

The Trinity

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The Godhead eternally exists in three, co-equal Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and these three are one God.

The teaching of the Trinity has been an area of contention from the beginning of the Church. This is understandable when one considers the great emphasis in the Scriptures on the unity of God and the mental gymnastics needed to try to accommodate in the human mind the concept of three being one. And Patrick's shamrock illustration will not really do since each part of the leaf is not the whole leaf, whereas each Person of the Godhead is wholly and fully God. The nearest analogy is the human triune nature of body, soul and spirit (see **I Thess. 5 v 23**).

However, the thing is more than a head matter - it must be revealed to the heart and received in faith. How can the finite human mind hope to surround and contain in its understanding, truths about the infinite and eternal One? Moreover, the teaching of the Trinity is not a mere invention of the Church under the influence of the thought-forms of its day. No! Its foundation is laid quite surely in Scripture and its importance is fundamental to the work of salvation, for on it depend the Deity of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit.

The teaching proclaims that there are three Persons, 'Personalities', with different functions (but where one Person operates the whole Godhead is involved).

- Thus the Father is seen as the fount of all Deity. (Read **Ephesians Chapter 1 vv 4 - 11**).
- The Son eternally reveals the Father whether it be in the Old Testament appearances (the so-called theophanies) or in the Incarnation in the New Testament. (Study **Matt 11 v 27; Hebrews 1 vv 1 - 3; Colossians 1 vv 12 - 15**).
- The Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son (See **John chapters 14 v 26, 16 v 7 and 15 v 26**), glorifies the Son (**John 16 vv 13, 14**).
- It is the Father's love that sets in motion the work of salvation (**John 3 vv 16, 17; I John 4 vv 9 & 10**).
- It is the Son who was willing to come that through Him we might be reconciled to God, having redeemed us through His blood (**Ephesians 1 v 7**). Hence the Scriptures affirm that "**God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself...**" (**II Cor. 5 v 19**).
Having experienced this work of salvation in our own lives, we too become sons of God our Father (**John 1 v 12; I John 3 vv 1, 2**), and brethren, heirs and joint-heirs with Christ (**Romans 8 vv 14 - 17**).
- It is the Holy Spirit who pleads with the hearts of men and women to be reconciled (**John 16 v 8**).
- The Son ever lives to intercede before the Father for us. (**Hebrews 7 v 25**). He is our advocate, should we sin, to plead on our behalf, for His blood was shed to cover all our sin. (**I John 1 vv 9 - II John 2 v 1**).
- The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, the Paraclete, or the One who indwells believers and who 'calls' to us on behalf of the Father to guide us into all Truth (**John 16 v 13**), to teach us all things (**I John 2 v 27; I Cor. 2 v 12**), and to enable us to live lives of prayer and power (Read **Romans Chapter 8 and Acts 1 v 8**) - the Christ-life.

Yet they are not separate Beings but One in essential nature and where One is so are all. The Word 'Person' in this sense, is actually taken from the Latin word persona which was the role an actor played (cf. the term dramatis personae) or, more precisely, the mask which, in ancient times, he would have worn to portray a character in drama. This, however, falls far short when applied to God for the Bible

does not suggest that the Trinity is simply God playing three separate roles at different stages. That heresy has long been repudiated since it denies the three distinct personalities of the Godhead. Neither dare we swing to the other extreme by holding that there are three separate Beings. In essential Being God is One. The best of which human language is capable is to present the matter in a seemingly illogical way, that God is three Persons in One essential nature and Being. But it is important for us to grasp this by faith.

The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, one finds the strongest statements emphasising the Unity of God. The confession of faith, still recited faithfully by Jewish people today (called the Shema) is central: "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is One Lord." (**Deut. 6 v 4**). In spite of this it is surprising to find that God is referred to by a plural term, a plural noun which, nevertheless, is used with a singular verb:

בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ: (***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*** **Gen. 1 v 1**). The Hebrew word for God is אֱלֹהִים (Elohim) which is plural; ברא (bara=created) is singular. Further, one finds God speaking, not in the first person singular but plural: ***Let us make man in our image after our likeness.*** (**Genesis 1 v 26**). Then, in **Isaiah 6 v 8**, the deliberation of God is similar: ***Whom shall I send, who will go for us?*** The three-fold ascription of worship a few verses previously, ***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts*** cannot be without significance. (See also **Isaiah 46 v 5**)

Why did the Jews not alter these records or refuse to accept them as Scriptures, if plurality of Persons in the Godhead is a denial of the Oneness of God. Surely it must be because such plurality is fundamental to the idea of God. A God of singular personality would not be complete. He could not be Love, for love requires an object. The Son is the eternal object of the Father's love and the revelation of His will and purpose. A God of singular personality could neither love nor reveal Himself in creation.

David, in **Psalm 110 v 1**, said, ***The Lord said unto my Lord...*** In Hebrew, two different words are used, so that it reads, ***Jehovah said unto my Adon (Lord)...*** Using this Scripture, Jesus asked a question about the Messiah, ***What think you of Christ? Whose Son is He? They say unto Him David's. He says unto them, How then does David in Spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord... If David then call Him Lord, how is He His Son?*** (**Matt 22 vv 41 - 46**). Do you see the truth Jesus was revealing in that very question? Yet that religious sect, the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses, poses the same question today to reject the very Truth of the Deity of Christ and the teaching of the Trinity, they being wilfully ignorant of the fact that it is only the teaching of the Trinity that satisfactorily answers the issue.

Finally, in the 'Wisdom' portions of the book of Proverbs one can find the eternal, pre-Incarnation Son, Christ the Wisdom of God (see **I Cor. 1 v 24**), the One who would, as the Word of God, be made flesh. Of that Wisdom, Who in Proverbs is spoken of as a Person, it is said, ***The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was... Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him : and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.*** (**Proverbs 8 vv 22 - 30**).

The New Testament

The unity of God is again stressed in the New Testament. Jesus referred to the confession of faith mentioned above when He taught about the first commandment, (**Mark 12 v 29**), and when He underlined the Oneness of God. However, in the subsequent verses in Mark, He proceeds to bring out the Deity of the Messiah by quoting **Psalm 110** - also mentioned above. Paul also emphasises the Oneness of God in **Ephesians 4 vv 4 - 6**, but note that he too teaches in a Trinitarian setting - One Spirit, One Lord, One God and Father.

The teaching of the Trinity, then, is implicit in the New Testament writings. The testimony of John's Gospel is that Jesus, the Word ***...was with God and the Word was God.*** (**John 1 v 1**). The Greek

construction (unlike the English translation) is emphatic, placing Theos (the Greek word for God) first in the phrase **...και Θεος ην ο Λογος (...kai Theos en ho Logos)** indicating and underlining the Deity of Jesus Christ - even with the absence of a definite article which the Jehovah's Witness sect, whose naïve translation chooses to ignore the grammatical construction, wrongly interprets as 'a god'. Jesus, the Word, was with God (as one of the Persons of the Trinity): He is God (as to His essential Being - and it is because it is His essential God-nature that is being proclaimed here that the word "God" is placed first in the final phrase, without the definite article). Therefore, John was able to testify, in the same chapter, that all things were made by Him (**vv 3, 10; cf. Colossians 1 v 16**). Certainly John knew what he was confessing when he said that, for every Jew knew that God is the only Creator (**Genesis 1; Isaiah 40 vv 12 - 31**). John knew for he had experienced that Deity on that occasion when Jesus was transfigured before them: **"...and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father..." (John 1 v 14)**.

Jesus Himself was even more emphatic when He claimed, **"I and My Father are One."** (**John 10 v 30**) The Jews knew what He meant by this - that is why they wanted to stone Him. He was making Himself equal with God. (See also **John 5 v 18**). Again, to His disciples who were anxious to have a real knowledge of God Jesus declared, **"He that has seen Me has seen the Father ...I am in the Father and the Father in Me."** (**John 14 vv 9 - 10**). To be sure, all this is to be expected if one reads the Old Testament prophecy of **Isaiah 9 v 6** concerning the Messiah: **"For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulders: and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."**

In His great prayer in **John 17**, Jesus again referred to His being one with the Father. This does seem to present a stumbling-block to some who prefer earth-bound, human logic. If He were God, they ask, how is it that He prayed to Himself? Let it be stressed again that the finite, human mind cannot comprehend the vastness of God. Nevertheless, can it not be seen that when Jesus came forth to be born into this world, (God was manifest in the flesh - **I Tim 3 v 16**) as a man, during His earthly life, He put Himself in our position? In other words, God put Himself in a position where He would be hungry, tired and suffer temptation, where the only place of victory would be in total submission to the will of the eternal, heavenly Father. Hence **Hebrews 5 v 8** informs us that as a Son He **"learned obedience by the things which He suffered."** Hence, there was a need for a life of prayer to live above earthly circumstance. Hence, we find the statements of **I Corinthians 3 v 23; 11 v 3 & 15 v 28** and **John 14 v 28** regarding the subjection of the Son to the Father. (Read also **Hebrews 2 vv 5 - 18**). This subordination is one of relation but NOT of nature. In nature, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are ONE in essential Being, co-equal and co-eternal. Paul, by the Holy Spirit, explained that Jesus, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a slave and was made in the likeness of men. (**Philippians 2 vv 6 - 8**). The logic of man and of Jehovah's Witnesses says that it is impossible for God (the Son) thus to assume a position of subjection to God the Father. But dare you say that anything is too hard for God? In fact, God the Father expressly addresses the Son as God in **Hebrews 1 v 8**.

If one glimpses into the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, one finds the same testimony respecting the Deity of Christ there: **"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty."** (**Rev. 1 v 8**). In case there should be any doubt about the identity of the speaker here, know certainly that it is Jesus. He is the Alpha and Omega (see **Rev. 22 vv 13 - 16**). He is the Almighty. With Thomas we can say, **"My Lord and my God," (John 20 v 28)** and worship Him.

Concerning the Trinity, one cannot find a more explicit reference than **I John 5 v 7: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit: and these three are One,"** and **I John 5 v 20 "...that we know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."**

There are other pointers to the fact of the Trinity. At the baptism of Jesus there was a manifestation of this truth as the three were witnessed together. Jesus, the Son, rose from the water, God the Father spoke from heaven, and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily shape like a dove (**Luke 3 vv 21, 22; Matt 3**

vv 16,17). When Jesus commanded His disciples to baptise new believers, He gave them a Trinitarian instruction to do so **"in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** (**Matt 28 v 19**). When Paul concluded his second Corinthian letter with "The Grace", the formula was again Trinitarian: **"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all."** (**II Cor. 13 v 14**).

Wherever God is operating, there is the Trinity. Thus when Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit into the very lives of believers. He promised, **"If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."** - that is the Trinity. Confirmation of this is provided in **I Corinthians 12 vv 4 - 6** in the matter of spiritual gifts: **"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations but it is the same God which works all in all."** Moreover, if one examines a central belief of the Christian faith - the Resurrection - to discover who raised Jesus from the dead, again one finds the Trinity involved. Jesus said that He had power to lay down His own life and to take it up again. (**John 10 v 18**) The apostles declared that it was God who raised Him from the dead (**Acts 3 v 15; 4 v 10**). In **Romans 8 v 11**, Paul says that it was the Holy Spirit. Which is right? They all are. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One, three Persons, but one in essential Being.

Finally, of great interest in substantiating the Deity of Christ, there are the great **'I Am'** statements of the Gospels. There are several of them but a focus on three of the important occurrences will suffice. The reader must first appreciate the significance of **'I Am'**. This is the great Name of God revealed to Moses in **Exodus 3 vv 14,15**. In other words, when Jesus laid claim to this name, He was testifying to His Deity. To the Jews who questioned His origin, Jesus replied, **"Before Abraham was, I am."** (**John 8 v 58**). Grammatically and logically the sentence is nonsense, but the Jews knew what He meant, for they took up stones to cast at Him. Then in response to the high priest's question whether He were the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, Jesus uttered the simple, but meaningful words, **'I Am'** (**Mark 14 vv 61, 62**), which was more than just a 'Yes' for the Jews began to accuse Him of blasphemy, which indeed it would have been had Jesus not been who He claimed to be. But Matthew had revealed why His name was called Jesus (= God saves) for He was truly Emmanuel - God with us. (**Matthew 1 vv 21 - 23**)

Now what is the importance of a belief that Jesus is God? Why are the Jehovah's Witnesses and other false sects in error when they deny His Deity? It is because only God can save a fallen humanity. **Isaiah** sums it up quite nicely: **"I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no Saviour."** (**Isaiah 43 v 11**) . Luke recorded the angelic announcement, **"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord."** (**Luke Chapter 2 v 11**) If Jesus Christ were not God, then He could not be the Saviour of the world. It is thus written in the Old Testament prophet. Indeed, Jesus said, **"...if you believe not that I am, you shall die in your sins"** (**John 8 v 24**).

It means that the One who loves us and draws us to Himself is God.

The One who saves us is God.

The One who fills us and keeps us is God.

The work of our whole salvation is, therefore, perfect.

Read **John chapters 14,15,16**. Make a note of the verses which say something special to you about the Trinity. Then read **Romans chapter 8** in the same way.