

The Doctrine of The Trinity

By T. P Simmons

I THE TRINITY DEFINED

Perhaps the meaning of the Trinity of God has never been better stated than it is stated by A. H. Strong- "in the nature of the one God there are three eternal distinctions which are represented to us under the figure of persons, and these three are equal" (Systematic Theology, p. 144).

The principles of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary set forth the doctrine of the Trinity as follows: "God is revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being."

In consideration of these definitions, note:

1. THE TRINITY CONSISTS OF THREE DISTINCTIONS.

The doctrine of the Trinity does not mean that God merely manifests Himself in three different ways. There are three actual distinctions in the Godhead. The truth of this will appear more clearly later.

2. THESE THREE DISTINCTIONS ARE ETERNAL.

This is proved, on one hand, by the immutability of God. If there was ever a time when these distinctions did not exist, then when they came to exist God changed. It is proved again by the Scriptures which assert or imply the eternity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. See **Joh 1:1-2**; **Re 22:13-14**; **Heb 9:14**.

John 1:1-2 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God.*

Revelation 22:13-14 *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. 14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

Hebrews 9:14 *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?*

"It is no reply to this, that the expressions 'begotten,' and 'proceedeth from,' involve the idea of the antecedent existence of him who begets, and from whom there is procession. For these are terms of human language, applied to divine actions, and must be understood suitably to God. There is no greater difficulty here than in other cases in which this principle is readily recognized" (Boyce, Abstract of Systematic Theology, pp. 138, 139). Just as there can be logical order without chronological sequence, and just as a cause and its effect can be simultaneous, so we have the eternal Father, the eternal Son, and the eternal Spirit. "If there had been an eternal sun, it is evident that there must have been an eternal sunlight also. Yet an eternal sunlight must have evermore proceeded from the sun. When Cyril was asked whether the Son existed before generation, he answered: 'The generation of the Son did not precede His existence, but He always existed, and that by generation'" (Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 165).

3. THESE THREE DISTINCTIONS ARE REPRESENTED TO US UNDER THE FIGURE OF PERSONS, BUT THERE IS NO DIVISION OF NATURE, ESSENCE, OR BEING.

The doctrine of the Trinity does not mean tritheism. When we speak of the distinctions of the Godhead as persons, we must understand that we use the term figuratively. There are not three persons in the Godhead in the same sense that three human beings are persons. In the case of three human beings there is division of nature, essence, and being; but it is not so with God. Such a conception of God is forbidden by the teaching of the Scripture as to the unity of God.

4. THE THREE MEMBERS OF THE TRINITY ARE EQUAL.

Many of the same attributes are ascribed to each member of the Trinity, and the attributes thus ascribed are such as could not be possessed without all other divine attributes. The equality of the members of the Trinity is further shown by the fact that each one is recognized as God, as we shall see later.

II SCRIPTURAL PROOFS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

1. THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT ARE ALL RECOGNIZED AS GOD.

(1) The Father Recognized as God.

This occurs in such a great number of passages that it is both unnecessary and impracticable to quote all of them. The two following ones will suffice:

"Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for him the Father, even God, hath sealed." {**Joh 6:27**}

"Elect...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." {**1Pe 1:1-2**}

(2) The Son Recognized as God.

A. He is Called God.

Joh 1:1; Ro 9:5; 1Jo 5:20.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Romans 9:5 *Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.*

1 John 5:20 *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may 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.*

B. Old Testament Passages Referring to God are Applied in the New Testament to the Son.

Mt 3:3 alluding to **Isa 40:3**; **Joh 12:41** alluding to **Isa 6:1**.

Matthew 3:3 *For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*

Isaiah 40:3 *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

John 12:41 *These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.*

Isaiah 6:1 *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.*

C. The Son Possesses the Attributes of God.

Eternity: **Joh 1:1**; Omnipresence: **Mt 28:20** and **Eph 1:23**; Omniscience: **Mt 9:4** and **Joh 2:24-25** and **Joh 16:30** and **1Co 4:5** and **Col 2:3**; Omnipotence: **Mt 28:18** and **Re 1:8**; Self-existence: **Joh 5:26**; Immutability. **Heb 13:8**; Truth: **Joh 14:6**; Love: **Joh 8:16**; Holiness: **Lu 1:35** and **Joh 6:39** and **Heb 7:26**.

Eternity: **John 1:1** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Omnipresence: **Matthew 28:20** *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

Omnipresence: **Ephesians 1:23** *Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

Omniscience: **Matthew 9:4** *And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?*

Omniscience: **John 2:24-25** *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

Omniscience: **1 Corinthians 4:5** *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*

Omniscience: **Colossians 2:3** *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Omniscience: **John 16:30** *Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.*

Omnipotence: **Matthew 28:18** *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*

Omnipotence: **Revelation 1:8** *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.*

Self-Existence: **John 5:26** *For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;*

Immutability: **Hebrews 13:8** *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*

Truth: **John 14:6** *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Love: **1 John 4:16** *And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*

Holiness: **Luke 1:35** *And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

Holiness: **John 6:39** *And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.*

Holiness: **Hebrews 7:26** *For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;*

D. The Works of God are Ascribed to the Son.

Creation: **Joh 1:3; 1Co 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:10.** Preservation: **Col 3:17; Heb 1:3.** Raising the dead and judging: **Joh 5:27-28; Mt 25:31-32.**

Creation: **John 1:3** *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

Creation: **1 Corinthians 8:6** *But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.*

Creation: **Colossians 1:16** *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:*

Creation: **Hebrews 1:10** *And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:*

Preservation: **Colossians 1:17** *And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

Preservation: **Hebrews 1:3** *Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the*

word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Raising the dead and judging: **John 5:27-28** *And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. 28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,*

Raising the dead and judging: **Matthew 25:31-32** *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:*

E. He Receives Honor and Worship Due to God Alone.

Joh 5:23; Heb 1:6; 1Co 11:24-25; 2Pe 3:18; 2Ti 4:18.

John 5:23 *That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.*

Hebrews 1:6 *And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*

1 Corinthians 11:24-25 *And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.*

2 Peter 3:18 *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

2 Timothy 4:18 *And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

(3) The Holy Spirit is Recognized as God.

A. The Attributes of God are Ascribed to Him.

Eternity: **Heb 9:14**; Omniscience: **1Co 2:10**; Omnipresence: **Ps 139:7**; Holiness: all passages that apply the term "holy" to the Spirit; Truth: **Joh 16:13**; Love: **Ro 15:30**.

Eternity: **Hebrews 9:14** *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?*

Omniscience: **1 Corinthians 2:10** *But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

Omnipresence: **Psalm 139:7** *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

Holiness: All passages which apply the word "holy" to the Spirit.

Truth: **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 himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*

Love: **Romans 15:30** *Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;*

B. He is Represented as Doing the Works of God.

Creation: **Ge 1:2**; moved mean "brooded;" Regeneration: **Joh 3:8; Tit 3:5**; Resurrection: **Ro 8:11**.

Creation: **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.*

Regeneration: **John 3:8** *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

Regeneration: **Titus 3:5** *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*

Resurrection: **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 FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT ARE ASSOCIATED TOGETHER ON AN EQUAL FOOTING.

This is done-

(1) In the Formula of Baptism. **Mt 28:19**.

(2) In Apostolic Benediction. **2Co 13:14**.

3. THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT ARE DISTINGUISHED FROM ONE ANOTHER.

(1) The Father and Son are Distinguished From Each Other.

The Father and the Son are distinguished as the begetter and begotten; and as the sender and the sent. The distinction between the Father and Son was manifested at the baptism of Jesus when God's voice from Heaven was heard saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." {**Mt 3:17**} Christ distinguished Himself from the Father when He prayed to the Father, as He often did. That the distinction thus implied was not a temporal one, continuing only so long as Christ was In the flesh, is proved by the fact that Christ still intercedes with the Father. {**Heb 7:25; 1Jo 2:1**} He is a perpetual mediator between God and man, {**1Ti 2:5**} and thus is perpetually distinguished from God the Father.

(2) The Spirit is Distinguished from the Father.

The Spirit is distinguished from the Father when He is said to proceed from and to be sent by the Father. {**Joh 15:26; 14:26; Ga 4:6**}

(3) The Son is Distinguished from the Spirit.

Jesus referred to the Spirit as "another Comforter." {**Joh 14:16**} And Jesus spoke of Himself as sending the Spirit. {**Joh 15:26**}

4. THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT ARE ONE GOD.

Trinity means tri-unity, or three-oneness. We have shown that there are three distinctions in the Godhead. Now, in order to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, rather than the doctrine of Tritheism, we must show that the three, while being distinguishable from one another, are yet one. This is proved:

(1) By All Passages Teaching the Unity of God.

The student is referred here to the chapter on the nature and attributes of God, where these passages are noted.

(2) By The Fact that Each One of the Three is Recognized As God.

We have already shown that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are severally recognized as God in the Scripture. This shows their unity, because God is represented as being the supreme being. For that reason there could not be three Gods. Supremacy is possible to only one.

(3) By the Fact that the Three are Equal.

We have already discussed the equality of the members of the Trinity. Absolute equality is impossible without identity of essence, nature, and being.

III THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY IS A MYSTERY INSCRUTABLE AND INSOLUBLE TO FINITE MINDS; BUT IT IS NOT SELF-CONTRADICTIONARY.

We make no attempt to deny or to explain away the mystery of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a high mystery that human minds can never fathom.

Yet the doctrine of the Trinity is not self-contradictory. God is not three in the same sense that He is one. He is one in essence, nature, and being; but in this one essence, nature, and being there are three eternal distinctions that are represented to us in such a way that we call them persons. Who can say that such distinctions are impossible in the nature of God? To do that one would have to have perfect understanding of God's nature. So we do well to accept what the Scripture teaches, and leave the mystery for solution when we have further light, if such light as will enable us to explain and understand it is ever given to us. The mystery comes because of our inability to understand fully the nature of God.

[From **Systematic Study of Bible Doctrine by T.P. Simmons; TPS. 007 Chapter 7 THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY**]