks not only of His deity, but against the idea of Him as a mere influence or force from God.
 - ii. We note the omission of the expression “which is in Him” when it comes to God. The spirit of man is within man because man comprises spirit, soul and body. But it is not said of the Spirit of God that He is “within” God. It is consistent with the expression “from the Father” in John 15, which speaks of the Holy Spirit being near or beside the Father and not a force coming from within the Father. The personality of the Holy Spirit is divinely preserved in this illustration that comes from the inspired pen of Paul.⁸
- d. **Acts 5:3:** “But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” A force or influence cannot be lied to.
- e. **Acts 5:32:** “And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him.” The Holy Ghost bears a personal witness to the raising of Jesus Christ, God's Son, by the Father as do the disciples also bear a personal witness to it.
- f. **Acts 15:28:** “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.” The expression “seemed good” is from *dokeo* which means to “think” – an act of intellect and judgment. This cannot be said of a mere force or influence. A further example of the use of *dokeo* is in Matthew 22:42. “What think [dokeo] ye of Christ.”
- g. **Acts 20:28:** The Spirit of God exercises His sovereign ministry in regard to the church and appoints overseers. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood.
- h. **1 Corinthians 12:11:** “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.” Observe that it is His *own* will! The Spirit of God is presented as One who has a sovereign (but cooperative) will. He exercises it according to His discretion as part of His unique ministry in the Godhead, and here His will is exercised in relation to the allocation of spiritual gifts. Such sovereignty cannot be possessed by a force or influence. The divine cooperation is seen in Hebrews 2:4. “God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will.”
- i. **Ephesians 4:30:** “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” See also Isaiah 63:10. “But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.” Then in Acts 5:9 we see that the Spirit can be tested. “Then Peter said unto her, how is it that ye have agreed together to tempt (test) the Spirit of the Lord?” A force cannot feel grief, be vexed or be tempted.

⁷ John 8:28: “Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.”

⁸ We must bear in mind however that the essence of the trinity is in the truth of “three in one yet one in three.”

2. The personality of the Holy Spirit is revealed in the Spirit as the Comforter

There are a number of biblical references to the Spirit of God as the Comforter. They compose a robust defense of the truth of His personality, particularly in regard to the validity of the personal pronouns used when speaking about the Holy Spirit (noted below).

- **John 14:16:** “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever.”
- **John 14:26:** “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”
- **John 15:26:** “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me.”
- **John 16:7:** “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.”

The following observations leave no doubt as to the personality of the Comforter – the Spirit of God.

- a. We note again that the Holy Ghost as the Comforter has a personal capacity - to teach, cause us to remember and to testify of Christ.
- b. The Holy Spirit is given a *proper* name, “the Comforter” – *ho Parakletos*. The Lord used this proper name being aware that it refers to a *person* who acted on behalf of another in a court of law.
- c. The Comforter comes “from” the Father not “out of” or “from within” the Father, which would be the case if the Holy Spirit was an emanation. The Greek preposition “from” is *para* which means “near,” “beside” or “in the vicinity of,” but not “out of” or from “within.” Christ, a Person said this of Himself. I came forth from [para] the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (Jn 16:28).
- d. There is no question that the Holy Spirit in power is “poured out” (Acts 2 etc). However, we read here that the Spirit was “sent.” Christ, the Son of God too was “sent” as a Person to do the will of He who sent Him (Gal 4:4). So too the Spirit of God was sent as Person to do the will of God. Here it is not just a “giving” of power but of “sending” a Person.
- e. In John 14:16, the Greek word for “another” is *allon*, which means *another of like kind*, and not *heteron* which means another of a *different* kind. Hence, the expression “another Comforter” means another Comforter like Christ, a Person. Christ was not a mere influence or force. One of the names of the Messiah – the *person*, among the Jews was *Menahem - the Comforter*.
- f. The Comforter or *Paraklete* as we noted is one who draws alongside personally. It is a promise of a personal presence – the Spirit, in consequence of the *absence* of another’s personal presence – the Son. The work of redemption was completed by the Son upon the cross and now He is exalted at the right hand of God. He is personally absent from the earth, but He does not leave His own on the earth comfortless. He sends another Comforter, the Holy Spirit. It is not said in John 16:7, that if the Lord does not depart that the Comforter will not come *into* you, but that He will not come *unto* you. (Yet, we know He does both as the Lord goes on to say. “Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth [*meno*, abides] with you, and shall be in [en] you” (Jn 14:17)).
- g. We have a further illustration of the personal ministry of the Comforter in Romans 8:26. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” How can a force or emanation from God intercede for us through heartfelt petitions before God?

3. **The personality of the Spirit is seen in His equality in essence, purpose and personal status with the Father and the Son.**

- a. **Matthew 28:19:** The disciples are exhorted to go forth, to teach and to baptise in (not into) the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Note the following:
 - i. The word "name" is singular declaring one Being, yet there are three distinct Persons associated with it, the distinction given in that each Person is identified by a conjunction and has the definite article – *the* Father and *the* Son; and *the* Holy Ghost. Again we have God i.e., the Godhead as one indivisible "Being" yet in plurality comprising three "Persons," the *Father*, the *Son* and the *Holy Spirit*. It is not Tritheism – three separate Persons which would be implied if it were "in the *names* of the Father, Son and Spirit." Tritheism denies the *compound unity* of God revealed in Scripture. Neither is it Sabellianism - three manifestations or aspects of the one God, which would be suggested if it were "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit", the definite article being omitted.
 - ii. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are mentioned together with each having the same authority in the ordinance of believers' baptism. We have again distinction in Persons, oneness in essence and unity in purpose.
- b. **Ephesians 1:** We are *chosen* by God the Father (of our Lord, vv 3-4); *redeemed* by the Son (v 7) and *sealed* by the Spirit of Promise (v 13). We note here the distinction between the promised Spirit (Acts 2, etc) and the "Spirit of promise." The former refers to the Person that was to come; the latter of the work He does in regard to the believer's inheritance.
- c. **2 Corinthians 13:14:** "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." This vital benediction equates the Persons of the Godhead in status (though altering the typical order in keeping with the corrective purpose of the Epistle and compassionate sentiment of the apostle Paul.).

The deity of the Holy Spirit

Scripture reveals clear evidence that all the divine attributes and power exist in all three Persons of the Godhead. The following are some examples confirming the deity of the Person of the Holy Spirit (in addition to the examples noted above).

1. Divine equality in the resurrection of the Son
 - a. **The Father** - Ephesians 1:17-20: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being lightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." As another has said, He was raised by the power of God as by the glory of the Father.
 - b. **The Son** - John 10:17-18: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Also John 2:19: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple [His body], and in three days I will raise it up."
 - c. **The Spirit** - 1 Peter 3:18: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit." Romans 8:11: "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you."
2. The *omnipotence, omniscience* and *omnipresence* of the Holy Spirit

- a. **Genesis 1:2:** “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”
 - b. **Job 33:4:** “The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.”
 - c. **1 Corinthian 2:10-11:** “But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”
 - d. **Psalms 139:7:** “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?”
 - e. We also note the Spirit’s work in indwelling *every* believer. “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19).
 - f. **In Hebrews 9:14** the Spirit is revealed as being eternal. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” The eternal existence of the Spirit is explicitly noted here.
3. The Spirit’s divine equality and deity is revealed in the work of sanctification. “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.” (1 Pet 1:2).⁹

The Deity of Christ

We noted above that as to Christ being a Person there is little question. Some however dispute His *deity* and so seek to undermine the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. The subject of Christ’s deity has been taken up in the article “The deity of Christ” and related references.¹⁰ However, we make the following remark by way of conclusion. We noted the Hebrew language has words for singularity, duality and plurality (more than two elements). In the OT we have the plurality within the Godhead and the compound unity of it. We asked, “what number is associated with this plurality?” Is it two, three, four Persons etc?” We observed it cannot be two, because the words for God in the OT are only in the singular or plural (more than two). The Hebrew word for two (duality) has been excluded. If Christ is deity then on the basis of this we have collateral proof of the personality of the Holy Spirit and, that the Godhead in the Bible comprises three Persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Related matters

The pronouns used in association with the Spirit

The Greek word for “spirit” is *pneuma* and it has a variety of applications in the Greek. For example, it may refer to the “wind” (Jn 3:8); “breath” (2 Thess 2:8); man’s invisible being (1 Cor 5:5); that which is opposed to the “letter” of the law (2 Cor 3:6). It is also used as a proper noun for the Spirit of God such as “the Holy Spirit.”

The controversy arises when the Greek Text uses *pronouns* (words that stand in the place of a noun) in association with the Holy Spirit. For instance, we say “Christ will return and *He* will establish *His* kingdom on earth.” In this sentence we have used two masculine pronouns (“He” and “His”) that take the place of the proper noun “Christ.” There is no controversy here. Christ is a male and a person and the so the masculine pronouns “He” and “Him” are grammatically correct.

However, the matter is less straightforward in regard to the Holy Spirit. Take for a case in point John 14:26. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, **He** shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” Here the translators have used the masculine personal pronoun “He” in association with the Greek word “spirit” or *pneuma*, indicating that the Holy

⁹ 2 Cor 3:17: “Now the Lord is that spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” The Authorised Version has a capital letter for the word “spirit” at the beginning of this text indicating that the translators thought it refer to the Holy Spirit. But this is not in keeping with the context. The passage contrasts the “letter of the law” that killeth” with the “spirit of the law” – the real and moral basis of the law which in found in Christ and His Spirit.

¹⁰ribbandofblue.net

Spirit is a (masculine) person. Those who deny that the Holy Spirit is a Person object to the use of these masculine personal pronouns. They claim – and correctly so, that the Greek word *pneuma* is *neuter* in gender (neither male nor female). Accordingly we should follow the rule of grammar and use the neuter or “impersonal” pronoun – “it” or “itself” when speaking about the Holy Spirit. This rule of grammar they say proves that the Bible regards the Spirit not a Person and just an emanation or force from God.

Let us examine this assertion and return to John 14:26. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” The personal pronoun used here in the Greek text is *ekeinos*, which is rendered in the KJV and many other translations as an *emphatic masculine* pronoun – *even though* *pneuma* is neuter. We have this same rendering in the following original Greek passages *in spite* of *pneuma* being neuter:

- a. **John 15:26:** “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He [*ekeinos*] shall testify of me.”
- b. **John 16:7-8:** “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He [*ekeinos* - the Paraklete] is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”
- c. **John 16: 13:** “Howbeit when He [*ekeinos*], the Spirit [*pneuma*] of truth, is come.”
- d. **John 16:14:** “He [*ekeinos*] [the Spirit of truth] shall glorify me.”

Why then do we have a masculine pronoun associated with a neuter noun – *pneuma*? The reason is that in John 15:26 and John 16:7 for instance, the pronoun unquestionably *refers back* to *paraklêtos* which is indisputably masculine (which of course refers to the Holy Spirit). The pronoun *ekeinos* must then take on the personality and masculinity associated with *paraklêtos*. “And when He [*ekeinos* - the Paraklete, the Holy Spirit] is come.”

We note here the remarks by Greek expositors as to which pronoun *must* be used according to this wider and proper grammatical context.

- Vincent *Word Studies in the New Testament*: John 14:26: “The pronoun used [*ekeinos*] in John’s First Epistle, distinctively of our Lord. See 1 John ii. 6; iii. 3, 5, 7, 16; iv. 17.” In each case *ekeinos* is used as the appropriate pronoun for the Lord, a masculine person. It is perfectly legitimate then to ascribe masculinity and personality to *ekeinos*.
- A T Robertson *Word Pictures in the New Testament*: John 14:26: “Whom (ho). Grammatical neuter, but “whom” is correct translation... Here the Holy Spirit (full title as in Mr 3:29; Mt 12:32; Lu 12:10) is identified with the Paraclete. He (*ekeinos*). Emphatic demonstrative pronoun and masculine like *paraklêtos*.”
- W E Vine *Dictionary of New Testament*: “The Personality of the Spirit is emphasised at the expense of strict grammatical procedure in John 14:20; 15:26: 16:8, 13, 14,” where the emphatic pronoun *ekeinos*, “He,” is used of Him in the masculine, whereas the noun *pneuma* is neuter in the Greek.”

A grammatical “rule?”

- In **John 4:24**, we have “God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth,” with the neuter *pneuma* for spirit. But who would deny the personality of God? Are we to refer to God as “it” and regard Him “impersonally”? Of course not! And so the accepted and appropriate rendering according to the teaching of Scripture must be a masculine pronoun regardless of the neuter. “God is a Spirit [neuter] and they that worship **Him** must worship **Him** in spirit and in truth.” Paradoxically, the *New World Translation* of the JWs seems to have no difficulty associating the neuter *pneuma* with the masculine pronoun “him.” “God is a Spirit, and those worshipping **him** must worship with spirit and truth”(NWT).
- **Matthew 2:13:** “And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child [neuter] and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy it [JND].” The child though a person is

referred to as “it.” The mere use of “it” or “that one” in accordance with the strict gender rule of grammar cannot therefore prima facia deny personality.

- **John 1:37:** “And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it [the dove] abode upon Him.” Here it is the *form of a dove* that takes on the neuter pronoun “it.”

In passing we note that the term “itself” is used for the Spirit in Romans 8:16 and 26 (AV). While this does not invalidate the personality of the Spirit, these passages have been corrected to read “Himself” (See W E Vine Collected Writings Vol 1 p 458; So too Wuest “Word Studies...” Romans Vol 1 p 135).

We have in Scripture, a clear and consistent testimony to the truth that the Comforter who is the Spirit of God is indeed a Person and properly represented by the personal pronouns, “He,” “Him,” and “Himself” etc. This is consistent with the Lord’s teaching of “another Comforter,” *another of like kind* - like Christ Himself, a Person as noted above. Notwithstanding any grammatical debate, it is the Lord Himself who personalized the Spirit by referring to Him as the Comforter. And, it is of deep interest that the Lord’s exceptional proof of the Spirit’s personality as the Comforter is particular to the Gospel of John, and consonant with His consoling upper-room ministry to His disciples, just before His departure from the world.

The divine order in titles

We have in Scripture the familiar order the *Father*, the *Son* and the *Holy Spirit* – the *First*, *Second* and *Third Persons* of the Trinity. It is not an order of supremacy or inferiority. Equality between the Persons of the Godhead is unquestionable as we have noted. What then do we make of the order of mention?

It is an order that speaks of *revelation*, *subjection* and *ministry*. The Son, though equal with the Father is subject to Him as the Son, a subjection He willingly took up in order to do the will of the Father. The Spirit likewise, though having His own will and equal to the Father and the Son, is subject to the Father and to the Son, yet all Persons acting in coequal cooperation and in oneness of mind. In John 14:26 it is the Father who will send the Spirit; in John 15: 26 it is “whom I [Christ, the Son] will send from the Father.” The Father sent the Son to do His will. The Son prayed to the Father to send the Spirit. The Son offered up Himself through the “Eternal Spirit.” The Father sent the Son to do His will. The Son came and having accomplished the will of the Father is now exalted He shares the Father’s throne. The Spirit has come in the absence of the Son and is doing His personal work in regard to the world, the Church and the believer.

Spirit, soul and body and “image” as illustrating the Trinity

It is biblically incorrect to represent the Trinity using the analogy of man in his threefold constitution as body, soul and spirit. The Trinity comprises three *Persons*. Man’s spirit, soul and body are not three persons. We must also resist the attempt to explain the Trinity on the ground that man is created in the image of God. The term “image” means “visible representation.” “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image [the visible representation] and glory of God: but the woman is the glory [but never the image – visible representation] of the man.”¹¹

Earlier we referred to 1 Corinthians 2:10-11. “But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” We noted the spirit of man is within man because man comprises spirit, soul and body, but it is not said - the Spirit of God that is “within God.” This is a further reason why man’s tri-part being cannot be used as an illustration of the Trinity. The lesson of this passage is to teach us that it is the spirit *within* man that engages with the Spirit of God, and that it is the Spirit of God who is the Revealer of God to man’s spirit. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16). So we have “the mind of Christ.”

¹¹ In 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15 Christ is stated as the image of God. This is indeed so, but with Christ exalted and ascended it is the man that becomes God’s visible representation in divine matters in earthly testimony.

The term “Father” in the OT

Some who accept the doctrine of the Trinity have gone beyond Scripture by indiscriminately claiming that the revelation of God as the “Father” in the OT is proof of the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. That is, where there is a Father there must also be a Son. They cite passages such as Deuteronomy 32:6 in support. “Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has bought you? He has made you and established you.” So too, Exodus 4:22 and Jeremiah 3:4. “Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?” These passages and others like it in the OT speak of God’s paternal love and provision for the nation of *Israel*. He is Father to Israel who is His son - His firstborn nation. “Go [Jeremiah] and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown” (Jer 2:2). “I am a Father to Israel” (Jer 31:9). Such passages do not intimate the distinction between the *Persons* of the Godhead – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This distinction had to wait the revelation of the NT.

The timing of the NT revelation of the Trinity

First, there was the divine work of creation. For this work and our faith in it, it was sufficient that the Creator be known as God – *Elohiym*. This plurality, anticipated the grammatical term *elohiym* was to be unveiled in regard to a new creation in Christ the Son. After the fall and man’s failure, God took unto Himself an earthly chosen people – the nation of Israel to display His grace and mercy. He was to be then known as Jehovah their covenant God Who had given certain covenant promises to the nation. He was their Father and Israel His firstborn nation. Alas, the nation failed and has been set aside by God until a coming day. Meanwhile God is dealing with His heavenly people – the Church of the firstborn ones (Heb 12:23). The divine record now brings into view the full revelation of the Godhead – the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and their particular relationship to the Church. It is not until the NT revelation that we have the divine title “God the Father,” which straightway brings into view the divine title “the Son of God” which was revealed prophetically in Daniel (Dan 3:25) and unveiled fully in the NT. With Israel now set aside, God has brought the Gentiles into blessing together with the Jews. In so doing He declares the divine basis upon which **all** men – past, present and future are saved. It is the Person of the Son and His work at Calvary along with the convicting work of the Spirit. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:25. i.e., the basis of the forgiveness of sins of the OT saints and indeed all saints – righteousness in Christ (Gen 15:6)).

The Trinity and the interpretation of Scripture

With the doctrine of the Trinity before us we are able to enter into a deeper appreciation of Scripture. For instance, we read of Christ now at the right hand of God (i.e., Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 8:1; 1 Pet 3:22). It is a place of divine accomplishment and glorification because of the vindicating work of the Son in regard to the holiness of God : but not just in regard to the holiness of the Father or of the holiness of the Spirit, but of *all* three Persons of the Godhead – the thrice holy God. “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev 4:8). The Son, as part of the Godhead vindicated *His* holiness in His work on the cross. We have this in the divine approbation concerning Him, “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom,” and that He “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows?” (Heb 1:8-9). We have it in Genesis 22:8, in that “God [*elohiym* – plural] will provide Himself [singular] a lamb,” and that God Himself is that Lamb in the Person of His only Begotten Son.” It means that the Son must be “sent” and that He must also “come,” truths well attested to in the NT.

This is clearly exemplified in regard to the Son’s resurrection. He was raised of **God** (Acts 13:30). We have this truth enlarged, in that he was raised of the *Father* (Eph 1:17-20); by the *Spirit* (1 Pet 3:18) and by *Himself* (Jn 2:19).

Then we have it in 1 Timothy 2:5 in answer to Job’s plea for a “daysman” between himself and God (Job 9:33). “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” The mediatorial work of

Christ was not just in regard to the Father, but in regard to a thrice holy God. So too in Romans 8:33 in regard to justification. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.” Justification is the prerogative of the thrice holy God – acting in perfect coequal righteousness but acknowledging the specific work of the Son. And so we read that as believers we are the righteousness of God [the thrice holy God] in Him [the Son] (2 Cor 5:21). As a concluding example, we have 1 Corinthians 15:28. “When all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God [i.e., the Father and the Son and the Spirit] may be all in all.”

The indwelling Spirit of Christ

It seems to be the case that Scripture does not speak of the Holy Spirit “indwelling” Christ or being “within” Christ. Ostensibly, this would be consistent with guarding the truth that the Son and the Spirit are two distinct Persons of the Godhead. And yet, we know that as part of the Triune Godhead the Spirit was in Him and He in the Spirit, as it was with the Father and the Son. Our Lord was “God manifest in flesh.” Scripture states explicitly that the Father indwelt the Son. “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works” (Jn 14:10). The indwelling here refers to the oneness in essence and so to the oneness in mind between the Father and the Son. It is in keeping with the distinct Persons of the Godhead and, yet, in full accord with the truth of the Trinity. The Lord was *anointed* by the Spirit, *led* by the Spirit and He offered Himself up *through* the Spirit. He was also *filled* with the Spirit. And the Spirit “abode” (or rested) on Him, and “drove” Him into the wilderness. His being led by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit would speak of His perfect *cooperation* with the Spirit, again in agreement with the truth of the Trinity – unceasingly, “three in one and one in three.”

We too are led and filled by the Spirit. This however is to do with the *inhabitation* by the Spirit. The Spirit takes up residence in accordance with our new man. As believers we have two natures – the old creation (man) and the new creation (man); the latter born of the Spirit upon conversion. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3:6). Our Lord does not have two natures. He is one nature – the *Man* in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Col 2:9). Is not this what the Lord meant when He referred to His body as a temple? “Jesus answered and said unto them, destroy (loose) this temple [*naos* – dwelling], and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19). God did not die; but the *Man* who died was God, “God manifest in flesh.” Blessed redeeming mystery!