

The Trinity: *Are there really three separate Persons in the one God?*

Interestingly, in clothing Himself with humanity God portrayed Himself as one Man and one Man only (Jesus is the express image of the invisible God), so what does that say about His very nature? The Church, during the time of Constantine and Athanasius in the fourth century A.D., decided to define God as a Trinity. It was, after much debate, agreed upon during one of the councils. Various official “creeds” include references to this doctrine. The Bible itself does make references to Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father all as God. And sometimes it references them simultaneously at particular events, such as the baptism of Jesus. That is, in a nutshell, the reason they arrived at this conclusion.

And yet the Old Testament declares in no uncertain terms that the Lord Our God is one God. The Jews were absolute monotheists, and religious Jews are to this day. Deuteronomy 6:4 says: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one!” and in Isaiah, “Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me...I am the Lord, and there is no other. Besides Me there is no God.” And even this: “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.’”¹

And it is also stated unequivocally in Exodus 3:14-15 that God has one name. He identifies Himself as “I AM,” the root meaning of Yahweh, which comprises four Hebrew characters represented in English by YHWH. (Ancient Hebrew did not signify its vowels with letters.) He tells Moses to say to the people, “The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.” Jesus claimed this name for Himself when He said to the Pharisees, “Before Abraham was, I AM.”² The Jews, recognizing His allusion to deity, picked up stones to kill him because they said He, being a man, was making Himself equal with God. It must be understood, then, that “Jesus” is merely the anglicized earthly name for the **one** God incarnate who saves us. Jesus means “Yahweh saves” or “Jehovah saves.” In Hebrew it is

¹ Isaiah 43:10b, 45:5 44:6

² John 8:58

pronounced “Yeshua” (Yah-SHOO-ah). Jesus is not *another* God. He is not a little god. He is not a demi-god. He is God incarnate.

The “Word” referred to in John 1:1 (“the Word was with God and the Word was God”) was the *manifestation* of God, in whatever form God chose, and appeared multiple times prior to the incarnation of God in Christ (e.g., the angel of the Lord, the burning bush, a pillar of fire, a pillar of cloud). The Word then, finally, became flesh and dwelt among us. Note that the Son did not become flesh. The Son did not exist as *the Son* before the incarnation. (“Today I have begotten you.”³) You will not find Him in the Old Testament, except prophetically. And then only three times, in Psalm 2:7,12, Isaiah 9:6 and Daniel 7:13,14. (But you will find the “Word” mentioned.⁴)

But since God is a spirit (invisible) He must have the means or capacity to manifest Himself in any time or place (or multiple places) when necessary to carry out His own purposes. In the fullness of time, this capacity of God to manifest Himself was clothed in human flesh. In the ultimate theophany⁵, God permanently ensconced Himself in His own creation, out of love for us, to redeem us, and out of a desire to be *with* us in a way that He could never have been before. Jesus' glorified body dwells now in heaven at the right hand of God the Father, and yet in some mysterious way, according to Isaiah 9:6,⁶ He is the Father. Or better said, He is a physical (human) embodiment or expression of the Father. For our benefit. Otherwise we could not fellowship with God in eternity. Certainly not with any sense of likeness and identification, for “He is a Spirit (the *Holy Spirit*), whom no man has seen nor can see.” Thus the Invisible became visible and the Unapproachable became approachable. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”⁷

³ Hebrews 1:5

⁴ Isaiah 55:8-11 states this: “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it....And it will be a memorial to the Lord, for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off.’”

⁵ A theological term meaning an appearance of God.

⁶ Isaiah 9:6 states: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Might God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” As shocking as it seems to be for people, scripture is very clear on this point.

⁷ Colossians 1:15

This one Scripture verse says it all:

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”⁸

This verse alone makes it clear that He is one God, and one Person, despite His appearing simultaneously in multiple forms. How many eternal Fathers are there? How many Mighty Gods?

So, in short, God couldn't make us Gods,⁹ but He *could* make Himself a man. And that is how He chose to get Himself a “wife,” a companion like Himself.¹⁰ He designed a body He could live with for eternity, and then made men in that image, with personhood, personality, emotions, will, intellect, spirit, in imitation of His own.

It is unfortunate that the “Church” decided to explain this phenomenon by describing God as three Persons in one God. A Trinity or Tri-Unity. This is not how we understand it (and the doctrine also may have pagan parallels). God is not three separate and co-eternal People. He declares this clearly in His word. “The Lord your God, the Lord is One.”¹¹

But what does that mean? One *what*? One committee? One group? One consortium? One substance? One nature? If it means *any* of these things, then there could be any number of “persons” in God, because “God” would be a term describing a class of beings rather than a *particular* Being. In The Revelation it talks about the seven spirits of God. Should those be capital “S” spirits then?

Let's look at it from another angle: I am made in the image of God. How many people am I?

⁸ Isaiah 9:6

⁹ God, by definition, is the Supreme Being. There can only be one *Supreme* person. Nor will He share His glory with another. (Isaiah 42:8) However, He has called us “gods,” because we are made in His image.

¹⁰ The Church of blood-washed believers is referred to as the Bride. See Revelations 22:17.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 6:4

If I say that I am a tripartite being, made up of spirit, soul and body, and that I am, as well, made in the image of God, does that make me three *people*? Or am I one person operating (manifesting myself) in three arenas, which sometimes conflict or disagree with each other?

For example:

- 1) my body (flesh) may desire, even demand, sex, but my will may overrule it because I have to go to work.
- 2) My mind (perceptions) may produce fearful emotions in response to a threatening stimulus, but I can *choose* with my will to give that perception an interpretation or explanation that will alleviate the fear.
- 3) My soul (heart) may crave diversion, but my spirit may bring it under subjection to the will of God.

All of these *manifestations* or expressions of my “self” can be operating during any particular event and can be having differing responses entirely. But they are all me, and I am one person.

In one sense, you could say that my spirit has a will (a “decider”), a mind (a way of perceiving), and emotions (the desire to please God); my soul has a will of its own (desires), a mind (a way of perceiving), and emotions (feelings); and my body has a will of its own (appetites), a way of perceiving (senses), and emotions (sensations, feelings). And I can let any one of them be in charge at any particular time. It’s up to me. Scripture calls me to have my spirit be in control.¹² But I may not if I am immature, or rebellious, or sufficiently driven by forces within or outside myself. I can even feel split or conflicted at times, *as if* I am *actually* two people with two completely separate wills. And I can, in fact, actually split off parts of my self and lock them in a room in my mind and never let them out.

In the same way, God is one Person, operating in three manifestations or expressions (at least), which Jesus called the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father could be said to correspond to the will or mind (or spirit) of man. The Holy Spirit could be said to correspond to the emotions or heart (or soul) of man. And the Son could be said to correspond to the flesh (physical body and appetites) of man. (This is not a

¹² Romans 8:12-14 says, “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”

doctrine, but simply an illustration. You might come up with a different way of allocating the roles. It's okay).

Jesus, then, as God manifested in the flesh, had to subject Himself to a higher law (“the Father is greater than I”) and obey the will of the Father even if He didn't *want to* in His flesh. In the same way, the flesh of man, his appetites, must bow to the higher rule of the spirit-controlled will or the whole life will run amok. The Holy Spirit is said to be a comforter, a counselor, who speaks to our hearts with conviction, warning, encouragement, and wisdom. He is a picture of the soul or heart of man.

Each of these manifestations of God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), then, has its own individual will, mind, and emotions, just as my flesh, soul and spirit do.¹³ But still that does not make them three People any more than it makes *me* three people. My flesh has desires of its own apart from my soul and spirit and often contrary to them. It has a will and sometimes is determined to exert it. And it has a way of viewing things or understanding what it sees, hears and feels. My emotions have a will, and a perspective that differ often from my mind. I may want to run into the arms of someone who is not good for me. But hopefully my mind will arrest me before I make a real mess of things.

In the same way, Jesus, a picture of our flesh, had to submit His individual will to the Father and the Holy Spirit, before He acted. He was not, however, a second God or a separate Person in the Godhead. He is God *manifested* in flesh.

We and God are different beings though we share His image. *We* are naturally localized, finite, and limited by our physical creation. God, however, is omnipresent and eternal and not limited to a specific locality. Therefore, in order to “appear” to men, He is required to take on a *form* that is localized. But that does not mean He is no longer omnipresent or that He is now limited.

¹³ This can most readily be seen in Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He sweated drops of blood in His battle to surrender to the will of the Father. He finally said, “Not My will, but Thine be done.”

The fact that we are made in God's image, then, is most fully demonstrated in the Incarnation and Redemption where we see God's spirit, soul and "body" (a body designed by God and for God) operating ultimately in complete harmony.¹⁴ We are spirit, soul and body and each respective part is able to express its own unique feelings, desires, perceptions and will. The goal of sanctification is that all of our "parts" would learn to conduct themselves in perfect harmony in submission to the will of God just as Jesus did. "He learned obedience through the things that He suffered."

That said, it is clear that God was permanently changed by the Redemption story.¹⁵ Just as John says in John 1:14: "And the Word *became* flesh and dwelt among us." This is why Jesus could say, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." When you're looking at Jesus, you're looking into the eyes of the eternal "I AM." Jesus was that divine Word *manifested* in flesh. (Scripture does not say, "In the beginning was the *Son* and the Son was with God and the Son was God" and "the Son became flesh and dwelt among us," even though this is what the Trinity doctrine teaches.) The coming or the begetting of the Son was an event in time.¹⁶ The gospels tell us how God played His cards in order to win back His creation. He became a man, a son, the Second Adam. (Check out **13 Theories**, #5 on this website for more on this subject.)

Did you ever ask yourself why Jesus said, "the Father is greater than I"? Or how about this one: "If anyone blasphemes the Son he will be forgiven; but blasphemy of the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this life nor in the life to come." Could it be that there is a hierarchical aspect to God that is reflected in our own nature? We are expected to live with our flesh under the control of our spirit, and our

¹⁴ In the Garden of Gethsemane, we see Jesus struggling with his human will, but ultimately submitting that will to the Father's will. "Not my will, but Thine be done."

¹⁵ When God says "I change not," He is referring specifically to His character and nature, because we have many examples of Him changing His mind, changing His course, changing His requirements, manifesting in different ways, speaking in different ways, etc.

¹⁶ When Scripture says "God sent His Son into the world," it does not mean that the Son had already been begotten in eternity past and was somehow turned back into a seed and put into Mary. That's absurd and it's not what Scripture teaches. If the Son was not co-existent with the Father as the "Word," He is not eternal and thus not God. But if He was an eternal Son, then He had no beginning and to call Him a "son" is meaningless, since "son" means "offspring" and by definition implies a beginning. Scripture says, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee." If today means anything, it means the sonship began at some point in time, specifically when the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and she conceived.

soul as well.¹⁷ Why? Because the flesh comprises our human appetites and those appetites are all about self: pleasure, satiety, freedom from pain. The flesh is inherently self-serving. This is why Paul could say “nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” and that “sin indwells me.” The soul, on the other hand, has the capacity to care for others, and so it must dominate the flesh, even though it, too, is corrupted by sin.

But the spirit (if regenerated) or the mind has the capacity¹⁸ to think independently of the flesh and soul, to be objective, to think of the higher virtues and to press the soul to practice those virtues.

In some sense, then, the Incarnation is a reflection of this reality. Jesus, a picture of our flesh, had to submit to the Father. The Holy Spirit (God’s omnipresence), who comforts, counsels and teaches us, is a picture of the sanctified soul in submission to the Spirit, and the Father, of course, is a picture of the sanctified Spirit. But they are not three “Persons,” even if one could say that there are three centers of consciousness, volition and activity in the “Godhead.” There is still only one Person, just as I am only one person.¹⁹ I am made in *His* image. God has mingled Himself with His creation and we who are being saved are being mingled with Deity.²⁰ He *lives* in us, we partake of His nature, and we will be glorified with Him, will be *like* Him. In a sense, God is creating a new race of beings who will be raised up to a status far above that of natural man. Above the angels. To rule and reign with Him. What a high calling! What a privilege! We are so dimly aware of what lies in store for those who trust in Him. God, help us to see our destiny and reach for it with all our hearts.

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¹⁷ Romans 8:5-8, 12-14 says: “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God...So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by Spirit of God, these are the Sons of God.”

¹⁸ We’re not saying the *unregenerate* mind will choose to act for the higher good. But mind has the *capacity* to evaluate and choose how to direct the will to act.

¹⁹ Someone may say here, “Why does Scripture tell us, then, to baptize in (or into) the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit?” Notice it does not say “names.” And note also Acts 2:38: “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of the Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” There is one name given among men by which we must be saved. That name? “Jehovah saves.” It is the one invisible God acting through the visible manifestation of Himself in human flesh.

²⁰ Hebrews 6:4: “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit...”