

Collected Notes on the Doctrine of the Trinity

Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity

New believers are typically unable to espouse large bodies of doctrine with any degree of accuracy. Spiritual growth often comes from their faith being questioned, forcing the young believer into the Word of God to find the truth. The new Christian believes the Word whole-heartedly, but their knowledge of bible doctrines must grow and be refined by searching the scriptures.

Christian history has a similar background. *A history of church doctrines is a history of controversies within Christianity.* As the apostles left the scene, their teachings were left as a collection of inspired writings. The apostolic fathers' (those immediately following the apostles, some who were tutored by the apostles themselves) teachings were simplistic, staying close to the scripture and not systematic. As different concepts of doctrines sprung forth, Christianity was forced to appeal to the scriptures for authority. Truth became more defined and error was "weeded out". The doctrine of the trinity had such a beginning. *"The doctrine of the Trinity cannot be said to have taken final shape before the appearance of the so-called Athanasian Creed in the 8th or 9th century."* [Strong's Theology]

OT *"No Jewish writer before Christ's coming had succeeded in constructing from [the OT] a doctrine of the Trinity. Only to those who bring to them the light of New Testament revelation do they show their real meaning.* Our general conclusion with regard to the Old Testament intimations must therefore be that, while they do not by themselves furnish a sufficient basis for the doctrine of the Trinity, they contain the germ of it, and may be used in confirmation of it when its truth is substantially proved from the New Testament.... That the doctrine of the Trinity Is not plainly taught in the Hebrew Scriptures is evident from the fact that Jews unite with Mohammedans in accusing trinitarians of polytheism. *It should not surprise us that the Old Testament teaching on this subject is undeveloped and obscure. The first necessity was that the Unity of God should be insisted on. Until the danger of idolatry was past, a clear revelation of the Trinity might have been a hindrance to religious progress. The child now, like the race then, must learn the unity of God before it can profitably be taught the Trinity, — else it will fall into tritheism.*" [Strong, Theology]

"It is a plain matter of fact that none who have depended on the revelation embodied in the Old Testament alone have ever attained to the doctrine of the Trinity. It is another question, however, whether there may not exist in the pages of the Old Testament turns of expression or records of occurrences in which one already acquainted with the doctrine of the Trinity may fairly see indications of an underlying implication of it.... It is an old saying that what becomes patent in the New Testament was latent in the Old Testament.... *The New Testament writers certainly were not conscious of being 'setters forth of strange gods.' To their own apprehension they worshiped and proclaimed just the God of Israel; and they laid no less stress than the Old Testament itself upon His unity (Jn 7:3; 1 Cor 8:4; 1 Tim 2:5). They do not, then, place two new gods by the side of Jehovah as alike with Him to be served and worshiped; they conceive Jehovah as Himself at once Father, Son and Spirit....* The simplicity and assurance with which the New Testament writers speak of God as a Trinity have, however, a further implication. If they betray no sense of novelty in so speaking of Him, this is undoubtedly in part because it was no longer a novelty so to speak of Him. *It is clear, in other words, that, as we read the New Testament, we are not witnessing the birth of a new conception of God. What we meet with in its pages is a firmly established conception of God underlying and giving its tone to the whole fabric. It is not in a text here and there that the New Testament bears its testimony to the doctrine of the Trinity. The whole book is Trinitarian to the core; all its teaching is built on the assumption of the Trinity; and its allusions to the Trinity are frequent, cursory, easy and confident.* It is with a view to the cursoriness of the allusions to it in the New Testament that it has been remarked that *'the doctrine of the Trinity is not so much heard as overheard in the statements of Scripture.'* *It would be more exact to say that it is not so much inculcated as presupposed. The doctrine of the Trinity does not appear in the New Testament in the making, but as already made.... It everywhere presupposes the doctrine as the fixed possession of the Christian community, and*

the process by which it became the possession of the Christian community lies behind the New Testament. We cannot speak of the doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, if we study exactness of speech, as revealed in the New Testament, any more than we can speak of it as revealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written before its revelation; the New Testament after it. The revelation itself was made not in word but in deed. It was made in the incarnation of God the Son, and the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit. The relation of the two Testaments to this revelation is in the one case that of preparation for it, and in the other that of product of it. The revelation itself is embodied just in Christ and the Holy Spirit.” [Warfield, *Trinity*]

1st
Century
(NT era)

“The early Church Fathers ... had no clear conception of the Trinity.... While [the apostolic fathers] use the scriptural designation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and also speak of Christ as God and man, they do not testify to an awareness of the implications and problems involved.” [Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*] The most well known apostolic fathers are Barnabas, Hermas, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Papias and Ignatius

“The construction of the doctrine of the Trinity started, not from the consideration of the three Persons, but from belief in the deity of One of them.” [Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*] Apostolic fathers ascribed majesty and deity to Christ in many places; e.g. **Hermas** calls Christ *“the holy pre-existent Spirit, that created every creature”*; **Clement**: *“Brethren, it is fitting that you should think of Jesus Christ as of God – as the Judge of the living and the dead.”*; **Ignatius** describes Him as *“begotten and unbegotten, passible and impassible ... who was before the eternities with the Father.”*

“The determining impulse to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the church was the church’s profound conviction of the absolute Deity of Christ, on which as on a pivot the whole Christian conception of God from the first origins of Christianity turned. The guiding principle in the formulation of the doctrine was supplied by the Baptismal Formula announced by Jesus (Mt 28:19), from which was derived the ground-plan of the baptismal confessions and ‘rules of faith’ which very soon began to be framed all over the church. It was by these two fundamental principia — the true Deity of Christ and the Baptismal Formula — that all attempts to formulate the Christian doctrine of God were tested, and by their molding power that the church at length found itself in possession of a form of statement which did full justice to the data of the redemptive revelation as reflected in the New Testament and the demands of the Christian heart under the experience of salvation.” [Warfield, *Trinity*]

2nd
Century

Marcion (ca. 139 AD) taught the God of the OT and NT were different gods. The OT god was creator but not perfect; the NT god (Christ) was good and merciful. Christ being good, could not have taken upon himself sinful flesh; therefore Christ only appeared to be human (gnosticism).

The **Montanists** (ca. 150 AD) were a reaction against the gnostics. While orthodox in many areas, they attempted to revive the Charismatic gifts. They greatly emphasized the Person of the Holy Spirit, were the first to define the personality of the Spirit, and the first to formulate what was to become the doctrine of the trinity.

3rd
Century

Several of my sources list **Tertullian** (d. 220 AD) as *“the first to use the term ‘Trinity’ and to formulate the doctrine*, but his formulation was deficient since it involved an unwarranted subordination of the Son to the Father.” But Shedd notes an earlier use of the term “trinity” by **Theophilus** of Antioch (d. 181 or 188 AD): *“The three days which were before the luminaries are types of the trinity.”* [Shedd, *Theology*]

Origen (d. 250 AD) went even farther in this direction by teaching explicitly that the Son is subordinate to the Father *in respect to essence*, and that the Holy Spirit is subordinate even to the Son. He detracted from the essential deity of these two persons in the Godhead,

and furnished a stepping-stone to the Arians, who later denied the deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

4th
Century

Errors concerning the Trinity had developed among these lines:

Dynamic Monarchianism saw Jesus as a mere man and the Holy Spirit as the divine influence. With very minor differences, one could place **Arius** in this group. To the Arians, Christ was a created being, changeable but chosen of God on account of his foreseen merits (cp. JW, the Way, Unitarians).

Modalistic Monarchianism regarded the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit merely as three modes of manifestation successively assumed by the Godhead. This is generally known today as **Sabellianism**, after a leading proponent **Sabellius**.

Some even lost sight of the unity of God to such an extent they landed in **Tritheism** (cp. the modern *Dake's Study Bible*).

“The great trinitarian strife is usually called the **Arian Controversy**, because it was occasioned by the anti-trinitarian views of **Arius**, a presbyter of Alexandria.” [Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*] The great defender of the faith was **Athanasius**, archdeacon of Alexandria, and the **Council of Nicaea** was convened in **AD 325** to settle the dispute. *The Arians rejected the idea of eternal generation while Athanasius reasserted this; the Arians said the Son was created from nothing while Athanasius maintained He was generated from the essence of the Father; the Arians held that the Son was not of the same substance as the Father while Athanasius affirmed He was of the same substance.* There was also a middle party defended by **Eusebius** of Caesarea (A.K.A. Origenistic Party) which had Arian leanings, not believing the Son was of the *same* substance as the Father but rather of *similar* substance. *The Council adapted an orthodox (although primitive) statement concerning the doctrine of the Trinity.*

“The decision of the Council did not terminate the controversy, but was rather only the beginning of it. A settlement forced upon the Church by the strong hand of the emperor could not satisfy and was also of uncertain duration.... **Athanasius himself, though victorious, was dissatisfied with such a method of settling ecclesiastical disputes. He would rather have convinced the opposing party by the strength of his arguments.**” [Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*]

Opposition to the Nicene Creed was divided: some said Jesus was of *different* substance, some that He was *unlike* the Father, some that He was *similar* substance. But the opposition all agreed the error of Jesus being the *same* substance. Semi-Arianism (Christ is of *similar* substance as the Father) prevailed in Eastern Christianity while the Western churches maintained the more orthodox doctrine. The **Council of Constantinople** met in **AD 381**, approving of the Nicene Creed while also further defining the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. While a great step, it failed to clearly define the relationship of the essence of the Spirit with that of the Father and Son. In the East the doctrine of the Trinity found its fullest statement in the work of **John of Damascus**, and in the West, in **Augustine's** (b. 354 - d. 430) work *De Trinitate*. The east kept an element of subordination, but the west entirely eliminated it. *In the form which Augustine gave it, and which is embodied in that “battle-hymn of the early church,” the so-called Athanasian Creed* (more properly called *Symbolum Quicunque*, not mentioned historically prior to 8th century), *it has retained its place as the fit expression of the faith of the church as to the nature of its God until today.*

Summation

- Modern-day Arians (JW's, the Way, et. al.) present the trinity to be a late addition as “Christianity apostatized”. However we can find bold and clear statements within the Church Father's early writings concerning the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and we can even see the development of an immature, primitive doctrine of the trinity within a generation of the apostles themselves.
- One method by which modern-day Arians attack the trinity is by stating Christianity “departed from the truth”

(of Arianism) and blended with Christianity the teachings of paganism. In response to this, several theologians have noted the contrast between Biblical trinitarianism and pagan triads: “By the doctrine of the Trinity Christianity secured itself against false heathen ideas of God’s unity and multiplicity and immanence, as well as against false Jewish ideas of God’s unity and transcendence. It owes nothing to foreign sources.... ***The heathen trinities are residuary fragments of the lost knowledge of God, not different stages in a process of theological evolution, but evidence of a moral and spiritual degradation.***” [Strong’s, *Theology*] “None of these [pagan] triads has the slightest resemblance to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity embodies much more than the notion of ‘threeness,’ and beyond their ‘threeness’ these triads have nothing in common with it.”

[Warfield, *Trinity*] *Note: rather than Christianity blending with pagan concepts, it is Arianism itself which was most readily accepted by the pagans. By making Christ unequal with the Father and regulating Him to a “demiurge”, Arianism gained a foothold with the Goths and other pagans (see section III , B, 2 “Arianism”).*

Prior to giving present-day statements on the Trinity, we must remember the following: ***“The doctrine of the Trinity has always bristled with difficulties, and therefore it is no wonder that the Church in its attempt to formulate it was repeatedly tempted to rationalize it and to give a construction of it which failed to do justice to the Scriptural data.”*** [Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*]

“If asked to define the trinity, we can only say that it is not this or that.” [Augustine] ... ***Even in our day we cannot say that a complete exposition of the Trinity is possible. Trinity is a unique fact, different aspects of which may be illustrated, while, as a whole, it has no analogies....*** There is extreme difficulty in giving any statement of a triunity that shall not verge upon tritheism on the one hand, or upon mere modalism on the other. It was very natural that Calvin should be charged with Sabellianism, and John Howe with tritheism.” [Strong, *Theology*]

Theological Definitions

“In the nature of the one God there are three eternal distinctions which are represented to us under the figure of persons, and these three are equal.” [Strong, *Systematic Theology*]

“(1) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one God; (2) each has a peculiarity incommunicable to the others; (3) neither is God without the others; (4) each, with the others, is God.” [Joseph Cook; quoted in Strong’s *Theology*]

“When we speak of the Trinity of God, we refer to a trinity in unity, and to a unity that is trinal.” [Berkhof, *Theology*]

“The term ‘Trinity’ is not a Biblical term, and we are not using Biblical language when we define what is expressed by it as the doctrine that there is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence. A doctrine so defined can be spoken of as a Biblical doctrine only on the principle that the sense of Scripture is Scripture. And the definition of a Biblical doctrine in such unbiblical language can be justified only on the principle that it is better to preserve the truth of Scripture than the words of Scripture.” [Warfield, *Trinity*]

Explanation [six major points from Strong, *Systematic Theology*]

Where we are going:

1. In Scripture there are three who are recognized as God.
2. These three are distinct persons.
3. This tripersonality of the divine nature is eternal.
4. This tripersonality is not tritheism; for while there are three persons, there is but one essence.
5. The three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are equal.
6. Although impossible to understand, it is not contradictory and furnishes the key to other doctrines.

I. In Scripture there are three who are recognized as God.

— Proofs from the NT —

A. The Father is recognized as God.

Passages are numerous and so universally accepted that we need not multiply proofs.

“for Him hath God the Father sealed” — Jn 6:27

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” — 1 Pet 1:2

B. The Son is recognized as God.

(1) He is expressly called God.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” — Jn 1:1

“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.” — Jn 1:18 (NIV) “the only begotten God” (RSV)

“And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God.” — Jn 20:28 Note this was accepted by Christ; contrast the conduct of Paul and Barnabas when the people considered them gods (Acts 14:11-18).

“As concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” — Rom 9:5

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” — Titus 2:13

“He saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.” — Heb 1:6; quoted from Ps 97:7 “Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods.”; the “him” is a reference to Jehovah, which the author of Hebrews equates with Jesus.

“But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever” — Heb 1:8; quoted in Ps 45:6 “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter.”, a reference to Jehovah

“Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands” — Heb 1:10

“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” — 1 John 5:20

(2) OT descriptions of God (Jehovah) are applied to Christ

“This is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. — Mat 3:3; quoted from “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” — Isa 40:3

“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. — Jn 12:37-41; His glory, a reference to Isa 6:1-3 “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”

“But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. — Eph 4:7, 8; referring to Christ what is attributed to Jehovah in Ps 68:18 “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.”

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.” — 1 Pet 3:15 (NIV) which is a reference from Isa 8:13 “Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.”

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ — Rom 10:9 (NIV); and “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” — 1 Cor 12:3; especially when it's remembered the Jews' reverence for the title of Lord: “When we remember that, with the Jews, God's covenant-title was so sacred that for the written Jehovah there was always substituted the read Adonai (Heb: Lord), in order to avoid pronunciation of the great Name, it seems the more remarkable that the Greek equivalent of ‘Jehovah’ should have been so constantly used of Christ.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(3) Jesus possesses the attributes of God.

life: “In Him was life” — Jn 1:4; “I am ... the life” — Jn 14:6

self-existence: “have life in Himself” — Jn 5:26; “power of an endless life” — Heb 7:16

immutability: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever” — Heb 13:8

truth: “I am ... the truth” — Jn 14:6; “He that is true” — Rev 3:7

love: “Hereby know we love (τὴν ἀγάπην = the personal Love, as the personal Truth) because He laid down His life for us.” — 1 Jn 3:16

holiness: “That which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God” — Lk 1:35; “Thou art the Holy One of God” — Jn 6:69; “holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners” — Heb 7:26

eternity: “In the beginning was the Word” — Jn 1:1; “What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before” — Jn 6:62; “glory which I had with thee before the world was” — Jn 17:5; “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world” — Eph 1:4; “before Abraham was, I am” — Jn 8:58; “He is before all things” — Col 1:17; “The heavens shall perish, but thou remainest” — Heb 1:11; “I am the alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” — Rev 21:6; “He shall be called ... the everlasting Father”, or rather, “the father of eternity” — Isa 9:6; “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” — Mic 5:2

omnipresence: “I am with you always” — Mt 28:20; “the fullness of Him which filleth all in all” — Eph 1:23

omniscience: “Jesus, knowing their thoughts” — Mt 9:4; “knew all men ... knew what was in man” — Jn 2:24,25; “knowest all things” — Jn 16:30; “Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men” — Acts 1:24; “Until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart” — 1 Cor 4:5; “In whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden” — Col 2:3

omnipotence: “all authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth” — Mt 28:18; “the Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty” — Rev 1:8

(4) The works of God are ascribed to Him.

creation: “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” — Jn 1:3, “This passage shows that the universe (1) exists within the bounds of Christ’s being, (2) is not dead, but living, (3) derives its life from Him.” [Strong’s, *Systematic Theology*]; “one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things” — 1 Cor 8:6; “all things have been created through Him, and unto Him” — Col 1:16; “Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands” — Heb 1:10; “he that built all things is God” — Heb 3:3,4, referring to Christ as the builder of the house of Israel, being the God who made all things; “the beginning of the creation of God” — Rev 3:14

upholding: “in Him all things consist” — Col 1:17; “upholding all things by the word of his power” — Heb 1:3

raising the dead / judging the world: “authority to execute judgement ... all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth” — Jn 5:27-29; “sit on the throne of His glory and before Him shall be gathered all the nations” — Mt 25:31,32

(5) He receives honor and worship due only to God.

“And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God.” — Jn 20:28

“that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” — Jn 5:23

“if ye shall ask me anything in my name, that will I do” — Jn 14:14

“Stephen, calling upon the Lord, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” — Acts 7:59

“confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord... whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” — Rom 10:9,13

“this do in remembrance of Me” (i.e. in worship of Me) — 1 Cor 11:24,25

“let all the angels of God worship Him” — Heb 1:6

“at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord” — Phil 2:10,11

“worthy is the Lamb that has been slain to receive power” — Rev 5:12-14

“Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory” — 2 Pet 3:18

“to whom be the glory forever” — 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21

(6) His name associated with that of God upon equal footing of equality.

The baptismal formula: “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” — Mt 28:19 — “*The nearest approach to a formal announcement of the doctrine of the Trinity which is recorded from Our Lord’s lips...* In seeking to estimate the significance of this great declaration, we must bear in mind the high solemnity of the utterance, by which we are required to give its full value to every word of it. Its phrasing is in any event, however, remarkable. It does not say, ‘In the names [plural] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost’; nor yet (what might be taken to be equivalent to that), ‘In the name of

the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Ghost,' as if we had to deal with three separate Beings. Nor, on the other hand, does it say, 'In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,' as if 'the Father, Son and Holy Ghost' might be taken as merely three designations of a single person. With stately impressiveness it asserts the unity of the three by combining them all within the bounds of the single Name; and then throws up into emphasis the distinctness of each by introducing them in turn with the repeated article: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' (AV). These three, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, each stand in some clear sense over against the others in distinct personality: these three, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, all unite in some profound sense in the common participation of the one Name. Fully to comprehend the implication of this mode of statement, we must bear in mind, further, the significance of the term, 'the name,' and the associations laden with which it came to the recipients of this commission. For the Hebrew did not think of the name, as we are accustomed to do, as a mere external symbol; but rather as the adequate expression of the innermost being of its bearer. In His name the Being of God finds expression; and the Name of God — 'this glorious and fearful name, Jehovah thy God' (Deut 28:58) — was accordingly a most sacred thing, being indeed virtually equivalent to God Himself. It is no solecism, therefore, when we read (Isa 30:27), 'Behold, the name of Jehovah cometh'; and the parallelisms are most instructive when we read (Isa 59:19): 'So shall they fear the Name of Jehovah from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; for He shall come as a stream pent in which the Spirit of Jehovah driveth.' So pregnant was the implication of the Name, that it was possible for the term to stand absolutely, without adjunction of the name itself, as the sufficient representative of the majesty of Jehovah: it was a terrible thing to 'blaspheme the Name' (Lev 24:11). All those over whom Jehovah's Name was called were His, His possession to whom He owed protection. It is for His Name's sake, therefore, that afflicted Judah cries to the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble: 'O Jehovah, Thou art in the midst of us, and Thy Name is called upon us; leave us not' (Jer 14:9); and His people find the appropriate expression of their deepest shame in the lament, 'We have become as they over whom Thou never barest rule; as they upon whom Thy Name was not called' (Isa 63:19); while the height of joy is attained in the cry, 'Thy Name, Jehovah, God of Hosts, is called upon me' (Jer 15:16; cf. 2 Chron 7:14; Dan 9:18,19). When, therefore, Our Lord commanded His disciples to baptize those whom they brought to His obedience 'into the name of...,' He was using language charged to them with high meaning. He could not have been understood otherwise than as substituting for the Name of Jehovah this other Name 'of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'; and this could not possibly have meant to His disciples anything else than that Jehovah was now to be known to them by the new Name, of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The only alternative would have been that, for the community which He was founding, Jesus was supplanting Jehovah by a new God; and this alternative is no less than monstrous. There is no alternative, therefore, to understanding Jesus here to be giving for His community a new Name to Jehovah and that new Name to be the threefold Name of 'the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.' Nor is there room for doubt that by 'the Son' in this threefold Name, He meant just Himself with all the implications of distinct personality which this carries with it; and, of course, that further carries with it the equally distinct personality of 'the Father' and 'the Holy Ghost,' with whom 'the Son' is here associated, and from whom alike 'the Son' is here distinguished. This is a direct ascription to Jehovah the God of Israel, of a threefold personality, and is therewith the direct enunciation of the doctrine of the Trinity. ***We are not witnessing here the birth of the doctrine of the Trinity; that is presupposed. What we are witnessing is the authoritative announcement of the Trinity as the God of Christianity by its Founder, in one of the most solemn of His recorded declarations. Israel had worshiped the one only true God under the Name of Jehovah; Christians are to worship the same one only and true God under the Name of 'the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.'*** This is the distinguishing characteristic of Christians; and that is as much as to say that the doctrine of the Trinity is, according to Our Lord's own apprehension of it, the distinctive mark of the religion which He founded." [Warfield, *Trinity*]

"be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ" – Acts 2:38

"baptized into Christ Jesus" – Rom 6:3

apostolic benedictions: "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" – 1 Cor 1:3

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

other passages: note the instances which the term "God the Father" is used to distinguish Him from God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Gal 1:3; Eph 3:14; 6:23; et. Al.)

"that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" – Jn 5:23

"believe in God, believe also in Me" – Jn 14:1

"This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" – Jn 17:3

"No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" – Mt 11:27

"the same Spirit ... the same Lord [Christ] ... the same God [Father]" – 1 Cor 12:4-6

"The grace of God ... in the mystery of Christ ... by the Spirit" — Eph 3:2-5

"One Spirit ... one Lord ... one God and Father over all ... the gift of Christ" — Eph 4:4-7

"Be ye filled with the Spirit ... giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" — Eph 5:18-20

"the kingdom of Christ and God" – Eph 6:5

Christ ... seated on the right hand of God" – Col 3:1; meaning Christ participating in the sovereignty of the universe

"We give thanks to God ... in our Lord Jesus Christ ... and in the Holy Ghost" — 1 Thes 1:2-5

“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit ... the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” — 2 Thes 2:13,14

“I thank God ... faith and love which is in Christ Jesus ... keep by the Holy Spirit” — 2 Tim 1:3,13,14

“Love of God our Saviour ... renewing of the Holy Spirit ... through Jesus Christ” — Titus 3:4-6

“Spoken by the Lord ... God also bearing them witness ... gifts of the Holy Spirit” — Heb 2:3,4

“Made partakers of the Holy Spirit ... the word of God ... the Son of God” — Heb 6:4-6

“The Son of God ... the Spirit of grace ... the living God” — Heb 10:29-31

“God the Father ... sanctification of the Spirit ... the blood of Jesus Christ” — 1 Pet 1:2

“The name of Christ ... the Spirit of glory and of God ... glorify God” — 1 Pet 4:14-16

“Praying in the Holy Spirit ... love of God ... mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ” — Jude 20,21

“priests of God and of Christ” — Rev 20:6

“the throne of God and of the Lamb” — Rev 22:3

(7) Equality with God is expressly claimed.

“All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” — Mt 11:27

“called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” — Jn 5:18 — “So clear is it that in speaking currently of Himself as God’s Son (Jn v.25; ix. 35; xi. 4; cf. x. 36), He meant, in accordance with the underlying significance of the idea of sonship in Semitic speech (founded on the natural implication that whatever the father is that the son is also; cf. xvi. 15; xvii. 10), to make Himself, as the Jews with exact appreciation of His meaning perceived, ‘equal with God’ (v.18), or, to put it brusquely, just ‘God’ (x. 33).” [Warfield, *Trinity*]

“who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped” — Phil 2:6; meaning Christ did not count His equality with God a thing to be forcibly retained

“Only one personage in history has claimed to teach absolute truth, to be one with God, and to attest His divine mission by works such as only God could perform.... Neither Confucius nor Buddha claimed to be divine, or the organs of divine revelation, though both were moral teachers and reformers. Zoroaster and Pythagoras apparently believed themselves charged with a divine mission, though their earliest biographers wrote centuries after their death. Socrates claimed nothing for himself which was beyond the power of others. Mohammed believed his extraordinary states of body and soul to be due to the action of celestial beings; he gave forth the Koran as ‘a warning to all creatures’, and sent a summons to the King of Persia and the Emperor of Constantinople, as well as to other potentates, to accept the religion of Islam; yet he mourned when he died that he could not have opportunity to correct the mistakes of the Koran and of His own life. For Confucius or Buddha, Zoroaster or Pythagoras, Socrates or Mohammed to claim all power in heaven and earth, would show insanity or moral perversion. But this is precisely what Jesus claimed. He was either mentally or morally unsound, or His testimony is true.” [Strong’s, *Theology*]

Robert Browning quoted the words of Charles Lamb: ***when asked how he and his friends would feel if the greatest of the dead were to appear suddenly in flesh and blood once more, many fond comments were made. Then when asked, “And if Christ entered this room?”, [he] changed his tone at once and stuttered out as his manner was when moved: “You see – if Shakespear entered, we should all rise; if He appeared, we must kneel.”*** [Strong’s *Theology*]

(8) Further proof of Christ’s deity may be found in the application to Him of the phrases: ‘Son of God,’ ‘Image of God’; in the declarations of His oneness with God; in the attribution to Him of the fulness of the Godhead.

“I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said” — Mt 26:63,64; if was for this that the Sanhedrin pronounced the death sentence upon Christ

“the image of the invisible God” — Col 1:15

“The effulgence of His [the Father’s] glory, and the very image of His substance” — Heb 1:3

“I and my Father are one.” — Jn 10:30

“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” — Jn 14:9

“Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.... That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.... O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.” — Jn 17:11,21-23, 25

“in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” — Col 2:9

“for it was the pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell” – Col 1:19; or (margin) “for the whole fulness of God was pleased to dwell in Him”

“all things whatsoever the Father hath are mine” – Jn 16:15

“all things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine” – Jn 17:10

(9) These proofs of Christ’s deity from the NT are corroborated by Christian experience.

“Although this experience cannot be regarded as an independent witness to Jesus’ claims, since it only tests the truth already made known in the Bible, still *the irresistible impulse of every person whom Christ has saved to lift his Redeemer to the highest place, and bow before Him in the lowliest worship, is strong evidence that only that interpretation of Scripture can be true which recognizes Christ’s absolute Godhead.* It is the church’s consciousness of her Lord’s divinity, indeed, and not mere speculation upon the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, that has compelled the formulation of the Scripture doctrine of the Trinity.” [Strong’s, *Theology*]

“Every redeemed soul, knowing himself reconciled with God through His Son, and quickened into newness of life by His Spirit, turns alike to Father, Son and Spirit with the exclamation of reverent gratitude upon his lips, ‘My Lord and my God!’ If he could not construct the doctrine of the Trinity out of his consciousness of salvation, yet the elements of his consciousness of salvation are interpreted to him and reduced to order only by the doctrine of the Trinity which he finds underlying and giving their significance and consistency to the teaching of the Scriptures as to the processes of salvation. By means of this doctrine he is able to think clearly and consequently of his threefold relation to the saving God, experienced by Him as Fatherly love sending a Redeemer, as redeeming love executing redemption, as saving love applying redemption: all manifestations in distinct methods and by distinct agencies of the one seeking and saving love of God. Without the doctrine of the Trinity, his conscious Christian life would be thrown into confusion and left in disorganization if not, indeed, given an air of unreality; with the doctrine of the Trinity, order, significance and reality are brought to every element of it.” [Warfield, *Trinity*]

(10) Passages which are apparently inconsistent with those cited are explained by His humiliation during His incarnation

“Passages ... [which] impute to Christ weakness and ignorance, limitation and subjection, we are to remember, first, that our Lord was truly man, as well as truly God, and that this ignorance and weakness may be predicated of him as the God-man in whom deity and humanity are united; secondly, that the divine nature itself was in some way limited and humbled during our Savior’s earthly life, and that these passages may describe him as he was in his estate of humiliation, rather than in his original and present glory and, thirdly, that there is an order of office and operation which is consistent with essential oneness and equality, but which permits the Father to be spoken of as first and the Son as second.” [Strong’s, *Theology*]

things which Christ was ignorant: “of that day or the hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” — Mk 13:32

“who touched My garments?” — Mk 5:30-34; although in this instance He might have merely been bringing the woman into the open

“where have you laid him?” — Jn 11:34, although Christ was about to show His deity by raising the dead

“seeing a fig-tree afar of having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon” — Mk 11:13; note He did not know it had no fruit, yet he had power to curse the tree

subject to physical fatigue: “Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus by the well” — Jn 4:6

a limitation connected with Christ’s taking of human flesh: “emptied himself, taking the form of a Servant, being made in the likeness of men” — Phil 2:7

there is a subjection, as respects order of office and operation, which is yet consistent with equality of essence and oneness with God: “then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all.” — 1 Cor 15:28

“the Father is greater than I.” — Jn 14:28

Note: “Even in his humiliation, Christ was the Essential Truth, and ignorance in him never involved error or false teaching. Ignorance on his part might make his teaching at times incomplete, — it never in the smallest particular made his teaching false.” [Strong, *Theology*]

C. The Holy Spirit is recognized as God.

(1) He is spoken of as God

“lie to the Holy Spirit not lied unto men, but unto God” — Acts 5:3,4

“ye are a temple of God.... the Spirit of God dwelleth in you” — 1 Cor 3:16; “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” — 1 Cor 6:19

“same Spirit.... same Lord same God, who worketh all things in all” — 1 Cor 12:4-6

(2) the attributes of God are ascribed to Him.

life: “Spirit of life” — Rom 8:2

truth: “Spirit of truth” — Jn 16:13

love: “love of the Spirit” — Rom 15:30

holiness: “the Holy Spirit of God” — Eph 4:30

eternity: “the eternal Spirit” — Heb 9:14; some take this to refer to Christ’s divine nature, i.e., the eternal spirit = the divine eternal spiritual side of Christ, as opposed to the human spirit which is eternal in the sense of never-ending only. “We prefer that which makes the passage refer to the Holy Spirit, and we cite in support of this view Acts 1:2 – “he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles”; 10:38 – “God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit.” [Strong, *Theology*]

omnipresence: “whither shall I go from thy Spirit?” — Ps 139:7

omniscience: “all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as He will.” — 1 Cor 12:11; “God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God” – 1 Cor 2:10; “The Spirit of God finds nothing even in God which baffles his scrutiny. His ‘search’ is not a seeking for knowledge yet beyond him ... Nothing but God could search the depths of God.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(3) He does the works of God.

creation: “Spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters” — Gen 1:2, margin

casting out of demons: “But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons.” — Mat 12:28

conviction of sin: “He will convict the world of sin” — Jn 16:8

regeneration: “born of the Spirit” — Jn 3:8; “renewing of the Holy Spirit” — Titus 3:5

resurrection: “give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit” — Rom 8:11; “The last Adam became a life giving spirit.” — 1 Cor 15:45

(4) He receives honor due only to God.

“ye are a temple of God ... the Spirit of God dwelleth in You” — 1 Cor 3:16; he who inhabits the temple is the object of worship there

(5) He is associated with God on a footing of equality.

formula of baptism: “baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” – Mat 28:19; if the baptismal formula might be considered worship, then we have here worship paid to the Spirit.

Apostolic benedictions: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” – 2 Cor 13:14; if the apostolic benedictions might be considered prayer, then we have here prayer to the Spirit.

“foreknowledge of God the Father ... sanctification of the Spirit ... the blood of Jesus Christ” – 1 Pet 1:2

(6) Christian experience.

“Christian experience, moreover, expressed as it is in the prayers and hymns of the church, furnishes an argument for the deity of the Holy Spirit similar to that for the deity of Jesus Christ. When our eyes are opened to see Christ as a Saviour, we are compelled to recognize the work in us of a divine Spirit who has taken of the things of Christ and has shown them to us; and this divine Spirit we necessarily distinguish both from the Father and the Son. Christian experience, however, is not an original and independent witness to the deity of the Holy Spirit; it simply shows what the church has held to be the natural and unforced interpretation of the Scriptures, and so confirms the Scripture argument already adduced.” [Strongs, *Theology*]

(7) This proof of the deity of the Holy Spirit is not invalidated by the limitations of His work under the Old Testament dispensation.

“for the Holy Spirit was not yet” — Jn 7:39; simply means that the Holy Spirit could not fulfill his peculiar office as Revealer of Christ until the atoning work of Christ should be accomplished.

“And yet the Holy Spirit is “the eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14), and he not only existed, but also wrought, in Old Testament times. 2 Peter 1:21 — “men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit” — seems to fix the meaning of the phrase “the Holy Spirit,” where it appears in the OT. ***Before Christ “the Holy Spirit was not yet” (John 7:39), just as before Edison electricity was not yet. There was just as much electricity in the world before Edison as there is now. Edison has only taught us its existence and how to use it. Still we can say that, before Edison, electricity, as a means of lighting, warming and transporting people, had no existence.***” [Strongs, *Theology*]

A. Passages which seem to teach plurality of some sort in the Godhead.

(1) The plural noun Elohim is employed, and that with a plural verb

“God caused [plural] me to wander from my father's house” — Gen 20:13

“built there in altar, and called the place El-Beth-el; because there God was revealed [plural] unto him.” — Gen 35:7

“It has been suggested that as Baal was worshiped in different places and under different names, as Baal-Berith, Baal-hanan, Baal-peor, Baal-zebul, and his priests could call upon any one of these as possessing certain personified attributes of Baal, while yet the whole was called by the plural term 'Baalim,' and Elijah could say: “Call ye upon your Gods," so 'Elohim' may be the collective designation of the God who was worshiped in different localities.... But this ignores the fact that Baal is always addressed in the singular, never in the plural, while the plural 'Elohim' is the term commonly used in addresses to God. This seems to show that 'Baalim' is a collective term, while 'Elohim' is not.... The fact that it is sometimes used in a narrower sense, as applicable to the Son

(Ps. 45:6; cf. Heb 1:8), need not prevent us from believing that the term was originally chosen as containing an allusion to a certain plurality in the divine nature. Nor is it sufficient to call this plural a simple *pluralis majesticus* ... This ancient Hebrew application of the plural to God is often explained as a mere plural of dignity, = one who combines in himself many reasons for adoration. The Hebrews had many plural forms, where we should use the singular, as 'heavens' instead of 'heaven,' 'waters' instead of 'water.' ... But the Church Fathers, such as Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Theophilus, Epiphanius, and Theodoret, saw in this plural an allusion to the trinity, and we are inclined to follow them.” [Strong's, *Theology*]

(2) God uses plural pronouns in speaking of Himself

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” — Gen 1:26

“Behold, the man is become as one of us” — Gen 3:22

“Come, let us go down, and there confound their language” — Gen 11:7

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” — Isa 6:8

(3) Jehovah distinguishes Himself from Jehovah

“Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven” — Gen 19:24

“I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by Jehovah, their God” — Hos 1:7

(4) a Son is ascribed to Jehovah

“Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee” — Ps 2:7

“Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou knowest?” — Prov 30:4

(5) the Spirit of God is distinguished from God

“God created ... the Spirit of God was brooding” — Gen 1:1,2 (margin)

“By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, And all the host of them by the breath [spirit] of his mouth” — Ps 33:6

“the Lord Jehovah hath sent me and his Spirit” — Isa 48:16

“loving kindnesses of Jehovah ... grieved his Holy Spirit.” — Isa 63:7,10

“And the Spirit entered into me when He spake unto me” — Ez 2:2

“And the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem” — Ez 8:3

“...so my Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the Lord of Hosts ...” — Hag 2:5,6

“And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah ... yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in His Spirit by the former prophets” — Zech 7:8,12

(6) there are a three-fold ascription and a three-fold benediction

“Jehovah bless thee and keep thee: Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” — Num 6:24-26

“Holy, holy, holy” — Isa 6:3; called the trisagion

B. Passages relating to the Angel of Jehovah.

“Though the phrase ‘angel of Jehovah’ is sometimes used in the later Scriptures to denote a merely human messenger or created angel, it seems in the OT, with hardly more than a single exception, to designate the pre-incarnate Logos, whose manifestations in angelic or human form foreshadowed his final coming in the flesh.... The ‘angel of the Lord’ appears to be a human messenger in Haggai 1:13 — ‘Haggai, Jehovah’s messenger’; a created angel in Mat 1:20 — ‘an angel of the Lord [called Gabriel] appeared unto’ Joseph; in Acts 8:26 — ‘an angel of the Lord spake unto Phillip’; and in 12:7 — ‘an angel of the Lord stood by him’ (Peter). But commonly, in the OT, the ‘angel of Jehovah’ is a theophany, a self-manifestation of God.” [Strongs, *Theology*]

(1) The angel of Jehovah identifies Himself with Jehovah.

“And the LORD appeared unto [Abraham] ... and the LORD said unto Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh?’ ... Abraham stood yet before the LORD” — Gen 18:1-21

“the angel of Jehovah called unto him [Abraham, when about to sacrifice Isaac] ... By myself have I swom, saith Jehovah” — Gen 22:11,16

“the angel of God said unto me [Jacob] ... I am the God of Beth-El.” — Gen 31:11,13

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush ... And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.... He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt ... And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh ... Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt:” — Ex 3:2,4,6,7,11,13-16

(2) He is identified with Jehovah by others.

“angel of Jehovah said unto her ... and she called the name of Jehovah that spake unto her, Thou art a God that seeth.” — Gen 16:9,13

“the God who hath fed me ... the angel who hath redeemed me.” — Gen 48:15,16

(3) He accepts worship due only to God.

“the angel of Jehovah appeared unto him ... God called unto him out of the midst of the bush ... put off thy shoes from off thy feet” — Ex 3:2,4,5

“angel of Jehovah ascended ... Manoah and his wife ... fell on their faces ... Manoah said ... we shall surely die, because we have seen God.” — Judges 13:20-22

C. Descriptions of the Messiah

(1) In some sense the Messiah is one with Jehovah

“unto us a child is born, unto us a son given ... and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” — Isa 9:6

“thou Bethlehem ... which art little ... out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” — Micah 5:2

(2) In some sense the Messiah is distinct from Jehovah

“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever ... therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee” — Ps 45:3,7

“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” — Ps 110:1

“I send my Messenger, and he shall prepare, the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom ye desire” — Mal 3:1; “Henderson, in his Commentary on this passage, points out that the Messiah is here called ‘the Lord’ or ‘the Sovereign’ — a title nowhere given in this form (with the article) to any but Jehovah; that he is predicted as coming to the temple as its proprietor; and that he is identified with the angel of the covenant, elsewhere shown to be one with Jehovah himself.” [Strongs, *Theology*]

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek” — Isa 61:1

II. These three are so described in Scripture that we are compelled to conceive of them as distinct persons.

A. The Father and the Son are persons distinct from each other.

(1) Christ distinguishes the Father from himself as “another”

“It is another that beareth witness of me ... the Father that sent me, he hath borne witness of me.” — Jn 5:32,37

(2) the Father and the Son are distinguished as the begetter and the begotten

“Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” — Ps 2:7

“the only begotten of the Father” — Jn 1:14

“the only begotten Son” — Jn 1:18

“gave His only begotten Son” — Jn 3:16

(3) the Father and the Son are distinguished as the sender and the sent

“say ye of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” — Jn 10:36

“when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son” — Gal 4:4

B. The Father and the Son are persons distinct from the Spirit.

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

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.... that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.... they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” — Mt 1:18,20,21,23

(1) Jesus distinguishes the Spirit from himself and from the Father

“I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth” — Jn 14:16,17; or “Spirit of the truth” = He whose work it is to reveal and apply the truth .. and especially to make manifest him who is the truth. Jesus had been their Comforter: he now promises them another Comforter. If he himself was a person, then the Spirit is a person.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(2) the Spirit proceeds from the Father

“the spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father” — Jn 15:26

(3) the Spirit is sent by the Father and by the Son

“when the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name” — Jn 14:26

“when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father” — Jn 15:26

“God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” — Gal 4:6

“The Greek church holds that the Spirit proceeds from the Father only; the Latin church, that the Spirit proceeds both from the Father and from the Son. The true formula is: The Spirit proceeds from the Father through or by (not ‘and’) the Son.” [Strong, *Theology*]

C. The Holy Spirit is a person.

(1) designations proper to personality are given to him.

(a) the masculine pronoun ἐκεῖνος (ekeinos), though πνεῦμα (pneuma) is neuter

“He (ἐκεῖνος) shall glorify me” — Jn 16:14

(b) the name παράκλητος (paraklatos), which cannot be translated by ‘comfort’, or be taken as the name of any abstract influence.

“if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you” — Jn 16:7

The Comforter, Instructor, Patron, Guide, Advocate, whom this term brings before us, must be a person. This is evident from its application to Christ in 1 Jn 2:1 — “we have an Advocate — παράκλητον (paraklaton) — with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.... He comforts not only by being our advocate, but by being our instructor, patron, and guide; and all these ideas are found attaching to the word παράκλητος in good Greek usage. The word indeed is a verbal adjective, signifying ‘called to one’s aid’, hence a ‘helper’; the idea of encouragement is included in it, as well as those of comfort and of advocacy.” “ [Strong, *Theology*]

(2) His name is mentioned in immediate connection with other persons, and in such a way as to imply his own personality.

“It is noticeable in all these passages that there is no obtrusion of the Holy Spirit’s personality, as if he desired to draw attention to himself. The Holy Spirit shows, not himself, but Christ. Like John the Baptist, he is a mere voice, and so is an example to Christian preachers, who are themselves ‘made ... sufficient as ministers ... of the spirit’ (2 Cor 3:6). His leading is therefore often unperceived; he so joins himself to us that we infer his presence only from the new and holy exercises of our own minds; he continues to work in us even when his presence is ignored and his purity is outraged by our sins.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(a) in connection with Christians

“it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” — Acts 15:28

(b) in connection with Christ

“He shall glorify me: for he take of mine, and shall declare it unto you” — Jn 16:14; cp Jn 17:4 — “I glorified thee on the earth”

(c) in connection with the Father and the Son

If the Father and the Son are persons, the Spirit must be a person also.

“baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” — Mt 28:29

“the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” — 2 Cor 13:14

“praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ” — Jude 21

“elect ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” — 1 Pet 1:1,2

(3) He performs acts proper to personality

“That which searches, knows, speaks, testifies, reveals, convinces, commands, strives, moves, helps, guides, creates, recreates, sanctifies, inspires, makes interception, orders the affairs of the church, performs miracles, raises the dead — cannot be a mere power, influence, efflux, or attribute of God, but must be a person.” [Strong, *Theology*]

creating: “the spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters” — Gen 1:2, margin

striving: “My Spirit shalt not strive with man for ever” — Gen 6:3

teaching: “the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what ye ought to say” — Lk 12:12

regenerating: “born of the Spirit” — Jn 3:8

convicting: “convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” — Jn 16:8

giving utterance: “the Spirit gave them utterance” — Acts 2:4

leading: “the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near” — Acts 8:29

sending: “the Spirit said unto him [Peter], Behold, three men seek thee ... go with them ... for I have sent them” — Acts 10:19,20

separating unto service: “the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul” — Acts 13:2

forbidding: “forbidden of the Holy Spirit ... Spirit of Jesus suffered them not” — Acts 16:6,7

resurrecting: “give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit” — Rom 8:11

interceding: “the Spirit also helps our infirmity ... maketh intercession for us” — Rom 8:26

empowering: “in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit” — Rom 15:19

searching: “the Spirit searcheth all things ... things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God” — 1 Cor 2:10,11

distributing spiritual gifts: distributes spiritual gift “to each one severally even as he will” — 1 Cor 12:8-11

inspiring the scriptures: “men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit” — 2 Pet 1:21

sanctifying: “sanctification of the Spirit” — 1 Pet 1:2

(4) He is affected as a person by the acts of others.

“That which can be resisted, grieved, vexed, blasphemed, must be a person; for only a person can perceive insult and be offended. The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost cannot be merely blasphemy against a power or attribute of God, since in that case blasphemy against God would be a less crime than blasphemy against his power. That against which the unpardonable sin can be committed must be a person.” [Strong, *Theology*]

grieved: “they rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit” — Isa 63:10; “grieve not the Holy Spirit” — Eph 4:30

blasphemed: “Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven” — Mt 12:31

lied to: “Lie to the Holy Ghost ... thou hast not lied unto men but unto God ... agreed together to try the Spirit of the Lord” — Acts 5:3,4,9

resisted: “ye do always resist the Holy Spirit” — Acts 7:51

(5) He manifests himself in visible form as distinct from the Father and the Son, yet in direct connection with personal acts performed by them.

“Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, & voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” — Mat 3:16,17

“Jesus also having been baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” — Lk 3:21,22

(6) This ascription to the Spirit of a personal subsistence distinct from that of the Father and of the Son cannot be explained as personifications.

“This seeming identification of the Spirit with Christ is to be explained upon the ground that the divine essence is common to both and permits the Father to dwell in and to work through the Son, and the Son to dwell in and to work through the Spirit. It should not blind us to the equally patent Scriptural fact that there are personal relations between Christ and the Holy Spirit, and work done by the latter in which Christ is the object and not the subject; John 16:14 — “He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you.” The Holy Spirit is not some *thing*, but some *one*; not αὐτό, but Ἀὐτός; Christ’s *alter ego*, or other self. We should therefore make vivid our belief in the personality of Christ and of the Holy Spirit by addressing each of them frequently in the prayers we offer and in such hymns as ‘Jesus, lover of my soul,’ and ‘Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove!’ “ [Strong, *Theology*]

(a) This would be to interpret sober prose by the canons of poetry. Such sustained personification is contrary to the genius of even Hebrew poetry, in which Wisdom itself is most naturally interpreted as designating a personal existence.

“The Bible is not primarily a book of poetry, although there is poetry in it. It is more properly a book of history and law. Even if the metric of allegory were used by the Psalmists and the Prophets, we should not expect them largely to characterize the Gospels and Epistles ... Yet it is the Gospels and Epistles which most constantly represent the Holy Spirit as a person.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(b) Such an interpretation would render a multitude of passages either tautological [tautology: needless repetition of an idea, statement, or word], meaningless, or absurd, — as can be easily seen by substituting for the name Holy Spirit the terms which are wrongly held to be its equivalents; e.g. the power, or influence, or efflux, or attribute of God.

“God anointed him [Jesus] with the Holy Spirit and with power” — Acts 10:38, = “anointed Him with power and power”?

“Abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit” — Rom 15:13, “in the power of the power of God”?

“In the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit” — Rom 15:19, = “in the power of the power of God”?

“Demonstration of the Spirit and of power” — 1 Cor 2:4, = “demonstration of power and of power”?

(c) It is contradicted, moreover, by all those passages in which the Holy Spirit is distinguished from his own gifts.

“ the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee” — Lk 1:35

“Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” — Lk 4:14

After mention of the gifts of the Spirit, such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, all these are traced to the Spirit who bestows them: “all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will” — 1 Cor 12:4,8,11; “Here is not only giving, but giving discreetly, in the exercise of an independent will such as belongs only to a person.” [Strong, *Theology*]

“the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us” — Rom 8:26; this would need interpreted, if the Holy Spirit is not a person distinct from the Father, as meaning the Holy Spirit [Father] intercedes with Himself.

III. This tripersonality of the divine nature is not merely economic and temporal, but is immanent and eternal.

(Immanent = inherent, internal; the sense is that God is by His very nature an eternal trinity, and not that He *became* a triune God nor does He merely *appear* to be a trinity due to the constraints of time)

A. Scripture proof that these distinctions of personality are eternal.

“Scripture compels us, in our judgment, ... to maintain that there are personal relations between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit independent of creation and of time; in other words we maintain that Scripture reveals to us a social Trinity and an intercourse of love apart from and before the existence of the universe. Love before time implies distinctions of personality before time. There are three eternal consciousnesses and three eternal wills in the divine nature. We here state only the fact, — the explanation of it, and its reconciliation with the fundamental unity of God is treated in the next section.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(1) Proven from those passages which speak of the existence of the Word from eternity with the Father.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” — Jn 1:1

“existing in the form of God ... on an equality with God.” — Phil 2:6

(2) Proven from passages asserting or implying Christ’s preexistence.

“Before Abraham was born, I am” — Jn 8:58

“the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father” — Jn 1:18

“firstborn of all creation” or “before every creature ... he is before all things” — Col 1:15-17; “In these passages ‘am’ and ‘is’ expresses an eternal fact; the present tense expresses permanent being.” [Strong, *Theology*]

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” — Rev 22:13,14

(3) Proven from passages implying intercourse between the Father and the Son before the foundation of the world.

“Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was” — Jn 17:5

“Thou lovest me before the foundation of the world” — Jn 17:24

(4) Proven from passages asserting the creation of the world by Christ.

“All things were made by Him” — Jn 1:3

“one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things” — 1 Cor 8:6

“all things have been created through him and unto him” — Col 1:16

“through whom also he made the worlds” — Heb 1:2

“Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands” — Heb 1:10

(5) Proven from passages asserting or implying the eternity of the Holy Spirit.

“the Spirit of God was brooding” — Gen 1:2

“by the word of Jehovah were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath [Spirit] of his mouth” — Ps 33:6

“through the eternal Spirit” — Heb 9:14

B. Errors refuted by the foregoing passages.

Luther, alluding to John 1:1, says: “*The Word was God’ is against Arius; ‘the Word was with God’ is against Sabellius.*”

(1) Sabellianism

Sabellius (of Ptolemais in Pentapolis, 250) held that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mere developments or revelations to creatures, in time, of the otherwise concealed Godhead. God as united to the creation is Father; God as united to Jesus Christ is Son; God as united to the church is Holy Spirit. The Trinity of Sabellius is therefore an economic and not an immanent Trinity — a Trinity of forms or manifestations, but not a necessary and eternal Trinity in the divine nature.

Sabellius hold that the One becomes three in the process of revelation, and the three are only media or modes of revelation. Father, Son, and Spirit are mere names applied to these modes of the divine action, there being no internal distinctions in the divine nature.

Sabellianism may be illustrated thusly: the trinity is (1) an artist working on his pictures, (2) the same man teaching pupils how to paint, and (3) the same man entertaining his friends at home. He has not taken on these types of conduct. They are not masks nor offices, which he takes up and lays down. There is a three-fold nature in him: he is artist, teacher, friend.

It is evident that this theory, in whatever form it may be held, is far from satisfying the demands of Scripture. Scripture speaks of the second person of the Trinity as existing and acting before the birth of Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit as existing and acting before the formation of churches. Both have a personal existence, eternal in the past as well as in the future — which this theory expressly denies. The unscripturalness of the Sabellian doctrine is plain, if we remember that upon this view the Three cannot exist at once: when the Father says “Thou art my beloved Son” (Luke 3:22), he is simply speaking to himself; when Christ sends the Holy Spirit, he only sends himself.” [quoted loosely from Strong, *Theology*]

(2) Arianism

Arius held that the Father is the only divine being absolutely without beginning; the Son and the Holy Spirit, through whom God creates and recreates, having been themselves created out of nothing before the world was; and Christ being called God, because he is next in rank to God, and is endowed by God with divine power to create. It regards Christ as called God only by courtesy, much as we give to a Lieutenant Governor the title of Governor.

Arius appealed chiefly to logic, not to Scripture. He claimed that a Son must be younger than his Father. But he was asserting the principle of heathenism and idolatry, in demanding worship for a creature. The Goths were easily converted to Arianism. Christ was to them a hero-god, a demigod, and the later Goths could worship Christ and heathen idols impartially.

It is evident that the theory of Arius does not satisfy the demands of Scripture. A created God, a God whose existence had a beginning and therefore may come to an end, a God made of a substance which once was not, and therefore a substance different from that of the Father, is not God, but a finite creature. But the Scripture speaks of Christ as being in the beginning God, with God, and equal with God. [quoted loosely from Strong, *Theology*]

IV. This tripersonality is not tritheism; for while there are three persons, there is but one essence.

“The clue to the right construction of the doctrine of the Trinity, lies in the accurate distinction and definition of Essence and Person.... God is one in respect to Essence.... God is three in respect to Persons.” [Shedd, *Theology*] This is the key to the trinity, and also that which is most difficult to express. Passages referring to the monotheistic nature of God: Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:4; Gal 3:20; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 1:17; 2:5

es·sence : *noun*; **the real or ultimate nature of a thing**, the permanent as contrasted with the accidental element of being. In the case of the trinity, God’s *essence* is the spiritual substance which makes Him God, that which is real, that which is the very core of God’s being. God’s essence is who God is. Synonyms would be God’s *nature, substance, being*.

dis·tinc·tion : *noun*; division; separations; that which indicates individuality

A. The term ‘person’ only approximately represents the truth. Although this word, more nearly than any other single word, expresses the conception which the Scriptures give us of the relation between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it is not itself used in this connection in Scripture, and we employ it in a qualified sense, not in the ordinary sense in which we apply the word ‘person’ to Peter, Paul, and John.

“The word ‘person’ is only the imperfect and inadequate expression of a fact that transcends our experience and comprehension. Bunyan: ‘My dark and cloudy words, they do but hold The truth, as cabinets encase the gold.’ Three Gods, limiting each other, would deprive each other of Deity. While we show that the unity is articulated by the persons, it is equally important to remember that the persons are limited by the unity. ***With us personality implies entire separation from all others — distinct individuality. But in the one God there can be no such separation.*** The personal distinctions in him must be such as are consistent with essential unity. This is the merit of the statement in the *Symbolum Quicumque* (or Athanasian Creed, wrongly so called): ‘The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Ghost is Lord; yet there are not three Lords but one Lord. For as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each person by himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the same truth to say that there are three Gods or three Lords.’ We add that the personality of the Godhead as a whole is separate and distinct from all others, and in this respect is more full analogous to man’s personality than is the personality of the Father or of the Son.... The church of Alexandria in the second century chanted together: ‘One only is holy, the Father; One only is holy, the Son; One only is holy, the Spirit.’ ... Moberly (Atonement and Personality, 154,167,168) — ‘The three persons are neither three Gods, nor three parts of God. Rather are they are God threefoldly, tri-personally.... The personal distinction

in Godhead is a distinction within, and of, Unity: not a distinction which qualifies Unity, or usurps the place of it, or destroys it. It is not a relation of mutual exclusiveness, but of mutual inclusiveness. No one person is or can be without the others.” [Strong, *Theology*]

*“In this one Divine Being there are three Persons or individual subsistences, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit....To denote these distinctions in the Godhead, Greek writers generally employed the term *hypostasis*, while Latin authors used the term *persona*, and sometimes *substantia*. Because the former was apt to be misleading and the latter was ambiguous, the Schoolmen coined the word *subsistentia*. The variety of the terms used points to the fact that their inadequacy was always felt. It is generally admitted that the word ‘person’ is but an imperfect expression of the idea.* In common parlance it denotes a separate rational and moral individual, possessed of self-consciousness, and conscious of his identity amid all changes. Experience teaches that where you have a person, you also have a distinct individual essence. Every person is a distinct and separate individual, in whom human nature is individualized. But in God there are no three individuals alongside of, and separate from, one another, but only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence, which is not only generically, but also numerically, one. Consequently many preferred to speak of three hypostases in God, three different modes, not of manifestation, as Sabellius taught, *but of existence or subsistence*. Thus Calvin says: ‘By person, then, I mean a subsistence in the Divine essence. — a subsistence which, while related to, the other two, is distinguished from them by incommunicable properties.’ [Institutes, I, XIII, 6] This is perfectly permissible and may ward off misunderstanding, but should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that the self-distinctions in the Divine Being imply an ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ and ‘He,’ in the Being of God, which assume personal relations one another.” [Berkhof, *Theology*]

“A divine person differs from a human person in the following respects. 1. The substance of a human person is not the identical and numerical substance of another human person. Two human persons have the same kind of substance, because they are constituted of fractional parts of one specific human substance or nature; but they do not have the same substance identically and numerically.... But the substance of one Divine person is the substance of the others, both numerically and identically. In this instance, there is no division of substance. The whole undivided Divine nature is in each Divine person simultaneously and eternally.... 2. One human person exists externally to another, and separate from him; but one Divine person exists in another, and inseparably from him.... 3. One human person can exist without another; but one Divine person cannot.” [Shedd, *Theology*]

B. The necessary qualification is that, while three persons among men have only a *specific* unity of nature or essence — that is, have the *same* species of nature or essence, — the persons of the Godhead have a *numerical* unity of nature or essence — that is, have the *same* nature or essence. The *undivided essence* of the Godhead belongs equally to each of the persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each possesses all the substance and all the attributes of Deity. The plurality of the Godhead is therefore not a plurality of essence, but a plurality of personal distinctions. *God is not three and one, but three in one. The one indivisible essence has three modes of subsistence.*

“The Trinity is not simply a partnership, in which each member can sign the name of the firm; for this is unity of council and operation only, not of essence. God's nature is not an abstract but an organic unity.... See Dorner (System of Doctrine, 1:450-453) ‘The one divine personality is so present in each of the distinctions, that these, which singly and by themselves would not be personal, yet do participate in the one divine personality, each in its own manner. This one divine personality is the unity of the three modes of subsistence which participate in itself. Neither is personal without the others. In each, in its manner, is the whole Godhead.’ ” [Strong, *Theology*]

“It is the characteristic of the Divine essence that it can subsist indivisibly and totally in more persons than once. The adjectives are important. For the human nature can also subsist in more persons than one; but not indivisibly and totally. An individual man, a human person, is only a part, and a very small part of the whole human nature or species. But the first, second, or third person of the Godhead is the entire Divine nature, in a particular mode of subsistence. All of the Divine substance is in each Divine person; but not all of the human substance is in each human person.” [Shedd, *Theology*]

C. This oneness of essence explains the fact that, while Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as respects their personality, are distinct subsistences, there is an intercommunion of persons which permits the peculiar work of one to be ascribed, with a single limitation, to either of the others, and the manifestation of one to be recognized in the manifestation of another. The limitation is simply this, that although the Son was sent by the Father, and the Spirit by the Father and the Son, it cannot be said *vice versa* that the Father is sent either by the Son, or by the Spirit. The Scripture representations of this intercommunion prevent us from conceiving of the distinctions called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as involving separation between them.

“Dorner adds that ‘in one is each of the others.’ This is true with the limitation mentioned in the text above. Whatever Christ does, God the Father can be said to do; for God acts only in and through Christ the Revealer. Whatever the Holy Spirit does, Christ can be said to do; for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit is the omnipresent Jesus.” [Strong, *Theology*]

“God created” — Gen 1:11; cp “through whom [the Son] also he made the worlds” — Heb 1:2; “All things were made through Him [Christ]” — Jn 1:3; “for by Him [Christ] were all things created” — Col 1:16

“My Father worketh even until now, and I work ... The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing; for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner” — Jn 5:17,19

“he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” — Jn 14:9

“I am in the Father and the Father in me” — Jn 14:11

“I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you” (by the Holy Spirit) — Jn 14:18; “when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth” — Jn 15:26

“that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee” — Jn 17:21

“God was in Christ reconciling” — 2 Cor 5:19

“God our Savior” — Titus 2:10

“God the Judge of all” — Heb 12:23; cp “neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son” — Jn 5:22; “judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained” — Acts 17:31

“It is this intercommunion, together with the order of personality and operation ... which explains the occasional use of the term ‘Father’ for the whole Godhead; as in Eph 4:6 — ‘one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all [in Christ], and in you all’ [by the Spirit]. This intercommunion also explains the designation of Christ as ‘the Spirit,’ and of the Spirit as ‘the Spirit of Christ,’ as in 1 Cor 15:45 — ‘the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit’; 2 Cor 3:17 — ‘Now the Lord is the Spirit’; Gal 4:6 — ‘sent forth the Spirit of his Son’; Phil 1:19 — ‘supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.’ So the Lamb, in Rev 5:6, has ‘seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all this earth’ = the Holy Spirit, with his manifold powers, is the Spirit of the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Christ.... The Holy Spirit is Christ’s *alter ego*, or other self. When Jesus went away, it was an exchange of his presence for his omnipresence; an exchange of limited for unlimited power; an exchange of companionship for indwelling. Since Christ comes to men in the Holy Spirit, he speaks through the apostles as authoritatively as if his own lips uttered the words. Each believer, in having the Holy Spirit, has the whole Christ for his own.... Moberly (Atonement and Personality, 85) — ‘For centuries upon centuries, the essential unity of God had been burnt and branded in upon the consciousness had to be completely established first, as a basal element of thought, indispensable, unalterable, before there could begin the disclosure to man of the reality of the eternal relations within the one indivisible being of God. And when the disclosure came, it came not as modifying, but as further interpreting and illuminating, that unity which it absolutely presupposed.’” [Strong’s, *Theology*]

V. The three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are equal.

“...there can be no subordination *as to essential being* of the one person, of the Godhead to the other, and therefore no difference in personal dignity. This must be maintained over against the subordinationism of Origen and other early Church Fathers, and the Arminians, and of Clarke and other Anglican theologians. ***The only subordination of which we can speak, is a subordination in respect to order and relationship.***” [Berkhof, *Theology*]

A. These titles belong to the Persons.

(1) The Father is not God as such; for God is not only Father, but also Son and Holy Spirit.

“The term ‘Father’ designates that hypostatical distinction in the divine nature in virtue of which God is related to the Son, and through the Son and the Spirit to the church and the world. As author of the believer’s spiritual as well as natural life, God is doubly his Father; but this relation which God sustains to creatures is not the ground of the title. God is Father primarily in virtue of the relation which he sustains to the eternal Son; only as we are spiritually united to Jesus Christ do we become children of God.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(2) The Son is not God as such; for God is not only Son, but also Father and Holy Spirit.

“‘The Son’ designates that distinction in virtue of which God is related to the Father, is sent by the Father to redeem the world, and with the Father sends the Holy Spirit.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(3) The Holy Spirit is not God as such; for God is not only Holy Spirit, but also Father and Son.

“‘The Holy Spirit’ designates that distinction in virtue of which God is related to the Father and the Son, and is sent by them to accomplish the work of renewing the ungodly and of sanctifying the church.” [Strong, *Theology*]

B. Qualified sense of these titles.

“Like the word ‘person’, the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not to be confined within the precise limitations of meaning which would be required if they were applied to men.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(1) The Scriptures enlarge our conceptions of Christ’s Sonship by giving to him in his preexistent state the names of the Logos, the Image, and the Effulgence of God.

“Passages representing Christ as the Image of God are Col 1:15 — ‘who is the image of the invisible God’; 2 Cor 4:4 — ‘Christ, who is the image of God’ (εἰκὼν); Heb 1:3 — ‘the very image of his substance’ (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ); here *χαρακτήρ* means ‘impress’, ‘counterpart’. Christ is the perfect image of God, as men are not. He therefore has consciousness and will. He possesses all the attributes and powers of God. The word ‘Image’ suggests the perfect equality with God which the title ‘Son’ might at first seem to deny. The living Image of God which is equal to himself and is the object of his infinite love can be nothing less than personal. As the bachelor can never satisfy his longing for companionship by lining his room with mirrors which furnish only a lifeless reflection of himself, so God requires for his love a personal as well as an infinite object.” [Strong, *Theology*]

“Christ is spoken of as the Effulgence of God in Heb 1:3 — ‘who being the effulgence of his glory’ (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης); cp. 2 Cor 4:6 — ‘shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ Notice that the radiance of the sun is as old as the sun itself, and without it the sun would not be sun. So Christ is coequal and coeternal with the

Father. Ps 84:11 — ‘Jehovah God is a sun.’ But we cannot see the sun except by the sunlight. Christ is the sunlight which streams forth from the Sun and which makes the Sun visible. If there be an eternal Sun, there must be also an eternal Sunlight, and Christ must be eternal.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(2) The names thus given to the second person of the Trinity, if they have *any* significance, bring him before our minds in the general aspect of Revealer, and suggest a relation of the doctrine of the Trinity to God’s immanent attributes of truth, love, and holiness.

“The prepositions used to describe the internal relations of the second person to the first are not prepositions of rest, but prepositions of direction and movement. The Trinity, as the organism of Deity, secures a life-movement of the Godhead, a process in which God evermore objectifies himself and in the Son gives forth of his fulness. Christ represents the centrifugal [*proceeding or acting in a direction away from a center or axis*] action of the deity. But There must be centripetal [*proceeding or acting in a direction toward a center or axis*] action also. In the Holy Spirit the movement is completed, and the divine activity and thought returns into itself. True religion, in reuniting us to God, reproduces in us, in our limited measure, this eternal process of the divine mind. Christian experience witnesses that God in himself is unknown; Christ is the organ of external revelation; the Holy Spirit is the organ of internal revelation — only he can give us an inward apprehension or realization of the truth. It is ‘through the eternal Spirit’ that Christ ‘offered himself without blemish unto God,’ and it is only through the Holy Spirit that the church has access to the Father, or fallen creatures can return to God.” [Strong, *Theology*]

(3) We may sum up the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in four statements, (1) all outdoing seems to be the work of Christ, all return to God the work of the Spirit; (2) Christ is the organ of external revelation, the Holy Spirit the organ of internal revelation; (3) Christ is our advocate in heaven, the Holy Spirit is our advocate in the soul; (4) in the work of Christ we are passive, in the work of the Spirit we are active.

“The Spirit of God was brooding” — Gen 1:2

“The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee [Mary]” — Lk 1:35

“born of the Spirit” — Jn 3:8

“Come from the four winds, O breath ... I will put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live” — Ez 37:9,14

“give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit” — Rom 8:11

“an advocate (παράκλητον) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” — 1 Jn 2:1

“another Comforter (παράκλητον) that he may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth” — Jn 14:16,17

“the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us” — Rom 8:26

“men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit” — 1 Pet 1:21

“convict the world in respect of sin” — Jn 16:8

“when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth” — Jn 16:13

“as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are sons of God” — Rom 8:14

“The Holy Spirit reveals not himself but Christ. John 16:14 — ‘He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you.’ So should the servants of the Spirit hide themselves while they make known Christ. E. H. Johnson (The Holy Spirit, 40) — ‘Some years ago a large steam engine all of glass was exhibited about the country. While it was at work one would see the piston and the valves go; but no one could see what made them go. When steam is hot enough to be a continuous elastic vapor, it is invisible.’ So we perceive the presence of the Holy Spirit, not by visions or voices, but by the effect he produces within us in the shape of new knowledge, new love, and new energy of our own powers. Denny (Studies in Theology, 161) ***‘No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time. Esprit is fatal to unctio; no man can give the impression that he himself is clever and also that Christ is mighty to save. The power of the Holy Spirit is felt only when the witness is unconscious of self, and when others remain unconscious of him.’***” [Strong, *Theology*]

C. Generation and procession consistent with equality.

“The Scripture terms ‘generation’ and ‘procession,’ as applied to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, are but approximate expressions of the truth, and we are to correct by other declarations of Scripture any imperfect impressions which we might derive solely from them. We use these terms in a special sense, which we explicitly state and define as excluding all notion of inequality between the persons of the Trinity. The eternal generation of the Son to which we hold is:

(1) Not creation, but the Father’s communication of himself to the Son. Since the names, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not applicable to the divine essence, but are only applicable to its hypostatical distinctions, they imply no derivation of the essence of the Son from the essence of the Father....

(2) Not a commencement of existence, but an eternal relation to the Father, — there never having been a time when the Son began to be, or when the Son did not exist as God with the Father.

If there had been an eternal sun, it is evident that there must have been an eternal sunlight also. Yet an eternal sunlight must have

evermore proceeded from the sun. When Cyril was asked whether the Son existed before generation, he answered: ‘The generation of the Son did not precede his existence, but he always existed, and that by generation.’

(3) Not an act of the Father’s will, but an internal necessity of the divine nature, — so that the Son is no more dependent upon the Father than the Father is dependent upon the Son, and so that, if it be consistent with deity to be Father, it is equally consistent with deity to be Son.

The sun is as dependent upon the sunlight as the sunlight is upon the sun; for without sunlight the sun is no true sun. So God the Father is as dependent upon God the Son, as God the Son is dependent upon God the Father; for without Son the Father would be no true Father [Strong, *Theology*]

(4) Not a relation in any way analogous to physical derivation, but a life-movement of the divine nature, in virtue of which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while equal in essence and divine nature, stand to each other in an order of personality, office, and operation, and in virtue of which the Father works through the Son, and the Father and the Son through the Spirit.

Priority is not necessarily superiority. The possibility of an order, which yet involves no inequality, may be illustrated by the relation between man and woman. In office man is first and woman second, but woman’s soul is worth as much as man’s: see 1 Cor 11:3 — ‘the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man: and the head of Christ is God.’” [Strong, *Theology*]

“There is, of course, no question that in ‘modes of operation,’ as it is technically called — that is to say, in the functions ascribed to the several Persons of the Trinity in the redemptive process, and, more broadly, in the entire dealing of God with the world — the principle of subordination is clearly expressed. The Father is first, the Son is second, and the Spirit is third, in the operations of God as revealed to us in general, and very especially in those operations by which redemption is accomplished.” [Warfield, *Trinity*]

VI. Inscrutable yet not self-contradictory, this doctrine furnishes the key to all other doctrines.

Inscrutable = incapable of being understood by study. *“Reason shows us the Unity of God; only revelation shows us the Trinity of God.”* [Strong, *Theology*] *“The doctrine of the Trinity is purely a revealed doctrine. That is to say, it embodies a truth which has never been discovered, and is undiscoverable, by natural reason. With all his searching, man has not been able to find out for himself the deepest things of God. Accordingly, ethnic thought has never attained a Trinitarian conception of God, nor does any ethnic religion present in its representations of the Divine Being any analogy to the doctrine of the Trinity.”* [Warfield, *Trinity*]

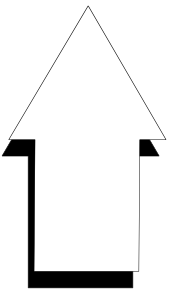
A. The mode of this triune existence is inscrutable.

“It is inscrutable because there are no analogies to it in our finite experience. For this reason all attempts are vain adequately to represent it: (1) From inanimate things — as the fountain, the stream, and the rivulet trickling from it (Athanasius); the cloud, the rain, and the rising mist (Boordman); color, shape, and size (F. W. Robertson) ; the actinic, luminiferous, and calorific principles in the ray of light (Solar Hieroglyphics, 34). (2) From the constitution or processes of our own minds — as the psychological unity of intellect, affection, and will (substantially held by Augustine); the logical unity of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (Hegel); the metaphysical unity of subject, object, and subject-object (Melancthon, Olshausen, Shedd). No one of these furnishes any proper analogue of the Trinity, since in no one of them is there found the essential element of tripersonality. *Such illustrations may sometimes be used to disarm objection, but they furnish no positive explanation of the mystery of the Trinity, and, unless carefully guarded, may lead to grievous error.”* [Strong, *Theology*]

“Augustine himself had said: *‘If asked to define the Trinity, we can only say that it is not this or that.’* John of Damascus: ‘All we know of the divine nature is that it is not to be known.’ By this, however, both Augustine and John of Damascus meant only that the precise mode of God’s triune existence is unrevealed and inscrutable.... Allen (Jonathan Edwards, 372) says that in the early church the Trinity was a doctrine of reason; in the Middle Ages it was a mystery; in the 18th century it was a meaningless or irrational dogma; again in the 19th century it becomes a doctrine of the reason, a truth essential to the nature of God. To Allen’s characterization of the stages in the history of the doctrine we would add that *even in our day we cannot say that a complete exposition of the Trinity is possible. Trinity is a unique fact, different aspects of which may be illustrated, while, as a whole, it has no analogies.* The most we can say is that human nature, in its processes and powers, points towards something higher than itself, and that Trinity in God is needed in order to constitute that perfection of being which man seeks as an object of love, worship and service.” [Strong, *Theology*]

“The Trinity is a mystery, not merely in the Biblical sense that it is a truth, which was formerly hidden but is now revealed; but in the sense that man cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible. It is intelligible in some of its relations and modes of manifestation, but unintelligible in its essential nature. *The many efforts that were made to explain the mystery were speculative rather than theological. They invariably resulted in the development of tritheistic or modalistic conceptions of God, in the denial of either the unity of the divine essence or the reality of the personal distinctions within the essence. The real difficulty lies in the relation in which the persons in the Godhead stand to the divine essence and to one another; and this is a difficulty which the Church cannot remove, but only try to reduce to its proper proportion by a proper definition of terms. It has never tried to explain the mystery of the Trinity, but only sought to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity in such a manner that the errors which endangered it were warded off.”* [Berkhof, *Theology*]

**Complexity
of Being**



“The fact that the ascending scale of life is marked by increasing differentiation of faculty and function should rather lead us to expect in the highest of all beings a nature more complex than our own.”

[Strong, Systematic Theology]