

The Biblical Witness to the Holy Trinity

It is common to hear claims that Christians, Jews, and Muslims worship the same God. Not true. Unlike those who worship Allah, or those Jews who claim to worship the God of Abraham, Christians worship the triune God who reveals himself in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is Christianity's most distinctive doctrine, despite the fact that the doctrine stretches the limits of human language and logic. Admittedly, in many ways the doctrine of the Trinity is beyond our comprehension, yet we believe this doctrine because this is how God reveals himself to us in his word.

The biblical witness to the doctrine of the Trinity is extensive and can be set forth in any number of ways. We begin by noting that the Scriptures are absolutely clear that there is only *one* God. In Deuteronomy 6:4, Moses declares "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." In Isaiah 44:6, we read "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god." In the New Testament, Paul writes, "there is no God but one. For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Corinthians 8:4-6). James writes, "you believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (James 2:19). The Scriptures of both testaments teach there is but one God.

Yet the Bible also teaches that although there is one God, he is revealed in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist, the Father declares, "this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," even as the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus as a dove (Matthew 3:16-17). In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands his disciples to "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." The mission of the church is to go and make disciples by baptizing them in the name (singular) of three persons of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

In the benediction concluding his second Corinthian letter, Paul blesses his readers in the names of the Triune God (2 Corinthians 13:14). "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." In John 14:26, Jesus informs the disciples that "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things." As God in human flesh (cf. John 1:14), Jesus speaks of both the Holy Spirit and the Father as equals.

Another line of biblical evidence for the Trinity is that the same divine attributes, glory, and majesty are assigned to each of the three persons of the Godhead. The Scriptures teach that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are eternal. According to Isaiah, God says, "I am the first and the last," (Isaiah 44:6) and Paul adds that God is "eternal," (Romans 16:26) without beginning or end. John records the Son saying, "I am the first and the last," (Revelation 22:13), and Micah notes that his "coming and going are from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). In Hebrews we read of the Holy Spirit as "the eternal Spirit" (Hebrews 9:14). Father, Son and Holy are eternal, without beginning or end.

The Scriptures also teach that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, created all things. Paul states, "God who created all things" (Ephesians 3:9), while the Psalmist declares "Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his" (Psalm 100). Yet, in John's gospel we read of the Son, "all things were made through [Jesus], and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

In Colossians 1:15-17, Paul writes that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Job tells us of the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit of God has made me” (Job 33:4) In Genesis 1:1 we read that at creation “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are said to have created all things.

As we see from this brief summary of the biblical evidence the work of the triune God in creation (and we can do the same in a number of other areas such as redemption), there is good reason to affirm that there is one God who exists in three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are equal in glory, majesty and power. This is how God reveals himself in his word.

When it comes to the Son (Jesus Christ), the bible affirms that Jesus is true and eternal God, uncreated, and without beginning or end. Given Jesus’ central place in Christianity, no one wants to say anything bad about Jesus. But non-Christian religions often attempt to co-opt Jesus and make him one of their own. If Jesus is true and eternal God, then the Christian doctrine of God is unique among world religions. The irony is that while virtually all religions honor Jesus as a prophet or teacher, nevertheless they all reject (implicitly or explicitly) the main point the New Testament makes about Jesus—that he is God in human flesh (John 1:1-18), something Jesus clearly believed and proclaimed about himself (cf. John 8:58).

That the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ is not the invention of the early church can be seen by merely scanning the pages of Holy Scripture, with its substantial teaching regarding the deity of Jesus in both testaments. One of the most powerful lines of evidence for the deity of Jesus are several Old Testament prophecies, such as that of Isaiah 7:14, written hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth. “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” The messiah will be miraculously conceived, and given the title “God with us.” In Isaiah 9:6, we read “for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). This too refers to Jesus Christ (cf. Colossians 2:9).

In addition to the messianic prophecies in Isaiah, we have a number of messianic Psalms (i.e., 8, 89, 110), in which the Father speaks of the Son as highly exalted and equal in majesty and glory. In Proverbs 8:22-31, the author speaks of “wisdom” personified—when seen through the lens of New Testament fulfillment, this is clearly a reference to the eternal Son, who is wisdom from God (1 Corinthians 1:30). In Micah 5:2, the prophet speaks of the one to be born in Bethlehem (Jesus) as eternal. The coming Messiah is repeatedly identified as the almighty God and eternal father, the wisdom of God, righteous, highly exalted, yet to be born of a lowly virgin. These prophetic verses can only be speaking of one person: Israel’s coming Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who is the God of Abraham (cf. John 8:58).

In the New Testament, Jesus is said to be eternal and preexistent. In John 1:1 we read, “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jesus is described by both John and Paul as the creator and sustainer of all things. “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3) and in a passage cited above (Colossians 1:16-17), Paul says Jesus created all things and holds them together.

Jesus is identified as “God” throughout the pages of the New Testament. In John 20:28, Thomas falls before Jesus and confesses, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus accepts Thomas’ worship. In Titus 2:13,

Paul speaks of Jesus' second coming as "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." The author of Hebrews writes of Jesus, "but of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom'" (Hebrews 1:8).

Then there are those attributes predicated of Jesus which can only apply to God. Jesus is the object of worship (Matthew 28:16-17). He has the power to raise the dead (John 5:21; 11:25). He is the final judge of humanity (Matthew 25:31-32). Jesus has universal power and authority (Matthew 28:18), as well as the power to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-7). He not only identifies himself as God (John 14:8-9), but calls himself the Alpha and Omega, "the first and the last" – a divine self designation (Revelation 22:13).

Throughout the Bible, Jesus is revealed to us as the true and eternal God, the almighty, the second person of the Godhead, the creator of all things, and that one whom we must worship and serve. Although we must keep their persons distinct, whatever we can say of God, we can say of Jesus. The same holds true of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity.

Far too often we hear people speak of the Holy Spirit as an "it," not a "who." One reason why this is the case is that the nature of the Holy Spirit's work is to bring glory to Jesus Christ, not to himself. In light of this, J. I. Packer describes the Holy Spirit as the "shy member of the Trinity." This self-effacing role of the Spirit does not mean that the Holy Spirit is impersonal, a mere force or power. The Spirit possesses the same divine attributes as do the other members of the Trinity. Even as we speak of the Father as God, the Son as God, so too we must speak of the Holy Spirit as God. He is the third person of the Holy Trinity.

While there is not as much biblical evidence for the deity of the Holy Spirit as there is for the deity of Jesus, it would be a mistake to conclude that the evidence is neither clear nor decisive. We start with the Bible's direct assertion that the Holy Spirit is God. In Acts 5:3-4, we read the story of Ananias and Saphirra, specifically of their deceit and the charge brought against them. "You have not lied to men but to God." To lie to the Holy Spirit (as they did) is to lie to God. In 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul tells us that the Spirit who indwells us, is God's Spirit. He makes the same point in 1 Corinthians 6:19. At the very least, both of Paul's comments are indirect assertions of the deity of the Holy Spirit.

There is significant evidence for the deity of the Holy Spirit found in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 63:10, Isaiah speaks of the Spirit of God, as does the Psalmist in Psalm 95:9. In Hebrews 3:7-9 the author of Hebrews attributes the words spoken by God in Psalm 95 to the Holy Spirit. "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test . . . for forty years." What the Old Testament prophets attributed to God, the author of Hebrews attributes to the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is said to possess divine attributes. In Genesis 1:1-2 we read that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Even as John and Paul attribute the work of creation to the Son (who is true and eternal God), so too, Moses assigns the work of creation to the Holy Spirit. In Psalm 33:6, the Psalmist states that the Holy Spirit (the *Ruach*, the breath of God) creates all things. As the Son is eternal, so too, is the Holy Spirit, who was with God before all things were created.

In Job 33:4, we read, "the Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." As the Father and the Son are said to give us life, so too does the Holy Spirit. But not only does the Holy Spirit grant us life and breath, he also gives the new birth, something only God can do (John 3:5). We

cannot enter God's kingdom until God's Spirit gives us eternal life.

Then we have a whole catalogue of divine attributes applied to the Spirit. In Psalm 139:7-10, the Psalmist says "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me." The Holy Spirit is omnipresent. God is omnipresent.

In 1 Corinthians 2:11, Paul says the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. God is omniscient. The Holy Spirit is omnipresent. The Scriptures also teach that the Holy Spirit is omnipotent. In Isaiah 11:2, we read, "and the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD." The Holy Spirit is described as possessing the power which God alone possesses. He is, in fact, all-powerful, because God is all-powerful. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is God.

The Scriptures mention other divine attributes of the Holy Spirit as well. The Holy Spirit is the author of our sanctification (1 Peter 1:2). He seals us unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14), ensuring that the work God has begun in us will reach completion (Ephesians 4:30). It is through the Holy Spirit that the prophets and apostles spoke (1 Peter 1:11). Peter proclaims "[that] *prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Peter 1:21). Finally, there are those verses which speak of the work of the Spirit in uniting believers to Jesus Christ, enabling them to approach God without fear. The Holy Spirit is described by Paul as the "Spirit of prayer" (Romans 8:15-16). It is the Spirit who unites us to Christ and enables us to cry out to God. It is the Spirit's work to ensure that the saving benefits of Christ become ours.

Since the Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity and is true and eternal God, we must invoke, worship, and serve the blessed Holy Spirit, even as we do the Father and the Son. After all, even the most basic doctrines and practices of the Christian faith are overtly Trinitarian in nature. When we were baptized, we were baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:9). When we leave worship and hear the benediction—the good word of from God—that apostolic benediction is given in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14). Therefore, we must ascribe all glory, majesty and honor to the Holy Spirit, even as we do so to the other members of the Godhead. We pray to the Holy Spirit, we worship the Holy Spirit, we invoke the blessed Holy Spirit.

Well, there is much, much more we could say. But given the vast amount of biblical data (of which we have barely scratched the surface) revealing to us that there is one God in three persons, it is good and useful to every now and again survey what the Bible reveals about the Triune God. And in light of the great ignorance of and confusion about the self-revelation of the God of the Bible, it is important for us to confess with great boldness and with as much clarity as we can, that we worship the one true God in unity and the Godhead in Tri-unity. For God is one, yet he reveals himself to us in three distinct persons who are each God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

And this is a summary of the biblical witness to the Trinity.