

## CHAPTER 5

### GOD AS TRINITY

[See Edward Henry Bickersteth, *The Trinity*; B. B. Warfield, “Trinity,” *ISBE* (1929), 5:3012-3022; C. Platinga, Jr., “Trinity,” *New ISBE*, rev. ed., 4:914-921; Gordon H. Clark, *The Trinity* (1985); Alister McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity* (1988, a popular introduction); William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (1980, helpful introduction to and collection of classical works, creeds, and letters.)]

While the word *Trinity* is not in the Bible, the truth of the Trinity is in the Bible. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is based on the Bible’s description of God and his activities. We find a God who is both a unity and yet is composed of individual persons in relationship with each other. This is truly a mystery, and yet is central to the Christian faith.

### Creedal formulations

#### ***Earliest creeds or creedal-like statements***

There are several creedal-like statements in the NT (such as the Great Commission in Matt 28:19, and the apostolic benediction in 2 Cor 13:14) which are Trinitarian in nature. Outside the NT the church fathers quote from baptismal and other creedal statements that were current in their times; these include statements from Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Novatian, Origen, Eusebius, and others (see Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* 2:11-41 for original language texts and English translations; there is a helpful chart comparing them on pp. 40-41). Typical is a primitive creed cited by Irenaeus in the second century:

“The Church, though scattered through the whole world to the ends of the earth, has received from the Apostles and their disciples the faith,

“In one God, the Father Almighty, who made the heaven and the earth, and the seas, and all that in them is;

“And in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became flesh for our salvation;

“And in the Holy Ghost, who through the prophets preached the dispensations and the advent,

“And the birth from the Virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily assumption into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his appearing from heaven in the glory of the Father, to comprehend all things under one head, and to raise up all flesh of all mankind, . . .” (Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* 2:13-14; quoted from *Against Heresies* 1:10:1)

## **Ecumenical creeds**

The Trinitarian form of these early statements of faith is maintained in the earliest ecumenical creed, the Apostles’ Creed, in all its various forms. Each is based on the same structure: “I believe in God the Father Almighty . . . and in Jesus Christ his only Son . . . and in the Holy Ghost” (cf. Schaff *Creeds of Christendom* 2:45-55; quoted in A. A. Hodge, *Confession of Faith*, p. 5).

The creeds of the four great ecumenical councils build upon this base, with a careful spelling out of the Trinitarian doctrine developing through the fires of controversy with heresy (for a helpful doctrinal and historical summary of these events, see C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1:448-467). The Nicene creed (A.D. 325), as revised at Constantinople in 381, is similar to the Apostles’ Creed in using the persons of the Trinity as its outline. This creed was produced in reaction to the heresy of Arianism (God the Son not being fully equal to God the Father), and hence emphasizes the deity of Christ (bracketed terms are later additions received by present Protestant churches):

“I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

“And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

“And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And [I believe] one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.” (Schaff *Creeds of Christendom* 2:58-59; cf. pp. 57-61; also quoted in A. A. Hodge, *Confession of Faith*, p. 6)

The final ecumenical form of the creed was produced by the council of Chalcedon in AD 451. Because of the heresies of Nestorianism (Christ having an incomplete humanity) and Monophysitism (Eutychianism; Christ having only one soul), this creed emphasizes the person of God the Son, with his essential deity and essential humanity as two complete natures combined in one person.

“We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.” (Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* 2:62-63; cf. pp. 62-65)

For relevant text from the later Athanasian Creed, named in honor of the great champion of orthodoxy, see A. A. Hodge, *Confession of Faith*, pp. 6-7. This creed affirms the same truths as the ecumenical creeds.

### ***Westminster standards***

The Westminster standards provide a precise and Scriptural description of the Trinity:

WCF 2:3: “In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.” (citing Matt 3:16-17; 28:19; John 1:14, 18; 17:24; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 4:6)

WSC 6: “How many persons are there in the Godhead? A. There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” (citing Matt 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14)

WLC 9: “How many persons are there in the Godhead?” A. There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory: although distinguished by their personal properties.” (citing Matt 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14)

WLC 10: “What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead? A. It is proper to the Father to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son, from all eternity” (citing John 1:14; 15:26; Gal 4:6; Heb 1:5-6)

WLC 11: “How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father? A. The Scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only.” (citing Gen 1:2; Ps 45:6; 104:30; Isa 9:6; Jer 23:6; Matt 28:19; John 1:1, 3; 2:24-25; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 2:10-11; 2 Cor 13:14; Col 1:16; Heb 9:14; 1 John 5:20)

We notice that the final question quoted from the Larger Catechism spells out the Scriptural argument for showing the three persons of the Trinity (“names, attributes, works, worship”). This same procedure will be used in the notes that follow.

## Unity of God

As was spelled out in the notes above (ch. 3, “Absolute Attributes of God,” section 2, “The Simplicity of God”), God is an absolute unity. There is one God, who is referred to often in the singular (pronouns, verbs, etc.).

Hence, all the persons of the Trinity form one God, of the same essence (not merely a similar essence). They must, therefore share the same attributes, from all eternity.

“Since there is but one indivisible and inalienable spiritual essence, which is common to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and since they have in common one infinite intelligence, power, will, etc., when we say they are distinct persons we do not mean that one is as separate from the other as one human person is from every other. Their mode of subsistence in the one substance must ever continue to us a profound mystery, as it transcends all analogy. All that is revealed to us is, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, stand so distinguished and related that,—

“1) They use mutually the personal pronouns I, thou, he, when speaking to or about each other. . . .

“2) That they mutually love one another, act upon and through one another, and take counsel together. . . .

“3) That they are eternally mutually related as Father and Son and Spirit. . . .

“4) That they work together in a perfectly harmonious economy of operations upon the creation. . . .” (A. A. Hodge, *Confession of Faith*, pp. 58-59)

The unity of the three persons of the Godhead is clearly taught not only in the OT, in such passages as Deut 6:4 (cf. Mark 12:29-30), but even in several NT passages which can be used to show a distinction of persons in the Godhead. In these passages the persons of the Trinity are spoken of as acting as one.

Deut 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

John 10:30, “I and the Father are one.” (Father and Son)

Rom 8:9, “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” (Father and Son)

1 Cor 2:11, “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” (Father and Holy Spirit)

1 Cor 3:16, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (Father and Holy Spirit)

By sharing the same essence, the same substance, unlike the various persons of the creation, the three persons of the Trinity avoid being three separate Gods. While their personalities are distinct, the unity of the Godhead is maintained.

Traditionally this phrase has expressed the unity of the Trinity in all its operations outside of itself: *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (“the works of the Trinity outside itself are inseparable”).

See Kyle Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together: Defending the Historic Doctrine of the Inseparable Operations of the Trinity,” *JETS* 56:4 (Dec 2013) 781-800. Claunch summarizes the arguments against modern “relational” theories of the Trinity, such as that proposed by Stanley Grenz and Peter Leithart.

## **Diversity of persons**

Even though there is only one God—and that unity of God is stressed in Scripture—we see also that there is diversity of persons in the Godhead.

### ***OT passages showing plurality in the Godhead***

Some have used the form of the Hebrew word for God (אֱלֹהִים *’ēlōhîm*), since it has the plural ending, as evidence for the Trinity. However, while the form certainly would agree with the idea of the Trinity, there are other feasible grammatical explanations. Most common is the use of the plural for majesty (*Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, pp. 398-400).

In some places God speaks in the plural—e.g., Gen 1:26, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

Similar passages:

Gen 3:22, “The man has now become like one of us.”

Gen 11:7, “Come, let us go down and confuse their language.” (plural verbs)

cf. Gen 35:7, “God appeared (pl. verb) to him.”

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

While it is possible to explain these as uses of the plural of majesty, such references also fit well with a plurality in the Godhead.

### ***OT passages showing interaction between members of the Godhead***

More convincing evidence from the OT is found in various passages which have God speaking to himself in another person, or which show more than one person with divine attributes.

Psa 45:6-7, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

(Bad translation in the old RSV, “Your divine throne endures forever and ever”; corrected in the NRSV, “Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever.”)

Note that the psalmist addresses the Messiah here with the title of “God,” and yet he also recognizes that the Messiah has a “God.” This passage is quoted in Heb 1:8-9 as an evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ, showing that he is superior to the angels.

Psa 110:1, (spoken by David), “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”

quoted by Jesus with effect in Matt 22:44 = Mark 12:36 = Luke 20:42; cf. Peter in Acts 2:34; Jesus asked the Jewish teachers to identify this “Lord” of David, the Psalm-writer; they were unable to answer

Prov 30:4, “Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? [these are characteristics of divinity] What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!”

Jer 23:5-6, “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD [Yahweh], ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD [Yahweh] Our Righteousness.’”

Here both the RSV and the NRSV have a poor translation:

“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.<sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’” (NRSV)

In this passage the Tetragrammaton (the covenant name of God) is specifically given to the coming Messiah; and yet he is not identical to the Lord who raises him up, a reference to the Father.

Dan 7:9-14, “As I looked, thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days [clearly, God the Father] took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. . . . The court was seated, and the books were opened. . . .

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven [the Messiah]. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence [distinct from the Father]. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

Note that in this passage the Messiah is worshiped, something strictly reserved in the OT to God alone.

### ***OT passages suggesting the Trinity***

There are some OT passages which suggest that there may be three persons in the Godhead, although the doctrine of the Trinity is not clearly explained until we study the NT.

- Num 6:24-26 “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

Notice the use of the name Yahweh three times in this benediction; cf. parallel to the Apostolic Benediction (2 Cor 13:14)

- Triune “holy” in the perpetual praises of the seraphs (Isa 6:3; cf. Rev 4:8)

Even though the DSS Isaiah scroll has only two “holies,” the scholarly consensus is that there were three in the original text (cf. John N. Oswalt, Isaiah in *NIC*, p. 181, n. 34)

- Isa 63:9-10, where in a single context we read of God the Father (“he”), the Son (“the angel of his presence”), and the Holy Spirit (“his Holy Spirit”)

“In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.”

### ***NT passages distinguishing persons in the Godhead***

In the NT there is a clear distinction between the various members of the Trinity.

1. At the baptism of Jesus the three are distinguished and appear together (Jesus, the Son, being baptized; the Father speaking from heaven, “This is my beloved Son,”; and the Holy Spirit descending upon him visibly, as a dove (Matt 3:16-17 = Mark 1:9-11 = Luke 3:21-22; cf. John 1:32-34).
2. In the baptismal formula given by Jesus in the Great Commission, the three are distinguished and given equal status (Matt 28:19).
3. Suggested in the distribution of spiritual gifts, each member of the Trinity takes a part (1 Cor 12:4-6, “the same Spirit . . . the same Lord . . . the same God”)
4. The Apostolic Benediction places the three members of the Trinity on an equal footing (2 Cor 13:14; cf. “my name upon them” for the Levitical benediction of Num 6:24-27).

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

5. Other passages mention the three persons together in the same context (e.g., Luke 1:35; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; Eph 4:4-6).

[The textual basis of 1 John 5:7 in the KJV is extremely weak; hence it should not be used in argument to support the doctrine of the Trinity. It is never cited in all the extant writings from the early controversies in the church about the Trinity.]

In the sections that follow we will see the full deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. There is no debate that the Bible presents the Father as truly God.



## God the Son

That the Son is truly God is shown by the application to him of divine names, attributes, works, and worship (cf. WLC 11; verses and outline below in A. A. Hodge, *Confession of Faith*, pp. 57-58).

WLC 11. “How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father?”

A. The scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only.”

[An excellent expansion of these arguments can be found in the classic work by Edward Henry Bickersteth, *The Trinity*, a book written to defend the orthodox doctrine against Unitarianism; Bickersteth includes helpful tables of verses which compare the attributes and works of God the Father with verses which ascribe the same attributes and works to Jesus Christ. For an excellent and thorough modern treatment of the doctrine of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, see Donald Macleod (pronounced “McCloud”), *The Person of Christ*, in the *Contours of Christian Theology* series (IVP, 1998).]

### ***Divine names***

Isa 9:6—mighty God, everlasting Father

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Jer 23:6—Yahweh

“In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”

John 1:1—God (also Heb 1:8)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John 1:18—the One and Only God

“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.

[in the better MSS (UBS {B})]—Here the literal expression is “the only-begotten God”; “only-begotten” (monogenh:v *monogenes*) could perhaps better be

translated “unique, one of a kind”; cf. Heb. 11:17, Isaac as the *monogenes* of Abraham. John 1:18 clearly calls Jesus God.

Rom 9:5—God over all

“Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”

1 John 5:20—the true God, and eternal life

“We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

Rev. 1:8—the Alpha and the Omega; the Almighty (Lord God says this; but cf. 1:17; 22:13)

“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

Note that the title “Son of God” does not imply any inferiority to God, but rather an equality with God (see John 5:18).

### ***Divine attributes***

- Pre-existence—
  - with the Father before creation (John 8:58; 17:5)
  - came down into the world (John 3:13; 16:28)
- Eternity—John 8:58; 17:5; Rev 1:8; 22:13
- Immutability—Heb 1:10-12; 13:8
- Omnipresence—Matt 18:20; 28:18; John 1:18; 3:13 (UBS omits relevant words with {B} rating, but see arguments of minority of committee in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, pp. 174-175)
- Omniscience—Matt 11:27; John 1:48; 2:24-25 (knows man); Rev 2:23 (knows hearts, all men, works)
- Omnipotence—John 5:17 (Father and I work); Heb 1:3 (upholds all things by word of his power)

## ***Divine works***

- Creation—John 1:3-10; Col 1:16-17
- Preservation and providential government—Matt 18:18 (authority over souls); Col 1:17; Heb 1:3
- Final judgment—Matt 25:31-32; John 5:22; 2 Cor 5:10

[Some people say they don't believe Jesus is God; they just want to live by his Sermon on the Mount. But note the conclusion of that sermon, in which Jesus claims he will be the last judge, sending those who reject his words to hell; Matt 7:21-23.]

- Forgiving sins—Matt 9:2-6
- Giving eternal life—John 10:28
- Raising the dead—John 6:40, 54
- Sending the Holy Spirit—John 16:7
- Sanctification—Eph 5:25-27

## ***Divine worship***

- People commanded to worship him—John 5:23; 1 Cor 1:2; Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5-6; 5:11-13

[Notice that Jesus on earth received worship, which is due to God alone—Matt 28:17; John 9:38; 20:28; cf. the angel's attitude in Rev 22:8-9.]

- People to be baptized in name of Jesus, along with that of Father and Holy Spirit
- Apostolic benediction includes grace of Jesus along with blessings from the Father and the Holy Spirit—2 Cor 13:14

If Jesus were not God, these statements about him from the Scripture would be highly inappropriate and even blasphemous. Yet they are given naturally to Jesus, without any explanation or qualification. It is clear that he truly is God.

## **God the Holy Spirit**

## ***Personality of the Holy Spirit***

The same line of argument used to show the deity of God the Son can be used to demonstrate the deity of the Holy Spirit. However, it may be helpful first to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is actually a separate person from God the Father. The Scriptures not only distinguish the two in the places where the Trinity is named (as Matt 28:19), but they attribute personality to the Holy Spirit directly, and they attribute to the Holy Spirit in particular the characteristics of personality—intelligence, volition, and emotion.

The Holy Spirit is referred to by the use of personal pronouns (“I, you, he”). He is active; he speaks (John 15:26; 16:13-14; Acts 13:2; 1 Tim 4:1); he speaks especially in Scripture (cf. many references in which God’s Spirit speaks, or citations from the Spirit, as Matt 22:43 or Heb 3:7). He enters into relations with us as Christians, indwelling us (Rom 8:9) and distributing gifts to us. He possesses intelligence (Rom 8:26-27), volition (1 Cor 12:11), and emotion (Eph 4:30). The Holy Spirit is a true divine spiritual essence, who is self-aware, understanding, and capable of fellowship and receiving worship.

## ***Deity of the Holy Spirit***

Once it is determined that the Holy Spirit is a person, it can be shown that he possesses divinity, using the same procedure as that used for God the Son. He possesses divine names or titles, divine attributes, performs divine works, and receives divine worship. For further study, see not only Bickersteth’s *The Trinity*, but also his *The Holy Spirit*; also see the classic works on the Holy Spirit by the Puritan John Owen and the Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuiper; Charles Hodge has an excellent discussion (*Systematic Theology* 1, ch. 8). Here we again follow the outline of the WLC #11 and of A. A. Hodge, *Confession of Faith*, p. 58.

### **Divine names and titles:**

- Equated with Yahweh—Isa 6:8-9, “the Lord says” (the Lord = v. 5 = Yahweh); cf. Acts 28:25-26 (God equated with the Holy Spirit); also Jer 31:33 (Yahweh says); Heb 10:15-16 (“the Holy Spirit says”)
- Called God—Acts 5:3-4
- Note that the title “Spirit of God” does not imply any inferiority to God. Rather, it indicates equality with God, just as a spirit of a human is the essence of that person (cf. 1 Cor 2:10-11).

### **Divine attributes:**

- Omniscience—1 Cor 2:10-11, knows deep things of God

- Omnipresence—Ps 139:7, Where flee from your Spirit?
- Omnipotence—Luke 1:35, power of Spirit overshadow, do work of God; Rom 8:11, Spirit raises Jesus from dead, will raise us up

### Divine works:

- Creation—Gen 1:2, Spirit hovered over water; phps. Job 26:13 (“breath” = “Spirit”); Ps 104:30, Spirit creates animals
- Miracles—1 Cor 12:9-11, gifts of Spirit, include healing, miracles, powers (cf. Samson in Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14)
- Regeneration—John 3:6, Spirit gives birth to spirit; Tit 3:5, washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit

### Divine worship:

- Apostolic benediction—2 Cor 13:14
- Baptized in his name—Matt 28:19
- Blasphemy against Holy Spirit never forgiven—Matt 12:31-32

## Offices within the Trinity

While the persons of the Trinity are consubstantial and equal in power and glory, they have functions within the Trinity which cause some to subordinate themselves to others. This arrangement appears to be eternal.

The Scriptures consistently set forth an order of office.

1 Cor 8:6, “For us there is but one God, the Father, from (ἐκ *ek*) whom all things came and for (εἰς *eis*, unto) whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through (διὰ *dia*) whom all things came and through (*dia*) whom we live.”

Eph 2:18, “For through (*dia*) him [Christ] we both [Jew and Gentile] have access to (πρός *pros*) the Father by (ἐν *en*, by means of) one Spirit.”

The Greek prepositions in these verses are interesting, as they point to such a distinction in function. The Father is the source and goal of all things (*ek*, and *eis* or *pros*); the Son is the agent by which the Father’s will is performed (*dia*); the Holy Spirit is the means or instrument by which the Father and the Son accomplish the Father’s will (*en*). As the verses quoted earlier

demonstrate, this same arrangement is evident in all of God's works, including creation, providence, and redemption.

The Father, as the title suggests, is seen as the person who originates, plans, and purposes what the Godhead will do. He eternally generates the Son, and commissions him to do his will (John 10:18; 17:3; 1 Cor 15:28). The entire structure of the covenant of redemption, from which all the biblical covenants spring, is based on this relation between the Father and the Son. The Father sends the Holy Spirit to do his will in carrying out his various purposes (Gen 1:2; Exod 31:3; 35:31; Num 11:17-29; Judg 3:10; Job 33:4; Ps 51:11; Isa 11:2; 40:13; 42:1-5; Luke 11:13; John 14:16, 26; Acts 2:17, etc.).

The Son is eternally generated from the Father, but this does not mean that he had a beginning, for he is eternal. He consistently has the title of Son of God, and is seen doing the will of his Father, even when his own (human) will recoiled at what lay before him (John 12:23, 27-28; cf. in the Garden of Gethsemane, Matt 26:39, 42, 44, and parallels in Mark and Luke). John's gospel especially shows us how Jesus said that he was doing what the Father commanded, both in his teaching (John 8:28; 12:50; 15:15; 17:8) and in his life and sacrifice (John 5:36; 10:17-18; 14:31; 17:4). This subordination of the Son to the Father does not mean that Jesus is less than his Father (as John 14:28 might suggest), but rather that Jesus in his subordinate role and in his estate of humiliation (as in Phil 2:5-8) voluntarily assumes an office of less authority than his Father. A parallel might be that of a husband to his wife (cf. Eph 5); while the husband is the head of the wife and the wife obeys her husband, they are equal before God in essence, importance, and glory.

The Holy Spirit is pictured in Scripture as the one who does the will of the Father and the Son, and who seeks to glorify them. Charles Hodge calls him "the executive of the Godhead" (*Systematic Theology* 1:529). He eternally proceeds from the Father (see verses above), and from the Son (John 15:26; cf. Gal 4:6, "the Spirit of his Son"; cf. the *filioque* controversy; see Macleod, *The Person of Christ*). Theologians are careful to distinguish the term "generation," referring to the Son's relation to the Father, from the term "procession," referring to the Spirit's relation to the Father and the Son.

This economy of relation in the Trinity is the basis of God's love and eternal fellowship with himself. When he created humans in his own image, he created them male and female (Gen 1:26). The fellowship we enjoy pictures the fellowship God enjoys in the Trinity, and the subordination of office God has ordained for humans is a picture of that subordination we see revealed in the Trinity.

[For helpful history of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, see C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1:532-534.]