

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

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THE TRINITY: IS GOD THREE PERSONS IN ONE?

It is abundantly obvious from Scripture that there is but one God. "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God **is one**" (Deut. 6:4)."Jesus answered, 'The first is, Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, **is one**'" (Mark 12:29).

For many years I have wondered about God being one God but three "Persons". It never made sense to me but I thought that I was just not learned enough to understand it. I am now of the opinion however, that the Word of God is not just for the learned, but for all of us who **are truly seeking** to know the truth. I therefore, offer this paper on the Trinity.

Before we consider the subject of the Trinity, we must be clear that God is spirit (John 4:24). By definition, He can not be seen and we can not know Him unless He wishes to reveal Himself. He **has revealed** several of His characteristics, many of them we will study in this paper.

Having determined that God is spirit, we may now contemplate the question of the Trinity. We are told that the Trinity is God in three Persons. Jesus Christ is a Person. He is described as, among other things, "**King of Kings**", as "**the Good Shepherd**", as "**the Lamb of God**". These are **titles** describing the **offices** and the **characteristics** of our Lord. For example, as the Lamb of God He was God's sacrifice for man. As King of Kings He is Lord over all. Each of these titles describes a different **characteristic** of the same Person. As He hung on the cross, He manifested the **characteristic** of One willing to die for the ungodly, i.e. **the Lamb of God**. As He leads His own down the path of righteousness He manifests

the **characteristic** of One who cares for His flock, i.e. **the Good Shepherd**. When He comes to reign over the nations He will manifest the characteristic of a righteous ruler, i.e. **Lord of Lords**. We see different **characteristics** of the same Person, but still **only one Person**.

Why then, do we find it necessary to assume that three of the manifestations of God's many characteristics are different **Persons**? I propose that we consider the possibility that "God the Father", "God the Son" and "God the Holy Spirit" are not three "Persons", but three of the different **manifestations of the One God, Who is spirit**. In other words, just as "King of Kings" and "Lamb of God" are characteristics of one Person, i.e. Jesus Christ, so "Father", "Son" and "Holy Spirit" are three different **characteristics, not Persons**, of One God.

An example from everyday life may help us. Let us suppose that there is a Dr. Jones who sees patients in his office, teaches at a hospital, is married and has three children and five grandchildren. In his office, he has a secretary who calls him "boss"; his patients call him "Doctor". At home, his wife calls him "dear", his children call him "Dad" and his grandchildren call him "Grandpa". He is one person but his "title" differs with the relationship he has with each person in his life. So also, is God One God with many titles.

As we continue with our study of the Trinity we will see that God, in the Old Testament has a Name and, like Christ in the New Testament, also has several titles. Again, just as Christ is One Person with several titles, so God in the Old Testament is One God with several titles. And just as the various titles of Christ in the New Testament describe different characteristics, so then do the various titles of God in the Old Testament describe His different characteristics.

Let us consider first God's Name as revealed in the Old Testament. God's Name is given in the Old Testament as "Jehovah". Is. 42:8 reads, "I am Jehovah; that is My Name...". (See also Ex.3:15). A comparison of Is. 40:3 with Matthew 3:3 will show that **Christ is the manifestation of Jehovah**. Is. 40:3 reads, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord' (Heb. "Jehovah")...". And in Matthew 3 we read of John the Baptist's message concerning Christ, "...Prepare ye the way of the Lord". Isaiah tells us that the one crying in the wilderness is preparing the way for Jehovah. Matthew tells us that John the Baptist is the one crying in the wilderness preparing the way for Christ. Therefore, **Jesus Christ is the manifestation of Jehovah**.

God's Name, as we have seen, is "Jehovah" but **with each different characteristic that God reveals, He takes on a different title**. For example there are ten titles which are combined with His Name, "Jehovah". In Gen. 22:14 we read the first occurrence of one of these Jehovah titles, "And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh; as it is said to this day, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall **be seen**'. Dr. E.W. Bullinger explains in his fourth Appendix of the Companion Bible that Jehovah-Jireh means "Jehovah will see, or provide".

What is important to keep in mind for the purpose of this study is that the ten titles combined with the Name "Jehovah" are **not ten different "Persons"** of the Godhead. They are simply ten different **characteristics** of the One God, Jehovah.

Exodus 15:1-2 provides insight into how the various titles of God all have their own special meaning. "I will sing to the Lord (Heb. Jehovah) for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The Lord (Heb. Jah) is my **strength** and my song. He has become my **salvation**. He is my God (Heb. El) and I will exalt Him." Here again, we read of several titles for one God, each of these titles does not refer to a different "Person", but to a different **characteristic of one God** Whose Name is "Jehovah".

"Elohim" is the title for God as creator. In Genesis 1:1 we read that "God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth". "Elohim" is the Hebrew word that is the plural of "El". As the reader will see as he/she continues in this study, the plural does not imply a Trinity, but **many titles** which correspond to the many characteristics that God, as spirit, has chosen to reveal. (Please see the paper on this web-site, [The Trinity, Part Two: Elohim](#)).

When we get to the New Testament we, of course, do not find the Hebrew titles, but we do find other titles used of God. Just as in the Old Testament these titles do not refer to different "Persons" so too in the New Testament, these titles do not refer to different "Persons". **They refer to the characteristics that God has chosen to make Himself known to us, and these titles describe those characteristics.**

Let us consider the names given to Jesus Christ. Matthew 1:21 gives us one of these names, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins". His name is Jesus, which means "savior". Matt. 1:22-23 is quoted from Isaiah 7:14 which gives one of His titles. "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet; 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' -which means "God with us". This tells us, of course, that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Immanuel is not a different "Person" than Jesus; **Immanuel is simply a different title, which describes a different office.**

Our Lord is called "Son of man" in, among other scriptures, Matt. 24:30, "At that time the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory". From this title we know that Christ is man. Once again, the Son of man is not a different "Person" than "Immanuel" or from "Jesus"; "Son of Man" is **a different title for the same Person and simply describes a different office.**

John 1:1 gives us yet another title used of Christ, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God". **"Word" is yet another title** for the same Jesus Christ.

I believe it may be helpful if we also consider Is. 9:6 which speaks of Christ and His many titles. "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a **Son** is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, **The Everlasting Father**, the Prince of Peace". This passage tells us that one of the "names" or titles of the Son is "Everlasting Father". If the Father and Son are two different Persons this makes no sense at all. But once we see that "Father" and "Son" are titles of Jehovah all is clear. That is to say, it is One Person Who fulfills the offices of Father and Son.

I believe that it is quite obvious that all these names/titles referring to Christ in the New Testament refer to one Man, and that each title reveals a different characteristic of that one Man.

Let us consider for the moment the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was certainly very active in Old Testament times, but not until John's Gospel do we read of Him being sent as the "Comforter". Is the Comforter a different "Person" than the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Old Testament? Of course not. The title "Comforter" reveals a characteristic not stressed in the Old Testament concerning the Holy Spirit. There is one Holy Spirit, and He manifests some of the many characteristics of the one God.

Let us consider "God the Father". In my opinion, one of the most wide spread confusions in Christianity today effecting the doctrine of the Trinity is the failure to differentiate between God the Father and God as spirit. That the term "God the Father" is not equivalent to the term "God" is evident from the fact that **God the Father does not express all that God is**. That is to say, God the Father does not fulfill the title of savior. It is true that He sent His only begotten Son, but God the Father did not offer Himself as a Lamb led to the slaughter. That characteristic of God was made known by Jesus Christ, the Son. God the Father is but **ONE OF the manifestations** of God.

Let us consider the phrase, "...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (Matt. 28:19). Does this oft repeated phrase tell us that God is one in three Persons?"

We know that God is spirit and that when He reveals Himself to man **He takes on a title which describes the characteristic He wants to reveal**. For example, we discovered that "Elohim" in Gen. 1:1 describes God as Creator.

Now let us return to our question concerning the phrase "God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit". In New Testament times God manifested Himself primarily in three offices, i.e. "Father", "Son" and "Holy Spirit". That is to say, whereas in the Old Testament we read of God manifesting Himself in many offices (please see the paper [on the titles of God](#)) in the New Testament He limited His works to those He had accomplished in His offices of "Father", "Son" and "Holy Spirit". That being the case, one was baptized in the name of the

three offices (**all of which were fulfilled in Christ**) by which He manifested Himself at that time.

Much has been written to show that "Father", "Son" and "Holy Spirit" are all referred to in the Bible as God. What we must keep in mind is, that while this is very true, it does in no way show that each is a different "Person" of a Trinity. It shows that **each is fully God but none reveals ALL that God, as spirit, is.**

When understood in the traditional way, i.e. God is three Persons in one, Jn. 14:28 demeans the very deity of Christ. That verse reads, "The Father is greater than I". But Christ is God. **God cannot be less than God?** If on the other hand, we understand that **the office of Father** is greater than **the office of Son**, then all is clear.

To be absolutely thorough let us see how the Holy Spirit means for us to understand the Greek word translated "greater". That Greek word is "*mizon*". The first two occurrences are found in Matt. 11:11 which reads, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a **greater** than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of Heaven is **greater** than he". Let us consider several more occurrences of this Greek word.

Matt. 18:1, "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, 'Who is the **greatest** in the kingdom of Heaven?'

John 4:12, "Art Thou **greater** than our father Jacob, which gave us the well.....?"

Jn. 13:16, "The servant is not **greater** than his lord.....".

Jn. 15:13, "**Greater** love hath no man than this.....".

I Cor. 13:13, "But the **greatest** of these is charity".

I Jn. 3:20, "God is **greater** than our heart....".

I Jn. 5:9, "The witness of God is **greater**....".

It is clear that the Greek word translated "greater" means the very same thing as does our English translation.

My point is that if we see "Father" and "Son" as different Persons we demean the deity of Christ. But if we see that "Father" and "Son" are two titles of One God, all is clear.

In my opinion, one of the reasons most Christians adhere to the doctrine of the Trinity is because they do not begin the study of this question with the Old Testament, they begin in the New Testament. The New Testament did not come out of a vacuum, it came as a continuation of the Old Testament.

It is clear that Christ and His followers were, for the most part, Jews, and so were most of those that heard their messages. The Old Testament is very clear, there is but one God, Whose Name is Jehovah. When these Jews heard that they should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, would their understanding be of a Trinity, or of titles? I think the answer is obvious, i.e. they would have understood them as titles.

If we are to correctly understand the New Testament, we must understand the mind set of those to whom Christ and His apostles were preaching. Their mind set was obviously not of a "triune" God. But they were certainly well aware of all the **titles** of Jehovah as revealed in the Old Testament. With that in mind let us consider Gen. 1:26 where **Elohim** says "Let **us** make Man in **our** own image". As Dr. Bullinger's note in the Companion Bible points out, this refers to **a physical**, not a moral image. Therefore, man was not created in the image of Elohim in His office of the Father or in His office of the Holy Spirit, as **neither have a physical image**. Therefore, Jehovah's title, "Elohim" does not imply a plurality **of Persons**, but of offices. One might ask, "to whom was Elohim speaking when He said "Let **us** create Man in our own image"? Perhaps an example from everyday life will help clarify this point.

At one time in my life I served as president of the board for a community orchestra. I was also the business manager, and for a short while I replaced the treasurer who had moved out of the area. At times I, as business manager, had to ask myself, as president of the board, for money to purchase music. And then I had to ask myself as treasurer to write a check. I held three offices, but I was still only one person. Naturally, I did not really talk to myself, but the Holy Spirit through Moses was making it clear in Gen. 1:26 that several offices were involved in creation.

Some have objected to the thought expressed above, by asking, "was God talking to Himself in Gen. 1:26?" We must answer that by reminding ourselves that it was **Christ, i.e. One Person**, Who was the manifestation of Elohim, the Creator. Therefore, Scripture supports the view that, in essence, Christ Who is One, was speaking to Himself in Gen.1:26 **in His many offices**.

Let us consider three other passages in which God speaks to Himself. They are Gen. 3:22 and Gen. 11:7 and Is. 6:8.

Gen. 3:22 reads, "And Jehovah Elohim said, 'Behold, the man is become as **one of Us**, to know good and evil: now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever-'. I have shown from Scripture in my paper [Elohim: The Trinity Part Two](#) that the title "Elohim" cannot refer to God in His office of Father or in His office of Holy Spirit. Who then is meant by the phrase "one of Us"? Because there is only one God, I believe He was speaking to Himself **in His various offices**. In this case, the context would indicate that the "Us" refers to all the offices in which God shows Himself to "know good and evil".

In Gen. 11:6-7 we read, "And Jehovah said, 'Behold the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do. Go to, **let Us** go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech". In this passage it is Jehovah that says "let Us". "Jehovah" is God's Name. There is only one Jehovah, i.e. only one God. Here too, Jehovah is speaking to Himself.

We read in Is. 6:8, "Also I heard the voice of Jehovah saying, 'Whom shall I send and whom will go **for Us**'". Here again, this is Jehovah speaking, and He must be speaking to Himself in His many offices.

The point is that there are at least four passages in which Jehovah is speaking to Himself in His several offices. Therefore, the fact that Christ, in His office of "Son" while on earth, spoke to Himself in His office of "Father" is certainly not without precedence. Again, those to whom Christ and His apostles came, i.e. first century Israel, would have been well aware of this precedence, and would certainly not have jumped to the false conclusion that Christ was speaking to a different "Person". And neither, in my opinion should we.

In conclusion, I believe that the concept of one God in three "Persons" is not what the Bible teaches and does not make sense. While it is true that there are many things in God's Word which must be accepted by faith, there is no reason to accept something on faith that contradicts logic. God is not the author of confusion. God is either one or three; He can not be both one **and** three. "Father", "Son" and "Holy Spirit" are not three "Persons". **"Father", "Son" "Holy Spirit" are titles which reveal different characteristics which God, as spirit, has chosen to reveal of Himself to those of us who desire to know Him. None reveals, by Himself, all that God, Who is spirit, is.**

I realize that this view is not widely held. That fact in and of itself does not make it false, nor does it make it true. I hope the reader will consider the views expressed.

I have added three parts to the study of the trinity titled, [Elohim: The Trinity Part Two.](#), [The Trinity: Part Three](#) and [Does Jesus Christ Sit Next To God In Heaven?](#)

*The bold type used in quotations were added.

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