
THE BLESSED THREE-IN-ONE

The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity Proven from Scripture

by

Alan Morrison
(Director, Diakrisis International)

The doctrine concerning the Trinitarian nature of God is probably one of the most misunderstood teachings of the Christian faith. This is hardly surprising. Firstly, the doctrine is rarely preached on and therefore there is a great deal of ignorance about it. Secondly, because of its seeming complexity and difficulty to be adequately comprehended, people assume it must be an invented teaching with no biblical references. Thirdly, because it is such a vital teaching — the very heart and revelation of true divinity and deity — it is especially vulnerable to attack.

A number of hurdles have created a stumbling-block for many sincere believers on the doctrine of the Trinity: 1) The need to balance correctly the unity of the Godhead with the distinction of personality within it; 2) Drawing the wrong conclusions from the differing emphases in Scripture on the work of individual members of the Godhead; 3) Having insufficient understanding of the deity and individual personality of the Holy Spirit.

Many believers understandably become overwhelmed by in-depth theological treatises on the subject of the Trinity, which often concentrate on highly involved analyses of historical controversies. Therefore, there is a need for a concise, non-technical exposition which simply and compellingly presents the teaching in a way which can be grasped and taken to heart by all believers rather than catering solely for advanced theological seminarians. This brief study is a humble attempt to do that.

[This article is primarily a study document in which much information has been brought together concisely in one place. You are therefore strongly advised to have your Bibles open in front of you because many scripture references have been given here without writing them all out in full — especially in the longer lists — as this would have massively increased the size of the article and interrupted the flow of the text. With an open Bible, you will be able to check all these references for yourself in their context. This could be undertaken in a study group or as an individual Bible study.]

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the Trinity — one God, consisting of three Persons, co-equal in deity — has come to be a central teaching of the Christian faith. The principal reason for this is because it contains the very heart of true divinity and deity as revealed in the Bible. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should have long been the object of attack from many sides in the unbelieving world.

In church history — especially during the first few

centuries — there were three primary controversies concerning the nature of God. First, there was that which centred on the co-equality, co-eternity and deity of the Son, which had been challenged by Arius (c.250-c.336), who believed that the Son of God was not eternal but had been created by the Father. His unique beliefs, revolving around his denial of the divinity of Christ, came to be known as “Arianism” — beliefs which are still held today by false religions such as the Jehovah Witnesses.

The second main area in which controversy raged over the nature of God in early church history was the individual “personalities” of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which had been challenged by Sabellius, a third century Libyan priest who sojourned in Rome. His beliefs came to be known as “Sabellianism”. Sabellius regarded the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as merely three different offices, aspects or “modes” of the one God — hence another name given to his belief system was “Modalism”.

Another Trinitarian controversy was known as “Macedonianism”, believed to have its origins with a Bishop of Constantinople (d.c.362). Just as Arianism had denied the co-equality, co-eternity and deity of the

Son — the Lord Jesus Christ — Macedonianism denied the co-equality, co-eternity and deity of the Holy Spirit.

It was not until the Council of Nicea in AD 325 and the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, that controversy over the Trinity was more or less settled. The One God exists in Three Persons who are One Substance, co-equal in divinity.

The church had been forced into developing a written formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity as the revelation of God because there were so many attacks on various aspects of deity in respect to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. But this does not mean that it is an artificial doctrine. The doctrine of the Trinity can be approached as a formula if seen purely in the context of a statement of faith. But quite apart from its credal formulations, the doctrine is simply a gathering together of the biblical data into a comprehensive understanding of deity and especially the *self-revelation* of deity, for God has chosen to reveal Himself to His human creation in His Triune (three-in-one) nature.

The early Christians knew very well that they had been reconciled to God the Father by the atoning work of the Son of God, of whose divinity and distinct personality they were in no doubt (see Col.1:12-19; 2:9), and that this had been applied by the Holy Spirit, who they also knew to be a divine Person, distinct from the Father and the Son (see Acts 5:3-4). Formulating the doctrine of the Trinity was simply a matter of stating what they already knew from spiritual experience.

In this brief paper, it is not our purpose to concentrate on the many aspects of these historical controversies. There is a great deal of theological and historical literature already devoted to this. **Our main concern here is to redress the rejection of Trinitarian teaching by many sincere Christians.**

From a pastoral standpoint, it is important to recognise that many sincere Christians have a problem with the concept of the Trinity simply because no one has taken the trouble to explain it properly to them and demonstrate it from Scripture. Many have been told, more or less at gunpoint, "*Either you accept the doctrine of the Trinity or you are a heretic*". Questions on such issues are discouraged in many circles as being subversive. Furthermore, many church "elders" are ill-equipped to respond helpfully to those who are confused on this issue and thus feel threatened when awkward questions are raised. This leads to an air of confrontation which can even result in excommunication, when a clear explanation and an attitude of compassion was all that was necessary.

There are three principal reasons which have led otherwise sincere Christians into rejecting the teaching on the

Trinity: **First**, it is said that the nature of God cannot be fathomed or understood and should thus be left as a mystery rather than rendered into a formula. **Second**, it is claimed that because the word "Trinity" does not appear in the Bible it cannot therefore be a biblical teaching. **Third**, while these sincere believers see clearly that the Father and the Son have distinct "personality", they do not accept the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit, who is often seen merely as a "force" or "power" or "aspect of God's activity".

The third of those objections will be responded to in the main body of this article, but in this introduction we can respond to the first two of those objections.

In responding to the first objection by some Christians to the doctrine of the Trinity, we should point out that because something cannot be fathomed or properly understood this should **never** prevent us from trying to fathom or understand it. If our inability to understand something fully stood in the way of our education about it, we would never learn anything and thus remain deeply ignorant people. Our mandate is to do all that we can to grasp as much as possible of whatever has been revealed to us either in Scripture or in the course of our lives (cf. Deut.29:29). Responsible stewardship means not only looking after our income and resources but also our knowledge and abilities.

To respond to the second objection by some Christians to the doctrine of the Trinity, although the actual word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible as a descriptive term of God, it is nevertheless a valid theological expression which has been composed out of historic necessity in order to refer succinctly to the threefold nature of the Godhead as it has been clearly revealed in Scripture, and as we will show in this article.

The word "Trinity" was first used in reference to the Godhead by Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (late 2nd century), who expressed it with the Greek word *Trias* (triad). Around the same time, Tertullian (c.160-c.225), in the last decade of the 2nd century, was using the Latin word *Trinitatis* when writing his apology against a heretic called Praxeas (who eventually recanted his heresy). However, it did not actually become "enshrined" in church theology until the 4th century. Under the leadership of Athanasius the doctrine was proclaimed to be the faith of the church at the Council of Nicea (AD.325), and through the work of Augustine in the following century it was ratified in the Athanasian Creed in the form that is accepted by all Trinitarian churches today.

The creed asserts three principal things: that there is one God; that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are each God; and that the Father, the Son and the

Spirit is each a distinct Person.

It is profoundly illogical to reject the doctrine of the Trinity merely because the word does not appear in the Bible. No one has any problem speaking about the Transcendence or Immanence of God; yet neither of those words appears in the Bible. The word ‘theology’ is an accepted reference to the study of God and His self-revelation, yet no one objects to using it on the basis that the actual word does not appear in the Bible. The word “Christology” does not appear in the Bible, yet it is universally accepted as a valid theological term referring to the study of the Person of Christ, especially in relation to His two natures, human and divine. The actual word “millennium” does not appear in the Bible, yet it is a universally accepted term used to refer to the “*thousand years*” in Rev.20:1-7. Even the word “Bible” does not appear in the Bible, yet no one rejects it on that basis!

So it is somewhat mystifying that there should be any objection to the word “Trinity” simply because it does not appear in the Bible. This seems to be something of a “red herring”. **For regardless of the lack of presence in the Bible of the word “trinity”, the fact is that the Bible is luminously Trinitarian in its revelation of God from the first book to the very last.**

The Creator and Fountain of all things has deliberately chosen to reveal Himself in Scripture as one God in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These three are not merely “aspects” of God or “modes” of His being. They are distinct Persons who speak, act and are spoken of as individuals, yet remaining as one in substance. Whether or not we can grasp that is entirely irrelevant to the force of truth behind it. Given that we have very limited brains (and fallen ones at that!), we could hardly be expected to fathom the reality of the Godhead. Nevertheless, that is how the Lord in His wisdom has chosen to reveal Himself to us; and that is how we should receive that revelation rather than attempting to superimpose our own ideas on it.

Regardless of whether or not the actual word “trinity” appears in the Bible, the fact remains that “One God in Three Persons” underscores the entire biblical revelation of God — implicitly whispered in the Old Testament and explicitly stated in the New Testament. To deny that would be to reject the plain teaching of the Word of God.

Let us now go on to examine this subject under the following main headings: **1) Foundational Biblical References to the Trinitarian Nature of God; 2) Balancing the Distinction Between the Unity and Plurality of the Godhead; 3) A Demonstration of Deity and Distinct Personality in the Godhead.**

I. FOUNDATIONAL BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO THE TRINITARIAN NATURE OF GOD

1. PLURALITY IN THE GODHEAD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In common with all other aspects of divine revelation, the concept of a Trinitarian God is revealed progressively throughout Scripture. Just as the Incarnation of the Son of God as Saviour was not fully revealed in the Book of Genesis, so it is with the Triune (three-in-one) nature of God. However, just as there are definite shadows and portents of the Incarnation (e.g. in Gen.3:15, where the “Seed” of “*the woman*” is spoken of as coming to crush Satan’s head), so there are definite shadows and portents of the fact that there is plurality in the Godhead — that there is more than one “Person” in the unity of God.

First, there is the fact that the very word “*Elohim*” — translated as “God” in the first verse of the Book of Genesis — is plural. Taken on its own this proves nothing in regard to the Trinity; but when taken against the revelation of Scripture as a whole, it can surely be seen as preparatory to and in anticipation of the full revelation of the Trinity.

In the actual account of the creation, we read: “Then God said, “*Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...*” (Gen.1:26). “Us” and “Our” are pronouns which speak of plurality. Exactly the same reality is expressed in Gen.3:22: “*Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil*”. “One of Us” — there is plurality in the Godhead.

Again, we find the same plurality in Gen.11:7-8 when the Lord announced the judgement at Babel:

“Come, let **Us** go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth”.

Another example of this intimation of the Trinity by demonstrating plurality in the Godhead occurs in 2 Sam.23:2-3:

“The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me: ‘He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God’.

Matthew Henry rightly points out on these verses:

“Some think this is an intimation of the Trinity of persons in the Godhead — the Father the God of Israel, the Son the Rock of Israel, and the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the

Son, who spoke by the prophets, and particularly by David, and whose word was not only in his heart, but in his tongue for the benefit of others. David here avows his divine inspiration, that in his psalms, and in this composition, the Spirit of God spoke by him”.

In Prov.30:4, we find a clear reference to God the Father and His Son, intimating plurality in the Godhead:

“Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if you know?”

Continuing that stream of plurality in the Godhead, we read in the prophet Isaiah: *“I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’”* (Isa.6:8). Surely, this reference to “Us” is yet another hint of the plurality of personality in the Godhead.

Some think that there are Trinitarian inferences in the threefold blessing in Num.6:24-26:

“The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

Others see the same inference in the triple use of the word “Holy” in Isa.6:3: *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”* But whatever one’s view on those verses, the fact remains that, already throughout the Old Testament, we find a number of references to the fact that the One True God involves more than one personality. Surely this is designed to prepare us for further, more lucid, revelation.

2. DISTINCTLY TRINITARIAN PASSAGES IN BOTH OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

There are many passages in Scripture which clearly reveal the Triune nature of God by making distinct reference to all three Persons of the Trinity within adjacent verses, or even in the same verse.

If we compare Scripture with Scripture, we can even see the work of the Trinity in creation in the first three verses of Genesis:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, *‘Let there be light’*; and there was light” (Gen.1:1-3).

There we see reference to both the Holy Spirit and the Son as the Word of God through whom the universe was made. We can see this now with the benefit of hindsight because of the Scriptures which act as a commentary on the creation verses in Genesis. As John puts it at the beginning of His gospel:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

Again, with the creation as the reference point, Paul contrasts the polytheism of the heathen with the one God of the Christian, yet referring pluralistically to both “the Father” and the “Lord Jesus Christ”, the Son:

“For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live”.

(1 Cor.8:5-6)

Again, Paul refers to *“God who created all things through Jesus Christ”* (Eph.3:9; cf. Heb.1:2). He created all things through the Word, which began with *“Let there be light”*. In Hebrews, we read that *“to the Son He [God the Father] says... ‘You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hand’”* (Heb.1:8-10; cf. Pro.8:27-36). From this we can see that at least two “Persons” were involved in the work of the creation; and when we read that *“the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”*, we can surely deduce — comparing Scripture with Scripture — that the first three verses of Genesis involved all three members of the Godhead.

Another passage which is plainly Trinitarian is Isa.48:16, in which the pre-incarnate Son of God says:

“Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit Have sent Me.”

The verse speaks of both the Lord God and His Spirit as sending the Son on a mission. Matthew Henry says on this verse: *“The Spirit of God is here spoken of as a person distinct from the Father and the Son, and having a divine authority to send prophets”*. We see the same Trinitarian context of the “sending” of the Son by the Spirit in Isa.61:1:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,

because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound..."

There are three distinct divine personalities mentioned here. We know that the "Me" who was anointed to preach is the Lord Jesus Christ because He explicitly refers this verse back to Himself in Luke's gospel by saying: "*Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*" (Luke 4:18-21).

This sending by another Person in the Trinity was echoed by the Lord Jesus during His ministry, when He said "*he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me*" (Luke 10:16); and to His apostles, He said: "*As the Father has sent Me, I also send you*" (John 20:21). The Father and the Son and the Spirit plainly have distinct personalities and they act separately and together and are thus not merely different neutral aspects of God.

Another Old Testament passage in which there is a shadowing forth of the Trinity is Isa.63:8-10, where we see God and his Word and Spirit brought together in the one context:

"For He said, 'Surely they are My people, children who will not lie.' So He became their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them".

In that passage, we have three persons: the covenant God of Israel (v.8), the "*angel of His presence*" (the pre-incarnate Christ, v.9, cf. Gen.22:11) and the Holy Spirit who was "*grieved*" by their rebellion (v.10, cf. Eph.4:30). The revelation of God as the Trinity is implicit in the Old Testament and explicit in the New, so that we can read the darker passages of the Old Testament and understand them in the light of the New.

One of the most famous Trinitarian passages in the New Testament is in Matthew 3:16-17, where all three Persons are involved in the act of the baptism of Jesus:

"When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Again, in Matt.28:19, we read: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*". One God, three distinct persons.

We also naturally see the Trinity mentioned in the context of salvation: "*you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Cor.6:11). In fact, all three members of the Trinity were individually involved in the Incarnation of Christ. The Father prepared His physical body:

"Therefore, when He [i.e. the Son] came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You [i.e. the Father] have prepared for Me'" (Heb.10:5).

The Holy Spirit was also involved in the Incarnation, as He is in all creative activity:

"And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God'" (Luke 1:35)

We can see from this that the Holy Spirit was also involved in sanctifying the union of the Son of God with the manhood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Mary conceived without human fertilisation when God the Son not only entered her womb, but also the egg in her womb, under the superintending ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus, "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14). The Father prepared the body for the Incarnation of the Son, and the Holy Spirit superintended the Incarnation. The Trinitarian God in action.

Just as we could expect the Trinity to be involved in the Incarnation and Baptism of Christ, so they were also involved in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, as Peter revealed:

"This **Jesus** God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from **the Father** the promise of **the Holy Spirit**, He poured out this which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:32).

Some of the many other passages which make mention of the Triune God with distinction of personality between them are as follows:

"Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that **Jesus is Lord** except by **the Holy Spirit**. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are

differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all" (1 Cor.12:3-6).

"The grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the communion of the **Holy Spirit** be with you all. Amen"
(2 Cor.13:14)

"When the kindness and the love of **God** our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the **Holy Spirit**, whom He poured out on us abundantly through **Jesus Christ our Savior**"
(Tit.3:4-6)

"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because **God** from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by **the Spirit** and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our **Lord Jesus Christ**" (2 Thess.2:13-14).

"To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, in sanctification of **the Spirit**, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of **Jesus Christ**" (1 Pet.1:1-2).

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the **Holy Spirit**, keep yourselves in the love of **God**, looking for the mercy of our **Lord Jesus Christ** unto eternal life" (Jude 20-21).

"Blessed be the **God and Father** of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ... In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the **Holy Spirit** of promise..." (Eph.1:3,14).

Surely there is also more than a veiled Trinitarian reference in Rev.1:4-5:

"Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come [the Father], and from the seven spirits before his throne [the Holy Spirit, cf. Rev. 3:1; 4:5; 5:6], and from Jesus Christ [the Son]..."

We can see from these texts that the manner in which the human Bible-writers incorporated the three Persons of the Trinity into the Scriptures is almost formulaic. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were always being invoked as co-workers in the process of the original creation and also in the redemption of it.

All the above has been given by way of introduction, as a mere taster of the Trinity in the Bible. Now we will go on to look at the necessity for balance when considering the unity and plurality in the Godhead.

II. BALANCING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE UNITY AND PLURALITY OF THE GODHEAD

There are two aspects to the Trinity which must be acutely balanced if we are to maintain the doctrine in a biblical and faithful manner. The unity of the Godhead — the oneness of God — must be maintained without being at the expense of the distinction of personality. Similarly, the distinction of personality has to be upheld without it lessening the unity of God. It is in the failure to maintain this tension between the unity and distinction of personality in the Godhead that problems have arisen.

Just to expand this a little, there are a couple of primary areas in which there has been a failure to maintain this Trinitarian tension. First, there has been a failure to comprehend that references to "the One God" in the Old Testament do not negate His Triune nature. The assumption here is that because God is described as "one" therefore the doctrine of the Trinity is abhorrent. A Scripture often quoted in this respect is: "*Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me*" (Deut.32:39). There is no other god co-ruling with Yahweh. He alone rules over all. Some claim this is proof text against Trinitarian God. But this verse does not obscure the doctrine of the Trinity. Remember that when the Scripture speaks about the one God, it is referring to the Triune God, as we must conclude by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

The Trinity does not consist of three separate gods: but One God Jehovah subsisting in Three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian Godhead Jehovah is speaking in Deut.32:39. To contrast the Lord with the polytheism of the heathen cults so prevalent in Old Testament times, great emphasis was placed on the oneness of God. But we must not let that unbalance the equally important aspect of plurality within the one God.

Second, there has been a failure to grasp the necessity for emphasis on one Person or another in different situations. Sometimes, in Scripture, more emphasis has been placed on individual members of the Trinity, according to

the context. This has led some to draw erroneous conclusions. For example, Acts 4:12 could imply that only the Son saves: *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”*. You might say: *“But the Father and the Holy Spirit are also Saviours”*. It is true that the work of salvation is something belonging to all three Persons of the Trinity. Yet, they must be distinguished by the manner in which they save. This is why both the distinction in Persons and the plurality of the Godhead must be made. The Father saves through the Son by providing Him as a sacrifice for our sins; the Son saves by paying the ransom for our sins; the Holy Spirit saves by applying that ransom to us. But it is the Son who actually pays the price of the ransom, and because of that He alone is given the name Jesus (Matt.1:21).

Incidentally, it should be understood that although we may speak of the First, Second and Third Persons of the Trinity this does not denote any superiority or inferiority of substance. They are all co-equal in terms of divine status. However, there is a subordination of role. Thus, the Father works through the Son by the Spirit, enabling Christ to say: *“My Father is greater than I”* (John 14:28). As the Son is sent by the Father, so the Spirit is sent by the Son. As it was the Son’s office to reveal the Father, so it is the Spirit’s office to reveal the Son, as Christ testified: *“He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you”* (John 16:14). But none of this dissolves co-equality in the Godhead. This can be compared to the relationship in a marriage. A woman is to be subordinate to her husband insofar as her role or office is concerned, but she is still equal before God as a person. God the Son is clearly subordinate to God the Father in terms of His role (cf. 1 Cor.15:27-28), but He is still equal in divine status.

Now we will go on to deal with the fact that deity is clearly ascribed to three Persons in the Godhead who each have distinct “personality” from each other.

III. A DEMONSTRATION OF DEITY AND PERSONALITY IN THE GODHEAD

We shall approach this by looking at the biblical proofs of deity and distinct personality in each of the three Persons of the Trinity in their turn. It should also be mentioned here that by “distinct” personality, we do not imply separation, as if there are three Gods! One God, three distinct Persons; but not three separate Gods.

1. GOD THE FATHER

i. His Deity

There is surely no need for proof of this. Probably most people think easily of the Father as being ‘Big

Daddy’ — the “real” God (although that is something of a misconception). The actual phrase *“God the Father”* occurs sixteen times in the New Testament. The “fatherhood” of God is an important part of the life of faith. To believe in the Father is to believe that the first Person of the Trinity is the Father of Christ and therefore to believe is to put our trust entirely in Him.

ii. His Distinct Personality

The Lord Jesus prayed to God the Father as a distinct personality and encouraged prayer to Him as our Father: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name”* (Matt.6:9). Similarly, He said: *“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever”* (John 14:16). This is a Trinitarian statement, with all three persons being ascribed with distinct personality. The “I” is Christ (God the Son); the Father is God the Father; and the “Helper” (Greek: *parakletos*) is God the Holy Spirit.

Again, the great prayer in John 17 begins with the words: *“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You”* (John 17:1). Once again, we can see distinct the distinct personality of the Father in this verse.

In Section I, we have already given many examples of passages which show God the father in the Trinity as a distinct Person. Many other examples could be given.

2. GOD THE SON

i. His Deity

If this was an article specifically on the subject of Christology, it would be necessary to devote a great deal of space to proofs of the deity of Christ. However, as this is an article on the Trinity and, in particular, one which deals with those difficulties which many sincere Christians have with the Trinity, we need only provide summary evidence here for the deity of Christ.

There are many places where “Lord” has been used in the Old Testament, as a translation of the Hebrew Yahweh (Jehovah), and it is then quoted in the New Testament as referring to Christ. Examples: compare Isa.8:13-14 with 1 Pet.2:7-8; Isa.40:3 with Matt.3:3; Isa.6:1-10 with John 12:37-41; Isa.45:23 with Rom.14:10-11. Thus Scripture ascribes deity to Christ.

Other passages which prove the deity of Christ are:
❖ John 1:1-18 (where Christ is called the Word, Greek: *Logos*, who is God).

❖ Rom.9:5 (where Christ is referred to as the one *“who is over all”* and also as *“the eternally blessed God”*).

❖ Col.2:9 (where it is said of Christ: *“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”*).

❖ Tit.2:13, “*looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ*”.

❖ John 20:28 (When the apostle Thomas said: “*My Lord and my God*” when he saw the wounds on Jesus’s body).

❖ Rev.22:13 (The Lord Jesus is said to be “*eternal*”).

The Lord Jesus also claimed deity for Himself:

❖ Jn.5:17-29 (where we see that the Jews plainly acknowledged that Christ claimed deity for Himself and also spoke of Himself as the Judge on the Day of Judgement).

❖ John 10:30 (where he says “*I and My Father are one*”.

❖ John 8:58 (when the Lord Jesus referred to Himself by the divine name “*Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM*”, cf. Exod.3:14).

❖ Mark 2:7-11 (where, after the Lord Jesus heard the Pharisees saying “*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*”, He went on to heal a paralysed man and then said pointedly that He had done it “*that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins*” — a sure claim to divinity if ever there was one!).

❖ Hebrews 1 (where the Lord Jesus is shown to be the divine Son of God in comparison to the angels).

❖ To Satan, the Lord Jesus said: “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve*” (Matt.4:10). Yet the Lord Jesus never discouraged those who worshipped Him (see e.g. Matt.8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 28:9,17; Mark 5:6; 15:19; Luke 24:52; John 9:38).

Truly, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity and very God of very God.

ii. His Distinct Personality

This surely needs no more proof, as we have already shown that the Bible is replete with examples of the distinct personality of the Son in the Godhead. The definitive example must surely be when God the Father says: “*This is My beloved Son...*” (Matt.3:17; 17:5, etc.). Even King David distinguished between the Father and the Son in Psa.110:1: “*The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’*”. In case you doubt that, the Lord Jesus clearly refers this verse to Himself in Matt.22:41-45.

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT

We shall focus far more on the Spirit as a distinct divine personality because there is a great deal more contention over this. Many of the difficulties people have with the Trinity centre on whether or not the Holy Spirit is a person with separate “personality” from the Father and the Son.

It is most important to begin with this, and to

understand it correctly. Some people have real difficulty with this concept. There are a few reasons for this.

Firstly, the language of Scripture sometimes speaks of the Holy Spirit as having been “*breathed*”, “*shed abroad*” or “*poured out*”. How can such terms be used of a Person? Well, the language is symbolic, figurative and not literal. As water which is poured out ‘descends’, so the Holy Spirit has come down from heaven to earth. Water also purifies — one of the Holy Spirit’s roles, as we will see. In both Hebrew and Greek, the words for breath, wind and spirit are the same, which has led to figurative expressions of the Spirit (e.g. John 3:8, “*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit*”, cf. Job 33:4).

Secondly, in general, there has been a failure to perceive the Holy Spirit as an individual Person rather than a mere “force”. The wrong impression is often given in many Christian circles that there is some kind of supernatural energy or force called ‘the Spirit’ which takes over a person. This is somewhat dangerous way to perceive the Almighty. We have personally come across a great many professing believers whose approach to the Holy Spirit can only be described as being something akin to the occult in the manner in which this force is administered.

i. His Deity

There are many places where “Lord” in the Old Testament, as a translation of the Hebrew word Yahweh (Jehovah), is shown in Scripture to be referring to the Holy Spirit. Examples: Compare Numbers 24:2-4 with 24:12-13. See also Acts 7:51; 28:25-27; 1 Cor.2:12; Heb.3:7-9; Heb.10:15-17; 2 Pet.1:21.

❖ The Holy Spirit is said to be “eternal” (Heb.9:14).

❖ The Holy Spirit is said to be omnipresent (Psa.139:7-8).

❖ The Holy Spirit is said to be all-knowing (1 Cor.2:10-11)

❖ The Holy Spirit is said to be the Creator of the universe (Isa.40:12-13).

❖ The Holy Spirit is called “Lord” (2 Cor.3:17-18).

❖ The Holy Spirit is said to be the giver of life — material & spiritual (Jn.6:63; 2 Cor.3:6; 1 Pet.3:18).

❖ The Holy Spirit is spoken of as “God” (Acts 5:3-4).

❖ The Holy Spirit can be “blasphemed” (Matt.12:32). Only God can be blasphemed, at a cost of eternal condemnation (Mark 3:28-29). Thus, He must be God.

❖ The Holy Spirit is spoken of as being co-equal with the other divine Persons of the Trinity (e.g. 2 Cor.13:14; Eph.3:16-19; 1 Pet.1:2; Matt.28:19;

Eph.2:22; 1 Cor.12:4-6; Eph.3:4-6; Eph.4:4-6; Luke 12:11-12).

❖ The Holy Spirit dwells in us as in His temple, which is said to be the “*dwelling place of God*” (1 Cor.3:16; 6:19; Eph.2:22).

Those are but a handful of proofs of the deity of the Holy Spirit. There are more.

ii. His Distinct Personality

The fact that the Holy Spirit is a distinct personality rather than some force or a mode of God can be shown by the fact that personal properties are used about Him, personal pronouns are used to refer to Him, and that personal acts are attributed to Him. Here are a number of Scriptures proving this:

a. Personal Properties are Used About Him

❖ The Holy Spirit is said to be endowed with wisdom (Isa.11:2; Eph.1:17).

❖ The Holy Spirit searches out (1 Cor.2:10).

❖ The Holy Spirit is said to “*know*” (1 Cor.2:11).

❖ Paul speaks of the love of the Holy Spirit (Rom.15:30).

❖ The Holy Spirit can be *lied* to (Acts 5:3-4). One cannot lie to a force or mode. One can only lie to a person.

❖ The Holy Spirit can be “*tested*” (Acts 5:9).

❖ The Holy Spirit can be *grieved* (Isa.63:10; Eph.4:30). Can one grieve a “force” or “mode of God”?

❖ The Holy Spirit can be *insulted* (Heb.10:29). One cannot insult a “force” or “mode of God”. Only a distinct personality could be insulted.

❖ The Holy Spirit can be blasphemed against (Matt.12:32).

❖ The Holy Spirit is called the “*Comforter*” or “*Advocate*” or “*Helper*” (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7). These are all words describing personality, and are various translations of the Greek word *parakletos*, which means literally “the one who gets alongside”.

The second proof that the Holy Spirit has distinct personality is that

b. Personal Pronouns are Used to Refer to Him

The word *pneuma*, spirit, is itself neuter in the Greek. But the Holy Spirit is frequently spoken of in the masculine gender. Examples: “*He shall teach you all things*” (Jn.14:26).

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send **Him** to you. and when **He** has come, **He** will convict the world of sin, and of

righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:7-8).

This use of personal pronouns is particularly prominent in a passage in John’s gospel where they are used of all three Persons in the context of indwelling the believer:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. and I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:15-17, 23).

This is a mightily powerful Trinitarian passage. Just examine it carefully. Here the Holy Spirit is referred to as having distinct personality from both the Father and the Son. For it is the Father who gives a “*Helper*” (the Holy Spirit — “*the Spirit of Truth*”) who is “other” than the Lord Jesus Christ (“*the Father... will give you another Helper*”). And this “Spirit of Truth” (the Holy Spirit) is referred to as “*He*” and “*Him*” no less than five times within two verses. To cap it all, after having said that the Holy Spirit “*will be in you*”, the Lord Jesus then refers to the Father and Himself as the “*We*” who will come to the believer and make Their home with him. To be indwelt by the Holy Spirit is also to have the Father and the Son. Those verses are one of the plainest examples of distinct threefold personality being a hallmark of the being of God.

The third proof that the Holy Spirit has distinct personality is that

c. Personal Acts are Attributed to Him

Here we list the many personal acts which are attributed to the Holy Spirit as a distinct Person

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was highly active, carrying out many acts which can only be attributed to a distinct personality:

❖ The Holy Spirit accomplished God’s will in the world (Isa.32:15-16; Isa.34:16; Zech.4:6).

❖ The Holy Spirit aroused and energised the Judges (Judg.3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:24-25).

❖ The Holy Spirit brought messages from God (Num.24:2-3; 2 Sam.23:2; 2 Chron.20:14-15; 2 Chron.24:20; Ezek.11:5; Zech.7:12).

❖ The Holy Spirit brought the abiding presence of God (Num.27:18; 1 Sam.10:6-7; 16:13; Isa.59:21; Hag.2:5).

❖ The Holy Spirit brought the power of God (Judg.14:6; 14:19; 15:14-15; 1 Sam.10:6,10;

1 Sam.11:6–7; 1 Sam.16:13; Mic.3:8).

❖The Holy Spirit gave guidance (1 Kgs.18:12; Psa.143:10; Isa.48:16; 63:14).

❖The Holy Spirit imparted knowledge (Exod.35:31; 1 Chron.28:12; Isa.11:2).

❖The Holy Spirit imparted wisdom and skill (Gen.41:38–39; Exod.31:3–5; 35:31; Deut.34:9; Dan.5:11–14).

The Holy Spirit, as a divine Person, has carried out personal acts throughout **the whole of Scripture**:

❖The Holy Spirit creates (Gen.1:2–3; Job 33:4; Psa.104:30; Isa.40:12–14).

❖The Holy Spirit is the Giver of life (Ezek.37:14–15).

❖The Holy Spirit is the Sustainer of life (Gen.6:3; Job 32:8; 34:14–15).

❖The Holy Spirit regenerates (John 3:3–6; Titus 3:4–8).

❖The Holy Spirit justifies (1 Cor.6:11).

❖The Holy Spirit sanctifies (Rom.15:16; 1 Cor.6:11; 2 Thess.2:13; 1 Pet.1:2).

❖The Holy Spirit convicts and brings a spirit of repentance (Psa.51:1,11; Isa.63:10–11; John 16:7–11).

❖The Holy Spirit counsels (John 14:16–17; John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:7).

❖The Holy Spirit prophesies: *“The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons”* (1 Tim.4:1). *“He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (Rev.2:7, etc).

The Holy Spirit teaches (Neh.9:20, *“You gave your good Spirit to instruct them”*). The Holy Spirit teaches those who are persecuted what to say (Luke 12:12). *“He shall teach you all things”* (John 14:26; 16:12–13).

❖The Holy Spirit calls into service: *“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”* (Acts 13:2).

❖The Holy Spirit anoints (Acts 10:38; 1 John 2:20,27).

❖The Holy Spirit gives the “call” through the Gospel (2 Thess.2:13–14).

❖The Holy Spirit strives (Gen.6:3).

❖The Holy Spirit restrains evil (Gen.6:3–5,12).

❖The Holy Spirit forbids (Acts 16:6–7).

❖The Holy Spirit illumines (John 14:26). He even illumines unbelievers on a temporary basis, Heb.6:4–6. As one commentator puts it: *“Here the Holy Spirit imparts light but He does not always apply that light unto salvation”* (cf. Matt.7:22).

❖The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16:14–15).

❖The Holy Spirit inspires (2 Tim.3:16; 2 Pet.1:21).

❖The Holy Spirit intercedes (Rom.8:26–27).

❖The Holy Spirit reveals (Luke 2:26; John 14:26; 16:12–15; Acts 21:11; 1 Cor. 2:9–13; Eph.3:5–7).

❖The Holy Spirit teaches us to pray (Rom.8:26).

❖The Holy Spirit seals (2 Cor.1:22; 5:5; Eph.1:13–14; 4:30).

❖The Holy Spirit testifies (John 15:26; Acts 5:30–32; Rom.8:16; Heb.10:15–17). Note also that in Acts 5:32, the Holy Spirit is referred to as one *“whom God has given to those who obey Him”*. “Whom” not “what”. He is a distinct Person rather than a force or mode.

❖The Holy Spirit dispenses gifts. *“When [the Lord Jesus] ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men”* (Eph.4:8) It is the Holy Spirit who dispenses those gifts according to His will: *“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills”* (1 Cor.12:11; Heb.2:4). Notice again that those gifts are not the result of a force or power but are distributed by “He” who “wills”. This is distinct divine personality.

Much more could be given in relation to the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit. However, from what has been revealed above, we can see without a doubt that the Holy Spirit cannot be merely an aspect or mode of God. Neither can He be a mere force. He acts in conjunction with the Father and the Son as a distinct personality. He is called “He” and “Him” in the same sentence as that in which the Father and the Son are called “He” or “Him”. Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is very God of very God.

CONCLUSION

The concept of a Triune God is part of the warp and woof of Scripture, both explicitly and implicitly. Whether one finds it completely understandable is not the issue. That is how the Lord has chosen to reveal Himself to us. If He has chosen that, then who are we to argue with it? We should instead relish in attempting to understand the glory that has been revealed.

At the very least, the Trinity means that God **can** be revealed. Such revelation is vital in this world. The Christian Gospel itself is Trinitarian in its origins and scope. Just as the Father with His Spirit sent His Son into this world to seek out the poor in spirit, the weak, the oppressed and the searchers for truth, so we are to do the same in our revealing to others what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have revealed to us. That is the essence of the Gospel, the goal of which is not to be able to chalk up X number of successes one has been able to achieve in a mission, or to attract a greater number of backsides onto church pews. Those are human power-games.

The transformation of a soul into an outward-looking, God-loving, Christ-centred, caring person is both the essence and goal of the gospel. After that has been achieved, all else falls into place. Understanding this would instantly dissolve some of the madness of the world and all the hideous sectarianism of the visible church.

We are not speaking of a sentimental or maudlin love here. This is not the plastic “love” of the pop song or the escapist “love and peace” of the hippy. It is instead a love which is not afraid to tell the truth (whether practical or spiritual), a love which does not hesitate to expose falsehood and corruption, a love which protects against deception and refuses to be deceived at any cost — and yet, at the same time, it is a love which seeks to heal unnecessary division, alleviate oppression and cauterise the open wound of hatred in the world and in the church.

It is Trinitarian love which is at the heart of the Gospel and it is Trinitarian love which is so needed today. Just as the Holy Spirit gets wholly alongside of us as the Counsellor/Helper/Comforter/Advocate/Paraklete, so we should get alongside of others. Similarly, the love which the Father has for the Son is compared by the Lord Jesus to the love which God has for His children. Shortly before the Lord Jesus went to the Cross, He prayed to the Father in His priestly prayer in John 17:23-24

“that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world”.

All true fellowship in this world has the Trinitarian fellowship of the Godhead as its basis. The reality of the Trinity means that we can know of that mutual love between the Father for the Son, and the patience and care of the Holy Spirit for us, and be inspired by it in our own ethical and pastoral attitudes. The Lord Jesus prayed to the Father about his disciples: “*that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us*” (John 17:21). Our Lord fully intended that the love existing in the Trinity should be reflected in our own relationships. That is one of the most powerful messages behind the plurality of the

Godhead which we call the Trinity.

Therefore, any proclamation of a gospel which issues in browbeating, manipulation, self-righteousness, social exclusivism or sectarianism is merely a witness to the emptiness of that gospel. The entire purpose of the Law of God is love, because “*love is the fulfillment of the law*” (Rom.13:10). “*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’*” (Gal.5:14). The message of the Trinity is love in its highest form and is an inspiration for all.

The Triune God — as both Creator and Redeemer — can be revealed and communicated as the fount of all things and the heart of love. He has reached down into this sinful, self-centred world with a message of hope, providing the only way to truth and salvation: The Father reconciling us to Himself through the sacrifice of His Son and the mediation of the Holy Spirit. The plurality in the Godhead provides the key to the Gospel and the inspiration for the love which should abound as a result of that Gospel. As the Lord Jesus Christ put it:

“O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:25-26).

When the love with which the Father loves the Son is mirrored in our own lives (John 17:26), and when we behold the glory which the Father has given to the Son (John 17:24), and when “*the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” (Rom.5:5), we bear witness to a staggering transformation which can have no other source than the Triune God revealed in the Bible.

May we be both believers in, and witnesses to, the blessed Three-in-One. As a hymnwriter has put it:

“Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name,
in earth and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!”

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For further information about Diakrisis and the resources available, please contact us via:

E-mail Address: AM@diakrisis.org

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