

2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

THREE GODS? NO! GOD IN THREE PERSONS!

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”¹

The doctrine of the Triune God is ridiculed as a fiction, depreciated and discounted by individuals opposed to the Faith. So-called “Christian cults”—Unitarians and Oneness Pentecostals as examples—ridicule the idea that God reveals Himself as a triunity. Similarly, the classic cults, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Latter-Day Saints, imagine the Triune God to be an absurdity. In the estimate of such cults, that God should present Himself as a triunity flies in the face of logic; it is as though their ability to understand becomes the ultimate determinant in any doctrinal discussion. Non-Christian cults, such as Islam and eastern cults, distort the Doctrine of the Triune God, arguing that Christians worship three gods or that we don’t really understand monotheism. However, we who are twice-born followers of the Christ do not appeal to the lost to instruct us in how we are to know God or how we are to please Him. We appeal to the written Word of God which is a revelation of all that God has deemed beneficial for knowing Him and to discover what is pleasing in our service to Him. If we will know God, He must reveal Himself to us; our responsibility is to receive what He has given us.

Thus, from the outset of our study, we confess that the Doctrine of the Triune God is controversial outside the precincts of orthodox, trinitarian Christianity. What is perhaps worse is that even professing Christians are often uncomfortable with the Doctrine of the Triune God. Perhaps you yourself wonder how to explain your belief that God is one and yet three. Most Christians profess to believe the doctrine because they realise that it is orthodox, but they believe themselves unqualified to defend what is taught.

I don’t suggest that we will all going to be transformed into brilliant theologians as result of this one message. Nevertheless, I trust that as result of our study today, our faith will be strengthened and our understanding of God’s nature will grow. In studying the doctrine of the Trinity, several truths support my contention that a Christian can comprehend this revelation of God. First, the teaching concerning the Person of God is not something that originated in the febrile imaginations of rabid theologians bent on inventing a new religion. If God is to be known, He must reveal Himself to mankind—no man could search out God or imagine Him. If God reveals Himself as a triunity, then whether we fully understand His revelation or not, we must accept that this is how He has chosen to reveal Himself to us.

Again, I rest confident in the knowledge that the Spirit of God lives with and in each Christian; He always testifies to our spirit, guiding our thoughts and guarding against error. He is always working in the lives of redeemed saints, teaching us those truths that glorify the True and Living God. Outsiders will find the teaching unsatisfying, however clear and reasonable it may be. Indeed, an unsaved person cannot understand even basic biblical truth. We are taught, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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Though he doesn't appear to be attempting to present a treatise on God's character, nevertheless, the character of God is assuredly in view as the Apostle concludes this missive. Paul frequently employs triune references in his letters, a point that is significant for understanding God. As examples, and in preparation for a more thorough study, look at the following references. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!" [GALATIANS 4:4-6]! The language demonstrates that the Apostle equates God the Son and the Spirit of God with God the Father. It should be noted that this was one of the earliest letters—if not the earliest letter—from the Apostle to have been included in the canon of Scripture. We can deduce from this information that the Triune Godhead was not some novel doctrine sprung on the churches at a later date. Rather, the Trinity was present from the beginning of the Faith.

In his earlier letter to the Church of God in Corinth, Paul provided a strong trinitarian example when he wrote, "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone" [1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-6].

Paul repeatedly weaves references to the Triune nature of the Living God throughout the Ephesian Encyclical. For instance, the Apostle has written, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" [EPHESIANS 1:3, 11-14]. Again, he moves effortlessly between the Persons of the Godhead—blessing the Father, now rejoicing in the salvation of the Son and always confident of the continuous working of the Spirit of God in the life of the child of God.

In that same letter, while focused on Christ the Son of God, Paul writes, "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" [EPHESIANS 2:13-18]. Note the same facile transition between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the Apostle sees them at work in the life of the believer.

In this Ephesian Letter, Paul has also written, "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" [EPHESIANS 3:14-17]. Almost unconsciously, the Apostle recognises the work of each Person within the Godhead as he instructs the saints.

In EPHESIANS 4:4-6, Paul wrote, "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." It is obvious that the trinitarian understanding permeates the Apostle's writings.

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Admittedly, I have taken longer for this introduction than I might normally take; however, the passages cited are foundational for all that follows. What is essential for Christians is the knowledge that the concept of the Triune God was not controversial for the Apostle Paul. The reason it was not controversial is that the Spirit of God was directing him as he wrote the letters that would be included in the canon of Scripture. With that understanding, let's refresh our minds concerning this vital, though neglected, revelation of God's character.

DOES THE BIBLE TEACH THREE GODS? Harold Brown has observed, "It is a curious fact that [Christianity] is the only major religion many of whose paid, full-time priests, prelates and professors spend much time and energy trying to show that it is false and should be totally changed or perhaps even abandoned. Buddhists do not do this; neither do Hindus, Muslims certainly do not, or if they do they do not live long. This shows, I believe, that the religion of Scripture, historic, biblical Christianity, is obnoxious to the Prince of Darkness, so that he makes a point of tempting the professors and priests of Christianity to undermine their own doctrine."²

Among professing Christians, several heresies have arisen over the years. Each of these has been addressed and refuted by the churches at various times. Among the heresies are some that are still promoted to this day. **Monarchianism** was one of the earliest heresies. This error argued that Jesus became Christ at His baptism. Proponents believed that Jesus was adopted by the Father after His death.

Sabellianism, also known as **Modalism**, taught that God reveals Himself in three modes. Those holding to Modalism believe that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not distinct personalities, but different modes of God's self-revelation. Modalists hold that God never exists as triune.

Early in the history of the churches, **Arianism** almost displaced faith in the Triune God. Arius denied that Jesus Christ was fully God. Obviously, if Jesus is not divine, then the doctrine of the Trinity is negated because the self-revelation of God as a triune being cannot be accurate.

Semi-Arianism, or **Eusebianism**, held that Christ is of similar essence with the Father, though He is subordinate to the Father. As was true with Arianism, Semi-Arianism, if true, negated the Triune God since there would not be co-equal persons in the Godhead.

I present but one further heresy from within the Faith that challenged the earliest churches—**Macedonianism**. Macedonianism taught that the Holy Spirit is a created being. Obviously, if the Spirit of God was created, there could be no Trinity; in that case, one member of the Godhead would have been less than divine.

Each of these named errors, and numerous other errors challenging the revelation of the triune God,³ were introduced early in the history of the Faith. Each of these errors compelled the churches to review Scripture, determining what was taught therein so that the Faith of Christ the Lord would accurately reflect the mind of the Living God. Nevertheless, the various heresies often provided a genuine service to the churches in that they forced the faithful to carefully study what was written so that the truth could be accurately presented among the faithful. In short, heresies force the faithful to articulate sound doctrine.

Errors were resolved as the churches resorted to the written Word in order to discover what the Lord had revealed concerning His nature. The same errors are still heard on occasion, but they are quickly dismissed as Christians study again the lessons taught by earlier saints. However, one error arose outside the Faith, an error propagated primarily by non-Christians. This error is tritheism (a subset of polytheism)—the idea that Christians worship three gods.

² Harold Brown, "Heresy in the Early Church," *Tabletalk Magazine*, April 1994, **Heresy**, Ligonier Ministries

³ E.g. Ebionitism, Docetism, etc.

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Let's look at this charge. To be sure, Christians know *the Father is God*. Multiple instances of writers acknowledging God as Father can be discovered with minimal effort. Jude addressed his brief missive to "those who are called, beloved in *God the Father*" [JUDE 1]. Similarly, the Apostle of Love addresses those whom he wrote with the blessing, "Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from *God the Father*" [2 JOHN 3]. In the same manner, the Apostle to the Jews recognises God as Father as he addresses his first letter. "To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of *God the Father*, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" [1 PETER 1:1, 2]. I must not neglect the fact that James, the brother of Jesus, acknowledge that the Father is God when he wrote, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before *God the Father* is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" [JAMES 1:27]. James is, of course, perhaps the earliest letter to have been included in the canon of Scripture.

Paul frequently wrote of "God the Father" in his various letters.⁴ One passage that is worthy of note is found in Paul's Letter to Corinthian Christians. The Apostle has written, "Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'—yet for us there is *one God, the Father*, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" [1 CORINTHIANS 8:5, 6]. This passage introduces the consideration of whether the Word of God presents Jesus as God.

There is no question but that Jesus is addressed as "*the Son of God*." Satan addressed Him as such,⁵ as did the demons.⁶ The evangelists,⁷ the Baptist⁸ and disciples⁹ confessed that Jesus is the Son of God. As John begins the Gospel that bears his name, he writes with the strongest possible statement that Jesus is very God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men" [JOHN 1:1-4]. In the original language, it is not possible to craft a statement that more firmly declares that *the Word is God*.

Other New Testament writers were equally open in declaring confidence that Jesus is very God in human form. When writing Roman Christians, the Apostle declares, "[My kinsmen] are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is *the Christ, who is God over all*, blessed forever. Amen" [ROMANS 9:4, 5].

Again, in his letter to Titus, Paul affirms, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of *our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" [TITUS 2:11-14]. Therefore, according to the Apostle Paul, our Great God is Jesus Christ, who is also our Saviour.

⁴ E.g. TITUS 1:4; 2 TIMOTHY 1:2; 1 TIMOTHY 1:2; COLOSSIANS 3:17; EPHESIANS 5:20; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:24

⁵ E.g. MATTHEW 4:3, 6

⁶ E.g. MATTHEW 8:29; MARK 3:11; LUKE 4:41

⁷ E.g. MARK 1:1; JOHN 20:31

⁸ E.g. JOHN 1:34

⁹ E.g. JOHN 1:49

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I appeal to one additional New Testament writer to affirm the truth that Jesus is God—the Apostle Peter. Peter’s second letter is addressed to “those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of *our God and Savior Jesus Christ*” [2 PETER 1:1]. The Apostle writes to those whom he understands as sharing an equal standing with the Apostles because they possess the righteousness of our God, Jesus Christ, who is—not so incidentally, our Saviour. Peter, a pious Jew raised in the Jewish milieu, was unhesitating in declaring Jesus to be both God and Saviour. Moreover, from the first open declaration at Pentecost, Peter was forthright in declaring Jesus to be the Anointed One of God, Himself very God.

More than that, Jesus did the acts that God alone could perform. He gave sight to blinded eyes,¹⁰ staunched the flow of blood that had caused ritual impurity for years,¹¹ restored the ability to hear to those who were deaf,¹² gave the power of speech to muted tongues¹³ and He raised the dead to life.¹⁴ He exercised power over nature, calming the raging sea,¹⁵ causing a fig tree to wither,¹⁶ multiplying loaves and fishes to feed multitudes¹⁷ and transforming water into wine.¹⁸ He commanded, and even the demons obeyed.¹⁹ These acts demonstrate that He possessed the power that God alone could possess.

Jesus was not in the least reticent in declaring that He was very God in human form as even those who hated Him confessed. As an example, recall an incident that occurred on one occasion during the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem. “At that time, the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So, the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.’

“The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?’ The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, “I said, you are gods?” If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, “You are blaspheming,” because I said, “I am the Son of God?” If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.’ Again, they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands” [JOHN 10:22-39].

¹⁰ E.g. JOHN 9:1-7

¹¹ E.g. MARK 5:25-29

¹² E.g. MARK 7:32-35

¹³ E.g. MARK 9:32, 33

¹⁴ E.g. LUKE 7:12-15

¹⁵ E.g. LUKE 8:22-24

¹⁶ E.g. MATTHEW 21:18-20

¹⁷ E.g. JOHN 6:9-13; MATTHEW 14:17-21; 15:32-38

¹⁸ E.g. JOHN 2:1-11

¹⁹ E.g. MARK 1:21-27; 5:1-16

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The Jewish leaders were very much aware that Jesus claimed to be equal with God, in effect, calling Himself very God.²⁰ That knowledge enraged them, ultimately driving them to seize Him and sentence Him to death. Luke records a telling exchange between Jesus and His captors. “When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, tell us.’ But He said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE power OF GOD.’ And they all said, ‘Are You the Son of God, then?’ And He said to them, ‘Yes, I am’” [LUKE 22:66-70 NASB 95].

But what of *the Spirit of God*—Him whom we see identified as the “Holy Spirit” or as the “Spirit of Christ?” Do we see this One, the third Person of the Godhead doing the works that God alone can do? First of all, He is referred to as God. Notice the account of a judgement in the first assembly. “A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.’ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it” [ACTS 5:1-5]. Note that Ananias *lied to the Holy Spirit* [VERSE 3] whom Peter identifies as *God* [VERSE 4].

Preparing the disciples for His exodus, Jesus promised, “I will come to you” [JOHN 14:18]. Of course, we have already established that Jesus is God. Then, Jesus promised that “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father [would] send in [Jesus’] Name” would provide divine instruction, bringing to remembrance all that Jesus had said [see JOHN 14:26]. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the Spirit whom God sent is sometimes identified as “the Spirit of Jesus”²¹ and at other times as “the Spirit of Christ.”²² The Spirit of God did provide direction to the disciples, just as He had the writers of the Old Testament Scriptures.

There was a moment in the early missionary journeys when the gospel band sought to move eastward, but the Spirit of Jesus prevented that movement. Here is the relevant account. “[The missionaries] went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” [ACTS 16:6-10].

Note several aspects from this account. First, Doctor Luke says that the Holy Spirit forbade them from moving to Asia to preach [VERSE 6]. However, he identified this Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of Jesus” in VERSE 7. In itself, this is interesting in that the Names “the Holy Spirit” and the “Spirit of Jesus” are synonymous in the missionary vocabulary. However, it is the commentary provided in VERSE 10 that is central to our study today. The missionaries concluded “that God has called [them] to preach the gospel to [the Macedonians].”

²⁰ E.g. JOHN 5:18

²¹ E.g. PHILIPPIANS 1:19

²² E.g. ROMANS 8:9

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We see the Spirit of God intimately involved in creation. The Word of God opens with this observation, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And *the Spirit of God* was hovering over the face of the waters” [GENESIS 1:1, 2].

As the Psalmist writes of God’s creation, he speaks of the earth and all the plants that grow on it before naming the various great beasts of the earth and the great sea creatures. Then, he notes that all creation is dependent upon the Lord God for their very existence. Then, he writes,

“These all look to you,
to give them their food in due season.
When you give it to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.”

[PSALM 104:27-30]

It is by the Spirit of the Living God that all things have their being. God created all things. Christ the Lord created all things. And now, we learn that the Spirit of God created all things.

Jesus cast out demons “by the Spirit of God,”²³ just as the Apostle Paul performed signs and wonders “by the Spirit of God.”²⁴ The Spirit of God directs our worship,²⁵ guards our speech²⁶ and guides the people of God.²⁷ It is the Spirit of God who gives the child of God discernment to reject error while embracing truth.²⁸

Recently, a United States senator foolishly suggested that an evangelical Christian is unsuited for public service if he holds to biblical doctrine.²⁹ The nominee, a graduate of a major Christian college, defended his school in a blog post some time ago. He presented the position, held by all evangelical Christians, that only through Jesus Christ can sin be forgiven and a person saved. The nominee was on solid ground in this assertion.

²³ E.g. MATTHEW 3:16

²⁴ E.g. ROMANS 15:19

²⁵ See PHILIPPIANS 3:3

²⁶ See 1 CORINTHIANS 12:3

²⁷ See ROMANS 8:14

²⁸ See 1 JOHN 4:2

²⁹ Samuel Smith, “NFL Star Ben Watson: Bernie Sanders ‘UnAmerican’ for Questioning Trump Nominee’s Evangelical Beliefs,” The Christian Post, Jun 9, 2017, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/nfl-star-ben-watson-bernie-sanders-unamerican-questioning-trump-nominee-evangelical-christian-beliefs-187202/>, accessed 10 June 2017; Todd Starnes, “Bernie Sanders attacks Trump nominee for following teachings of Christ,” Fox News, June 09, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2017/06/09/bernie-sanders-attacks-trump-nominee-for-following-teachings-christ.html>, accessed 9 June 2017; streiff, “Bernie Sanders Decides That Being An Actual Christian Disqualifies You From Office (VIDEO),” RedState, June 8, 2017, <http://www.redstate.com/streiff/2017/06/08/sanders-vought-confirmation/>, accessed 8 June 2017; Sarah Oladokun, “Former presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders draws evangelical fire at Vought confirmation hearing,” Christian Today, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/former-presidential-hopeful-bernie-sanders-draws-evangelical-fire-at-vought-confirmation-hearing/109894.htm>, accessed 10 June 2017

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Jesus testified, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” [JOHN 14:6].

Again, we read the account of a controversy with the Jewish leaders recorded in John’s Gospel. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” [JOHN 10:27-30].

I am not attacking that senator; I understand that he spoke in ignorance. He is incapable of understanding biblical truth; he can rise no higher than his own worldview—a position that has been at best misinformed about the things of the Spirit. We who are born from above are taught, “Who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 2:11-16].

WHEN THE BIBLE PRESENTS THE ONE TRUE GOD, DOES IT SPEAK OF A TRIUNITY? Though we speak of God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit, we do not believe in three gods. We believe all that is presented in the Word, beginning with the great Mosaic declaration, “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one” [DEUTERONOMY 6:4].

This truth that God is one is powerfully iterated when James challenges those who contend they are monotheists without placing themselves under the reign of the Risen Christ: “Someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder” [JAMES 2:18-19]!

God’s unique character is affirmed when Paul declares “God is one” [GALATIANS 3:20]! He makes the identical assertion in ROMANS 3:30. In making this statement, the Apostle aligns himself with the Prophets of the Old Testament. Malachi asks, “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers” [MALACHI 2:10]?

The LORD God follows this line of questioning with a serious accusation that could easily be applied to our modern world. “This second thing you do. You cover the LORD’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So, guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. ‘For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So, guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless’” [MALACHI 2:13-16].

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However, this one God reveals Himself as three Persons. The doctrine of the Triune God is not suddenly sprung on us as we read the Bible. Throughout the Word we see it developed with time. For instance, in the creation account we read, “Then God said, ‘Let *us* make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’” [GENESIS 1:26].

Similarly, after the man had fallen, God said, “Behold, the man has become like *one of us* in knowing good and evil” [GENESIS 3:22].

Some, seeing such language, posit that this is the language of majesty, much as the Queen might employ in a formal speech. However, this is unknown from God in most instances. Others imagine that God is speaking to angels. However, angels are not like God, so it would be strange for the Living God to exalt angels to be equal to Him. Rather, it seems obvious in retrospect that we are observing a consultation within the godhead.

Another hint from the Old Testament is recorded in the Psalms. David writes,

“The LORD says to my Lord:
‘Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.’”

[PSALM 110:1]

In this Psalm, Yahweh, the LORD God, is having a conversation with David’s Lord. Throughout the Old Testament, we see the personal Name of God (Yahweh) associated with His chief, or supreme title (Adonai); that is what is witnessed in this instance. You will recall that in the New Testament, Jesus challenged the Pharisees to explain how this was possible.³⁰

Writing the Corinthians, Paul affirms the oneness of God and then brings in a new element. He was addressing a pastoral problem, when he suddenly ascribed deity to Christ. “Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

“Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-6]. According to the Apostle’s revelation, all things are *from* the Father and *through* Christ. Similarly, Christians exist *for* the Father and *through* the Son.

Quickly, note that Paul frequently appealed to the Triune God. One example is, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:13, 14].

Another of the Apostle’s use of trinitarian formulae is in his First Corinthian Letter. “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-6].

³⁰ E.g. MATTHEW 22:41-46

THREE GODS? NO! GOD IS THREE PERSONS!
2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

To the several trinitarian citations already noted, I would add this one found in the Letter to the churches of Galatia. “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” [GALATIANS 4:4-6]!

Recall the baptismal formula the faithful received from the Risen Saviour. Jesus commanded His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].

Finally, we have the trinitarian formula provided in the text received for this day. Pronouncing a blessing on his readers, the Apostle appealed to the Triune God. Paul thinks of the one God as Triune. There is the Lord Jesus Christ, God (His Father)³¹ and the Holy Spirit. In Paul’s estimate, Christ the Lord and the Father are in a Father-Son relationship, and the Holy Spirit, whose “fellowship” with individuals demonstrates that He is a Person and not a force or an influence. The grace, the love and the fellowship the Apostle seeks for readers are each related to personal beings who are called by different names.

Paul Barnett cogently observes, “It is a small step to believe that the ‘God of love and of peace’ of whom Paul spoke comes to us as three ‘persons’ within the one God. Thus, we may agree with H. B. Swete that this verse ‘suggests beyond doubt that beneath the religious life of the apostolic age there lay a profound, though as yet unformulated, faith in the tri-personality of God.’” Then, citing Karl Barth, Barnett concludes, “Trinity is the Christian name for God.”³²

WORSHIPPING THE TRUE AND LIVING GOD — Ultimately, what we believe is critical. Tragically, I learned long ago that an individual can be straight as a gun barrel theologically, and just as empty. We can cite the numerous Scriptures and delineate all the truths revealed therein; however, if we fail to know this God, we are still lost. If we do not have a speaking knowledge with the Living God, we are deceived. Too many professed Christians can recite the creeds, mouth prayers and sing the hymns of Zion without knowing the God who redeems sinners and restores broken lives.

I’ve spoken the truths multiple times, and there is no better way to draw the message to a close than through asking several questions demanding that we answer honestly. Are you on speaking terms with the Living God? When you recite the Lord’s Prayer, are you speaking to One who is your Father? Or is this merely a formulaic recitation for you? Do you come into His presence as a child coming into the presence of a loving father? Or do you think of the Father as some distant, austere, sinister bully intent on stealing your pleasure? Is the love of God real for you? Do you rejoice in the love that He showers on you day-after-day?

Do you know Christ, the Son of God? Or do you merely know about Him? Is He that One who sticks closer than a brother? Or do you think of Him as a God so remote that you must seek a mediator to reach the One Mediator between God and men? You do know that we have been given the truth, “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time” [1 TIMOTHY 2:5, 6]. Do you revel in His grace each day? Are you growing in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

³¹ See 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3; 11:31

³² Paul Barnett, **The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament** (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1997) 619

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Is the Spirit of Christ real to you? If all you know is an experience, answer this question, “Do you know Him?” Have you appropriated His mighty power? Does He guide your steps? Are you walking in His power as evidence by boldness in your witness? Is the fruit merely a list of characteristics that you have yet to experience? Or are you keeping step with the Spirit?

I would never presume upon your kindness, but I must speak rather pointedly in these few moments remaining. I’m calling on the people of God to seek the face of God. I’m calling the people of God to spend sufficient time in the presence of the Father until each one knows that He has heard our cry. Among the old-time believers in another era, we spoke of saints who laid hold of the doorlatch of Heaven. That is what is needed now—saints who pray, crying out as did Jacob of old, “I will not let you go unless You bless me” [GENESIS 32:26]. When He blesses us, we will speak of His love from experience and not as something that is theoretical.

There is a glaring, unmet need for believers who have met the Risen Son of God, though we intuitively shrink before Him, testifying, “How awesome is this place” [see GENESIS 28:17]. We imagine that we worship because we sing a lively chorus, or because we endure a lengthy sermon, or because we have observed some religious performance; however, I’m suggesting that we worship only when we have found ourselves in the glorious presence of the Son of God. There, before Him, we will be lost in admiration, in awe, in wonder. As A. W. Tozer has said, “Worship is no longer worship when it reflects the culture around us more than the Christ within us.”³³ And much of what we attempt to pass off as worship reflects culture rather than Christ. Worship is not about what we do; worship is about the One Whom we meet. When we meet the Risen Son of God, like Elijah, we will cover our face and bow before Him. We will find ourselves awed by the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord when He stands in our midst.

The surest evidence that we do not know the Spirit of God is that we shrink from being alone with Him. We fear that we may become fanatics, though we can easily become excited over a hockey game or a football game. We fear that should the Holy Spirit take control we will be emotional, though we have no trouble crying over a movie that we know is make-believe. We are able to laugh uproariously at a comedic presentation, but we don’t want to be so overwhelmed by the fellowship of the Spirit that we would smile, much less laugh. We want to be in control, and we are not convinced that we can trust God’s Spirit. Since He does not control, fellowship with the Holy One is unknown. Because we have not experienced fellowship with Holy God, fellowship with the saints is transient at best. All the while, we are dying for our lack of fellowship—our inability to share our lives, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep.

I am calling the people of God to turn again to the Triune God. If you do not know Him, call out to Him, asking that His love will open a way for you into His heart. If you do not know the Son of God, I urge you to seek Him while there is yet time. My prayer is that God’s Holy Spirit will break down some barriers, drawing God’s chosen ones into a deep walk with Him. My prayer is that the Son of God will invade the darkened precincts of hearts that are cold and stony, breaking up the fallow ground so that His Word may take root and His grace may surprise you with joy. May the Lord God act with power; and may He be pleased to do this thing even in this hour. Amen.

³³ Cited by James L. Snyder, ed., “Introduction,” in **A Disruptive Faith: Expect God to Interrupt Your Life**, (Regal, Ventura, CA 2011) 5