

## ANSWERING TRINITARIAN ARGUMENTS

### JESUS IS CALLED “GOD”

Normal modern-day understanding would be that if Jesus is called “God” then he must be the Almighty God. However, biblical understanding is not based on such modern ways of thinking, but rather on Hebrew thinking which did not change even when the NT was written in Greek. The key to our correct understanding is that of the Hebrew concept of the title of a person as being applied to his agent.

After having examined this subject and the relevant passages in John 20:28; Hebrews 1:8, 9, we will examine the relevant often misapplied verses of: 1 John 5:18, 20; 10:30; 14:9; Colossians 2:9; Matthew 1:23; John 8:58 and 18:6 in relation to Exodus 3:14. Then we shall examine whether ‘the alpha and omega’ title; the passages containing the terms ‘God, the Son, and holy spirit’ together;” the baptism formula; and further non-biblical Trinitarian reasoning, must mean that Jesus is God Almighty.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF AGENCY

When speaking of Jesus Trinitarians often forget that just as a human principal may use an agent so, too, God often uses agents. In the Bible the human principal/agent relationship can be seen from the account in Luke 7:1-10 concerning **the centurion** who sent Jewish elders to ask Jesus to heal his servant. Yet the parallel account in Matthew 8:5-13 presents the event as if the centurion were personally speaking to Jesus. Furthermore, God is shown to use **Aaron** as agent:

❖ “Thus says the LORD...behold with *the staff that is in my hand* I will strike the water that is in the Nile ...And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, “Take your staff and stretch out *your hand* over the waters of Egypt...” (Ex. 7:17, 19).

So within a few verses God treats “the staff” as being both in His hand and in Aaron’s hand. This shows that God is using Aaron as His agent in this particular event. Additionally, the Scriptures show that God uses angelic agents even though the utterances and actions are attributed to Him (Ex. 3:2-6, Acts 7:30-33 and Ex. 13:21, 14:19). *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion* describes agency:

Agent (Heb. shaliah): The main point of the Jewish law of agency is expressed in the dictum, “a persons agent is regarded as the person himself” (Ned. 72b; Kidd, 41b). Therefore any act committed by a duly appointed agent is regarded as having been committed by the principal...

So any agent was granted the full authority and powers of his master.

“GOD” IN A SECONDARY/REPRESENTATIONAL/FUNCTIONAL SENSE

❖ “I have made you [*Moses*] God to Pharaoh” (Ex. 7:1). (Not “as God” as in many translations. See Hebrew Interlinear).

*This was because God worked through Moses just as he later worked through other human representatives and finally Jesus.* In the Scriptures the word ‘god’ is used in ways other than to refer to Almighty God e.g. “their god is their belly” (Phil. 3:19).

For the Hebrew word for ‘God’, *elohim* the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon says:

1. pl. in number. a. rulers, judges, either as **divine representatives** at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power...b. divine ones, superhuman beings including God and angels...c. angels...d. gods.

2. Pl. intensive. a. god or goddess, always with sf. 1 S 5:7 (Dagon), Ju 11:24 (Chemosh),...b. godlike one Ex 4:16 (J; Moses in relation to Aaron), Ex 7:1 (P; in relation to Pharaoh), 1 S 28:13 (the shade of Samuel), **Psalm 45:7 (the Messianic king...)**. c. works of God, or things specially belonging to him d. God (vid. 3 & 4).

For the Greek word for 'God', *theos* Thayer's Greek Lexicon says:

4. Θεός is used of whatever can in any respect be likened to God, or resembles him in any way: Hebraistically, **equivalent to God's representative or vicegerent**, 6 of magistrates and judges, John 10:34f after Ps. 81:6 (Ps. 82:6)...; of the devil.

#### *OTHER EXAMPLES OF HUMANS WHO WERE DESCRIBED AS 'GOD'*

- ❖ “Hear us, my lord [*Abraham*], you are a **mighty** (Heb. *elohim*) prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead” (*Gen. 23:6*).
- ❖ “But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master must bring him to the **judges** (*elohim*), and...” (*Ex. 21: 5, 6 NKJV*).
- ❖ “God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of **the rulers** (*elohim*). How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Vindicate the weak and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked. They do not know nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, “**You are gods**, and all of you are **sons of the Most High**. “Nevertheless you will die like men and fall like any one of the princes.” Arise, O God, judge the earth! For it is You who possesses all the nations” (*Ps. 82: 1-8 NASB*).

The NIV notes on Psalm 82.1 read:

In the language of the OT—and in accordance with the conceptual world of the ancient Near East—rulers and judges, as deputies of the heavenly King, could be given the honorific title “god” or be called “son of God.”

#### *SAME USAGE OF “GOD” IN JESUS’ DAY*

- ❖ “The Jews answered him [*Jesus*], “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but **for blasphemy**, because you, being a man, make yourself **God**.” Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, **‘I said you are gods’**? “If he called them gods to whom the word of God came - and the Scripture cannot be broken - do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming’, because I said, ‘I am **the Son of God**?’” (*John 10:33-39 ESV*).

By his quotation of Psalm 82, Jesus is clearly still using the term “God” in the same representational way as in earlier days. Just as that Psalm defined the term “gods” as “sons of the Most High” i.e. “sons of God”, so, too, Jesus defines the term “God” as “the Son of God.” Because he is the prophet like Moses he is the ultimate judge and therefore is the ultimate “God” in the representational and functional sense. So Jesus is functionally equal to the Father, but does not have positional equality with Him. (John 5:23).

#### *JESUS IS GOD’S PRE-EMINENT AGENT AS “THE SON OF GOD”*

Throughout the NT Jesus is shown to be the agent of God because he is the one who is “sent” i.e. commissioned by God, or granted certain prerogatives and given authority to act for God.

JESUS IS CALLED “GOD” OR ‘god’ ON TWO OCCASIONS  
IN JOHN 20:28 & HEBREWS 1:8, 9

Trinitarian **Murray Harris** claims that, as applied to Jesus in the NT, there are: “only **seven** certain, very probable, or probable instances out of a total of 1,315 uses of *theos*.” He further notes that: “the majority of scholars hold that *theos* is applied to Jesus no fewer than five times and no more than nine times in the NT.”

*Jesus as God*, 274, 268.

*The term God – O Theos – is used of the Father 1,317 times in the NT.*

However, the examination in the previous study of: John 1:18; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; and Acts 20:28 revealed that these verses are not giving a reference to Jesus as being “God.” The remaining two texts which have the word *theos* i.e. John 20:28 and Hebrews 1:8 will now be examined.

**JOHN 20:28**: “Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and **my God!**’”

For Thomas to call Jesus “my Lord” is culturally the same as his calling any other superior by this title. Mary Magdalene even called the one she thought was a gardener *Kyrie* which means “Lord/sir.” However, is Thomas calling Jesus “my God” in the **ontological** sense as if Jesus was consubstantial with the Father and really was the Almighty God? Or was he being modalistic or even polytheistic? An alternative is that his exclamation was based on his seeing Jesus as “God” in **the Hebrew representational sense**.

*THOMAS’ PRESUPPOSITION*

As a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew Thomas would, as with Jesus (Mark 12:28, 29), have believed the Shema which stated that “Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one” (Deut 6:4). By all of the singular pronouns and verbs used when referring to God, every Jew believed that God was one individual person. So clearly Thomas is **not being polytheistic**. But was he being **modalistic**? This could not be the case because John 1:18 states that “No one has ever seen God” and later Jesus’ prayer is recorded as “Father ... you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). So Jesus could not be the Father.

*NOT AN ONTOLOGICAL STATEMENT*

The very idea of a person sharing the actual substance of another was completely alien to 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish thinking. It is totally implausible that Thomas had suddenly, in contradistinction to Peter’s confession, originated the idea that Jesus was a co-equal part of a Godhead of two or three. It was likely a hundred years after Thomas’ confession that this kind of Greek thinking was proposed in relation to Jesus and the God of Israel and certainly some three centuries later, and in a Gentile environment, before such ideas became official church teaching.

*THOMAS’ CONFESSION OF JESUS AS “GOD” REPRESENTATIONALLY*

Thomas had seen the many miracles and heard the amazing teachings of Jesus as proof of Messiahship. He also knew that Jesus had been executed as the claimed Messiah. Yet, Jesus’ death seemed to belie that claim in the eyes of many. This seems to have left Thomas in a state of confusion so that he refused to believe the reports of others concerning the resurrection of Jesus. So now confronted with the fact of that resurrection, Thomas was shocked to realize that certainly Jesus was the real and genuine Messiah. This sudden realization was what prompted Thomas’ exclamation “My Lord and my God.” This was not the result of some carefully worked out theology but rather it was a sudden emotional response removing all doubt “*that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God*” (John 20:31), which was the very purpose of John’s writing of his gospel. With this background it is clear that Thomas’ exclamation really was one of realizing that, as Messiah, Jesus was “God” in this

very Jewish representational sense. Thomas is really addressing Jesus as *King of Israel*, the Messiah who represents God in having been **granted the prerogatives of God** “*that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father*” (John 5:23). Additionally, the resurrection is actually proof that Jesus could never be part of the Almighty God, because God has always been immortal (1 Tim. 1:17) and therefore, never can be subject to a resurrection. It was God who resurrected Jesus (Acts 2:32). Furthermore, Jesus does not correct Thomas but accepts the title of “God” in this Hebrew *secondary sense* that he had earlier responded to (John 10:33) when he was accused of “*blasphemy, because you being a man, make yourself God.*” Jesus then explained (verse 34) to his accusers that Psalm 82:6 speaks of the human warrior judges being called *gods*. This was because they, like Jesus, represented God and functioned before the people as God. Standing *in loco Dei* (in the place of God) Jesus now functions as God. For the earlier confession of Peter that: “*You [Jesus] are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*” Jesus said to him, ‘*Blessed are you, Simon...*’” (Matt.16:16, 17); but for Thomas’ confession Jesus gives him no benediction, but rather mildly rebukes him with: “*Blessed are those who have not seen and believed.*” If Thomas was stating a development of the revelation about Jesus as being ontologically the Almighty God Yahweh he would certainly have been commended rather than rebuked for failing to recognize at an earlier stage the facts about Jesus’ Messiahship which Peter successfully had done.

#### UNCERTAINTY OF IDENTIFICATION OF THE SUBJECT

#### HEBREWS 1:8

Traditionally this verse has been rendered as: “***But of the Son [he says], ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.’***” This may be a reasonable rendering. However, it is not so clear in the Greek just how it should be rendered. In *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* p. 32 C. F. D. Moule explains that:

(Heb. 1:8, which looks similar [to Luke 18:11 *ho theos*], may conceivably be a true Nominative, construed so as to mean *Thy throne is God*; but see commentators in loc.)

So other translators have rendered it as:

“God is thy throne forever and ever,...” Moffatt

“God is thy throne...” Footnote to the RSV

“God is your throne forever and ever,...” Smith and Goodspeed, Byington, NWT

“Your throne is God for an age of ages,...” The Unvarnished New Testament

The text is a quotation from Psalm 45:6, 7 which is rendered in the NAB as: “*Your throne, O god, stands forever.*” This is a reference to the king of Israel as being called “god” **by his people**. Also note that Jesus has the Almighty God as his God.

The RSV renders it as: “*Your divine throne endures forever and ever.*”

And the footnote as: “*Your throne is a throne of God*”

Hebrews 1:8 is a quotation from the LXX and the word for word from the Greek NT is:

**“Regards but the Son, ‘The throne of you the god into the age of the age.’”**

Please notice that, unlike most translations, *it does not say ‘he says’* (also see REB, NAB and Rotherham) **as if God is calling Jesus His ‘God.’** Rather, based on the context of Psalm 45, it is **the people of Israel** who honour the king as ‘god’ i.e. as God’s representative because he sat *in loco Dei* on God’s throne in Jerusalem. The NIV notes on Psalm 45 state:

Possibly the king’s throne is called God’s throne because he is God’s appointed regent. But it is also possible that **the king himself is addressed as “god.”** The Davidic king (the “LORD’s anointed,” 2 Sam19.21), because of his special relationship with God, was called at his enthronement **the “son” of**



same Person, the Father, and the additional points made in the apparent final repetition are that it is this One, namely the God made known by Jesus Christ, who is the true God, and that, besides this, He is *eternal life*. As He is both light and love (i.5, iv.8), so He is also life,” p. 357.

John Stott’s comments are in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Letters of John (Revised Edition)*, pp. 197-198.

#### COMMENTS OF THE SCHOLARS ON JESUS BEING CALLED “GOD”

Rudolf Bultmann:

Neither in the synoptic gospels nor in the Pauline epistles is Jesus called God; nor do we find him so called in the Acts of the Apostles or in the Apocalypse

*Essays, Philosophical and Theological*, tr. J.C.G. Greig, p. 275.

John Macquarrie says that:

it may strike us as rather odd that such an apparently central Christian affirmation as ‘Jesus Christ is God’ is so minimally attested in the Scriptures that we have to hunt around for instances, and when we have found them, argue about what they really mean. *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, p. 295.

In *Jesus God and Man*, leading Catholic Raymond Brown admits that: “even in the New Testament works that speak of Jesus as God, there are also passages that seem to militate against such a usage.” To retrieve his Trinitarian position Brown then proposes that: “The New Testament does call Jesus ‘God,’ but this is a development of the later New Testament books. In the Gospels, Jesus never uses the title ‘God’ of Himself.”

p. 33, 86.

#### TEXTS THAT MIGHT IMPLY THAT JESUS IS “GOD ALMIGHTY”

These are texts which do not directly call Jesus *theos*: John 5:18; 8:24, 28, 58; 10:30-33; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:19; 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:5; 3:16. These will be examined in the remainder of this and the later studies.

*IS JESUS ONE ESSENCE WITH “THE FATHER”?*

**John 10:30:** “I and the Father are one.”

This does not mean *being of one substance* but being united in will and purpose. In this context it means that the Father and the Son are **one in respect to the preservation of the sheep**. The phrase is used similarly in John 17:11: “...that they may be one as we are one.” *No Christians become one in essence with God*.

**John 5:18:** “He...was calling God his own Father, making himself **equal with God**”

However, Jesus, in verse 16, simply shows that he is subordinate to the Father and therefore not of one essence with Him. By calling God his own Father Jesus simply showed that he was God’s heir (Gal.4:1) and therefore was claiming God-given authority to function representatively for God. One cannot be “**equal with God**” and actually be God unless this makes a 2<sup>nd</sup> Almighty God, which would be polytheism.

**John 14:9:** “He who has seen me has seen the Father”

If taken in a literalistic sense this would mean that Jesus claimed to be the Father, a view that no Trinitarian holds because they view Jesus as being *God the Son*. However, “*no man has seen God at any time*” (John 1:18).

**Colossians 2:9:**

“For in him the whole fullness of **deity** [*the Godhead* in KJV and NKJ] dwells bodily”

This no more turns Jesus into God than it does Christians who also “*may be filled with all the fullness of God*” (Eph. 3:19).

**Matthew 1:23:** “God with us”

This is an apt title for the Messiah through whom God is working to reconcile mankind to Himself. A similar phrase is used in Proverbs 30:1 of Ithiel whose name means “*God is with me.*”

IS JESUS THE “*I AM*” OF EXODUS 3:14?

**John 18:6:**

“When Jesus said to them, ‘I am he’, they drew back and fell to the ground.”

Trinitarians use this to indicate that by Jesus’ use of the *I AM* phrase he bowled over the crowd of soldiers and this, therefore, is proof that he is God. If this was the reason one must wonder why the soldiers got up and continued to arrest *God*. In fact, Jesus used the phrase “I am he” on numerous occasions and with no powerful effect on those to whom he said it. A possible reason for the crowd falling to the ground was perhaps that they were aware of the rumours that Jesus could be the resurrected John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah. If they had Elijah in mind they could have been in fear of fire being called down on them as happened to the soldiers sent to arrest Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-12). Once they realized they were not in such danger they carried out their orders.

**John 8:58:** “...before Abraham was born, *I am* (Gk *ego eimi*).”

Exodus 3:14 ESV: “God said to Moses, *I AM WHO I AM...*”

This Hebrew phrase is the basis for God’s personal name Yahweh. The footnote in the ESV notes show this also to mean “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.” The Greek Septuagint reads *ego eimi ho hown* which has quite a different meaning to the *ego eimi* phrase used by Jesus. However, concerning Jesus’ “**I am he**” statement in John 8:58 the *I AM WHO I AM* statement in Exodus 3:14 was not revealed to Abraham but to Moses hundreds of years later.

SCHOLARLY COMMENTS ON THE “*I AM*” SAYINGS

Dr. Harold H. Rowdon stated:

That the absolute use of ‘**I am**’ need not have connotations of divinity is clear from its usage by the man born blind at John 9:9. Jesus’ words, then, were not an unambiguous asseveration of divinity ....

*Christ the Lord*, p. 172

J. A. T. Robinson (C. of E. Bishop of Woolwich - deceased) stated:

That Jesus is arrogating to himself the divine name is nowhere stated or implied in this gospel [of John]. Even the Jews do not accuse him of this — only of calling God His Father, and thereby implying equality with God or as H. Oldberg interprets this from Rabbinic parallels, rebellious independence being ‘as good as God’ (5:18). What they take to be the blasphemy of making himself ‘a god’ in 10:33 is again made clear to be a *misunderstanding* of Jesus calling Himself ‘God’s son’.... The worst than can be said of Him at the trial is that He claimed to be ‘God’s Son. *The Priority of John*, pp. 386, 387.

Bultmann advises that: “We should reject the idea that ‘ego eimi’ means ‘I (Jesus) am God.’”

C. K. Barrett in his celebrated commentary on John stated that:

EGO EIMI (“I am He”) does not identify Jesus with God, but it does draw attention to him in the strongest possible terms. I am the one, the one you must look at, and listen to if you would know God” (*Comm. on John*, p. 342, cf. p. 98). “It is simply intolerable that Jesus should be made to say, ‘I am God, the supreme

God of the OT, and being God I do as I am told,' and in 13:19, 'I am God, and I am here because someone sent me.'" "Jesus' *Ego Eimi* is not a claim to divinity."

*SCHOLARLY COMMENT ON THE OTHER "I AM" SAYINGS*

Again JAT Robinson:

Of the 'I am' sayings in this Gospel [John]. those with the predicate 'I am the bread of life', 'the door', 'the way', 'the good shepherd', etc., certainly do not imply that the subject is God. As Barrett rightly says. '**ego eimi** does not identify Jesus with God, but it does draw attention to him in the strongest possible terms. "I am the one-the one you must look at, and listen to if you would know God." *The Priority of John*, pp. 385.

*JESUS MEANT "I AM HE – THE MESSIAH"*

In **John 4:25, 26** the woman at the well says:

"I know that **Messiah** is coming" *Jesus said to her: 'I who am speaking to you am he (Gk ego eimi).'"*

This is further proved by a comparison of "I am he" in Mark 13:6/Luke 21:8 with the parallel account in Matthew 24:5: "I am the Christ [Messiah NAB]." So he is saying "I am he - the **Messiah**." Hence in 8:58 he is telling them the same thing, that is, that he is the Messiah. All other instances of this Greek phrase *ego eimi* are translated as "**I am he**" or "**I am (he)**" or "**I am the one**," see John 4:26, 8:24, 8:28, 9:9, 13:9, 18:5. This is recognized as correct by all scholars. There is no contextual reason to render 8:58 any differently. Only Benjamin Wilson's Diaglott is consistent on this point. Furthermore, *Edwin Freed comments that:*

Jesus is reported as affirming his *messiahship* through the use of 'ego eimi' "... and that **John 4:26** is... "the clue to understanding all other passages where the words 'ego eimi' occur.

*THE MESSIAH WAS FOREORDAINED*

Jesus' words in John 8:58 are, in fact, a case of his being foreknown or foreordained in the "**predetermined plan**" as shown in Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:20. The subject here in its immediate context (8:53) is **who is the greater**, Abraham or Jesus. Who takes precedence, Abraham or the promised Messiah? The Jews ask: "Who do you claim to be." By pointing out that he fulfils the role of the Messiah that was promised, he shows he is greater than Abraham. **The proof comes, that** only in this foreordained sense did Jesus exist before Abraham, when Jesus says:

❖ "Abraham rejoiced greatly at the prospect of seeing my day and **he saw it** (*through eyes of faith or possibly a vision*) and rejoiced" (*John 8:56*).

So Abraham was privileged to see into **the future**—to Jesus' day. He looked forward and saw the coming of the Messiah before its realization. So when Jesus says "*Before Abraham came into being I am he*" he is not making a statement about literal pre-existence, but simply claiming to be the One who was promised to come, which promise existed before Abraham was born and the fulfilment of which Abraham was privileged to see in his mind. The Jews, as ever, misunderstand and think that Jesus was meaning that he—Jesus had seen Abraham (8:57), but Jesus is emphasizing that he takes precedence over Abraham because of his **superior position** in being the promised, **foreordained** Messiah with that promise of the Messiah existing "**before** Abraham came into being..." that is in the sense that **the planned Messiah was in God's mind** (*Gen. 3:15*).

*J.A.T Robinson* makes the point that:

to say that Jesus is "before" him is not to lift him out of the ranks of humanity but to assert his *unconditional precedence*. To take such statements at the level of "flesh" so as to infer, as "the Jews" do that, at less than fifty, Jesus is claiming to have lived on this earth before Abraham (8:52 and 57), is to be

as crass as Nicodemus who understands rebirth as an old man entering his mother's womb a second time (3:4). *The Priority of John*, p. 384.

Similarly, as Revelation 13:8b states:

❖ “The lamb who was slaughtered from the founding of the world” *speaks not of a literal pre-existence but of foreordination.*

So, as now fulfilled in Jesus, the planned and promised Messiah existed in God's mind before Abraham was born. Jesus' fulfilling this role as Messiah is what made him greater than Abraham. *The literal coming into existence of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God was at his conception (Luke 1:32, 35).*

### IS JESUS THE ‘ALPHA AND OMEGA’, ‘THE FIRST AND THE LAST’, AND ‘THE BEGINNING AND THE END’?

The title “*the first and the last*” in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12 are applied to Yahweh. This is difficult for Trinitarians who do not propose that Yahweh is Jesus. However, the title “*Alpha and Omega*” appears only in Revelation 1:8, 21:6 and 22:13. In 1:8 it clearly applies to “*the Lord God...the Almighty*” and not to Jesus. In 21:6 it clearly applies to “*He who sits on the throne*” (verse 5) and not to the Lamb (see above and in STUDY 5 under the heading: SEATED ON GOD'S THRONE). However, Revelation 22:13 contains all three phrases and is applied by Trinitarians to Jesus. Also within chapter 22 verses 7 and 12 are thought by Trinitarians to be the words of Jesus and are presented as such in the many red-letter bibles. Is this correct? No! For verse 6 says “*And he said to me...*” So who is the *he* who is speaking to John? We have to go back to 21:9 to discover that “**one of the seven angels** who had the seven bowls...*spoke with [John].*” There is no change of speaker after that until Jesus begins to speak in 22:16. So all the words in 22:7, 12 and 13 are those of this **angel who evidently is speaking for God** as if God himself i.e. the Father were speaking. So it is the Father who says “I am coming quickly” just as in OT texts, and “I am the Alpha and Omega” just as He does in 1:8 and 21:6.

### PASSAGES WHICH MENTION GOD (OR FATHER), SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

There are about **11 or 12 texts** or passages which mention God, the Son, and the holy spirit all together. However, in these passages there is no indication of any co-equality and the Son is always a reference to Jesus as a man and not to the thought of a pre-existent divine being. It takes an enormous mental leap to imagine that any of the following texts teach the Trinity. These texts are: Luke 4:1-12; John 4:10-25; Acts 1:4-8, 2:33, 2:38ff, 7:55ff, 10:44-48, 11:15-18, 15:8-11; Gal. 3:8-14; Eph. 5:18-20 and 1 Peter 1:2.

#### EXAMPLES

- *1 Peter 1:2:*

“...according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, in the sanctification *of* (not “by”) the **Spirit**, for obedience to **Jesus** Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.”

As demonstrated in STUDY 3 only the Father is God (Eph 4:6; 1 Cor. 12:6). If the first member of this triad is God then the Son and the Spirit cannot be God. Verse 3 says “Blessed be **the God** and Father **of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” He is the God of Jesus. Nowhere in the Scriptures is Jesus ever called *the God of the Father* or *the God of the holy spirit.*

- *Acts 2:32, 33:*

“This **Jesus**...God raised up ... Being therefore, exalted at the right hand of **God**, and having received from the Father the promise of Holy **Spirit.**”

The man Jesus was dependent on God (not a 1<sup>st</sup> Person Father) to raise him and so was subordinate. Jesus was raised to the right hand – not of a 1<sup>st</sup> Person of the trinity - but of the complete God. Also the spirit is a gift and not a person.

- *Luke 4:1-12:*

Here Jesus is led by the spirit into the wilderness. This merely shows that the spirit is God's powerful influence and that people should "*worship the Lord your God.*" Jesus obviously was not including himself in the term "God."

- *Galatians 3:8-14:*

Here God justifies the Gentiles, Christ redeems us from the curse of the law and we receive the promised spirit. Again this is the human Jesus and not a pre-existent divine being and the spirit is a gift and not a person.

There also is sometimes a misapplication of **Isaiah 48:16b** which says in the KJV: "...and now the Lord **GOD**, and his *Spirit* hath sent *me*" as if this involved the 3 persons of the Trinity. However, the one speaking is shown by the context, the NAB notes, and the NIV notes to be either Isaiah or Cyrus. Notice that God, or more correctly Yahweh, is separate from the *Spirit* and the *me*. Isaiah 48:16b can also be rendered:

- ❖ "...and now Lord **Yahweh** has sent me with his spirit" (NJB). The NIV is similar.
- ❖ "And now I the Lord **GOD** have sent him, endowed with my spirit" (S&G).

*THREE DO NOT NECESSARILY MAKE THE TRINITY*

- ❖ "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels..." (1Tim. 5:21).

*Here Christ is shown to be a person separate from God. Also there is again no mention of the holy spirit, but rather of chosen angels, and so there is no Trinity here.*

## THE SO-CALLED BAPTISM FORMULA

### Matthew 28:19:

"...baptizing them *in the name of* the Father and of the Son and of **the Holy Spirit.**"

*EXAMPLE: DO SPIRIT, WATER AND BLOOD MAKE A TRINITY?*

- ❖ "And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one" (1 John 5:8 NKJV).

One would not conclude that these three make a triune entity or that they are persons just because they agree. So too we would not arrive at such a wrong conclusion with Matthew 28:19. Such things are simply rhetorical devices of the time.

*CONTEXT:*

Matthew 28:18 shows Jesus as subordinate to the Father because "All authority in heaven and on earth has been **given to** (him)." This subordinate position of Jesus is not just whilst he was on earth but, here, it is since his resurrection and glorification. So co-equality of the Father and the Son is excluded.

*BAPTISM IN JESUS' NAME*

The fact is that when there are occurrences of actual baptism recorded in the book of Acts they are always performed "*in the name of Jesus Christ*" (Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5) and never using the Matthew 28:19 formula. On pages 35-37 of his book *One or Three?* Professor Karl-Heinz Ohlig explains why Matthew 28:19 is, in fact, a triadic formula not a Trinitarian one so that it summarizes the 3 central changes that were characteristic of conversion to Christianity i.e.

1. Faith in the one Father.
2. Recognition of Jesus.
3. Living according to the Spirit of Jesus.

A possible explanation is that the Jews who converted needed to make only one change by accepting Jesus as Messiah, and so the thought of: “in the name of Jesus Christ” was relevant; whereas pagan Gentile converts would need to abandon their polytheism and accept wider changes as demonstrated by the formula in Matthew 28:19. Because the holy spirit does not have a personal name and because Father and Son are titles there are not three names mentioned here. Furthermore, the phrase “In the name of” simply means *all that is revealed about the Father and the Son*. Biblical definitions of “name” are *reputation, character, fame, glory and authority* (Rev. 3:2, 2 Sam. 8:13, Isa. 55:13, Ezek. 22:5 and Jer. 13:11, Matt. 28:18, 19). Also Jesus says “*I will continue to make it [the Father’s name] known*” (John 17:26). This does not mean Jesus’ continuing to tell the disciples the personal name of God but rather to keep on revealing new factors about the character of the Father. The fact that “*all authority*” has been given to Jesus for him to command baptism demonstrates the fact that baptism is administered **with his authority** as synonymous with the phrase “in his name” (see Acts 4:12). Therefore, Matthew 28:19 is not referring to baptism in the personal names of three separate individuals but is effected in the **singular name** or reputation/authority of *Jesus as the channel* (mediator, high priest and sacrifice) representing *the Father as the one delegating “all authority”* and *the holy spirit as God’s power* which proceeds from both Him and the Son (John 7:38, 39). This is why we find *in practice*, as revealed in the book of Acts, that baptism was carried out in one name—“in the name of Jesus Christ.” So Matthew 28:19 does not say that Father, Son and holy spirit constitute one God or even that the holy spirit is in any way a distinct person.

*NOTE:* Most passages that mention God and Jesus together exclude the holy spirit. For example, in John 5:23 the holy spirit is not listed as honoured. Also salvation throughout the book of Revelation (7:10, 15-17; 14:1; 21:22, 23) is attributed to God and to “the Lamb” with no mention of holy spirit.

### THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

❖ “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; and behold, **a voice from heaven** said, ‘This is my beloved **Son**, with whom I am well pleased’” (*Matt. 3:16*).

Because “God is spirit” He needs no third person working with Him. There is here no indication that “the Spirit of God” is a person anymore than that “the spirit of Elijah” is a separate person from him. Neither is there any indication of a co-equal arrangement of three persons; but rather of a superior, namely God bestowing a gift on a subordinate—the Son. The use of this account to prove the Trinity carries no weight because the event is a **public confirmation of Jesus as the Messiah** and so is of great symbolic importance. It is not of a literal person descending upon Jesus but of his public anointing with holy spirit. *The “voice from heaven” is that of God. Yet only the Father is God. So from the Trinitarian perspective this voice comes from only 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of God.* Furthermore, how could the Father be “well pleased” with the Son if they had always been co-equal and co-eternal? It was God who anointed Jesus:

❖ “...**God** anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit...for God was with him” (*Acts 10:37-38*). *This was Peter’s comment on the baptism of Jesus. As is clearly evident Jesus is a different person to “God” and is therefore not God.*

## THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

### 2 Corinthians 13:14:

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and **the fellowship** (Gk *koinonia*) **of** the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

This text does not speak of fellowship with the Holy Spirit, but rather as a subjective genitive or genitive of quality—fellowship *brought about by* the Holy Spirit as being God’s outreach. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* makes the point:

That the subjective aspect (“fellowship produced by the Spirit”) should be included in the concept is strongly suggested by two other clauses, in which the exhortation comes from their being in Christ, and their comfort comes from love, p. 121.

The Greek word *koinonia* is also correctly translated as “a sharing,” Bauer’s Greek/Eng Lexicon e.g.

❖ “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless *a sharing* (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break **a sharing** in the body...” (1 Cor. 10:16 NASU).

Many other translations of this verse are the same as or similar to the NASU and *koinonia* is used similarly in other verses such as:

❖ “...for the favour of **taking part** (*koinonia*) in the relief of the saints.” (2 Cor. 8:4 ESV).

Hence, Smith and Goodspeed translate 2 Corinthians 13:14 as: “*and the participation in the holy Spirit.*” The RSV and NRSV give the footnote for this verse: “*and the sharing in.*” The Amplified Bible gives the textual note: “and fellowship (*the communion and sharing together, and participation*) in the Holy Spirit...” This verse simply **means that the influence of God and Jesus is working among the believers**. The fact that Christ, God and Holy Spirit are mentioned in the same sentence clearly does not mean that they are the same being i.e. God who is already one of those mentioned! Such an illogical approach would mean that Peter, James and John are one being because they are often mentioned together in a single phrase.

## GOD AS THE SPIRIT WHO EMPOWERS

### 1 Corinthians 12:11:

“All these things are **empowered** by the one and **the same Spirit** *who* apportions to each one individually as **he** wills.”

The fact that the pronoun is personal as “who” is taken by Trinitarians to mean that there must be a ‘God the Holy Spirit.’ However, this passage is difficult grammatically and there are two ways that it may be rendered and understood:

1. The **he** in this instance refers back to God (*the Father*) in verse 6: “it is **the same God** who **empowers** them all in everyone.”
2. Verse 11 could be correctly translated as “*that* apportions...as **it** wills” because “spirit” is neuter.

So in neither case does this result in a reading that gives the idea that there is a ‘God the Holy Spirit’

## TRINITARIAN REDEFINING OF GREEK & LATIN TERMS

- PERSON is redefined to be a mind and not a being.
- PERSONAL PRONOUNS are stripped of their number and gender.

- The word “BEGOTTEN” is redefined from being the act of bringing into existence by a father to being a relationship.
- The word “TODAY” is redefined as “the eternal day which has no beginning or end.” This argument is based on the supposition that with God all of time is the same.

### IT’S A MYSTERY!

If it is a case of divine mystery, then can Trinitarians properly claim that it is revealed? Miami university professor Robert Hach reasons:

Revelation is, by definition, *the unveiling of a mystery*: once revealed, it is a mystery no longer (see Eph. 1:9-10; 3:1-6; Col. 2:2-3); if it remains a mystery, then it has not been revealed. In other words, revelation on God’s side corresponds to understanding on the human side.

So if the Trinity is a mystery it has not been revealed to Trinitarians and they really have nothing to say on this subject. If, on the other hand, the Trinity has been revealed to them, then the doctrine must perfectly dovetail with all of the Holy Scriptures which contains God’s revelation of Himself.

### MUST GOD BE A TRINITY TO HAVE EXPRESSED HIS LOVE IN ETERNITY?

Augustine said:

If God is love, then there must be in him a lover, a beloved and a Spirit of love, for love is inconceivable without a lover and a beloved.

However, Augustine’s reasoning fails to take into account that one can love someone, such as a conceived child, before they are actually born. Even more so is this the case with God.

#### WHEN DID GOD LOVE JESUS?

- ❖ “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave me may be with me where I am, that they may behold *my glory which You have given me*; for **You loved me before the foundation of the world**”  
(John 17:24).

The anticipatory language generally used throughout John 17 is used also in this verse (24). At the time of these words Jesus had not in fact received his glory (17:5). Verse 20 shows that Jesus promised the same glory to those disciples not even alive at the time, saying “*I have given them the glory which You have given me.*” It is so certain that it is all as good as done and now past. Professor H.H. Wendt states that:

As the Messiah and Son he knows he **has been loved** and *foreordained* by the father from eternity (v. 24). Both John 8:58 and 17:5 are concerned with God’s **predetermination of the Messiah**.

Just as God loved Jacob before he was born (Rom. 9:13) so, too, the love that the Father had for His foreordained Son (1 Pet. 1:20) means that He had always loved him even before he existed. This is evident because God made His entire plan revolve around the coming Son. God expressed His love for His Son by preparing for the time he would come into existence. This is similar to when a married couple plan to have a child. In their mind they see the child and love him or her so that they prepare for the arrival of the child. So at the time the uni-personal God was entirely alone He was fully capable of expressing love. He had no need to be a social trinity to be able to express His love.

## WOULD ‘GOD THE FATHER’ BE INCOMPLETE WITHOUT THE OTHER TWO MEMBERS OF THE TRINITY?

In defining God as a divine society, and therefore an abstraction, Social Trinitarianism posits the idea that, as with humans, ‘God the Father’ would be incomplete as a *Person* unless there were others, and that there are two others according to the Bible.

### *FAULTY REASONING*

For this reasoning to be true it would be necessary for God to have **female company**. This is because God’s arrangement for man was for him to have a wife. However, Social Trinitarianism consists only of an all-male trio and God has no literal wife. So if God the Father would have been incomplete as a person why is the Holy Spirit not His wife as in the pagan trinities (Holy Spirit would also be the Son’s mother). Consider also, that if a man is happy with **just two relatives** would he not be **even happier with more relatives and friends**. Would a father feel absolutely complete with only a wife and one son? Would he not be even more complete if his father and mother were still living or at least one grandparent was alive? Would he not be happier still if he had at least two children or 6 other friends etc? Indeed one feels the loss when one of these relationships ceases, perhaps through death. Yet am I incomplete as person just because I have never had a sister? So the Trinitarian idea that God is only complete if there are three persons in one essence is entirely hypothetical and unscriptural. Clearly this Trinitarian reasoning is faulty and only results in tritheism.

## MUST GOD BE A TRINITY SO THAT HE IS NOT GUILTY OF CHILD ABUSE?

The argument is presented by Trinitarians that only God could sacrifice Himself otherwise the atonement would be a case of child abuse. Yet in Trinitarianism the same accusation can be made because the Person of the Father is supposed to have offered the Person of His Son – his child. However, abuse stems from a lack of love and is something that is forced on another. This is something that God never did with Jesus because God loved him and Jesus exercised his own will:

- ❖ “...So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason **the Father loves me**, because **I lay down my life** that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but **I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down**, and I have authority to take (or “receive”) it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (*John 10:16-18*).

Jesus sought to do his Father’s will; yet having free-will he harmonized his own will to that of the Father when he willingly offered himself sacrificially for mankind and with no coercion from God who as his Father loved him. Furthermore, the example of Abraham who loved his son Isaac is seen as a type of the later sacrificial arrangement. Yet, Isaac was willing to be that sacrifice. It was not required that he be of one essence with Abraham so that Abraham would not be accused of child abuse. Nevertheless, whatever moral view we take of this issue, all the properly analysed biblical data points away from any possibility of God existing in a triune form.

## DID JESUS LITERALLY PRE-EXIST?

*Please see* STUDY 17. THE ‘LOGOS’ IN JOHN’S PROLOGUE. – which discusses **John 1:1**.

*Please see* STUDY 16. JOHN’S PORTRAIT OF JESUS - which discusses **John 1:15, 3:31, 6:46, 6:62, 8:58, 12:41, and 17:5**.

*Please see* STUDY 15 which discusses **Philippians 2:5-9**.

QUICK REFERENCE KEY PROOF TEXTS

**HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD’S MIND/POWER**

*Micah 3:8:* “I am filled **with power**, with the **Spirit** of the LORD.”

It is an *interchangeable term with **mind of God*** as Paul shows when he quotes from:

*Isaiah 40:13:*

“Who has measured **the Spirit** of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel?”

*Romans 11:34:*

“Who has known **the mind** of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?”

.....

**JESUS IS NOT ALMIGHTY GOD**

*John 17:1, 3:*

“**Father**...you, **the only true God** and *Jesus Christ* whom you have sent.”

*1 Corinthians 8:4, 6:*

“...and that there is no God except one (*person*)...yet to us there is one (*person*) **God, the Father**, from whom are all things ...and one (*person*) Lord Jesus Christ.”

*1 Timothy 2:5:*

“For there is one (*person*) God and there is one (*person*) mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

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**GOD IS ONE PERSON**

*Galatians 3:20* Amplified Bible: “Yet God is [only] one Person.”

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