

# God's Triune Existence

## The Basis for Belief in a Trinity

The terms *trinity* and *triune* are not Biblical terms. These words are never found in the pages of Scripture. Yet, the triunity of God is a Biblical idea. So, these terms, even though non-biblical, can be used to help us describe how God exists. That they represent valid concepts is shown by the fact that it is possible to demonstrate from the pages of Scripture that the God identified there as the one true God of gods is a triune God. God exists as a trinity. Such a demonstration indicates that this God, revealed in Scripture, is a personal being with a person-nature relationship as previously described. There are three distinct persons sharing one divine nature.

It is interesting to note that the writers of the New Testament made no effort to prove that the Godhead is triune. And, in fact, they may have never formulated God's being in the sense that we have today. They simply believed that on the one hand the Father was God, the Son was God, and the Spirit was God and on the other hand there was only one God. By the time they wrote the New Testament, these truths had evidently become established, accepted facts in the "orthodox" Christian community of their day. For these writers, no demonstration was necessary.

Demonstrating that the Godhead is triune is relatively simple. To do so it is only necessary to establish two basic truths and then from those truths draw a conclusion. First, one must show that *there exists three, distinct, divine persons*. We must identify exactly three persons, no more and no less. These three persons must be distinct. And these three persons must be designated as divine. This first point is concerned primarily with the *person* side of the personal being. But, if we were to stop here, we would only have proved that three persons are God or tri-theism.

So, second, we must show that *there is only one being with a divine nature*, that there is only one God. There is only one divine being in existence, the God revealed in Scripture. This second point focuses on the *nature* side of the personal being.

Then third, by bringing together the two points just demonstrated, the conclusion can be drawn that a trinity, as defined earlier, exists. If there are three, distinct, divine persons and there is only one divine nature, then a trinity necessarily exists. In the end we can see that the Scripture teaches Trinitarianism. Three persons are God, yet there is only one God.

Before proceeding with a Scriptural demonstration of God's triunity there is one "difficulty" that should be mentioned. It involves this question. Has

Scripture given us the "whole story" regarding the Godhead? The "difficulty" concerns whether there are only three members of the Godhead. We believe there are only three. But, to come to this conclusion we must assume that God has revealed himself to us in a way that shows us how he really exists. This was not the case in the Old Testament, at least to the degree that Judaism did not understand God as triune. That revelation awaited the Incarnation and the ministry of Jesus. So now we have further evidence in the writings of the New Testament. Because only three persons are named in the pages of both the Old and New Testaments, we assume that there are no additional members of the Godhead about which nothing is revealed. This seems to be a safe assumption.

One additional note is in order before proceeding. In demonstrating the Scriptural basis for the doctrine of the Trinity, as it concerns the Son, I will include not only references where the Son is clearly identified but also references where we see Jesus as the one named. At this juncture there has been no effort to demonstrate that the Son who is divine and Jesus who is human is the same person. For now, we will simply assume that they are different designations for the same person.<sup>1</sup> We will wait until later when we consider the Hypostatic Union to examine statements of Scripture that indicate the person identified as Jesus Christ is the person identified as God the Son.

### **There Are Three Divine Persons**

As mentioned, the first order of business in demonstrating that the Godhead is triune is to demonstrate that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three, distinct, divine persons. To do so, three steps are required. First, one must show that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit should be considered as persons. We must see that each named individual has characteristics that would indicate he is a person. Second, it must be demonstrated that these three persons are distinct. That is, it must be shown that the names used to designate the persons are not just different names for the same person associating that one person with three different roles. And third, having shown that these are three distinct persons, we must show that these three persons are divine. That is, we must demonstrate that the three persons are each identified as God, as having or individualizing a divine nature. The Father is God. The Son is God. And the Spirit is God.

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<sup>1</sup> While *the Son* and *Jesus* are designations for the same eternally existing person, these two designations reflect two different natures possessed by this one person, one divine and one human.

## **The Father, Son, and Spirit are Persons**

We will demonstrate that (1) the Father is a person; (2) the Son is a person; and (3) the Spirit is a person. In so doing we will have shown that these three members of the Godhead are persons. How can we do this? How can we demonstrate that the Father, the Son, or the Spirit is a person? Scripture makes no explicit statements regarding these three as being persons. There is no statement, for example, "the Spirit is a person." But that should not really be a surprise. We do not find any such statements regarding individual men or women being persons either.

Since we find no such identifying statements in Scripture, it seems best to begin by itemizing the characteristics that mark a being as a personal being. What characteristics does a person possess? Then, we can check to see whether the three persons of the Godhead have these characteristics and thus function like a person. That is, each is spoken of as doing those things characteristic of a person. On that basis, given no mitigating statements, we will be able to conclude that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are persons.

What criteria should we use to make this demonstration reasonable? What characteristics should be included? There are several things that are considered true about a person that distinguishes him or her as such. First, a person is aware of his or her own existence. That is, a person possesses self-consciousness. Second, a person possesses the ability to make determinations. The power of free choice, based on desire, is inherent in a person. Third, persons can use language to converse with other personal beings, including abstract ideas. So then, if we can demonstrate that a being is self-conscious, makes decisions, and communicates with other persons, then we can conclude that the being is a personal being. There is a fourth item that we could also consider. Persons have an awareness of the existence of a divine being. That is, persons are "god-conscious."<sup>2</sup> Since we will demonstrate that each of the three persons in the Trinity is recognized as God, we will not consider this aspect of personhood at this juncture.

This, of course, means that we must find that there are no otherwise contrary statements, statements that would indicate the Father or Son or Spirit is not a person. In fact, I find that there are no statements in Scripture which argue against a conclusion that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are persons. I realize that some could dispute their personhood because each of these three persons is at times represented as other than a personal being. But, does this mean that they are not persons? No. For

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<sup>2</sup> I am using "god-conscious" in the sense we understand Roman 1:19-20. From creation itself, persons are aware of the existence of a *god* even if they do not recognize that god as *the God* revealed in Scripture.

example, Jesus says he is a door and the Spirit is pictured as a dove and a flame fire. God is represented as a rock and like a bird having wings. God is also pictured as a censor passing between two halves of an animal's carcass when making a covenant with Abraham. What these non-personal representations do is help us understand something about the nature of the one described as such. This is no different than Jesus referring to Peter as a "rock." These are all metaphors that help us understand something about the person or his activity. These depictions serve to clarify God's nature and work and do not imply that the members of the Godhead are not persons. So again, there is nothing to negate a conclusion drawn from Scripture that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are persons.

Of the three members of the Godhead, there is usually little argument regarding the personhood of either the Father or the Son. The Father is a given. As for the Son, non-Christians may argue that the Son as manifest by Jesus is not God. But for the most part, there is no doubt that this Son is a person. This is not the case, however, with the Spirit. Non-Trinitarians, for example, may view the Spirit simply as a force and not as a person. But when one examines the evidence presented in Scripture, the conclusion can be safely drawn that the Spirit is also a person. Thus, the Scripture indicates that each of these three, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, is a person.

In what follows, the demonstrations that the Father and the Son are persons may seem more overdone than is necessary. Why demonstrate what everyone already believes? It is important, however, for us to see that all three members of the Godhead are spoken of in Scripture in the same way, even if the extent of revelation about one member is more or less than that for another.

In demonstrating that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are persons we will follow the same basic pattern. First, we begin by showing that the individuals possess self-consciousness. Each of them speaks of himself using first person pronouns. Second, we will demonstrate that these three individuals each make decisions. Acts of the will are attributed to each of these individuals. And third, we finish by demonstrating that each individual carries on activities normally associated with persons and that other persons interact with that individual as such. For example, each of these individuals can be shown to engage in conversation with other persons.

### **The Father is a Person**

From the record contained in Scripture we see that the Father acts and is spoken of as one possessing the characteristics of a person. He does those things associated with persons.

## God's Triune Existence

First, the Father exhibits self-awareness. He does this by making statements that use the first-person pronoun with reference to himself. At the baptism of Jesus, the Father gave his endorsement of Jesus, testifying to his Sonship. In so doing the Father spoke of the Son as "my beloved Son." He said, "I am well-pleased" with him. In his account, Matthew wrote, "and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'" (3:17). See also the parallel accounts in Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22. These passages do not directly identify the speaker as God the Father. The gospel writers recorded that they heard "a voice from heaven." Had they made identification, no doubt they would have identified the voice as having come from God the Father. However, the fact that the voice said "my beloved Son" makes the need to specifically designate the speaker unnecessary. The speaker is speaking about his Son and is therefore the Father. Thus, in saying "I am well pleased" the Father demonstrated his own self-consciousness. He is aware of his own existence separate from any other person.

A similar event took place at the transfiguration of Christ. Jesus was accompanied by Peter, James, and John up on a mount. While there Jesus's appearance changed, manifesting his veiled glory. Again, as at his baptism, a voice gave testimony to the identity of Jesus. Matthew recorded what happened. He wrote, "A voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him'" (17:5). Parallels in Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:35 record this event as well. Again, the writers did not identify the speaker, only referring to "a voice from the cloud." But again, by saying "my beloved Son" and "I am well pleased" the Father, as before, shows that he is self-conscious. Any doubt that this is the testimony of God the Father is removed by Peter's later recounting of this event (2 Peter 1:17). In that account Peter, writing as an eyewitness, identified the speaker as the "God the Father" whom he also identified as "the Majestic Glory." Clearly, the Father is aware of his own existence, lending evidence that he is a person.

Additionally, in the letter to the Hebrews the author begins with a demonstration of the importance of the Son. In making this demonstration the author twice cited Old Testament passages, indicating that these were words used by the Father regarding his Son. "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'? Or again, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son'?" (1:5). Even though the writer referred to the speaker as "God," it is apparent that the reference is to the God the Father. In using the personal pronouns "my" and "me" and in using the first-person singular verbs "I have begotten" and "I will be" the Father gives evidence that he is aware of his own existence.

Second, the Father, like any other person, makes decisions. In the New Testament record we find statements made by the Father or about him that demonstrate he makes determinations or choices. When Jesus was praying

in the garden just before his arrest, he expressed his desire that the "cup" he was facing be removed. But he only wanted it to be removed if that was also the Father's desire and the Father would choose to make such a determination.<sup>3</sup> Jesus was willing to accept whatever the Father determined, even if it was not his own desire. He prayed, "Father, if you are willing [*boulomai*], remove this cup from me; yet not My will [*thelāma*], but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).<sup>4</sup>

James provides another example of the Father making determinations. In his letter to his Jewish brothers James referred to God the Father as "the Father of lights" (1:17). He wrote that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." He then went on and attributed an aspect of our salvation to the Father's determination. "Of his own will [*boulomai*] he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (1:18). Our salvation has come about because the Father made a determination to bring us to himself.

Luke too provides an example. In Acts 4 we read an account he recorded regarding the appearance of Peter and John before the council. After these men were dismissed, they reported to other disciples what had been done to them. As a result of their testimony, the group offered a prayer to God (Acts 4:24-30). Luke wrote, "they lifted up their voices together to God" addressing him as "Sovereign Lord" (4:24). That this is a prayer to the God the Father is evident from their citing of Psalm 2 and its reference to "the Lord and his Anointed" (4:26) and from their reference to "*your* holy servant Jesus, whom *you* anointed" (4:27). The events that took place in conjunction with the death of Christ were planned by the Father. What happened fulfilled "whatever your hand and your plan predestined [*proorizō*, determined before] to take place" (4:28). In this prayer these men attribute the fact that Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews crucified Christ to the "plan" or the determination (*boulā*) made by the one they are addressing, God the Father.

Other examples of the fact that God the Father makes determinations abound. Luke wrote that the Son was designated by the Father as the one whom he had chosen. "This is my Son, my Chosen One" (Luke 9:35). In the Ephesians 1 eulogy to God the Father, believers are said to have been

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<sup>3</sup> In a personal being, it appears that the determining is associated with the person and the desiring is associated with the nature individualized by the person. Thus, a person's desires originate in their nature. For human beings the exceptions to this are those desires that arise externally from the influences of the world and from the working of Satan and are then assumed by the nature.

<sup>4</sup> In saying "not My will [desire], but Yours" we see that there is a difference between a desire rising from Jesus's human nature and that arising from the Father's divine nature. In the end, Jesus's greater desire was to do what the Father desired.

chosen by the Father. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us ..., even as he chose us" (Eph 1:3-4). While teaching, Jesus praised the Father that things are hidden and revealed as they are because this is what seemed right to him. "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight." (Matt 11:25-26, NASB). So then, the Father speaks of himself and exercises his will, just as we would expect a person to do.

Thirdly, persons interact with the Father as they would with other persons. And the Father is involved in activities associated with other persons. During Jesus's ministry he often referred to the Father in heaven. On those occasions Jesus spoke of him in terms indicating that he considered the Father to be a person just like himself. Note, for example, the statements recorded in John 5:17-29. The Father works. He sets a pattern of activity which Jesus follows. The Father loves, raises the dead, and allows the Son to judge in his place. And the Father receives honor. During his ministry Jesus closely associated himself with the Father. In doing this he claimed, as evidenced even by his opponents, equality with his Father. Clearly the Father is a person.

Later, when Jesus was on the cross, he made the following request of the Father. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Here the Father is asked to forgive those involved in crucifying Jesus. Persons answer requests from other persons. And persons forgive other persons. The Gospel accounts contain numerous examples of activities attributed to the Father indicating he is a person.

The illustrations demonstrating that the Father is a person continue in the balance of the New Testament. Paul opened his letters expressing his desire for those to whom he is writing to receive grace and peace from God the Father (Rom 1:7; 1Cor 1:3; 2Cor 1:2; etc.). The two letters to Timothy also include mercy (1Tim 1:2 and 2Tim 1:2) that the Father gives to us. Grace, mercy, and peace come from persons. James wrote that "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (Jas 1:17). Gifts are given by one person to another person. Peter wrote of the Father as of one "who judges impartially according to each one's deeds" (1Pet 1:17). Judgment of another's deeds is done by a person.

Therefore, it is clear from the record contained in the New Testament that the Father is a person. We move now to consider the Son.

### The Son is a Person

The Son, like the Father, is a person. Again, we will show that the Son has self-consciousness, that he makes determinations, and that he is treated and acts like other persons.

It should be noted that there are many passages in the Gospel accounts that record conversations in which Jesus speaks using first person verbs or that speak of Jesus choosing or making determinations. However, we have not yet confirmed that *Jesus* and *Son* are designations for the same person.<sup>5</sup> At this point we will assume that this is true. Nevertheless, as we demonstrate the Son is a distinct person of the Trinity, we will restrict the passages used to those that specifically identify the Son or to those where the Incarnate Son, Jesus, speaks of or to God as his Father and in so doing asserts that he is the Son of God.

First, to show that the Son is a person we begin, as we did with the Father, by demonstrating that the Son is self-conscious. That is, the Son is aware of his own existence.

In the Gospel of John we have recorded part of a conversation that took place at the time of the call of the Nathanael.

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:49-51)

Toward the end of his ministry as he neared the time of his crucifixion, the Son asked the disciples who others thought him to be and they answered him. Then the conversation continued as recorded by Matthew.

He [Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." (Matt 16:15-17)

These conversations provide further evidence of the Son's awareness of his own existence as a person.

At one point in his ministry the Incarnate Son explains why only some come to know his Father. "All things have been handed over to me by my

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<sup>5</sup> The subject of the Hypostatic Union, though mentioned earlier, will be considered in more detail later, in the section "God's Vocational Existence." It is clear from passages like John 5:16-20 that Jesus is identified as the Son of God. So *Jesus* and *Son* are designations for the same person.



Father" (Matt 11:27). Notice the personal pronouns *me* and *my*. These indicate the Son's self-awareness even though in the balance of the verse he speaks of himself in the third person ("no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him").

Before the Son was crucified he endured a series of "trials." During one of them, the high priest questioned him. "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus, Son of the Father, replied, "I am" (Mark 14:61-62). Here Jesus is speaking as the Son of God. That this is the case is clear from the reaction of the high priest who tore his garments and accused Jesus of blasphemy (14:63-64). Later, when Jesus was being crucified, those who were mocking him cited his claim to be the Son of God. "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matt 27:43) In these examples the Son used the first person pronoun indicating his awareness of his own existence as a person.

The last book of the New Testament records letters to seven churches. The letter to the church in Thyatira records the words of "the Son of God." Fourteen times in this letter (Rev 2:19-28) the Son refers to himself using the first person singular verbs. He said, "I know ... I have ... I gave ... I come" etc. Included among these self-references is an emphatic "I am" (*egō eimi*). This repeated use of first-person singular verbs demonstrates that the Son is aware of his own existence as a person.

Second, like the Father, the Son makes decisions. On one occasion Jesus, thanked the Father for what he had done for him. In so doing, he explained why things are as they are. In this passage, Matthew 11:27, Jesus referred to the Son, himself, in the third person. But note that he made reference to the fact that those who know the Father do so because "the Son chooses to reveal him." The verb used here (*boulomai*) refers to the Son's determination as a person.

In John 6 the writer mentioned the choosing of the twelve disciples including the fact that one of the twelve would betray him. Many of Jesus's followers had departed. So, Jesus asks the twelve if they too will go. In his response Peter identifies Jesus as "the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69) asking where else they would find the "the words of eternal life" which they had believed. Even so Jesus revealed that one of the twelve would betray him. "Jesus answered them, 'Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil'" (6:70). Here again is an example of the Son making a determination, "did I not choose?"

Later in John's Gospel there is another passage in which Jesus referred to choosing his disciples. By this point in time the betrayer Judas had departed. Notice here the references to "my Father" (not simply "our

Father"). It is the Son who is speaking and he speaks of his determining who would be his disciples.

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. (John 15:15-16)

We see the Son making determinations in Hebrews 10. Even though the context of this passage does not specifically use the designation *Son*, it is evident that the pre-Incarnate Son who took on flesh is the one about whom these citations are speaking. The author is writing about Christ, the anointed one of the Father.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"

When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:5-10)

In this passage we have an account of what apparently took place at the time the Son departed from heaven when coming earth at the time of the Incarnation. The Son states the desires of the Father, addressing him as God. Twice here the Son addresses the Father saying "I have come to do your will." It was his determination of fulfill the desires of God the Father.

Thus, as a person, the Son, like other persons, makes decisions.

Third, the Son acts like and is treated by others as we would expect of any person. In the fifth chapter of John, Jesus describes activities of the Son. In so doing, he describes the Son's activities as we would describe those of any person. The Son observes, judges, and receives honor (John 5:16-24). In this passage Jesus speaks of the Son in the third person, even though he is speaking of himself.<sup>6</sup>

In Hebrews 1, citing the second psalm, the author records the Father, a person, addressing the Son as a person. Here the Father is speaking of a personal relationship that exists between them. "You are my Son, today I

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<sup>6</sup> We will consider later this third person reference of Jesus to the Son.

have begotten you" (Heb 1:5).<sup>7</sup> So also, we see this personal relationship between the Father and the Son in the earlier references to Jesus's baptism and transfiguration. Furthermore, that the Father and Son are persons in the same sense may be seen in passages like 1 John 2:22 ("he who denies the Father and the Son") and 2 John 3 ("Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son."). In the first example they are both denied. In the second example they are both a source of grace, mercy, and peace.

The Son is spoken of by others in a way that indicates he was viewed as a person. He is said to "declare" the Father in a way that we know what the Father, a person, is like by looking at the Son (John 1:18). In this regard see also John 3:16-18, John 5:19, 22.

Love is a characteristic of a person. And the Son is said to love. Paul wrote of "the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Other personal activities are indicated which support the fact that the Son is a person. In the foregoing illustrations, we have seen multiple examples of conversations that occurred between this person and others. We expect this of persons.

The Son is aware of his own existence, makes choices, and is associated with and carries out the activities associated with persons. Therefore, the Son is a person.

### **The Spirit is a Person**

The Spirit too is a person. Non-Trinitarians especially take issue at this point. They claim that the Spirit is merely a power or an influence. It is true that the Spirit does appear as a dove (John 1:32 and the Synoptic parallels) and as a wind and a flame of fire (Acts 2:2-4, cp. 1:5,8 and 2:17,18,33). In some way perhaps the non-personal nature of the Spirit's designation has had some influence here. Normally we would not think of *Spirit* as a name of a person.

Furthermore, the Greek text of the New Testament has neuter pronouns referring to the Spirit rather than masculine ones as we would expect of a person of the Godhead. But such usage is consistent the rules of grammar for the Greek language. The Greek word for *spirit* is neuter. For example, the Greek text of Romans 8:16 says "*auto to pneuma*" where the pronoun is neuter. Older translations, like the King James and the New American Standard, translated this literally as "the Spirit itself," thus recognizing the neuter case. Contemporary translations, understanding the pronoun as a

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<sup>7</sup> The begetting of the Son by the Father is considered under the heading "Decretal Sonship."

reference to a person, render it as "the Spirit himself." See also Romans 8:26 ("the Spirit itself" versus "the Spirit himself"). In Matthew 10:26 a neuter participle is used, "*to pneuma ... to laloun*" ("the Spirit ... speaking"). Again, these neuter forms are to be expected in order to maintain agreement with the neuter noun *spirit*.<sup>8</sup>

Even so, despite suggestions that the Spirit is not a person, the Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is a person. He is spoken of as one possessing the characteristics of a person. Perhaps because of the Spirit's role in the plan of redemption there is relatively less said about him. Admittedly there are fewer examples in Scripture from which to draw to demonstrate that the Spirit is a person. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that this is the case. The Spirit is aware of his own existence, he exercises choices, and he is associated with other persons and does activities associated with persons.

First, just like the other two persons in the Godhead, the Spirit speaks referring to himself using first person pronouns and verbs. So, the Spirit is aware of his own existence. In Acts 13 Luke records the following statement that is attributed to the Spirit. "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). This statement includes a personal pronoun, "me," and a first-person verb form, "I have called." There is no indication here that the Spirit is speaking on behalf of another member of the Godhead.

Another example is recorded earlier in the book of Acts. There, in the account centering on Peter and Cornelius, Luke recorded the words of the Spirit to Peter, commanding him to go with the men at his door to see Cornelius. In commanding Peter to go the Spirit explained that the men were there, "for I have sent them" (Acts 10:19-20). Here we find, as in the Acts 13 account, the Spirit speaking and referring to himself using a first-person verb form.

Second, the Spirit makes decisions as we would expect of persons. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul speaks of the fact that the Spirit makes determinations. Regarding spiritual gifts, Paul wrote, "All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills [*boulomai*]" (1Cor 12:11). Here the word *wills* means "determines." The Spirit apportions gifts as he determines to do so. The ability to make determinations is associated with persons, not with forces or

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<sup>8</sup> Despite this consistent use of neuter pronouns, there are examples of masculine pronouns used to refer to the Spirit. These examples include John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:13-14. However, some have suggested that in these instances the masculine pronouns refer back to "Helper," a masculine noun, and not to the neuter noun "*Spirit*." In the John 16:13-14 passage "Helper" is in the near context (verse 7).

influences. This reference is apparently the only one directly attributing determination to the Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

Third, the Spirit does those things naturally associated with persons. The Scripture contains many references to such activity. One that we find often is the Spirit speaking to other persons. Addressing other persons is an activity regularly performed by a person. For example, in Acts 8:29 and in Acts 10:19-20 the Spirit is said to address both Philip ("Go over and join this chariot.") and Peter ("Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them."). In both cases what the Spirit said has been directly quoted.

In Hebrews 3:7-11 we read "as the Holy Spirit says" followed by a quotation from the Old Testament (Psm 95:7b-11). This example is of particular interest because it provides evidence of the Spirit's authorship of Scripture, further testimony to the fact that the Spirit is a person. Paul wrote that "all scripture is breathed by God" (2Tim 3:16); and Peter wrote, regarding "prophecy of Scripture," that "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2Pet 1:20-21). In these cases, we see not only "speaking" attributed to the Spirit but we also see his activity in producing Scripture.

Other passages also record the speaking of the Spirit. Luke recorded the testimony of Agabus (Acts 21:10-11) that cited the words of the Spirit regarding Paul's being bound and handed over to the Gentiles by the Jews in Jerusalem. In the first letter of Paul to Timothy he recorded a warning regarding the future as an indirect quote, attributing it to the Spirit (1Tim 4:1). A final example is that recorded in Revelation 14:13. There John records words spoken by "a voice from heaven" attributing them to "the Spirit." Thus, there are many examples of the Spirit speaking in the way we would expect a person to speak.

Other activities customarily associated with persons are also mentioned in Scripture as being done by the Spirit. In Luke 12:12 the Spirit is said to be able to "teach" believers what to say in their hour of need; "the Holy Spirit will teach you." In Romans 8:26-27 the Spirit is mentioned as one who "helps us in our weakness." He does this when he "intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." Furthermore, Paul wrote that the Spirit "intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." We also read that

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<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 2:4 refers to the Holy Spirit as one who distributes gifts "according to his will." But the reference to will here is to *desire* rather than to *determination*. Furthermore the antecedent of the pronoun *his* is best understood in this context as God, the Father, since it is masculine. One could argue, however, that the work of distribution involves actions on the part of the Spirit and therefore the making of determinations, since actions are preceded by determinations.

the Spirit can be grieved (Isa 63:10 and Eph 4:30), outraged (Heb 10:29), and resisted (Acts 7:51).

Jesus told his disciples that when the Helper, the Spirit, comes he would "bear witness about me" (John 15:26). Later Jesus informed them that the Spirit "will guide [them] into all truth" for "whatever he hears he will speak" and "he will declare to [them] the things that are to come" (John 16:13). There can be no doubt that Jesus knew the Spirit could carry out these personal activities.

In Hebrews 3:7-11 there is an extended quotation, cited from Psalm 95:7-11, which is attributed to the Spirit. In attributing this passage to the Spirit, the writer of Hebrews is confirming that the Spirit was the one who moved the psalmist to write as he did. Thus, as the ultimate author of Scripture, we have further evidence that the Spirit is a person.

One final example is the account by Luke recorded in Acts 5. This account provides further evidence of the fact that the Spirit is a person. Luke related the account where Ananias and Sapphira sell their property, give of the proceeds to the apostles, and, as they give, lie about how much they had given. Peter here accused these two of sin. He told them, "Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:3) and that they had "agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord" (5:9). These are activities where one person interacts with another. Ananias and Sapphira lied to and tested the Spirit.

Thus, like the Father and the Son, the Spirit is a person. He is aware of his own existence, he makes determinations, and he carries on activities that would be expected of a person.

### **The Father, Son, and Spirit are Distinct**

At this point we have demonstrated that the Father is a person, the Son is a person, and the Spirit is a person. But how do we know that these are three different persons? It could be argued that these are simply three role names, names designating the same person acting out differing roles. Demonstrating the "personhood" of someone named "Father" or "Son" or "Spirit" is not sufficient to demonstrate that these three are distinct individuals, distinct persons. Based on the Trinitarian formula found in Matthew 28:19, "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," some might argue that one name implies one person. One could argue that *Son* is just another name for the Father or that the Spirit is just the Son acting under a different condition and fulfilling a different role. This would be like calling someone named Joe, "Dad" because he is a father and "Son" because he is a son and "Sparky" because he works as an electrician. We must demonstrate that *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit* are not simply three

designations for the same person, as some have proposed. We must show that these are designations of three distinct persons.<sup>10</sup>

To show that these are distinct persons, it need only be shown that these persons interact with each other in one-to-one relationships that would be meaningless if those involved were not distinct from each other. Joe does not interact with Sparky if he is, in fact, Sparky. The same can be said for the Father, Son, and Spirit. If these are just designations for one person, then it is nonsense to speak of interaction. Distinct persons must be involved if interaction is to occur.

To demonstrate that these three persons are distinct we will show that they communicate or carry on activities with each other as we would expect distinct persons to do. Of course, we know people who "talk to themselves." We all may do it from time to time. However, in the passages cited below it will be evident that one person is conversing with another as in normal conversation. These are not cases of "talking to oneself." The same is true regarding activities they carry one with one another. Such activities are described just as we would expect when they take place between distinct persons.

We will demonstrate that (1) the Father is not the Son; (2) the Father is not the Spirit; and (3) the Son is not the Spirit. This is the same "is not" expression seen three times on the ancient Trinity diagram. By making this demonstration we will have shown that these three members of the Godhead are distinct persons. Thus, *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit* are not simply designations for a single person but are designations for three distinct persons.

### **The Father is not the Son**

The Father is involved in certain relations with the Son and cannot therefore be the Son. Often this distinction is apparent from the references which include the phrase "my Son" or "his Son." One of the best-known verses in Scripture, John 3:16, includes this kind of language. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son." We know that *God* is used here as of a person and is a reference to the Father. We know this because he gave "his only Son." It would not make sense to think that by "he gave *his only Son*" is meant "he gave *himself*." We find similar language in Romans 8:32. Paul wrote about the one, namely the Father, "who did not spare his own Son." Again, in not sparing his Son, the Father is distinguished from the Son.

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<sup>10</sup> As noted before, later we will demonstrate that *Jesus* and *the Son* are designations for the same person.

Consider too the account of the baptism of Jesus recorded in Matthew 3:13-17. As Jesus came up from the water he saw the Spirit rest on him and heard "a voice from heaven." Here Matthew records what was heard. It is a statement by the Father regarding his Son. "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Clearly, this passage, which identifies Jesus as "my Son," distinguishes the Father, who is speaking from heaven, from the Son. So, Father and Son are not designations for the same person.<sup>11</sup>

The writer of Hebrews also used this language. In Hebrews 1:1-2 we read, "God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Two persons are mentioned here, "God" and "his Son."<sup>12</sup> As in earlier examples, from the reference to a "Son" we can determine that "God," used here of a person, is a reference to God the Father. The Father has spoken. He has spoken first "by the prophets," clearly persons distinct from himself. Later, in a "parallel" fashion, he has spoken "by his Son." Again, clearly this "Son" is a person distinct from himself. With reference to this Son, the writer continued "whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." The Father arranged that the Son inherit all things and employed him as the agent of creation. The Father and Son must be distinct persons. Otherwise, these statements make no sense.

Later in this same chapter of Hebrews the author demonstrated the distinction between the Son and mere angels. In so doing he again distinguished between "God," the Father, and the "Son." As before, Hebrews 1:5-9 is nonsense if the Father and Son are not distinct persons. Note here the statements to and about the Son coming from the Father.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

If we accept that Jesus Christ and the Son are designations for the same person, then we can find other examples where the Son and the Father are distinguished. In 1 John 2:1 we read that "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." An advocate is a person who presents a

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<sup>11</sup> See also John 12:27-28 where the Son prays to the Father and the Father responds to the Son.

<sup>12</sup> The word *his* is not in the Greek text of Hebrews 1:2. However, from the context of this verse and the balance of Scripture it is clear that this is a reference to "his Son." For example, notice the "You are *my* Son" and "he shall be to *me* a son" in 1:5.



case to one person on behalf of another person. And in Romans 8:34 Paul wrote, "Christ Jesus is the one who died ... who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." Again, *God* here is used as of a person. From 8:28-29 we can see that *God* is a reference to God the Father by whom we were "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." It does not make sense to think that a person can be at his own right hand. Two distinct persons must be involved in such a relationship.

Since the Father speaks of and to the Son and interacts with him as he does, a reasonable conclusion is that the Father and the Son are distinct persons.

### **The Father is not the Spirit**

We can now use the same approach as we did in showing that the Father and the Son are distinct persons to demonstrate that the Father and the Spirit are distinct persons. Just as the Father is involved in certain relations with the Son, so too is he involved in relationships with the Spirit. That being the case, the Father cannot be the Spirit. Passages in Scripture in which both the Father and the Spirit are clearly identified are less frequent than those regarding the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, there are examples where both the Father and the Spirit are mentioned in the same context. These passages will demonstrate our point.

Recall the account of Jesus's baptism considered earlier (Matthew 3:13-17). There we read that when Jesus "went up from the water" Jesus (and John, cf. John 1:32-33) saw "the Spirit of God descending ... and coming to rest on him" after which those present heard the voice of the Father. On this occasion the Spirit had manifested himself in the form of a dove. Even so, we are explicitly told that it was the Spirit of God that was taking this form. Therefore, if the Spirit is on earth, appearing as a dove and resting on Jesus, and the Father is speaking "from heaven," then the Father and the Spirit are distinct persons.

In John's gospel we read of Jesus teaching his disciples regarding the coming of the Spirit. In John 14:26 we read of "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name." Here again the Spirit and the Father are distinguished. Jesus said that the Father would send the Spirit. If we take this language at face value, it cannot mean that the Father would send himself. Regarding this coming of the Spirit, Jesus used similar language adding more details as recorded in John 15:26. Jesus said, "the Helper ... whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father." Twice the Spirit is distinguished from the Father. The Spirit is sent from the Father and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. In these two accounts we find further evidence that the Spirit and the Father are distinct persons.

As a final example, consider the account of the conception of Mary (Luke 1:26-38). Luke recorded Gabriel's announcement to her that she would bear the Son of God. But Mary questions how such a thing could take place. Gabriel responded, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God." In answering Mary's question, Gabriel refers to all three persons of the Trinity<sup>13</sup>. He specifically names the Spirit and the Son. The reference to "the Most High" is best understood as a reference to God the Father. So here again we see a distinction between the Father and the Spirit.

Thus, we can conclude that the Father and the Spirit are distinct. *Spirit* is not simply another designation for the person called the Father.

### **The Son is not the Spirit**

Just as the Father's involvement in relations with the Son and the Spirit demonstrate that he is distinct from them, so too the Son's involvement with the Spirit will show that they too are distinct. The Son and Spirit interact with each other. Therefore, the Son cannot be the Spirit.

Again, as is the case with the Father and the Spirit, we do not find many instances where both the Son and Spirit are identified. However, some do exist. We have already considered two passages where the Son, identified as Jesus, is distinguished from the Spirit. One was the account of the baptism of Jesus, the Father's beloved Son (Matthew 3:13-17). At his baptism the Spirit is pictured as a dove that comes to rest on this Son. The other was the account of the announcement by Gabriel to Mary regarding the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). Mary would bear a child, "the Son of God," because the "Holy Spirit would come upon" her. These two accounts distinguish the Son from the Spirit.

We also noted from John's gospel Jesus's promise concerning the coming of a Helper, the Spirit (John 15:26). There, John recorded Jesus's statement that he would send the Helper, the Spirit, to his disciples. Jesus is not saying that he would send himself, coming back in a different role, but would send a different person. Later, in this same gospel we read these words of Jesus (16:7); "if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you." Again, the Helper, the Spirit, is distinguished from Jesus, the Son. They are not the same person.

As a final example showing that the Son and the Spirit are distinct persons consider the following. Each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12; and Luke 4:1) refers to the fact that the Spirit was instrumental in leading Jesus into the wilderness after his baptism to be tempted by the

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<sup>13</sup> Unlike Mary, Gabriel was fully aware that the Godhead was triune.

Satan. Mathew wrote, "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." In these accounts one person, the Spirit is "leading," or as recorded in Mark 1:12, "driving," another person, the Son, to do something. So again, we have evidence that the Son and the Spirit are distinct persons.

Where does this bring us at this point? We saw that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit were persons. Now, if the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit and if the Son is not the Spirit, then what conclusion can we draw? *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit* are designations for three distinct persons. From what we have seen, Scripture makes this evident.

### **The Father, Son, and Spirit are Divine**

Our objective has been to show that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three, distinct, divine persons. Having now demonstrated that three distinct persons exist, the final task is to establish that each of these three persons is divine. That is, each is identified as God in the capital G sense. To do this we will examine Scriptures where each of that these three distinct persons is identified as God. To use the ideas expressed earlier, we will see that each person individualizes a divine nature. Regarding the Father, there is little contention that he is God. However, the deity of both the Son and the Spirit has been challenged.

That three persons can be divine is plausible since we read statements such as "Let us make man in our image" (Gen 1:26). Here "our image" refers to that of the divine being. But note the plural pronouns. There is a single image for more than one person. They are equally divine.

### **The Father is God**

The person of the Godhead known as the Father is identified as one who possesses a divine nature. He is called God. We see several passages in the New Testament where the Father is designated "God the Father" (18 times in ESV) or "God our Father" (11 times in ESV). Here are several examples. John 6:27 records Jesus's statement, "For on him [the Son of Man] God the Father has set his seal." Paul regularly opened his letters, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (e.g., Gal 1:3). To the Philippians Paul wrote that everyone would "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:11). And the apostle Peter wrote of "the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1Pet 1:2).

In Romans 15:6 Paul wrote of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here *God* and *Father* are designations for the same person. The

Greek text is in the pattern of a Granville-Sharp construction.<sup>14</sup> *God* and *Father* designate one and the same person. 2 Corinthians 11:31 has the same pattern, "The God and Father of the Lord Jesus." James also writes in similar fashion. Regarding our tongue he wrote, "With it we bless our Lord and Father" (Jas 3:9). Here *Lord*<sup>15</sup> is used in the sense of deity. The Father is God.

In some passages the deity of the Father is emphasized when he is referred to as the "one God." For example, in 1 Corinthians 8:6 Paul wrote that there is "only one God, the Father." This does not mean that the Father alone is God to the exclusion of the Son and the Spirit. Even in this same passage the Son, Jesus Christ, is called "one Lord," another designation for deity. In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul wrote of "one God and Father of all." In this list of seven "ones" the other two persons of the Godhead are also mentioned: "one Spirit" and "one Lord."

When Jesus was teaching, he sometimes referred to his heavenly Father. In doing so, he was referring to his Father as God. John recorded such a statement and then noted how Jesus was understood. Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17). Those opposing him clearly understood that he was claiming deity because he was "calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (5:18). Jesus, and even those opposing him, understood that the Father is God.

### The Son is God

The deity of the Son, like the personality of the Spirit, is a major attack point by those who are non-Trinitarian. Regarding the Son, it is claimed by some that he is the first among created beings and therefore an exalted person but not equal to God, not deity. However, the person called the Son is identified as one who possesses a divine nature. He is designated as God.

Earlier, when demonstrating that the Son was a distinct person, we considered the passage in Hebrews where the Father speaks of and addresses the Son (Hebrews 1:5-9). Beyond that, there are also in this passage multiple indications that the Son is God. In verse 6 God (the Father) commands the angels to worship the Son. "Let all God's angels worship him." But Scripture is clear that only God is to be worshipped.<sup>16</sup> If that is the case and the Son is to be worshipped, then the Son must be God. Furthermore, in verse 8 where the Father addresses the Son, he calls the

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<sup>14</sup> Granville-Sharp, Rule 1. The basic pattern is article-noun-*kai*-noun. Here in Romans 15:6 the text is "*ton theon kai patera*."

<sup>15</sup> There is a textual variant on the word *Lord*. Some manuscripts have *God*. Since *Lord* is often a designation for deity, in either case, the Father is divine.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Exodus 34:13-14; Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9.

Son *God*, "Your throne, O God." In this instance one member of the Godhead refers to another member of the Godhead as God. So again, the Son must be God. There are other indications in this passage as well that the Son is God, having a divine nature as does the Father. For example, the Father is quoted as saying "You are my Son" (1:5). In the context, this Father-Son relationship would suggest sameness of nature.<sup>17</sup>

This Father-Son relationship and the sameness of nature that it suggests is mentioned by John in his gospel. He recorded an instance where Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. As a result, those opposing him charged Jesus with doing work on the Sabbath. In answering their charge, Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." John then explains, "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:16-18). These men understood that Jesus, the Son, was claiming to be divine.

John begins his gospel with a declaration of the deity of someone he designates "the Word." "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (1:1)." Later, in 1:14 this Word is identified as the one who "became flesh and dwelt among" and as one whose glory was "as of the only Son from the Father." So clearly this Word is the Son who became incarnate. Pick any point in time you like, say creation, establishment of the decree, or even a point in time before these, and regardless of which one you pick, the Word, i.e., the Son, existed. The Word has existed from eternity. Furthermore, this Word has been eternally with God, the Father. John wrote that this one is "the only God, who is at the Father's side" (1:18).<sup>18</sup> How could this be true? It is true because "the Word was God" from eternity. The Son always has been God; and he always will be.

Furthermore, passages such as "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit 2:13) and "the Son of God, Jesus Christ" (2Cor 1:19) identify Jesus Christ as God. When we consider the Hypostatic Union we will demonstrate

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<sup>17</sup> Note that Hebrews 1:5 concludes with another quotation from the Father. "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son." These words, here directed to the Son, were cited from the Old Testament (2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13). There the reference is to a relationship between God who is divine and David who is human. On that basis one might argue that sameness of nature is not in view here. But the point of the Old Testament passage is very different than the one being made here. The point here is that the second person of the Trinity, the Son, is treated differently than the angels because of who this person is; he is God. Cf. "Decretal Sonship" where this passage is considered in more detail.

<sup>18</sup> John 1:18 contains a textual variant. Where some manuscripts have *God*, others have *Son*. If *God* is the original reading (as it seems), this verse provides additional testimony to the deity of the Son.

that *Jesus* and *Son* are designations for the same person. Therefore, these texts by Paul provide additional testimony that the Son is God.

### **The Spirit is God**

The person called the Spirit is identified as one who possesses a divine nature. He is designated as God.

The Spirit is referred to in some passages in association with the Father and Son. That is, the Father and the Son and the Spirit are grouped in a manner that indicates they are closely connected with one another. These passages would suggest that Spirit should be treated as a person of the same nature as those with whom he is associated. One of the best-known examples of this association is that found in the baptismal formula. Believers are to be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). If the Father is God and the Son is God, then it is reasonable to believe that so too is the Spirit. Paul's benediction for the letter of 2 Corinthians provides another example. He wrote, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (13:14). Here again the Spirit is placed on equal footing with the Father, here designated "God," and the Son, here designated "the Lord Jesus Christ."

Sometimes the Spirit is referred to as "the Spirit of God" (more than 20 times, ESV). This designation is used in contexts where the deity of this person is assumed. And this language is used in both testaments. In Genesis 1:2 we see the Spirit's activity over a water-covered earth. "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." In the Old Testament there are several cases where "the Spirit of God" filled or came upon a particular person to enable them for service. Examples include Exodus 31:3; Numbers 24:2; 2 Chronicles 24:20; and Ezekiel 11:24. In Old Testament times, before God revealed himself as triune, these references might not have been understood as references to a person. However, from our perspective today we can recognize these as references to a person, a person who is, in fact, divine.

In the New Testament there are further examples. Jesus spoke of casting out demons "by the Spirit of God" (Matt 12:28). Paul used this phrase at times indicating the person known as the Spirit was God. In his letter to the Romans, he referred to believers "who are led by the Spirit of God" (Rom 8:14). To the Corinthians he wrote, "no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1Cor 2:11). Later, in the same letter, he told these believers that he thought the "Spirit of God" would agree with what he had written to them (7:40). When he wrote to the churches of Galatia he commanded them, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Clearly Paul's thinking was that the Spirit is God.

Also, Luke's account of an event in the early history of the Church contains definitive evidence regarding the identity of the Spirit as God. In this account, in Acts 5:1-5, Ananias is charged by the apostle Peter with lying. The significance of this account with reference to the deity of the Spirit is Peter's statement that Ananias lied "to the Holy Spirit." In so doing, Peter explains, he did not lie "to men, but to God." Of course, Ananias lied to men. He had lied to Peter and the others there with Peter. But Peter is not concerned with that. He wished to emphasize the seriousness of the action of Ananias by pointing out that his lie was really to the Spirit who is God.

So then, from the Scripture we can see that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God.

We have now completed our demonstration that Scripture speaks of three distinct persons each of whom is God. And, as noted earlier, by this we mean that the three persons are *equally* divine. There is no distinction in their deity; one person is no less God than another. All are to be worshipped and glorified equally.<sup>19</sup>

Having considered the *person* aspect of the Godhead, we now move on to consider the *nature* aspect of the Godhead.

### **There Is One Divine Nature**

We just saw that three distinct persons are God. If we were to stop our demonstration that God is triune at this point, we would have demonstrated tri-theism, namely that there are three distinct personal Gods. But Christians believe there is only one God. Repeatedly Scripture emphasizes that there is only one divine being. So, to show that Scripture does not teach tri-theism, we now need to demonstrate that Scripture teaches there is only one being having a divine nature. There is only one God in the capital G sense. Once we have established that fact then we can wrestle with how to reconcile the threeness of God and the oneness of God.

The fact that there is only one divine being, God, is the consistent understanding of the writers of Scripture. Never in Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is there any suggestion that there is more than one God in the capital G sense. Not only is this fact assumed, it is at times explicitly asserted by the writers of Scripture. Some might argue that in the Old Testament the Hebrew word used to refer to God, *'ēlōhîm*, is a plural form. However, that this plural form was not understood as such is clear. Whenever *'ēlōhîm* is used of God it is always accompanied by singular verbs.

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<sup>19</sup> There are indications in Scripture that one person of the Godhead is subject to another person of the Godhead in some respects. We will consider this "inequality" when discussing the person-to-person relationships within the Trinity.

Furthermore, when the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, was undertaken, the plural form was translated as a singular, *theos*.

That there is only one true God or deity is not only presumed by Scripture, it is specifically stated. While Scripture does speak of gods in the plural it indicates that these so-called gods are the contrivances of man and are not to be compared to the one true God. These other gods are not gods in the capital G sense.

Because we are speaking of personal beings, we regularly find statements about their nature used in conjunction with the person possessing or individualizing the nature. That is, we find statements about the personal being God. But there are references that speak of a divine nature or that distinguish that which is truly divine from that which is not. In the Greek language the word *phusis* means "nature." This word can have various meanings. But it is sometimes used in the sense of nature as used herein, as that which distinguishes one kind of being from another. Among several definitions Thayer indicates that the word may refer to "the sum of innate properties and powers by which one person differs from others"<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Friberg writes, "as a creature produced naturally, natural being, species, kind" and "as God's essential character nature"<sup>21</sup> For these two definitions Friberg cites James 3:7 and 2 Peter 1:4 respectively.

In writing to the churches of Galatia, Paul reminds them of their former lives, their lives before they became believers. He wrote, "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods" (Gal 4:8). Here Paul is suggesting that there is a difference between the nature of God and the nature of something that is not God. The Greek word *phusis* that he used here may not be used in a technical or ontological sense, but it does suggest that there is something about God that distinguishes God from not-God.

However, Peter did write specifically referring to a divine nature in an ontological sense. In 2 Peter 1:4 he wrote that we who are believers "may become partakers of the<sup>22</sup> divine nature." In what sense we share in or partake of that divine nature may not be clear. Nevertheless, the point here is that Peter referred to a "divine nature." Peter had just referred to God's "divine power" (1:3) by which we have what we need for godly living. So not only do we benefit because of God's power, but apparently, we also benefit because God shares aspects of what he is like with us. We hold some things in common with God.

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<sup>20</sup> Thayer's Greek Lexicon, *phusis* (cited from Bibleworks)

<sup>21</sup> Friberg Lexicon, *phusis* (cited from Bibleworks)

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that there is no article in the Greek text.



## God's Triune Existence

When considering the evidence regarding the oneness of God, it is not surprising to find that the Old Testament writers emphasized that oneness, particularly considering the fact the Israel lived amid polytheistic nations. And Judaism to this day remains monotheistic.

Moses wrote of the oneness of God. In Deuteronomy 6:4 we read, "The LORD our God, the LORD is one." This passage could also be rendered, "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (NRSV). In this passage "the LORD" is a designation and as such one of the names of God by which he is known, namely "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." Moses emphasized that there is, for Israel, only this one God. This emphasis was particularly important for a people who after hundreds of years had been rescued from Egypt with its multitudes of gods. The LORD alone is God. It should be acknowledged that this verse itself may not be asserting that there is only one divine being. However, it does assert that Israel only has one God. Furthermore, this God of Israel, as revealed in the Old Testament and understood considering the New Testament, is a multi-personal being. We now know these persons as Father, Son, and Spirit. So, with this statement and other passages in the Old and New Testaments one can conclude that there is only one divine being.

Later the prophet Isaiah cited a statement of the LORD. In that statement the LORD said, "I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me" (Isa 44:6, NASB). God claims a unique place for himself. As Isaiah continued the LORD then asked rhetorically, "Who is like me" (44:7)? The obvious answer is "No one!" The LORD again asked and then answered, "Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any" (44:8). God asserts that he is in a class by himself. As such he is holy. There is only one divine being.

We find similar claims regarding God's uniqueness earlier in the book of Isaiah. Here Isaiah recorded, "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?" (Isa 40:18). Later he wrote, "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One" (40:25). Again, the answers to these questions are all obvious. There is not one being like God. He is unique. God is the only being of his kind.

The oneness of God needed to be emphasized in the Old Testament because of polytheistic nations surrounding Israel. But this was no less true in the Roman Empire during the writing of the New Testament. Furthermore, in the New Testament God's oneness also needed to be emphasized considering the designation of three persons as God. With the Incarnation of the Son and the pouring out of the Spirit, both of whom are God, the fact of God's oneness could not be abandoned. The writers of the New Testament recognized that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit were each God, yet they believed there was only one God. As they wrote, they

affirmed the truth of God's oneness. They were consistent with the Old Testament revelation in this regard.

James speaks of the fact that there is only one God. Addressing his readers he wrote, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (2:19). James commended these believers for such faith; even fallen angels believe that there is only one God. That the fallen angels hold such a view should not be surprising in light of Satan's evident desire to make himself "like the Most High" (Isa 14:14).<sup>23</sup> To Satan there was one divine being, "the Most High," and he wished to be like him.

Paul speaks in much the same way as James. Contrasting the one true God with the multitudes of false gods, Paul wrote, "we know that 'an idol has no real existence,' and that 'there is no God but one'" (1Cor 8:4). False gods, yes, there are many. But there is only one true God. Here clearly Paul is contrasting any god which is not divine with the one God that truly is divine.

And there are other examples that attest to the fact that God is one. Twice Paul used the expression "God is one." To the Romans Paul wrote that "God is one" (Rom 3:30), making the point that there is not one divine being for Jews and another divine being for Gentiles. To the Galatians he wrote, "Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one" (Gal 3:20). In his argument here Paul again contrasts that which is plural with the one God.

Sometimes the word *God* is used of the entire Godhead,<sup>24</sup> of the divine being, and sometimes the word is used of a particular person in the Godhead. This is the case when the New Testament writers used the expressions "only [*monos*] God" and "one [*heis*] God." There are three<sup>25</sup> instances of "only God:" John 5:44, 1 Timothy 1:17, and Jude 25. While the first instance could refer to the Godhead as a whole,<sup>26</sup> it may well be a reference to the Father. The second and third instances are references to God the Father. Similarly, there are three instances of "one God:" 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:6, and 1 Timothy 2:5. Each of these is also a reference to God the Father. What is the point here? Even though these writers are referring to the Father, a person, as the only God or as the one God, they are not denying that the Son and Spirit are also God. But in so doing, they are affirming that there is only one being who is God. If the Son and Spirit had their own independent divine natures and were thus distinct divine beings, then the Father would not be the only God or the one God. In that case there would be three Gods and we would need to be tritheistic, not

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<sup>23</sup> This passage, seen through the King of Babylon, reflects the desires of Satan.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., consider Matthew 19:26; Mark 8:33; and 2 Timothy 3:4.

<sup>25</sup> In John 1:18 the ESV's "only" is from *monogenēs*, not *monos*.

<sup>26</sup> If this is the case, this verse provides evidence that there is only one divine nature.

trinitarian. Even though these references are to a person who is God, they provide further evidence that there is only one such being.

So then, the testimony of Scripture is that there is only one divine being. There is only one being that possesses a divine nature. That being is designated as *God*.

### **There Is One Triune God**

We have now demonstrated that three, distinct, divine persons exist. And we have also demonstrated that there is only one God or one being with a divine nature. If we define a God's triunity as three distinct persons sharing one divine nature and also accept the veracity of the two propositions, (1) there are three divine persons and (2) there is one divine nature, we are bound to conclude that the Godhead is triune. Since there is only one God or divine nature and there are three persons who are God, then necessarily, these three persons must somehow share this one divine nature. Therefore, a trinity as we have defined it exists.

The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is but the synthesis of these facts. When we have said these three things, –that there is but one God, that the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each God, and that the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each a distinct Person, –we have enunciated the doctrine of the Trinity in its fullness. This is the form in which it is found in the Scriptures, and it is also the form in which it has entered into the faith of the Church.<sup>27</sup>

We should not be surprised to find statements in Scripture that confirm and harmonize with these conclusions. For example, in John 10:30, John cited the words of Jesus saying that he and the Father are one. He claims that there is a unity that exists between them. What Jesus claims would be nonsense when applied to two human beings. But it makes sense when applied to two persons who share the same nature.<sup>28</sup> And apparently, given the response, that is what he was doing. Essentially Jesus was claiming that he and the Father share a single divine nature.

In a similar vein, note the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19. On the basis of his authority, Jesus commanded his followers, "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." Here the singular name of God includes all three persons. It is not "the names," but "the name of the Father and of

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<sup>27</sup>Boettner, p. 91.

<sup>28</sup> It is thought by some that the oneness here is not oneness of nature but oneness in thinking; Jesus and the Father are of the same mind. However, this was not the thinking of his hearers. They charged him, "you, being a man, make yourself God" (John 10:33).

## God's Triune Existence

the Son and of the Holy Spirit." There is a unity here even though three persons are designated.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, that there is only one God is a claim God himself makes. Isaiah records God's statement to that effect.

I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. (Isa 45:5-6)

So then, we conclude, based on the evidence we find in Scripture, that the Godhead is triune. Three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, are sharing one divine nature.

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<sup>29</sup> Perhaps we see something similar in Genesis 1:26. There we read the statement of God, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The being God refers to himself using plurals but to his image and likeness using singulars.