

# Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 231

## THE TRIUNE GOD

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*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and  
the love of God, and the communion  
of the Holy Ghost, be with  
you all. Amen.*

2 Corinthians 13:14

### Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,  
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,  
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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## The Triune God

# 231

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# THE MOST MYSTERIOUS DOCTRINE

Loraine Boettner (1901-1990)

**T**HE doctrine of the Trinity is perhaps the most mysterious and difficult doctrine that is presented to us in the entire range of Scripture. Consequently, we do not presume to give a full explanation of it. In the nature of the case, we can know only as much concerning the inner nature of the Godhead as has been revealed to us in the Scriptures.

The tri-personality of God is exclusively a truth of revelation,<sup>1</sup> and one that lies outside the realm of natural reason. Its height and depth and length and breadth are immeasurable by reason of the fact that the finite is dealing with the Infinite. As well might we expect to confine the ocean within a teacup as to place a full explanation of the nature of God within the limits of our feeble human minds... We do hope, however, that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we shall be enabled to set forth the truth concerning it in a plain, simple way—yet as fully as the limitations of our finite minds and language will permit—and to guard it against the errors and heresies that have prevailed at one time or another in the history of the Church...

Since in the study of this doctrine we are absolutely dependent on revelation (there being nothing else quite similar to or analogous<sup>2</sup> with it in our own consciousness or in the material world), and since the subject of our study is transcendently<sup>3</sup> sacred—that subject being the innermost nature of the infinitely righteous and transcendent God—our attitude should be that of disciples who, with true humility and reverence, are ready to receive implicitly whatever God has seen fit to reveal.

Since God is the Creator, Preserver, and final Disposer of all things, the One in Whom we live and move and have our being (Act 17:28), our knowledge of Him must be basic and fundamental to all our knowledge. In answer to the question, “What is God?”, the Scriptures reveal Him to us in the first place as a rational<sup>4</sup> and righteous Spirit, infinite in His attributes of wisdom, being, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. In the second place, they reveal Him to us as One Who exists eternally as three “persons,” these three persons, however, being one in substance and existing in the most perfect unity of thought and purpose. It is evident, moreover, that if God does thus exist in three persons, each of Whom has

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<sup>1</sup> **revelation** – the 66 books of the Bible and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> **analogous** – bearing some resemblance.

<sup>3</sup> **transcendently** – in a manner that goes beyond the range of human experience.

<sup>4</sup> **rational** – having the mental power of reason.

His distinctive part in the works of creation, providence, redemption, and grace, that fact governs His activity in all spheres of His work and, consequently, the doctrine that treats of the nature of His person must seriously affect all true theology and philosophy. Doctrines vital to the Christian system, such as those of the deity and person of Christ,<sup>5</sup> the incarnation, the atonement, etc., are so inextricably<sup>6</sup> interwoven with that of the tri-unity of God that they cannot be properly understood apart from it.

We should notice that the doctrine of the Trinity is the distinctive mark of the Christian religion, setting it apart from all the other religions of the world. Working without the benefit of the revelations made in Scripture, men have, it is true, arrived at some limited truths concerning the nature and person of God. The pagan religions, as well as all philosophical speculations, are based on natural religion and can, therefore, rise to no higher conception than that of the unity of God. In some systems, we find monotheism<sup>7</sup> with its belief in only one God. In others, we find polytheism<sup>8</sup> with its belief in many separate gods. But none of the pagan religions nor any of the systems of speculative philosophy have ever arrived at a trinitarian conception of God. The fact of the matter is that apart from supernatural revelation there is nothing in human consciousness or experience that can give man the slightest clue to the distinctive God of the Christian faith—the triune, incarnate, redeeming, sanctifying God...

It may be well to remind ourselves that man's knowledge of God has been progressive. The most general revelation of the existence of God has been given through nature and is therefore common to all men. The existence of God is an intuitive<sup>9</sup> truth universally accepted by the unprejudiced mind. Man knows himself to be dependent and responsible, and therefore posits<sup>10</sup> the One on Whom he is dependent and to Whom he is responsible. He [ascribes] to this One in an eminent degree all of the good qualities that he finds in himself, and thus comes to know God as a personal Spirit—infinite, eternal, and perfect in His attributes.<sup>11</sup>

The second stage in the revelation concerning the nature and attributes of God was that given through the Old Testament period. There a great advance is made over the revelation given through man's intuition and through nature, and God is disclosed as particularly the God of grace and the redeemer of sinners.

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<sup>5</sup> See FGB 230, *The Deity of Christ*, 219, *The Person of Christ*, and 227, *The Atonement*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>6</sup> **inextricably** – beyond all possibility of being disentangled.

<sup>7</sup> **monotheism** – the belief that there is only one God.

<sup>8</sup> **polytheism** – belief in or worship of many gods.

<sup>9</sup> **intuitive** – feeling something to be true without the need for conscious reasoning.

<sup>10</sup> **posits** – affirms the existence of.

<sup>11</sup> See A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

The third stage, the one in which at present we are particularly interested, is that given in the New Testament, in which God is represented as existing in a trinity of persons, each of Whom performs a distinctive part in the works of creation, providence, and redemption. As Dr. Warfield<sup>12</sup> has pointed out:

“The elements of the plan of salvation are rooted in the mysterious nature of the Godhead, in which there coexists a trinal<sup>13</sup> distinction of persons with absolute unity of essence; and the revelation of the Trinity was accordingly incidental to the execution of this plan of salvation, in which the Father sent the Son to be the propitiation<sup>14</sup> for sin, and the Son, when He returned to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, sent the Spirit to apply His redemption to men. The disclosure of this fundamental fact of the divine nature, therefore, lagged until the time had arrived for the actual working out of the long-promised redemption; and it was accomplished first of all in fact rather than in word, by the actual appearance of God the Son on earth and the subsequent manifestations of the Spirit, Who was sent forth to act as His representative in His absence.”<sup>15</sup>

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**Loraine Boettner (1901-1990):** American Presbyterian theologian; born in Linden, Missouri.



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<sup>12</sup> **Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield** (1851-1921) – Presbyterian theologian at Princeton Seminary 1887-1921.

<sup>13</sup> **trinal** – threefold; consisting in three parts.

<sup>14</sup> **propitiation** – sin offering that turns away wrath; appeasement.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Studies in Theology*, Vol. 9, 113.

# OVERVIEW OF THE TRINITY

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

**T**HE word *trinity* is not found in the Bible,<sup>1</sup> but the doctrine of the Trinity is there. The word *trinity* means the unity of three, that is, the unity of the three divine persons.<sup>2</sup>

The word *person*, when used on this subject, does not mean a separate individual, but a distinct subsistence.<sup>3</sup> It denotes a distinction in the divine Being [that is] real, but inexplicable.<sup>4</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity has had many enemies. The Arians<sup>5</sup> contended that the Son of God was totally and essentially distinct from the Father, and so in nature and dignity inferior to the Father. They also taught that the Holy Ghost was not God, but was created by the power of Jesus Christ. The Sabellians<sup>6</sup> denied that there was more than one person in the Godhead and said that the Son and the Spirit were mere virtues or functions of divinity. The

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<sup>1</sup> Some believers have difficulty understanding why theologians use terms that are not found in Scripture. “Part of the problem for the ordinary Christian may be that in its debates and struggles, the ancient Church was forced to use extrabiblical terms to defend biblical concepts. This was necessary because heretics misused the Bible to support their erroneous ideas. Athanasius [c. 296-374] provides a glimpse of what happened at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), when the assembled bishops rejected the claim of Arius that the Son was not eternal, but was created by God, Who thereby became His Father. Originally, the statement was proposed to the Council that the Son came “from God.” This meant that He was not from some other source, nor was He a creature. However, those who sympathized with Arius [see *Arians* below] agreed to the phrase, since in their eyes, all creatures came from God. Consequently, the council was forced to look for a word that excluded all possibility of an Arian interpretation. Biblical language could not resolve the issue, for the conflict was over the meaning of biblical language in the first place.” (Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 1-2)

<sup>2</sup> **trinity** – from the Latin *trinitas*, which means “threeness.” Trinity means “tri-unity” or “three-in-oneness.”

<sup>3</sup> **subsistence** – technical word that means a personal mode of existence of the divine substance. Therefore, in the Godhead, there is only one *substance* (*essence*) but three *subsistences* (*persons*).

<sup>4</sup> **inexplicable** – unable to be explained or understood.

<sup>5</sup> **Arians** – followers of Arius, a bishop of Alexandria (AD 256-336), an antitrinitarian who taught that the Son is the first and greatest of created beings, but not equal to the Father in his attributes: While theologians usually understand *divine* and *deity* as synonymous, Arius described the Son as divine—“*like* God”—but not *deity*—“truly God.” Jehovah’s Witnesses are an example of modern day Arians.

<sup>6</sup> **Sabellians** – followers of Sabellius (early 3<sup>rd</sup> century), a Roman theologian who denied the Trinity, teaching that God is only one person Who acted out three different roles—first as Father (Creator), then as Son (Redeemer), and finally as Spirit (Giver of regeneration and sanctification). Sabellianism, also known as Monarchianism and Modalism, laid the groundwork for the later heresies of Socinianism and Unitarianism (see footnotes 7 & 8). Oneness Pentecostals are an example of modern day Sabellians.

Socinians<sup>7</sup> taught that Christ was a mere man, and that the Holy Ghost was not a distinct subsistence. The Unitarians<sup>8</sup> confine the glory and attributes of divinity to the Father. They do not allow Christ or the Holy Spirit to be truly divine. Still, the doctrine of the Trinity has been held and is now held by the great body of Christians.

**The Persons of the Trinity are clearly distinguished in the Scriptures as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Mat 28:19).** [They are distinguished] elsewhere as the Lord Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Ghost (2Co 13:14). The first Person of the Godhead is spoken of as one God, the Father, of Whom are all things. The second is spoken of as one Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things, and we by Him (1Co 8:6). The third is spoken of as the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Comforter sent to convince men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (Joh 16:8).

**The Father is neither begotten,<sup>9</sup> nor does He proceed from the Son or the Spirit.** The Son is begotten of the Father, the only-begotten<sup>10</sup> of the Father (Joh 1:14; 3:16). The Spirit is not begotten, but proceeds from the Father, is the Spirit of the Father, and is the Spirit of the Son; [He] is of the Son and is sent by the Son (Joh 15:26; Rom 8:9, 14; 1Pe 1:11). But the words *Father* and *Son*, *beget* and *begotten*, are not to be overstrained. They are merely the fittest words to convey to our dull minds some just idea of the relation existing between the first and second Persons of the Godhead.

**No one denies the divinity of the Father.** No one ought to deny the true and supreme divinity of the Son.<sup>11</sup> Of Him, the Scripture says, “This is the true God and

<sup>7</sup> **Socinians** – followers of Faustus (1539-1604) and Laelius Socinus (1525-1562), 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian theologians that denied the deity of Christ and that the cross brought forgiveness of sins.

<sup>8</sup> **Unitarians** – antitrinitarian movement rooted in the ancient heresies of Sabellianism and Arianism. Unitarianism grew rapidly in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary and Poland; but is now largely humanistic and antichristian, rejecting the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, the Bible as God’s Word, and eternal hell.

<sup>9</sup> **begotten** – this refers to the *eternal generation* of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit. Begotten refers to the eternal relation between the Second Person (the Son) to the First Person (the Father) of the Trinity: it is “the eternal and changeless activity in the Godhead by which the Father produces the Son without division of essence and by which the Second Person of the Trinity is identified as an individual substance (person) of the divine essence.” (Richard Muller, “generatio,” *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 127) Similarly, the Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son.

<sup>10</sup> **only begotten** – many scholars today reject the term *only begotten* (Greek = *monogenēs*), preferring instead “only,” “unique,” or “one and only.” For a defense of retaining the term “only begotten” see Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2004), 383-386; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002), 710-711; Roger Beckwith, “The Calvinist Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Churchman* 115 (2001), 308-16; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 65n26.

<sup>11</sup> See FGB 230, *The Deity of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

eternal life” (1Jo 5:20). He “is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5). “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (Joh 5:26). Thomas worshipped Him, calling Him, “My Lord and my God” (Joh 20:28). The world was made by the Son (Col 1:16). It shall be destroyed by the Son (Heb 1:12). All men shall be judged by the Son (Joh 5:22, 27). Stephen, dying, prayed to Him (Acts 7:59). The very highest worship of heaven is offered to Him (Rev 5:12-13). So also the Spirit of God is truly God. In Acts 5:3-4, the Holy Ghost is expressly called God. The Spirit perfectly knows God, and so is God (1Co 2:10-11). He is joined with the Father and the Son in the form of baptism (Mat 28:19) and in the apostolic benediction<sup>12</sup> (2Co 13:14).

**This doctrine is never to be so taught as to lead men to suppose that there are three Gods.**<sup>13</sup> We do not deny the unity of God. We glory in it. Nor do we hold that God is three in the same sense in which He is one, for that would be a contradiction. But He is one in being, in nature, in essence; and three in personality or subsistence. So that when we speak of the Father, we say He, His, Him; and when the Father speaks of Himself, He says I, Mine, Me; and when we speak to Him, we say Thou, Thine, Thee. The same form of speech is also found in regard to the Son and the Spirit. When John baptized our Lord, all three persons of the Trinity were present: “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:16-17). So we find all three persons of the Godhead spoken of in John 14:26: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”

**As all three persons of the Godhead concurred<sup>14</sup> in man’s creation, so do they all concur in man’s redemption.** The Father gave the only-begotten Son (Joh 3:16). The Son laid down His life for His sheep (Joh 10:17-18). The Spirit reproves the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment, and guides God’s people into all truth (Joh 16:8, 13). There is a wonderful and unspeakable communion of nature, attributes, and glory in the persons of the Godhead. Christ says of the Spirit: “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (Joh 16:14-15). It is the will of God 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” (Joh 5:23). Now, if men

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<sup>12</sup> **apostolic benediction** – in this context, the apostle Paul’s prayer for God’s blessing.

<sup>13</sup> **three Gods** – this is the error known as *tritheism*.

<sup>14</sup> **concurred** – combined in action; cooperated.



refuse to honor the Son and worship only the Father, or if they honor the Son not as the Son of God but merely as a creature, they do displease Him Who sent His Son into the world. We must worship the Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity. The doctrine here maintained relates therefore to the *object* of religious worship. The orthodox hold that we are to worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. All others worship God not as He is revealed in the Bible, but according to their own ideas. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3). It is a remarkable fact that men who hold the supreme divinity of Christ never deny the divinity of the Spirit.

**We have hints of this doctrine of the Trinity in the oldest writings of Scripture.** In the first verse of Genesis, the word rendered *God* is in the plural form. So in Job 35:10, the word *Maker* in the Hebrew is plural. So in Ecclesiastes 12:1, the word *Creator* is in the plural. So in Isaiah 54:5, the words *Maker* and *Husband* are both in the plural. So in Malachi 1:6, the word *Master* is in the plural. Not only are nouns but pronouns found in the plural. In Genesis 1:26, we read, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness” (See Gen 3:22). Many things like these are found in the Old Testament. Whatever arguments prove the divinity and personality of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, prove the doctrine of the Trinity. For if each of these is a person, and each of Them is divine, there is no more doubt of the Trinity.

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**William S. Plumer (1802-1880):** American Presbyterian minister and author; born in Greensburg, PA, USA.



# ONE ESSENCE, THREE PERSONS

Wilhelmus á Brakel (1635-1711)

**W**E will now turn to the mystery of all mysteries, the *Holy Trinity*. Throughout history all parties opposed to the truth have vehemently assaulted this article of faith. The ancient Church has always confessed this article and defended it as a steadfast pillar of the truth against *Sabellians*, *Arians*, and *Valentians*.<sup>1</sup> However much they may disagree with one another concerning other points of doctrine, they are united in their attack upon the Holy Trinity. Today we must defend this article against Socinians, Anabaptists,<sup>2</sup> Socinian Arminians,<sup>3</sup> and other proponents of error. Thanks be unto God Who has always caused the Church to be faithful to this truth. The Church stands firm in this truth until this very day, and God will enable her to stand firm in it until the day of Christ, in spite of all who regret this.

Before we proceed with our consideration of this doctrine and before you meditate upon it, the following must be clearly perceived:

**First, it must be understood that God is incomprehensible<sup>4</sup> in His *essence* and *existence*.<sup>5</sup>** It should further be understood that we human beings, to whom God has been pleased to reveal Himself in a manner sufficient to lead us unto salvation, only know in part and are but able to grasp a fragment or the external fringes

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<sup>1</sup> **Valentians** or **Valentinians** – followers of the heretical Egyptian theologian Valentinus (ca. 136-165), founder of a Gnostic sect. Gnosticism (from Greek *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge”) was a group of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century heresies that taught escape from the material world through gaining secret knowledge. Valentianism was a major movement.

<sup>2</sup> **Anabaptists** – the Greek preposition *ana*—meaning “re”—was joined with “baptist” to become *Anabaptist*, or “re-baptizer.” This was originally a term of contempt applied to Christians in the time of the Reformation, who rejected infant baptism and established churches based on believers’ baptism. German, Swiss, Polish, Dutch, and numerous other groups emerged, often with widely different, and sometimes heretical, theologies. Some, but not all, were antitrinitarian, which is why the author mentions them here.

<sup>3</sup> **Socinian Arminians** – followers of the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), born in Oudewater, the Netherlands. He rejected the Reformers’ understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God’s predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will. Socinian Arminians were antitrinitarian, though Arminius and many of his followers were not.

<sup>4</sup> **incomprehensible** – unable to be contained within limits.

<sup>5</sup> **essence** and **existence** – when considering the biblical revelation of the Trinity, one must understand the distinction between God’s *essence* (Greek = *ousia*) and His *existence*. Essence refers to what God *is* in His nature; existence speaks of the mode in which God’s nature expresses itself: His *essence* is Spirit and His *existence* is in three persons. From this arises the following definition: Within the nature of the one God (*essence*), there exist three coequal and coeternal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (*existence*).

of the doctrine at hand. Believers must not, nor do they desire to, proceed with their minds beyond its defined limitations, that is, beyond that which the Lord has been pleased to shed light upon. Whatever cannot be fully understood and perceived, they believe. They worship the Invisible One Who dwells in the light that no man can approach unto (1Ti 6:16).

**Secondly, the entire written Word of God, having been given to man, uses human language and words that relate to tangible<sup>6</sup> objects.** Such is the wondrous wisdom, goodness, and omnipotence<sup>7</sup> of God that man by means of earthly expressions understands spiritual matters. Thus, that which is stated *anthropopathos* [“after the manner of men”], that is, in a *human manner*, can be understood *theoprepos* [“after the manner of God”], that is, in its *divine* dimension. Such is the case with the language and vocabulary that are used to reveal the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, one must be cautious not to cleave to the tangible matters from which the words have been derived nor to bring divine matters down to the human level. Rather, we must ascend above tangible matters and expressions in order that, in a spiritual manner pleasing to God, we may understand what God states concerning Himself..

**Thirdly, it should be understood that the Holy Trinity cannot be known from nature, but has only been revealed in Scripture.** Therefore, one should refer only to Scripture and in all simplicity believe its testimony. One must not exalt his wisdom above that which has been written: he must set all human reasoning aside and avoid all imaginary comparisons to tangible objects. Such comparisons, rather than shedding light upon the issue, result in more obscurity and tend to divert from, rather than promote, a proper understanding of this mystery. May the Lord sanctify and guide me in writing, and you in reading or hearing.

**THE SINGULAR ESSENCE OF GOD’S BEING:** We maintain and state emphatically that there is only one God. “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD” (Deu 6:4); “For though there be that are called gods...to us there is but one God” (1Co 8:5–6); “But God is one” (Gal 3:20); “For there is one God” (1Ti 2:5). There can of necessity only be one eternal, omnipotent, and all-sufficient Being. Even the most intelligent among the heathen have acknowledged this. The most barbaric heathen of our time, showing no external evidence of any religion, acknowledge but one God. The perception among the heathen that there are many gods seems to originate from the knowledge of the existence of angels, and perhaps also from an erroneous understanding concerning the Holy Trinity and the plural name of God, *Elohim*.

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<sup>6</sup> **tangible** – what can be grasped by the mind or dealt with as a fact.

<sup>7</sup> **omnipotence** – unlimited power; “The all-powerfulness of God, His unlimited ability to act according to His own perfect will.” (Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 313)

**Divine personality defined:** This one and only God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The divine Being has a threefold manner of existence, which expressed in intelligible language—lest heretics<sup>8</sup> find here a pretext<sup>9</sup>—is denominated in Scripture by the use of the word *person*. In Hebrews 1:3, reference is made to *tēs hypostaseōs autou*, “the express image of His person.” Since the word *hypostasis* refers to “an intelligent, independent being,” the reference is consequently to a *person*. We understand this to refer to a living, intelligent, incommunicable<sup>10</sup> being who is fully independent, sharing no part with any other being. Such is true of angels and men who consequently are referred to as *persons*. By application of this concept, the divine entities are called persons, so that, in perceiving the divine dimension of the anthropomorphism,<sup>11</sup> we should be able to comprehend something about that which is incomprehensible. We can consider one of the divine persons in an abstract sense, that is, outside of the context of the divine Being, as is expressed for instance in Hebrews 1:3, where it is stated that Christ is the express image of His Father’s person. We can also consider the person in a concrete sense, that is, as viewed in union with the divine Being, such as is expressed in Philippians 2:6, where it is said, “Who, being in the form of God.” According to His divine nature Christ is said to be *en morphē Theou*, “in the form,” that is, having the *being* and *nature* of God so that He is equal to God. As the form of a servant includes personhood, essential being, and characteristics, the Word of God similarly includes personhood, essential being, and attributes as constituting the form of God...

**THE DIVINE ESSENCE CONSISTS OF THREE PERSONS:** This one divine Being subsists<sup>12</sup> in three persons, not collaterally (or side-by-side), but rather the one person exists by virtue of the other person either by way of generation or procession. The fact that there are three persons in the one divine Being is so clearly revealed in the Word of God that it cannot be contradicted. It is evident in both the Old and New Testaments.

**First, it is revealed in the name *Elohim*** (1) *Elohim* is a plural form that does not refer to one or two persons, but always expresses a plurality that exceeds two. Since Scripture expressly refers to three, we ought to be convinced of its teaching that the one God subsists in three persons. *Elohim* is rarely used in the singular, never in a dual sense, but generally in the plural. Since we know that there is but one God, Who in reference to His Being cannot be given a name with a plural dimension, the name *Elohim* clearly indicates that there is a trinity of persons.

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<sup>8</sup> **heretics** – those who hold self-willed opinion(s) or doctrine(s) in opposition to biblical truth.

<sup>9</sup> **pretext** – false reason for doing something usually in order to hide the real reason.

<sup>10</sup> **incommunicable** – incapable of being imparted or shared.

<sup>11</sup> **anthropomorphism** – attributing a human form, human characteristics, or human behavior to non-human things; in this case, the eternal God.

<sup>12</sup> **subsists** – exists as a personal mode of existence in the divine nature.

(2) It should additionally be noted that the plural form of *Elohim* is also used in conjunction with a plural verb, adjective, or pronoun, and that a plural number is always affixed to it. Such is true in the following texts: “And God (*Elohim*) said, Let us make man” (Gen 1:26); “when God (*Elohim*) caused me to wander” (Gen 20:13). “He is an holy God (*Elohim*)” (Jos 24:19); “Remember now thy Creator (*Creators*)” (Ecc 12:1); “Thy Makers are Thy husbands” (Isa 54:5); “I am the LORD thy God (*Eloheka*)” (Exo 20:2).<sup>13</sup>

It should be noted that the names *Jehovah*<sup>14</sup> and *Elohim* often coalesce<sup>15</sup> into the one name *Jehovah*, and that quite frequently these two names are used in conjunction with each other, indicating the unity of Being as well as the subsistence in three persons. Whenever the plural name of God, *Elohim*, is used in a singular sense, the persons are considered as one Being...This indicates *periemchoresin*,<sup>16</sup> that is, the internal coexistence, and that the divine persons are inseparable from the divine Being and from each other.<sup>17</sup>

**Secondly, the Trinity of persons is also evident in texts (1) in which the Lord refers to Himself as being more than one or two. “Let us make man” (Gen 1:26);<sup>18</sup>**

<sup>13</sup> These quotations deviate somewhat from the KJV as á Brakel here gives a literal rendering of the original Hebrew.

<sup>14</sup> **Jehovah** – The English name *Jehovah* appears four times in the Old Testament of the KJV (Exo 6:3; Psa 83:18; Isa 12:2; 26:4) and three other times as a compound: Jehovahjireh (Gen 22:14); Jehovahnissi (Exo 17:15); and Jehovahshalom (Jdg 6:24). God’s name in the Hebrew Scriptures consists of four consonants, YHWH or JHVH (Hebrew = יהוה), commonly referred to as the Tetragrammaton (“four letters”). The KJV translates it LORD, which informs the reader that God’s name is being used in the Hebrew. Modern scholars prefer to use Yahweh instead of Jehovah, although the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* says, “The pronunciation of *yhw* as Yahweh is a scholarly guess.”

<sup>15</sup> **coalesce** – unite.

<sup>16</sup> **periemchoresin/perichoresis** – Greek term used to describe the triune relationship between each person of the Godhead, defined as co-indwelling, co-inhering [permanent existing *in* one another], and mutual interpenetration. Alister McGrath says this “allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of a ‘community of being,’ in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them.” (McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 325)

<sup>17</sup> Richard Muller quotes the Decree for the Jacobites (Syrian Church), which says that “the unity of the Godhead is such that the persons are ‘wholly in’ one another—a perfect and complete co-inherence or *perichoresis*—and that, therefore, ‘none precedes the other in eternity, none exceeds the other in greatness, or excels the other in power.’” (Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 4: *The Triunity of God*, 57)

<sup>18</sup> According to Genesis 1:26, God said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.” What do the plural verb (“let us”) and the plural pronoun (“our”) mean? Some have suggested they are plurals of majesty, a form of speech a king would use in saying, for example, “We are pleased to grant your request.” However, in Old Testament Hebrew, there are no other examples of a monarch using plural verbs or plural pronouns of himself in such a “plural of majesty,” so this suggestion has no evidence to support it. Another suggestion is that God is here speaking to angels. But angels did not participate in the creation of man, nor was man created in the image and likeness of angels; so this suggestion is not convincing. The best explanation is that already in the first chapter of Genesis, we have

“the man is become as one of us” (Gen 3:22); “let us go down, and there confound their language” (Gen 11:7). [God’s] use of the plural relative to Himself reveals the Trinity of persons, for which reason He is referred to in the original Hebrew as *Creators* in Ecclesiastes 12:1.

(2) It is also evident in texts wherein the Lord speaks about Himself as if He were referring to another person. “Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven” (Gen 19:24). One of the three angels that spoke with Abraham was *Jehovah*, the Son of God. He Who appeared on earth caused this rain to come down from the Lord in heaven. Both He Who summoned this rain, as well as the One Who caused it to rain, are referred to as *Jehovah*. As God is one in essence, the reference here cannot be to two different Beings, but rather to the Son and the Father, being the Second and the First Persons of the Godhead. For it is the Father Who works through the Son, and the Son works on behalf of His Father (Joh 5:19).

**Thirdly, to further facilitate your inner conviction, consider with a believing heart those texts that expressly state that God is trinitarian, not in His *essence (ousia)* but in *persons (hypostases)*.** In the blessing that the Lord enjoins to be pronounced upon His people, the name *Jehovah* is repeated three times. “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num 6:24-26). In each repetition, the name *Jehovah* is conjoined to an activity that in the administration of the covenant of grace is specifically ascribed to either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost. Safekeeping is ascribed to the Father, the manifestation of grace to the Son, and the bestowal of peace to the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul expressing this in his benediction mentions the three persons in 2 Corinthians 13:14, clearly proving that the repetition of the name *Jehovah* must be viewed as being indicative of the three persons. This threefold repetition is also found in Isaiah 6:3, where it is stated, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD.” In the New Testament, this text is used to refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (*cf.* Joh 12:41; Act 28:25). Furthermore, consider the following texts: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me” (Isa 61:1); “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD...the angel of His presence (from Mal 3:1 we know that this refers to the Son) saved them” (Isa 63:7, 9); “But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit” (Isa 63:10); “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth” (Psa 33:6).

There is also clear evidence in the New Testament. “And, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and light-

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an indication of a plurality of persons in God Himself. We are not told how many persons, and we have nothing approaching a complete doctrine of the Trinity, but it is implied that more than one person is involved. (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 227)

ing upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:16-17). “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mat 28:19); “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2Co 13:14); “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1Jo 5:7).

We have thus observed that there are three persons in the divine Being.

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**Wilhelmus á Brakel (1635-1711):** Dutch theologian and major representative of the Dutch Second Reformation; born in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands.



# THE DOCTRINE UNFOLDED

Loraine Boettner (1901-1990)

**T**HERE is but one living and true God: One of the most common objections alleged against the doctrine of the Trinity is that it involves *tritheism*, or a belief in three Gods. The fact of the matter, however, is that it stands unalterably opposed to tritheism as well as to every other form of polytheism. Scripture, reason, and conscience are in perfect agreement that there is but one self-existent, eternal, Supreme Being in Whom all of the divine attributes or perfections inhere<sup>1</sup> and from Whom they cannot be separated. That both the Old and New Testaments do teach the unity of God is clearly set forth in the following verses:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deu 6:4). “Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God” (Isa 44:6). The Decalogue,<sup>2</sup> which is the foundation of the moral and religious code of Christianity, as well as of Judaism, has as its first and greatest commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exo 20:3). “I and my Father are one,” said Jesus (Joh 10:30). “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well” (Jam 2:19). “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (1Co 8:4). There is but “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:5-6). “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13). From Genesis to Revelation, God is declared to be one...

Certainly the Unitarians have no monopoly on the doctrine of the unity of God. Trinitarians hold this just as definitely. The unity of God is one of the basic postulates<sup>3</sup> of theism,<sup>4</sup> and no system can possibly be true that teaches otherwise.

**WHILE GOD IN HIS INNERMOST NATURE IS ONE, HE, NEVERTHELESS, EXISTS AS THREE PERSONS.** The best concise definition of the doctrine of the Trinity, so far as we are aware, is that found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: “There are three persons within the Godhead: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” We would prefer, however, to use the term *Spirit* rather than *Ghost*, since a ghost is

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<sup>1</sup> **inhere** – exist essentially or permanently in.

<sup>2</sup> **Decalogue** – Ten Commandments.

<sup>3</sup> **postulates** – principles.

<sup>4</sup> **theism** – belief in a god or gods.



commonly understood to be a spirit that once had a body but lost it, and the Holy Spirit has never possessed a body of any kind.

We have seen that the Scriptures teach that there is but one true and living God. They teach with equal clearness that this one God exists as three distinct persons, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

**(a) The Father is God:** “To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things” (1Co 8:6). “Paul, an apostle...through Jesus Christ, and God the Father” (Gal 1:1). “There is...one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:6). “At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Mat 11:25). “For him [the Son] hath God the Father sealed” (Joh 6:27). “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1Pe 1:2). “That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phi 2:11). “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (Joh 20:17). “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:23). Jesus prayed to God the Father (Mar 14:36; Joh 11:41; 17:11, etc.).

**(b) The Son is God:**<sup>5</sup> “Christ...who is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5). “For in Him [*Christ*] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). “Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God” (Joh 20:28). “I and the Father are one” (Joh 10:30). “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:13). “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mat 16:16). Christ assumed power over the Sabbath, and “said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God” (Joh 5:18). He assumed the prerogatives<sup>6</sup> of God in forgiving sins (Mar 2:5). “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Joh 1:1).

The attributes that can be ascribed only to God are ascribed to Christ: *Holiness*—“...thou art, the Holy One of God” (Mar 1:24); “Him...who knew no sin” (2Co 5:21); “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (Joh 8:46); “Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb 7:26). *Eternity*—“In the beginning was the Word” (Joh 1:1); “Before Abraham was, I am” (Joh 8:58); “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever” (Heb 1:8); “The glory which I had with thee before the world was” (Joh 17:5). *Life*—“In him was life” (Joh 1:4); “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Joh 14:6); “I am the resurrection and the life” (Joh 11:25). *Immutability*<sup>7</sup>—“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb 13:8). “They [*the heavens*] shall perish; but thou remainest...They shall be changed: but thou art the

<sup>5</sup> See FGB 230, *The Deity of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>6</sup> **prerogatives** – exclusive privileges or rights.

<sup>7</sup> **immutability** – unchangeableness.

same” (Heb 1:11-12). *Omnipotence*—“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18); “The Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8). *Omniscience*<sup>8</sup>—“Thou knowest all things” (Joh 16:30); “Jesus knowing their thoughts” (Mat 9:4); “Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him” (Joh 6:64); “In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). *Omnipresence*<sup>9</sup>—“I am with you always” (Mat 28:20); “The fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). *Creation*—“ All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (Joh 1:3); “The world was made by him” (Joh 1:10); “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: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col 1:16-17); “Upholding all things by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3). *Raising the dead*— “[The Father] hath given him authority to execute judgment also...for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (Joh 5:27-29). *Judgment of all men*— “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: 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: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Mat 25:31-46). Prayer and worship are to be directed to Christ—“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (Joh 14:14); “He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him” (Luk 24:51-52); “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Act 7:59); all are to “honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (Joh 5:23); “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Act 16:31); “Let all the angels of God worship him” (Heb 1:6). “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phi 2:10-11). “Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 3:18); “Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever” (Heb 13:21)—and

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<sup>8</sup> **omniscience** – having infinite knowledge.

<sup>9</sup> **omnipresence** – present in all places at the same time.

when we compare these verses with statements such as we have in Isaiah, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (45:22), and Jeremiah, “Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm” (17:5), we are faced with this dilemma: either the Christian doctrine of the Trinity must be true, or the Scriptures are self-contradictory; either the Scriptures recognize more gods than one, or Christ, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit is that one God.

All of these ascriptions<sup>10</sup> of holiness, eternity, life, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, creation, providence, raising the dead, judgment of all men, prayer, and worship due to Christ most clearly teach His deity. Such attitudes of mind if directed toward a creature would be idolatrous.

(c) **The Holy Spirit is God:** “Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?...thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Act 5:3-4); “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1Co 2:11); “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (Joh 15:26). In the Baptismal Formula, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mat 28:19), and in the Apostolic Benediction, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2Co 13:14), the Holy Spirit is placed on a plane of absolute equality with the Father and the Son as deity and is regarded equally with them as the source of all power and blessing.

There are many, even among professedly Christian people, who have no higher conception of the Holy Spirit than that of an impersonal, mysterious, supernatural power or influence of God. It is true that in the Old Testament, where the emphasis was upon the unity of God, the references to the Spirit, while not incapable of being applied to a distinct person, were more generally understood to designate simply God’s power or influence. But in the more advanced revelation of the New Testament, the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit is clearly seen. No longer can He be looked upon as merely a divine power or influence, but as a divine *person*...

That the Holy Spirit is a person is clearly taught in the following verses: “Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” (Act 8:29). “The Spirit said unto him [*Peter*], Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them” (Act 10:19-20). “The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the

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<sup>10</sup> **ascriptions** – assigning qualities or characters to a person or thing.

work whereunto I have called them” (Act 13:2). “For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say” (Luk 12:12). “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. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (Joh 16:13-14). “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (Joh 14:16-17)—here the Holy Spirit is called a “Comforter” (marginal reference “Advocate”), that is, one called to stand by our side as our Guide, Teacher, Instructor, Sponsor; and in the nature of the case, therefore, He must be a person. In a parallel passage, Christ is similarly spoken of: “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1Jo 2:1). “The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). “And grieve not the holy Spirit of God” (Eph 4:30). “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev 2:17). “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Mat 12:31-32). The language here used implies that it is impossible to commit a sin against a more divine personage than the Holy Spirit; that of all possible sins, the sin against the Holy Spirit is the worst—both in its nature and consequences—and thus implies His eternal dignity and deity.

Words that in the Old Testament are ascribed to God are in the New Testament more specifically said to have been spoken by the Holy Spirit (*cf.* Jer 31:33-34 with Heb 10:15-17; Psa 95:7-11 with Heb 3:7-11; Isa 6:9-10 with Act 28:25-28). In the Old Testament, we read that the Holy Spirit brought order out of the primeval<sup>11</sup> chaos (Gen 1:2); and He strove to lead the antediluvians<sup>12</sup> in the ways of righteousness (Gen 6:3). He equipped certain men to become prophets (Num 11:26, 29). He instructed the Israelites as a people (Neh 9:20); He came upon Isaiah and equipped him to be a prophet (61:1), and caused Ezekiel to go and preach to those of the captivity (3:12, 15). In the New Testament, the miracle of the virgin birth of Christ was wrought through His power (Luk 1:35). He descended on Jesus at the baptism and equipped Him for the public ministry (Mat 3:16). He was promised as a Comforter and Teacher to the disciples (Joh 16:7-13). He came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost and equipped them to be world missionaries (Act

<sup>11</sup> **primeval** – earliest ages of the history of the world.

<sup>12</sup> **antediluvians** – persons that lived before Noah’s flood.

2:1-42). He kept Paul from going in one direction and sent him in another (Act 16:6-10); He equips different individuals with different gifts and talents (1Co 12:4-31); He performs the supernatural work of regenerating the souls of men (Ti 3:5; Joh 3:5). He inspired the prophets and apostles so that what they spoke or wrote in God's name was truly His word to the people (2Pe 1:20-21). In the works of regeneration<sup>13</sup> and sanctification,<sup>14</sup> He applies to the heart of each of the Lord's people the objective redemption that was wrought out by Christ, and in general He directs the affairs of the advancing Church. He is thus set forth as the "Author" of order and beauty in the physical world and of faith and holiness in the spiritual world.

Throughout the Scriptures the Holy Spirit is thus set forth as a distinct person, with a mind, will, and power of His own. Baptism is administered in His name. He is constantly associated with two other persons—the Father and the Son—Whose distinct personalities are recognized, a phenomenon that could lead only to confusion if He, too, were not a distinct person. The personal pronouns *He*, *Him*, *I*, and *Me* are applied to [the Holy Spirit], pronouns that can be used intelligently only when applied to a person. They occur so repeatedly through the prose narratives and cannot be set aside as a tendency to personify an impersonal force. That two and two make four does not appear more clear and conclusive than that the Holy Spirit is a living agent, working with consciousness, will, and power.

After the personality of the Holy Spirit is established, there are but few who will deny His deity. It is certain that He is not a creature, and consequently those who admit His personality accept His deity readily enough. Most of the heretical sects that have maintained that Christ was a mere man have, in accordance with that, maintained that the Spirit was only a power or influence...

**THE TERMS "FATHER," "SON," AND "HOLY SPIRIT" DESIGNATE DISTINCT PERSONS WHO ARE OBJECTIVE TO EACH OTHER.** The terms Father, Son, and Spirit do not merely designate the different relations that God assumes toward His creatures. They are not analogous<sup>15</sup> to the terms Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, which do express such relations, but are the proper names of different subjects Who are distinct from one another as one person is distinct from another. That this is true is clear from the following personal relations that they bear toward each other:

**(a) They mutually use the pronouns *I*, *Thou*, *He*, and *Him* when speaking to or of each other.** "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Mat 17:5). "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (Joh 17:1). "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (Joh 16:28). "When he, the Spirit of

<sup>13</sup> See FGB 202, *The New Birth*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>14</sup> See FGB 215, *Sanctification*.

<sup>15</sup> **analogous** – similar or equivalent.

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” (Joh 16:13).

(b) **The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father.** The Spirit glorifies the Son. “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand” (Joh 3:35). “...even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (Joh 15:10). “He [*the Holy Spirit*] shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (Joh 16:14).

(c) **The Son prays to the Father.** “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (Joh 17:5). “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (Joh 14:16).

(d) **The Father sends the Son, and the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit Who acts as Their Agent.** “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (Mat 10:40). “As thou hast sent me into the world” (Joh 17:18). “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3). “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Joh 14:26). “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (Joh 16:7).

Thus, we see that the persons within the Godhead are so distinct that each can address the others, each can love the others, the Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, the Son prays to the Father, and we can pray to each of them. They act and are acted upon as subject and object, and each has a particular work to perform. We say they are distinct persons, for a person is one who can say I, who can be addressed as thou, and who can act and be the object of action.

The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is but the synthesis<sup>16</sup> of these facts. When we have said these three things, that there is but one God, that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are each God, and that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are each a distinct Person, we have enunciated the doctrine of the Trinity in its fullness. This is the form in which it is found in the Scriptures, and it is also the form in which it has entered into the faith of the Church.

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<sup>16</sup> **synthesis** – combination of ideas into a complex whole.

# DIVINE ORDER IN THE GODHEAD

Loraine Boettner (1901-1990)

**I**N discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, we must distinguish between what is technically known as the *immanent*<sup>1</sup> and the *economic*<sup>2</sup> Trinity. By the *immanent* Trinity, we mean the Trinity as it has subsisted in the Godhead from all eternity. In their essential, innate<sup>3</sup> life, we say that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same in substance,<sup>4</sup> possessing identical attributes and powers, and therefore equal in glory. This relates to God's essential existence apart from the creation. By the *economic* Trinity, we mean the Trinity as manifested in the world, particularly in the redemption of sinful men. There are three *opera ad extra*<sup>5</sup>—additional works, if we may so describe them—that are ascribed to the Trinity, namely, Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification. These are works that are outside of the necessary activities of the Trinity, works that God was under no obligation or compulsion to perform.

In the Scriptures, we find that the plan of redemption takes the form of a covenant, not merely between God and His people, but between the different persons within the Trinity, so that there is, as it were, a division of labor, [with] each person voluntarily assuming a particular part of the work. 1<sup>st</sup>—To the Father is ascribed primarily the work of Creation, together with the election of a certain number of individuals whom He has given to the Son. The Father is in general the “Author” of the plan of redemption. 2<sup>nd</sup>—To the Son is ascribed the work of redemption, which to accomplish He became incarnate, assuming human nature in order that, as the federal head and representative of His people, He might, as their substitute,<sup>6</sup> assume the guilt of their sin and suffer a full equivalent for the penalty of eternal death that rested upon them. He thus made full satisfaction to the demands of justice, which demands are expressed in the words, “The soul that

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<sup>1</sup> **immanent** or **ontological** – the Trinity as it exists necessarily and eternally, apart from creation. It is, like God's attributes, what God necessarily is. (John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 706)

<sup>2</sup> **economic** – the Trinity in its relation to creation, including the specific roles played by the Trinitarian persons throughout the history of creation, providence, and redemption. (John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 706)

<sup>3</sup> **innate** – belonging to the essential nature of something.

<sup>4</sup> **substance** – essence; Greek = *ousia*.

<sup>5</sup> **opera ad extra** – outward or external works of God; “The activities and effects by which the Trinity is manifested outwardly. They are the following: (1) Creation, preservation, and government of the universe. (2) Redemption. (3) Inspiration, regeneration, and sanctification. The first belongs officially and eminently to the Father; the second to the Son; the third to the Holy Spirit.” (W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 252)

<sup>6</sup> See FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

sinneth, it shall die” (Eze 18:4, 20), and, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Also, in His capacity as the federal head and representative of His people, He covenanted to keep the law of perfect obedience that was originally given to their forefather, Adam, in his representative capacity, which law Adam had broken and had thereby plunged the race into a state of guilt and ruin. Identifying Himself thus with His people, He paid the penalty that rested on them and earned their salvation. Acting as their King and Savior, and also as Head of the Church that He thus forms, He directs the advancing kingdom and is ever present with His people. 3<sup>rd</sup>—To the Holy Spirit is ascribed the works of regeneration and sanctification, or the application to the hearts of individuals of the objective atonement that has been wrought out by Christ. This He does by spiritually renewing their hearts, working in them faith and repentance, cleansing them of every taint<sup>7</sup> of sin, and eventually glorifying them in heaven. Redemption, in the broad sense, is thus a matter of *pure grace*, being planned by the Father, purchased by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit...

Yet while particular works are ascribed pre-eminently to each of the persons, so intimate is the unity that exists within the Trinity, there being but one substance and “one God,” that each of the persons participates to some extent in the work of the others.<sup>8</sup> “I am in the Father, and the Father in me” (Joh 14:11), said Jesus. “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Joh 14:9). “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2Co 5:19). “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” [*through the Holy Spirit*] (Joh 14:18). As Dr. Charles Hodge<sup>9</sup> says,

“According to the Scriptures, the Father created the world, the Son created the world, and the Spirit created the world. The Father preserves all things; the Son upholds all things; and the Spirit is the source of all life. These facts are expressed by saying that the persons of the Trinity concur in all acts *ad extra*. Nevertheless, there are some acts which are predominantly referred to the Father, others to the Son, and others to the Spirit. The Father creates, elects, and calls; the Son redeems; and the Spirit sanctifies.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> **taint** – trace of a bad or undesirable quality.

<sup>8</sup> Scripture presents a delicate balance between the *essence (ousia)* of God and the *persons (hypostases)* of the Godhead. Fullness of being is in the Trinity itself: each member—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—shares equally in this fullness. This unity of the Trinity is sometimes referred to as *perichoresis* or *circumincession*. John Frame explains: “Even though the three are distinct persons, they are nevertheless intimately involved with one another. This mutual involvement is called by the English terms *circumincession* and *coinherence* (by the Latin *circumincessio* and the Greek *perichōresis*). This means that, first, the Father is in the Son and the Son in Him (Joh 10:38; 14:10-11) and, second, both Father and Son are in the Spirit and the Spirit in Them (Rom 8:9). Notice: it’s not that the Father *is* the Son and so on but that the Father is *in* the Son.” (John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 34)

<sup>9</sup> **Charles Hodge** (1797-1878) – American Presbyterian theologian at Princeton Seminary.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 445.



Hence, we say that while the spheres and functions of the three persons of the Trinity are different, they are not exclusive. That which is done by one is participated in by the others with varying degrees of prominence.<sup>11</sup> The fact of the matter is that there have been three great epochs or dispensations in the history of redemption, corresponding to and successively manifesting the three persons of the Godhead. That of the Father began at the creation and continued until the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus; that of the Son, embracing a comparatively short period of time, but the important period in which redemption was worked out objectively, began with the public ministry of Jesus and continued until the day of Pentecost; and that of the Holy Spirit began with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples on the day of Pentecost and continues until the end of the age.

In regard to the work of the economic Trinity, we find there is a definite procedure in the work of redemption and also in the government of the world in general: the work of the Father in creation and in the general plan for the world being primary, that of the Son in redeeming the world being subordinate to and dependent on that of the Father, and that of the Holy Spirit in applying redemption coming later in time and being subordinate to and dependent on that of the Father and of the Son. Hence, in regard to the work of redemption particularly, which is the great and all-important work that God does for man in this world, there is a *logical* order—that of the Father being first, that of the Son second, and that of the Spirit third. And when the persons of the Trinity are mentioned in our theological statements, it is always in this order.

The Father sends the Son and works through Him (Joh 17:8; Rom 8:3; 1Th 5:9; Rom 5:1), and the Father and Son work through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22-23; Ti 3:5; Act 15:8-9). In Christ's own words, He that is sent is not greater than He that hath sent Him (Joh 13:16); and in His state of humiliation, speaking from the standpoint of His human nature, He could say, "The Father is greater than I" (Joh 14:28). Paul tells us that we are Christ's and that Christ is God's (1Co 3:23); also, that as Christ is the head of every man, so God is the head of Christ (1Co 11:3). Numerous things are predicated<sup>12</sup> of the incarnate Son that cannot be predicated of the Second Person of the Trinity as such—Jesus in His human nature advanced in wisdom (Luk 2:52), and even late in His public ministry did not know when the end of the world was to come (Mat 24:36). In the work of redemption, which we may term a work of supererogation<sup>13</sup> since it is undertaken through pure grace and love and not through obligation, the Son Who is equal with the Father becomes, as it were, officially subject to Him. And in turn, the Spirit is

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<sup>11</sup> **prominence** – importance.

<sup>12</sup> **predicated** – asserted or stated as a quality.

<sup>13</sup> **supererogation** – performance of more than duty or circumstances require.

sent by, acts for, and reveals both the Father and the Son, glorifies not Himself but Christ, and works in the hearts of His people faith, love, holiness, and spiritual enlightenment. This subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, relates *not* to their essential life within the Godhead, but only to their modes of operation or their division of labor in creation and redemption.

This subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, is not in any way inconsistent with true equality. We have an analogy of such priority and subordination, for instance, in the relationship that exists between husband and wife in the human family. Paul tells us that that relationship is one of equality in Christ Jesus, in Whom “there can be no male and female” (Gal 3:28), woman’s soul being of as much value as man’s, yet one of personal priority and subordination in which in the home and the State the husband is the acknowledged spokesman and leader. As Dr. W. Brenton Greene says:

“In the sight of God husband and wife are, and in the eye of the law ought to be, halves of one whole and neither better than the other. But while this is so and cannot be emphasized too strongly, the relationship of husband and wife, nevertheless, is such that the position of the wife is distinct from and dependent on that of the husband. This does not imply that the wife as a person is of inferior worth to her husband: in this respect there is neither male nor female; for they are both ‘one in Christ Jesus.’ Neither does it mean that the mission of the wife is of less importance than that of the husband. There are certain functions, moral and intellectual as well as physical, which she fulfills far better than her husband; and there are certain other functions of supreme necessity that only she can fulfill at all. What is meant, however, is that as there are some things of primary importance that only the wife can do, so there are other indispensable functions that only the husband ought to discharge, and chief among these is the direction of their *common* life. He, therefore, should be the ‘head’ of the ‘one body’ that husband and wife together form. Whether we can understand it or not, such a relationship is not inconsistent with perfect equality. It is not in the case of the Trinity. Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in power and glory. Yet the Son is second to the Father, and the Spirit is second to both the Father and the Son, as to their ‘mode of subsistence and operation.’ Whatever, therefore, the secondary position of the wife as regards her husband may imply, it need not imply even the least inferiority.”<sup>14</sup>

In the work of redemption...through a covenant voluntarily entered into, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each undertake a specific work in such a manner

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<sup>14</sup> **William Brenton Greene** (1893-1929) – Stuart Professor, Relation of Philosophy and Science to Christian Religion, Princeton Theological Seminary; Student Course Notes: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1924-1927; *Christian Sociology*, 1926.

that, during the time this work is in progress, the Father becomes officially *first*, the Son officially *second*, and the Spirit officially *third*. Yet within the essential and inherent life of the Trinity, the full equality of the persons is preserved.

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The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation is not corrected by the fuller revelation which follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged.—*B. B. Warfield*

# A FOUNDATIONAL DOCTRINE

A. W. Pink (1886-1952)

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.—2 Corinthians 13:14*

**T**HE divine Trinity lies at the basis of all New Testament teaching...The “only true God” is revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and is known in and through Jesus Christ, the one Mediator.<sup>1</sup> That the revelation of the triune God constitutes the doctrinal foundation of Christianity is easily capable of demonstration.

**First**, as pointed out above, the true God subsists<sup>2</sup> in three co-essential<sup>3</sup> and co-eternal persons, and therefore he who worships any but the triune God is merely rendering homage to a figment of his own imagination. He who denies the personality and absolute deity of either the Father, the Son, or the Spirit cannot be a true Christian.

**Second**, no salvation is possible for any sinner save that of which the triune God is the Author. To regard the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior to the exclusion of the saving operations of both the Father and the Spirit is a serious mistake. The Father eternally purposed the salvation of His elect in Christ (Eph 1:3-6). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit entered into an everlasting covenant<sup>4</sup> with each other for the Son to become incarnate in order to redeem sinners.

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<sup>1</sup> **Mediator** – a go-between; “It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.” (1689 London Baptist Confession 8.1, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY) See also FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator*.

<sup>2</sup> **subsists** – having a substantial, real, or independent existence.

<sup>3</sup> **co-essential** – having the same essence.

<sup>4</sup> **everlasting covenant** – Differing views exist among those who believe in God’s eternal purpose of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Some believe that God’s eternal purpose is expressed in two covenants: (1) a Covenant of Redemption, which is made in eternity among the members of the Godhead, which is the foundation for (2) a Covenant of Grace, which is made in history between God and His elect (i.e., John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Charles Hodge, R. L. Dabney, etc.). Of those who believe in the Covenant of Redemption, some believe that it is between the Father and the Son, while others include all the members of the Trinity. However, some believe that God’s eternal purpose is expressed in only one Covenant of Grace, which has an *eternal* aspect between the members of the Trinity and an *historical* aspect between God and His elect (i.e., Edmund Calamy, Thomas Boston, John Brown of Haddington, John Gill, Hugh Martin, Benjamin Keach, etc.).

The salvation of the Church is ascribed to the Father: “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling...according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2Ti 1:9). The Father, then, was our Savior long before Christ died to become such, and thanksgiving is due Him for the same. Equally necessary are the operations of the Spirit to actually apply to the hearts of God’s elect the good of what Christ did for them. It is the Spirit Who convicts men of sin and Who imparts saving faith to them. Therefore is our salvation also ascribed to Him: “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2Th 2:13). A careful reading of Titus 3:4-6 shows the three persons together in this connection, for “God our Savior” is plainly the Father; “*he* saved us, *by* the washing of regeneration,<sup>5</sup> and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Ti 3:6).

**Third**, the doctrine of the Trinity is a foundational doctrine because it is by the distinctive operations of the Holy Three that our varied needs are supplied. Do we not need “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ”? Is not our most urgent experimental requirement to come to Him constantly and draw from the fullness of grace that is treasured up for us in Him? (Joh 1:16). If we would obtain “grace to help in time of need,” then we must go to that throne on which the Mediator sits. And do we not also need “the love of God,” that is, fresh manifestations of it, new apprehensions thereof? Are we not bidden to keep ourselves “in the love of God”? (Jude 21). And do we not equally need “the communion of the Holy Spirit”? What would become of us if He did not renew day by day in the inner man? (*See* 2Co 4:16; Eph 3:16). What would be our prayer-life if He no longer helped “our infirmities” and made “intercession for the saints according to the will of God”? (Rom 8:26-27).

**The Holy Trinity:** Like the virgin birth of Christ and the resurrection of our bodies, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is one of the mysteries of the faith. The first truth presented to faith is the Being of the true and living God, and this we know not from any discovery of reason but because He has revealed it in His Word. The next grand truth is that the one living and true God has made Himself known to us under the threefold relation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and this we know on the same authority as the first...Whenever we attempt to discuss the revelation God has made of His three persons, we should do so with bowed heads and reverent hearts, for the ground we tread is ineffably<sup>6</sup> holy. The subject is one of transcendent sacredness for it concerns the infinitely majestic and glorious One. For the whole of our knowledge on this subject, we are entirely shut up to what it has pleased God to reveal of Himself in His Oracles. Science, philosophy,

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<sup>5</sup> See FGB 202, *The New Birth*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>6</sup> **ineffably** – in a manner too great to be described in words.

experience, observation, or speculation cannot in this exalted sphere increase our knowledge one iota.

**Trinity in Unity:** The divine Trinity is a Trinity in unity: that is to say, there are not three *Gods* but three *persons* as coexisting by essential union in the divine essence as being the one true God. Those three persons are coequal and co-glorious so that one is not before or after the other, neither greater nor less than the other. It is in and by Their covenant offices [that] They are manifested to us, and it is our privilege and duty to believe and know how these three persons stand committed to us and are interested in us by the everlasting covenant; but we cannot understand the mystery of Their subsistence.<sup>7</sup> Any teaching that does not equally honor all the persons of the Godhead, distinctively and unitedly, is of no value to the soul. As one has said, “There is not a vestige of Christianity where the truth of the Trinity is not known, and owned, and honored. Not a vestige of godliness in the heart of any child of Adam where the Father, Son, and Spirit do not officially dwell. There is not a clear view of one doctrine of God’s grace to be obtained unless the telescope, if I may so speak, the doctrine of the Trinity, is applied to the eye of faith and all viewed there”<sup>8</sup>...

In this benediction, the apostle invokes the Trinity as the source of grace, love, and communion. Its unique features must not be overlooked: the order is unusual, and the names used informally. The Son is placed before the Father. The divine persons are not here spoken of as the Son, the Father, and the Spirit, but as the Lord Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is because what we have in our text is not primarily a confession of faith (as is Mat 28:19), nor a doxology (as is Jude 24-25), but a benediction. A doxology is an ascription of praise; a benediction is a word of blessing—the one ascends from the heart of the saint to God, the other descends from God to the saint...

**The Doctrine of the Trinity of Great Importance:** The Christian benediction therefore intimates that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of great importance to the existence and progress of vital godliness: that it is not a subject of mere speculation, but one on which depends all the communications of grace and peace to the saints. It is a striking and solemn fact that those who reject the truth of the Trinity are seldom known to even profess having spiritual communion with God, but instead treat the same as a species of enthusiasm and fanaticism,<sup>9</sup> as a perusal of the writings of Unitarians will show. The benediction, then, sums up the blessings of Christian privilege in the three great words of the gospel: *grace, love, com-*

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<sup>7</sup> **subsistence** – mode of existence of the divine essence as a person.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Irons, *The Incarnation*, delivered in Grove Chapel, Camberwell, Lord’s Day Morning, December 1, 1850.

<sup>9</sup> **enthusiasm and fanaticism** – the belief that one receives direct, personal revelation from God and the tendency to indulge in wild, extravagant religious notion.

*munion*. Those three divine gifts are attributed to different persons in the Godhead. Each takes precedence in His own peculiar work, though we cannot trace the limits of such, and must be careful lest we conceive of God as three Gods rather than one. Each belongs to all. Grace is of God and of the Spirit as well as of the Son. Love is of the Son and Spirit as well as the Father. And our communion is with the Father and the Son as well as with the Spirit.

**Grace—a Great Word of the Gospel:** “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Why distinctively ascribe grace to *Him* if it is of God and the Spirit as well? Because in the economy of redemption, all grace comes to us through Him. The word *grace* is the special token of Paul in every epistle: eight close with “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,” sometimes varying the formula to “with your spirit.” *Grace* is one of the outstanding words of the gospel...

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” That is His designation as the God-man Mediator. It includes and indicates His divine nature: He is “the Lord,” yes, “the Lord of lords.” His human nature: He is “Jesus.” His office: He is “Christ,” the anointed One, the long-promised Messiah, the Mediator. It is the favor of His divine person clothed with our nature and made the Head of His people that the apostle invokes for all his believing brethren. “*His* grace be with you all.” That comes first in the benediction because it is our initial need. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2Co 8:9). There, it is His infinite condescension in submitting to such a mean condition for our sakes.

When He became incarnate, the only begotten of the Father was beheld by His own as “full of grace and truth,” and as the apostle added, “And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (Joh 1:14, 16). Here, the meaning of grace passes from an attribute of the divine character to an active energy in the souls of the redeemed. At the throne of grace, we “find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). The heart is “established with grace” (Heb 13:9), and by that grace we are enabled to “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28). It is in “the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 2:1) that we find our strength, and He assures us of its competency to support us under all afflictions and persecutions by the promise “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2Co 12:9). Therefore, we are exhorted to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2Pe 3:18). Those passages all speak of the divine power in the soul as the operation of grace in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ as its Fountain.

**The Love of God:** “And the love of God.” There are two reasons why this comes second: because this is the order both in the economy of redemption and in Christian experience. First, it was the mediatorial grace or work of Christ that procured the love of God for His people, which turned away His wrath from them and rec-

onciled Him to them. Hence, it is referred to not as “the love of the Father,” which never changed or diminished to His people, but as the love or goodwill of God considered as their Governor and Judge. Second, it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in saving us that we are brought to the knowledge and enjoyment of the love of God. The love of the Father is indeed the source and originating cause of redemption, but that is not the particular love of God that is here in view. The death of Christ as a satisfaction for our sins was necessary in order to bring us to God and into participation of His love. The manifestation of the love of God toward us in the pardon of our sins and the justification of our persons was conditioned on the atoning blood.

**The Communion of the Holy Spirit:** “And the communion of the Holy Spirit.” As the grand design of Christ’s work Godward was to appease His judicial wrath and procure for us His love and favor, so the grand effect saint-ward was the procuring of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word may be rendered either “communion” or “communication.” By the communication of the Holy Spirit, we are regenerated, faith is given, holiness is wrought in us. Life, light, love, and liberty are the special benefits He bestows on us. Without the Spirit being communicated to us we could never enter, personally and experimentally, into the benefits of Christ’s mediation. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us...That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:13-14). Thus, the communicating of the Spirit to His people was one of the chief objects of Christ’s death.

But the Greek also signifies the *communion* of the Holy Spirit, a word that means “partnership, companionship.” He shares with us the things of God. Grace tends to love, and love to communion. Hence, we see again that the order here is that of Christian experience. Only as grace is consciously received and the love of God is realized in the soul can there be any intelligent and real communion, through Christ to God the Father and through both to the abiding presence of the Comforter. This expression “the communion of the Holy Spirit” shows He is a person, for it is meaningless to talk of communion with an impersonal principle or influence. United as He is in this verse with “the Lord Jesus Christ and God,” it evidences Him to be a divine person. Further, it denotes He is an object of intercourse and converse, and hence we must be on our guard against grieving Him (Eph 4:30). The separate mention of each of the eternal Three teaches us that They are to be accorded equal honor, glory, and praise from us.

What is signified by “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, *be with you all?*” It cannot mean less than a consciousness of God’s presence. The apostle was not praying for the gifts of grace, love, and communion apart from the persons in whom alone they are to be



found. He requested that the presence of the triune God might be realized in the souls of His people. The New Testament teaches that the divine Three are equally present in the heart of the believer. Speaking of the Spirit Christ said, “He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you,” and of Himself and the Father, “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” (Joh 14:17, 23). The Christian is indwelt by the triune God: the Lord Jesus dwells in him as the source of all grace, God the Father abides in him as the spring of all love, and the Holy Spirit communes with him and energizes him for all spiritual service.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**A. W. Pink (1886-1952):** Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England.



# A PROFITABLE DOCTRINE

Wilhelmus á Brakel (1635-1711)

**T**HE Father, the Son, and the Spirit reveal themselves, interact with, and exercise believers in an individual and distinct manner. “My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (Joh 14:23). The Holy Spirit dwells in the godly as in a temple (1Co 6:19). From all this, it should be evident that God cannot be served except as being Triune in persons, and that those who honor and serve Him as such are the truly godly in this life and will experience salvation hereafter. Thus, this truth is most profitable and essential...As we seek to demonstrate how one may profit from this mystery, we shall follow the order of the divine persons. First,

**GOD THE FATHER** is viewed by believers as the origin of all things, and thus also of their salvation. They may perceive that He has chosen them from eternity to become the objects of His eternal love, to exalt them, and to make them partakers of an eternal and incomprehensible salvation; and that all is of Him, through Him, and unto Him. Secondly, they perceive how the Father has appointed His only-begotten and beloved Son to be Surety for the elect in order to make known to men and angels His perfect righteousness, incomprehensible mercy, wisdom, freeness in the dispensing of grace, and wondrous benevolence—the purpose of this revelation being to enhance their experience of salvation. Thirdly, they perceive that the Father in order to accomplish that purpose has created the world, and has decreed that man, due to his own fault, would fall into sin. By His providence, He maintains and governs everything for the benefit and profit of His elect, whom He has appointed to be the inheritors or possessors of the entire world. Fourthly, they perceive that the Father, according to the Counsel of Peace,<sup>1</sup> has sent His Son into the world to assume the human nature, to suffer and die as Surety,<sup>2</sup> to place Him under the Law in order to satisfy the Father’s justice by His Son’s perfect obedience, and thus deliver the elect from guilt and punishment, granting them a right unto eternal life. Fifthly, they perceive that the Father sends forth His Holy Spirit into the hearts of the elect to illuminate and regenerate them, to lead them to Christ, unite them to Christ by faith, and in the way of holiness lead them to glory. Sixthly, they perceive that the Father receives them as His children and heirs, and consequently loves and cares for them as His children. Such reflection produces in the believer a childlike frame that causes the soul to sink away in humility. How the soul then rejoices and receives liberty to

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<sup>1</sup> **Counsel of Peace** – another term for the *Covenant of Redemption*: see article 6, footnote 4.

<sup>2</sup> **Surety** – one who undertakes the debts of another: Jesus paid our sin debt upon the cross.

exclaim, “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6)! The soul will commit himself and his entire case into the hands of the Father, entrusting all to Him, living out of His hand, bringing all his needs to Him as his Father, making all his desires known to Him, being willing to obey his Father and to serve Him according to His will...

In considering **GOD THE SON**, first, believers perceive Him to be the only qualified Surety to make the elect sons and daughters—children of the Father—while in amazement, they reflect upon the unsearchable wisdom of God in appointing such a qualified person to be Surety. Secondly, they perceive the wondrous love of the Son towards man, Who gave Himself in the eternal Counsel of Peace to be Surety in order to accomplish the great work of redemption. Thirdly, they perceive how He humbled Himself in the fullness of time, taking upon Himself the form of a servant and assuming their nature, not being ashamed to call them brethren, in order that they might enjoy communion and fellowship with Him. Fourthly, they perceive how He out of pure and voluntary love has taken their sins upon Himself, doing so as if He had personally committed them. They perceive how He Himself, with all willingness, bore the punishment that they deserved, thereby fully satisfying divine justice and reconciling them to God. Fifthly, they perceive that He has united them to Himself as members of a spiritual body, He being the Head and they the members, He being the Bridegroom and they His bride, so that in Him, the Son, they are sons and daughters. Sixthly, they perceive that He thus brings them to God, presenting them to the Father, saying, “Behold I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb 2:13). Here is the fountain of salvation, and here all the perfections of God manifest themselves in an entirely different and more glorious manner than in the work of creation and providential maintenance...

**GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT** is for believers the One Who, in a manifold and merciful manner, applies and makes them partakers of all that the Father has eternally decreed for their benefit, as well as all that which the Son has merited for them...The Father and the Son send forth the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers, and the Holy Spirit dwells in them as in a temple. Prior to their regeneration, the elect are by nature as all other men, “sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 19). As it is only the Spirit Who makes alive, they are dead in sins and trespasses, living in total separation from God, having neither perception of their sinfulness and damnable state nor of salvation and spiritual life, and having no desire for these things. That which is of the earth is the focus of all their soul’s activity and of all the members of their body. All their religious activity is of a mechanical nature, in order to quiet their conscience. They rest in what they have done and hate all that which resembles light, spirituality, and true godliness—especially when their encounter with them is too close for comfort.

However, when the moment of God's good pleasure arrives for the elect, God grants them the Holy Spirit, Who illuminates and regenerates them and by faith makes them partakers of Christ and all His benefits. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6); "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15); "Now we have received...the Spirit which is of God" (1Co 2:12). At this point we must consider in what manner or in what regard believers receive the Holy Spirit.

*Question:* Do believers receive the gifts of the Spirit, or is the person Himself communicated to them?

*Answer:* (1) The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer is not just a mere presence, such as is true for the omnipresence<sup>3</sup> of His Godhead. (2) Neither is it an external relationship, viewing them as children of God and the objects of His operation. (3) Nor is it a communication of His gifts, such as faith, hope, and charity, etc. (4) Rather, it is the person Himself Who is given to believers, dwelling in them in a manner that is incomprehensible<sup>4</sup> and inexpressible to us. This presence infinitely exceeds the limits of their person, and yet [it] is in an extraordinary manner within them.

First, this becomes evident in those texts where the Holy Spirit is expressly said not only to be given to them, but also to dwell in them. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (Joh 14:16-17). "The Spirit of Christ which was in them" (1Pe 1:11). "Know ye not...that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1Co 3:16).

*Evasive Argument:* The gifts of the Holy Spirit are identified as being the Holy Spirit Himself (Act 10:44-45).

*Answer:* (1) In those places where the Holy Spirit is mentioned, it is not always and everywhere to be understood as being the same as His gifts. Thus, this argument has no clout, for it must then be shown that in the aforementioned and similar texts, the reference is to gifts and not to the person Himself. (2) A clear distinction is made between the Spirit Himself, Who is given to God's children, and His gifts. These gifts neither teach, lead, comfort, bear witness, regenerate, nor work faith; but it is the person, the Holy Spirit Himself, Who works and imparts these things to each person as is pleasing to Him. (3) The gifts of the Spirit are also given to reprobates<sup>5</sup> (Heb 6:4). Nevertheless, these gifts do not make the person a partaker of Christ, as does the indwelling of the Spirit. "If any man have not

<sup>3</sup> **omnipresence** – present in all places at the same time.

<sup>4</sup> **incomprehensible** – impossible or very difficult to understand.

<sup>5</sup> **reprobates** – unbelievers left in their sins and abandoned by God to judgment.

the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9). Thus, it is confirmed that the person of the Holy Spirit Himself dwells in the believer in a manner that is inexpressible and yet consistent with God’s Being.

Secondly, this indwelling is confirmed by such texts where believers are called the temples of the Holy Ghost. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1Co 3:16). “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1Co 6:19). God Himself, and not His gifts, dwelt in the temple at Jerusalem. “And I will dwell among the children of Israel” (Exo 29:45); “In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion” (Psa 76:2); “Thou that dwellest between the cherubims” (Psa 80:1). Since the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer as He formerly did in the temple, He Himself likewise, rather than His gifts only, personally dwells in the believer.

Thirdly, believers have an infinite desire that can only be satisfied with the Infinite One. The gifts of God are not infinite, and thus a believer cannot be satisfied with them. God Himself must be and is their portion, and they are united to God in Christ and are made perfect in one (Joh 17:23). Thus, the believer does not merely have the gifts of the Spirit, but he has the Spirit Himself.

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# COMMUNION WITH THE TRINITY

John Owen (1616-1683)

**B**Y nature, since the entrance of sin, no man hath any communion with God. He is *Light*, we *darkness*; and what communion hath light with darkness? He is *life*, we are *dead*. He is *love*, and we are *enmity*; and what agreement can there be between us? Men in such a condition have neither Christ nor hope nor God in the world (Eph 2:12), “being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them” (4:18). Now, two cannot walk together unless they be agreed (Amo 3:3). Whilst there is this *distance* between God and man, there is no *walking together* for them in any fellowship or communion. Our first interest in God was so lost by sin, as that there was left unto us (in ourselves) no possibility of a recovery. As we had deprived ourselves of all power for a return, so God had not revealed any way of *access* unto Himself; or that He could, under any consideration, be approached unto by sinners in peace. Not any work that God had made, not any attribute that He had revealed, could give the least light into such a dispensation...

But now in Christ we have boldness and access with confidence to God (Eph 3:12). This boldness and access with confidence the saints of old were not acquainted with. By Jesus Christ alone, then, on all considerations as to being and full manifestation, is this distance taken away. He hath consecrated for us a new and living way (the old being quite shut up), “through the vail, that is to say, his flesh” (Heb 10:20); and “through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). “Ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ, for he is our peace” (vv. 13-14)...Upon this new [base] and foundation, by this new and living way, are sinners admitted unto communion with God, and have fellowship with Him. And truly, for sinners to have fellowship with God, the infinitely holy God, is an astonishing dispensation. To speak a little of it in general...

Communion is the mutual communication of such good things as wherein the persons holding that communion are delighted, [based] upon some union between them. So it was with Jonathan and David: their souls clave to one another (1Sa 20:17) *in love*. There was the *union* of love between them; and then they really communicated all issues of love mutually. In spiritual things, this is more eminent:<sup>1</sup> those who enjoy this communion have the most excellent union for the foundation of it; and the issues of that union, which they mutually communicate, are the most precious and eminent...

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<sup>1</sup> **eminent** – important; especially valuable.

Our communion, then, with God consisteth in His *communication of Himself unto us, with our return unto Him* of that which He requireth and accepteth, flowing from that *union* that we have with Him in Jesus Christ. And it is twofold: (1) *Perfect and complete*, in the full fruition of His glory and total giving up of ourselves to Him, resting in Him as our utmost end; which we shall enjoy when we see Him as He is, and, (2) *initial and incomplete*, in the first-fruits and dawns of that perfection that we have here in grace, which only I shall handle.

It is, then, I say, of that mutual communication in giving and receiving, after a most holy and spiritual manner, which is between God and the saints while they walk together in a covenant of peace, ratified<sup>2</sup> in the blood of Jesus, whereof we are to treat.<sup>3</sup> And this we shall do, if God permit; in the meantime praying the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Who hath, of the riches of His grace, recovered us from a state of enmity into a condition of communion and fellowship with Himself, [so] that both He that writes and they that read the words of His mercy may have such a taste of His sweetness and excellence therein as to be stirred up to a farther longing after the fullness of His salvation and the eternal [enjoyment] of Him in glory...

That the saints have distinct communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (that is, distinctly with the Father, and distinctly with the Son, and distinctly with the Holy Spirit), and in what the peculiar appropriation<sup>4</sup> of this distinct communion unto the several persons doth consist, must, in the first place, be made manifest.

The apostle tells us, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1Jo 5:7). In heaven they are and bear witness to us. And what is it that they bear witness unto? Unto the sonship of Christ and the salvation of believers in His blood. Of the carrying on of that, both by blood and water, justification<sup>5</sup> and sanctification,<sup>6</sup> is he there treating. Now, how do they bear witness hereunto? Even as three—as three distinct witnesses. When God witnesseth concerning our salvation, surely it is incumbent<sup>7</sup> on us to receive His testimony. And *as* He beareth witness, *so* are we to receive it. Now this is done distinctly. The Father beareth witness, the Son beareth witness,

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<sup>2</sup> **ratified** – confirmed.

<sup>3</sup> **treat** – deal with; discuss.

<sup>4</sup> **peculiar appropriation** – particular obtaining.

<sup>5</sup> **justification** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY) See also FGB 187, *Justification*.

<sup>6</sup> **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God’s Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin, and live to righteousness.” (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 34)

<sup>7</sup> **incumbent** – necessary as an obligation or duty.

and the Holy Spirit beareth witness; for they are three distinct witnesses. So, then, are we to receive their several testimonies; and in doing so we have communion with them severally. For in *this giving and receiving* of testimony consists no small part of our fellowship with God...

The apostle, speaking of the distribution of gifts and graces unto the saints, ascribes them distinctly, in respect of the fountain of their communication, unto the distinct persons. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1Co 12:4-6)—“that one and the selfsame Spirit” (12:11), that is, the Holy Ghost. “And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord” (12:5), the same Lord Jesus. “And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God, etc.” (12:6), even the Father (Eph 4:6). So graces and gifts are bestowed and so are they received.

And not only in the emanation<sup>8</sup> of grace from God and the illapses<sup>9</sup> of the Spirit on us, but also in all our approaches unto God is the same distinction observed. “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). Our access unto God (wherein we have communion with Him) is “through Christ,” “in the Spirit,” and “unto the Father”—the persons being here considered as engaged distinctly unto the accomplishment of the counsel of the will of God revealed in the gospel.

*Sometimes, indeed, there is express mention made only of the Father and the Son:* “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1Jo 1:3). The particle “and” is both distinguishing and uniting. Also John 14:23, “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.” It is in this communion wherein Father and Son do make Their abode with the soul. *Sometimes the Son only is spoken of,* as to this purpose: “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1Co 1:9). And, “If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20)...*Sometimes the Spirit alone is mentioned.* “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all” (2Co 13:14). This distinct communion, then, of the saints with the Father, Son, and Spirit is very plain in the Scripture...

The way and means, then, on the part of the saints whereby in Christ they enjoy communion with God, are all the spiritual and holy [actions] and outgoings of their souls in those graces and by those ways, wherein both the *moral* and *instituted* worship of God doth consist. Faith, love, trust, joy, etc., are the natural or moral worship of God, whereby those in whom they are have communion with Him. Now, these are either *immediately* acted on God, and not tied to any ways or means

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<sup>8</sup> **emanation** – flowing forth.

<sup>9</sup> **illapses** – gentle sinkings in.



outwardly manifesting themselves; or else they are farther drawn forth in solemn prayer and praises, according unto the way that He hath appointed. That the Scripture doth distinctly assign all these unto the Father, Son, and Spirit...is that which, to give light to the assertion in hand, I shall farther declare by particular instances:

**1. For the Father.** Faith, love, obedience, etc., are peculiarly<sup>10</sup> and distinctly yielded by the saints unto Him; and He is peculiarly manifested in those ways as acting peculiarly towards them, which should draw them forth and stir them up thereunto. He gives *testimony* unto and beareth witness of His Son, “This is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son” (1Jo 5:9). In His bearing witness, He is an object of belief. When He gives testimony (which He doth as the Father because He doth it of the Son), He is to be received in it by faith. And this is affirmed: “He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself” (1Jo 5:10). To believe on the Son of God in this place is to receive the Lord Christ as the Son, the Son given unto us for all the ends<sup>11</sup> of the Father’s love, upon the credit of the Father’s testimony; and, therefore, therein is faith immediately acted on the Father. So it follows in the next words, “He that believeth not God” (that is, the Father, Who bears witness to the Son) “hath made him a liar.” “Ye believe in God,” saith our Savior, that is, the Father as such, for He adds, “Believe also in me” (Joh 14:1) or, “Believe you in God; believe also in me.” God, as the *prima Veritas*,<sup>12</sup> upon Whose authority is founded and whereunto all divine faith is ultimately resolved, is not to be considered *personally*, as peculiarly expressive of any person, but *essentially*, comprehending the whole deity...But in this particular, it is the testimony and authority of the Father (as such) therein, of which we speak, and whereupon faith is distinctly fixed on Him, which, if it were not so, the Son could not add, “Believe also in me.”

The like also is said of love. “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1Jo 2:15), that is, the love that we bear to Him, not that which we receive from Him. The Father is here placed as the object of our love, in opposition to the world, which takes up our affections—“the love of the Father.” The Father denotes the matter and object, not the efficient cause, of the love inquired after. And this love of Him as a Father is that which He calls His “honor” (Mal 1:6).

Farther: these graces as acted in prayer and praises and as clothed with instituted worship are peculiarly directed unto Him. “Ye call on the Father” (1Pe 1:17). “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph 3:14-15). Bowing the knee compriseth the whole worship of God, both that which is moral in the uni-

<sup>10</sup> **peculiarly** – especially.

<sup>11</sup> **ends** – purposes for which something is designed.

<sup>12</sup> **prima Veritas** – prime or first truth.

versal obedience He requireth, and those peculiar ways of carrying it on that are appointed by Him: “Unto me,” saith the LORD, “every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Isa 45:23). Which, verses 24-25, He declareth to consist in their acknowledging of Him for righteousness and strength. Yea, it seems sometimes to comprehend the *orderly* subjection of the whole creation unto His sovereignty. In this place of the apostle, it hath a far more restrained acceptance and is but a figurative expression of prayer, taken from the most expressive *bodily* posture to be used in that duty. This he farther manifests, declaring at large what his aim was and whereabouts his thoughts were exercised in that bowing of his knees (Eph 3:16-17).

The workings, then, of the Spirit of grace in that duty are distinctly directed to the Father as such, as the fountain of the deity and of all good things in Christ—as the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And therefore the same apostle doth, in another place, expressly *conjoin*, and yet as expressly *distinguish*, the Father and the Son in directing his supplications: “God himself even our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you” (1Th 3:11). The like precedent also have you of thanksgiving: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (Eph 1:3-4). I shall not add those very many places wherein the several particulars that do concur unto that whole divine worship...are distinctly directed to the person of the Father.

**2. It is so also in reference unto the Son:** “Ye believe in God,” saith Christ, “believe also in me” (Joh 14:1). “Believe also, act faith distinctly on Me; faith divine, supernatural—that faith whereby you believe in God, that is, the Father.” There is a believing of Christ, namely, that He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. [It] is that whose neglect our Savior so threatened unto the Pharisees, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (Joh 8:24). In this sense, faith is not immediately fixed on the Son, being only an owning of Him—that is, the Christ to be the Son—by closing with the testimony of the Father concerning Him.

But there is also a believing on Him, called “Believing on the name of the Son of God” (1Jo 5:13; so also Joh 9:36)—yea, the distinct affixing of faith, affiance,<sup>13</sup> and confidence on the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, as the Son of God, is most frequently pressed. “God”—that is, the Father—“so loved the world...that whosoever believeth in him”—that is, the Son—“should not perish.” The Son, Who is given of the Father, is believed on. “He that believeth on him is not condemned” (3:18). “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (3:36). “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (Joh 4:29, 40; 1Jo 5:10). The foundation of the whole is laid: “That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the

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<sup>13</sup> **affiance** – trust.

Father which hath sent him” (Joh 5:23)...For *love*, I shall only add that solemn apostolic benediction, “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” (Eph 6:24)—that is, with divine love, the love of religious worship, which is the only incorrupt love of the Lord Jesus.

Farther: that faith, hope, and love, acting themselves in all manner of obedience and appointed worship, are peculiarly due from the saints and distinctly directed unto the Son, is abundantly manifest from that solemn doxology: “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6). Which yet is set forth with more glory: “The four living creatures, and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints” (5:8); and “Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (5:13-14). The Father and the Son (He that sits upon the throne and the Lamb) are held out jointly, yet distinctly, as the adequate object of all divine worship and honor forever and ever. And therefore Stephen, in his solemn dying invocation,<sup>14</sup> fixeth his faith and hope distinctly on Him, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” and, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Act 7:59-60)—for he knew that the Son of man had power to forgive sins also. And this worship of the Lord Jesus, the apostle makes the discriminating character of the saints: “With all,” saith he, “that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1Co 1:2), that is, with all the saints of God. And invocation generally comprises the whole worship of God. This, then, is the due of our Mediator, though as God, as the Son, not as Mediator.

**3. Thus also is it in reference unto the Holy Spirit of grace:** The closing of the great sin of unbelief is still described as an opposition unto and a resisting of that Holy Spirit. And you have distinct mention of the love of the Spirit (Rom 15:30). The apostle also peculiarly directs his supplication to Him in that solemn benediction, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2Co 13:14). And such benedictions are originally supplications.<sup>15</sup> He is likewise entitled unto all instituted worship from the appointment of the administration of baptism in His name (Mat 28:19)...

Now, of the things that have been delivered this is the sum: there is no grace whereby our souls go forth unto God, no act of divine worship yielded unto Him, no duty or obedience performed, but they are distinctly directed unto Father, Son,

<sup>14</sup> **invocation** – calling upon God for help in prayer

<sup>15</sup> **supplications** – earnest, humble requests or pleas in prayer.

and Spirit. Now, by these and such like ways as these, do we hold communion with God.

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in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Goold, Vol. 2  
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**John Owen (1616-1683):** Congregational pastor, author, and theologian; born in Stadhampton, Oxfordshire, UK.



# TRINITARIAN SALVATION

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.—Matthew 3:16-17*

**L**ET us at once try to learn the first lesson from the text, which relates to the co-working of the Trinity in the matter of our salvation.

There are some who seem to suppose that Jesus Christ is our Savior to the exclusion of God the Father and of God the Holy Ghost, but this is a most erroneous idea. It is true that we are saved by the precious blood of Christ, but it is equally true that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have had their share in the great work of our salvation. In order that we might not fall into the error in which some have been entangled, it pleased God to give us, at the very beginning of Christ's public ministry, a very distinct intimation that He did not come alone and that He did not undertake the work of our redemption apart from the other adorable persons of the ever-blessed Trinity.

Try to picture to yourselves the scene that our text describes: there is Jesus Christ, Who has just been baptized in Jordan by John; and John bears witness that He is the Son of God because the sign from heaven for which he had been bidden to look had been given (Joh 1:33). As Jesus comes up out of the water, the Spirit of God descends upon Him in a visible shape, in appearance like a dove, and rests upon Him. John says that "it abode upon him" (Joh 1:32), as though the Spirit was thenceforth to be His continual Companion; and, truly, it was so. At the same time that the dove descended and lighted upon Christ, there was heard a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This was the voice of God the Father, Who did not reveal Himself in a bodily shape, but uttered wondrous words such as mortal ears had never before heard. The Father revealed Himself, not to the eye as the Spirit did, but to the ear; and the words He spake clearly indicated that it was God the Father bearing witness to His beloved Son. So that the entrance of Christ upon His public ministry on earth was the chosen opportunity for the public manifestation of the intimate union between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Now, sinner, from this day forward, if you have never done so before, think humbly, reverently, and lovingly of all the three persons of the most blessed Trinity in unity.

Bless the Son of God for becoming man in order that He might redeem us from destruction. He left His glory in heaven and was made in the likeness of men that He might suffer in our stead, as the Lamb of God's Passover, and that we might shelter beneath His sprinkled blood, and so escape the sword of vengeance. Do you know that, when Christ was baptized, He gave, as it were, a picture of His great work of redemption? He said to John, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Mat 3:15), by which I understand, not that He fulfilled all righteousness by being baptized, but that His baptism was a picture or emblem of the fulfilment of all righteousness.

What was done with Christ when He was baptized? Why, first, He was regarded as one Who was dead, and therefore He was buried beneath the waters of Jordan. He thus set forth by a most significant symbol the fact that He had come to earth to be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and that in due time He would actually die and be really buried, as now He was submerged beneath the yielding wave in a metaphorical burial. But baptism does not consist in merely plunging the person into the water: he must be lifted out again; otherwise he would be drowned, not baptized. So the Savior, when He rose up out of the water, set forth His own resurrection. By His baptism, He figuratively said, "I shall die for sinners, I shall rise again for sinners, and I shall go back to heaven to plead for sinners. My death will put away their offences, and my resurrection will complete their justification."

Go ye, who long for salvation, and by faith look to the Savior dying on the cross at Calvary: see Him buried in Joseph's tomb, see Him rise the third day, and after forty days see Him ascend to heaven leading captivity captive. His dying, His burial, His rising, His ascension—these are the fulfilment of all righteousness, and it is by these that you must be saved. It is not your being baptized that can save you; it is Christ's being baptized for you with that baptism of blood when He poured out His soul unto death that you might live forever. It is not your suffering, but His suffering that avails for your salvation; it is not your being or your doing that is the secret of blessing, but it is His being and His doing on which you must depend for everything. Trust in Jesus Christ, and you shall find salvation in Him.

**Now I want you to look with humbly grateful eyes to God the Holy Ghost.** You remember how Jesus Christ applied to Himself the words He read in the synagogue at Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luk 4:18-19). It was the Spirit of God Who gave success to Jesus Christ's ministry; and if you, dear friend, would be saved, it is only the Holy Spirit Who can take away from you the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

I pray you to think with holy reverence of that mighty, mysterious Being Who works in human hearts and molds them according to the will of God. By nature, you are spiritually dead, and only the Spirit of God can give you spiritual life. By nature, you are spiritually blind, and only the Spirit of God can give you spiritual sight. Even the work of Christ on the cross does not avail for you until the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto you. You must look to Christ, or He will not save you. You must trust in Christ, or His precious blood will not be applied to you. But you will never look to Him or trust in Him unless the Father, Who sent Him, shall draw you to do so by His Spirit effectually working in you. When we are thinking and speaking of the Holy Spirit, let us always feel as if we must put off our shoes from our feet; for the place whereon we stand is peculiarly holy. You remember how solemnly Christ warns us as to the consequences of even speaking against the Holy Ghost: “Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Mat 12:32).

Whenever we mention the name of the Holy Spirit, let us do it with holy awe and reverence, remembering that it is the Spirit that quickeneth, it is the Spirit that instructeth, it is the Spirit that sanctifieth,<sup>1</sup> it is the Spirit that preserveth, it is the Spirit that maketh us [fit] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. So, unto the ever-blessed Spirit of God as well as unto the well-beloved Son of God be glory and honor, praise and power, forever and ever.

**With equal reverence and with equal awe let us also think of God the Father.** What does the Father here say concerning Christ? First, He calls Him His Son. There has been much disputing about how Christ can be equal with the Father and equally eternal, and yet be the Son of the Father. This is a great deep into which you and I, dear friends, will do well not to pry. We usually speak of Christ being the Son of the Father by what is called “eternal generation.”<sup>2</sup> I confess that there is a mystery here that I can neither understand nor explain; but as the Father calls Him His Son, I unhesitatingly believe that He is what the Scripture constantly calls Him, “the Son of God.” In our text, we find that the Father not

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<sup>1</sup> **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God’s Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin, and live to righteousness. (Spurgeon’s Catechism, Q. 34) See FGB 215, *Sanctification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>2</sup> **eternal generation** – The relationship that exists between the first and second persons of the Trinity. God the Father is said to generate (or “beget”) the Son eternally. In other words, the Son’s identity as *Son* is defined eternally by His relationship to the Father. Likewise, the Father is eternally the *Father* by His relationship to the Son. The “generation” of the Son is not to be confused with physical conception or birth, whereby a human father begets a son who did not previously exist. In other words, the eternal generation of the Son does not speak about the origin of the Son but rather seeks to define the relationship of the Son to the Father. (Grenz, Guretzki, Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of the Theological Terms*, 46-47)

only calls Christ His Son, but He says, “This is my beloved Son.” What wondrous love there must be in the heart of each one of the divine persons in the sacred Trinity towards each of the others! How blessedly they must look upon one another with divine benignity<sup>3</sup> and complacency! There never could be any diversity in their interests; for they are one in heart, one in purpose, one in every respect, even as Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.”

Now, sinner, the point to which I want specially to direct your thoughts is this—that God not only calls Christ His Son, and His beloved Son, but that He says He is well pleased with Him; and this concerns you in that, if you are so united to Christ as to be one with Him, God will also be well pleased with you for His dear Son’s sake. But can a sinner ever be pleasing to God? Not in himself, apart from Christ, but all who are in Christ are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). His Father is so pleased with Him that all whom He represents are pleasing unto God for His sake. “But,” asks one, “how can I be in Christ?” My dear friend, if you are one of the Lord’s chosen, you are already in Christ in God’s eternal purpose; but the way in which you must experimentally get into Christ is by true faith in Him. To trust in Jesus is to be in Jesus. To rely upon the atoning sacrifice<sup>4</sup> of Christ is to be one with Christ. Faith is the uniting bond that binds together the Christ in Whom we believe and those who believe in Him. If you are truly trusting in Christ, God looks upon you as a part of Christ’s mystical body, and He is well pleased with you for Christ’s sake.

Thus, then, you have the Son suffering for you, the Spirit applying to you the merit of His atoning sacrifice, and the Father well pleased with you because you are trusting in His beloved Son. Or, to put the truth in another form, the Father gives the great gospel feast, the Son is the feast, and the Spirit not only brings the invitations, but He also gathers the guests around the table. Or, to use another metaphor, God the Father is the fountain of grace, God the Son is the channel of grace, and God the Holy Spirit is the cup from which we drink of the flowing stream. I wish that I could really make you see Jesus Christ standing by Jordan’s brink as He came up out of the water after He had been baptized by John, and the Spirit of God descending and lighting upon Him, and that I could make you hear the voice of the Father saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” If I could do this, all I should have to add would be John’s message: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” There is eternal life for everyone who truly looks unto Him by faith.

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<sup>3</sup> **benignity** – kindness and gentleness.

<sup>4</sup> See FGB 227, *Atonement*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



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From a sermon published on Thursday, April 18, 1912,  
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

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**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.



Beloved friends, here you have the Trinity, and there is no salvation apart from the Trinity. It must be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. "All things that the Father hath are mine," saith Christ, and the Father hath all things. They were always His; they are still His; they always will be His; and they cannot become ours until they change ownership, until Christ can say, "All things that the Father hath are mine"; for it is by virtue of the representative character of Christ standing as the surety of the covenant that the "all things" of the Father are passed over to the Son that they might be passed over to us. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and of his fullness have all we received" (Col 1:19). But yet we are so dull that, though the conduit-pipe is laid on to the great fountain, we cannot get at it.

We are lame; we cannot reach thereto; and in comes the third Person of the divine unity, even the Holy Spirit, and He receives of the things of Christ, and then delivers them over to us. So we do actually receive, through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, what is in the Father... Give me a gospel with the Trinity, and the might of hell cannot prevail against it.—*Charles H. Spurgeon*