

# The Holy Trinity

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## Introduction

Although the word *trinity* does not appear in the Bible, most Christians have believed it throughout Christian history. The English word is actually a combination of two words, *tri* and *unity*, so that the very term speaks of God as three *eternal* Beings—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—existing in perfect unity and of the same *substance* or nature. This belief in a Trinitarian God views each of the three Beings as sharing precisely the same nature, character, purpose, and will so that it is utterly impossible that there would ever be a disagreement among them. In this way, Christian Trinitarianism can correctly be identified as a monotheistic view of God despite accusations of polytheism by rabbinical Judaism and Islam.

Nevertheless, through the centuries there have been four basic challenges to Trinitarianism by Christians themselves in addition to a more recent one. After identifying and briefly describing each of these alternative views, our attention will focus on the relevant Biblical evidence, beginning with the Old Testament and ending with the New Testament. Finally, we will look at how logic supports our Scriptural findings and end with a concluding statement about the subordination, both apparent and real, of Jesus to God the Father.

## Adoptionism

Adoptionism is the view that Jesus was only a man but that God adopted Him as the Son of God at His resurrection because of Christ's extraordinary character and superlative ministry. Thus, there is only one Being called God, and the doctrine of the Trinity was considered unbiblical. The earliest known document to make this argument was the *Shepherd of Hermas*, usually considered to have been written in Rome about A.D. 150. While different forms of this understanding have arisen over the centuries, it was never a major threat to the Trinitarian position.

## Tritheism

Tritheism is the view that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each separate Gods, which makes this

position essentially the same as pagan polytheism (i.e., belief in many gods). Tritheism made its first appearance sometime in the late second or very early third century and was soundly rejected by the vast majority of Christian leaders.

### **Modalism**

Modalism gets its name from the view that there is only one divine Being called God, who has expressed Himself at various times in three different modes, as Father, as Son, or as the Holy Spirit. This position is also called Sabellianism because a Christian thinker named Sabellius is credited with espousing this view at Rome during the early third, although he was not actually the first to do so. Monarchianism is yet another name for this teaching because its advocates sought to protect the monarchy of one God.

### **Arianism**

This view was named after Arius, a church leader in Alexandria, Egypt. Early in the fourth century Arius began teaching that there is only one Being called God, or Father, and that Jesus was a created being, therefore subordinate to God. Jesus occupied the preeminent position in creation because He was the first created being, who then created everything else in the universe. Arius' position caused much controversy in the Church, who finally rejected his views officially at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, which produced the famous Nicene Creed, declaring that Jesus was of the same substance as the Father and had always existed eternally with Him. Unitarianism and the Jehovah's Witnesses are the most famous modern expressions of Arian theology, with the latter group referring to Jesus as a lesser God on the basis of their interpretation of John 1:1 (see our own exposition of John 1:1 later in this paper).

### **Possible Misunderstanding**

There is one other possible challenge to the traditional view of the Triune God. As far as we know this has not been advocated by any scholar, but we mention it as a possible erroneous belief. This possible view is that while Jesus as the Son of God and/or the Holy Spirit is of the same spiritual *substance* (nature) as the Father, God the Father is the only Being in the Godhead who is eternal. At the earliest moment in Creation, the Father created the Son and/or the Holy Spirit out of His *substance* (nature). This means that the Son's and/or the Holy Spirit's *substance* has existed eternally in the Father but that the distinct Person of the Son and/or the Holy Spirit is not eternal. However, common sense tells us that God cannot take any portion of His *substance* (nature) and create anyone or anything from it because that would subtract from His own *substance* (nature) so

that He would be less God. Therefore, we deduce that God's nature is indivisible.

## **Old Testament Evidence for the Holy Trinity**

### Messiah as God

If the Old Testament teaches the doctrine of the Trinity, or at least allows for it, then we would expect some clear indications of the Messiah's divine nature. Of course, as Christians we accept that Jesus is the Messiah of the Old Testament promises. Therefore, when the nature of the Old Testament Messiah is discussed below, this naturally applies to Jesus.

#### *Psalms 45:6-7*

Psalms 45:6-7 addresses an unnamed king who is *anointed* by God. Significantly, the Hebrew word for *Messiah* means *anointed one*. Note carefully that the words *throne*, *scepter*, and *kingdom* in this passage refer to this anointed king rather than to God, as verse 7 makes clear. Then note that this anointed king himself is called *God* in verse 6. Obviously, this is a reference to the end-time Messiah-King because His throne will last *forever and ever* (v. 6). Therefore the Messiah is also God Himself.

#### *Psalms 110*

Christians and Jews widely understand that Psalms 110 refers to the Messiah. Not only does verse 4 picture him as a priest *forever*, making him God because only God lives forever in the present tense, but verse 1 declares him to be King David's lord (*my Lord*—David wrote this psalm). Only a divine being (i.e., God) could be King David's Lord because no one else possessed authority over David. Furthermore, David's Lord is pictured as sitting at the right hand of YHWH (Jehovah), the first *Lord* in the verse, occupying a position of divine authority. Thus, the Messiah is God as well as man.

#### *Isaiah 9:6-7*

Isaiah 9:6-7 speaks of a king on *the throne of David* whose kingdom will last forever, and he is called *Mighty God* and *Everlasting Father*. This is, therefore, the Messiah-King, and with those titles, He must also be God.

### *Isaiah 53:1-12*

Isaiah 53:1-12 refers to the *Lord's Servant* who will astonish kings (cf. Isaiah 52:13-15 for the context). Again, this is widely understood by most Jews and Christians to refer to the Messiah. The prophesied actions of the Messiah in chapter 53 include the following: (1) he would be *wounded for our transgressions* (v. 5); (2) his suffering would be the cause of spiritual healing for humans (v. 5); (3) God will place on him everyone's sins (v. 6); (4) he will be an offering for sin (v. 10); (5) he will *justify* (i.e., declare righteous) many by bearing their sins (v. 11); and (6) he will *make intercession for the transgressors* (v. 12). Only of a divine Being (i.e., God) could these things be said for no ordinary man is sufficiently righteous or holy to accomplish them.

### *Micah 5:2*

Micah 5:2 predicts that a future ruler in Israel will arise from Bethlehem of Judea, and his *goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*. Obviously, this future king is the Messiah because of the great importance attached to Him. And that importance involves the fact that He is an everlasting being, which means He is God.

### *Conclusion*

The Hebrew Scriptures prophesy of a future, last-day king who would bring everlasting righteousness and peace to Israel/Judah. This king is *the Anointed, or the Messiah*. He will serve as King, Priest, and Prophet, reflecting the reality that He will be both a political leader (king) and a spiritual leader (priest and prophet). As a spiritual leader, He will have to suffer and die as a sacrifice for all mankind's sins, a sacrifice which will provide the basis for God's work of justifying those who belong to Him. Obviously, since the Messiah's political kingdom will be everlasting, the implicit meaning is that He will then be resurrected after His sacrifice. These Scriptures also teach that He will be unique among men in that he will both be a man (descended from King David) and God. In other words, the Messiah is God who will become incarnated as a man, the God-Man.

### God Consists of More Than One Being

The Old Testament teaching that the Messiah will be both human and divine is consistent with, but does not prove, the doctrine of the holy Trinity. In this and the subsequent section, we will see that the Old Testament does in fact provide strong indications of a triune God.

### *Genesis 1-3*

In the creation account of Genesis 1 the word *God* appears more than 30 times. In each case, it is translated from the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which is the plural form for God. Note that Biblical Hebrew has a singular, dual, and plural (three or more), so that the word *God* in the very first chapter of the Old Testament points to God as consisting of three or more Beings. Rabbinical Judaism and other anti-Trinitarian scholars have stated that this use of the plural for God is simply the majesty of plural, or majestic plural, much the same as an editorial may often use *we* when the writer is literally referring only to himself. However, historical evidence suggests that the majestic plural was unknown to the ancient Hebrews. Moreover, the evidence in Genesis 1-3 refutes this suggestion because of the following two statements:

*Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness' (Genesis 1:26).*

*Then the Lord God [Elohim] said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil' (Genesis 3:22).*

Two suggestions have been made concerning the plural pronouns *Us* and *Our* in the above texts. The first is that the singular God was referring to angels in both verses. The second is that the singular God was referring to Himself, man, and woman as the *parents* of all future human beings in Genesis 1:26. However, both of these theories fail the credibility test. First, Genesis 1:27 states that man was made in the image of God, not angels. Besides, angels must be created beings, so they cannot create life. Second, there is no clue in the context of either passage that God is talking to anyone other than Himself. Finally, the theory of a three-fold parentage could not apply to Adam and Eve, whom God created as the first human beings because He did not create them until after the statement in question in verse 26 (see v. 27), after which He instructs them to multiply themselves on the earth (v. 28).

Therefore, the use of the plural pronouns in these passages in Genesis 1 and 3 make it clear that the use of *Elohim* in this entire section of Genesis is not a majestic plural, but a reference to the plurality of three or more Beings in the one God. Then compare these passages with Genesis 11:7, where the Lord is quoted as saying, *Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language*. In the context of verses 5-9, because it was only the Lord who did this, the Lord could only be talking to Himself when He used the pronoun *Us*.

### *Deuteronomy 6:4*

This passage represents what rabbinical Judaism calls the *Shema*, which means *hear*, and is interpreted to mean that God is an absolute sole unity of one Being: *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!* However, this very text which is used to stress that God is an absolute monotheistic God of one Being uses the plural form for God. Also significant is the Hebrew word which is translated in the passage as *one*. That word, *echad*, represents a compound unity in which two or more entities are reckoned as one. Other examples in the Hebrew Scriptures include Genesis 2:24, where the man and woman in marriage are said to *become one [echad] flesh*, and Genesis 11:6, where at the Tower of Babel *the people are one [echad]*. The Old Testament uses another word, *yachid*, to represent an absolute sole unity of one. For example, in Genesis 22:2, God told Abraham to *Take now your son, your only [yachid] son*. This was a reference to his son Isaac. Although his son Ishmael was still living, he and his mother had been sent out of the camp and out of Abraham's life before this incident (see chapter 21). Thus, Isaac was the only son Abraham had left to him. Therefore, Deuteronomy 6:4's use of the plural word for God along with the word *echad* means that three or more Beings are united as one God.

### *Psalms 2*

Psalms 2 is clearly a Messianic psalm because it refers to the Lord's *anointed* who is also His king that will establish the *earth* for his kingdom and eventually bring judgment against the nations. Of course, we have already established the fact that the Messiah is both man and God. In this light, Psalm 2:7 provides additional evidence to support the proposition that God consists of more than one Being: *The Lord (YHWH) has said to Me, 'You are My Son....'* By God calling the divine Messiah His Son, we know that God consists of more than one Being.

### God Consists of Three Beings

#### *Isaiah 48:16*

The last part of this text reads, *And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me*. However, in the original Hebrew the verb is singular (*has*). Furthermore, the Hebrew word order is consistent with the singular verb, so that the text should actually read, *And now the Lord God has sent Me and His Spirit*. According to verses 12-13, the person here referred to by the pronoun *Me* is clearly a divine Being for He says of Himself that He is the First and the Last (eternal) and that He was associated with creation. Then the association of *Spirit* with a personal Being (*Me*) strongly implies that the Spirit is also a personal divine Being. Therefore, this text is strong evidence that God consists of a

trinity of three personal Beings.

### *Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 63:7-10*

From these two Old Testament passages, we can now deduce the titles of the three Beings Who make up the one [*echad*] God. Psalm 2:7, as already noted above, speaks of the divine Messiah as God's [YHWH] Son. We can logically infer from this designation that the other Being in the passage is the Father because you cannot have two Beings in a relationship in which one is called the Son without the other one being called the Father. Of course, in God's case, these terms are certainly not equivalent to the relationship of a *human* father and son. Although the Son is also called the Everlasting Father in Isaiah 9:6, this must only mean that He is equal to the Father because of the implicit testimony of Psalm 2:7. Then Isaiah 63:10 speaks of God's people grieving God's Holy Spirit (note the context of vv. 7-10). The argument that the Holy Spirit is simply the spirit or influence of God is untenable because only a personal Being can be grieved. Therefore, God's Holy Spirit is another Being making up the one [*echad*] God.

### **Conclusion of the Old Testament Evidence**

There is no doubt from a careful reading of the Old Testament that the emphasis on one [*echad*] God (e.g., Deuteronomy 6:4) was designed to distinguish Israel from the pagan religions they encountered, which were all polytheistic in nature. At the same time, we are left with the conclusion that at the very least the Old Testament points in the direction of a plurality of three divine Beings in a composite unity of one God. Moreover, these Scriptures cast a shadowy outline of these three divine Beings as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, titles which surely denote the primary function which each One performs in relation to humanity. Thus, the Father is portrayed as sending His Son and His Holy Spirit, the Son to be the incarnate Messiah King, Priest, and Prophet (and Savior as in Isaiah 53), and the Holy Spirit to be the One who influences and empowers people to do God's will.

### **New Testament Evidence for the Holy Trinity**

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also emphasizes the oneness, or monotheistic nature, of God. For example, I Corinthians 8:4-6 states that *there is no other God but one* (v. 4) and *there is one God* (v. 6). Galatians 3:20 declares that *God is one*. And I Timothy 2:5 states, *there is one God*. Compare also John 17:3, I Timothy 1:17, and James 2:19. At the same time, the New Testament teaches that three different personal Beings make up this one God, as we will demonstrate below.

## The Father is God

The following list of passages illustrates the truth that the New Testament declares the Father in heaven to be God:

- *Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: ‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’* (John 17:1-3).
- *To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 1:7).
- *yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him* (I Corinthians 8:6).
- *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Philippians 2:11).
- *elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father* (I Peter 1:2).

## The Son (Jesus) is God

This section demonstrates the New Testament teaching that the Son (Jesus) is God.

*Jesus accepted the Titles of “Son of God” and “God”*

- When Simon Peter called Jesus *the Son of the living God*, Jesus blessed him for it (Matthew 16:16-17).
- When Nathaniel called Jesus *the Son of God*, Jesus approved of his belief (John 1:49-51).
- When Martha also called Jesus *the Son of God*, Jesus did not rebuke her (John 11:27-28).
- Thomas called Jesus *God*, to which Jesus gave His obvious approval (John 20:26-29).

### *The “I am” Statements show that Jesus Claimed to be God*

- Jesus invoked Abraham’s name and declared to Jewish leaders that *before Abraham was, I AM*, which prompted those same leaders to attempt to stone Jesus on the spot (John 8:56-59) because they knew that He had thereby stated that He was God who spoke to Moses in the burning bush episode (cf. Exodus 3:14).
- In talking to Martha, Jesus boldly claimed that *I am the resurrection and the life...And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die* (John 11:25-26), which was obviously a claim that He embodied the very substance or energy of eternal life.
- Jesus once declared to His disciples, *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me* (John 14:6), which associated Him with the way to salvation, and the personification of truth and life themselves.

### *Jesus accepted Worship as God*

- When Jesus’ disciples worshiped Him as the Son of God, Jesus gave them no rebuke (Matthew 14:33), despite His knowledge of and previous reference to the Jewish Scriptures which reserve worship only for God (Matthew 4:10; cf. Deuteronomy 6:13-15).
- Late in Jesus’ ministry, His disciples again knelt down before Jesus and worshiped Him without any rebuke from Him (Matthew 28:9), despite the prohibition in Jewish Scripture of bowing down and worshiping anything or anyone other than God (see Exodus 20:3-5).
- Jesus Himself admonished everyone to honor Him in the same way that they honor the divine Father (John 5:23).

### *Jesus Claimed Equality with God by certain Direct Statements*

- At the religious trial of Jesus, He acknowledged that He was *the Son of the Blessed*, and associated Himself with God’s power and future coming, which resulted in the high priest tearing his clothes as a sign of disgust at what was considered blasphemy by Jesus (Mark 14:60-64).
- Jesus’ references to *My Father’s house* (John 2:16; 14:2) and *My Father* (Matthew 7:21; John 5:17-18; 8:19; 15:23) is a claim to be the divine Son of God. Note the Jewish reaction

in John 5:18, which demonstrates their understanding of what Jesus was saying—*My Father* as opposed to *our Father*.

- Jesus' statements that *he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me* (John 12:45) and *He who has seen Me has seen the Father* (John 14:9) clearly identify His claim as one who was equal with God the Father.
- When Jesus declared that *I and My Father are one* (John 10:30), Jewish critics knew instantly that He had thereby claimed to be God (John 10:31-33).
- Jesus' critics who heard Him directly tell people that their sins were forgiven knew that Jesus was claiming to be God (Mark 2:5-7; Luke 7:48-50) because Jewish Scriptures teach that only God can forgive sins (Isaiah 43:25).

#### *Other New Testament Persons Taught that Jesus was God*

- *Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, God with us* (Matthew 1:23).
- *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1).

In this text, the *Word* clearly refers to Jesus, as shown by the statement in verse 14 that *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. Jehovah Witnesses and other anti-Trinitarians view Jesus as a created being, specifically as a lesser god to the one, singular Being they call God. John 1:1 is their favorite text to defend that belief, which they translate in the following manner: *In [the] beginning was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god*. Because the second Greek word for *God* in the text does not have the definite article (*the*) preceding it, they maintain that it should therefore be translated as *a God* rather than merely *God*.

In adopting this translation, Jehovah Witnesses actually give support to two historical heresies. First, it represents dualism, or polytheism, by teaching that there are at least two gods. Second, it is reminiscent of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism, the teaching that since matter was inherently evil, God could not even touch it. Thus, to create the universe, He had to use one or more emanations, or lesser gods, from Himself, until finally the last of these emanations or gods did the actual creating of the material universe. That is, He was sufficiently far removed from God that he could afford to get his “hands” dirty by creating matter. Without further comment on those heresies, we will confine ourselves to an examination of the Greek text of John 1:1 to demonstrate that this interpretation does

not hold up under the light of the facts.

First, the opening clause in the Greek text is literally translated as follows: *In beginning was the Word*. In other words, the definite article *the* does not precede the word for *beginning* in the original Greek text. If the definite article were there, that would imply that it was a specific, or particular, beginning or point in time, as *in the beginning* of the creation of the world (Genesis 1:1). Although the absence of the definite article in New Testament Greek sometimes necessitates that the English translator add the indefinite article *a*, *in a beginning* would make no sense. This means, in harmony with Greek grammar, that the word *beginning* is being highlighted for its own inherent quality. And the immediate context provides the reason for this. Verse 3 declares that *all things* were made through, or by, the Word. Philosophically, we know that space and time, the very fabric of the universe itself, must have been created. If the Word (Jesus) created time and space, then the phrase *in beginning* must refer back before the beginning of time. In other words, it refers to infinity or eternity, so that an appropriate translation would be *in eternity the Word existed*. Verse 2 repeats the same truth by again omitting the definite article before the word *beginning*, so that it literally reads, *He was [existed] in beginning [eternity] with God*.

Second, our conclusion in the preceding paragraph is confirmed by the verb translated as *was* in the first clause of the text: *In the beginning was the Word*. It is a form of the verb *to be* and implies a continued state of existence. In other words, in eternity past, Jesus was [existed]. This is made even more significant by the fact that in verse 14, it is said that Jesus, as the Word, *became* flesh. This means that Jesus existed in the infinite, or eternal, past, but at a specific point in time and space, He became a human being.

Third, in the last clause of the text, the word *God* does not have the definite article *the*. If it did have this article, then the clause would have to be translated in one of two different ways: (1) *and God was the Word* or (2) *the Word was the God*. In either case, the Word would be identical to God so that they would be one and the same Being. And that would violate the clear meaning of the second clause in the text: *and the Word was with God*—a statement which plainly teaches that the Word and God are two different Beings. This leaves us with two choices for translating this last clause. Either it should be translated as *and the Word was a God* as many anti-Trinitarians do, or it should be translated as *and the Word was God*. The former cannot be a proper translation because it clearly teaches a dualistic or polytheistic view of God, something the entire Bible emphatically abhors. Therefore, the latter must be the correct translation, in which case the absence of the definite article highlights the inherent quality of the word *God*, just as its absence with *beginning* in the first clause served to highlight the inherent quality of that word. In other words, Jesus, as the Word, possesses all the qualities, or the very nature, of God. This truth is underscored most plainly by Paul's

statement in Colossians 2:9: *For in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily [in bodily form].*

- *Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:18).*
- *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28). Note that although Jesus is not specifically mentioned here, it was obviously Jesus who shed His blood for us; thus, Jesus and God the Father are so united that the former's shed blood can be called God's blood.*
- *of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen (Romans 9:5).*
- *who [Christ Jesus], being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6-7).*
- *looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).*
- *But to the Son He [God the Father] says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever' (Hebrews 1:8).*
- *To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:1).*

#### *Other Evidence that Jesus is God*

- He is said to have Equal Glory and Honor with God (the Father)—James 1:1; Jude 1, 21.
- He possesses an Eternal Nature (Colossians 1:15-18). [Since by *Him (Christ) all things were created....And He is before all things*, then He must have existed before anything else existed; thus He is eternal.]; Revelation 22:12-16 [The fact that Jesus is *the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last* (v. 12) means that He is eternal,

because Revelation 1:8 connects this same phraseology to the statement *who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*, and the latter clauses refer to the fact that God has always existed.]

## **The Holy Spirit is God**

### The Holy Spirit is a Personal Being

Throughout the centuries, there have been some believers who have viewed the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force or influence, a kind of “Star Wars” force operating in the universe, except only for good. But the testimony of the New Testament is that the Holy Spirit is a personal Being. First, He is referred to with the masculine pronoun instead of the neuter pronoun in John 14:26 and 16:8, 13-15. Second, the following is a list of numerous things that the Holy Spirit can do or that can be done to Him, and none of these would be appropriate if the Holy Spirit were an impersonal force or influence:

- He can be blasphemed against (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:10).
- He can be lied to (Acts 5:3).
- He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30).
- He can be insulted (Hebrews 10:29).
- He comforts (John 14:16, 26; the Greek word for *Helper* actually means *Comforter*).
- He teaches (John 14:26).
- He glorifies Jesus (John 16:14).
- He speaks (Acts 13:2; 28:25; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)
- He supervises (Acts 16:6-7; 20:28).
- He makes intercession for our prayers (Romans 8:26).
- He has a mind (Romans 8:27).

### The Holy Spirit is God

- *Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit....You have not lied to men but to God* (Acts 5:3-4).
- *how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God...?* (Hebrews 9:14; Since the Holy Spirit is *eternal*, He must be God).

## Three Beings in One God

Since the New Testament, in different ways, calls the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit each God, and yet emphasizes a monotheistic view of God as well, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is implied. But what seals this truth is that the New Testament also speaks, in a variety of ways, of all three together in an equal setting. Before listing these passages, however, it may be important to say that most of I John 5:7, often used to prove the Holy Trinity, almost certainly was not part of the original Greek text: *For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.* Therefore, this text should not be used to support the Trinitarian view of God.

The following passages from the New Testament place the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit together on an equal plane so as to provide conclusive evidence for the triune God:

- *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* (Matthew 28:19). Note that the word *name* is singular, which means that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three Beings in complete unity or oneness.
- *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). Note that the Holy Spirit, the Highest, and the Son of God represent three different Beings.
- *When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased'* (Luke 3:21-22). Note that Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Father (implied because the voice from heaven calls Jesus His Son) are the three Beings spoken of as equal.
- *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* (I Corinthians 12:4-6). Note that the Spirit, the Lord, and God are each listed in the same relative position in their respective sentences.
- *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen* (II Corinthians 13:14).

- *For through Him [Christ, see v. 13] we both have access by one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2:18).*
- *For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man (Ephesians 3:14-16).*
- *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption....And be kind to one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:30-32).*
- *be filled with the Spirit...singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:18-20).*
- *For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3).*
- *remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father...and in the Holy Spirit (I Thessalonians 1:3-5).*
- *in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit (I Thessalonians 5:18-19).*
- *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 (II Thessalonians 2:13-14).*
- *But 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 (Titus 3:4-6).*
- *how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself*

*without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* (Hebrews 9:14).

- *elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ* (I Peter 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).

### Two Additional Facts Place the Three on an Equal Plane

- According to John 3:3-17, the Holy Spirit regenerates (vv. 3-12), the Son redeems (vv. 13-15), and the Father reveals His love (v. 16-17), all in the same process of saving mankind.
- All three Beings of the Godhead are portrayed as having raised Jesus Christ from the dead: (a) God the Father (Acts 2:24; 13:30; Romans 6:4), (b) the Son Himself (John 2:19-21; 10:17-18), and (c) the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11; I Peter 3:18).

### **Logic and the Holy Trinity**

I John 4:8, 16 declare the unique Christian view that *God is love*. The other major monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, both agree that God loves and is loving toward His spiritual children. But Christianity goes farther by emphatically declaring that God is the very Personification of love; He *is* Love. This understanding is crucial to the doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed, it actually requires this doctrine.

First, love exists only in a relationship. Although people often speak about loving themselves or food and other objects, true love exists only in a relationship in which each participant loves back. Second, since genuine love is selfless in giving oneself to another, the love relationship is, by definition, intimate. And since God is infinitely perfect, He must exist in an infinitely perfect intimate relationship with Himself. Third, the most intimate relationship known to man is the marriage relationship, which makes it the best analogy, albeit imperfect, to God as love. The number of this intimate relationship is three: a husband, a wife, and the relationship between them itself. Each marriage partner in a good marriage does things for the other one, and avoids certain behaviors, because of the relationship they possess. We even speak of *having* a relationship. That relationship, or the spirit that bonds them together, causes each one to do things that he or she would not

otherwise do. Therefore, although an intangible thing, the relationship between them is a kind of third entity. Thus, the number of an intimate relationship is three.

Since God exists in an infinitely perfect intimate relationship with Himself, there must be three entities. Unlike the human marriage relationship, however, God is eternal, which means He existed before all matter, energy, time, or space came into existence. As a result, the relationship in the Godhead itself must also be eternal. But since nothing is eternal that is not God, then the relationship itself must be a divine Being. Thus, there must be three Beings existing as one God. In other words, logic guided by Scripture supports the complete testimony of Scripture in declaring that God exists as the Holy Trinity.

## **Conclusion**

Our study of the doctrine of the Trinity illustrates the inadequacy of human language to fully explain deep theological truths. Many Christians have stumbled on this doctrine by pointing to the human language that portrays Jesus as obeying His Father's will and as having received authority from God the Father as proof that Jesus is inherently subordinate to the Father. Perhaps the strongest such statement is found in John 5:30: *I can of Myself do nothing....I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.* This kind of language was one of the contributing factors in the development of the alternate views identified at the beginning of this paper. Yet these passages must be interpreted in the light of those implicit and explicit passages that demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus was equal with God the Father.

The only Biblical way to resolve the tension between these two groups of texts is to understand that although Jesus is inherently equal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, all three equal members of the Holy Trinity agreed to function in different ways in their relationships with mankind. In human language, it is natural to speak of a divine Father who remains in heaven as sending His Son to represent Him and a Spirit to influence and empower people to live holy lives. How else could human beings understand the inner workings of the Trinity on man's behalf? The very existence and nature of God is beyond any created being's ability to fully grasp because God is infinite and every creature is finite. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Bible writers had to use human metaphors to describe God and His interactions on behalf of humanity.

Beyond this, there is an additional reason for the language depicting Christ's subordination to the Father. Jesus is called *the last Adam* (I Corinthians 15:45; cf. Romans 5:14) because, as mankind's Substitute, He took the place of Adam as the representative of the human race and gained the victory that Adam failed to achieve in his spiritual encounter with Satan (Genesis 3). It is this victory that

Jesus obtained in His life, in addition to His atoning death, which made it possible for all who enter into a relationship with Him to get credit for His righteousness and be eternally saved in God's kingdom.

In gaining the spiritual victory as our Substitute, Jesus had to face Satan with the same power that Adam could have faced him with in the Garden of Eden. That is to say, just as Adam had to rely on divine power outside himself (although he did not do so) because he was not intrinsically divine himself, Jesus had to rely on divine power outside Himself. If Jesus had used His *own* divine power, then He really could not justifiably be called *the last Adam*. Moreover, according to I Peter 2:21 and I John 2:3-6, Jesus was our Example as well as our Substitute. As such, He would have set an impossible example *if* He had used His own divine power to meet sin and temptation because none of us has divine power intrinsically within us; only as we cooperate with God the Holy Spirit do we have access to divine power. In other words, in His *human* nature, Jesus was as subordinate to the Father's will and authority and as dependent upon the Holy Spirit as we are, for only in this way could He have been our Example.

The evidence described in this paper, both Biblical and philosophical, provides sound support for the traditional Christian teaching that the singular God exists as three Beings in a composite unity sharing the same divine nature, character, personality, and will. God is singular yet triune.