

# **A Definition of God**

---

Presented to

Department of Systematic Theology

Dallas Theological Seminary

402N Trinitarianism – Stephen Spencer

---

by

Scott F. Campbell

Box #293

# A Definition of God

## Triunity of God

God, Deity, exists or lives as one in essential nature or substance and as three in distinct person or ontology. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit coexist in one unity, consubstantial or of one essence from all eternity. Each Person co-penetrating the others, with will, mind, character, life and complete essence being equally shared and possessed by all three and by each one - indivisible and inseparable. Each is unique in identity as person or ontology and unique in function or performance, yet interchangeable in reference and non-jealous of identity. Differing roles help to define the unique personalities but the personalities are not limited to function.<sup>1</sup>

The Son is declared and seen to be of equal essence with the Father. Declared, "I and the Father are one,"<sup>2</sup> and seen, by instrumentality in creation<sup>3</sup> and by the performance of the miracles of His incarnation.<sup>4</sup> Called the Son because He was born of a virgin through the intervention of the Holy Spirit<sup>5</sup>, yet being fully human in every way as we<sup>6</sup>, excepting sin.<sup>7</sup> It was and is the function of the Son, the second person of the Trinity, to effect the means of salvation for mankind, first in His incarnation, now in His exaltation and in the future in His return to earth and eventual judgment.<sup>8</sup> He is fully God and fully man.

The Spirit is the third Person of the Godhead, not third in order of importance nor unequal at all in essence or quality but third only in order of mention and function and revelation, having an equally important but less obvious role. Sent by the Father and the Son to the church, His role has been and remains that of empowerment of humans for life and ministry and resurrection, also the inspiration of the Scriptures, and its instruction to us.<sup>9</sup> The Spirit is equal to the Father and Son as closure to the Trinity.<sup>10</sup>

## Character of God

"God is spirit"<sup>11</sup> in relation to Himself and "God is love"<sup>12</sup> in relation to His creation. God is perfect in all His ways and traits, being simple, that is whole, unpartitioned with all His ways and traits commingled. He is eternal,<sup>13</sup> immutable,<sup>14</sup> impassable,<sup>15</sup> omnipotent,<sup>16</sup> omnipresent,<sup>17</sup> omniscient and just. He is great and magnificent, all encompassing and holy. He is also condescending and intimate, focused and gracious. He is perfect in balance, equilibrium and restraint, yet capable of great deliberative anger. Between Him and us exists an unfathomable gulf, an eternal difference in kind and degree able to be bridged only from His side. Being thus transcendent to and separate from us, He is also immanent with us. He became ultimately so by the incarnation, becoming one of us. Jesus Christ clearly imaged and communicated the Divine to us in condescending grace and uncompromising truth.<sup>18</sup>

## Works of the Father

All the works of God proceed from His essential nature and character and, in their totality, represent and communicate who He is. The Father is the director and anchor, the source and destination of the works of Triunity. The incarnation exposed this relationship in the Godhead, Jesus being sent by and functioning in submission to the Father. The Father, as principal partner, directed and willed creation, the unfolding of salvation and history itself, and, in the end, will "be all in all."<sup>19</sup> Knowing all things "before the foundation of the world", He is intimately involved in all things, coordinating the free will decisions of man to accomplish His "plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness".<sup>20</sup>

---

## NOTES

1. The work and action of each person of the Trinity is characteristic of and consistent with their individual uniqueness. However, their uniqueness is not limited to their role or function. Rather their role proceeds from their ontological uniqueness. In other words, they would be who they are if no work or action was ever performed or carried out. Their ontology is not dependent on their function.

2. John 10:30 NASB

3. John 1:3; Col 1:16 NASB

4. John 14:11; 15:24; 5:36 NASB

5. Luke 1:35

I believe this verse gives us the source of the *designation* of the second Person of the Trinity as the Son. He has always been the same in ontology and the same in relation to the Father and Spirit. It is clear that before His incarnation, He had being and existence and function, but certainly a less distinct *reference* or *identity* in regards to revelation, at least. The incarnation seems to have given the second Person a *designation* He did not have before. Or if He did have, it was by virtue of the future incarnation that He had it. He is the Son because He had physical birth by two agencies, the Holy Spirit and His human mother. This seems to have been the inception, or better stated, the conception, of His dual nature.

6. Heb 2:14-18 NASB

7. Heb 4:15; 2 Cor 5:21 NASB

8. Luke 19:10; 1 Pet 2:24; Heb 7:25; John 5:22 NASB

Jesus truly did and is doing all the salvic work for man, in terms of the means of securing and maintaining eternal salvation. The Holy Spirit has the job, as the Spirit of Christ, of mediating resurrection (Rom 8:11) and of sanctification (1 Pet 1:2), the means of transformation. So the Spirit is involved in the results of eternal salvation (daily and final salvation) but not the procurement work involved. In some sense, though, there is a sharing by the first and third Persons even in the procurement but indirectly or tangentially so, the Spirit enabling Christ and the Father commanding and suffering separation. The actual “hands on” direct work, though, was that of the Son alone, being forsaken.

9. 1 Sam 10:6; Acts 1:8; Rom 8:11; John 14:26 NASB

10. 2 Cor 3:17 NASB

The deity of the Holy Spirit has been more difficult to establish, His purpose being supportive and to direct attention to the first and second Persons. The above verse, His inclusion in biblical doxologies and the baptismal formula of Matthew along with His interchangeableness in reference are the main objective supports for deity. The church did not settle on this until

---

issuing the creed of Constantinople in AD 381. Even then there was a great diversity of opinion ( Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995), 89.)

11. John 4:24 NASB

12. 1 John 4:8, 16 NASB

13. Eternal- That is He in His own nature has no beginning and no end. He has created time, the concept of beginning and end, that which is other than God, and that which is bound by time, that which has a sense of progression. Yet He Himself is not bound by time but is involved in it, being both transcendent to and immanent with it.

14. That is He, as He exists, never alters or degrades. He grows from the effects of experiencing in the sense of actual interaction with what was formerly foreknown. Not being diminished but fulfilled. (I'm trying to speak carefully, this is untested water for me.)

15. That is not subject to be effected by other than Himself. Any effecting must be allowed and will be positive.

16. But not always exercising omnipotence. He may restrain.

17. He is both transcendent and immanent. He may be present without assuming identity or ontologically indwelling.

18. Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; John 1:18 NASB

19. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things." (Rom 11:36) In a real sense "it has all been the Father's idea. From creation through the giving of the promises with the plan of salvation and the direction of its fulfillment, including the subjection of all things to the Son, the Father is behind it all. This pattern was most clearly revealed in the Son to Father submission relationship of the incarnation. The Son, sent by the Father, did and said only what He saw and heard (John 5:19, 30; 8: 26, 28). "I can do nothing on My own initiative." When He has received the kingdom and has had all things "put in subjection", He will hand "over the kingdom to the God and Father" that He (the Father) "may be all in all." (1 Cor 15:24-28) This will be the "end".

20. Isa 25:1 NASB

The sovereign coordination of history, nations, events and individual decisions, three passages and illustrations come to mind. First God's dealing with Joseph, as He used the decisions of Joseph's brothers to bring the future nation into isolation and protection in Egypt until the exodus. Genesis 45:4-8 and 50:18-21 make Joseph's understanding of God's working clear, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good". He held both the intentions of the individuals and the sovereign intentions of God in tension and balance.

The scene of contention with Pharaoh comes to mind, as well. In Exodus 7-14 the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is mentioned 18 times (including one in Exod 4:21). Sometimes it was Pharaoh doing the hardening and sometimes it refers to God doing the hardening (Stephen Spencer, "Providence and Miracles" [unpublished class notes in 402 Trinitarianism, Dallas

---

Theological Seminary, Spring Semester 2000], 10-11). In the end the purpose was to "demonstrate My power in you (Pharaoh)" (Exod 9:16 and Rom 9:17).

Finally, the way God brought about the sacrifice and crucifixion of Christ illustrates this "sovereignty-freedom" balance and tension. Peter, in Acts 2:22-23, 36 and in Acts 4:27-28, gave credit to both God's preplanning and the accountable actions of people, both commoners and political authorities.