

# About the Triunity of God (or The Trinity).

## The Triune God In Action.

In Matthew 28.20 we are given a clear picture of the unity and tri-unity of God. There we are told that men are to be baptised 'into the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28.19).

We notice first that there is only one Name mentioned. Yet we know from the Old Testament that the Father also only has one Name (although many titles) and that is the Name of YHWH (usually translated into English as LORD). Thus it is made quite clear here that the Son and the Holy Spirit also bear the one Name of YHWH.

Furthermore the fact that those who believe are 'baptised' into 'the Name' is a further clear indication that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are YHWH, for elsewhere we learn that Christians are baptised 'in the Name of the Lord Jesus'. Thus the Name of the Lord Jesus is the Name YHWH. Furthermore Christians are 'baptised in one Spirit into one body' into Christ (1 Corinthians 12.12-13) and become one with Him. Thus being baptised into the Name involves being baptised into Christ, and a resulting oneness with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Compare Jesus' promises in John 14.23; 17.23, 26).

For Jesus to name Himself within this triune description in this way, and especially as placed between Father and Holy Spirit (both representations of God in the Old Testament), is to indicate a clear claim to full deity and full equality in the Godhead.

This position is confirmed in 2 Corinthians 13.14 where in his prayer for the Corinthians Paul prays, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all'. Once again, while different attributes are being revealed, Jesus Christ, God and the Holy Spirit are being placed on a par. It is a revelation of tri-unity in unity. All three personalities in God are active together as one in man's salvation.

Regularly through the New Testament we read of the grace (active unmerited love and favour) of God, and of the Father (e.g. Romans 5.15; 2 Corinthians 6.1; Titus 3.4). Here it is expressed as the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This uniting of the divine trio in the work of salvation, especially as in this case with the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ coming first (in contrast with and yet parallel to Matthew 28.19), is a further confirmation of the full deity and full equality of the personalities within the Godhead.

We must here also add a further aspect of this verse, something which in fact comes out constantly throughout the New Testament, and that is that in the context of the Godhead Jesus Christ is described as 'Lord'. The significance of this arises from the fact that the Name of YHWH in the Old Testament was considered to be so sacred that it could not be spoken. The result was that the consonantal letters of YHWH were given vowel sounds taken from the word adonai = Lord, with the purpose of indicating that the Name should be read as 'Lord'. That is why in the Greek Old Testament the Name YHWH is translated as though it were adonai = Lord. 'Kurios' (LORD) is used in the place of the divine Name. Thus for Jesus Christ to be called Lord (kurios) in this context is for Him to be revealed as YHWH.

This application of the Name YHWH to Jesus Christ, signifying His complete equality with the Father, comes out in Philippians 2.11 where Jesus is described as being given 'the Name which is above every Name'. To a Jew like Paul the Name above every Name could only be one Name and that was the Name YHWH, and this is confirmed by the fact that as a result Jesus is declared as 'Lord' (kurios), the Lord of the Greek Old Testament Who is YHWH. This is further confirmed by the application to Him in Philippians 2.10 of Isaiah 45.23, 'to Me (YHWH) every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear', and this in a passage which emphasises the greatness and supremacy of God (Isaiah 45.21-22).

That it is not the name 'Jesus' that is Name above every Name comes out in that in New Testament times Jesus was a name borne by thousands of Jews (it is the Greek representation of the Hebrew name Joshua). That was why Jesus had constantly to be identified as 'Christ' and as 'the Lord'. Here therefore 'the Name OF Jesus' means 'the Name that He also bore', the Name that revealed His essence. This is confirmed by the fact that nowhere else in the New Testament is 'the Name' connected by an Apostle with the name Jesus. Rather it is 'in the Name of Christ' (Matthew 24.5; Mark 9.41; 13.6; Luke 21.8) or 'in the Name of the only Son' (John 3.17). In this regard we should also note that to a Jew 'the Name' indicated the nature of the person in question. Thus it is as what Jesus is as YHWH that every knee will bow and every tongue confess Him as 'LORD' (YHWH).

A similar confirmatory application of the Name YHWH to Jesus can be found in 1 Corinthians 8.6. There we read, 'and to us there is but One God, the Father, --- and One Lord, Jesus Christ.' This paralleling of the One God with the One Lord in this way, using terms regularly applied in the Old Testament to God, could on the lips of a Jew only signify full equality of both and of both as identified as YHWH, especially as it is said of God the Father 'of Whom are all things and we unto Him', and of the Lord, Jesus Christ, 'through Whom are all things, and we through Him'.

Furthermore both of these verses are confirmed by Jesus' own claim in John 8.58 to be the 'I am' (ego eimi) in accordance with Exodus 3.14. This passage in John 8 builds up to this revelation of Jesus as the 'I AM'. It commences with His claim 'I am (ego eimi) the Light of the world', continues to the point where He says 'when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then will you know that I AM' (8.28), and leads up to this open claim 'before Abraham was, I AM'. No Jew could now miss the significance of His words, especially as Abraham is mentioned in the context of the giving of the Name 'I AM' in Exodus 3.14-16) There we read, 'God said to Moses "I AM THAT I AM", and He said, "Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you". --- YHWH the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham --- has sent me to you. This is My Name for ever, and this is my memorial for all generations"

The Jews present certainly recognised it as such a claim for they took up stones in order to stone Him. It should be noted that the Name YHWH means 'the One Who is'. This in this personal revelation then became EHYH - 'I AM', translated into Greek as 'ego eimi' (or by LXX as ho own), indicating 'the being One, the One who is'.

In the light of all this we can now pause again to recognise the significance of both of our main verses in Matthew 28.19 and 2 Corinthians 13.14, noting again their contrasting orders. There is absolutely no way in which the three could have been described together in this way (in one case with the Father first, and with the Son coming between the Father and the Holy Spirit, and in the second case with our Lord Jesus Christ first) had they not been seen as co-equal workers together in the salvation of men. With Jewish Christians it would simply not have been acceptable.

### Jesus' View Of Himself.

In considering this question we must bear in mind the fact that we know that Jesus deliberately preached in such a way that the truth was not made explicit, but was left to dawn on those who had 'eyes to see'. That is one of His stated reasons for preaching in parables (Mark 4.11-12). It was so that those who had ears to hear, would hear (see Mark 4.9, 11-12, 23). Thus it is clear that, quite apart from the danger of the charge of blasphemy, if He was God He would want the truth about Himself slowly to dawn on men rather than being explicitly stated. It was those to whom the Father gave illumination who would 'see'. That would appear to be why, in spite of a number of hints, Jesus did not reveal His deity openly until late in His life.

I remember meeting a man at Hyde Park Corner who claimed to be God. He was dressed in

eastern robes, and had a longish, somewhat scraggy beard and shoulder length hair. And how many people do you think believed him? You are quite right. No one believed him. For if you want people to believe such a statement you have first to make clear to them that it is true by your life and teaching. Jesus shunned the use of miracles for the purpose. He said that such an idea was the temptation of Satan. Thus He slowly revealed it in what He was in His life and teaching.

There are, in fact, not lacking hints. In Matthew 7.23 He taught that He would play a prominent part in judging men at the last Day. Everything would depend then on His verdict on them, and on their attitude towards His teaching (Matthew 7.24-27). Thus He saw Himself as standing alone from all men at the Judgment. Furthermore Matthew's Gospel divides into two parts in that in the first part Jesus teaches His disciples about 'your Father in Heaven', which is His constant emphasis, while in the latter part He speaks constantly about 'My Father in Heaven'. In other words He deliberately makes a clear distinction between the relationship of His disciples to the Father, as compared with His own relationship. This especially comes out in Matthew 11.27 where He says, 'all things have been delivered to Me of My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, neither does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whomever the Son wills to reveal Him.'

In these words He speaks of Himself as 'the Son' in comparison with 'the Father'. Or to put it another way He sees Himself as having a unique relationship with the Father, and as being of the same nature as the Father (a true son always has the same nature as his father). That is why He declares that 'ALL things' have been delivered to Him by His Father. In other words He is saying that He is here expressly to fulfil the Father's purpose, a purpose which is fully known to Him, and to Him alone, and that for that purpose He has control of EVERYTHING. This is comprehensive and all-inclusive, especially as He then goes on to say that His uniqueness is such that only the Father knows the full truth about Him, and that He alone knows the Father in such a way that He can be a revealer of the Father. And this knowledge, He claimed, had been made known to Him so that He might reveal it to whomever He willed. Note that it is His will that is determinant in the matter and not His Father's. No wonder men said of Him 'no man ever spoke like this man'. He was making clear that He really was God.

But the even greater fullness of this revelation is brought out in John's Gospel, where Jesus constantly speaks of Himself as 'the Son' in parallel with 'the Father'. On the one hand is the universe, on the other is the Son and the Father. And He does it in terms in which there is no doubt that He is indicating equality with the Father.

Thus He declares, "My Father works even until now, and I work" (John 5.17). And this caused the Judaisers present to seek to kill Him, because 'He called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God'. But it was also an indication that all His activity paralleled that of the Father. And He then confirmed that when He declared, "Truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father doing. For whatever things He does, those the Son also does in the same way" (John 5.19). Note the inference. There is a divine inevitability that the Son will do what the Father does. The Son is aware at all times of what the Father is doing (Who else but God could say that while walking on earth?). And both do the same thing in the same way.

He then declared that the Son knows ALL that the Father does. "For the Father loves the Son and shows Him (even while He is on earth as man) all that He Himself does" (John 5.20). There can be no doubt about the uniqueness of the divine Son. But it does not stop there, for He then declares His power over life itself. "As the Father raises the dead and makes them alive, even so the Son makes alive whom He will" and that is because 'the Father judges no man, but He has given ALL judgment to the Son' (John 5.21-22). Thus it is within the will of the Son to decide who is raised from the dead, and all God's judgment is dependent on Him. Of Whom else could that be true but One Who was truly God? And note in all the verses the

continuous use of 'ALL'. *Absolutely everything that is the Father's* is under the Son's control. It is difficult to express equality more definitely. And this is so even while He has become man.

But why Has the Father given ALL judgment to the Son? It is so that, "All may honour the Son as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son, does not honour the Father Who sent Him" (John 5.23). For one to be given equal honour with the other is an indication of equality of status, and yet the Son is to have equal honour with the Father. And it goes even further because if the Son is not honoured (even while on earth in manhood), then the Father also is not honoured. In other words the claim is that so close is the liaison between Father and Son that it is impossible to worship the One without worshipping the other. No wonder that Jesus could say later to Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14.9). The Father was wholly manifested through Him.

Thus it is the one who believes in HIM, hearing His word and believing Him Who sent Him, who has eternal life. Eternal life is only receivable through the Son (John 5.24). And this is because such life is under the Son's control. "As the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son also (even while a man on earth) to have life in Himself" (John 5.26). And He has given Him "authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man" (John 5.27).

So the eternal Son (the eternal Logos - John 1.1, 14) has emptied Himself and become man (Philippians 2.6), so that in His divine manhood He might be given authority over all things. This idea of the Son of Man is taken from Daniel 7.13-14 where the Son of Man comes out of suffering into the presence of God in order to receive His everlasting kingdom (compare Mark 8.28; 13.26; Matthew 26.64). Through the incarnation, death and resurrection of 'the Son' life will be made available to all who believe in Him. He became man so that as representative Man He might bring us so close to God that we might be 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1.4). Not that we ourselves become divine, but because we experience the divine in His fullness, and in our being united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6.5; 1 Corinthians 12.12-27).

#### Further Details.

The doctrine of God as Triune is not one that can easily be defined. And in looking at Him we must remember that we are dealing with what is incomprehensible to man, and is indescribable in human language, for human language is limited to physical and rational experience, and God is beyond both. Thus God is beyond the ability of man to conceive or to define.

Understanding God is for us far more difficult than it would be for a primitive tribesman to understand a neutron or a quark. The latter could to some extent happen eventually for the neutron and quark are part of the world of which he is also a part (although no one really understands them in themselves because they are beyond the capabilities of men's senses to discern). Thus the tribesman could slowly and gradually, and with much patience and effort, be educated in terms of all human knowledge, in terms of what could be seen and known and experienced, so as to partially understand the quark. But none of us have ever seen, or known, or experienced God in His fullness, or indeed while merely human could ever do so. Only Jesus had done that. Thus apart from Jesus there has never been anyone who could educate us truly in heavenly things from personal experience, and as we would have had no experience of 'Heaven', what He was able to tell us could only be a dim image of the reality. For none of us could accumulate from our earthly surroundings sufficient knowledge for anyone to be able to understand God. It is true that the spiritual man discerns spiritual things. But even that is limited by our ability to discern. Men of old 'saw' God, but it was only a dim reflection of the reality, for no man could see God and live. So the truth is that the divine side of reality is not something that we could ever hope to fully understand.

We can, however, recognise that God will not be just a mirror image of ourselves. When God

created Adam He recognised that Adam needed a companion. It was 'not good for man to be alone'. Yet He Himself had ever existed in eternity quite satisfactorily without a companion. He needed no companion. But as He is a communicating Being we must then ask, how could that be? And that suggests the answer that He was able to communicate within Himself. The idea of a lone isolated God with no communication of any kind either inward or outward is not an idea of the God revealed in Scripture, or indeed of a God Who is complete within Himself. That is why with all their emphasis on the Oneness of God Israel felt it necessary to speak of Him, not only in terms of His being the Creator, but also in terms of the 'Angel of the Lord' Who was God and yet communicated with God, and of the Spirit of God Who acted out God's activity on earth in communication with Him. They recognised this aspect of separateness and communication within God.

Furthermore basic to God is that He is love. But for there to be love there must be an object of that love, and had to be from all eternity. This again demands 'plurality' within the Godhead, that Which loves and that Which is loved.

We must in the end, however, look at Him in the light of what He has been pleased to reveal, and accept that there is a limit beyond which we cannot go in understanding. God cannot be summed up in meaningful human words, He can only be partially revealed to our limited ability to comprehend. Indeed once we could begin to define God satisfactorily the God we defined would have ceased to be God. He would have become subject to the limitations of earthly description. He would have become earthly.

The Bible begins with God, not by defining Him, but by revealing Him in action. 'In the beginning God (Elohim) created' (Genesis 1.1). The word for God is in the plural but this is because it is the plural of intensity showing the many facets and attributes of God and that He is beyond limitation. It did not deny His essential unity, and the word Elohim, when used of God, is always used with a singular verb, showing unity of will, action and of being. And yet He is also revealed as self-communicating.

This unity of God was important, for in a polytheistic world, where people believed in many 'gods' who controlled different parts of life and of nature, and were very unreliable and constantly bickering and fighting with each other and acting against each other, the idea that there was really One, and only One, true God provided stability and certainty. Thus the Bible stresses that 'The LORD our God, the LORD is One' (or 'is the only One') (Deuteronomy 6.4).

The word for One is 'echad which means not so much numerical oneness as uniqueness of being and essence. There is none like Him. Thus Exodus 15.11 could ask, 'Who is like you, Oh YHWH, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?'

The word for 'LORD' is strictly YHWH. (We do not know the vowels or how it was pronounced). It probably means either 'the One Who acts', 'the One Who will be what He wants to be,' or 'the One Who causes to be', and is the name by which He revealed Himself (Genesis 4.26; Exodus 3.14; 6.3). In Exodus 6.3 the idea is not of a totally new name but of the revealing of the significance of the name in what Yahweh intended to do (compare Ezekiel 20.44; 39.7; Exodus 6.5; 7.7, 17 etc.). The Pharaoh whom Moses was opposing would write to his underlings reminding them 'I am there'. So God is reminding both Moses and Pharaoh and His people that He is truly 'the One Who is there', as His activity will reveal.

### 1) In the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament the essential oneness of God is stressed and powerfully maintained. Yet in the midst of this oneness there are undoubtedly hints of diversity in unity. Thus we have mention of 'the Angel of the Lord', where sometimes the Angel is clearly God Himself, and sometimes the Angel appears to be separate from God, yet always working in total harmony.

In Genesis 16.7-13 the Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar when she ran away from Abraham. It is clear that this Angel is God Himself, for in verse 10 He promises 'I will greatly increase your seed so that it will not be numbered for multitude', which compares with a similar promise given by God to Abraham (compare Genesis 13.16).

Yet in verse 11 there is some distinction between the Angel and the Lord, for the Angel says '*The Lord* has heard your affliction', where we might have expected '*I* have heard your affliction', which suggests a distinction. But in verse 13 we are told it was the Lord Who 'spoke with her', and she calls Him 'the God who sees' (el roi).

Again at Hagar's second expulsion we are told 'God heard the voice of the lad'. Then the Angel of God calls to her from Heaven, saying, 'God has heard the voice of the lad' as though God were separate from the Angel. Yet from then on it is God Who opens her eyes and is with the lad (Genesis 21.17-20). So there is unity yet distinction.

In Genesis 22.11-12 'the Angel of the Lord' calls to Abraham from Heaven saying 'now I know that you fear God', as though God was separate. But then He adds 'you have not withheld your son, your only son *from Me*', which can only mean the Angel is referring to Himself as God.

Again in Genesis 31.11 it is 'the Angel of the Lord' who is said to have spoken to Jacob in a dream, while in verse 13 He says, 'I am the God of Bethel'. In Exodus 3.2 it is the Angel of the Lord Who appears to Moses in the burning bush, but we soon learn it is God Himself (verse 4). But in 2 Samuel 24.16 'the Angel of the Lord' is clearly separate from 'the Lord', although closely connected in activity. So there are suggestions of dual activity within the Godhead.

In Judges 13 the Angel of the Lord appears first to the wife of Manoah, and then to Manoah and his wife, and speaks of God (verse 5) as though separate from Himself. The Angel then adds 'I will not eat of your bread and if you would make ready a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord', giving the same impression (verse 16). (The writer recognises the distinction and explains that Manoah was not yet aware that this was the Angel of the Lord, for he is puzzled by the distinction revealed). When the burnt offering is offered 'the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar' (verse 20). Prior to this He had refused to divulge His name saying, 'Why do you ask My name seeing it is wonderful (or secret)?' (verse 18). Basically the idea here is that the name is too holy to be revealed. Manoah later realises that he has been speaking to God (verse 22). Again we receive the impression, as the writer did, that God is one and yet compound.

Even more significantly, in Zechariah 1.12 the Angel of the Lord speaks with the Lord, and the Lord answers Him. This stresses a *separate and inter-personal relationship*. But when in Zechariah 3 Joshua the High Priest is standing before the Angel of the Lord (v.1), we are told in verse 2 it is 'the Lord' Who speaks to him, and this looks back to verse 1 in such a way as to suggest that the Angel of the Lord is identifiable with the Lord. Yet in verses 6-7 the Angel of the Lord speaks as though He is speaking on the Lord's behalf.

Then in Zechariah 12.8 'the house of David will be as God, as the Angel of the Lord', suggesting that God and the Angel of the Lord are one. So in Zechariah the Angel of the Lord is both identified with the Lord, and separated from Him in such a way as to converse with Him.

In a similar way Malachi can say, 'behold I send My messenger (angel), and he shall prepare the way before Me, and the Lord Whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple, and the Angel of the covenant whom you delight in', again hinting at dual activity.

So God is seen as One in thought and action and yet in that unity there is a suggestion of plurality.

Furthermore, while there is no mention of the Angel of the Lord, there is an interesting

passage where the One Who is 'the first and the last' (Isaiah 48.12 compare Revelation 1.17) is speaking through Isaiah and says, 'From the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time that it was, there am I. And now the Lord God has sent me, and His Spirit' (Isaiah 48.16). The way that this is usually explained is to say that we have here words interjected by Isaiah himself, but the remainder of the passage is certainly from the mouth of God and the wording is suggestive of God's revelation of Himself. So the One Who is the first and the last is sent by the Lord God and His Spirit.

Compare with this Isaiah 63.9-10 where Isaiah says, 'in all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and He bore them and carried them all the days of old, but they rebelled and grieved His holy Spirit', where again we have the Lord, the Angel and the Holy Spirit, and while this could by itself be seen as simply a parallel speaking of the same 'person', reference back to where the Angel of the Lord is spoken of in this way again gives a suggestion of duality.

Finally, in the case of Gideon (Judges 6) the 'Angel of the Lord' speaks with Gideon as though He was separate from 'the Lord', speaking of Him in the third person (v.12) and Gideon speaks with Him as though He were different from 'the Lord' (v.13), yet immediately we have 'the Lord' there, and speaking in the first person (v.14-16). Then 'the Spirit of the Lord' comes on Gideon (Judges 6.34). So Gideon experiences the Lord, the Angel of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord.

We therefore see a distinctive recognition in the Old Testament that God was more than a single individual. He was revealed as a composite being while at the same time essentially one.

This leads on to the fact that the Old Testament also depicts God as working through 'the Spirit of God (or of the Lord)', a term which gives a similar impression. At creation when God speaks it is 'the Spirit of God' Who hovers over the face of the deep (Genesis 1.1-2). The Spirit of the Lord (of God) also comes, for example, on Bezalel (Exodus 31.3) and on Jephthah, Samson, Saul and David in their service for God as war leaders (Judges; 1 Samuel 11.6; 16.13). The Spirit of the Lord also speaks through David (2 Samuel 23.2), Azariah (2 Chronicles 15.1), and Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24.20). And a coming 'pouring out' of the Spirit of God is often spoken of (e.g. Isaiah 44.3), the verb used arising from the fact that the Spirit's activity is likened to the rain.

We cannot speak here of a Tri-unity in any developed form, but we can conclude that there is unquestionably the suggestion of a 'threeness' within God, depicted in terms of the Lord, the Angel of the Lord, and the Spirit of the Lord, and there is certainly as we have seen even the impression of an inter-personal relationship between the Lord and the Angel of the Lord. These ideas are further developed in the New Testament.

## 2). The New Testament.

In the New Testament we have the revelation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28.19), where it is stressed that they have only one 'Name'. Thus they are 'one'. So even here we must tread with care, and the Name in which men are to be baptised can only be that of YHWH, the Name above every name (compare Philippians 2.9). We speak of three 'persons', but that is because our vocabulary is insufficient, and we have no word to describe the combined unity and inter-relationship of God. But God is not strictly three persons, for that would suggest three individuals. Rather we should speak of three personal inter-personal, self-distinctions in God, while there is only one essence (or being).

But having said this we must continually recognise the limitations of our human language. Here we are speaking of One Who cannot be described in our terminology, which is based on earthly experience. What we must recognise is that God is One and acts totally as one, and yet is revealed in an inter-personal threeness such that there is inter-communication between the three. The Father communicates with the Son, the Son communicates with the Father, and

both communicate with the Spirit, and yet the acts of each are the acts of all.

## **GOD THE FATHER.**

God is described as the Father in different ways.

- **1). He is the Father of Creation.**

When contrasting Christianity with polytheism Paul says ‘To us there is one God the Father of whom are all things, and we unto Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him’ (1 Corinthians 8.6). Here the Father is seen as the Source of the whole of creation and the Son as the Mediator of the whole of creation, acting together as One.

It is noteworthy in such a context, where Paul is stressing the oneness of God as against the many gods of other religions, that he links the ‘one God’ with the ‘one Lord’, (both Old Testament titles for God) and ‘the Father’ with ‘Jesus Christ’, in creating. It is true that the Father is seen as in some ways more distant, as the original Architect to Whom we look in submission, while Jesus Christ is seen as being closer as the source of our lives, but that is because it was Jesus Christ Who was sent from the Godhead to act personally among us. Both are, however, seen as acting in creation, as indeed does the Spirit (Genesis 1.2 compare John 1.1-3; Colossians 1.16-17; Hebrews 1.1-3).

- **2) He is the Father over All.**

Paul says, ‘I bow my knees to the Father, from whom every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth is named’ (Ephesians 3.14-15). Here God is seen as the source and pattern of all father-relationships. The father of the clan was seen as the one authoritative figure over the wider family, and then there would be fathers over sub-groups, and so on in descending order. Thus God is the One Who is Father and Lord over all. As the Father He grants to those who are open and responsive to Him power in the inner man through His Spirit, and the indwelling of Christ, so that they may be filled with all the fulness of God (Ephesians 3.16-19). Thus the Father is made known through the indwelling of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

- **3) He is Father over our spirits.**

When referring to the fact that God chastens His people for their benefit, Hebrews tells us ‘We had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence, shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?’ (Hebrews 12.9). Here God is acting as Father to our spirits, chastening our spirits in love, as against fathers of our flesh who chasten our flesh. So His fatherly care for His people results in chastening. God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2.13).

- **4) He is the Father Who Gives All that is truly Good.**

Having spoken of facing trials and temptations and warned of the danger of riches James tells us ‘all good giving and every perfect boon is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, in whom is no variation, nor shadow cast by turning’ (James 1.17). This would appear to refer to the contrast between what mankind offers, which has strings attached and drags men down in temptation, and what God gives freely, which is totally good.

The phrase ‘Father of lights’ signifies total openness, reliability and integrity. It refers to His creation and oversight of the heavenly lights (Genesis 1.14-16), comparing His unchanging, total reliability with the lesser reliability of the heavenly lights which cause shadows and vary with the time of day or night and the seasons. God’s gifts may then especially have in mind the gifts of sun and rain, which beget fruitfulness (compare Matthew 5.45). But the greatest gift, says James, is our being begotten



spiritually by the word of truth, which is the direct result of the will of God (James 1.18) through the Spirit of God (John 3.6).

- **5) He is the Father of Israel, His People.**

The Bible speaks of Jesus as ‘the only begotten’ (monogenes) (John 1.14, 18). But again this is human terminology. On earth if someone is begotten, the begetter precedes the begotten one timewise. This is not so with God. This is why theologians speak of Jesus as being ‘eternally begotten’. They recognise that the word ‘begotten’ has to be qualified. What this is stressing, as with the Bible use of the term ‘begotten’ of Jesus, is the essential oneness in being of Father and Son. It is saying He is the only ‘Son’ Who is thus, and always has been, of the same nature. But He is not really to be thought of as begotten in any sense in which we understand it, i.e. brought into being, for He always ‘was’ (John 1.1).

The Bible also speaks of the Spirit as ‘proceeding from the Father’ (John 15.26). But again this is an attempt to find words to describe the indescribable, although the basic idea is clear. He comes from the Father and is of His essence.

As we are introduced to the work of the Trinity in the Bible we regularly see the Father as the overall controller and planner, of both Creation and the plan of redemption. This is then seen as carried out by the Son in the acts of creation and redemption and the Holy Spirit in the application of it. But this is seeing it from a simplistic viewpoint. Regularly the creating and saving acts are carried out by ‘God’ or ‘YHWH’ (‘the Lord’) and in everything the Father is at work as well as the Son and the Spirit (John 5.17).

### **GOD AND CHRIST AS SAVIOUR AND REDEEMER.**

The Old Testament points clearly to God as the Saviour and Redeemer. Job can declare, ‘I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand at last upon the earth’ (Job 19.25), and the psalmist can speak of ‘the Lord’ as ‘my rock and my Redeemer’ (Psalm 19.14). Thus he can boldly declare, ‘they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer’ (Psalm 78.35), while in Psalm 106.21 we are told of a contrary occasion when, ‘they forgot God their Saviour’.

Isaiah reminds God’s people that ‘your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel’ (Isaiah 41.14), and God Himself declares ‘I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour’ (Isaiah 43.3) or alternately, ‘your Redeemer, the Holy one of Israel’ (Isaiah 43.14 compare 47.4), so that He can add ‘beside Me there is no Saviour’ (Isaiah 43.11). Both words are combined in Isaiah 49.26, ‘I the Lord am your Saviour and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob’ (compare also 60.16).

Jeremiah declares, ‘Oh hope of Israel, their Saviour in time of trouble’ (Jeremiah 14.8), while in 50.34 he adds, ‘their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of Hosts is His name’, while God declares through Hosea, ‘beside Me there is no Saviour’ (Hosea 13.4). God is therefore constant as Saviour and Redeemer.

This passes over into the New Testament where Mary can declare, ‘my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour’ (Luke 1.47), and God is often declared to be our Saviour. Paul is ‘an apostle of Jesus Christ, by commandment of God our Saviour’ (1 Timothy 1.1) and he can speak of what is ‘good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour’ (1 Timothy 2.3). Indeed ‘the living God is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe’ (1 Timothy 4.10).

Again Paul can say that the word is ‘committed to me (Paul) according to the commandment of God our Saviour’ (Titus 1.3). So that we are told to ‘adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things’ (Titus 2.10), for ‘when the kindness and love

of God our Saviour towards man appeared --- He saved us' (Titus 3.4-5). And again Jude addresses his paean of praise to 'the only God, our Saviour' (Jude 1.25). Thus in the New Testament also God is both God and Saviour.

This all makes it very significant, then, that Jesus Christ is regularly called our Saviour, and even 'our God and Saviour'. The angels tell us, 'unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2.11), and the woman of Samaria declares Him to be 'Christ, the Saviour of the world' (John 4.42). Indeed 'Him has God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour' (Acts 5.31). He has 'brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus' (Acts 13.23). So Christ is 'the head of the church, and He is the Saviour of the body' (Ephesians 5.23). Thus we 'wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ' (Philippians 3.20). For God's purpose in Christ is revealed by 'the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Timothy 1.10) and Paul can speak of 'God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour' (Titus 1.4). But he finalises the union when he says that we are looking for 'the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (Titus 2.13).

It is to Him, says Paul, that we owe the blessing of 'the renewing of the Holy Spirit which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour' (Titus 3.5-6). And John agrees, for he says, 'the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world' (1 John 4.14). So Peter can speak even more definitely of those who have 'obtained like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 1.1), and of those who have had ministered to them an abundant entrance into 'the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 1.11) (note that the Greek construction in 1.1 ('God and Saviour') and 1.11 ('Lord and Saviour') is the same so that if 'Lord' refers to Jesus so must 'God').

So Peter tells us to remember the commandment of 'the Lord and Saviour' (2 Peter 3.2) and that we are to 'grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 3.18). To Peter Jesus is both 'Lord and Saviour' and 'God and Saviour'. And in Acts 20.28 Paul can speak of 'the church of God which He (God) purchased with His own blood' in a context where the whole stress is on God.

Thus the 'God and Saviour' of the Old Testament has become the 'God and Saviour' of the New Testament as revealed in Jesus Christ, Who is Himself 'God and Saviour'.

As the writer to the Hebrews tells us. "He (Jesus Christ) is the outshining of His (God's) glory and the exact representation of His substance" (Hebrews 1.3). So that "all the angels of God worship Him" (Hebrews 1.6). This is why he can speak of Jesus Christ as God on the throne (Hebrews 1.8).

### GOD THE SON.

Just as Jesus speaks of 'the Father' so He speaks of Himself as 'the Son'. He is not 'a son of God', or one of a number of sons, He is THE Son. This comes out many times, especially, but not exclusively in the Gospel of John (Matthew 11.27; Mark 13.26; Luke 10.22; John 3.36; John 5.19-26; 6.40; 8.35-36; 14.13; Hebrews 1.8; 1 John 2.22-24; 4.14; 5.12). Furthermore a reading of these verses brings out the divine prerogatives He claimed. He is the giver of life by His own will, He has life in Himself, He will raise men at the last day, He will be the judge of all so that He might have equal honour with the Father, He alone knows and reveals the Father. The one who has seen Him has seen the Father (John 14.9). All things that the Father has are His (John 16.15).

Thus Jesus always distinguishes His relationship to the Father from that of all others. He speaks of 'My Father' and 'your Father' but never of 'our Father'. He sees His relationship with the Father as unique.

**Kings of the house of David were seen as ‘begotten’ by God when they ascended the throne and were ‘adopted’ by Him (Psalm 2.7 with 2 Samuel 7.14, Psalm 89.26-27). But Jesus is the monogenes, the ‘only’ begotten. So His Sonship is distinctive. Thus while the term ‘son of God’ could be applied to kings of the house of David, and possibly to the coming Messiah (certainly in the same way as it was applied to David), and Jesus claimed this application for Himself as He awaited their full illumination (Matthew 16.16), the use of the term Son of God went further with Jesus for it was given divine qualities (Matthew 8.29; 21.37; Mark 12.6; Luke 20.13; John 3.18; 5.25; Romans 1.4; 8.32; Galatians 2.20; Ephesians 4.13; Hebrews 4.14; 10.29; 1 John 3.8; 4.15; 5.5, 10, 12, 13, 20; Revelation 2.18). Others were adopted as sons of God, but He was the Son uniquely sent by the Father Who pre-existed with Him (John 1.14, 18; 3.13,16; 3.31; 6.38, 46; 8.42; Galatians 4.4; Hebrews 1.6; 1 John 4.9).**

**Even more significantly Jesus claims authority over the Spirit. In John 15.26; 16.6; Luke 24.49 Jesus promises that He will send the Spirit to His disciples from Heaven, and in John 14.16-23 He tells them that the Spirit will mediate to them the presence of the Father and the Son. The former claim demonstrates His control over the Spirit of God, and as the Spirit was seen as the extension of the activity of God Himself, it is a distinct claim to divine sovereignty. Who else could send and control His Spirit? In the latter case His paralleling of Himself with the Father in their effect on human experience is a firm statement of His equality with the Father.**

**Elsewhere Jesus Christ is clearly shown to be God. Not only is He referred to as ‘our God and Saviour’ (Titus 2.13; 2 Peter 1.1; see above) but He is described as having ‘the Name above every Name’ (Philippians 2.9), which is the name YHWH. That is why all will declare that Jesus is ‘LORD’ (Philippians 2.11) for the word for ‘Lord’ (kurios) is used in the Greek Old Testament to translate YHWH. That this is the significance here can also be seen by comparison with Isaiah 45.21-23 where it is YHWH to Whom every knee shall bow. Thus Paul is equating Jesus with this high statement of faith. And all this in the passage where Paul has spoken of His self emptying and His willingness not to grasp on to His Godhood (Philippians 2.6) in words which were clearly an early church statement of faith..**

**John also can call Him ‘the Word Who was made flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1.14), having earlier pointed out that the Word existed in the beginning and created all things (John 1.1-3) and was the giver of life (1.4). Indeed that He was of the very nature of God (John 1.1). As ‘the Word’ He was the very revelation and expression of God. In the Book of Revelation Jesus constantly has applied to Him divine titles and ideas (e.g. 1.17-18; 22.13), and Jesus unquestionably applied to Himself the divine title ‘I am’ (ego eimi) (John 8.58-59 compare vv. 24, 28) as is demonstrated by the response of His hearers.**

**In response to the multiplicity of gods worshipped by others, the Jews proudly declared ‘the Lord our God, the Lord is One’. That Paul can therefore make the response in a similar context that ‘to us there is one God, the Father, of Whom are all things and we unto Him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ through Whom are all things and we through Him’ (1 Corinthians 8.6) again demonstrates that he sees Jesus Christ as equal with the Father and an essential part of the oneness of God. This is further demonstrated by the fact that he conjoins Jesus Christ with the Father as a dispenser of the divine grace (Romans 1.7; 1 Corinthians 1.3 and often) and that Jesus is to be seen as the object of worship and prayer by the early church (Matthew 28.17; John 20.28; Acts 7.59; 1 Corinthians 16.22b (‘maranatha’ - ‘our Lord come!’); Revelation 5.11-14; 22.1-5, 17, 20).**

**GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

**That the Holy Spirit is God is clear from the continuous use of the name to describe the activity of God. When the Spirit acts, God acts. The question in this case is as to whether we are to see any distinction, except in emphasis, between God the Father and the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament we find reference mainly to ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ or ‘the Spirit of God’. Reference to Him as ‘the Holy Spirit’ is comparatively rare (Psalm 51.11; Isaiah 63.10-11). However in the New Testament reference is almost exclusively (but not totally) to the Holy Spirit. The distinction is not, however, important as all phrases indicate the uniqueness of the Spirit as God’s Spirit.**

**That God is Spirit Jesus expressly declared (John 4.24). But the Holy Spirit is seen as active in conjunction with the God Who is Spirit. He ‘proceeds’ from the Father (John 15.26) and is sent by the Father in Jesus’ name (John 14.26). He is the ‘Spirit of God’ (Romans 8.9, 14; 15.19; 1 Corinthians 2.11, 14; 3.16; 7.40; 12.3; 1 John 4.2). But He is also ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ (2 Corinthians 3.17; Acts 5.9; 8.39), ‘the Spirit of Christ’ (Romans 8.9; 1 Peter 1.11) and ‘the Spirit of His Son’ (Galatians 4.6). Indeed He is sent by the Son (John 16.7). This is why the church has spoken of Him as ‘proceeding from the Father and the Son’. This sending by the Son demonstrates that the Spirit is not to be seen as just an extension of God the Father.**

**In 1 Corinthians 2.10-12 we learn that the Spirit ‘knows’ the things of God and ‘searches the deep things of God’. It is by Him that God reveals such things to men. Thus we ‘receive the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are freely given to us by God’. The Spirit’s Oneness with God is clearly understood, and yet there is separation in unity.**

**That He is personal comes out in His activity. He searches (1 Corinthians 2.10), speaks (Acts 13.2), teaches (John 14.26; Luke 12.12; 1 Corinthians 2.13), brings to mind (John 14.26), bears witness (John 15.26; Romans 8.16), leads (Romans 8.14; Galatians 5.18), knows (1 Corinthians 2.11), convicts of sin (John 16.8), commands (Acts 8.29), reveals, creates (Genesis 1.2), makes intercession (Romans 8.27), raises the dead (Romans 8.11).**

**He is clearly distinguished from the Father and the Son in Matthew 28.19; 2 Corinthians 13.13; 1 Peter 1.1-2; Jude 1.20-21 where the Trinity as a whole is revealed in action. As the Father is distinct from the Son, so He is from the Spirit and yet they always work as One.**

### **SUMMARY.**

**To those who seek to have everything cut and dried the doctrine of God is an enigma. This is necessarily so for we are considering One Who is beyond our understanding and outside our experience except in so far as we can experience Him through His word and through prayer and worship. How can we define Him Who is beyond our conception?**

**Thus it is being too simplistic to speak of the Trinity as representing ‘one God in three persons’, for the word ‘person’ tends to mean to us individuals and within God there are not three individuals. Rather we should say that within God is a threeness revealed in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a threeness which includes interpersonal relationships, and yet which excludes individual and contrary activity. God always acts as one, and yet within that activity one member of the Godhead may appear more prominent. But in a real sense any action is always the action of all.**

### **Further thoughts on the Trinity.**

**The problem we have when dealing with the Triune God is in finding words to describe what God is like. The only words we have are based on our experience of the world and**

of ourselves. But God is not remotely like the world. Descriptions we use do not fit God (any more than we can describe our own spirits and make-up. For we too are a strange mix of flesh and mind and spirit and cannot understand how these three are one).

When we try to describe to a man blind from birth what the colour red, or blue, or green is like we cannot do it. Try it!. Without a concept of colour he cannot possibly understand what we mean, try as we will. All the explanations in the world will not enable him to understand colour. We will try this and that and he will then suggest what we mean and we will cringe. He just has not grasped it. And he never will. It can only be known by those who have sight.

Of course if we are very clever we may teach him words that almost describe it and he will then be able to describe it so that we think he knows what it means. But he does not. He is only using words which we understand in one way and he understands in another.

When the translators tried to put the Bible in basic English it resulted, nobly though they tried, in a translation which was part good, part bad, not always quite right and sometimes laughable. Trying to put theology in basic English is well nigh impossible. It works for a time and then we have to start using specialist words.

But compared to God all the languages of the world, and all that is in them, are basic. They contain no words that can describe Him. Consider the question of, 'what is eternity?' We can say what it is not. It is not time. It is not limited. But we cannot say what it is. We have no experience of eternity except in our inner beings. The only reason that we can have a little understanding about God and eternity is because we have spirit, the image of God within, and He comes to reveal Himself to us through His Spirit. But we do not understand Him. We reach out in experience that we cannot define.

Imagine talking to Isaac Newton about protons, neutrons, electrons and quarks, about curved space and black holes. They could not be seen through a telescope or a microscope, so he would think you were either mad or just being funny. He would feel that he knew far too much about science to believe in such things. He would think you were deluded. Indeed he might well arrange for you to be locked up. When I was a boy I knew that the atom was the smallest known thing. Today compared with the quark it is a giant world containing a multitude of other worlds. When I told my 15 year old physicist son about quarks which could not be seen through a microscope or even an electron microscope he thought I was pulling his leg. Now he is a nuclear scientist (medical) he knows about quarks and he loses me and has to explain things gently. But even he does not know what a quark is. Only something of what it does. It can only be known through interpreting 'experience'.

In the same way when God is trying to reveal Himself to us in the Bible He has to use human language. But how with human language can He reveal heavenly things, for human language is limited to earthly things? The answer is that He cannot. How then can He show that within the Godhead are two, and even three, Who are yet equal and of the same nature and essence? Answer, use a number of analogies, a number of pictures.

Consider how Jesus is called 'the heir of all things'. Take it literally and it is absurd, because for someone to be an heir someone else has to die or retire. Thus Jesus can never inherit. Will God die or retire? Of course He will not. We must therefore drop the aspects that do not fit and concentrate on what the picture is trying to say. In this case the title simply signifies that all that belongs to the Father belongs to Jesus, and that everything will one day be under Him.

**The most common picture is that of the relationship of father and son. But such a relationship did not exist before the world was made. No angel prior to creation would have known what a father and son were. Such relationships did not exist. However, all men know that a trueborn son is of the same nature as his father because they live in a world of fathers and sons. Thus if Jesus is the 'only born Son' they can know that He is of the same nature as the Father.**

**However, on earth a son is born after the father has come into existence, while that is not true of the Son. So we have to drop that part of the significance of 'son', because it is not true of God. The image being used is not complete. It is one part of the jigsaw. Then we have to add another piece to the picture in order to reveal that He always existed.**

**For example, we speak of Jesus as 'God's Word'. ' In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was in a two way personal relationship with God (pros ton theon), and the Word was of the nature of God. (theos en ho logos)' (John 1.1-2). A wordless God is not possible. God could never be without His word therefore His Word always 'was'. Here the eternity of Jesus is stressed, and His close unity with the Father, but the idea understates the genuine living relationship which was present in the analogy of father and son.**

**So God exercised His word at creation, but His word had always existed. Thus Jesus is called the Word. This indicates that is He is eternal and so much a part of God that God would not be God without Him. The word is God revealed in action through something issuing forth from Himself, for by the word of the Lord the heavens were made. Furthermore the Word is God revealed in essence, for the only born Son, He has made Him known through the revealing of His glory (John 1.14-18).**

**Thus Jesus is not just a word, He is personal. He is the revealing Word, the Word/Son. That is why we use the idea of His being 'eternally begotten', which is simply saying that Jesus is eternal and that He is of the true nature of God, while not being the totality of God.**

**Is a father superior in rank to his son? Ask Napoleon's father. On earth each son in turn becomes a father, and some sons far outrank their fathers, for rank is an earthly concept. But these are earthly rankings based on the birth of one preceding the other, or on one rising above the other in importance. The Father, however, did not precede the Son. Both always were. In such a relationship neither is superior in rank. But Jesus became man and voluntarily lowered His rank to being that of a servant. In a similar way John the Baptist was the greatest of all the prophets, but he who was least in the Kingly Rule of God was greater than he. Thus the descriptions Father and Son are simply used to explain their relationship to each other in terms which poor, failing, 'lacking in heavenly knowledge' men, who have no better terms, can appreciate. But they fail if we read too much into them.**

**Had God not created the world and had not Jesus become a man, Jesus would never have been called 'the Son', neither would He have been called 'Jesus'. Both are human terms, seeking to describe eternal realities to human beings. (All such words are human. It may be that there is such a thing as heavenly language but if so you can be sure that most of the words they use would be gobbledygook to us, for they would speak of things both outside our experience and beyond what we can experience. It may, however, be that in that 'other' world 'mind' speaks to 'mind' and spirit to spirit without words).**

**Of course when Jesus became man He subordinated Himself to the Father by choice. He chose to become a servant. That is why He could say while He walked on earth, 'My**

**Father is greater than I'. Yet at the same time He could say 'I and the Father are One'. He could further say that He had the power to give life in itself, that He was honoured equally with the Father, that all judgment had been committed to Him, and that those who had seen Him had seen the Father.**

**So He possessed all the prerogatives of God, and is regularly described in language used only of God. Indeed in the New Testament He is given the title 'LORD', the name above every name. That is how the Septuagint speaks of God. It is the name of Yahweh, the only God.**

**But does the Bible not say that one day the Son will subject all things to the Father, and that He Himself will subject Himself to the Father? (1 Corinthians 15.24-28). The answer is 'Yes', and 'He will', but He will do it as the One Who became man and operates on behalf of the whole of manhood, not in His eternal Godhood. For in the end it is 'God' Who will be all in all, not just the Father. The Son's emptying of Himself will then be over.**

**The Spirit is also revealed as active at creation. Throughout the Old Testament it is clear that the Spirit is God seen in action. But how are we to describe the relationship of the Spirit to the Father? That perplexed the theologians. So they searched the Scriptures and found that Jesus said that the Spirit would proceed from the Father, as fire proceeds from fire. That gave them a lifeline. It means of course that in some way the Father and the Spirit are of one nature, for One proceeds from the other. If fire proceeds from fire we know they are of the same nature. But does that mean that fire is inferior to fire because it proceeds from fire. That is far from the truth. The second may indeed become a raging inferno and be far 'superior' in size and grandeur to its source, but it is not really so for they are both fire. Both are equally capable of setting the world alight.**

**The question therefore is, how can the One Who is God in action in the world be inferior to God? And the answer is, He cannot be, for He is God in action.**