

## 2. The Trinity<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

God is undivided unity expressed in the threefold and equal nature of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Being so far beyond our normal human experience, it is and will likely ever be a great and incomprehensible mystery.

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) tried to illustrate the **Trinity** through the use of a psychological **analogy**. In his illustration, just as a person exists as one being with the three dimensions of memory, understanding, and will; so also the Godhead exists as three Persons forming one.

Another common illustration is to consider that we exist as body, soul (mind, will and emotions), and spirit (that part that can experience God).

However, though we may strive to grasp it, we must conclude that it must be understood, not by intellectual speculation but by direct experience. This is not an unreasonable demand. Do we truly understand our spouses through intellectual assent to their heartbeat, respiration, the color of their eyes and hair, their height and weight or through emotional interaction and conversation?

Some may question the point of studying such a particularly deep subject as the Trinity. Paul informs us in 1 Corinthians<sup>2</sup> that the point of the Scriptures is not to increase our knowledge but in order to improve our relationship with the Lord. If Elohim exists in a state of "**triunity**" then to understand that state is to better understand God. To better understand God is to better grasp His will. To better grasp His will is to better obey Him. To better obey Him is to love Him and be His people.

The word "Trinity" as such does not appear in the Bible. It is a name that humans have applied to identify the concept that is clearly taught in the Scriptures. A recent preference is to refer to the Trinity as the "Triunity" in order to hopefully avoid a couple of misconceptions. One such error is the idea of **tritheism**. This concept over-emphasizes the distinctiveness of each person of the Trinity to the point where it becomes **polytheism**, or belief in three separate gods. This is not what Adonaic theology teaches.

- Deuteronomy 6:4 states that the Lord is One.
- Isaiah 45:21 teaches that there is only one God and there is no other god besides Him.
- Galatians 3:20, while dealing with Jesus as our Mediator, still reiterates that God is one.
- James 2:19, written by the Lord's half-brother, says that those who believe that God is one do well.

Another mistake on the other end of the theological spectrum is to so emphasize the unity of the Godhead that that we begin teaching **Unitarianism**. Unitarianism ends up contradicting the clear teaching of the Scriptures by saying that only the Father is God and that Christ and the Holy Spirit are lesser and servile beings. That is a complete heresy.

In John 10:30, Jesus said that He and the Father are one. The people in front of Him clearly understood what He was saying because they picked up rocks to stone Him.

In John 14:8-9, Jesus told Philip that to see Jesus is to see the Father.

In order to see the **transcendent**, invisible Father and Spirit, we have been given the **immanent**, visible Son. They are so uniquely indivisible that to see one is to see the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Hand out both the study sheet and "The Concept of the Trinity in the Bible"

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:1-3

To understand one is to understand the other. To love, obey, and worship one is to give the same honor to the other.

- **John 14:16 HCSB** And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.

When Jesus said I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor, the word he used for “another” is *allos* (Strong’s #243). *Allos* means “another of the same kind”. The word for “another of a DIFFERENT kind” is *heteros* (Strong’s #2087) as we find in 2 Corinthians 11:4 and Galatians 1:6-7. Not only does it grammatically shed light on the issue but John 14:16 also shows all three figures of the Trinity operating simultaneously, each with a different role but all unified in their goal and strategy.

Another major error of those who overemphasize the unity of God is to say that the one divine person appears at different times in different manners. Since they refer to these different “masks” of God as modes of appearance, their concept is called “**modalism**”.

Tritheism, Unitarianism, and Modalism all go against the teaching of the Scriptures which state that there is only one God<sup>3</sup> yet this one God is three Persons – Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>4</sup> That statement is not contradictory. A contradictory statement is one that directly pits its principle elements against themselves. For example, the following statements are contradictory:

“I am a bear”  
“I am not a bear”

To say that the Trinity is one in essence while being three persons, while being out of our normal experience, is not contradictory.

## The Trinity in the Bible

Because the idea of a community of Persons forming one Person is so foreign to us, the concept was revealed to humanity progressively over time. Thus, the idea is far more clearly expressed in the New Covenant than in the Old. However, we get intimations of the Trinity from the very beginning of the Holy Scriptures.

All three were involved in the creation process. This would shed light on the use of the word “us” in Genesis 1:26-27. There we see the “Us” of the Trinity balanced by the “God” (singular), “His” and “He” (both also singular). God was not using the “majestic we” as some claim, else He would consistently follow that practice, not only in these two verses but throughout the Scriptures. We also see that to be “in the image of God” entailed two persons, one male and the other female, together forming Mankind.

If you examine the Bible, carefully allowing the Scriptures to comment on Scriptures in the Adonaic style of **midrash** called “**hafokh ba**”, you will come to the conclusion that:

1. All three were involved in the creation process.<sup>5</sup>
2. All three are called God.<sup>6</sup>
3. All three are eternal.<sup>7</sup>
4. All three are holy.<sup>8</sup>
5. All three are true.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:21; Galatians 3:20; James 2:19

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22

<sup>5</sup> Father (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6; 33:9; 148:5; Proverbs 3:19); Son (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17); Spirit (Job 26:13; 33:4; Proverbs 8:27-31). Note: Wisdom in Proverbs is a personification of Ruach’, the Spirit of God, Who is referred to in the New Covenant as “Sophia” the Spirit of Wisdom.

<sup>6</sup> Father (Exodus 20:2); Son (John 20:28); Spirit (Acts 5:3-4)

<sup>7</sup> Father (Romans 16:26); Son (Revelation 22:13); Spirit (Hebrews 9:14)

<sup>8</sup> Father (Revelation 4:8); Son (Acts 3:13-14; Revelation 15:3-4 **Note:** though the wording of the title given is nearly identical to Revelation 4:8, this is called the “Song of the Lamb”.); Spirit (1 John 2:20)

6. All three raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>10</sup>
7. All three give eternal life.<sup>11</sup>
8. All three are **prevenient** in the issue of salvation.<sup>12</sup>
9. All three sanctify.<sup>13</sup>
10. All three work in us, enable us.<sup>14</sup>
11. All three teach us.<sup>15</sup>
12. All three speak through humans.<sup>16</sup>
13. All three appoint spiritual leaders for us.<sup>17</sup>

However, we do not only derive the doctrine of the Trinity from fragmentary comments found throughout the Scriptures.

### **Sabellianism**

During the third century, a false doctrine was introduced to the Church that was called **Sabellianism**. Sabellius was a Libyan priest who taught that the Trinity was simply a way of describing three *aspects* of the one person that is God. According to Sabellius, God wears his Father hat, his Son hat, and his Spirit hat, successively; one at a time; not simultaneously. Sabellianism is often called modalism. According to them, the Son is the Father is the Spirit - but one at a time; in modes of being, not distinct Persons. So for example, Sabellians insisted that God the Father was active in creation, God the Son was involved in redemption, and God the Holy Spirit is presently involved in sanctification.

You will find modern counterparts to this heresy in a theology called “Oneness Pentecostalism”. Two well-known adherents of this theology are T.D. Jakes and the music group “Philips, Craig and Dean.”

Like all the best lies there is an element of truth to this teaching. The problem is not in what they believe each Person’s primary role is but in the overemphasis of that role. By doing this, they functionally denied the Trinity’s operation as a unified whole in every aspect of the universe.

There are many verses in which the Trinity as a simultaneously functioning whole may be demonstrated in a single passage. The Scriptures flatly repudiate Sabellianism by the Gospel descriptions of the Lord Jesus’ baptism<sup>18</sup> where we see the Son being baptized and the Father speaking from heaven while the Spirit descends in the aspect of a dove simultaneously.

The Sabellians distinguished between the Son’s role in redemption and the Holy Spirit’s in sanctification. However, Peter said

- [1 Peter 1:2 HCSB](#) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father and set apart by the Spirit for obedience and *for the* sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

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<sup>9</sup> Father (Psalm 31:5; John 7:28); Son (Revelation 3:7); Spirit (John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:5-6; 5:6)

<sup>10</sup> Father (1 Corinthians 6:14); Son (John 2:19); Spirit (Romans 8:11)

<sup>11</sup> Father (Romans 6:23); Son (John 10:27-30); Spirit (Galatians 6:7-8)

<sup>12</sup> Father (Psalm 107:19-20; John 6:44; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14); Son (2 Timothy 2:3-5); Spirit (Titus 3:4-6; 1 Peter 1:12)

<sup>13</sup> Father (Romans 8:28-31); Son (Hebrews 2:11); Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2)

<sup>14</sup> Father (Hebrews 13:20-21; Philippians 2:13); Son (Colossians 1:28-29); Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 11)

<sup>15</sup> Father (John 6:45; Isaiah 48:17-18; 54:13); Son (Luke 21:12-15; Galatians 1:11-12); Spirit (Zechariah 4:4-6; John 14:26; 1 John 2:20)

<sup>16</sup> Father (Hebrews 1:1); Son (Luke 21:14-15; 2 Corinthians 13:3); Spirit (Matthew 10:20; Mark 13:11; 2 Peter 1:21)

<sup>17</sup> Father (Jeremiah 3:15; 26:4-6); Son (Matthew 10:5-7; Ephesians 4:10-13); Spirit (Acts 13:2; 20:28)

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22

Our salvation, sanctification and ministry all depend on the foreknowledge of the Father, the sanctifying power of the Spirit and the grace made available through the shed blood of Christ.

Also, the Great Commission demonstrates the equality and continuous working of all three Persons.

- **Matthew 28:19 HCSB** Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

We are to go and proclaim the gospel, convert souls, baptize them, and disciple them under the authority and in the name of all three.

Jesus said that He would ask the Father to give the disciples the Spirit to act as their counselor. What does John teach concerning the role of the Trinity in our continued spiritual well-being?

- **John 14:16 HCSB** And I (*Jesus*) will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor (*the Spirit*) to be with you forever.
- **John 15:26 HCSB** "When the Counselor (*the Spirit*) comes, the One I (*Jesus*) will send to you from the Father--the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father--He will testify about Me.
- **John 16:13-15 HCSB** When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. (14) He will glorify Me (*Jesus*), because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you. (15) Everything the Father has is Mine. This is why I told you that He takes from what is Mine and will declare it to you.

Clearly, all three members are intimately involved in the continued spiritual well-being of the believer.

Each Person has a separate role at times. They are distinct and different yet not diminished by their differences. Paul, when he addressed this very issue of different functions or roles had this to say:

- **1 Corinthians 12:3-6 HCSB** Therefore I am informing you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (4) Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. (5) There are different ministries, but the same Lord. (6) And there are different activities, but the same God is active in everyone and everything.

Here we see all three mentioned, accompanied by the clear statement that though each has their own function, it is the same God who is active in everyone and everything.

Paul's grateful prayer concerning the believers in Thessalonica shed light on the process of salvation, sanctification, and glorification of the saint. Paul thanked the Father that the Thessalonians had been chosen through the Spirit to not only be saved and sanctified but to obtain the glory of the Son.<sup>19</sup>

Compare that to Paul's description in Galatians.

- **Galatians 4:4-6 HCSB** But when the completion of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (6) And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"

The Father initiated, the Son came to redeem, and the Spirit has confirmed the process. How about in this admonition to Titus?

- **Titus 3:4-6 HCSB** But when the goodness and love for man appeared from God our Savior, (5) He saved us--not by works of righteousness that we had done, but

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<sup>19</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

according to His mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (6) This *Spirit* He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

The Father saved us through Spirit Who was given to us by the Son.

Or what about this blessing Paul gave to the Corinthians?

- [2 Corinthians 13:14 HCSB \(13:13\)](#) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Paul blessed the Corinthians in the name of the Trinity. Grace, love, and fellowship are extended from and possible through all three.

The concept of “three in one” or “triunity” has important applications to our daily walk. Paul applied his theology of the Trinity to church unity when He addressed the Ephesian church. He said that just as many Christians form one body of Christ, so the three Persons of the Trinity form one God.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Jude taught us about the relationship between our understanding of the Trinity and our prayer life. He said,

- [Jude 1:20-21 HCSB](#) But you, dear friends, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, (21) keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.

D'vekut (a deep, passionate and intimate relationship that is only possible with God) is built through Holy Spirit empowered prayer, focus on the love of the Father, and an appreciation for the mercy demonstrated by our Savior Jesus Christ.

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<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 4:4-6