

Theology—Doctrine of God: The Fact of God and the Trinity

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Introduction: Nothing is of greater benefit to man than the contemplation of God. To be able to say that I know and understand God (at least as much as finite can understand the infinite) is a treasure greater than that possessed among the wisest or the richest of men—*23 Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: 24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23-24).* The first chapter of *Genesis* is one of the most God-centered chapters in the Bible. God is called by name 32 times and when we add the use of personal pronouns, He is mentioned no less than 43 times. Thus, in the very opening of this marvelous book we are brought into the presence of God and kept there. Our present inquiry into God deals with two areas.

I. The truth of God—God really exists.

- A. The assertion of the truth that God really exists may be shown through at least three areas of study.
 1. Revelation—deals with the supernatural communication of God with man, either written or oral. It is God making known Himself to His creation in a way that reason cannot do because of the limitation of reason's ability to disclose the true God. Reason can declare that God is, only revelation can make God known in a specific way. All that we know about God through revelation (special or supernatural as opposed to general or natural revelation), is contained within the pages of Scripture.
 - a. Assumption—*Genesis 1:1* simply begins with the assertion *In the beginning God...* No ground work is laid to show that God is or must be; rather Scripture commences with God's existence as an assumed truth known in the heart of man. As the Psalmist declares only *the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God (Psalm 14:1).*
 - b. Assurance—While the Bible never seeks to prove the truth that God exists, it does give assurance concerning Him by revealing to us His person, purpose, and providential working among men.

2. Reason—Belief in God is a reasonable matter. When one beholds all that is in this complex universe or the very complexity of man himself it is a most rational line of thinking to believe that something exists greater than man. Reason alone certainly cannot establish the existence of God, especially the God of the Bible, but does give a number of corroborating though not conclusive evidences of this fact.
 - a. Common Belief—*Man everywhere believes in the existence of a supreme Being or beings to whom he is morally responsible and to whom propitiation needs to be made. Such belief may be crudely, even grotesquely stated and manifested, but the reality of the fact is no more invalidated by such crudeness than the existence of a father is invalidated by the crude attempts of a child to draw a picture of its father (Great Doctrines of the Bible, William Evans, Pg. 14, Moody Press, 1974).*
 - b. Cause and effect—*The very essence of the scientific method, in common with all human experience, involves the basic principle of Cause and Effect. That is, no effect can be greater than its cause. From nothing, nothing comes! There must therefore be a First Cause of all things, which has at least all the characteristics which are seen in the universe which has been produced by it (The Bible Has The Answer, H. Morris, M. Clark, pg. 14, Creation Life Pub.).*
 - c. Conscience—*Conscience in man says: "Thou Shalt," and "Thou shalt not," "I ought," and "I ought not." These mandates are not self-imposed. They imply the existence of a Moral Governor to whom we are responsible. Conscience- there it is in the breast of man, an ideal Moses thundering from an invisible Sinai the Law of a holy Judge (Great Doctrines of the Bible, William Evans, Pg. 17, Moody Press, 1974).*
 - d. Creation—*Order and arrangement pervading a system, respectively imply intelligence and purpose as the cause of that order and arrangement. Since order and arrangement pervade the universe, there must exist an intelligence adequate to the production of this order and a will adequate to direct this arrangement to useful ends (Christian Theology, Emery Bancroft, pg. 52, Zondervan Pub.). This argument is argumentative to that of Cause and Effect. It takes the idea of the former and advances it through the additional argument of looking at the intricate design and integrated organization we find in the world.*
 - e. Congruity—*Congruity refers to a state of logical or practical agreement or harmonious relationship.....If we have a key which fits all the wards of the lock, we know that it is the right key. If we have a theory which fits all the facts in the case we know that we have the correct theory. Belief in a self-existent, personal God is in harmony with all the facts of our mental and moral nature, as well as with all the phenomena of the natural world. (Christian Theology, Emery Bancroft, pg. 52, Zondervan Pub.).*
3. Redemption—In redemption God proves His existence in a most wonderful and final way. Ask any believer how do you know there is a God and his response is because He lives in me. In the case of redemption we have the revelation of Jesus Christ; and in that revelation we have a marvelous and complete unveiling of God—7 *If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.* 8 *Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.* 9 *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then,*

Shew us the Father? (John 14:7-9); Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature (Colossians 1:15); Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3).

- B. The attitude toward the truth that God really exists.
 - 1. The atheist asserts there is no God.
 - 2. The agnostic says he cannot know whether or not God is. The pantheist insists that the total of all he experiences is God.
 - 3. The materialist boasts that he does not need a God.
 - 4. The worldly fool wishes there were not a God.
 - 5. But for the child of God, He is the one in whom we live and move and have our being.
- C. The administration (uses) of the truth that God really exists.
 - 1. For comfort—Someone is in charge and therefore life is not left to chance or fate.
 - 2. For conviction—Since God is, then He has the right to make certain demands on my life and the lives of all humanity.
 - 3. For Consolation—The fact of God argues for eternity and presents a future hope of seeing loved ones who are now dead or facing death.
 - 4. For constraint—Men who face the fact of God and are knowledgeable of facing a living God are constrained from doing some of that which otherwise they might do.
 - 5. For courage—To know that God is and that God is gracious and wise in all His dealings with His children gives strength and courage to face each situation.

II. The Trinity of God—The one and only God exists in three persons.

- A. The Trinity of God defined.
 - 1. Elements of definition of *Trinity*.
 - a. *The doctrine of the unity or oneness of God does not preclude the idea of a plurality of persons in the Godhead. While the doctrine of the unity of God is presented in resolute fashion in the Scripture so is the doctrine of a triune God. We believe as does the vast majority of Christianity that the Godhead is composed of the Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. The one indivisible divine essence, as a whole, exists eternally as Father and as Son and as Holy Spirit; that each person possesses the whole essence, and is constituted a distinct person by certain incommunicable properties- not common in Him with the others (Outlines of Theology, A. A. Hodge, pg 167).*
 - b. *There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three co-eternal and co-equal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence (B. B. Warfield, Trinity, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).*
 - c. *These distinctions are seen in the use of I, Thou, He; consultation between them and a distinct order of operation. The word person in its Trinitarian sense is not wholly free from objection, but it seems to be understood by orthodox writers that there is no better word. The objection is that it cannot be used in its common acceptation applied to human*

beings. It needs modification. For example, person in the ordinary use of the term means a distinct and independent being, so that one person is one being, and a hundred persons are a hundred beings. But in the Godhead there are three persons and one Being. The dissimilarity in the two instances is manifest (*Christian Doctrines*, J.M. Pendleton, pp.64-65).

2. In light of our understanding of the trinity, we reach the following considerations.

a. There is one God.

- (1) The Hebrew word *Elohim* in our text is translated *God*. It is a plural noun accompanied with a singular verb, which is the construction maintained for the most part throughout the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament. Its use here presents in obscurity what is later revealed in open that the one and only God exists in a plurality of persons. Please understand there is but one God!
- (2) There are three monotheistic religions in the world: Judaism, Christianity, and Muhammadanism. The doctrine of the oneness (unity) of God is held in contradistinction to polytheism (belief in many gods), tri-theism (the teaching that there are three Gods) and dualism (the belief in two eternal divine beings or eternal principles, one good and one evil). The *unity of God* means, not that He is possessed of a single personality, but that He is possessed of oneness of essence and being as the one and only deity. The unity of God while it is real and true unity is compound rather than simple or single unity. We will discuss this more fully later. To state the meaning of unity another way we mean that the divine nature is undivided and indivisible and that there is but one infinite and perfect spirit.
- (3) The Scriptural manifestation or representation of God is that He is one God—4:35 *Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him..... 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD (Deuteronomy 4:35; 6:4); 10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. 11 I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour (Isaiah 43:10-11); 6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.....8 Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any (Isaiah 44:6, 8); And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God (Mark 10:18); And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent (John 17:3); As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one (I Corinthians 8:4); 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:4-6); 1:17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.....2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ*

Jesus.....6:15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (I Timothy 1:17, 2:5, 6:15).

- (4) Throughout the Scriptures there is the absolute insistence on the fact of one God. The very idea of a multiplication of Gods is a contradiction; there can be but one absolutely perfect, almighty, supreme being.
- b. There is one ^{God}god who consists in three distinctions. The doctrine of the trinity does not mean that God merely manifest Himself in three different ways. God does not simply hold three different offices by which He displays His love. There are some who teach that God simply reveals Himself at one time as a father at another as a son and another as spirit even as a man might to his parents be their son, to his children be their father, and to his grandchildren be their grandfather. The Scripture teaches that there are three actual distinctions in the Godhead. In the very beginning of Scripture we are given insight into the complexity of the Godhead—*In the beginning god (Genesis 1:1)*. Again within *Genesis 1* we have these words of communication between the Godhead—*Let us make man in our image and after our likeness (Genesis 1:26)*.
 - c. There is one God who consists in three eternal distinctions. This is demonstrated on the one hand by the immutability (unchangeability) of God. If there ever was a time when God did not exist as He now exist there has been change in God. The truth of His immutability will be firmly established in the study of the attributes. Scriptures affirm the eternity of the Son and Holy Spirit—*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God (John 1:1-20)*; *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14)*; *13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. 14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (Revelation 22:13-14)*.
 - d. There is one ^{God}god who consists in three eternal distinctions without division of nature, essence or being. The doctrine of tri-unity is not tri-theism. When we speak of the distinctions of the Godhead as persons, we must understand again the limitations suggested above by Pendleton. Part of the mystery of God is the truth of His tri-unity. Three but one seems to our finite minds a contradiction but instead it is a matter confirmed by Scripture.
 - e. There is one ^{God}god who consists in three eternal distinctions without division of nature, essence or being, with each member of the god head being equal. Many of the same attributes are ascribed to each member of the Trinity, and the attributes thus ascribed are such as could not be possessed without all other divine attributes, The equality of the members of the Trinity is further shown by the fact that each one is recognized as God, as we shall see later.
- B. The defence of the truth that God really exists.
1. The designation of each person of the Trinity as God.

- a. God the Father is fully God—*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed (John 6:27); To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 1:7); Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied (I Peter 1:2).*
- b. God the Son is fully God.
 - (1) The Son is called God—*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1); Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen (Romans 9:5); And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life (I John 5:20).*
 - (2) Old Testament passages referring to God are applied to the Son—*For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (Matthew 3:3) which refers to The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God (Isaiah 40:3); These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him (John 12:41) which refers to In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple (Isaiah 6:1).*
 - (3) The Son possesses the attributes of God.
 - (a) Eternity—*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).*
 - (b) Omnipresence—*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matthew 28:20).*
 - (c) Omniscience—*And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? (Matthew 9:4); 24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man (John 2:24-25); Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God (John 16:30).*
 - (d) Omnipotence—*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18); I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8).*
 - (e) Self-existence—*For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself (John 5:26).*
 - (f) Immutability—*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever (Hebrews 13:8).*
 - (g) Truth—*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).*

- (h) Love—*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (I John 3:16).*
 - (i) Holiness—*And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35); And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day (John 6:39).*
- (4) The works of God are ascribed to the Son.
- (a) Creation—*All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:3); But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him (I Corinthians 8:6); For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him (Colossians 1:16); And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands (Hebrews 1:10).*
 - (b) Preservation—*As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ (Colossians 1:7); Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3).*
 - (c) Raising the dead and judging—*27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. 28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice (John 5:27-28); 31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-32).*
- (5) The Son receives honor and worship due to God alone—*That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him (John 5:23); And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him (Hebrews 1:6); 24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me (I Corinthians 11:24-25); But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen (I Peter 3:18); And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (II Timothy 4:18).*

c. The Holy Spirit is fully God.

- (1) The attributes of God are ascribed to the Holy Spirit.
 - (a) Eternity—*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14).*
 - (b) Omniscience—*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God (I Corinthians 2:10).*
 - (c) Omnipresence—*Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? (Psalm 139:7).*
 - (d) Holiness—That is part of His name, i.e. *Holy Spirit!*—*He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit (I Thessalonians 4:8).*
 - (e) Truth—*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13).*
 - (f) Love—*Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me (Romans 15:30).*
- (2) The Holy Spirit is represented as doing the works of God.
 - (a) Creation—*And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2).*
 - (b) Regeneration—*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:8); Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5).*
 - (c) Resurrection—*But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you (Romans 8:11).*
2. The demonstration of each person of the Trinity equally as God.
 - a. In the formula of baptism—*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19).*
 - b. In the Apostolic Benediction—*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen (II Corinthians 13:14).*
3. The discrimination of one person of the Trinity from the other.
 - a. Father distinguished from the Son.
 - (1) The Father and Son are distinguished as the begetter and begotten; the sender and the sent—*1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.....5:36 But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me (John 1:14, 5:36).*

- (2) The distinction between the Father and Son was manifested at the baptism of Jesus when God's voice from heaven was heard saying: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:17).*
- (3) Christ distinguished Himself from the Father.
 - (a) Christ prayed to the Father—*These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee (John 17:1).*
 - (b) Christ yielded obedience to the Father—*And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him (John 8:29).*
 - (c) Christ referred to the Father as a separate person—*37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. 38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me (John 6:37-38).*
 - (d) Christ is distinguished as the intercessor between God and man—*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2:5).*
 - (e) Christ is distinguished by the fact that He is at the right hand of the Father—*Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Romans 8:34)*
- b. The Holy Spirit is distinguished from the Father.
 - (1) The Spirit is distinguished from the Father in that He is said to proceed from and be sent by the Father—*26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. 27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:26-27); But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me (John 15:26); And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Galatians 4:6).*
 - (2) At the baptism of Christ, the Spirit is seen descending in the form of a dove while the Father spoke from heaven—*And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him (Matthew 3:16).*
- c. The Son is distinguished from the Holy Spirit.
 - (1) Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as another comforter—*But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:16).*
 - (2) Jesus spoke of Himself sending the Holy Spirit—*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me (John 15:26).*
 - (3) At the baptism of Christ, Christ stood in the water and the Spirit descended and lighted upon Him—*And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened*

unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him (Matthew 3:16).

- C. The great truth of the Trinity brings us to a position of awe and humility.
1. The doctrine of the Trinity is inscrutable and insoluble to finite minds; but so it is at any point between the finite and infinite.
 2. The doctrine of the Trinity is not self-contradictory as some would charge. God is not three in the same sense He is one. He is one *is* essence, nature, and being; but in this one essence, nature, and being there are three eternal distinctions that are represented to us in such a way that we call them persons. Who can say that such distinctions are impossible in the nature of God? To do that one would have to have a perfect understanding of God's nature.
 3. We do well to accept what the Scripture teaches, and leave the mystery for eternity when we will behold Him as He is.