

A BIBLICAL OVERVIEW OF THE TRIUNE GOD

by Ed Marks

A Mystery

We must speak of the Triune God's being a mystery at the outset of this overview because this realization is crucial for our seeing the complete and balanced truth concerning the Divine Trinity as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Augustine once said, "To try to analyze the Triune God is like using a dipper to measure the ocean."

Martin Luther warned us not to approach the truth of the Divine Trinity by our natural reasoning:

For this article [the Trinity] is very slippery, first because of its subtlety, then also because of our weakness. It is, therefore, complete folly and a most perilous undertaking to wish to search into these things more subtly. For if we could do this, we would not need the Scriptures as a guide. No, neither would this Teacher and King be necessary for us. Moreover, those who neglect the Scriptures and approach such questions with confidence in their own mental power are the teachers of God, not His pupils....If reason disturbs you here and questions arise like those of the Turks: Are there, then, two gods? answer: There is only one God, and still there is the Father and the Son. How is this possible? Respond with humility: I do not know....Our reason is blind and unable to see such great things...shame on you, disgraceful reason! How can we miserable poor mortals comprehend this mystery? (Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, An Anthology, Vol. III, pp. 1387-1388).

We want to emphasize as Luther did that those who approach this matter with confidence in their own mental power are "the teachers of God, not His pupils." With this realization, we should simply accept and believe whatever the Scriptures reveal concerning the Divine Trinity and say amen to it, even if it does not conform to our natural understanding or human logic.

In relation to the mystery of the Divine Trinity, John Calvin said:

In considering the hidden mysteries of Scripture, we

should speculate soberly and with great moderation, cautiously guarding against allowing either our mind or our tongue to go a step beyond the confines of God's Word. For how can the human mind, which has not yet been able to ascertain of what the body of the sun consists, though it is daily presented to the eye, bring down the boundless essence of God to its little measure? Nay, how can it, under its

own guidance, penetrate to a knowledge of the substance of God while unable to understand its own? Wherefore, let us willingly leave to God the knowledge of Himself.... never to attempt to search after God anywhere but in His sacred Word, and never to speak or think of Him farther than we have it for our guide. But if the distinction of the Father, Son, and Spirit, subsisting in the one Godhead (certainly a subject of great difficulty), gives more trouble and annoyance to some intellects than is meet, let us remember that the human mind enters a labyrinth whenever it indulges its curiosity, and thus submit to be guided by the divine oracles, how much soever the mystery may be beyond our reach (*Institutes*, 1:13:21).

The things of life may be analyzed to a certain degree, but there is always an element of mystery with them. Doctors continually study the human anatomy and are able to quantify and account for many things, but they must also acknowledge the mystery of physical life. Who can fully fathom the mystery of the human brain with its neurological functions or the mystery of the human heart as it functions to spontaneously pump millions of gallons of blood in the course of a person's lifetime? Psychologists can try to help people with the limited knowledge they have about the soul and the mind of man, but who can fully fathom the mystery of human thought, feeling, and decision? Since the physical and psychological life have their realm of mystery, how much more the divine life.

The Bible reveals that the divine life is nothing less than the Triune God Himself. Life is God Himself in Christ as the Spirit. In John 5:26 the Lord Jesus said, "For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself." This shows that God the Father

is the source of life. Concerning God the Son, Christ, John 1:4 says, “In Him was life,” and He Himself declared, “I am...the life” (14:6a). Furthermore, God the Spirit is “the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2). This life is the un-created, eternal life—the life without beginning or ending. It is the indestructible, indissoluble life of the Triune God. In the New Jerusalem, God will be the light of life to illumine us (Rev. 22:5); Christ the Son will be the tree of life to supply us (v. 2); and the Spirit will be the river of water of life to satisfy us (v. 1). This life, which is a wonderful divine person, is a mystery that was meant not for us to fully understand, but for us to possess, experience, and enjoy. This is why the Lord Jesus declared, “I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly” (John 10:10b).

The Need of Revelation and Experience

The mystery of God (Rev. 10:7) is the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19). We need a revelation of such a mystery (Eph. 3:4). To have a mere doctrinal apprehension of the Triune God would be a tragedy. He wants us to see Him. This is why the apostle Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that the eyes of our heart would be enlightened with the divine light (Eph. 1:17-18). Our God also wants us to experience Him. This is why Paul bowed His knees to pray for the believers’ experience of the Triune God in Christ making His home in their hearts (3:14-19). Ultimately, Paul showed that the Triune God wants us to express Him so that He can display the unsearchable riches of Christ as His multifarious wisdom through the church to the whole universe (vv. 8-11).

We need not a mere mental apprehension of what the Bible says but a revelation of the mystery of the Triune God for our experience of Him. We need to know the truth, not the mere doctrine, the mere letter, concerning the Triune God. In John 18:37 the Lord told Pilate, “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, that I would testify to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears My voice.” Pilate then asked Him, “What is truth?” (v. 38). Pilate asked this question but did not get a verbal response from the Lord. Actually, the response to this question was the very One standing before Pilate, the One who said, “I am...the truth” (John 14:6). According to the divine revelation, the truth is the

reality of the Triune God. The Father’s word is truth (John 17:17), the Son is the truth (14:6a), and the Spirit is the truth (1 John 5:6). The Lord Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32). To know the truth is to know Christ, the Son, who is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9). He is the reality of what God is, and we need to know Him to experience His freeing power. The Triune God embodied in Christ is not a doctrine but a living reality, a living person, whom we can experience and enjoy.

The Triune God’s desire is not that His people would engage in endless doctrinal study or debate regarding Him. His desire is to impart Himself into His chosen people to be their life and everything. The Bible tells us that the entire Triune God has been dispensed into and dwells in the regenerated believers. The Father is in us (Eph. 4:6), the Son is in us (2 Cor. 13:5), and the Spirit is in us (Rom. 8:9). The Bible also reveals that the Triune God wants to be our spiritual drink so that we can be constituted with Him as our life supply to become His expression. The Father is the fountain of life, the source of life (Jer. 2:13); the Son is the spring of life, the manifestation and expression of life (John 4:14); and the Spirit is the flow of life, the circulation and application of life (Rev. 22:1), to be our all-inclusive, spiritual supply. The Lord Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37). Then Paul said that we “were all given to drink one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13).

When Paul wrote concerning the Triune God, he was not putting forth a doctrinal exegesis. He was speaking of the believers subjectively experiencing the operation of the Triune God. Ephesians 1 shows us God the Father’s choosing and predestinating us to be His holy sons for His sonship (vv. 3-6), God the Son’s redeeming us to bring all things in the universe under His headship (vv. 7-12), and God the Spirit’s sealing us and becoming our pledge so that God can fully possess us as His inheritance and we can fully possess God as our inheritance (vv. 13-14). This outflow of the Divine Trinity produces the Body of Christ, as the fullness of Christ (vv. 22-23).

In Ephesians 3 Paul said that he bowed his knees to the Father that the believers would be strengthened through His Spirit into the inner man so that Christ (the Son) might make His home in their hearts; this results in our

being filled unto the fullness of the Triune God (vv. 14-19). All three of the Divine Trinity were put into operation through the apostle's prayer. We may say that Paul was the "operator" of the "machine" of the Triune God, and his prayer was the divine switch that turned on this "machine" so that Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God, could build Himself into the believers' hearts.

At the conclusion of Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians, he blessed the Corinthians with the Divine Trinity by saying, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (13:14). The love of God is the source, the grace of Christ is the manifestation and outflow of the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is the transmission of the grace of Christ with the love of God for our experience and enjoyment of the Divine Trinity.

As a genuine priest of the gospel of God (Rom. 15:16), Paul's duty was to bless God's people with God Himself in His Divine Trinity. This was also the function of the priests in the Old Testament as seen in the Lord's charge to Moses in Numbers 6: "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them" (vv. 22-27, KJV). The priests were to bless the children of Israel in a threefold way, which was to bless them with the entire Divine Trinity. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee" is the blessing of being kept in God the Father's name, His divine person, and being kept outside of the evil one (John 17:11, 15). "The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee" is the blessing of God the Son as the rising sun from on high for us to receive Him as grace upon grace (Luke 1:78; John 1:16). "The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" is the blessing of God the Spirit as the living presence of the Triune God to give us the peace that surpasses all understanding (John 20:21-22; Phil. 4:7). The Bible reveals that God is triune for the dispensing, distributing, of Himself with all of His riches into His chosen and

redeemed people so that they can be His universal expression as the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. With this understanding let us consider what our Triune God says concerning Himself in His Holy Scriptures.

God Being Only One, yet Having the Aspect of Three

The Bible reveals that there is only one God. First Corinthians 8:4b says, "There is no God but one." Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (KJV). Isaiah 45:5 and 6 say, "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me...that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is none else" (KJV). Verse 22 says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (KJV). Psalm 86:10b says, "Thou art God alone" (KJV). These are just a few quotations from the Scriptures which show that we have only one God. This is the clear and definite revelation from the Scriptures and a fundamental principle.

Although there is only one God, the Bible also reveals that this one God is plural, that He has the aspect of three. Genesis 1:1 says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The Hebrew word for *God* in this verse is *Elohim*, which is plural in number. Genesis 1:26 records that God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The words *us* and *our* show that the one God has a plural aspect. In Isaiah 6:8 God said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" In this verse *I* is *us*, and *us* is *I*. These verses shows us that God is not merely singular or merely plural. The God revealed in the Bible is "uni-plural."

**The Bible reveals
that God is triune for
the dispensing,
distributing, of Himself
with all of His riches
into His chosen and
redeemed people
so that they can be His
universal expression
as the Body of Christ,
which consummates
in the New Jerusalem.**

says in a note to this verse in his reference Bible: "The word is in the singular, the 'name,' not names. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the final name of the one true God." The name is equivalent to the person, and the name in Matthew 28:19 is the sum total of all that the Triune God is in His Divine Being. We immerse people *into* this wonderful name. The word *into* indicates that we bring them into a spiritual, mystical, and organic union with the Divine Trinity. (This is corroborated by Paul's

word in Romans 6:3-5 which indicates that our baptism was our being grafted into Christ and into His death.)

There is one name for God, yet this God is three. We may ask, "This God is three what?" Many Christians are accustomed to saying that God is in three persons. But we must be careful when using the term *persons*. Griffith Thomas, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, said the following in his book *The Principles of Theology*:

The term "Person" is also sometimes objected to. Like all human language, it is liable to be accused of inadequacy and even positive error. It certainly must not be pressed too far, or it will lead to Tritheism....While we are compelled to use terms like "substance" and "Person," we are not to think of them as identical with what we understand as human substance and personality....The truth and experience of the Trinity is not dependent upon the theological terminology (p. 31).

Our God is the three-one God. He is three yet one, and one yet three. The three are distinct, but they are not separate because there is only one God.

The Eternal Coexistence of the Divine Trinity

The Bible unveils the eternal coexistence of the Divine Trinity. All three of the Godhead are God but not three Gods. They are the three-one God. The belief in three Gods is the heresy of tritheism. We believers are not polytheists but monotheists. Our monotheistic view, however, is of a "uniplural" God, a God who is three-one.

The Father is God. Many passages in the New Testament speak of God the Father. In Ephesians 1:17 Paul speaks of "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory"; in 4:6 of the "one God and Father of all"; and in 1 Corinthians 1:3 of "God our Father." Peter speaks in his first Epistle of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3).

The Son is also God. We have to be clear that Jesus, the Son of God, is God. Hebrews 1:8 says, "But of the Son, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.'" Romans 9:5 declares that Christ is "God blessed forever." John 1:1 and 14 reveal that Christ is the eternal Word, the very God, who became flesh and dwelt among men.

In John 20:27 the Lord Jesus appeared in resurrection to Thomas, the doubting one, and charged him, "Do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas then said to the resurrected Jesus: "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28). Jesus responded to Thomas by saying, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (v. 29). Because Thomas saw the Lord Jesus, he believed that Jesus is God. We are blessed,

because even though we have not seen Him with our physical eyes, we believe that Jesus, the glorified and resurrected Man, is our God!

When the unbelieving Jews were virulently debating with the Lord Jesus in John 8, He revealed His eternal deity. "The Jews then said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I am. So they picked up stones to throw at Him" (vv. 57-59). According to correct grammar, the Lord should have said, "Before Abraham came into being, I was." The Lord, of course, was not caring for grammar but for the revelation of His eternal deity as the great I Am, who revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 3. "And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you....The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (vv. 13-15, KJV). In John 8 Jesus was declaring that He is the very God, the eternal I Am. This is why the Jews picked up stones to throw at Him. They thought His declaration was blasphemy. He also said, "Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins" (v. 24), and "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am" (v. 28).

The I Am in Exodus 3 is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the Triune God. The God of Abraham refers to "God the Father calling man, justifying man, and equipping man to live by faith and live in fellowship with Him" as seen in His dealings with Abraham (Gen. 12:1; 15:6; ch. 17; ch. 18; 19:29; 21:1-13; 22:1-18). The God of Isaac refers to "God the Son blessing man with the inheritance of all His riches, with a life of the enjoyment of His abundance, and with a life in peace" as seen in His dealings with Isaac (Gen. 25:5; 26:3-4, 12-33). The God of Jacob refers to "God the Spirit working in all things for the good of His lovers, transforming man, and making man mature in the divine life that man may be able to bless all the people, to rule over all the earth, and to satisfy all the people with God the Son as the life supply" (Gen. 27:41; 28:1—35:10; chs. 37, 39—49; Rom. 8:28-29)—Witness Lee, *The History of God in His Union with Man*, p. 136. Colossians 2:9 says that in Christ "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." He is the embodiment of the Triune God as the great I Am, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

A divine title for God in the Old Testament is *Jehovah* (Gen. 2:4), which is used in God's relationship with man.

This title literally means “He that is who He is; therefore, the eternal I Am.” In Jehovah’s being, there is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. As Jehovah, He is the threefold yet unique God. The name *Jesus* means “Jehovah the Savior” or “the salvation of Jehovah.” We declare to all that Jesus is Jehovah! He is Emmanuel, God with us (Matt. 1:21, 23).

The Bible also reveals that the Spirit is God. In Acts 5 Peter told Ananias that he had lied to the Holy Spirit (v. 3). Then he said, “You have not lied to men but to God” (v. 4). This shows that the Spirit is God.

The Bible unveils that the Father is eternal (Isa. 9:6), the Son is eternal (Heb. 1:11-12; 7:3), and the Spirit is eternal (Heb. 9:14). The psalmist said, “From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (90:2, KJV). The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are, from eternity past to eternity future, the infinite Triune God. The Bible clearly shows that the three of the Godhead coexist at the same time and under the same conditions. In Matthew 3 we see that when Jesus, the Son of God, was baptized, the Spirit of God descended upon Him as a dove and the Father’s voice from the heavens said, “This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight” (3:16-17). The Son was in the water, the Spirit was descending on Him as a dove, and the Father spoke from the heavens, showing the simultaneous coexistence of the three of the Godhead.

In John 14:16-17 Jesus, the Son, said, “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of reality....” Here the Son asks the Father to give us the Spirit. In Ephesians 3:14-17 Paul prays to the Father that He would strengthen us through His Spirit into the inner man so that the Son, Christ, can make His home in our hearts. Also, in 2 Corinthians 13:14 Paul blesses the believers with the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. These passages from the Scripture reveal the simultaneous coexistence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Coinhering and Being Inseparable

We must also realize that the three of the Godhead are distinct but inseparable. It is wrong to say that they are separate, for the three are one God. The Father, Son, and Spirit coinhere. The word *coinhere* means to mutually

indwell or mutually interpenetrate one another. This means that the Father is in the Son and in the Spirit; the Son is in the Father and in the Spirit; and the Spirit is in the Father and in the Son. Thus, while the three of the Godhead simultaneously coexist, they also exist in one another. The Father, Son, and Spirit are eternally coexistent and coinherent.

In John 14:10-11 the Lord Jesus said, “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.” Then in 8:29 He said, “He [the Father] who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone.” These verses show that the Son and the Father indwell each other and are inseparable. Matthew 1:18 and 20 show that Jesus was begotten of the Holy Spirit. This means that He had the Holy Spirit in His essence from His birth. Whatever He did in His human living was by the Spirit (Luke 4:1; Matt. 12:28).

The three
of the Godhead
are distinct but
inseparable.
It is wrong
to say that they
are separate,
for the three
are one God.

come in the person of the Father. The Son’s coming was the Father’s coming.

In John 15:26 the Lord Jesus said, “When the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of reality, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify concerning Me.” Again the word *from* in this verse is *para* and has the sense of *from with* in Greek. The Son sends the Spirit to us *from with* the Father, and the Spirit proceeds *from with* the Father. Thus, the Spirit comes not only from the Father but also with the Father, showing that the Spirit and the Father are inseparable. Elsewhere, the Lord told the disciples that when they would be delivered up, they should not be anxious about what to speak. He told them, “For you are not the ones speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is the One speaking in you” (Matt. 10:20). The Spirit who dwells in us is the Spirit of our Father.

In John 14:26 the Lord said, “The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name.” Here the Father sends the Spirit in the Son’s name. The name

indicates the person, so this indicates that the Father sent the Spirit as the Son. The phrase *in My name* in 14:26 may also modify the Father's sending. In other words, the Father in the Son's name sent the Spirit. Thus, the Father as the Son sent the Spirit as the Son. In John 14:26 it is the Father who sends the Spirit, but in 15:26 the Son sends the Spirit; so who sent the Spirit, the Father or the Son? Again, these verses show us that the Father as the Son sent the Spirit as the Son, and the Spirit is sent with the Father. This shows us the inseparability of the three of the Godhead.

This is also confirmed by Zechariah 2:8-11 (KJV), which shows that the Lord of hosts sends Himself to meet the need of His people. Verse 8 says, "For thus saith the Lord of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations..." This verse shows that someone ("he") sent the Lord of hosts. Who is this "he"? Eventually, in verse 9 the Lord of hosts says, "The Lord of hosts hath sent me." Also, in verse 11 the Lord of hosts says, "The Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee."

In considering the inseparability of the three of the Godhead, we would point out that in the book of Revelation, the Spirit, the third of the Divine Trinity, is revealed as the seven Spirits of God (1:4). In essence and existence God's Spirit is one, but in functioning to rescue the church from degradation the Spirit is sevenfold. John points out that these seven Spirits are the seven lamps of fire, the lamps of the lampstand (4:5). The lampstand is one in its essence, its existence, like the one Spirit, but it is seven lamps in its shining function. John says that these seven Spirits, signified by the seven lamps, are also the seven eyes of the Lamb, Christ (5:6). This shows that the Spirit is inseparable from Christ because the Spirit is the eyes of Christ.

The mysterious inseparability and coinherence of the Father, Son, and Spirit are marvelously related to us. In John 14:20 the Lord told the disciples that on the day of His resurrection, they would know "that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." The Son dwells in the Father, the disciples dwell

in the Son, and the Son dwells in the disciples. Thus, the disciples coinhere with the Triune God in His coinherence. How marvelous!

Furthermore, before His death and resurrection the Lord prayed, "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us....I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one...." (John 17:21, 23). The Son prayed that all of us would be one, but what kind of oneness is this? It is the oneness of the Divine Trinity, a oneness of coinherence. We are all to be one, but how? The Lord prayed, "That they may be one, even as We are one" (v. 22). We are to be one as the Triune God is one. The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father, and we are in the divine "Us," the uni-plural God, the Triune God, enjoying a oneness of divine coinherence. The Triune God is in us and we are in Him to be perfected into one. This shows that the only real and eternal oneness in this universe is the oneness of the Divine Trinity, a oneness of coinherence which was meant for the believers' participation. This is the great mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16a), the great mystery of the spiritual union of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32), the great mystery of the coinhering Triune God coinhering with His believers for His glory, His radiant expression.

**The Lord prayed
"That they may be one,
even as We are one."**

**We are to be one
as the Triune God
is one.**

**The Father is
in the Son,
the Son is
in the Father,
and we are
in the divine "Us,"
the uni-plural God,
the Triune God,
enjoying a oneness of
divine coinherence.**

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit Being One

The Son is one with the Father to such an extent that the Bible tells us that He is called "the everlasting Father." Isaiah 9:6 says, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...and his name shall be called...the mighty God, the everlasting Father" (KJV). The child born, Jesus, is the mighty God, and the son given, Jesus, is the everlasting Father. We should simply accept what Isaiah 9:6 says without trying to twist it to fit our natural concept, finite limited mentality, or traditional theology.

In John 14 the Lord said, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and henceforth you know Him and have seen Him" (v. 7). Then Philip asked the Lord Jesus to show the Father to him and the other disciples. The Lord responded by saying, "Have I been

so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how is it that you say, Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?" (vv. 9-10a). In other words, to know the Son is to know the Father, and to see the Son is to see the Father because the Son is the Father. The Son and the Father coinhere. Thus, the Lord declares, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). During the Lord's earthly ministry, He carried out the Father's work (John 4:34; 17:4), spoke the Father's word (14:10, 24), did the Father's will (5:30), and sought the Father's glory (7:18). The Son is one with the Father, coinheres with the Father, and expresses the Father. In this sense, the Bible identifies the Son with the Father. His name is the everlasting Father.

First Corinthians 15:45 says "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." The last Adam was the incarnate Christ. First, Christ as the Word became flesh (John 1:14). Then in resurrection this incarnate Christ became a life-giving Spirit. To say that this life-giving Spirit is not the Holy Spirit is wrong, because there is not another Spirit who gives life besides the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Spirit who gives life (2 Cor. 3:6b).

This is confirmed by the Lord in John 14. He told the disciples that He would ask the Father to give them another Comforter, even the Spirit of reality. Then the Lord said in verse 17, "He abides with you and shall be in you." In verse 18 the Lord continued: "I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you." This shows that "He," the Spirit of reality in verse 17, is the "I," the Son, in verse 18. The Son would come as the Spirit to abide in the disciples. In verse 20 the Lord said that on the day of resurrection the disciples would know "that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." In verse 17 the Spirit of reality would be in the disciples, and in verse 20 the Lord Jesus would be in them. This is the Son as the Spirit coming to dwell in them.

The essential Trinity is God in His existence, in His being. The Bible reveals that God is three-one. He is eternally coexisting and coinhering without any succession.

The economical Trinity is "God coming out" to accomplish His eternal purpose.

In 2 Corinthians 3:17 Paul declares, "The Lord is the Spirit." Who is the Lord in this verse? In the same Epistle, just six verses later, Paul said, "We...preach...Christ Jesus as Lord." This reveals clearly that Christ Jesus, the Lord, is the Spirit. John Nelson Darby in his New Translation places verses 7 through 16 of 2 Corinthians 3 in parentheses. This would indicate that verse 17 may be regarded as a direct continuation of verse 6. The end of verse 6 and the beginning of verse 17 would read in this way: "The Spirit gives life....and the Lord is the Spirit." Christ the Lord is the Spirit who gives life, the life-giving Spirit. Regarding these verses, Henry Alford said:

"The Lord of ver. 16, is the *Spirit*...which *giveth life*, ver. 6: meaning, '*the Lord*,' as here spoken of, '*Christ*,' '*is the Spirit*,' is identical with the *Holy Spirit*...*Christ*, here, *is the Spirit of Christ*" (*The New Testament for English Readers*, Moody Press, p. 1105).

The Essential and Economical Aspects of the Trinity

In order for us to have a full and balanced view of the truth concerning the Divine Trinity, we must see His essential and economical aspects. The essential Trinity is "God in Himself," God in His existence, God in His being. The Bible reveals that God is three-one. He is three yet one God, and one God yet three. He is eternally coexisting and coinhering without any succession.

The economical Trinity is "God coming out" to accomplish His eternal purpose. The Greek word for *economy* is *oikonomia* and is composed of two words: *oikos* meaning "house" or "household" and *nomos* meaning "law." The word *oikonomia* is used by Paul in his Epistles a number of times (Eph. 1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4; 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25). God's economy is His household law, His household administration, His divine arrangement, His divine plan, to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into man. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit, who eternally coexist and coinhere,

become the three successive stages in God's economy for the accomplishment of His plan. The Father is embodied in the Son, the Son is realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit as the reality of the Son, who is the embodiment of the Father, enters into man. The Father planned, the Son accomplished what the Father planned, and the Spirit applies what the Son has accomplished according to the Father's plan. This is the economical Trinity, the Triune God carrying out His economy.

Ephesians 1:3 through 6 reveal that the Father chose us to be holy and predestinated us unto sonship before the foundation of the world in eternity past. Verses 7 through 12 show that the Son worked in time to accomplish redemption to bring us under His headship. Verses 13 and 14 show that the Spirit now works to apply what God is to us as a living seal and a pledge to be our foretaste of enjoyment in this age. Thus, in the Triune God's economical move to accomplish His plan, the Father takes the first step, the Son takes the second step, and the Spirit takes the third step. God's economy to dispense Himself into man is thus carried out from the Father, in the Son, and through the Spirit.

We need to realize, however, that at each stage of God's economical work, the essential nature of the Trinity in His eternal coexistence and coinherence is not compromised. The three of the Godhead coexist in their coinherence, so they are distinct but not separate. When the Father purposed and planned to accomplish His heart's desire economically, He did this in Christ the Son (Eph. 1:4-5) and with the Spirit. When the Son worked to accomplish the Father's plan economically, He did this with the Father (John 8:29; 16:32) and by the Spirit (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20; 12:28). When the Spirit applies what the Son accomplished, He does this as the Son and with the Father (John 14:26; 15:26; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17). Thus, while God is working to carry out His economy, His essential being in His eternal coexistence and coinherence remains intact and is not jeopardized.

Saved from Heretical Extremes

This realization saves us from the heresy of modalism, which takes the aspect of the economical Trinity to an extreme. This teaching denies the fact that the Father, Son, and Spirit are eternally coexistent. Instead, each of the three—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—is considered a temporary or successive mode or form of activity by which God manifests Himself in various roles for the carrying out of His plan. In modalistic teaching God's being triune does not relate to His

inner being but only to the ways in which God reveals and manifests Himself according to the circumstances. It further says that God was there as the Father, being the Creator, but when God was incarnated as the Son, the Father ceased to exist. Also, in modalism the revelation of the Son ended with His ascension, and the Spirit is now going on in His work of regeneration and sanctification. Thus, the Father and the Son no longer exist. It is evident that modalism presses the side of God being one to an extreme and misunderstands and misappropriates the side of God being three. This is a great heresy, and we repudiate it!

On the other hand, we need to avoid the heretical extreme of tritheism, the teaching that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three distinct and separate Gods. According to tritheism the Father is one God, the Son is another God, and the Spirit is a third God. Tritheism presses the side of God being three to an extreme and denies the unique oneness of the Triune God. We repudiate this great heresy!

However, many Christians unconsciously have a tritheistic concept of God when they say that the three of the Godhead are not only distinct but also *separate*. To say that the Father, Son, and Spirit are separate is blatantly false and leads to tritheism—a belief in three separate Gods.

The biblical revelation of the Triune God is not at the extremes of modalism or tritheism, but is balanced and in the center. In order to be balanced, we must believe in the twofoldness of the truth concerning the Divine Trinity. God is one being three, and three being one. We should simply accept both sides of this truth.

Many of the church Fathers faithfully shared the balanced truth of the Divine Trinity. But depending on which aspect of the Trinity one is emphasizing at the time, one may sound either modalistic or tritheistic. Concerning the church Fathers' attempt to define the Divine Trinity Philip Schaff said:

Many passages of the Nicene Fathers have unquestionably a tritheistic sound, but are neutralized by others which by themselves

The biblical
revelation
of the Triune God
is not
at the extremes
of modalism
or tritheism,
but is balanced
and in the center.



In order to be
balanced, we must
believe in
the twofoldness
of the truth
concerning the
Divine Trinity.

may bear a Sabellian [modalistic] construction; so that their position must be regarded as midway between these two extremes (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. III, Erdman's, p. 674).

Some accused Augustine of being a modalist because he could not reconcile the aspects of the mystery of God being one yet three and three yet one. He said:

Our Greek friends have spoken of one essence, three substances; but the Latins of one essence or substance, three persons...provided that what is said is understood only in a mystery, such a way of speaking was sufficient....Why do we not also say three Gods?...Or else, since on account of their ineffable union these three are together one God, why not also one person; so that we could not say three persons, although we call each a person singly, just as we can not say three Gods, although we call each singly God, whether the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Is it because Scripture does not say three Gods? But neither do we find that Scripture anywhere mentions three Persons. (Augustine, "On the Trinity," *Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st Series, Vol. III. pp. 109-110).

The Triune God is an unfathomable mystery. This is why we must believe what the Bible has to say in its entirety about the Triune God and accept it by faith. We cannot fully reconcile the mystery of God being one yet three and three yet one. We cannot fully reconcile His essential and economical aspects. On the one hand, the Father is in the Son, but on the other hand, the Son prays to the Father. The Son who prays and the Father who listens are one. Andrew Murray once said that the best prayer is one which is prayed by the Christ who dwells within us to the Christ who sits on the throne in heaven. In John 3:13 the Lord Jesus said, "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven." The Lord as the One who descended out of heaven was also the One who was in heaven at the same time. Romans 8:34 says that Christ is sitting on the right hand of God, but verse 10 says that Christ is in us. How can all this be? This is the mystery of the omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent three-one God.

Above all, we must realize that God is triune for the dispensing of Himself as life into His chosen and redeemed people, thus, becoming their life and everything. The Father is the source (John 13:3); the Son is the expression of the Father (John 1:1, 18); and the Spirit is the application of the Triune God to man. God is triune essentially so that He can function to carry out His plan economically.

First Peter 1:2 shows the working of the Divine Trinity to redeem fallen man. This verse speaks of our being chosen

according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. After being redeemed, we are to be blessed with the Divine Trinity by having the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with us all (2 Cor. 13:14). In the New Jerusalem, we will enjoy the river of water of life (the Spirit) proceeding out of the throne of God (the Father) and of the Lamb (the redeeming Son) for eternity (Rev. 22:1).

The entire Bible may be considered the autobiography of the Triune God. The Bible is the life-story of the Triune God spoken from God by men borne by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). This book gives us an account of the Triune God traveling from eternity past through the bridge of

*The entire
Bible
may be
considered the
autobiography
of the
Triune God.*

time to eternity future to accomplish His heart's desire. It tells us the story of the Triune God coming out of eternity into time, with His divinity into humanity, to pass through a marvelous human living, an all-inclusive death, and an all-surpassing resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit to enter into man for the producing and building up of the Body of Christ which eventually consummates in the New Jerusalem in eternity future. Once the Triune God enters into us to become our life, His autobiography begins to become our biography. After regenerating us, He proceeds to sanctify us with His nature, transform us with His life, conform us to His image, and eventually glorify us with His glory so that we become exactly like Him in life, nature, and appearance, but not in the Godhead, for His eternal expression in the New Jerusalem (1 John 3:2). This is the consummation of the biblical revelation of the Triune God.