

CHAPTER XIV: THE TRINITY

The Scripture doctrine of the Trinity is set forth in the abstract of principles of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in these words (Art. III.): " God is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being."

The peculiarity of this definition is that it is a mere statement of the Scriptural facts revealed, while, at the same time, it includes every point involved in the doctrine of the Trinity as held by orthodox Christians of all ages. There is no addition to the Scripture facts, but the complete exhibition which these words make of the doctrine, shows that it has been correctly formulated from what God has himself revealed. As he alone can know and reveal what he is, so we must accept his statements, however mysterious and incomprehensible may be his revelation.

This definition suggests to us a method of treatment by which, in the utmost simplicity and Scripturalness, the whole truth on this important subject may be attained.

I. THE RELATION OF FATHER AND SON.

God is revealed to us as the Father; not merely in the general way in which he is called the Father of all created beings, and they his sons; nor in that in which he is the Father of those who are his sons, in virtue of the adoption, which is in Christ Jesus; but the Father as indicative of a special relation between him and another person whom the Scriptures call his only begotten Son. There are several classes of Scripture passages which reveal this.

1. That class in which, in recognition of this relation, Christ addresses God as "Father." Matt. 11:25, 26; Mark 14:36; Luke 10:21; 22:42 ; 23:34, 46; John 12:26, 27, 28 ; 17:1, 5, 11, 24, 25.

2. That class in which Christ speaks of him as peculiarly his Father. The ex-pression "our Father" is never used by him, except in the Lord's prayer when he is teaching the disciples how to pray. Matt. 10:32, 33 ; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 19; 20:23 ; 24:36; 25:34; 26:29, 39, 42, 53; Luke 2:49; 22:29; 24:49; John 5:17, 43; 6:32; 8:19, 38, 49, 54; 10:18, 25, 29, 30, 32, 37; 12:26; 14:7, 20, 21, 23; 15:1, 8, 10, 15, 23; 20:17; Rev. 2:27; 3:5.

3. That class in which the Father is spoken of as sending and as giving the Son.

This does not include many passages in which Christ is said to be sent, but only those in which he is referred to as sent by the Father. John 3:16, 17; 5:37; 6:37-40, 57; 8:16-19; 10:36 ; John 12:45, 49 ; 14:24 ; 17:18; 20:21.

4. A fourth class represents the Father as knowing and loving the Son. Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 3:35; 5:20.

5. There is, also, a class in which Christ and the Father are said to be co-workers, or in which the works of Christ are claimed to be the Father's witness to him. John 5:17; 10:25, 32, 36, 37, 38.

6. That class in which the Father is said to put special honour on the Son. John 3:35; 5:23, 25, 26, 27.

7. There is yet another class in which peculiarity of relation is shown by such terms, as

(1.) " My beloved Son;" the language is very strong and emphatic, "my Son, the beloved." Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; 2 Pet. 1: 17.

(2.) " Only begotten Son." John 1:14, 18; 3: 16, 18; 1 John 4:9.

(3.) " His own Son." Rom.8:32. In connection with this, it should be remembered that, in John 5: 18, the charge made against Christ by the Jews was that he "called God his own Father making himself equal with God."

8. The statements that the Son alone has seen, and known, and revealed the Father, also show peculiarity of this relationship. John 1:18; 14:6-11; 17:25, 26.

9. The same peculiarity is shown by the manner in which Christ speaks of the works he does by virtue of it. See his Sabbath day discourse after curing the man at the pool of Bethesda. John 5:19-31, 36, 37; also, John 14:10, 11.

II. THIS FATHER IS GOD

The relation pointed out above, is one borne by Christ to the supreme God. It is he, whom the Scriptures call God in the true sense of that word, to whom Christ is said by them to be Son to the Father.

1. There are the passages which expressly call Christ "Son of God." All are here omitted where the name is given by devils, or by the Centurion, or in any other way in which the authority of inspired teaching may not be claimed for its use.

Mark 1:1 ; Luke 1:35; John 5:25; 10:36; 11:27; Acts 9:20; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:15; 5:5, 20, 21.

2. There are other passages in which the epithet "God" is ascribed to the Father in this relationship.

John 1:18; 3:16, 17; 6:18 ; Rom. 1:1-4; 8:31, 32; 2 Pet. 1:17; 1 John 4:9, 10; 2 John 3.

III. THIS SON IS GOD

1. He is expressly called God. It is not denied that this epithet, like that of Lord, is applied in an inferior sense to others. The mere use of these titles would not prove that the one to whom they are attributed has the divine nature. But the manner in which they are applied to Christ, and the frequency of that application, become, along with the other evidences presented, an incontestable proof, that he, as well as the Father, is true God. If they were not ascribed to Christ in the Scriptures, their absence would be conspicuous and well-fitted to cast doubt on the other evidence. Matt. 1:23; John 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 1:3; Heb. 1:8.

In the above are omitted, as, on various grounds, doubtful. Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:16; and 1 John 5:20. An exegetical study of these passages will show, even with the text of the recent critics, that they strongly corroborate the doctrine that Christ is God.

2. Christ is also called Lord. This title is used in both the Old and New Testaments still more generally than is that of God. An examination of the texts here quoted, will show that, in a peculiar sense, only suited to Christ as God, is it applied to him. Matt. 12:8; 22:41-45; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:46; 20:41-44; John 13:13, 14; Acts 10:36 ; Rom. 14:9; 1 Cor. 2:8; Gal. 1:3; 6:18; Phil. 2:11; 2 Thess. 2:16; Jude 4; Rev. 17:14; 19:13, 16.

3. He is a peculiar object of worship. The worship paid to him is not merely that reverential respect offered to kings and others in authority, but such worship as was refused by the apostles with horror, because they were mere men (Acts 14:13-15), and against which, when offered to him by John, even the mighty angel (Revelation 19:10; 22:9) earnestly protested. All doubtful cases of worship are here omitted, even that of the wise men (Matt. 2:2, 11) in which perhaps divine worship was paid. Matt. 14:33; Luke 24:52; Acts 7:59, 60; 2 Cor. 12:8, 9; Phil. 2:10; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:8-14; 7:9-12.

4. He is to be honoured equally with the Father. John 5: 23.

5. His relations to the Father are those of identity and unity. John 1:18; 5:17-19; 8:16, 19; 10:30; 12:44, 45; 14:7-11; 15:24; Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15, 19; 2:9; 1 John 2:23, 24.

6. They are equally known to each other, and unknown to all others. Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:18; 6:46; 10:15.

7. He is the creator of all things. John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:10.

8. He upholds and preserves all things. Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3.

9. He is the manifestation of the Divine Being in this world. John 1:10, 14, 18; 14:8-11; 16:28-30; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 1:2.

10. He is greater than all others; greater than Moses, and David, and Solomon, and Jonah, and the Baptist; and not greater than man only, but than all the spiritual intelligences of the universe. Matt. 3:11; 12:41,42; Mark 12:37; Luke 11:31,32; John 1:17; Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:4,5; 3:3; 1 Pet. 3:22.

11, He is the source of all spiritual blessing.

(a) He gives the Holy Spirit. Luke 24:49; John 16:7; 20:22; Acts 2:33.

(b) He forgives sins. Mark 2:5-10; Luke 5:20-24; 7:47-49; Acts 5:31.

(c) He gives peculiar peace. John 14:27; 16:33. Is not he the one who is called "God of Peace?" Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20.

(d) He gives light. John 1:4, 7, 8, 9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 46; 1 John 1:5-7; Rev. 21:23.

(e) He gives faith. Luke 17:5; Heb. 12:2.

(f) He gives eternal life. John 17: 2.

(g) He confers all the spiritual gifts bestowed upon his churches. Eph. 4:8-13.

12. All the incommunicable attributes of God are ascribed to him.

(a) Self-existence. He has power over his own life. John 2:19; 10:17, 18. He has life in himself, as has the Father. John 5:26.

(b) Eternity of existence. John 1:1, 2; 17:5, 24; Heb. 1:8, 10-12; 1 John 1:2.

(c) Omniscience. Matt. 9:4; 12:25; Mark 2:8; Luke 6:8; 9:47; 10:22; John 1:48; 2:24,25; 10:15; 16:30; 21:17; Col. 2:3; Rev. 2:23.

(d) Omnipresence. Matt. 18:20; 28:20; John 3:13; Eph. 1:23.

(e) Omnipotence. Matt. 28:18; Luke 21:15; John 1:3; 10:18; 1 Cor. 1:24; Eph. 1:22; Phi1.3:21; Col. 2:10; Rev. 1:18.

(f) Immutability. Heb. 1:11, 12; 13:8.

13. The judgement of the world is entrusted to him. Matt. 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim.4:1.

14. Absolute equality with the Father is ascribed to Him. This shows that the unity and identity, before referred to, is not of will, but of nature; and that the names, and worship, and attributes of God are not bestowed on any other ground than that he is true God.

(a) Equality in works. John 5:17-23.

(b) Equality in knowledge. Luke 10:22; John 10:15.

(c) Equality in nature. John 5:18; 10:33; Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3.

It will be seen by the foregoing statements that the Scriptures distinctly teach the existence of God in the personal relations of Father and Son, and that each of them is God. No reference has been made to the Old Testament, in proof of the divinity of Christ. The New Testament is the most natural source of such instruction, because it reveals to us the fulfilment of God's purpose in sending his Son into the world, and teaches us clearly his nature and relation to the Father. What the nature of this relation of Son and Father is, will be hereafter examined in the discussion of the eternal Sonship of Christ. What the Old Testament says of Christ will also be presented hereafter.

There remains, however, to be shown that

IV. THE FATHER AND SON HAVE DISTINCT PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES.

This fact is so manifest, from the manner in which the Scripture speaks of each, as to need but brief discussion.

The mere use of the names Father and Son points out a relation between two persons. That to each of them is ascribed the attributes of character, such as love, hate, goodness, mercy, truth, and justice, which can only exist in, and be exercised by persons, shows separate personality. Neither, except through distinct personal relation, can mutual love be said to be exercised, as by Christ to the Father, John 14:31; and by the Father to Christ, John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 17:24. Manifestly, also, there must be two persons, when one is said to send, and another to be sent; one to give, and another to be given; one to teach, and another to be taught; one to show, and another to perceive what is shown; one to receive power, and another to bestow it; and one to be declared, with respect to another, to be "the effulgence

of his glory and the very image of his substance," Heb. 1:2; and, because in the form of that other, to have "counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God." Phil. 2:6.

We have here, therefore, not the one God, manifesting himself sometimes as Father, and sometimes as Son; but a distinction of persons in the Godhead, in which we are taught that in that Godhead there exists a personal relation of Father to Son, and Son to Father, with a distinct individuality and personality of each.

V. THE HOLY SPIRIT A PERSON.

The Scriptures designate, by several very similar terms, the third personality revealed in the Godhead. He is called "the Spirit," "the Spirit of God," "the Holy Spirit," "my Spirit," "the Spirit of the Lord," "the Spirit of Christ," "thy good Spirit," "the Spirit of glory," "the Spirit of grace," "the Spirit of knowledge and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord," "the Holy Spirit of promise," "the Spirit of truth," and "the Spirit of wisdom." Christ also called him "the Comforter," and "another Comforter."

The divine Spirit, thus denominated, must either be some power or influence exerted by God, or a distinct person in the Godhead. It cannot be simply the spiritual part of God, as is the spirit in man, for God is not compounded of spirit and body. This is manifest from his immateriality. Neither can it be in any way a part of his spiritual nature, as sometimes a distinction is made in man, between his mind and spirit, or his soul and spirit. The perfect simplicity of God, which forbids all composition, makes this impossible. It is, therefore, either God himself exercising some power or influence, or a person in the Godhead. An examination of the Scripture shows that it is the latter.

1. The evidences of personal action show that the Spirit is not merely a power or influence from God, but is either God himself or a divine person.

(1.) The Scriptures speak of the Spirit as in a state of activity. Gen. 1:2; Matt. 3:16; Acts 8:39. The language in these passages may be anthropomorphic, but the state of activity taught is undoubtedly real.

(2.) They declare that the Spirit teaches and gives instruction. Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 16:8, 13, 14; Acts 10:19; 1 Cor. 12:3.

(3.) The Spirit is also spoken of by them, as a witness of Christ to his people. John 15:26.

(4.) They also assert that he witnesses to believers that they are the children of God, and becomes the earnest of their inheritance. Rom. 8:16; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13, 14; 4:30.

(5.) He is spoken of as leading the sons of God. Rom. 8:14.

(6.) He is also said to dwell within them in such a way that his presence is that of God. John 14:16, 17; Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19.

(7.) We are taught that he is grieved. Eph. 4: 30.

(8.) Ananias is charged with having lied to him. Acts 5: 3.

(9.) Blasphemy against him is the unpardonable sin. Matt. 12:31, 32.

(10.) He is spoken of as resisted by men. Acts 7:51.

(11.) Also as vexed by them. Isa. 63:10.

(12.) As striving with them. Gen. 6:3.

(13.) As inspiring men. Acts 2:4; 8:29; 13:2; 15:28; 2 Pet. 1:21.

(14.) As interceding for them. Rom. 8:26, 27.

(15.) As bestowing diversities of gifts. 1 Cor. 12:4-11.

In all these cases there is personal activity, thought, and feeling. What is thus declared, cannot be true of a mere power, or influence. The only question can be, whether this person is God, distinct from any plurality of personal relations, or whether he is another personality in the divine nature.

2. The Scriptures show that he is a separate person from the Father and the Son.

(1.) It is stated that he proceeds from the Father. John 15:26. A personal being, proceeding from a person, cannot be that person himself. The proofs above given, therefore, of his personal action and emotion, show that this Spirit is another person.

(2.) He is given, or sent by the Father. John 14:16, 26; Acts 5:32, and by the Son, John 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:33. He that is sent cannot be identical with him that sends.

(3.) He is called the Spirit of the Father. Eph. 3:16; and also the Spirit of Christ, and of the Son. Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6, perhaps also 2 Thess. 2:8.

(4.) The Son is said to send the Spirit from the Father. John 15:26; and God is said to send the Spirit of the Son. Gal. 4:6.

(5.) The Spirit is distinguished from the Father, and the Son, in passages which directly connect them with each other. Matt. 3:16, 17; 28:19; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 2:33; Eph. 2:18; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2.

(6.) The personality of the Spirit is also ably argued from "the use of the personal pronouns in relation to him," by Dr. Charles Hodge, Sys. Theol., Vol. I, p. 524. Not only are personal pronouns used by the Spirit, and of the Spirit., but there is a departure from grammatical rule, in the use of a masculine pronoun in connection with a neuter noun, unless the masculine is warranted by the fact, that a person is referred to who may be called "he."

VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD.

So completely do the Scriptures identify the Spirit with the Supreme God, that the fact of his personality having been established, his essential divinity will at once be admitted. In the discussion of the Trinity,

therefore, the point of necessary proof as to the Spirit is his personality, while that as to the Son is his divinity. The abundant proof of the divinity of the Spirit is found :

1. In the passages which call him "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of the Lord," as well as those in which God calls him "my Spirit." These are conclusive, in like manner, as is the divinity of Christ from those which call him the Son of God. The titles "Spirit of God," and "Spirit of the Lord," are each used about twenty-five times in the Bible. "My Spirit" is used in reference to God's Spirit in Gen. 6:3; Prov. 1:23; Isa. 44:3; 59:21 ; Ezek. 36:27; 39:29; Joel 2:28; Haggai 2:5; Zech. 4:6.; Matt. 12:18; Acts 2:17, 18.

2. The writers of the New Testament declare that certain things, which in the Old Testament are ascribed to Jehovah, were said by the Spirit. Compare Acts 28:25-27, and Hebrews 3:7-9, with Isaiah 6:9, and also Heb. 9:8, with Ex. 25:1, and 30:10.

3. The sacred writers of the Old Testament were the messengers of God, and spake for him, yet the influence by which they became such is called in the New Testament the Holy Ghost. Compare Luke 1:70 with 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16, and Heb. 1:1 with 1 Peter 1:11; also Jer. 31:31, 33, 34, with Heb. 10:15-17.

4. The creation of the world is ascribed to the Spirit. Gen. 1: 2; Job 26:13; Ps. 104:30.

5. He is said to search, and know even the deep things of God. 1Cor. 2:10.

6. He is spoken of as omnipresent. Ps. 139:7-10, and omniscient. Ps. 139:11; 1 Cor. 2:10.

7. The divinity of the Spirit is peculiarly proved by his influences over Christ. It having been shown that Christ the Son is God, the connection of the Spirit of God with Christ, though it were only in his human nature, is a convincing proof that the Spirit, which is not a mere power of God, but a person, as we have seen above, must be also God.

(1.) In his birth. Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:31-35.

(2.) Mental and spiritual influences from the Spirit were predicted. Isa. 11:2, and Isaiah 61:1.

(a) And these were fulfilled at his baptism. Matt. 3:16; John 1:33.

(b) At the time of the temptation in the wilderness. Matt. 4:1; Mark 1:12.

(c) In his preaching. Luke 4:14, 18-21.

(d) In his casting out devils. Matt. 12:28.

(3.) This spiritual influence was without measure. John 3:34.

8. The indwelling of the Spirit in the people of God is said to make them the temple of God. Compare 1 Cor. 3:16, and 6:19 with 2 Cor. 6:16, and Eph. 2:22.

9. The Spirit is expressly called God in connection with the falsehood of Ananias and Sapphira. Acts 5:3, 4, 9.

VII. THE THREE REVEALED DISTINCTLY.

The scriptural proofs of the personality and divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit having now been considered, it is proper to notice a few passages of Scripture in which the Three are revealed distinctly, by being mentioned, or manifested together. [See others under V. 2, (5), p. 132.]

1. At the baptism of Christ are seen the Son, who has just been baptized, and the "Spirit of God descending as a dove," while, from Heaven above, [and therefore from the Father and not from the Spirit, who is thus manifested distinctly from the Father,] is heard "a voice," "saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matt. 3: 17.

2. An equally plain distinction is set forth in the language of Christ, Matt. 28:19, in which he commanded baptism to be performed "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." This act of baptism is such as to involve the divinity as well as the personality of the Three, for it is an act of worship such as can be paid to God only; it is a profession of faith in God and his righteousness, which can be due to God only; and it is a pledge of fealty, such as God has plainly taught he will share with no other.

3. In our Lord's last discourse he promises to send "the Comforter," "even the Holy Spirit," "from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father." Here the Son sends, the Spirit is sent, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. He is also referred to as one "whom the Father will send in my name." See John 14:26, and 15:26.

4. The apostle Paul evidently refers to this same Three, when he writes the Corinthians of "the same Spirit," "the same Lord," and "the same God." 1 Cor. 12: 4-6.

5. The benediction, with which Paul closes his second epistle to the Corinthians, also presents unitedly, yet separately, the same Three; certain blessings are invoked, but with no apparent distinction of rank among those of whom they are asked. If there be any prominence, it is given the rather to the Son than to the Father.

VIII. THESE THREE ARE ONE GOD.

Our definition states that these Three are revealed as without division of nature, essence, or being. It is not intended to indicate, by the use of these three words, any wide distinction between them. They are nearly alike. Yet some distinction exists. By nature is meant that peculiar character of being which makes one kind of being to differ from another. Thus we speak of the divine nature, or the angelic nature, or the human nature, or the brute nature; meaning that peculiarity of life, and character, and personal condition, which makes a God, or an angel, or a man, or a brute. By essence is meant, that peculiarity, in the nature itself, which constitutes what is necessary to its existence, so that we cannot say, in the absence of that essence, that such a nature exists. Take away from human nature that which is its essential quality, and it must cease to be human nature. Being is the essence of any nature becoming actually existent in that nature. In God nature and essence must be identical, because everything in the nature of God is necessary to his existence, and consequently the nature can neither be greater nor less than the essence; indeed they must be the same. Neither can being be separated from the nature and essence of God, though it is not identical with them. The necessity of his actual existence is something inherent in his nature. There could be no such nature without necessarily involving the existence of some person or persons in it.

When it is affirmed, therefore, that there is no "division of nature, essence, or being," all that is meant is simply that there is but one God; that such is the divine nature that it cannot be multiplied, or divided, or distributed, any more than God can be thus divided in his omnipresence with all things. The divine nature is so possessed, by each of the persons in the Trinity, that neither has his own separate divine nature, but each subsists in one divine nature, common to the three. Otherwise the three persons would be three Gods. So also, in that divine nature, its essential quality is not divided in its relation through the nature to the persons. Were this so, there would be three separate parts of the divine nature. But that this cannot be, is manifest from the identity in God of nature and essence. That it is not

so, is declared by the Scriptures, when they teach that there is but one God. In God there is also but one divine being, because there is but one divine essence and nature. There is but one that can have actuality of existence. The being of person, not being identical with that of nature, a fact which is true of all natures, created or uncreated, the unity of the nature, and of the essence does not forbid plurality of persons. The threeness of the persons, therefore, does not destroy the unity of the nature or essence, and consequently, not that of the being of God.

The Scriptures teach everywhere the unity of God explicitly and emphatically. There can be no doubt that they reveal a God that is exclusively one. But their other statements, which we have been examining, should assure us that they also teach that there are three divine persons. It is this peculiar twofold teaching, which is expressed by the word "trinity." The revelation to us, is not that of tritheism or three Gods; nor of triplicity, which is threefoldness, and would involve composition, and be contrary to the simplicity of God; nor of mere manifestation of one person in three forms, which is opposed to the revealed individuality of the persons; but it is well expressed by the word trinity, which is declarative, not simply of threeness, but of three-oneness. That this word is not found in Scripture is no objection to it, when the doctrine, expressed by it, is so clearly set forth.