

THE TRIUNE GOD

BY WITNESS LEE

The presentation of the Triune God's desire to incorporate God and man in His economy to produce the corporate God in the first three articles of this issue is based on an orthodox understanding of the Triune God as presented in this article. It is helpful to proclaim this foundational understanding in order to align the revelation of the high peak of God's economy with the historical development of the doctrine of the Triune God.

The Lord's recovery is the recovery of the divine truths as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, the holy Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). The first crucial point of the major items of the Lord's recovery today is the divine revelation concerning the Triune God. Among Christians the truth concerning the Triune God has been lost, missed, misunderstood, misinterpreted, and wrongly taught. Thus, there is the need to recover this truth.

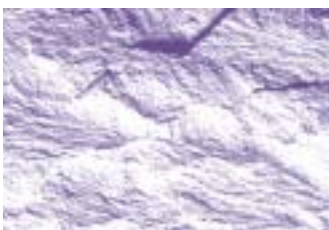
Two Basic Divine Titles: *Elohim* in God's Creation and *Jehovah* in God's Relationship with Man

The first time the Bible mentions God is in Genesis 1:1, which says, "In the beginning God created..." The word for *God* here in Hebrew is *Elohim*. In Genesis 1:1 the subject *Elohim*, used in relation to God's creation, is plural in number whereas the verb *created* is singular. The plurality of the word *Elohim* implies the Divine Trinity. Furthermore, Genesis 1:26, 3:22, and 11:7 all mention God, using the plural pronouns *Us* and *Our*. In Isaiah 6:8 God said, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?" *I* is singular, but *Us* is plural, showing that God is "uni-plural." In John 17 the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, "That they may be one, even as We are one" (vv. 22, 11). He also prayed, "That they also may be in Us" (v. 21). God the Father and God the Son are "Us"; they are plural, yet they are one (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). The title *Elohim*, denoting the unique yet triune God, is used more than two thousand five hundred times in the Old Testament.

Jehovah is another divine title of God (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." As *Jehovah*, He is the One who was in the past, who is in the present, and who is to come in the future. Revelation 1:4 speaks of "Him who is and who was and who is coming." For the past He was; for the present He is; and for the future He is to be. He is the great I Am.

The Lord Jesus told the Pharisees, "Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). Eventually, they asked Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus responded, "Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I am" (vv. 57-58). The Lord as the great I Am is the eternal, ever-existing God. Hence, He was before Abraham and is greater than Abraham (v. 53). The name *Jesus* means "Jehovah the Savior." Jesus is *Jehovah*, the eternal I Am.

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When Moses was called by God, Moses asked God what His name was. Exodus 3:13 and 14 say, “Then Moses said to God, If I come to the children of Israel and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they say to me, What is His name? what shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM. And He said, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.” As the I Am, He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (v. 15). In His person there is the Father like Abraham, the Son like Isaac, and the Spirit like Jacob. As Jehovah, He is the threefold yet one unique God. The title *Jehovah*, denoting the Triune God as the One who is not only eternally existing but also eternally being, is used more than seven thousand times in the Old Testament.

The Divine Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—in the Distribution of God into His Chosen People

According to the entire revelation of the sixty-six books of the Bible, the Divine Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—is for God’s dispensing, that is, for the distribution of God into His chosen people. God’s desire with His strong intention is to dispense Himself into His chosen people as their life, as their life supply, and as their everything. To carry out this dispensing He needs to be triune.

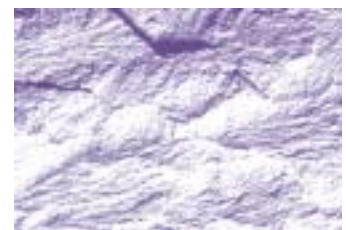
The Father as the origin is the fountain; the Son as the expression is the spring; and the Spirit as the transmission is the flow. The Spirit as the flow is the reaching, the application, of the Triune God for the distribution of Himself into His chosen people. A fountain is the origin, the source, of a stream, or river; a spring is the emergence, the expression, of the fountain; and the stream or river is the flow. In Jeremiah 2:13 God refers to Himself as the fountain of living waters; in John 4:14 Christ is the fountain of water that springs up in the believers into eternal life; and in Revelation 22:1 the Spirit is the flow, the river of water of life. The Father is the fountain, the source, and the Son is the spring as the course to express the source. This course, this spring, issues in a flow, which is the Spirit as the reaching, the application, of the Triune God. This shows that God is triune to dispense, or distribute, Himself into His chosen people.

Second Corinthians 13:14 says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Here three things are mentioned: grace, love, and fellowship. This sets forth the reason why God is triune; it is thus that He can dispense Himself into us, work Himself into us for us to enjoy, and be our all. The love of God, that is, the love of the Father, is the source. The grace of Christ, that is, the grace of the Son, is the flowing out of the love of the Father. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is the flowing into us of the grace of the Son with the love of the Father for us to enjoy. This is for our experience and enjoyment of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are not three different things but three stages of one thing for us to possess and enjoy. Likewise, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not three separate Gods but three stages of one God for us to possess and enjoy. Second Corinthians 13:14 is strong proof that the Divine Trinity is not for the doctrinal understanding of systematic theology but for the dispensing, the distributing, of God Himself into His chosen people.

The Eternal Coexistence of the Divine Trinity

We must be clear that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist simultaneously from eternity to eternity. Undoubtedly, the Father is God (1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:17), the Son is God (Heb. 1:8; John 1:1; Rom. 9:5), and the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4). They are not three Gods, but one. The Scriptures tell us clearly and definitely that God is only one (1 Cor. 8:4; Isa. 45:5; Psa. 86:10), yet He is also three—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. He is the Triune God.

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The Father is eternal (Isa. 9:6), the Son is eternal (Heb. 1:12; 7:3), the Spirit is eternal (Heb. 9:14), and they coexist simultaneously. John 14:16-17 says, “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.” In these two verses the Son says that He will pray to the Father that the Father may send the Spirit. Hence, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit exist together at the same time. In Ephesians 3:14-17 Paul prays that the Father would grant us to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into our inner man, that Christ may make His home in our hearts. In this passage we have the Father, the Spirit, and Christ the Son, showing again that all three exist together at the same time. We have already mentioned 2 Corinthians 13:14, which speaks of the grace of Christ the Son, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, showing the coexistence of the three of the Divine Trinity.

The Eternal Coinherence of the Divine Trinity

The relationship among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is not only that they simultaneously coexist but also that they mutually indwell one another. The Father exists in the Son and the Spirit; the Son exists in the Father and the Spirit; and the Spirit exists in the Father and the Son. This mutual indwelling among the three of the Godhead is called *coinherence*. In John 14:10-11 the Lord Jesus said, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; but if not, believe because of the works themselves.” Here we have not only the coexistence of the Father and the Son but also their coinherence. The three of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—are both coexistent and coinherent.

The Essential Trinity

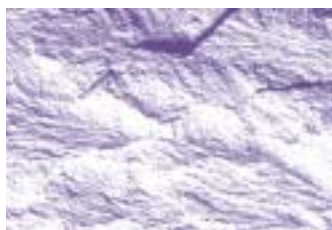
The essential Trinity refers to the essence of the Triune God for His existence. In His essence, God is one, the one unique God (Isa. 45:18; 1 Cor. 8:6). In the essential Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist and coinhere at the same time and in the same way with no succession. There is no first, second, or third.

The Economical Trinity

Essentially, God is one, but economically He is three—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). In God’s plan, God’s administrative arrangement, God’s economy, the Father takes the first step, the Son takes the second step, and the Spirit takes the third step. The Father purposed (Eph. 1:4-6), the Son accomplished (vv. 7-12), and the Spirit applies what the Son accomplished according to the Father’s purpose (vv. 13-14). This is a successive procedure or a succession in God’s economy to carry out His eternal purpose. Whereas the essential Trinity refers to the essence of the Triune God for His existence, the economical Trinity refers to His plan for His move. There is the need of the existence of the Divine Trinity, and there is also the need of the plan of the Divine Trinity.

The Father accomplished the first step of His plan, His economy, by working to choose and predestinate us, but He did this in Christ the Son (Eph. 1:4-5) and with the Spirit. After this plan was made, the Son came to accomplish this plan, but He did this with the Father (John 8:29; 16:32) and by the Spirit (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20; 12:28). Now that the Son has accomplished all that the Father has planned, the Spirit comes in the third step to apply all that He accomplished, but He does this as the Son and with the Father (John 14:26; 15:26; 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). In this way, while the divine economy of the Divine Trinity is being carried out, the divine existence of the Divine Trinity, His eternal coexistence and coinherence, remains intact and is not jeopardized.

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The Three of the Divine Trinity Being Distinct but Not Separate

Among the three of the Divine Trinity, there is distinction but no separation. The Father is distinct from the Son, the Son is distinct from the Spirit, and the Spirit is distinct from the Son and the Father. But we cannot say that they are separate, because they coinhere; that is, they live within one another. In their coexistence the three of the Godhead are distinct, but their coinherence makes them one. They coexist in their coinherence, so they are distinct but not separate.

The Son never did anything apart from the Father (John 5:19). He came in the Father's name (v. 43) and with the Father (8:29; 16:32). He is in the Father and the Father is in Him (14:10-11). Furthermore, He was begotten of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20) and did everything by the Spirit (Luke 4:1, 18; Matt. 12:28).

The Holy Scriptures also reveal that the Son is the Father. Isaiah 9:6 says, "A child is born to us, / A son is given to us... / And His name will be called... / Mighty God, / Eternal Father." The Lord Jesus as the child born in Bethlehem is the Mighty God, and the Lord Jesus who is the Son is also the Eternal Father.

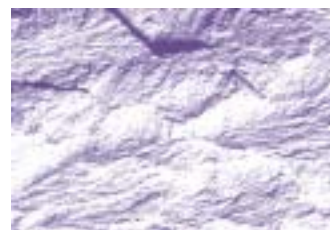
John 14:7-11 says, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and henceforth you know Him and have seen Him. Philip said to Him, Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us. Jesus said to him, Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has 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? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; but if not, believe because of the works themselves." In these verses the Lord clearly reveals to us the mystery that He and the Father are one (10:30). He is in the Father and the Father is in Him; when He speaks, it is the Father who works; when men see Him, they see the Father; when they know Him, they know the Father, because He is the Father.

The Scriptures also reveal that the Son (the last Adam) became a life-giving Spirit. First Corinthians 15:45 says, "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." The last Adam, of course, is the incarnated Lord Jesus, and the life-giving Spirit, of course, is the Holy Spirit. There can never be another life-giving Spirit besides the Holy Spirit. The Lord was made flesh and became the last Adam, and later, after death and resurrection, He became the life-giving Spirit.

The words spoken by the Lord in John 14:16-20 confirm this point. Here the Lord tells us that He will pass through death and resurrection to become another Comforter, that is, the Spirit of reality, who will come to abide with us and dwell in us. In verse 17 the Lord said concerning the Spirit of reality, "He abides with you and shall be in you." Then in verse 18 He says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you." The very "He" who is the Spirit of reality in verse 17 becomes the very "I" who is the Lord Himself in verse 18. The Lord said in effect, "When He comes, I come. He is I; I am He." The Holy Spirit is the Lord Jesus, and the Lord Jesus is the Holy Spirit. Also, in verse 17 the Lord said, "The Spirit of reality...shall be in you," and then in verse 20 He says, "I in you." This also proves that the Holy Spirit who is in us is the Lord who died and rose and now lives in us.

Second Corinthians 3:17 says, "The Lord is the Spirit." The Lord spoken of here, of course, is the Lord Jesus, and the Spirit, of course, is the Holy Spirit. This verse tells us clearly and definitely that our Lord Jesus is the Holy Spirit. He is the Father and He is the Spirit, the very God and the Lord. This clearly shows that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one God, not three; they are distinct but not separate.

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The Triune God in Us for Our Experience and Enjoyment

We need to see that the God who is dispensing Himself into us is triune. According to the New Testament, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us (Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:27; John 14:17). Although the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us, in our experience we sense that there is just One in us. This One who dwells in us is the Triune God.

The Lord charged us to baptize the nations “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). There is one name for the Divine Trinity. The name is the sum total of the Divine Being, equivalent to His person. To baptize people into the name of the Triune God is to immerse them into all that the Triune God is. Once we believe into Christ and are baptized into the person of the Divine Trinity, we should daily enjoy the Triune God by participating in the love of God the Father, in the grace of Christ the Son, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). Eventually, we will enjoy the Divine Trinity in His divine dispensing to the fullest in eternity. Revelation 22:1 says that the river of water of life proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. This depicts how the Triune God—God, the Lamb, and the Spirit (symbolized by the water of life)—dispenses Himself into His redeemed people under His headship (implied in the authority of the throne) for eternity.

Martin Luther warned us not to approach the matter of the Divine Trinity by our natural reasoning. He said that those who approach this matter with confidence in their own mental power are “the teachers of God, not His pupils.” No human being can explain the Divine Trinity adequately. We should simply accept and say Amen to whatever is recorded in the pure Word of God. We can only present the divine facts from the New Testament concerning this great truth so that we may be impressed that the Triune God is dispensing Himself into our being. Instead of exercising our mentality too much to try to figure out the Triune God, we should exercise our spirit to experience and enjoy the marvelous dispensing of the Triune God as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit within us.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

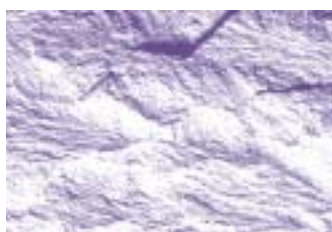
The God who is dispensing Himself into us is the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit certainly are not three Gods. God is one, yet He is triune.

Baptized into the Triune God

We see the Triune God in Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In this verse there is one name for the Divine Trinity—the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The name is the sum total of the Divine Being, equivalent to His person. To baptize anyone into the name of the Trinity is to immerse him into all that the Triune God is.

Matthew and John are two books in which the Divine Trinity is more fully revealed, for the participation and enjoyment of God’s chosen people, than in all the other books of Scripture. John unveils the mystery of the Godhead in the Father, Son, and Spirit, especially in chapters 14 through 16, for our experience of life. Matthew discloses the reality of the Divine Trinity in the one name for all three, for the constitution of the kingdom. In the opening chapter of Matthew, the Holy Spirit (v. 18), Christ the Son (v. 18), and God the Father (v. 23) are on the scene for the producing of the man Jesus (v. 21), who, as Jehovah the Savior and God with us, is the embodiment of the Triune God. In chapter 3 Matthew presents a picture of the Son standing in the water of baptism under the opened heaven, the Spirit as a dove descending upon the Son, and the

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Father out of the heavens speaking concerning the Son (vv. 16-17). In chapter 12 the Son, in the person of man, cast out demons by the Spirit to bring in the kingdom of God the Father (v. 28). In chapter 16 the Son is revealed by the Father to the disciples for the building of the church (vv. 16-19). In chapter 17 the Son entered into transfiguration (v. 2) and was confirmed by the Father's word of delight (v. 5) for a miniature display of the manifestation of the kingdom (16:28). Eventually, in the closing chapter, after Christ, as the last Adam, had passed through the process of crucifixion, entered into the realm of resurrection, and become the life-giving Spirit, He came back to His disciples, in the atmosphere and reality of His resurrection, to charge them to make the heathen the kingdom people by baptizing them into the name, the person, the reality, of the Trinity. According to Matthew, such a baptism into the reality of the Father, Son, and Spirit is for the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens. The heavenly kingdom cannot be organized with human beings of flesh and blood (1 Cor. 15:50) as an earthly society; it can be constituted only of people who are immersed into union with the Triune God and who are established and built up with the Triune God who is wrought into them.

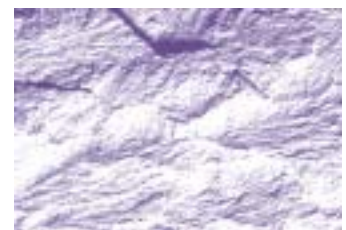
The Grace of Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Another verse that reveals the Triune God is 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." The grace of the Lord is the Lord Himself as life to us for our enjoyment (John 1:17; 1 Cor. 15:10), the love of God is God Himself (1 John 4:8, 16) as the source of the grace of the Lord, and the fellowship of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself as the transmission of the grace of the Lord with the love of God for our participation. These are not three separate matters but three aspects of one thing, just as the Lord, God, and the Holy Spirit are not three separate Gods but three "hypostases...of the one same undivided and indivisible" God (Philip Schaff). The love of God is the source, since God is the origin. The grace of the Lord is the course of the love of God, since the Lord is the expression of God. The fellowship of the Spirit is the impartation of the grace of the Lord with the love of God, since the Spirit is the transmission of the Lord with God for our experience and enjoyment of the Triune God with all His attributes. Here the grace of the Lord is mentioned first because 2 Corinthians is a book on the grace of Christ (1:12; 4:15; 6:1; 8:1, 9; 9:8, 14; 12:9).

Second Corinthians 13:14 is strong proof that the Trinity of the Godhead is not for the doctrinal understanding of systematic theology but for the dispensing of God Himself in His trinity into His chosen and redeemed people. In the Bible the Divine Trinity is never revealed merely as a doctrine. Rather, it is always revealed or mentioned in regard to the relationship of God with His creatures, especially with men created by Him and even the more with His chosen and redeemed people. The first divine title used in God's divine revelation concerning His creation, *Elohim* in Hebrew, is plural in number (Gen. 1:1). This implies that God, as the Creator of the heavens and the earth for man, is triune, and He created the universe in His trinity. Concerning the creation of man in His own image, after His own likeness, He used the plural pronouns, *Us* and *Our*, referring to His trinity (Gen. 1:26) and implying that He will be one with man and express Himself through man in His trinity. Later, in Genesis 3:22 and 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8, He referred to Himself again and again as "Us" concerning His relationship with man and with His chosen people.

In order to redeem man so that He might still have the position to be one with man, God became incarnated (John 1:1, 14) in the Son and through the Spirit (Luke 1:31-35) to be a man, and He lived a human life on the earth, also in the Son (Luke 2:49) and by the Spirit (Luke 4:1; Matt. 12:28). At the beginning of the Lord's ministry on earth, the Father anointed the Son with the Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17; Luke 4:18) for reaching men and bringing them back to Him. Just before He was crucified in the flesh

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and resurrected to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), the Lord unveiled His mysterious trinity to His disciples in plain words (John 14—17), stating that the Son is in the Father and that the Father is in the Son (14:9-11), that the Spirit is the transfiguration of the Son (14:16-20), that the three, coexisting and coinhering simultaneously, are abiding with the believers for their enjoyment (14:23; 16:7-10; 17:21-23), and that all the Father has is the Son's, and all the Son possesses is received by the Spirit to be disclosed, revealed, to the believers (16:13-15). Such a Trinity is altogether related to the dispensing of the processed God into His believers (14:17, 20; 15:4-5) so that they may be one in and with the Triune God (17:21-23).

After His resurrection the Lord charged His disciples to disciple the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). As we have pointed out, this is to bring the believing ones into the Triune God, into an organic union with the processed God, who has passed through incarnation, human living, and crucifixion and has entered into resurrection. It is based upon such an organic union that at the conclusion of 2 Corinthians Paul blesses the Corinthians with the blessed Trinity in the participation of the Son's grace with the Father's love through the Spirit's fellowship. In this Trinity God the Father operates all things in all the members in the church, which is the Body of Christ, through the ministries of the Lord, God the Son, by the gifts of God the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

The Triune God Revealed in Ephesians

The entire divine revelation in the book of Ephesians concerning the producing, existing, growing, building up, and fighting of the church as the Body of Christ is composed of the divine economy—the dispensing of the Triune God into the members of the Body of Christ. Chapter 1 unveils how God the Father chose and predestinated these members in eternity (vv. 4-5), God the Son redeemed them (vv. 6-12), and God the Spirit sealed them as a pledge (vv. 13-14), thus imparting Himself into His believers for the formation of the church, which is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 18-23). Chapter 2 shows us that in the Divine Trinity all the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, have access unto God the Father through God the Son, in God the Spirit (v. 18). This also indicates that the three coexist and coinhere simultaneously, even after all the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. In chapter 3 the apostle prays that God the Father will grant the believers to be strengthened through God the Spirit into their inner man so that Christ, God the Son, may make His home in their hearts, that is, to occupy their entire being, that they might be filled unto all the fullness of the processed Triune God (vv. 14-19). This is the climax of God in His trinity to be experienced and participated in by the believers in Christ for His full expression. Chapter 4 portrays how the processed God as the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father, is mingled with the Body of Christ (vv. 4-6) for the experience of the Divine Trinity by all its members. Chapter 5 exhorts the believers to praise the Lord, God the Son, with the songs of God the Spirit and to give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, to God the Father (vv. 19-20). This is to praise and thank the processed God in His divine trinity for our enjoyment of Him as the Triune God. Chapter 6 instructs us to fight the spiritual warfare by being empowered in the Lord, God the Son, putting on the whole armor of God the Father, and wielding the sword of God the Spirit (vv. 10-11, 17). This is the experience and enjoyment of the Triune God by the believers even in spiritual warfare.

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The Triune God in 1 Peter and in Revelation

In his writings the apostle Peter confirms this trinity of God for the believers' enjoyment by referring them to the election of God the Father, the sanctification of God the Spirit, and the redemption of Jesus Christ, God the Son, by His blood (1 Pet. 1:2).

John the apostle also strengthens the revelation of the Divine Trinity for the believers' participation in the processed Triune God. In the book of Revelation he blesses the churches in different localities with grace and peace from God the Father, Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from God the Spirit, the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from God the Son, Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth (1:4-5). This blessing of John to the churches also indicates that the processed Triune God, in all He is as the eternal Father, in all He is able to do as the sevenfold intensified Spirit, and in all He has attained and obtained as the anointed Son, is for the believers' enjoyment so that they may be His corporate testimony as the golden lampstands (1:9-11, 20).

It is evident, therefore, that the divine revelation of the Trinity of the Godhead in the holy Word, from Genesis through Revelation, is not for the study of theology but for the understanding of how God in His mysterious and marvelous trinity dispenses Himself into His chosen people so that we, as His chosen and redeemed people, may, as indicated in Paul's blessing to the Corinthian believers in 2 Corinthians 13:14, participate in, experience, enjoy, and possess the processed Triune God now and for eternity.

Concerning the Triune God, Revelation 1:4 and 5 say, "Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth." He "who is and who was and who is coming" is God the eternal Father. The seven Spirits who are before God's throne are the operating Spirit of God, God the Spirit. Jesus Christ, to God the faithful Witness, to the church the Firstborn of the dead, and to the world the Ruler of the kings of the earth, is God the Son. This is the Triune God. As God the eternal Father, He was in the past, He is in the present, and He is coming in the future. As God the Spirit, He is the sevenfold intensified Spirit for God's operation. As God the Son, He is the Witness, the testimony, the expression, of God; the Firstborn of the dead for the church, the new creation; and the Ruler of the kings of the earth for the world. From such a Triune God, grace and peace are imparted to the churches.

The seven Spirits in Revelation 1:4 are undoubtedly the Spirit of God because they are ranked among the Triune God in verses 4 and 5. As seven is the number for completion in God's operation, in God's move, so the seven Spirits must be for God's move on earth. In substance and existence God's Spirit is one; in the intensified function and work of God's operation God's Spirit is sevenfold. It is like the lampstand in Zechariah 4:2: in existence it is one lampstand standing, but in function it is seven lamps shining.

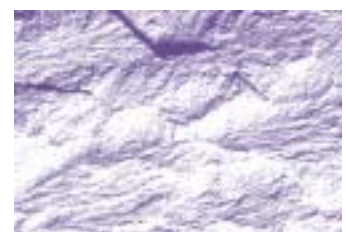
In Matthew 28:19 the sequence of the Triune God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here the sequence is changed. The seven Spirits of God are listed in the second place instead of the third. This reveals the importance of the intensified function of the sevenfold Spirit of God in the dark situation of the degraded churches. This point is confirmed by the repeated emphasis on the Spirit's speaking in 2:7-11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; and 22:17.

At the opening of most of the Epistles, only the Father and the Son are mentioned, from whom grace and peace are given to the receivers. However, in Revelation 1:4 and 5 the Spirit also is included, from whom grace and peace are imparted to the churches. This also signifies the crucial need of the Spirit of God for God's move in the degradation of the churches.

Modalism, Tritheism, and the Pure Revelation of the Triune God according to the Bible

The New Testament reveals that our God is triune. During the centuries three main

THE DIVINE REVELATION OF THE TRINITY OF THE GODHEAD IN THE HOLY WORD, FROM GENESIS THROUGH REVELATION, IS NOT FOR THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY BUT FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF HOW GOD IN HIS MYSTERIOUS AND MARVELOUS TRINITY DISPENSES HIMSELF INTO HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE.



schools of teaching concerning the Trinity have emerged: modalism, tritheism, and the pure revelation according to the Bible. Modalism teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not all eternal and do not all exist at the same time but are merely three temporary manifestations of the one God. Tritheism teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three Gods. We should have nothing to do with modalism, for that extreme view concerning the Trinity is a heresy. It is also a great heresy to teach that there are three Gods.

According to the natural law in God's creation, there is the law of balance. Nothing can exist without having two sides. For example, the earth exists because of two forces: centrifugal force thrusts the earth away, and centripetal force holds it back. This is the balance of power. All the truths in the Bible also have two sides. In order to hold a biblical truth properly, we must hold both sides of it. The pure revelation of the Triune God in the Bible occupies a central position between the extremes of modalism and tritheism.

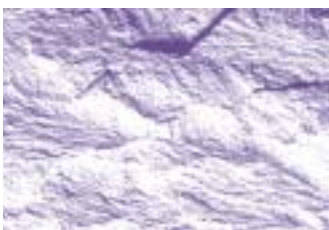
Because the truths in the Bible have two sides, there are two aspects to the Trinity: the aspect of the one-in-three and the aspect of the three-in-one. Modalism is an extreme on the side of the three-in-one. There is, of course, ground in the Scriptures for the side of the three-in-one, but modalism, going to an extreme, far beyond the confines of the Bible, neglects and even annuls the side of the one-in-three. Because modalism goes beyond the confines of the Scriptures concerning the aspect of the one, it is a heresy on the extreme of the one. Tritheism is the opposite extreme, the extreme of the three. Tritheism emphasizes the side of the three, going beyond the confines of the Scriptures concerning the aspect of the three, and neglects the side of the one. It also has scriptural ground because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit certainly are three. But tritheism, like modalism, also goes beyond the confines of the Bible and becomes a heresy. Therefore, both modalism and tritheism, being extremes, are heresies.

The Bible is not at either of these extremes; it stands in the center, testifying the twofoldness of the truth of the Trinity. In this matter, the Scriptures are balanced. The Bible, true to the principle of balance in God's creation, is balanced and in the center; it does not go to an extreme. Regarding the truth of the Triune God, we also should be balanced and avoid the heretical extremes of both modalism and tritheism.

MODALISTS SAY THAT THE THREE OF THE GODHEAD EXIST RESPECTIVELY IN THREE CONSECUTIVE STAGES. THEY DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE COEXISTENCE AND COINHERENCE OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE SPIRIT.

Augustine, a leader in teaching the Divine Trinity, was sometimes accused of being modalistic and at other times was accused of being tritheistic. Because he taught that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one God, not three separate Gods, he was accused of teaching modalism. But because he strongly emphasized that God is three—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—he was also accused of teaching tritheism. Likewise, when we point out the Scriptures that reveal that our God is absolutely one, that the Son is even called the Father (Isa. 9:6), and that the Son is the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17), we have been falsely accused of teaching modalism. But when our writings are considered fairly and completely, it will become evident that we teach neither modalism nor tritheism but the pure revelation of the Triune God according to the Scriptures.

What is the error in modalism? Modalism teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not all eternal and do not all exist at the same time. Rather, modalism claims that the Father ended with the Son's coming and that the Son ceased with the Spirit's coming. The modalists say that the three of the Godhead exist respectively in three consecutive stages. They do not believe in the coexistence and coinherence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Unlike them, we believe in the coexistence and coinherence of the three of the Godhead; that is, we believe that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all exist essentially at the same time and under the same conditions.



However, in the divine economy, the three work and are manifested respectively in three consecutive stages. Yet even in their economical works and manifestations the three still remain essentially in their coexistence and coinherence. The Father chose us in the Son and by the Spirit (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:2). The Son accomplished redemption for us with the Father and by the Spirit (John 8:29; Heb. 9:14). The Spirit works in us as the Son (John 14:26; 2 Cor. 3:17) with the Father (John 15:26). Their works and manifestations are economical, but their coexistence and coinherence are eternal. All the three are eternal essentially. Isaiah 9:6 says that the Father is eternal, Hebrews 1:12 and 7:3 indicate that the Son is eternal, and Hebrews 9:14 speaks of the eternal Spirit. Therefore, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not consecutive but eternal in their existence, in their being.

God is uniquely one but triune—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 2:18; 3:14-16; Rev. 1:4-5). The Godhead is distinctively three, but the Father, Son, and Spirit certainly are not three Gods separately. The New Testament tells us definitely that God is one (1 Cor. 8:4; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Some Christians have believed that the Father is one person and that the Son is another person, but the Spirit is merely a power. Others believe that the three of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—are three separate Gods. These concepts are heretical. According to the divine revelation of the holy Word, we believe that our God is uniquely one. We have only one God, who is triune.


Because our mentality is limited, we are not able to explain the Triune God thoroughly. Actually we cannot even define ourselves very well. How, then, could we define the Triune God adequately and thoroughly? This is impossible. We can only believe what is clearly revealed in the New Testament: God is one but triune.

Distinct but Not Separate

Certain of today's fundamental Bible teachers are actually tritheistic, perhaps unconsciously. These teachers say not only that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct but also that they are separate. We can say that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct but not that they are separate. We cannot separate the Son from the Father, or the Father and the Son from the Spirit, because all three coexist and coinhere. In the Gospel of John the Son said that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him (10:38; 14:10-11). Since the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son, how can they be separated? The Lord Jesus also said that He and the Father are one (10:30). This is further proof that the Father and the Son, although distinct, cannot be separated. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct but not separate, because they are three and yet one.

The Triune God in Us

We need to see that the God who is dispensing Himself into us is triune. Do you realize that the Triune God is in you? According to the New Testament, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us (Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:27; John 14:17). Although the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us, in our experience we sense that there is just One in us. This One who dwells in us is the Triune God.

I surely cannot explain the Divine Trinity adequately. I only present the facts from the New Testament concerning this great truth so that you all may be impressed with this divine fact that the Triune God is dispensing Himself into our being in His trinity. Do not exercise your mentality too much to explore it. Rather, exercise your spirit to experience and enjoy the marvelous dispensing of the Triune God as the Father, Son, and Spirit. 

IN THE DIVINE ECONOMY, THE THREE WORK AND ARE MANIFESTED RESPECTIVELY IN THREE CONSECUTIVE STAGES. YET EVEN IN THEIR ECONOMICAL WORKS AND MANIFESTATIONS THE THREE STILL REMAIN ESSENTIALLY IN THEIR COEXISTENCE AND COINHERENCE.

