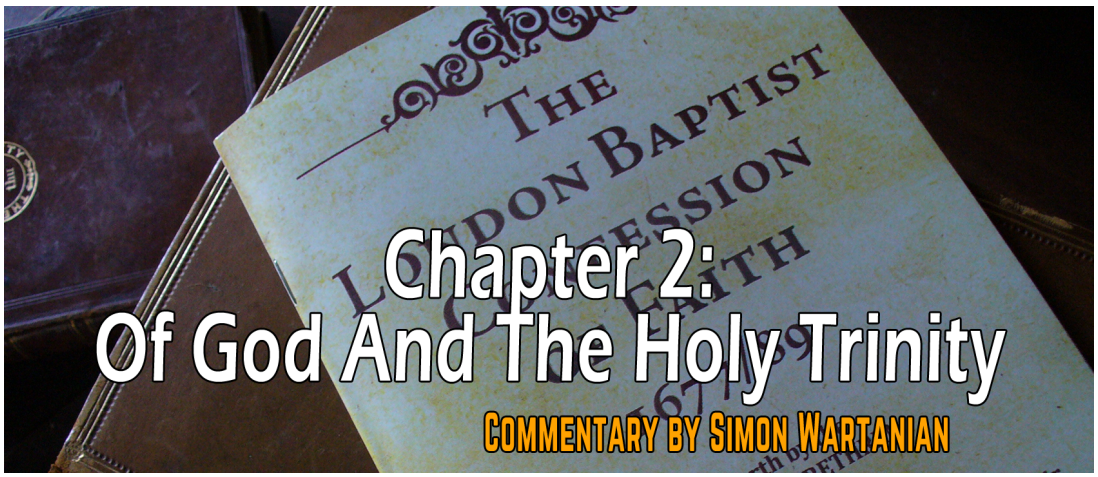
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 2: Of God and of the Holy Trinity - Commentary

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Chapter 2: Of God and of the Holy Trinity

Who is God? What is God like? What does it mean that God is immutable? Does God never change His mind? What is God's love? What is God's justice? Does God know all things? What is the Trinity? Is it biblical? Do we believe in three gods? What do the words "*essence*" and "*person*" mean?

§1 The Attributes of God

1. The Lord our God is but **one only living and true God**; **1** whose **subsistence** is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection; **2** whose **essence** cannot be comprehended by any but himself; **3** a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; **4** who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; **5** **working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will** for **his own glory**; **6** most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; **7** the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, **8** and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. **9**
    1. Deut. 6:4; Jer. 10:10; 1 Cor. 8:4,6; 1 Thess. 1:9[1]
    2. Job 11:7-9; 26:14; Isa. 48:12; Acts 17:24-25
    3. Ex. 3:14; Job 11:7-8; 26:14; Ps. 145:3; Rom. 11:33-34; 1 Cor. 2:11
    4. John 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; Deut. 4:15-16; Luke 24:39; Acts 14:11, 15; James 5:17
    5. Mal. 3:6; James 1:17; 1 Kings 8:27; Jer. 23:23-24; Ps. 90:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Gen. 17:1; Rev. 4:8; Isa. 6:3; Rom. 16:27; Ps. 115:3; Ex. 3:14
    6. Eph. 1:11; Isa. 46:10; Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36
    7. 1 John 4:8, 16; Ex. 34:6-7
    8. Heb. 11:6; Gen. 15:1; Matt. 5:12; 10:41-42; Luke 6:35
    9. Neh 9:32-33; Ps. 5:5-6; 11:5; Nahum 1:2-3; Ex. 34:7

There is but **one only living and true God** (Deut. 6:4; Ps. 96:5; Jer. 10:10; 1 Cor 8:4, 6). His **subsistence is in and of himself**, that is, the three Persons of the Trinity, which will be spoken of in paragraph 3. This great God is **infinite in being**

and perfection. He is infinite and perfect in all of His ways and attributes. Furthermore, no one can truly and fully **comprehend** this great God **but Himself** (Rom. 11:33-34). He is a **most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions** (1 Tim. 1:17), meaning that He is free of the limitation of physical existence and emotions like humans (**passions**).

He possesses **immortality** by a necessity of His nature (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16). Our immortality is delegated and derived from God, but His immorality is by necessity and thanks to His nature as God. God cannot but be immortal. He is not only immortal, but He is also **immutable**, i.e., unchanging (Mal 3:6; Jas. 1:17; Num. 23:19). He is **immense**, which means that He is without limits and immeasurable (1 Kgs. 8:27). He is **eternal**, meaning that He neither has a beginning or will He have an end (Ps. 90:2). He is **almighty**, which means that He can do and accomplish anything He pleases (Gen. 17:1; 18:14; Jer. 32:27). He is **infinite**, great, without limits and perfect in all His ways and attributes. He is **most holy**, meaning perfect, unique and separate from the rest (Isa. 6:3). He is **most wise**, in fact, He is the fountain of all knowledge and wisdom (e.g., Col. 2:3). He is **most free**, meaning that He is not limited or hindered by anything to accomplish His desires (Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Dan. 4:34-35). He is **most absolute**, meaning that He is the ground of all reality and the First Cause of all things. This Great God is absolutely sovereign and works **all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will** with the goal being **his own glory** (Eph. 1:11). His will is not arbitrary or without reason. No. It is called an **immutable**, meaning unchanging and **righteous** will. We may not understand His plans, but that does not mean that God's will in directing things is not righteous.

This God, this infinite God of all perfection, is a **most loving** God (1 John 4:8). He loves those who do not deserve anything but wrath from Him because of sin. He loves them so much that He sent His Son to save them (John 3:16). His love is a love which loves us *despite* what we are. He is **gracious** in giving us that which we do not deserve (e.g., salvation). He is **merciful** in *not* giving us what we deserve (immediate judgment). He is the fountain of **goodness and truth**. Everything good comes down from Him (Jas. 1:17) and He is the foundation of all truth, Himself being the Truth (John 14:6). This gracious and merciful God is a **forgiving** God. He has promised everyone who turns to Christ and confesses their sins to cleanse them of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9). Even though it is our duty to seek and worship Him, yet He is a God Who **rewards** us when we **diligently seek Him** (Heb. 11:6).

Yet this does not mean that this God is not a just and righteous God. In fact, He is **most just and terrible in his judgments** (Nah. 1:2). ***Terrible*** meaning that he is dreadful and to be feared in His judgments. He is not to be messed with and His wrath and judgments are not to be taken lightly, He **hates all sin**, He cannot be tainted with it nor can He look with delight at sin (Hab. 1:13). Sin causes His wrath and brings His judgment. This righteous God **will by no means clear the guilty** (Ex. 34:7). All those who have sinned against this great God and transgressed His holy Law will be condemned by Him, except if they be found in the Substitute which He provided.

This is the God of Scripture. He is the only God that exists and there is no other. There is only One God Who is not uni-personal, but tri-personal as the Confession confesses and clarifies especially in paragraph 3. In this paragraph, we will take a brief look at the attributes of God. Systematic theologies spend several chapters discussing the attributes of God, but here we will merely give a very brief survey of the biblical data for the attributes of God.

The Incommunicable Attributes of God

Theologians commonly distinguish between the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God. The communicable attributes of God are those attributes which man and God have in common. For example, both man and God are able to be just, love, show mercy, have knowledge. On the other hand, the incommunicable attributes of God are those perfections which are not shared with others, like His triune nature, eternity, immutability, absolute sovereignty, omnipresence, omnipotence. God's attributes are God's perfections and excellencies. They are the things which shine forth His glory and majesty.

The Singularity Of God[2]

The Bible is clear on the fact that there is but **one God**. The Scriptures are manifold proving this in both Testaments. The doctrine of the Trinity is monotheistic and Christianity is at the core monotheistic. In Mark 12:29, the Lord Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 saying that the most important commandment "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'" The Lord Christ Himself affirmed the doctrine of monotheism, which teaches that there is but one Being of God. Isaiah 43:10 is definite in its affirmation of monotheism:

> "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me

and understand that **I am he**. **Before me no god** was formed, **nor shall there be any after me**.

Before Yahweh, there was no other god and after Him, there shall be no other god. He is the only God that exists and He is but one God. We will also come back to this point in paragraph 3 when we will discuss the doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches that although there is but one Being of God, yet this Being exists in three Persons.

The Lord our God is described as a **living God**, that implies that He is active and interacts with the world. He is not a god who set up the world and left it on its own. Rather, He is the living God Whose providence guides every step. The expression "living God" is used 28 times in the Scriptures, which implies the activity of God in this world, and it is also an expression against the dead idols of the heathen. In Leviticus 26:30, the Lord warns Israel if they go astray to serve idols saying: "And I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars and cast **your dead bodies** upon the **dead bodies of your idols**, and my soul will abhor you." Their bodies will be cast upon the *dead bodies of their idols. They* will be just like their idols with whom they provoked Him to anger—dead.

He is not only the singular and living God, but He is also the **true God.** He is the only God that exists and He is likewise truthful. He is the "God of truth" (Isa. 65:16). The expression "true God" is used 5 times in the Bible (2 Chron. 15:3; Jer. 10:10; John 17:3; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 John 5:20), and it is often connected with God being a living God. Jeremiah 10:10 declares, "But the LORD is **the true God**; he is **the living God** and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation." To say that God is the living and true God is to separate Him from the idols. Paul writes of the Thessalonians and of all Christians that we "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9).

The Independence of God

God is absolutely dependent on no other being than Himself. He is all sufficient in and of Himself. God is wholly happy, glorious, holy, loving and joyful in and of Himself. He was not unhappy before the Creation, nor was He less glorious or loving. All life, happiness, glory, and holiness is in Himself. He is the I AM THAT I AM! Self-existent and self-sufficient, glorious, holy, just and loving. This attribute is also called God's self-sufficiency, self-existence, or aseity.

'The term *aseity*', writes John Frame, 'comes from the Latin phrase *a se*, meaning "from or by self."'[3] To speak of God's aseity, therefore, is to speak of His independence from anything and anyone but Himself. God is dependent on no one for His existence because He is the only Necessary Being—a being that *must* exist, in any possible world. He is the Being on Whom all reality and all creation depends, yet He Himself depends on nothing. Without Him all would turn into chaos and the world will not be, but because of Him, there is order and not chaos. All that the God of the Bible has, He has in and of Himself and is dependent upon no other being for it. The very name of God, which was given to Moses in Exodus 3:14, is "I AM WHO I AM." It is a basic and most fundamental observation that in the Bible names represent the nature and character of the people who bear them. Names are not merely nice-sounding, but they say something about the name-bearer. The name of God, YHWH, represents all the perfections of God and God explains it as "I AM WHO I AM." In essence and at the most minimal level, this name teaches the absolute independence of God. He is what He is because of Himself. John Gill notes on this passage saying that "This signifies the real being of God, his self-existence, and that he is the Being of beings; as also it denotes his eternity and immutability, and his constancy and faithfulness in fulfilling his promises, for it includes all time, past, present, and to come; and the sense is, not only I am what I am at present, but I am what I have been, and I am what I shall be, and shall be what I am."[4]

The Bible over and over again declares the independence of God from the created world. Paul on the Areopagus declares that the true God is not "served by human hands, as though he needed anything," but in contrast, "he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:25). This is the scriptural proof for our assertion that God is the Independent Being on Whom all creation depends. Scriptures teaches that **God owns all things** (Deut. 10:14; Job 41:11; Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12; 80:11). He is called "the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:22). 1 Chronicles 29:11 majestically declares, "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all." **All that we have comes from His hand**. John the Baptist says that "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (John 3:27; cf. Jas 1:17). Amazingly, in 1 Chronicles 29, King David acknowledges that when we give things to God, we are giving Him things which He has given us. For all the offerings which the people brought for the Temple, David thanks the Lord and says, "For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you" (1 Chron. 29:14). Job 41:11 (see also Rom. 11:35-36) says, "Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine." Nobody has given to God anything which was not His in the first place. That's what the Lord Jesus said in Luke 17:10, "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

Even before the creation—before the eyes of men and angels could gaze at the glory of God, the Lord Jesus speaks of His glory. In John 17:5 we read, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the

world existed." God—both Father and Son, existed and had glory *before the world existed.* This implies that the glory of God is underived and independent from the world. In creation, the glory of God is manifested to creatures, but it is not increased as if God was less glorious before He created. God was love even before the creation (John 17:24) because love was there between the three Persons of the Trinity. The glory and love of God are independent of the created world but have their basis in Himself alone.

We sound the praise of God along with Paul, saying, '"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" **For from him** and **through him** and **to him** are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen' (Rom. 11:35-36).

The Incomprehensibility of God

Webster's 1913 Dictionary defines "incomprehensible" by "Not capable of being comprehended or understood; beyond the reach of the human intellect; inconceivable."[5] Only God can fully understand God. All that we know about Him is revealed by Him. There is no use in people sitting and contemplating about God without standing on the solid and infallible foundation of the Word of God (**chapter 1**). As the Confession declares, so the Bible teaches, God is fully comprehended only by Himself. Obviously, we do not mean that He is *absolutely* incomprehensible, for we know a lot of things about Him even without special revelation. From the natural world, says Paul, we can know "his eternal power and divine nature" (Rom. 1:20), for example. But we cannot fully and exhaustively understand "his eternal power and divine nature" whether from general revelation or even from special revelation. The essence of God is only exhaustively and completely understood by Himself alone.

Job 7:11-12 describes this doctrine: "Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? 8 It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?" There are hundreds of mysteries about God which we do not know and do not comprehend. Even things which we know about Him from special revelation, we do not fully comprehend. How is it that a being can exist without a beginning? What is eternity exactly? It is difficult for us to understand because these things fall outside of our experience. Even when thinking about God and when God speaks to us in Scripture, He condescends to speak in a way that we would understand. Thus He speaks of Himself being a father, a husband, a friend, and so on. Using things from the natural world which we know, so that we would comprehend Him a little bit. Paul breaks forth in praise, saying: '"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen' (Rom. 11:34-36). The incomprehensibility of God is implied when Paul speaks about "the depths of God" which the Spirit searches and understands (1 Cor. 2:10). Wayne Grudem writes:

> It is not only true that we can never fully understand God; it is also true that *we can never fully understand any single thing about God*. His greatness (Ps. 145:3), his understanding (Ps. 147:5), his knowledge (Ps. 139:6), his riches, wisdom, judgments, and ways (Rom. 11:33) are all beyond our ability to understand fully.[6]

Yet obviously, even though we cannot fully understand anything about God, yet we understand several things that God has revealed to us in general and special revelation about Himself. But all the things which we know are the "outskirts of his ways" and a small "whisper do we hear of him" (Job 26:14).

The Immutability of God

Although this heading properly belongs to the Infinity of God, yet since I want to give a longer treatment of this subject, I chose to include it under a separate heading. The immutability of God is the doctrine that God never changes His mind. The word immutable means "not capable or susceptible of change; unchangeable; unalterable."[7] This doctrine is closely connected with the absolute sovereignty of God and His perfect knowledge of all things. Since God is perfect and infinite in all His attributes, including His knowledge, therefore, He cannot change His mind. Contrary to some Open Theist claims, this is not a limitation or a weakness in God, but a perfection. To say that God truly and literally changes His mind/plan is to say that God became better and wiser. Arthur Pink said that immutability

> is one of the excellencies of the Creator which distinguishes Him from all His creatures. God is perpetually the same: subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations. Therefore God is compared to a rock (Deu 32:4) which remains immovable, when the entire ocean surrounding it is continually in a fluctuating state. Even so, though all creatures are subject to change, God is immutable. Because God has no beginning and no ending, He can know no change. He is everlastingly "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning" (Jas 1:17).[8]

A.H. Strong gives the following definition to the immutability of God, saying:

> By this we mean that the nature, attributes, and will of God are exempt from all change. Reason teaches us that no change is possible in God, whether of increase or decrease, progress or deterioration, contraction or development. All change must be to better or to worse. But God is absolute perfection, and no change to better is possible. Change to worse would be equally inconsistent with perfection. No cause for such change exists, either outside of God or in God himself.[9]

The Knowledge of God

Several times the immutability of God is plainly taught in Scripture. But let us take a quick look at what the Scriptures say about God's Omniscience (all-knowing) first. Had not the heresy of Open Theism re-arisen (formerly taught by the Socinians or a version of it), no one would have doubted the perfect knowledge of God, but as it is, the Scriptures are plain on this subject. 1 John 3:20 states that even when our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and God "**knows everything**." Even hidden things that we do, our God knows (Dan. 2:22; Isa. 29:15; Heb. 4:13). The knowledge which God possesses is high and unattainable for any creature (Ps. 139:6). He is called "the God of knowledge" (1Sam. 2:3). He knows our actions, even our thoughts and words before they come to our minds or out of our mouths (Ps. 139:2-4). The LORD declares, "I know the things that come into your mind" (Ezek. 11:5). He knows how many hairs each one of us has (Matt. 10:29-30). He knows all the course of history—the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:9-10). Solomon declares, "you, you only, **know the hearts of all the children of mankind**" (1 Kgs. 8:39). In similar words, the early church prayed, "You, Lord, who **know the hearts of all**" (Acts 1:24). This perfect and infinite knowledge is peculiar to God alone. Isaiah 40:27-28 says that "his understanding is unsearchable" (v. 28) with reference to His knowledge of our ways which we think are hidden (v. 27). He is said to be "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16). He sees and is well aquatinted with our ways (Job 23:10; 24:23; 31:4; Ps. 139:2-4). Even the Lord Jesus is said to have known the thoughts of His opponents several times (Matt. 9:4; 12:25; Mark 2:6-8; Luke 6:8). John 2:25 even goes on to say that He "needed no one to bear witness about man, for **he himself knew what was in man**."

The extent of God's knowledge is comprehensive and that's why it is called *omniscience*. It includes both the possible and the actual. Louis Berkhof gives the following list of passages which prove that God knows contingent events and free actions of men:

> It is perfectly evident that Scripture teaches the divine foreknowledge of contingent events, I Sam 23:10-13; II Kings 13:19; Ps. 81:14,15; Isa. 42:9; 48:18; Jer. 2:2,3; 38:17-20; Ezek. 3:6; Matt. 11:21.[10]

In light of God's perfect knowledge, the immutability of God is just a logical conclusion. Pink writes:

> God's purpose never alters. One of two things causes a man to change his mind and reverse his plans: want of foresight to anticipate everything, or lack of power to execute them. But as God is both omniscient and omnipotent, there is never any need for Him to revise His decrees. No, "The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Psa 33:11). Therefore we read of, "the immutability of his counsel" (Heb 6:17).[8]

Scriptural Proof for God's Immutability

Now we move to the positive proof of this doctrine from Scripture. In Malachi 3:6, Yahweh plainly declares, "For **I the LORD do not change**; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed." The fact that the Lord is immutable is a comfort for His people, for His promises to them and His plans for them likewise do not change. John Calvin comments on this passage saying "that God continues in his purpose, and is not turned here and there like men who repent of a purpose they have formed, because what they had not thought of comes to their mind, or because they wish undone what they have performed, and seek new ways by which they may retrace their steps. God denies that anything of this kind can take place in him, for he is *Jehovah*, and *changes* not, or is not changed."[11] For God to be *mutable* is a contradiction to His very Name! He is Yahweh Who is the I AM WHO I AM of Exodus 3:14. His very name declares His independence as well as the immutability of His character and will. Albert Barnes comments on Malachi 3:6: 'The proper name of God, "He who Is," involves His unchangeableness. For change implies imperfection; it changes to that which is either more perfect or less perfect: to somewhat which that being, who changes, is not or has not. But God has everything in Himself perfectly.'[12]

Numbers 23:19 declares:

> God is not man, that he **should lie**, or a son of man, that he should **change his mind**. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? (cf. 1Sam. 15:29)

While it is true of men that they are liars (Rom. 3:4), that is untrue of the "God of truth" (Isa. 65:16). While it is true of the sons of men to change their minds, that is untrue of God. See how the passage mentions two things common to man, while at the same time completely denying them to God. God can neither lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), nor will He change His mind. A change of mind or repentance (KJV) are incompatible with God. This is said with the most straightforward and plain words. Two things mentioned in this passage that are common to man are completely denied of God. We will see that this statement and the like form the basis and the backdrop against which we interpret the passages which say that God repents or changes His mind. Matthew Poole notes that God does not "change his counsels or purposes; which men do, either because they are not able to execute them, or because they are better informed and their minds changed by some unexpected occurrent, or by their lusts and passions, none of which have a place in God. And therefore I plainly see that all our endeavors and repeated sacrifices are to no purpose, and can make no impression in God, nor induce him to curse those whom he hath purposed, and solemnly and frequently promised, to bless."[13] A change of mind and repentance is peculiarly connected to man and excluded from God.

Job 23:13 plainly declares, "But **he is unchangeable**, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does." This passage declares both the absolute freedom as well as the absolute sovereignty of God. No one can influence God so that He changes His plans, nor can anyone thwart His purposes (Job 42:2). What He has desired and planned, that He will purpose and there is no change to His plans and His purposes. The promises to the Patriarchs and to His people are called are said to be "unchangeable character of his purpose", which is guaranteed by an oath (Heb. 6:17).

Psalm 102:25-27 teaches that unlike the creation, which is the work of His hands and which will perish, yet the Lord remains. They will be changed by the Lord and they will pass away, but in contrast, "you are the same, and your years have no end" (v. 27). This passage is quoted in Hebrews 1:10-12 and applied to God the Son. While the creation and all that is in it changes, the Lord of the Bible, does not change and remains the same as He was. In Hebrews 13:8, it is said that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Yesterday refers not merely to the previous day, but to the whole period from the beginning of the world. Basically, this passage applies, as did Hebrews 1:10-12, what was common of God in the Old Testament to the Lord Jesus, and thereby making a claim to deity. Christ does not change in His nature, nor in His purposes. Albert Barnes comments on the passage saying that:

> he is unchangeable. The evident design of this independent proposition here is, to encourage them to persevere by showing that their Saviour was always the same; that he who had sustained his people in former times, was the same still, and would be the same forever. The argument here, therefore, for perseverance is founded on the "immutability" of the Redeemer. If he were fickle, vacillating, changing in his character and plans; if today he aids his people, and tomorrow will forsake them; if at one time he loves the virtuous, and at another equally loves the vicious; if he formed a plan yesterday which he has abandoned today; or if he is ever to be a different being from what he is now, there would be no encouragement to effort.[12]

God, in James 1:17, is described as "the Father of lights with whom there is **no variation or shadow due to change**." The KJV translates it with "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." There is no variation or variableness within God, neither is any shadow of repentance or turning from His purposes and plans. God is not like the sun with its, from our perspective, changing rays and going downs. God remains the same and there is not a slight shadow of a doubt that He would change. John Gill comments:

> **with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning**: as there is in that great luminary, the sun in the firmament, which has its parallaxes, eclipses, and turnings, and casts its shadow; it rises and sets, appears and disappears every day; and it comes out of one tropic, and enters into another at certain seasons of the year: but with God, who is light itself, and in him is no darkness at all, there is no change, nor anything like it; he is changeable in his nature, perfections, purposes, promises, and gifts; wherefore he being holy, cannot turn to that which is evil; nor can he, who is the fountain of light, be the cause of darkness, or admit of any in him; and since every good and perfect gift comes from him, evil cannot proceed from him, nor can he tempt any to it.[4]

Matthew Poole notes saying that James "here sets forth God as essentially and immutably good, and the Father of lights, by allusion to the sun, the fountain of corporeal light, and makes use of terms borrowed from astronomy. The sun, though it scattereth its beams every where, yet is not without its changes, parallaxes, and diversities of aspects, not only sometimes clear and sometimes eclipsed, but one while in the east, another in the south, then in the west; nor without its turnings in its annual course from tropic to tropic, (to which the Greek word here used seems to allude), its various accesses and recesses, by reason of which it casts different shadows: but God is always the same, like himself, constant in the emanations of his goodness, without casting any dark shadow of evil, which might infer a change in him."[13]

In all these passages which we looked at (Num. 23:19; Job 23:13; Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 13:8; Jas. 1:27), we have clearly stated for us the doctrine of God's immutability, not to mention the testimony of Scripture about God's perfect knowledge, which

results in the immutability of God's will as well.

God Changes His Mind?

Passages like Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:14; 1 Samuel 15:11, 35; 2 Samuel 24:16; Psalm 106:45; Jeremiah 18:7-10; Jonah 3:9-10; 4:2 should be read in light of the straightforward and didactic teaching on God's immutability as presented above.

Jonah

For passages like **Jonah 3:9-10**, which are one of the most prime examples brought against God's immutability, it must be replied that what we have here is not a prophecy of what will happen to them, regardless of their action, but rather, a promise and a warning of what will happen to Nineveh *if* they do not repent. God relented from His judgment *because* the Ninevites repented. The change here is not in God but in man. The Ninevites moved from a state of unrepentance, which placed them under God's wrath and judgment, to a state of repentance, which moves them under God's grace and mercy. God will not bring judgment upon the righteous, and neither will He acquit the wicked. The change here is in the Ninevites and not in God. Jeremiah 18:7-10 teaches a general principle about the warnings and promises of God. If the nation, against whom God brings warnings and promises of judgment, repents from its wickedness, then God will relent from His judgment, and vice versa. The change is with the people themselves and not God. Since God has determined to place those who are repentant under His grace and mercy and those who are unrepentant under His wrath and judgment, God is merely acting according to His nature and promises. This is consistent with Jonah's description of God, saying, "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster" (Jonah 4:2). Jonah knew that if he would preach to the Ninevites and they would repent than forgiveness and grace will follow them. He simply knew that this is the nature of God, in which He will not condemn the righteous with the wicked, neither will He acquit the wicked. He relents from the disasters which He has pronounced as long as the nations against whom those disasters were pronounced repent of their wickedness. If they repent, then there would be no cause of Him bringing His judgments upon them, therefore, He relents. But this does not entail a change in His plans, will, purpose or in His being. It may entail a change in how He works in His providence and the way He works, but not in His purpose and plan. God is absolutely sovereign over everything, including repentance. He is the One who gives it (2 Tim. 2:25-26), therefore, God had beforehand determined to bring the Ninevites to repentance through the warnings of Jonah, which He, in fact, did accomplish. God's purpose was to grant them repentance, and therefore, He sent Jonah to warn them about the judgment that would come upon them with the supposition that this judgment could be reversed, if the people repent. The same principle applies to passages like **2 Samuel 24:16**; **Psalm 106:45**. A.H. Strong writes:

> God's unchanging holiness requires him to treat the wicked differently from the righteous. When the righteous become wicked, his treatment of them must change. The sun is not fickle or partial because it melts the wax but hardens the clay,—the change is not in the sun but in the objects it shines upon. The change in God's treatment of men is described anthropomorphically, as if it were a change in God himself,—other passages in close conjunction with the first being given to correct any possible misapprehension. Threats not fulfilled, as in Jonah 3:4, 10, are to be explained by their conditional nature. Hence God's immutability itself renders it certain that his love will adapt itself to every varying mood and condition of his children, so as to guide their steps, sympathize with their sorrows, answer their prayers. God responds to us more quickly than the mother's face to the changing moods of her babe.[14]

Genesis 6:6

Genesis 6:6 says that "it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (KJV). This is the same Hebrew word, *nacham*, which is used Numbers 23:19 to say that "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should ***change his mind***"; or 1 Samuel 15:29, "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or ***have regret***, for he is not a man, that he should ***have regret***"; Psalm 110:4, "The LORD has sworn and will not ***change his mind***". These are straightforward, without-qualification and plain passages that declare that change in plan is impossible for God. As we stated above, Numbers 23:19 makes clear that what is common to man, lying and changing our minds, is completely absent from God. Therefore, we are to understand the expressions of God having regret or being sorry, as ***Anthropopathisms*** and ***Anthropomorphisms***. 'Anthropopathism (from Greek ἄνθρωπος *anthropos*, "human" and πάθος *pathos*, "suffering") is the attribution of human emotions, or the ascription of human feelings or passions to a non-human being, generally to a deity.'[15] Anthropomorphism, on the other hand, is the attribution of forms or human characteristics to God, thus He is said to have hands, feet, a face, a nose, a mouth, walk, and so on. All these things are attributed to God so that we would understand Him. They do not truly describe His nature for He is an immaterial spirit. As John Gill explains with reference to Genesis 6:6—

> This is speaking by an anthropopathy, after the manner of men, because God determined to do, and did something

similar to men, when they repent of anything: as a potter, when he has formed a vessel that does not please him, and he repents that he has made it, he takes it and breaks it in pieces; and so God, because of man's wickedness, and to show his aversion to it, and displicency at it, repented of his making him; that is, he resolved within himself to destroy him...[4]

John Calvin likewise agrees:

> The repentance which is here ascribed to God does not properly belong to him, but has reference to our understanding of him. For since we cannot comprehend him as he is, it is necessary that, for our sakes he should, in a certain sense, transform himself. That repentance cannot take place in God, easily appears from this single considerations that nothing happens which is by him unexpected or unforeseen. The same reasoning, and remark, applies to what follows, that God was affected with grief. Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains forever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity. Wherefore, there is no need for us to involve ourselves in thorny and difficult questions, when it is obvious to what end these words of repentance and grief are applied; namely, to teach us, that from the time when man was so greatly corrupted, God would not reckon him among his creatures; as if he would say, 'This is not my workmanship; this is not that man who was formed in my image, and whom I had adorned with such excellent gifts: I do not deign now to acknowledge this degenerate and defiled creature as mine.'... This figure, which represents God as transferring to himself what is peculiar to human nature, is called ἀνθρωποπάθεια[11] [*anthropopatheia*]

Arthur Pink likewise follows the same line of reasoning, but first of all declaring, "Our first reply is, Do the Scriptures contradict themselves? No, that cannot be." That is the first and most proper response. We have already seen that Scripture is very clear that God does not change His mind, without any qualifications or any contextual difficulties. Therefore, the unclear must be interpreted in light of the clear. Pink goes on to cite Numbers 23:19 and say, "When speaking of Himself, God frequently accommodates His language to our limited capacities. He describes Himself as clothed with bodily members, as eyes, ears, hands."[8]

The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges likewise comments on this passage saying that "This is a strong instance of what is called anthropomorphism, an expression descriptive of human emotion or action ascribed to Jehovah (e.g. Gen 3:8, Gen 7:16, Gen 8:21). Such expressions have often given rise to superficial criticisms, depreciatory of Holy Scripture, on the part both of those who are ignorant of Oriental literature, and of those who assume that the Books of Holy Scripture must be free from the literary characteristics of the writers' age and nationality. In this verse Jehovah is represented as intensely grieved at the frustration of His purposes for the human race. The description is given in the childlike simplicity of the language of an early age: compare Gen 11:5-6; Gen 18:21."[16] Moses was not trying to say that God was surprised by the course of actions and now He seeks to change His plan. But rather, He merely describes and speaks about God's disapproval of human wickedness and His plan to wipe out man from the earth because of their sin. He describes God's course of action in a human way—in a way that even a child can understand, much like the references given in the above commentary.

1 Samuel 15

Another passage that I want to look at is found in 1 Samuel 15. Both 1 Samuel 15:11, 35 say that God "regretted" (ESV) or "repented" (KJV) making Saul king over Israel. Does this mean that God now realizes that He did not make a wise choice in giving Saul as a prince over Israel? Who would dare make such an accusation of God? Yet some profane men are making such accusations against the Glory of Israel. They believe that God hoped that Saul would have been a good king, but He was sadly disappointed. But such is not the God of the Bible, as we have seen. He is the Immutable Sovereign over all things. How are these two passages to be interpreted? They should be interpreted in light of the clear teaching already established that God does not change His mind (Num. 23:19). But wait. I have forgotten to mention what v. 29 of the same chapter says, "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or **have regret**, for he is not a man, that he should **have regret**." This statement occurs in the same chapter where we twice read that God regretted making Saul king (vv. 11, 35). For the unbeliever, this is a clear contradiction in the Bible, but for the believer, that cannot be. Moreover, the Hebrew words used in these verses are all the same. Therefore, there is a sense in which God regrets or repents, but He does not. Notice that two things common to man are completely denied to God: lying and having regret. For someone to say that God sometimes repents or regrets, must by necessity also say that God sometimes lies. The parallelism simply requires such a connection, but the Bible denies the possibility that God can lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), therefore, He cannot change His mind as well.

It seems to me that vv. 11, 35 speak of God repenting, relenting or regretting from a human point of view, while v. 29 unambiguously declares that He, in fact, does not repent, relent, or have regret. J.P. Lange comments on v. 10, saying, "The *repentance of God* is the anthropopathic [attribution of passions to God] expression for the change of the divine procedure into the opposite of what the holy and righteous will of God had determined under the condition of holy and righteous

conduct by men, when on man's side there has been a change to the opposite of this condition without repentance."[17] Saul had disobeyed the Lord, therefore, the Lord rejected Saul as king. As He said to Eli, the same is true here, "Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1Sam. 2:30). Saul had dishonored the Lord and therefore, the Lord was sorry and regretted (from our perspective) for making him king. As John Piper notes:

> the repentance of God is his expression of a different attitude and action about something past or future—not because events have taken him off guard, but because events make the expression of a different attitude more fitting now than it would have been earlier. God's mind "changes," not because it responds to unforeseen circumstances, but because he has ordained that his mind accord with the way he himself orders the changing events of the world.[18]

Since Saul had disobeyed and dishonored the Lord, therefore, he is rejected by the Lord Who made him king. Moreover, the fact that this expression in vv. 11, 35 does not denote a surprise in God of what happened, or a change of mind is confirmed by His promise to Judah. In Genesis 49:8-11, it is to Judah that the scepter is promised, and not to Benjamin whose descendant Saul was. Therefore, Saul had to be rejected so that the promise to Judah could be fulfilled in David (and ultimately in the Greater David). God knew and had promised that the kingdom would belong to Judah, therefore, this makes it all the more necessary for Saul to be rejected and a descendant of Judah to sit upon the throne. Had Saul been obedient then the kingdom would have been established in his name, but he was not because his line was not promised to have the scepter.

Exodus 32:14

The last passage which I want to look at is the intercession of Moses and the "repentance" of God in Exodus 32. Moses has gone up to Mt. Sinai to receive the Decalogue from the hand of God. He has been there forty days and forty nights and then God tells him, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves" (Ex. 32:7). Notice how God distances Himself from the idolatrous Israelites. He does not say "*My* people whom, whom *I* brought up…," but rather He associates the people with Moses because of their sin. Then we read of God's determination to destroy Israel in these words:

> Exod 32:9-10 And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. 10 Now **therefore let me alone**, that **my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them**, in order that I may make a **great nation of you.**"

God wants to destroy the idolatrous Israelites and start a new nation with Moses and his line. God is angry and He has had it with this idolatrous and disobedient people, therefore, He decides to blot of out this people and start over again. God requests to be left alone (v. 10), but then comes Moses' intercession before the Lord for Israel. Moses, on the other hand, reminds the Lord that contra to the Lord's declaration in v. 7, it is "*your* people, whom *you* have brought out of Egypt" (v. 11), not Moses'. He also reminds the Lord about His reputation among the heathen. What will the Egyptians say when they hear about the Lord wiping Israel out? Did He bring them out to destroy them in the desert (v. 12)? Therefore, Moses implores and begs the Lord, saying, "**Turn from your burning anger and relent** from this disaster against your people" (v. 12). Finally, Moses reminds the Lord of one final thing: the promises to the Patriarchs with special emphasis upon the fact that God swore by Himself to establish the promises concerning innumerable offspring and the Promised Land (v. 13). Three things does Moses remind the Lord of: 1) Israel is His people; 2) God's reputation, and 3) the promises to the Fathers. It is without question that the use of "remember" in v. 13 is meant to be figurative, as in applying things common to man to God so that we would be able to understand Him. In other words: God did not forget about these things.

Now to make a few observations about this incident. Based on the actions of the Israelites, which were sinful and rebellious, God wanted to wipe out Israel and start all over again with Moses. Had Moses not interceded, the Lord would have wiped out Israel. The Lord said to Moses, "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them…" (v. 10). Had Moses left God alone, i.e., not interceded, the Lord would have consumed Israel. But Moses did intercede and therefore, God relented from the disaster which He had pronounced. Here, as with the account of Jonah, we see **the principle of Jeremiah 18:7-10 in action**. God will only wipe out Israel if: 1) Moses leaves God alone and 2) Israel remains as they are. But Moses did intercede and bring to mind to God the promises of God made to the Patriarchs. In essence, the petition of Moses was that "Your promises, Lord, depend not upon the people, but Your faithfulness to the fathers." Obviously, the Lord had not forgotten this, but He uses Moses and his intercession to accomplish His purposes. The Lord did not make a decretive declaration or a prophecy of judgment upon Israel, but as with Jonah and other instances, He sends warnings of judgment to the people (in this case, the representative) about what will happen to them, assuming that they don't repent. Well, the people are stiff-necked and rebellious, and although they remain so throughout their history, yet what keeps God from wiping them out is His promises to the Patriarchs. Over and over again, Israel is reminded that it is not because of their

goodness, but because of God's love of the Patriarchs that blessings fall upon them (e.g., Deut. 7:7-8). Based on God's covenant-keeping nature, which began with Abraham and extended through Isaac and Jacob, and even in the greatest act of redemption of the exodus from Egypt. In all of these things, God had demonstrated His covenant faithfulness all based on His grace and love of the fathers. God knows that Israel is disobedient, but He will not let the disobedient people annul His covenant promises.

Furthermore, let us simply reflect on the implication of taking this text to mean that God literally changed His mind. This would imply that 1) God did not care about His people; 2) God did not care about His reputation; 3) God did not care about His covenant promises. Even worse, this would imply that God did not know that it would be bad for His reputation to wipe out Israel, so Moses had to come and give counsel to the Lord. This is the God of Whom it is rhetorically said, "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" (Rom. 11:36). Well, according to this interpretation, Moses was once His counselor. R. C. Sproul lays the consequences out of such an irresponsible exegesis of the text:

> For example, in the Exodus incident Moses pleaded with God, arguing that God would look bad to the Egyptians if He carried out His threat. Then God changed His mind? Think of the meaning of this in human terms: If God first thought about punishing His people, He must have overlooked the consequence of that action on His reputation. His reasoning was flawed. His decision was impulsive. Fortunately, Moses was astute enough to see the folly of this decision and persuaded the shortsighted Deity to come up with a better plan. Fortunately for God, He was helped by a superior guidance counselor. Without the help of Moses, God would have made a foolish mistake!
>
> Even to talk like this is to border on blasphemy. That God could be corrected by Moses or any other creature is utterly unthinkable. Yet, that seems to be the implication of the narrative. This is a major reason why we must interpret the narrative passages of Scripture by the didactic or "teaching" portions. If we try to find too much theology in narrative passages, we can easily go beyond the point of the narrative into serious errors.[19]

We interpret this passage in the light of the clear passages which teach that God does not change His mind, nature, purposes or plans. He may change the way He acts based on what people do, i.e., they repent, or Moses intercedes on their behalf, but He does not change His plans. To say that God changed His mind because He did not know certain facts and His decisions before were not wise is blasphemy. *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* interprets this passage 'anthropopathically':

> Hebrew writers often express themselves 'anthropopathically,' i.e. attribute to God the feelings or emotions of a man. God is thus said to 'repent,' not because He really changes His purpose, but because He does so apparently, when, in consequence of a change in the character and conduct of men, He is obliged to make a corresponding change in the purpose towards them which He had previously announced, and adopt towards them a new attitude.[16]

From our point of view, it appears to us that God is changing and to help us understand the course of God's action, the Bible says that He repented or relented, but in actuality and strictly, He does not relent for He is not man. The comments of the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown should also not be ignored:

> God generally works by the instrumentality of means; and in this case the means of averting the wrath of God was the urgent intercessions of Moses, who, as the 'elect'-the leader chosen by Yahweh to accomplish in subserviency to His direction the great work of His people's deliverance and legislation-`stood in the breach before Him, to turn back His wrath from destroying' (Psa 106:23).[20]

God ordains the ends as well as the means to the end (**chapter 3, paragraph 6**). The ends were that Israel would be spared and the promises made to the Patriarchs fulfilled. The intercession of Moses, in light of the people's conduct, was the necessary *means* thereto. Critics of Reformed Theology often ignore the means in relation to God's sovereignty, which we, Reformed people, stress very much.

Most importantly, we should not miss the Christological significance of this text. This passage points ultimately to the intercession of Christ before the Father on behalf of the elect. Christ stands before the Father, holding back His judgment against His people, taking their punishment upon Himself as their Substitute. The Lord did bring judgment upon Israel; 3000 people were killed by the Levites at the command of the Lord (Ex. 32:28), but He did not bring a *total* judgment because of Moses' intercession. The point of this narrative is to teach about intercessory prayer and not to teach us that God changes His mind when we come up with a brilliant idea as if God needs the councils of men. Shane Lems writes on the application of this passage, saying:

Application: God has stooped down to show us that prayer in accordance with his will is effective. Exodus 32:14 teaches us, through Moses' intercession and mediation, that God shows mercy to sinners. "You in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness" (Neh. 9:19). In this **anthropomorphic** and **accommodated** way, God illustrates that he shows mercy to sinners. And this, in turn, points us to Jesus' intercession and mediation, which appeases God's just wrath for those who trust in him. God is not inviting us to peer into his secret counsel in Exodus 32:14, but he is pointing us to himself as revealed in his Son, whom Moses typified.[21]

Of Christ, it is said that the Father always hears Him (John 11:42) and that by His intercession "he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him" (Heb. 7:25). His intercession is also connected to His atoning work on behalf of His people (Rom. 8:32). Those for whom He dies, He also intercedes to save. So, as God listened to Moses and relented of the disaster which He pronounced, so, all the more will the Lord listen to Christ's intercession for His people.

To maintain that Scripture teaches that God changes in His nature, plans, purposes, or will, is to ignore the plain, straightforward, unqualified, and didactic teaching on the immutability of God in both testaments, both explicit and by implication. Passages which seem to teach a change of mind in God must be interpreted either as 1) conditional warnings, and not actual prophecies of judgment; 2) *anthropopathisms*, that is, attribution of human passions and emotions to God; or 3) accommodation, that is, God stoops low to speak to us in a way that we can understand.

The Spirituality of God

"God is spirit" means that He is immaterial, invisible and immortal. He is not limited by space. He is not a man who has body parts, but He chose to enter into His creation as a man (Phil. 2:5-11). When we are told that we are created in the image of God, this does not mean that we look physically like God, but that we represent God. We, in some measure mirror God in what He does, and not that we *look* like Him. See more on the image of God **here**.

The spirituality of God is asserted in the following words, "a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto". Although the simple spirituality of God is a communicable attribute, yet the full description of the Confession of God's spirituality is peculiar only to God. It is true that both men and angels have or are spirits, but it is not true that men are without bodies, parts or passions. God is said to be a most pure spirit, which basically means that He is invisible. Scriptures agree with this. In John 4:24, the Lord Jesus told the Samaritan woman that "God is spirit" who should be worshiped "in spirit and truth." To be spirit at most basic level is to be immaterial. God is not made up of stuff. He has no physical form (e.g., Deut. 4:12). The Lord Jesus teaches us elsewhere that "a spirit does not have flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39), i.e., a physical form. He is the "invisible God" who became visible in Jesus (Col. 1:15). He is "the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God" (1 Tim. 1:17). Even though the Bible often portrays God as having physical aspects, e.g., hands, eyes, feet, mouth, face, etc., we understand these things as merely baby-talk—God communicating to us in ways which we could understand, and not describing the reality of what He truly is. In the last verse, Paul says that God is immortal. In 1 Timothy 6:16, Paul says that God "alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see." Immortality is the quality of being unable to die. God has this by virtue of His nature, on the other hand, humans have immortality by virtue of God granting them that. See **chapter 31** for a little bit more on this. God alone, by virtue of being God, has no possibility of either not existing or ceasing to exist. God, by virtue of His being and nature, must exist and He cannot *not* exist.

Divine Impassibility is defined by Samuel Renihan as "God does not experience emotional changes either from within or affected by His creation." Webster defines it as "Incapable of pain, passion or suffering; that cannot be affected with pain or uneasiness. Whatever is destitute of sensation is impassible."[22] This is a subject which I still have to read on, but the idea is basically that just like God uses physical and human things to describe Himself, so likewise He uses human emotions and feelings to describe Himself to us. In many ways, we humans, are controlled by our passions and feelings, but God is not like us. His "emotions" or "feelings" are nothing like ours, but since God wants to communicate with us, He uses the vocabulary of feelings and emotions which we are familiar with, just like He does that when speaking of His hand, eyes, mouth, feet, wings, Him being a husband, a father, etc. God is incapable of suffering since He is all-sufficient and all-glorious. This should not be confused, as it is often done, with the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is God and man. Since the Son became man in Jesus Christ, He also shared in "flesh and blood" (Heb. 2:14) and partook of our nature, including our feelings, passions, and emotions, not to mention other things which are excluded from God including hunger, tiredness, sleep, physical form, pain, blood, etc. There are some good resources on impassibility that have recently come from Samuel Renihan which I have not studied.

The Infinity of God

The infinity of God is asserted in the words "who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute". The attributes of God are to their utter perfection with God. Although we are holy, He is *most* holy; although we are wise, He is *most* wise; although we are free, he is *most* free;

although we are finite, He is *in*finite and so on.

To say that God is **immense** is to declare that He fills heaven and earth as the Scriptures say (Jer. 23:24). There is not an inch in the Universe that the Lord of heaven and earth does not fill. He is immeasurable and unlimited not only in His being but also in His perfections. Solomon, after building the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, admits that even "heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built" (2 Chron. 6:18). His greatness is immeasurable and unlimited. To say that God is immense is also to say that He is **Omnipresent**. Louis Berkhof defines the immensity of God as "*that perfection of the Divine Being by which He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole Being*."[23] Since He fills heaven and earth, this means that He is everywhere at once. David also clearly expresses God's omnipresence in the following words:

> Ps. 139:7-10 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! 9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

Since God is without body and physical parts, His presence is not limited like ours is. Besides being a most pure and free spirit, He is the only one Who is perfect and infinite in everything.

God is said to be **eternal** meaning that He had no beginning, neither will He have an end. Moses declares, "from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:2). He is the God Who existed before the point of "the beginning" in Genesis 1, and the One who "began" the "beginning." The eternality of God is connected with the fact that He is self-existent and immortal. He never began to exist and He will never cease to exist. He is the One who "lives forever and ever" (Rev. 4:9-10; 10:6; 15:7). He lives and His life will never have an end. The fact that God is eternal, i.e., without beginning and without an end, and that He is omnipresent, implies that He sees and knows all things. He is not constrained by time. Time does not bind Him as it binds us. 2 Peter 3:8 says "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." To us, one day is one day, and a thousand years is a very long time. But to the Lord, both the thousand years and the single day are the same.

He is the only One which we cannot completely comprehend—He is **incomprehensible**. **See above**.

He is Omnipotent, meaning that He is **almighty.** He is called "God Almighty" in Scripture by the Patriarchs (Gen. 17:1). He reveals Himself to the Patriarchs as "God Almighty" (Gen. 17:1; 35:11; Ex. 6:3) and is called by them as such (Gen. 28:3; 43:14; 48:3). In the book of Job, a search for the word "Almighty" delivers 31 verses. This is the Name by which the Lord was known to the ancients and this is a name which is based on the attribute of God's power. If He is the Creator of all things, then obviously He is the Almighty One. He is the One Who has all the might in the Universe to do anything that pleases Him. God possessing all power does not mean that He can do anything. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), He cannot sin, He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13), neither can He make a square circle because that is a logical contradiction. God being Almighty does not mean that He can make contradictions come true. Nothing can make contradictions true. God being Almighty means that He can accomplish all that He wants and all that is in accord with His holy nature.

God is in **every way infinite** which means that His perfections are perfect beyond measure. His glory, His love, His grace, His justice, His holiness are all in every way infinite and beyond any limit.

He is not holy, neither, holy, holy, but "**holy, holy, holy**" (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). He is the thrice-holy Triune God of Scripture. Repetition is a form of emphasis as in Galatians 1:8-9. He is countlessly called Holy in the Bible. This is His most prominent and most proclaimed attribute. The holiness of God is that which sets Him apart from everything else. He is *other* and *different* from everything else. He is not wholly other, otherwise, we would not know anything about Him and neither be able to relate to Him. But as creatures made in His image, we are able to communicate with Him and know Him relationally. He is free from all moral corruption that we are acquainted with. He has never sinned nor can sin (James 1:13; Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2). In Ezekiel 36, God will vindicate the holiness of His name by His judgment upon Israel's enemies and their salvation. Whenever God saves sinners, He vindicates the holiness of His name by having placed their sins upon Christ and punishing those sins and thereby satisfying His holiness and justice. The holiness of God is the most central attribute of the Divine Being. All the perfections of God are infinite and most holy. His love is a *holy* love; His justice is a *holy* justice; His wrath is a *holy* wrath; His grace is a *holy* grace; and so on. He is on a class by Himself, perfectly pure and satisfied in Himself.

The **wisdom** of God is beyond measure given the fact that God is the all-knowing One. Christ is called "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Prov. 9:10). The one who denies the Lord denies the only source of true wisdom. God has no need of any council, all He does is most wise and cannot be foolish (Rom. 11:34-35; Job 21:22; 36:23). Everything that He does is most wise. Everything that He has ordained from all eternity is most wise and for the glorification of His holy Name. Even the "foolishness of God", as Paul says, "is wiser than men" (1 Cor. 1:25). Wisdom is definitional to His Being, as Job 12:13 says, "With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding" (cf. Job 9:4; Dan. 2:20). These things belong to Him primarily, and they are delegated to

man with some measure, but never in the same measure that He possesses. He is the One who gives wisdom to man (Dan. 1:17; 2:23; Jas. 1:5).

God is said to be **most free** and **most absolute**. These perfections relate to God's absolute sovereignty. God is uncontrolled by anything outside of Himself. There are no constraints on God besides His holy nature. Even a pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar, says of God in Daniel 4:35: 'he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"' Answering the heathen mocking the people of God, Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." Again and again, the Bible declares the freedom and sovereignty of God. The word absolute is defined by Webster as "Loosed from any limitation or condition; uncontrolled; unrestricted; unconditional; as, absolute authority, monarchy, sovereignty, an absolute promise or command; absolute power; an absolute monarch."[24] God being most absolute is another reference to His sovereignty and freedom to do as He pleases. His power is unrestricted, His will is uncontrolled by any other besides Himself, there are no limitations to His power or any of His perfections.

The Sovereignty of God

He is the Sovereign God Who directs every minute detail in the universe and has ordained every single thing in history (more on that in **chapter 3**). He is not bound by anything. He is most free. He is absolutely sovereign. He works everything according to His will (Eph. 1:11). He looks at history and says: I will do all my pleasure! Isaiah 46:8-11 declares: "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, 9 remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' 11 calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it." This is the God Who from before Creation chose a certain people, out of His good pleasure alone, not because He foresaw anything in them, and decided to draw them to Himself and give them to His Son. By this, He will demonstrate the infinity of His grace and mercy. On the other hand, He left the rest in their sins and ordained their damnation because of their sins, so as to display His justice and wrath. Much more will be said in **chapter 3**.

The Communicable Attributes of God

The Love of God

God's love is described in the fact that He is "most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin". The love of God is infinite for His people in that He predestined them in love (Eph. 1:4-5) and because of love, He sent His Son into the world for us (John 3:16). God's love for the elect is an everlasting love, which extends from eternity past to eternity future. It is the same kind of love which the Father has for the Son (John 17:26). This is what to me is mind-blowing. The Father loves the elect in the same way that He loves the Son. It has pleased the Trinity to create and redeem so that we may enjoy and join the Trinity in their loving communion and live with Them.

God is love (1 John 4:8). He loved us while we were sinners and gave up Christ for our sake (Rom. 5:8-9). By His grace—His unmerited favor—we have been saved from Himself, by Himself and for Himself. While we were wicked and God-hating, Christ died for us. We did not deserve this, but He is the Sovereign Lord who is sovereign in dispensing His grace, which He does most freely and without any obligation to save anyone (Rom. 9:18). He is the God Who is long-suffering. The Bible many times says that He is "slow to anger" (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18), which is demonstrated clearly in allowing us to live so long and sin, without directly sending us to Hell. He bears with us and grants us good gifts and blessings. He is good to all; He is Omni-benevolent (Ps. 145:9). Even to the wicked He is good and demonstrates His goodness. But to the righteous, God is especially good, gracious and loving, because they are peculiarly His. Even after granting us faith and repentance, He still bears with us and is slow to anger toward us. The difference between mercy and grace lies in this: *Grace* is grating that which we do not deserve, while *mercy* is not getting what we deserve. *Mercy* gets us out of Hell, while *grace* grants us all the blessings of Christ and His covenant. For the elect, mercy and grace go hand-in-hand. God demonstrates His mercy and common grace even to the wicked in allowing them to live and his riches and happiness in their lives, which He absolutely does not owe them for the continual sinning against Him.

He forgave us by the sacrifice of His beloved Son. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." God took our sin and placed it on His beloved and most holy Son, Who is equal to Him, and punished Him instead of us. God is most holy and therefore He must punish all sin. He cannot tolerate sin. The Good News to us is summarized in Romans 3:23-26: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." A great substitution has taken place where Christ has taken the punishment of all the elect upon Himself and thereby satisfying the holy wrath and law of God.

The Justice of God

Those who seek Him will indeed find Him (Jer. 29:13; 33:3). He does not reject those who seek Him, yet He rewards them (Heb. 11:6), although they don't deserve it (Luke 17:10). It is our duty to do the will of God and seek Him. Those who seek God realize that it was God Who was seeking them (John 6:44). God's rewards to the righteous are by grace and gracious covenant and not by obligation. The Lord Jesus taught us in Luke 17:10, "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" Even if we did *all* that we were commanded, which we are not able to do, we still are unworthy slaves, deserving of no rewards. Therefore, how gracious and merciful God is toward us that He even rewards our works, which are always stained with sin, and for the sake of Christ, pours out on us His immeasurable grace.

The justice of God means that He hates "all sin, and…will by no means clear the guilty." The justice of God is demonstrated in bringing judgment upon the godless in this life and also in the next. The Bible teaches that not only does He hate the sin, but He also hates *sinners* (e.g., Ps. 5:5-6; 11:5; Rom. 9:13). This doctrine is difficult. We cannot equate the righteous and holy hatred of God with human hatred, which is motivated by sin. Since God is sinless and altogether holy, His hatred, therefore, is likewise sinless and holy. The hatred of God against sin and sinners was demonstrated on the cross in that the Father sent His only Son to die a terrible death and bear the wrath of God on behalf of His people. On the cross, both the wrath and love of God were demonstrated. God does not simply forgive us without sacrifice. Rather, He provided the sacrifice which would provide satisfaction to His holiness and His law. We have defied His holiness and we have broken His law. God cannot simply push sin under the rug, but He must deal with it because He is not a corrupt judge, but He is the righteous Judge of all the earth. God punished His Son, as the Substitute on behalf of His people, so that His people can be forgiven and given the righteousness of Christ. In this way, God is Just and the Justifier of those who believe in the Son. See **chapter 11** for more on this.

Nahum 1:2 introduces God as, "The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies." The **wrath of God** is what Jesus took upon Himself in the place of all those who believe in Him. It is from the judgment and wrath of God that we are saved. The wrath of God rests on everyone who does not believe and obey the Son (John 3:36; Rom. 1:18-31). The wrath of God is His displeasure and hatred of the sin and the sinner, yes the sinner too (Ps. 5:5-6; 11:5). The place of punishment where God's wrath will be unrestrained is Hell. There the Lord will be present in His displeasure and wrath, unrestrained by Himself and with no ounce of mercy anymore. Oftentimes the Lord shows unfathomable grace to the worst of sinners on earth, which is meant to lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4), yet they keep rebelling against Him and thereby storing more and more wrath for themselves for rejecting the God whom they know (Rom. 1:21). It is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). But for all those who have put their faith in the Mediator, the Substitute in our place, they are freed from the wrath of God and that wrath which they rightly deserve is taken by Christ because He loved them. By placing our sins upon Jesus, He is shown to be both just and the justifier of those who put their faith in the Substitute (Rom. 3:26).

This is our God. He's awesome and Sovereign and we are not ashamed to say that we know no characteristics/attributes (as mentioned in the confession) of Him aside from His revelation and condescension in Holy Writ. All that we certainly and clearly know about God is based upon His divine condescension in the Holy Scriptures by revealing Himself to undeserving sinners.

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§2 The Self-Sufficiency Of God

2. God, having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself, is alone in and unto himself **all-sufficient,** not standing in need of any creature which he hath made, **nor deriving any glory** from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; **1** he is the alone **fountain of all being,** of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, and **he hath most sovereign dominion over all creatures,** to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth; **2** in his sight all things are open and manifest, **his knowledge** is infinite, infallible, and **independent upon the creature,** so as **nothing is to him contingent or uncertain; 3** he is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands; **4** to him is due from angels and men, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, as creatures they owe unto the Creator, and whatever he is further pleased to require of them. **5**
    1. John 5:26; Acts 7:2; Ps 148:13; 119:68; 1 Tim 6:15; Job 22:2-3; Acts 17:24-25
    2. Rev. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rom. 11:34-36; Dan 4:25, 34-35
    3. Heb. 4:13; Rom. 11:33-34; Ps. 147:5; Acts 15:18; Ezek. 11:5

4. Ps. 145:17; Rom. 7:12
5. Rev. 5:12-14

God is **in and unto Himself all-sufficient** because he has **all life, glory, goodness**, and **blessedness** without being dependent upon any other. Even His glory is not **derived** from any creature, rather He **manifests** His glory **in, by, unto and upon** Hs creatures. What we give God is *ascribed* glory. We do not increase His glory, we acknowledge it and are changed by it. As paragraph 1 said, He is **most absolute**, meaning that He is **the foundation of all being** and reality. He is **most sovereign** over His creation and He does **by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth** (Dan. 4:34-35; Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Eph. 1:11). There is no one who can resist this Majesty of Heaven (Dan. 4:34-35; Rom. 9:19). Everything is open and naked before Him. He does not have to go and search for anyone or search for motives in people. All things are open and known before Him for **his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent**. Because His knowledge is **infinite**, meaning exhaustive, it cannot be fallible, therefore it is **infallible** (cannot be wrong). Furthermore, His knowledge is independent of His creatures and what they will do, therefore, nothing is **contingent** or **uncertain** about His knowledge. Contingent basically means uncertain or with the possibility of not happening. In other words, if God knows that event *X* will happen, then it is no longer contingent, but it *must* happen. This great and Sovereign God is not an arbitrary God. In fact, **He is most holy** in **all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commandments**. He has purposes which He is willing to accomplish and all His purposes are **most holy** purposes.

Because of these things about this great God, all His creatures owe Him **worship, service,** and **obedience**. Most importantly, this they owe Him as **creatures** owe unto the **Creator**. They do not owe this obedience and worship to Him as to the Redeemer, but by virtue of the fact that they are *His* creatures. Because they were created by Him, they should worship and obey Him as Creator (Rom. 1:19-21). The obligation to worship and obedience does not only spring forth from God as Redeemer, but first of all from God as Creator.

Our Triune God is all-sufficient in and of Himself, that's why the popular idea that God regarding election as having looked down into the corridors of time is foolish and unbiblical because that would mean that God was depended on something for His decrees, which would not make Him self-sufficient. When God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass", He looked to nothing but His good pleasure. All that God has ordained, He has ordained not because it was foreseen, but because He wanted it to be so.

God's glory is underived. He does not get more glory from us. Sometimes speaking about the glory of God can imply that God is getting more glory from us. We speaking of God receiving "more glory" from this or that, or we must give more glory to God. It is easy to misunderstand such language. In actuality all we can give God is "ascribed" (attributed) glory; we cannot add anything to Him. We can ascribe glory to Him and we can also manifest His glory to others by obeying Him and also by Him changing us into Christ's likeness. But the glory that God has is underived and independent from the world. God may manifest His glory in one instance more than the other, but this does not mean that His actual and internal glory increases or diminishes. He is the God Whose glory the whole earth is filled with (Isa. 6:3). He is the God Who is happy and blessed in and of Himself (1 Tim. 1:11; 6:15-16). He does not depend for His glory on anything but Himself, as He does not depend for His existence and other eternal perfections on any but Himself. All creation depends on Him, but He, on the other hand, depends on no one and no thing. He does with His creation as He pleases (Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Dan. 4:34-35).

God's perfect knowledge is stated and thereby the heretical doctrines of Open Theism and Process Theology are denied. He knows what I will speak before I speak it, He knows when I rise up and when I lay down, He knows everything about me and us (Psalm 139). He's the God Who ordains everything, thus infallibly knows everything because He has ordained everything (Isa. 46:8-11; Eph. 1:11; see also **chapter 3**). We've taken a look at the "**Repentance of God**" and **Immutability of God** in paragraph 1 and we've seen that God is unchanging in His mind and plans. He knows all things (1 John 3:20) and ordains all things (Isa. 46:8-11; Eph. 1:11), therefore, His knowledge is most infallible and most exhaustive.

As the Creator, all His creatures owe Him honor, worship, service, and obedience. The Lord Jesus told us that when we do all that God demands we should not feel like we should get a reward for doing what we were obligated to do, for we are merely "unworthy servants" (Luke 17:7-10). It's the duty of man to obey God and worship Him. Ecclesiastes 12:13 says, "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." We cannot forget the Westminster Shorter Catechism question 1:

> Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?
>
> A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

The goal of man's existence is to be found in God, and not in self. We were made to worship God to live with Him forever. This goal was lost in the Fall, but regained on the cross for all those who have faith in the Son. We look forward to Paradise Regained with our Triune God.

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§3 The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity

3. In this divine and infinite Being there are **three subsistences**, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, **1** **of one substance**, power, and eternity, **each having the whole divine essence,** yet the essence **undivided**: **2** the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the **Son is eternally begotten of the Father;** the **Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son**; **all infinite, without beginning,** therefore but one God, who is **not to be divided in nature and being,** but **distinguished** by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him. **3**
    1. Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14
    2. Ex. 3:14; John 14:11; 1 Cor. 8:6
    3. Prov. 8:22-23; John 1:1-3, 14, 18; 3:16; 10:36; 15:26; 16:28; Heb. 1:2; 1 John 4:14; Gal 4:4-6

This God is trinitarian. The word **subsistences** points to the *Persons* of the Trinity: **Father**, **Son**, and **Holy Spirit**. Yet we do not talk about three gods, but one **substance** of God, in other words, one God Who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The **three subsistences** of the **one substance** of God have all **power, and eternity** in common. Each person is fully God in and of Himself and does not have a 1/3 of the divine being to Himself. Rather, each Person has **the whole divine essence** (substance, being). Yet this essence is **undivided**, meaning that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are fully God and share fully in the divine essence and are not "parts" of it.

Then comes the classic formulation of the Persons of the Trinity. This portion can be confusing and it may confound the mind. But should we be surprised that this great God is incomprehensible? Should we be surprised that there are many secrets and mysteries about His life and being? The **Father is of none**. Meaning that He is neither **begotten** nor **proceeding**. The **Son is eternally begotten**. It is important to note the word **eternally** here, which denotes that there was not a time when the Son did not exist. **Begotten** here, according to the historical usage of the word, does not mean created, but describes His relation to the Father as a Son. The **Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son**. This term again is used to describe the relationship of the Spirit to the Father and the Son. Lest there be any confusion, the Confession goes on to say concerning the Persons of the Trinity that They are **all infinite** and **without beginning**. Therefore, there is **but one God**. We do not worship three gods. We worship **one God** Who exists in **three subsistences**. The Persons of God are not to be **divided in nature and being**, but may be **distinguished** by their **peculiar relative properties** and **personal relations**. The Father is not the Son, neither is the Son the Father or the Spirit. The Spirit is not the Son or the Father, and so on. These things distinguish the Persons from one another. The Father created through the Son and by the power of the Spirit. In redemption, we even clearly see the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity. The Father elects a people and sends His Son into the world to save them. The Son gives His life in their stead by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Christ to those for whom He died and whom the Father elected. Each Person has a unique position or work to do in the self-glorification of God in the redemption of the elect.

The **doctrine of the Trinity** is not a doctrine for intellectuals alone, but is a doctrine which we should love and which is **the foundation of all our communion with God**. Even in prayer, we are Trinitarian. The usual form of prayer is to the Father, by the power of the Spirit and in the name of the Son. How conscious are we that our God is a Trinitarian God? See Ephesians 2:18 for the work of the Trinity in our communion with God. Thanks to the Son we have access to the Father by the Holy Spirit. All three Persons of the Blessed Trinity our involved in our daily walk and communion with God.

Definition Of Terms

Before proceeding, it is essential to get a good grasp of what the terms relating to the doctrine of the Trinity mean. These are terms that are always associated with the doctrine as "*being*" and "*person*", for example.

Essence and Its Synonyms

The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature defines ***essence*** as "(essentia, from essens, the old participle of esse, to be), a term in philosophy corresponding to οὐσία [*ousia*] in Greek, and sometimes to nature, sometimes to being or substance in English."[25] Webster defines ***essence*** thus:

> 1. **That which constitutes the particular nature of a being or substance**, or of a genus, and which distinguishes it from all others.
>
> Mr. Locke makes a distinction between nominal essence and real essence. The nominal essence, for example, of gold, is that complex idea expressed by gold; the real essence is the constitution of its insensible parts, on which its properties depend, which is unknown to us.
>
> The essence of God bears no relation to place.
>
> 2. Formal existence; **that which makes any thing to be what it is**; or rather, the peculiar nature of a thing; the very substance; as the essence of christianity.[26] [emphasis added]

It is good that Webster mentioned John Locke because his definition of essence is pretty simple: "Essence may be taken for the very being of anything, whereby it is what it is."[25] Webster defines ***substance,*** a related term in the discussion of the Trinity, as:

> 1. In a general sense, **being**; something **existing by itself**; that which really is or exists; equally applicable to matter or spirit. Thus the soul of man is called an immaterial substance, a cogitative substance, a substance endued with thought. We say, a stone is a hard substance, tallow is a soft substance.[27] [emphasis added]

It is recognized by the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* that ***substance*** is synonymous with ***essence*** and ***nature*** when speaking about the Trinity.

> (Lat. sub, under, sto or stans, to stand) is literally **that which subsists** [exists] **by itself.** In Greek. substance is denoted by οὐσία; hence, *that which truly is,*or ***essence***, seems to be the proper meaning of substance...Substance, a term used in technical divinity to describe **nearly the same idea as essence or nature**. Thus the Son is said to be the same substance with the Father, that is, truly and essentially God, as the Father is.[28] [words within brackets and emphasis mine]

Therefore, the words *substance, being, nature,* and *ousia,* when used in theological discussions about the Blessed Trinity, refer to the one Being of God. They refer to the nature of God. They refer to what makes God *God*. God is one essence/substance/nature/ousia. God's "Being" is the answer to the question of "what is God?" God is the eternal and supreme Being. Now we turn to answer the question of "who is God?"

Person and Its Synonyms

The words ***person***, ***hypostasis***, ***subsistence*** are likewise synonymous with each other. The *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* defines ***hypostasis*** as:

> (from ὑπό, under, and ἵστημι, to stand; hence **subsistence**), a term used in theology to **signify person**. Thus the orthodox hold that there is but **one nature or essence in God**, but **three hypostases or persons**. This term is of very ancient use in the Church. Cyril, in a letter to Nestormus, employs it instead of πρόσωπον [*prosopon*], person, which did not appear to him sufficiently expressive. The term occasioned great dissensions, both among the Greeks and Latins. In the Council of Nicaea, hypostasis was defined to mean essence or substance, so that it was heresy to say that Christ was of a different hypostasis from his Father. Custom, however, altered its meaning. In the necessity they were under of expressing themselves strongly against the Sabellians, the **Greeks used the word hypostasis**, the **Latins persona**, which proved a source of great disagreement. The barrenness of the Latin language allowed them only one word by which to translate the two Greek ones οὐσία [*ousia*] and ὑπόστασις [*prosopon*], and thus prevented them' from distinguishing essence from hypostasis. An end was put to these disputes by a synod held in Alexandria about A.D. 362, at which Athanasius assisted, when it was determined to be **synonymous with πρόσωπον** [*prosopon*]. After this time the Latins made no great scruple in saying **tres**

hypostases, or the Greeks **three persons**.[29] [emphasis and words within brackets added]

Matt Slick observes the following about the words ***person*** and ***subsistence***:

> The word "subsistence" means something that has a **real existence**. The word "person" denotes **individuality** and **self-awareness**. [30] [emphasis added]
>
> In reference to the Trinity as three persons, the word [person] refers to the attributes of personhood: **self-awareness**, **choice**, can **reason**, **love**, possessing a **will** and **consciousness**, etc.[31]

Thus we can understand *subsistence* as that distinction which exists between the three blessed Persons of the Trinity. That which distinguishes them from one another, although they are *essentially* one. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are ***subsistences***, ***hypostases*** or ***persons*** of the one substance and being of God. They share the One Being of God. The best word to use is still ***person*** with caveats and an explanation of what we mean by it. We do not mean "person" in the sense which is common to man. When we speak of "person," we imagine people before us. This is not what the word means when used in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, by "person" we mean a distinct self-consciousness, will, and existence. The Father is distinct from the Son and the Holy Spirit. All three have a distinct self-consciousness. They communicate with each other with "I" and "you," which implies a separate identity and consciousness.

Trinity

James White defines the Trinity as:

> Within the **one Being that is God**, there **exists eternally three coequal and coeternal persons**, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[32]

This definition is pretty basic and understandable. There is a distinction between the Being of God (what?) and the persons of God (who?). Wayne Grudem defines the Trinity thus:

> **God eternally exists as three persons**, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and **each person is fully God**, and **there is one God**.[33]

Simply said: God is **one essence** in **three Persons.** There is One Being of God which is shared by three co-equal and co-eternal Persons. God is one in *A* and three in *B.* The words *Being* and *Person* are not synonymous and they refer to different things concerning God, as explained above. Furthermore, the English word "Trinity", originally from Latin, which is a word not found in the Bible, but what it teaches is all over the Bible, means "three-in-oneness." The word Trinity contains in it both the three-ness and the one-ness of God. God is just one Being, but His existence is complex. This one Being exists as three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To establish the doctrine of the Trinity as biblical, 4 things must be proven:

1. The Father is Fully God;
2. The Son is Fully God;
3. The Spirit is Fully God;
4. Monotheism – There is but one God.

As an extra, if it is not clear from the first four points, we add the distinction between the Persons of the Godhead.

The Deity of the Three Persons

In this paragraph, I am merely scratching the surface of what Christian theology since the resurrection has said on the doctrine of the Trinity. This is merely an introduction to the mysterious and glorious doctrine of the Trinity.

The Father is God

This is the easiest. No major non-Trinitarian group seems to deny the deity of the Father. Countless times is God the Father called *God* in the New and Old Testaments.

Phil. 1:2 Grace to you and peace from **God our Father** and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph. 1:3 Blessed be the **God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

1 Cor. 8:6 yet for us there is **one God, the Father**, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

John 6:27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him **God the Father** has set his seal."

Since this point is not controversial, we will be content with the little out of the many that is provided here.

The Son is God

John 1:1

Here is where the controversy starts. Heretics have oftentimes denied the full deity of the Blessed Son or have taught that He is not equal with the Father. There is no place where the deity of Christ is better taught than the gospel of John, so let us start there.

John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and **the Word was with God**, and the **Word was God**. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 **All things were made through him**, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Not only one can hear Genesis 1:1 in this passage, but the Word, which is then identified with Jesus in John 1:14, is said to be God and with God! This is clear evidence for the eternal deity of the Son. From the beginning and before the beginning (John 17:5), as far back you want to push the beginning, He has existed with the Father. In the "beginning" of time, space and matter, at that point the Son of God "was", i.e., He existed even before the creation, namely, in eternity. Even though the Word is clearly called God, yet at the same time, it is distinguished from God. The doctrine of Trinity teaches a distinction between the three Persons of the one Being of God. John 1:1b speaks of the Word's relationship to God the Father. He was face to face with Him, in blessed communion (John 17:5). While John 1:1c speaks of the nature of the Word. The Word as to His nature was God or deity. Clearly, even when the Word is called God, in the same sentence He is distinguished from God the Father. Charles J. Ellicott notes on this verse, saying, "These words express the co-existence, but at the same time the distinction of person. They imply relation with, intercourse with."[34]

Concerning the eternality of the Logos (i.e. the Word), aside from John 17:5, for example, Dr. James White notes:

When speaking of the Logos as He existed in eternity past, John uses the Greek word ἦν, *en* (a form of *eimi*). The tense of the word expresses *continuous action in the past*...Above we noted that John gave us some very important information about the time frame he has in mind when he says "in the beginning." That information is found in the tense of the verb *en*. You see, as far back as you wish to push "the beginning," the Word is already in existence. The Word does not come *into existence* at the "beginning," but is already in existence when the "beginning" takes place. If we take the beginning of John 1:1, the Word is already there. If we push it back further (if one can even do so!), say, a year, the Word is already there. A thousand years, the Word is there. A billion years, the Word is there.' What is John's point? The Word is eternal. The Word has always existed. The Word is not a creation. The *New English Bible* puts it quite nicely: "When all things began, the Word already was."[35]

Not only is the Son of God here clearly called God, but the creation is said to be made through Him, and without Him, nothing was made! God the Father created through the agency of the Son. He is the Creator. No one can be said to be the creator of everything than God. Colossians 1:15-17 is gloriously in agreement with Jesus being the Creator of everything that exists. If He has created everything that exists, this means that the Son is uncreated, and therefore eternal, without beginning. The *International Critical Commentary on the New Testament* notes the following:

Before anything is said by him about creation, he proclaims that the Logos was in being originally—ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν, not ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐγένετο (see for the distinction on 8:58). This doctrine is also found in the Apocalypse. In that book, Christ is also called the Word of God (19:13), and He is represented (22:13) as claiming pre-existence: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Paul, who does not apply the title "Logos" to Christ, yet has the same doctrine of His pre-existence: "He is before all things" (Col. 1:17). With this cf. the words ascribed to Jesus in 17:5.[36]

The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges notes concerning the verb *was* in John 1:1a, saying, "The Arians maintained that there was a period when the Son was not: S. John says distinctly that the Son or Word was existing before time began, i.e. from all eternity."[37] Our last commentary is from Philip Schaff:

> **And the Word was with God:** the second of the three statements made in this verse regarding the Word, and obviously higher than the first. It is impossible to convey in English the full force of the preposition 'with' in the Greek, for it denotes not merely being beside, but maintaining communion and intercourse with (comp. Mar 6:3; 1Jn 1:2; 1Jn 2:1).
>
> **And the Word was God:** the third and highest statement respecting the Word. The Word is possessed of divine essence; in that being in which He 'was,' He so possesses the divine attributes that He is God. There is difference of personality, but unity of nature. In this last clause the climax of the three clauses is complete.[38]

John 1:18

In the prologue of John (John 1:1-18), the Lord Jesus is once again called *God*. This time He is called the μονογενὴς θεὸς (*monogenes theos*). The unique or only God.

> John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; **the only God**, **who is at the Father's side**, he has made him known.

He is the only One Who truly knows and comprehends God the Father (Matt. 11:27) and He is the exact revelation of God the Father sent into the world (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15; John 14:7). Notice that the Son is here again distinguished from the Father as in the first verse of the gospel. The *Monogenes Theos* is at the Father's side. He is not the Father, but He is in His presence, as He was from all eternity in John 1:1b. Again and again, Scripture both reveals the deity of the Son and also the distinction of persons in the Godhead. The Son is the One Who has exegeted (ἐξηγήσατο, *exēgēsato*) the Father to us. He is the One Who has explained the Father to us. The Son of God is absolutely equal to the Father here. He is called the Only or Unique God. Some manuscripts here had "only Son" instead of "only God", but the oldest and most reliable manuscripts have "only God" here. Dr. White elsewhere writes that 'the most ancient texts, including the oldest existing copies of John's gospel (P^{66} and P^{75}), as well as a number of the church's early fathers, refer to Christ as the "only-begotten God," or more accurately, the "unique God."' [39]

More than a century ago, A. H. Strong likewise noted that *monogenes theos* is the earlier and more established reading than *monogones houios.* 'In this passage, although Tischendorf (8th ed.) has μονογενὴς υἱός [*monogones houios*], Westcott and Hort (with א*BC*L Pesh. Syr.) read μονογενὴς Θεός [*monogones theos*] and the Rev. Vers. puts "the only begotten God" in the margin, though it retains "the only begotten Son" in the text. Harnack says the reading μονογενὴς θεός [*monogones theos*] is "established beyond contradiction"; see Westcott, Bib. Com. on John, pages 32, 33. Here then we have a new and unmistakable assertion of the deity of Christ.'[40] *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* notes on this variant, saying:

> Most MSS. and versions have 'the only-begotten Son' or 'only-begotten Son.' But the three oldest and best MSS. and two others of great value have 'only-begotten *God*.' The test of the value of a MS., or group of MSS., on any disputed point, is the extent to which it admits false readings on other points not disputed. Judged by this test the group of MSS. which read 'only-begotten God' is very strong; while the far larger group of MSS. which have 'Son' for 'God' is comparatively weak, for the same group of MSS. might be quoted in defence of a multitude of readings which no one would think of adopting. Again, the revised Syriac, which is among the minority of versions that support 'God,' is here of special weight, because it agrees with MSS. from which it usually differs. We conclude, therefore, that the very unusual expression 'only-begotten God' is the true reading, which has been changed to the usual 'only-begotten Son,' a change which in an old Greek MS. would involve the alteration of only a single letter.[37]

The ICCNT commentary notes, "An exhaustive examination of the textual evidence was made by Hort, and his conclusion that the true reading is μονογενὴς θεός [*monogones theos*] has been generally accepted. There can be no doubt that the evidence of MSS., versions, and Fathers is overwhelmingly on this side."[36] The Son of God is clearly referred to as the only and unique God here, Who is separate, yet one with the Father.

John 20:28

We will look at yet another explicit statement from John:

> John 20:28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and **my God**!”

In no uncertain words, Jesus is here called *God*. Doubting-Thomas did not believe that the Lord Jesus rose and appeared to the disciples. He said that he would not believe unless he touched Him. The Lord Jesus appears to him a week later and he falls on his knees and makes this confession, which is every true Christian’s confession, too. Jesus is directly called “my God.” It’s amazing how some heretics try to explain this away. They say it’s like Thomas blasphemed, or used God’s name in vain, like “My Lord…and oh wow, my God.” This is a very desperate and failed attempt. The words are clear: Thomas answered *him*. Thomas was not speaking to himself but spoke these words to the Lord Jesus Himself. Now surely, Jesus, if He were but a man would have rebuked Thomas, but is this what the blessed Savior did?

> John 20:29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

No, Jesus does not reject Thomas’ confession, but He receives it and commends those who would believe in Him without seeing Him. The Lord Jesus is in total agreement that He is God and blesses us who believe in Him as such, though we have not seen Him. He is here called: Ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (*ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou*). *The Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges* notes on this passage:

> Most unnatural is the Unitarian view, that these words are an expression of astonishment addressed to God. Against this are (1) the plain and conclusive εἶπεν αὐτῷ [answered him]; (2) ὁ κύριός μου [my Lord], which is manifestly addressed to Christ (comp. Joh 20:13); (3) the fact that this confession of faith forms a climax and conclusion to the whole Gospel. The words are rightly considered as an impassioned declaration on the part of a devoted but (in the better sense of the term) sceptical Apostle of his conviction, not merely that his Risen Lord stood before him, but that this Lord was also his God. And it must be noted that Christ does not correct His Apostle for this avowal, any more than He corrected the Jews for supposing that He claimed to be ἴσον τῷ θεῷ [equal with God] (Joh 5:18); rather He accepts and approves this confession of belief in His Divinity.[37]

Hebrews 1:8

Even the Father calls the Son “God.” In Hebrews 1, not only do we read about the Son as the final revelation of God (Heb. 1:1-2), the Sovereign over the Universe (Heb. 1:3), His authority above and over angels (Heb. 1:4-5), but also of His divinity.

> Heb. 1:6-8 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, **he says**, “Let all God’s **angels worship him**.” 7 Of the angels **he says,** “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.” 8 But of the Son **he says**, “**Your throne, O God**, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

Not only is the Son worshipped, which is something due only to God (Matt. 4:10), but the Father calls Him *God!* He is not an angel because God the Father calls Him “God” and the angels are said to worship *Him.* If they worshipped anything or anyone other than God that would be idolatry, which God does not tolerate. There is no escaping the weight of Hebrews 1. The Lord Jesus there is called God. It is true that Psalm 45 is a “love song” and a celebration of a royal wedding, but that does not destroy the fact that it is used differently by the Author of Hebrews. Here, these words which were applied to the king in Psalm 45, are also applied to God–God the Son, that is, by God the Father. It’s very simple. Just follow the pronouns from Hebrews 1:5. The only possible “he” is God the Father. Albert Barnes comments on v. 8:

> “O God.” This certainly could not be applied to Solomon; but applied to the Messiah it proves what the apostle is aiming to prove - that he is above the angels. The argument is, that a name is given to “him” which is never given to “them.” They are not called “God” in any strict and proper sense. The “argument” here requires us to understand this word, as used in a sense more exalted than any name which is ever given to angels, and though it may be maintained that the name □□□□□ ’elohiym, is given to magistrates or to angels, yet here the argument requires us to understand it as used in a sense superior to what it ever is when applied to an angel - or of course to any creature, since it was the express design of the argument to prove that the Messiah was superior to the angels.

Matthew Poole likes notes, “In the Father’s apostrophe to the Son, he giveth him the name of God, and thereby is he proved to have a better one than angels, made by, and servants to, him; and as the great gospel Minister hath a kingdom, in which they are his ministers and servants: this proof is quoted out of Psa 45:6,7. It was not to Solomon or David, but to the Son

God-man, spoken by the Father."[13] Then Matthew Poole goes on to describe a common evasion for the words:

> **Thy throne, O God:** some heretics, to elude this proof of Christ's Deity, would make *God* the genitive case in the proposition, as: Thy throne of God, expressly contrary to the grammar, both in Hebrew and Greek: others gloss it, that ο θεος is the nominative case, as, God is thy throne for ever, &c. i.e. He doth and will establish it: but this is cavilling, since it is the Father's speech to and of his Son, describing his nature in opposition to the angels before. They were created *spirits,* but he was *God;* they were *ministers* and servants in his kingdom, where he was King; therefore his name and person is better than theirs.[13]

Therefore, without any ambiguity, the Son is clearly called "God" by God the Father, which proves His full divinity and equality with the Father.

Titus 2:13

In Titus 2:13, we are waiting for the ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (*tes doxes tou megalou theou kai soteros houmon Christou Isou*).

> Titus 2:13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of **our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**,

We are waiting for the coming of our **great God** and Savior who is Jesus Himself. There are interesting associations of the words *megas* (G3173) and *theos* (G2316) in the LXX. There is no direct "τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ," but these individual words are used of God in the Old Testament. Note these verses:

- Isa. 26:4 ἤλπισαν κύριε ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας ὁ αἰώνιος
  - LXXE they have trusted with confidence for ever, **the great,** the eternal **God;**
- Deut. 7:21 οὐ τρωθήσῃ ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτῶν ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεός σου ἐν σοί θεὸς μέγας καὶ κραταιός
  - LXXE Thou shalt not be wounded before them, because the Lord thy God in the midst of thee [is] **a great** and powerful **God.**
- Deut. 10:17 ὁ γὰρ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν οὗτος θεὸς τῶν θεῶν καὶ κύριος τῶν κυρίων ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας καὶ ἰσχυρὸς καὶ ὁ φοβερός ὅστις οὐ θαυμάζει πρόσωπον οὐδ' οὐ μὴ λάβῃ δῶρον
  - LXXE For the Lord your God, he [is] God of gods, and the Lord of lords, **the great**, and strong, and terrible **God,** who does not accept persons, nor will he by any means accept a bribe:
- Jer. 32:18 (39:18 LXX) …ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας καὶ ἰσχυρός
  - Jer. 39:18 LXXE …**the great**, the strong **God**;
- Dan 2:45 …ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας ἐσήμανε τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰ ἐσόμενα ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν…
  - LXXE …**the great God** has made known to the king what must happen hereafter…
- Ezra 5:8 …εἰς οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου…
  - LXXE …to the house of **the great God**…

It seems that from these instances that Paul may have been borrowing terminology from the Old Testament LXX to speak of the Lord Jesus as divine, equal with the God of the Old Testament. Charles J. Ellicott notes on this passage:

> In this sublime passage the glory of the only begotten Son alone finds mention. Taken thus, it is a studied declaration of the divinity of the Eternal Son, who is here styled "our great God and Saviour." Reasoning merely on grammatical principles, either translation would be possible, only even then there is a presumption in favour of the translation we have adopted. (See Ellicott's Note on this verse.) But other considerations are by no means so nearly equally balanced. The word "manifestation" (*epiphany*), the central thought of the sentence, is employed by St. Paul in his Epistles five times, and in every one of them to describe the manifestation of *Christ*, and in four of them to designate the future manifestation of His coming in glory, as here. The term epiphany is *never* applied to the Father.[34]

What we have here is the Granville Sharp's Rule, which was unknown to the translators of the KJV and that's why the verse in that translation seems to be speaking of the appearing of both the Father and the Son. But that is not the case. Rather, the passage speaks of the appearing of our great God and Savior *Jesus Christ*. A single person Who is both our God and Savior. Dr. White writes:

> Sharp's work [which was in the 1790s] resulted in a rule of *koine* Greek that bears his name, one not fully understood by the KJV translators. Because of his efforts we are able to better understand how plain is the testimony to Christ's deity found in such places as Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1...Basically, the rule states that when you have two nouns, which are not proper names (such as Cephas, or Paul, or Timothy), which are describing a person, and are connected by thef word "and," and the first noun has the article ("the") while the second does not, *both nouns are referring to the same person.* In our texts, this is demonstrated by "God" and "Savior" at Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1. *God* has the article, it is followed by the word for *and*, and *Savior* does not have the article. Hence, both nouns are being applied to the same person, Jesus Christ.[41]

Therefore, in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, we have a clear evidence of Christ's divinity.

Philippians 2:5-7

In Philippians 2, the Incarnation of our Blessed Lord is described.

> Phil. 2:5-7 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though **he was in the form of God**, did not count **equality with God** a thing to be grasped, 7 but **emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant**, being born in the likeness of men.

He was in the form of God and equal with God, yet He emptied Himself. How? Not by ceasing to be divine, but by taking the form of a servant and being born like the rest of us. He humbled Himself. God the Creator Himself entered His own creation. Why? To save His people. The emptying of the Son does not happen by Him leaving His divinity aside. Rather, the "emptying" of the Son happens by Him taking the nature of man upon Himself. The emptying of the Son is His humility to become like us, and to walk with us, not holding on to His rightful claim as God. Notice that the passage says "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped". He was in the very form of God, yea, God from all eternity, but this equality which He had with God the Father, He did not hold onto, but became a man like us. Notice that the Son is here said to be "in the form of God" prior to His incarnation. This means that Christ preexisted prior to being born in Bethlehem, and as we know from elsewhere, His existence has no beginning (John 1:1; 17:5). Furthermore, the popular evasion that what is spoken of here is that the *plan* of the incarnation is absurd. The Son was active and doing these actions prior to His incarnation Himself. Notice that the passage speaks of Christ "emptied himself", and not the Father emptied Christ. Rather, this is the action of the Son prior to His incarnation. It was *He* Who did not count equality with God the Father something to be grasped, not the Father. It was He who thought this and took action. Plans do not think and take actions, but the eternal Second Person of the Blessed Trinity certainly did. Charles J. Ellicott notes on v. 6, saying:

> The word "form" (which, except for a casual use in Mar. 16:12 [which is a very strong textual variant, the whole section of Mark 16:9-20], is found only in this passage of the New Testament) is to be carefully distinguished from "fashion." There can be no doubt that in classical Greek it describes the actual specific character, which (like the structure of a material substance) makes each being what it is; and this same idea is always conveyed in the New Testament by the compound words in which the root "form" is found (Rom. 8:29; Rom. 12:2; 2Co. 3:18; Gal. 4:19). (3) On the other hand, the word "fashion," as in 1Co. 7:31 ("the fashion of this world passeth away"), denotes the mere outward appearance (which we frequently designate as "form"), as will be seen also in its compounds (2Co. 11:13-14; 1Pe. 1:14). The two words are seen in juxtaposition in Rom. 12:2; Php. 3:21 (where see Notes). Hence, in this passage the "being in the form of God," describes our Lord's essential, and therefore eternal, being in the true nature of God; while the "taking on Him the form of a servant" similarly refers to His voluntary assumption of the true nature of man.[34] [words within square brackets added]

The Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges likewise notes on the word *morphe,* with the help of Lightfoot, saying, 'The μορφὴ θεοῦ [*morphé theou*] is thus, in fact, His Nature "seen" in its attributes; and to be "in" it is to be invested with them.'[42] Philip Schaff likewise comments on this passage (v. 6), saying:

> 'Christ being in the form of God:' here the word 'being' is not the usual simple substantive verb, but a stronger word which is employed when *the nature* of a thing, in contradistinction to its *mere existence,* is to be predicated. Here it

relates to the existence of Christ before His manifestation in the flesh, and its fuller force is fairly represented by the addition of the word 'originally.' 'Form' is here all that makes a thing to be recognised for what it is. Hence, when 'the form of God' is spoken of, we must understand all those attributes which make the Divinity known as such. All these the apostle says Christ had originally, and in this way was 'in the form of God,' though He had not been manifested unto men...What Christ did not do was this. He did not count His equality with God as a prize to be held fast. He possessed this equality, but consented to forego it for a time, that He might work out the salvation of men. Thus he became an instance (how mighty!) of one who looked not at His own things, but also at the things of others.[38]

While the passage was not given by Paul as a lesson on the Incarnation of the Son, but on humility, yet the Incarnation of the Son is the greatest humility that God has displayed. It is the prime example of humility that ever was, and therefore, believers are directed to it.

Isaiah 9:6

Even in the Old Testament, the Messiah is expected to be God Himself.

> Isa. 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God**, **Everlasting Father,** Prince of Peace.

Everlasting Father is not to be confused with God the Father. As the revelation of the Trinity took place after the coming of Christ and the Blessed Persons were not clearly revealed in the Old Testament. The expression, literally, as most acknowledge, is "father of eternity," which emphasizes His eternality and His being Lord of time. Matthew Poole notes that "though as man he was then unborn, yet was and is from everlasting to everlasting"[13]. The ESV Study Bible says 'A "father" here is a benevolent protector (cf. Isa. 22:21; Job 29:16), which is the task of the ideal king and is also the way God himself cares for his people (cf. Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Ps. 103:13). (That is, this is not using the Trinitarian title "Father" for the Messiah; rather, it is portraying him as a king.)'[43] The child—the Son—is called Mighty God—*El-Gibbor*. He is the almighty God Himself. In the next chapter, in Isaiah 10:21, Yahweh Himself is called *El-Gibbor*. Therefore, this makes Christ equal with the Father, and the same Yahweh. These and many other verses teach the deity of the Son. Albert Barnes comments on this passage, saying:

> **The mighty God** - Syriac, 'The mighty God of ages.' This is one, and but one out of many, of the instances in which the name God is applied to the Messiah; compare Joh 1:1; Rom 9:5; 1Jo 5:20; Joh 20:28; 1Ti 3:16; Heb 1:8. The name 'mighty God,' is unquestionably attributed to the true God in Isa 10:21. Much controversy has arisen in relation to this expression; and attempts have been made to show that the word translated "God," □□ 'ĕl, may refer to a hero, a king, a conqueror...But after all such controversy, it still remains certain that the natural and obvious meaning of the expression is to denote a divine nature. So it was evidently understood by the ancient versions; and the fact that the name God is so often applied to Christ in the New Testament proves that it is to be understood in its natural and obvious signification.[12]

This is not the only place that the Lord Jesus is called God, but it is one among many in the Bible. John Calvin comments on this passage and shows us the relation of Christ as divine and our trust in Him:

> *The mighty God.* □□ (*El*) is one of the names of God, though derived from *strength*, so that it is sometimes added as an attribute. But here it is evidently a proper name, because Isaiah is not satisfied with it, and in addition to it employs the adjective □□□□, (*gibbor*,) which means *strong*. And indeed if Christ had not been *God*, it would have been unlawful to glory in him; for it is written,
>
> Cursed be he that trusteth in man. (Jer. 17:5.)
>
> We must, therefore, meet with the majesty of God in him, so that there truly dwells in him that which cannot without sacrilege be attributed to a creature.
>
> He is, therefore, called *the mighty God*, for the same reason that he was formerly called *Immanuel*. (Isa 7:14.) For if we find in Christ nothing but the flesh and nature of man, our glorying will be foolish and vain, and our hope will rest on an uncertain and insecure foundation; but if he shows himself to be to us *God* and *the mighty God*, we may now rely on him with safety. With good reason does he call him *strong* or *mighty*, because our contest is with the devil, death, and sin, (Eph 6:12,) enemies too powerful and strong, by whom we would be immediately vanquished, if the *strength* of Christ had not rendered us invincible. Thus we learn from this title that there is in Christ abundance of protection for defending our salvation, so that we desire nothing beyond him; for he is *God*, who is pleased to show himself *strong* on our behalf. This application may be regarded as the key to this and similar passages, leading us to distinguish between

Christ's mysterious essence and the power by which he hath revealed himself to us.[11]

We could turn to many more verses to show the deity of the Son, but it should be sufficient proof for any reasonable person that what we've surveyed is a conclusive proof that the Son indeed is fully divine. Therefore, we move to the next point.

The Spirit is God

Once the Son is acknowledged to be divine, equal with the Father, the Holy Spirit of Truth soon follows. I know of no Christian denomination who are Binitarians (of Twinitarians, for a funny-sounding name), which believes that only the Father and Son are divine, while the Spirit is not.

We come across the Spirit in the second verse of the Bible:

> Gen. 1:2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And **the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters**.

The Spirit of God is Who brought order to the world. He was there when God made the world and He was there before the Creation with the Father and the Son. We read nothing in all of the Bible which would suggest to us that the Spirit of God was a creation of God. Rather, from the very beginning, we are confronted with His presence. He is plainly said to be God in Acts 5:3-4:

> But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to **lie to the Holy Spirit** and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? **You have** not **lied** to man but **to God.**"

Lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God because He is fully God. He possesses all things that the Father and Son have. He shares the one divine Being with the Father and the Son. He is equal with Them. Here we see clearly that the apostle Peter, even in such primitive time of the church as here, equated God with the Holy Spirit showing that the Holy Spirit is divine and has the same quality as God the Father. Charles J. Ellicott notes on v. 4 that

> The parallelism between this and "lying to the Holy Ghost" in Act. 5:3 has often been used, and perfectly legitimately, as a proof that while the Apostles thought of the Spirit as sent by the Father, and therefore distinct in His personality, they yet did not shrink from speaking of Him as God, and so identifying Him with the Divine Essential Being.[34]

Peter is obviously equating the Holy Spirit with God and therefore acknowledging Him as divine. As Calvin likewise notes on v. 4, "the divinity of the Holy Ghost is manifestly proved by this form of speech."[11] John Gill likewise notes, "**Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God**; that is, not to men only, for he had lied to the apostles; but to God also, to the Holy Ghost, who is truly and properly God, of which this passage is a full proof; and it was owing to his omniscience, which is a peculiar attribute of deity, that this wicked man, and this fraud of his, were discovered."[4] How could Peter know Ananias' deception without the Holy Spirit? And how could the Holy Spirit know if He was not indeed omniscient? Omniscience belongs only to God, therefore, the Holy Spirit is fully God. Lastly, Dr. Schaff comments on this phrase in v. 4, saying:

> **Thou hast not lied onto men, but unto God**. The doctrine of the early Church on the subject of the Holy Ghost is plainly declared in the words of this and the preceding verse. The *personality* of the blessed Spirit is assumed by the words of Act 5:3, and from Act 5:4 we gather that, in the esteem of St. Peter, the Holy Ghost *was God.* In the first question Peter asks, 'Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?' In reference to the same offence, in Act 5:4 his words are, 'Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.' To lie to the Holy Ghost is not to lie unto men, because the Holy Ghost is not man, but to lie unto God, because the Holy Ghost is God[38]

This is the primitive doctrine of the church regarding the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit. They did not envision Him as an "it", but as a person against Whom one is able to lie, and One Who is able to be angered or grieved because of sin. Paul writes to the Corinthians about the omniscience of the Spirit:

> 1 Cor. 2:10-11 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For **the Spirit searches everything**, **even the depths of God.** 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also **no**

one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

The apostle here is clearly identifying the Spirit as God. He even uses the terminology of personhood. Lest anyone is led astray, the terminology for the distinction of *being* and *personhood* are extra-biblical, but not anti-biblical. It was necessary to develop the terminology to be able to distinguish between the Persons and understand what the Bible teaches, therefore, when the apostle Paul is using the word "person" in v. 11, he does not mean the same thing that we mean by "person" when speaking of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Rather, what Paul is doing is that he is identifying the Spirit as God and with God. Since no one can comprehend the things of God, except the Spirit, therefore, this means that the Spirit is indeed God. Yet, as with all biblical passages where the Trinity is taught, the Author always distinguishes between them and does not make the persons as merely titles or modes of a unitarian god. God the Father has revealed things to us through His Spirit, Who is the Third Person of the Trinity. The medium which the Father has chosen is the third Person of the Trinity, Whom He has given to us as the guarantee and seal (Eph. 1:13-14). We would do well to pay attention to the wise words of Albert Barnes on v. 10:

> **The deep things of God -** He has a thorough knowledge of the hidden counsels or purposes of God; of all his plans and purposes. He sees all his designs. He sees all his councils; all his purposes in regard to the government of the universe, and the scheme of salvation. He knows all whom God designs to save; he sees all that they need; and he sees how the plan of God is suited to their salvation - This passage proves:
>
> (1) That the Spirit is, in some respects, distinct from the Father, or from him who is here called God. Else how could he be said to search all things, even the deep purposes of God? To "search" implies "action, thought, personality." An attribute of God cannot be said to search. How could it be said of the justice, the goodness, the power, or the wisdom of God that it "searches," or "acts?" To search, is the action of an intelligent agent, and cannot be performed by an attribute.
>
> (2) the Spirit is omniscient. He searches or clearly understands "all things" - the very definition of omniscience. He understands all the profound plans and counsels of God. And how can there be a higher demonstration of omniscience than to "know God?" - But if omniscient, the Holy Spirit is divine - for this is one of the incommunicable attributes of God; 1Ch 28:9; Psa 139:1; Jer 17:10.
>
> (3) he is not a distinct being from God. There is a union between him and God, such as may be compared to the union between a man and his soul, 1Co 2:11. God is one; and though he subsists as Father, Son, and Spirit, yet he is one God, Deu 6:4 - This passage is, therefore, a very important, and a decisive one in regard to the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit.[12]

The Spirit is wholly acquainted with the ways of God because He is God. God can only be comprehended by Himself and the Spirit alone (along with Jesus Matt. 11:27) comprehends the things of God. Therefore, They are divine and equal with God the Father. We shall look to yet another passage:

> 1 Cor. 3:16-17 Do you not know that **you are God's temple** and that **God's Spirit dwells in you?** 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Multiple times throughout Paul's writing the believers are said to be the Temple of God (e.g., Eph. 2:18-22; 2 Cor. 6:16), but in this passage, he gives the reason why we are the Temple of God. The reason lies in the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. We should have known that we are God's temple because of the fact that the Spirit dwells in us. Therefore, if the Spirit dwells in us, that fact directly makes us the temple of God. Now we must ask ourselves: how can the indwelling of the Spirit make us the Temple of God if the Spirit is not God? If the Spirit of God did not dwell in us, we would not be His Temple, but since He does dwell in the believers, therefore, we are His Temple. We are His Temple because God has condescended and made His abode in us, as we await the New Heavens and New Earth (2 Cor. 6:14-18). Therefore, since the Holy Spirit is He that indwells us, and we, because of His indwelling, are called the God's temple, therefore, this shows that the Spirit is, in fact, God. Calvin comments on this passage saying:

> *And the Spirit of God.* Here we have the reason why they are *the temple of God* Hence *and* must be understood as meaning *because.* This is customary, as in the words of the poet — "Thou hadst heard it, *and* it had been reported." "For this reason," says he, "are ye the *temples of God*, because He dwells in you by his Spirit; for no unclean place can be the habitation of God." In this passage we have an explicit testimony for maintaining the divinity of the Holy Spirit. For if he were a creature, or merely a gift, he would not make us *temples of God*, by dwelling in us. At the same time we learn, in what manner God communicates himself to us, and by what tie we are bound to him — when he pours down upon us the influence of his Spirit.[11] [footnote reference removed]

Philip Schaff comments on the significance of the word "temple" here, saying:

> The word rendered "temple" here means, classically, 'the dwelling-place of a deity.' In the New Testament, when applied to the temple of Jerusalem, it denotes the holy of holies—that most sacred part of it where of old the Shechinah, or visible symbol of the Divine Presence, was manifested. As applied to believers under the new economy, it means that they are "a habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph 2:22).[38]

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown basically state: "God's indwelling, and that of the Holy Spirit, are one; and therefore the Holy Spirit is God."[20] Yes, the Holy Spirit is *HE*, not an *it*. Heretics have believed all kinds of things about the glorious Holy Spirit, even that He is an impersonal force, and not a glorious Person. We beg to differ. The following things prove His Personhood, because they are characteristics of personhood and not of impersonality, like a force.

- He speaks (Acts 8:29; 10:19-20; 13:2; 21:11; John 15:26; 16:13-14).
- He is blasphemed, He is spoken against (Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29).
    - It is ridiculous to think that the unforgivable sin is against a mere force and not against God the Spirit Himself.
- He can be insulted (Heb. 10:29).
- He can be grieved (Eph. 4:30).
- He can be resisted (Acts 7:51).
- He grants gifts as He chooses, i.e., He has the power of choice (1 Cor. 12:9-11).

I really recommend looking at Matt Slick's article on **the Holy Spirit** and His personhood, wherein he provides ample biblical testimony to that effect. Not only is the Holy Spirit directly called God in Acts 5, but He is over and over again described as having attributes belonging to God alone, which makes Him equal to God. To say that the glorious and third Person of the Trinity is a force and not a person is blasphemy. The following things not only prove His personhood but also His full deity, as He is attributed things which only belong to God:

- Omnipresent
    - Ps. 139:7 **Where shall I go from your Spirit?** Or where shall I flee from your presence?
        - Who aside God is said to be omnipresent in the Bible? None. Therefore, the attribution of this perfection to the Holy Spirit proves that He is, in fact, God. In fact, wherever God is, there His Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit is equated with the very presence of God.
- Omniscient
    - 1 Cor. 2:10-11 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For **the Spirit searches everything**, **even the depths of God.** 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also **no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.**
        - See above.
- Creator
    - Gen. 1:2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And **the Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters.
    - Ps. 104:30 When you send forth **your Spirit, they are created,** and you renew the face of the ground.
    - Job 33:4 The **Spirit of God has made me**, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.
- The one who speaks the Word of God.
    - Acts 28:25-26 And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "**The Holy Spirit was right in saying** to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 26 "'Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive."
        - It is the Lord who speaks in Isaiah 6:1, 11-12. The speech of the Lord is equated with what the Holy Spirit actually said.

- Heb. 10:15-17 And **the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us**; for after saying, 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," 17 then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."
  - Jer. 31:31-34 "Behold, the days are coming, **declares the LORD,** when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, **declares the LORD.** 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, **declares the LORD**: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, **declares the LORD.** For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."
  - The words of the LORD, Yahweh, are equated and are said to be spoken by the Holy Spirit, which implies that the Spirit is God and Yahweh.
- Heb. 3:7 Therefore, **as the Holy Spirit says,** "Today, if you hear his voice,
  - Ps. 95:6-9 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! 7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, 9 when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
    - Who did the Israelites put to the test but Yahweh? (Ps. 78:18; 40, 106:32)

- He is the One who regenerates, the One who gives spiritual life.
  - John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is **born of the Spirit is spirit.**
  - John 6:63 It is the **Spirit who gives life;** the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.
  - Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the **washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,**
- He is the One who gives physical life.
  - Job 27:3 as long as my breath is in me, and **the spirit of God is in my nostrils**, (cf. Job 32:8; 33:4; 34:14)
  - Ps. 104:30 When you send **forth your Spirit, they are created,** and you renew the face of the ground.

The Holy Spirit is fully and completely God. He is called the Spirit of God (Gen. 1:2), Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11), the Helper (John 14:16, 26), and Eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14). He knows all things (1 Cor. 2:10-11); He is the "power of the Most High" (Luke 1:35); and He is everywhere (Ps. 139:7-13). He is not only the Spirit of God the Father (e.g., Gen. 1:2), but He is also called the Spirit of Christ/Son (Acts 16:7; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1:19; 1 Pet. 1:11). We declare that our study has led us to the conclusion that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. If we were to stop here, we may be led to tri-theism, but the Bible is very clear on Monotheism. We have touched briefly on Monotheism above, but let us repeat a couple of things.

Trinity Chart

The following chart is taken **from CARM** and was made by Matt Slick:

	FATHER	SON	HOLY SPIRIT
Called God	Phil. 1:2	John 1:1,14; Col. 2:9	Acts 5:3-4
Creator	Isaiah 64:8	John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17	Job 33:4, 26:13
Resurrects	1 Thess. 1:10	John 2:19, 10:17	Rom. 8:11

Indwells	2 Cor. 6:16	Col. 1:27	John 14:17
Everywhere	1 Kings 8:27	Matt. 28:20	Psalm 139:7-10
All knowing	1 John 3:20	John 16:30; 21:17	1 Cor. 2:10-11
Sanctifies	1 Thess. 5:23	Heb. 2:11	1 Pet. 1:2
Life giver	Gen. 2:7: John 5:21	John 1:3; 5:21	2 Cor. 3:6,8
Fellowship	1 John 1:3	1 Cor. 1:9	2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1
Eternal	Psalm 90:2	Micah 5:1-2	Rom. 8:11; Heb. 9:14
A Will	Luke 22:42	Luke 22:42	1 Cor. 12:11
Speaks	Matt. 3:17; Luke 9:25	Luke 5:20; 7:48	Acts 8:29; 11:12; 13:2
Love	John 3:16	Eph. 5:25	Rom. 15:30
Searches the heart	Jer. 17:10	Rev. 2:23	1 Cor. 2:10
We belong to	John 17:9	John 17:6	...
Savior	1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10	2 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:4; 3:6	...
We serve	Matt. 4:10	Col. 3:24	...
Believe in	John 14:1	John 14:1	...
Gives joy	...	John 15:11	John 14:7

Monotheism and Equality

Indeed, we cannot stop by only showing the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must now show that this Tri-unity is consistent with the Bible's testimony about monotheism. We must show the "oneness" in the "threeness." From the first chapter and verse of Holy Scripture, we see the One Being of God.

> Gen. 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

He is the God Who was there even before time began. He is the First and the Last. There was not a war among the gods which resulted in the creation, or creation of preexistent matter, no. The God of the Bible is the only God that exists, all others are delusions and are false. He is the Sovereign and all-sufficient God Who created by Himself with no help from any other creature. He creates and sustains every one of them, yet He is not sustained by them (Acts 17:24-27). He is the only God that ever was, is and will be. Before Him, there was no god and after Him, there will be no god (Isa. 43:10). In all the Creation narrative we do not get the slightest hint that there is more than one God, but there is clearly only one true and living God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. But it is likewise very interesting to see that even in the first chapter we receive glimpses of the doctrine of Trinity. Not exactly a trinity, but a plurality of persons within the one Being of God. We read in the 26th verse:

> Gen. 1:26 Then God said, "Let **us make** man in **our image**, after **our likeness**. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

We must ask ourselves, why is God referring to Himself in the plural number? If there is but a singular *person* of God, i.e., a Unitarian god, and not a Trinitarian God, why is He speaking of Himself in the plural? Some try to evade the force of the plural here by saying that God was speaking to His counsel and to the angels. While such an idea may be possible in some cases, yet it is impossible *here.* We must ask ourselves, do we read anywhere about anything that the angels had to do with the creation of man? To my knowledge—nothing. But, what is more forceful is the fact that it speaks of not merely of "us *making*" man, but "in *our* image, after *our* likeness." This is conclusive to me that God is speaking within the Divine Being, and not within His angelic council. The very next verse is very clear and unambiguous so as to whose image man bears: "So God created man in *his own* image, in *the image of God* he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27; cf. Gen. 5:1; 1 Cor. 11:7). Because of this, I conclude that the plural way of speaking about God by God Himself is a proof of the plurality of persons within the one Being of God. Some object that this may be some highly or very respectful manner of talking about someone, which is common, for example, in my Armenian language. When we speak to elders, we speak to them in the plural. I'm sure many other languages have such a thing. The problem with this theory is that the plural way of speaking of God is non-existent in the Old Testament (except those few disputed places), therefore, this theory is implausible. If this theory were true, we would find that all references to God would be in the plural because of respect. The Quran, for example, speaks of Allah in the plural because of respect, but this does not make Muslims doubt the Unitarian nature of Allah. The Quran is filled with such speeches of Allah in which he refers to himself in the plural, but the Bible, in fact, is not. If it were, then we would not have approached this verse as a proof for the doctrine of plurality of persons in the Divine Being. There are other "us" verses in the Bible, but these are, in my opinion, less clear than Genesis 1:26 on the

plurality of persons with the one Being of God.

> Gen. 3:22 Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become **like one of us** in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”
>
> Gen. 11:7-8 Come, **let us** go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” 8 So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.
>
> Isa. 6:8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and **who will go for us**?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”
>
> > John 12:37-41 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, 38 so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” 39 Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, 40 “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” 41 Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.
>
> Who’s glory did Isaiah see? God’s or Jesus’? Jesus is God. Jesus is Yahweh.

Dr. Grudem agrees with us that this is the best explanation of the plurals in Genesis 1:26. He writes, “The best explanation is that already in the first chapter of Genesis we have an indication of a plurality of persons in God himself. We are not told how many persons, and we have nothing approaching a complete doctrine of the Trinity, but it is implied that more than one person is involved.”[44] Although we see this plurality within God, we see also clear evidence of God’s oneness throughout the whole Bible.

> Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, **the LORD is one**.
>
> > Mark 12:29 Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, **the Lord is one.**
> >
> > 1 Cor. 8:6 yet for us there is **one God, the Father,** from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and **one Lord, Jesus Christ**, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.
>
> Isa. 43:10 “You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. **Before me no god** was formed, **nor shall there be any after me.**
>
> Jas 2:19 You believe that **God is one**; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

There is really no serious discussion that the Bible teaches anything other than that there is but one living and true God.

The Distinction Of Persons

The most important text is the Great Commission text:

> Matt. 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in **the name** of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

All three Persons are mentioned together and are said to share the one Name. This not only proves Their unity but also Their equality as They all share the one Name and Being of God. The word “name” in the Bible denotes much more than we in the modern world think it does. The name of the person says something about the name-bearer. It says something about their nature and attributes. In this place, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, all three, share the singular Name of God, which makes them equal. Charles J. Ellicott asks the question of the significance of this Trinitarian formula for baptism and answers:

> There remains the question, What is meant by being baptised “into a name”? The answer is to be found in the fact so prominent in the Old Testament (*e.g.* Exo. 3:14-15), that the Name of God is a revelation of what He is. Baptism was to be no longer, as it had been in the hands of John as the forerunner, merely a symbol of repentance, but was the token that those who received it were brought into an altogether new relation to Him who was thus revealed to them. The union of the three names in one formula (as in the benediction of 2Co. 13:14) is in itself a proof at once of the distinctness and equality of the three Divine Persons. We cannot conceive of a command given to. and adopted by, the universal Church to baptise all its members in the name (not “the names”) of God and a merely human prophet and an impersonal influence or power.[34]

If we had here a formula which said baptize in the ***names*** then we would have other things to say about this passage, but as it is, the passage speaks of a singular name, which all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity share, namely, the Divine Nature and Being—Yahweh. Henry Alford notes the significance of the singular when he says, "Not τὰ ὀνόματα [*ta onamata,* the names]—but **τὸ ὄνομα** [*to onama,* the name]—setting forth the Unity of the Godhead."[45] Philip Schaff likewise comments on this formula, saying:

> It is into *one* name, *of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* It is impossible that this means, the one name of God, of a mere man, and of an attribute of God. It is the one name of One God, existing (as well as manifested), as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Comp, the baptism of Jesus, where all three persons of the Godhead revealed themselves.—The doctrine of the Trinity receives powerful support from passages like this, but it rests even more on facts, on the whole Scripture revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the three great works of creation, redemption, and sanctification. All of which are signified and sealed in this formula of baptism. Since God reveals Himself as He is: this Trinity of revelation (economical Trinity) involves the Trinity of essence (ontological Trinity).[38]

In this passage we have for us confirmed the truth which we have seen throughout the Scriptures that while there is but one Being of God, yet this Being is shared by three co-equal and co-eternal Persons.

Some heretics say that the Persons of God are really modes, titles, or different masks of God. They are different ways that He expresses Himself or manifests Himself, but they are not distinct Persons within the singular Being of God. He puts on different masks. This is Modalism and this is heresy, condemned by the church long ago. That there is a distinction in persons is something which we have said from the beginning and throughout our commentary, we have tried to show. We saw in the previous passage, Matthew 28:19, both the unity of the Persons within the one Being of God, and the three persons of the Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit. I am reminded of the beautiful words of Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329 - 390) concerning the unity and distinction between the Persons:

> This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the one Godhead and power, found in **the three in unity** and comprising **the three separately**; not unequal, in substances or natures, **neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same;** just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of three infinite ones, **each God when considered in himself;** as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Spirit; the three one God when contemplated together; each God because consubstantial; one God because of the monarchy. **No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendor of the three**; **no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one.** When I think of any one of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that one so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. **When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.**[46]

We distinguish but do not separate between the three Persons of God. As we think of the singular Being of God, we likewise think of the three Persons. As we think of the three Persons, we also are directed toward their unity within the one Being of God. In the baptism of our Lord, we clearly see this distinction of Persons:

> Matt. 3:16-18 And when **Jesus was baptized,** immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw **the Spirit of God descending** like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, **a voice from heaven** said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

In this verse, we see a clear distinction between the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. The Son is present on earth because of His incarnation (John 1:1-18). He became a man while not ceasing to be God (Phil. 2:5-7). The Spirit comes upon the Son in the form of a dove and the Father speaks from heaven. All three Persons are present and are distinguished. It is not the God in the mask of the Lord Jesus on earth, while He puts on another mode or mask as the Spirit, and then speaks from the mode or mask of the Father. That is an absurdity. The clear implication of our study has led us to say that all three Persons are fully God and are distinct from each other. Let us simply look to some more passages where the three Persons are mentioned and are distinguished from each other:

> Rom. 15:30 I appeal to you, brothers, by **our Lord Jesus Christ** and by **the love of the Spirit,** to strive together with me in your **prayers to God** on my behalf,
>
> 2 Cor. 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.

2 Thess. 2:13 But we ought always to **give thanks to God** for you, brothers **beloved by the Lord**, because **God chose you** as the firstfruits to be saved, through **sanctification by the Spirit** and belief in the truth.

1 Cor. 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in **the name of the Lord Jesus Christ** and by **the Spirit of our God**.

1 Cor. 12:4-6 Now there are varieties of gifts, but **the same Spirit**; 5 and there are varieties of service, but **the same Lord**; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is **the same God** who empowers them all in everyone.

1 Thess. 1:3-5 remembering before **our God and Father** your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in **our Lord Jesus Christ.** 4 For we know, **brothers loved by God**, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in **the Holy Spirit** and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Eph. 3:14-17 For this reason I bow my knees before **the Father**, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power **through his Spirit** in your inner being, 17 so **that Christ may dwell in your hearts** through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

Eph. 4:4-6 There is one body and **one Spirit**—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 **one Lord**, one faith, one baptism, 6 **one God and Father of all**, who is over all and through all and in all.

Dr. John Frame observes that “As we have seen, much of the Trinitarian language of Scripture appears in liturgical texts: the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, the apostolic greetings and benedictions (Rom. 16:27; 2 Cor. 13:14), the polemic against idolatry (1 Cor. 8:4–6), the call to prayer (Rom. 15:30).”[47] This means that the doctrine of the Trinity is a doctrine not only for the mind but for the soul to worship God. We do not worship God unless we worship Him in Trinity because that is how He has revealed Himself. He has not revealed Himself as a Unitarian god, but as a Trinitarian God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is a doctrine for which we should be willing to live and die. The Trinity is the heart of Christianity. There is no Christianity where the Trinity is not adored and confessed.

The distinction between the Persons lies in Their roles and Their titles. ‘What distinguishes the three are “the attributes indicative of the persons” and unique to them. For Basil, these are “fatherhood, sonship, and sanctification.” For Gregory of Nazianzus, the three distinguishing characteristics are “the unbegottenness of the Father … the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit.” In terms of the persons, “the Father is the begetter and the emitter … the Son is the begotten, and the Holy Spirit the emission.”’[48] The distinction between the Persons does not lie in their power, worth, glory, but in their interaction with each other and with the world. For example, it was the Second Person of the Trinity Who was incarnated by the help of the Spirit (Luke 1:35). It was the Son, Who was sent to the world by the Father (John 3:16). It was not the Father Who was sent, rather, the Father did the sending of the Son. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is not the One Who sent the Son, but rather, He is sent by the Son (John 14:26; 15:26). The distinction does not lie in Their worth, nature, glory, or any other excellence, but in Their interaction with each other and the world.

The Athanasian Creed

This is, I believe, to be one of the best historical statements on the doctrine of the Trinity, and it seemed helpful to me to include it here for our edification. The following section is on the Trinity:

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one **God in Trinity**, and **Trinity in Unity**, **neither confounding** the persons, **nor dividing** the substance.

For there is one **Person** of the **Father**, another of the **Son**, and another of the **Holy Spirit.** But **the godhead** of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, **is all one**, the **glory equal**, the **majesty co-eternal**.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are **not three eternals**, but **one Eternal**.

As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but **one Uncreated**, and **one Incomprehensible**. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but **one Almighty**.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are **not three gods**, but **one God**.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet **not three lords**, but **one Lord**.

For as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge **each Person by Himself to be both God and Lord**,

so we are also forbidden by the catholic religion to say that there are three gods or three lords.

The **Father is made of none, neither created**, nor begotten. The **Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created,** but begotten. The **Holy Spirit is of the Father**, **neither made, nor created**, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is **one Father**, not three fathers; **one Son**, not three sons; **one Holy Spirit**, not three holy spirits.

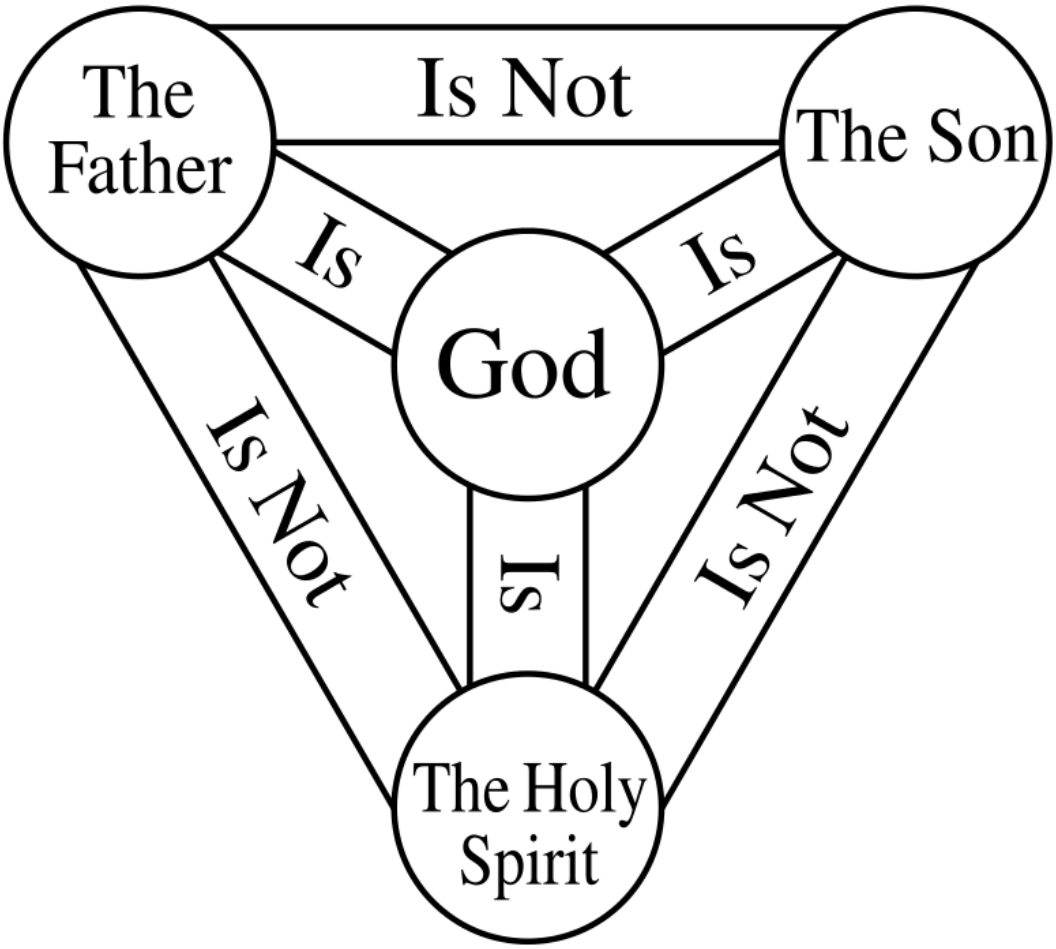
And in Trinity **none is before or after another**; **none is greater or less** than another, but **all three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal**. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the **Unity in Trinity** and the **Trinity in Unity** **is to be worshipped**.

He therefore that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity.

Conclusion

We could have gone much longer, but my purpose was to give a "concise" and a basic defense and definition of the glorious doctrine of the Trinity. Surely there are many verses not mentioned and topics not explored here, but I direct you to the works I referenced in the footnotes for further study. Christian theology has produced a lot of material from its birth on this pillar and heart of the Christian Faith. The basic definition of the Trinity is: There is one Being of God which is shared by three co-equal and co-eternal Persons. Do not forget this, nor confuse the words *being* and *person* with each other. There is one *A* of God which exists as three *B's.* Being and person are two categories; they are not the same thing. There is but one true God. This is not tri-theism. There is unity, but also distinction made between the Persons. The Father is the Father only, He is not the Son. The Son is not the Father neither the Spirit. The Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.

The Shield of the Trinity best helps us understand the Trinity.

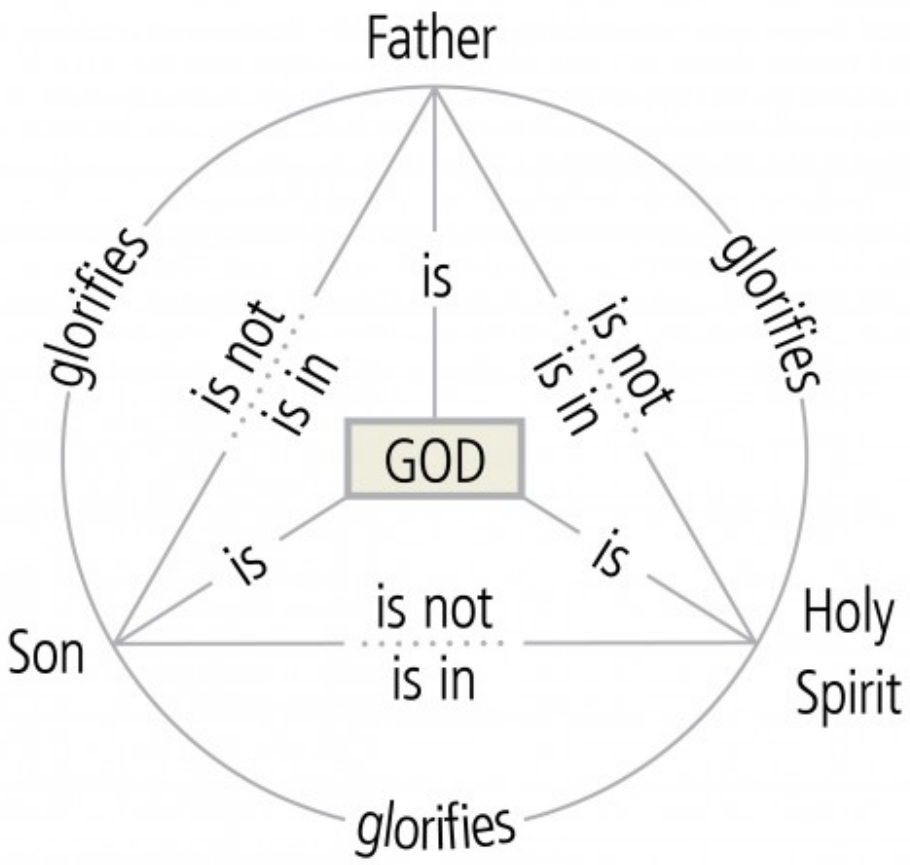


The shield is to be read as:

- The Father is God
- The Son is God
- The Holy Spirit is God
- God is the Father

- God is the Son
- God is the Holy Spirit
- The Father is not the Son
- The Father is not the Holy Spirit
- The Son is not the Father
- The Son is not the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit is not the Father
- The Holy Spirit is not the Son

This shield teaches the unity as well as the distinction in the Godhead. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as distinct from each other. They are not the same Person, but all three share the same Being of God. We could add to this shield the following diagram given by Justin Taylor and which is also used in the ESV Study Bible:



This diagram speaks the same truths as the Shield of the Trinity, but it includes the inter-communion and relationship in the Persons of the Trinity. The Father is in the Son, the Father is in the Holy Spirit, and so on. What we also have is the circle of glorification of the divine Persons of each other. The Son glorifies the Father (e.g., John 17:1); the Father glorifies the Son (e.g., John 17:1); the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14) and so on the circle of glorification and love between the three Persons of the Trinity goes. Justin Taylor writes about this diagram:

> Another aspect indicated by the lines on the triangle is that of mutual indwelling (or perichoresis). The three persons indwell each other in the one being of God. So:
>
> 1. The Father is in the Son.
> 2. The Son is in the Father.
> 3. The Father is in the Holy Spirit.

4. The Holy Spirit is in the Father.
5. The Son is in the Holy Spirit.
6. The Holy Spirit is in the Son.

Finally, each of the three persons in the one being of God glorify one another. As Gregory of Nyssa writes, there is a "revolving circle" of glory:

> The Son is glorified by the Spirit; the Father is glorified by the Son; again the Son has His glory from the Father; and the Only-begotten thus becomes the glory of the Spirit. . . . In like manner, again, Faith completes the circle, and glorifies the Son by means of the Spirit, and the Father by means of the Son. (Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit*, in *NPNF, Second Series*, 5:324).[49]

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

(2 Corinthians 13:14)

Footnotes

1. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
2. ^ *The outlines were taken from Alan Dunn's exposition of this chapter over at Herald of Grace.*
3. ^ *John M. Frame. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014). p. 405.*
4. a, b, c, d *John Gill. Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
5. ^ *Webster's 1913 Dictionary. Incomprehensible.*
6. ^ *Wayne Grudem. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). p. 150.*
7. ^ *Webster's 1913 Dictionary. Immutable.*
8. a, b, c *Arthur W. Pink. Gleanings in the Godhead. 7. The Immutability of God.*
9. ^ *A. H. Strong. Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed For The Use Of Theological Students. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1970. Originally, 1907). p. 257.*
10. ^ *Louis Berkhof. Systematic Theology. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Banner of Truth Trust. 1963). p. 67.*
11. a, b, c, d, e *John Calvin. Commentaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
12. a, b, c, d *Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
13. a, b, c, d, e *Matthew Poole. English Annotations on the Holy Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
14. ^ *A.H. Strong, Systematic Theology. p. 258.*
15. ^ *Anthropopathism. Wikipedia.*

16. a, b *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Edited by J. J. S. Perowne. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
17. ^ *John Peter Lange. Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical (25 volumes). Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
18. ^ *John Piper. The Repentance of God. Desiring God Ministries.*
19. ^ *R.C. Sproul. Divine Repentance. Reformation Theology.*
20. a, b *Jamieson, Fausset, Brown. Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Full). Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
21. ^ *Shane Lems. The Repentance of God (Ex. 32:14). Emphasis added.*
22. ^ *Webster's 1828 Dictionary. Impassibility.*
23. ^ *Berkhof, Systematic Theology. p. 60.*
24. ^ *Webster's 1913 Dictionary. Absolute.*
25. a, b *The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature. Essence.*
26. ^ *Webster's 1828 English Dictionary. Essence.*
27. ^ *Ibid. Substance.*
28. ^ *The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature. Substance.*
29. ^ *Ibid. Hypostasis.*
30. ^ *Matt Slick. What is the Trinity?*
31. ^ *Ibid. Person.*
32. ^ *James R. White. The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House. 1998). p. 26.*
33. ^ *Grudem, Systematic Theology. p. 226.*
34. a, b, c, d, e *Charles J. Ellicott. Commentary For English Readers. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
35. ^ *White, Forgotten Trinity. pp. 50-51.*
36. a, b *International Critical Commentary on the New Testament (ICCNT). Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
37. a, b, c *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Edited by J. J. S. Perowne. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
38. a, b, c, d, e *Philip Schaff. A Popular Commentary on the New Testament. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
39. ^ *James R. White. The King James Only Controversy. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House. 2009, originally 1995). pp. 251-252.*
40. ^ *Strong, Systematic Theology. p. 306.*
41. ^ *White, KJV Controversy. pp. 334-335.*
42. ^ *Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges. Taken from the TrecoheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
43. ^ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version: The ESV Study Bible. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. 2008). p. 1257.*
44. ^ *Grudem, Systematic Theology. p. 227.*
45. ^ *Henry Alford. The Greek Testament. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
46. ^ *Gregory of Nazianzus, "On Holy Baptism," Oration 40.41, in NPNF 2, 7:375. As quoted in: Greg R. Allison. Historical Theology: An Introduction To Christian Doctrine: A Companion To Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011). pp. 240-241. Emphasis added.*
47. ^ *Frame, Systematic Theology. p. 512.*
48. ^ *Allison, Historical Theology. p. 240. Footnote references omitted.*
49. ^ *Justin Taylor. What Do We Mean By "Person" And "Essence" In The Doctrine Of The Trinity? (The Gospel Coalition).*