



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDED NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15

Battle of the Wills

Dr. Eddie Ildefonso



Whatever else we know about the nature and character of God, we know that He is a volitional being. This is simply to say that God has a will, and He exercises that will. How sovereignly He exercises His will is a matter of great disagreement, but that He has a will to exercise is not in dispute, at least not in orthodox Christian theology, though it is questioned in popular concepts of God in our culture. These concepts often define God as a mindless, impersonal, will-less “force” or “higher power.” Such just as easily could be defined as “cosmic dust” as it could be identified with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

We also know, at least from the Christian perspective, that whatever else humans are, they are volitional beings also. To be sure, they are creaturely beings with creaturely wills, but they are volitional nonetheless.

Though many secular determinists have denied both the reality of mind and the reality of will to human beings; that is not the case with historic Christianity. The issue in the church has been not so much

whether we have wills, but the extent to which our wills are free. The issue in theology (as distinguished from philosophy, wherein the question of free will encounters other obstacles) has two foci.

The first has to do with the relationship between man’s will and God’s will with respect to predestination and divine providence. Here, most agree (at least certainly Calvinists) that in the mystery of concurrence, or the point at which the human will intersects the divine will, man’s freedom is neither violated nor destroyed. That is, the human will does not fall victim to coercion; God works out His divine will in and through the choices made by the human will. At no time does He reduce humans to the level of impersonal or non-volitional puppets who can move and act only as their strings are pulled externally. To be sure, all of our acting could not be achieved without the power of God, for it is in Him that we live, and move, and have our being. Yet, in Him we really do *live*, we really do *move* (act and choose), and we really do *have being*. **We are free but not autonomous.**

Sometimes we hear that the sovereignty of God and the free will of man are antinomies, wherein both sides are true. This reflects a serious misunderstanding of antinomy, not to mention freedom. An antinomy, strictly speaking, is a contradiction,

wherein the two poles are mutually exclusive and cannot both be true. **But the two statements—God is sovereign and man is free—do not constitute an antinomy.**

If, however, we said that God is sovereign and man is autonomous, that would be a bona fide antinomy, or contradiction. It is self-evident that if God is sovereign over His creatures, none of them can be autonomous, or “a law unto themselves.” Such a notion not only is repugnant to reason, it is repugnant in the extreme to the teaching of Scripture. Likewise, if man is autonomous, then God cannot be sovereign. He could have “limited sovereignty,” perhaps over trees and rocks, except where men were dealing with the trees and rocks.

The false dilemma or false antinomy is avoided if we understand that God’s sovereignty is unlimited and man’s freedom, though real, is limited.

The popular idea that God’s sovereignty is limited by human freedom is pure blasphemy and represents both a pagan view of God and a pagan view of man. If God’s sovereignty is limited by human freedom, then it is man and not God who is sovereign. This would make human freedom absolute and God’s sovereignty relative and subject to man. Some seek to advance the notion that God is self-limited by His righteous character, in that it would be immoral for Him to exercise sovereignty over man’s will. This reflects confusion between God’s violating human will via coercion and overruling human decisions by His government.

God is free and man is free. However, God is freer than I am. That is what sovereignty is all about. If my will bumps up against God’s will, something has to give. I can only exercise my will insofar as God chooses to let me do so. At any point in my life, God has both the power and the right to take my life or otherwise stop me in my tracks. For Him to override my will is perfectly consistent with His righteous character.

The second focus of theological concern regarding free will has to do with the degree to which our liberty has been impaired by the Fall. This is the issue is chronicled historically in R.C. Sproul’s book *Willing to Believe*. This is the issue that was at the heart of the Pelagian controversy that pitted the British

monk Pelagius against St. Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century. In that debate, Pelagius argued that man not only was created free but that his nature was created immutable. He denied the reality of the Fall, arguing that Adam’s sin affected Adam and only Adam. There was no fall into a state of moral corruption called original sin, which was transmitted to the entire human race. Against Pelagius, Augustine argued that the Fall produced dire consequences for humanity that involved the loss of original liberty. He distinguished between “freewill” (*liberium arbitrium*) and liberty” (*libertas*). He argued that since the Fall man still has a free will—that is, he retains the faculty of choosing. He still can act intentionally, according to his desires. What he lost was any desire for the things of God. Thus, he never will choose God precisely because he doesn’t want to choose God. This is freedom without liberty. This state of affairs is rooted in man’s bondage to sin. The sinner is both free and enslaved at the same time, but not in the same relationship. He is free to do what he wants, but what he wants to do is sin. Therein is his bondage.

Pagan and humanistic views of man, while admitting that we sin, do not agree that we sin because of a fallen nature that is enslaved to sin. Sin is seen as peripheral to human experience, not at its core. The humanist argues that a free will is always an indifferent will that has no pre-inclination to sin but is always able, in any circumstance, to choose sin or righteousness. It is this “indifference” that is on a collision course with the biblical view of man.

Pelagianism was condemned by the church and rarely occurs in history in its unvarnished form, save in the writings of people such as Charles Finney and, perhaps in our own time, Clark Pinnock. The usual struggle is between Augustinianism and Semi-Pelagianism. Semi-Pelagianism, early articulated by John Cassianus, taught that there truly was a Fall and that the Fall left man in such a state of corruption that his will or liberty was seriously impaired. Whereas Pelagius argued that man could make godly choices without the assistance of grace, Semi-Pelagianism insists that grace is a necessary prerequisite for godly choices. The chief difference between Augustinian theology and Semi-Pelagianism is with respect to the degree of moral bondage we are in. The Semi-Pelagian believes that, to some extent, the will is still able to cooperate with or refuse the offer of grace. The grace of regeneration (or its equivalent) is deemed resistible. By contrast, Augustine believed that

the grace that liberates the soul from bondage is not cooperative but monergistic. In other words, for the sinner to respond to God, God first must do a work of monergistic grace, by which He unilaterally changes the disposition of the soul of man to make him willing to respond positively to God, and this gracious change is absolutely effectual.

This was the debate between Luther and Erasmus, Calvin and Arminius, and Edwards and the Arminianism of his day. Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, Calvin's *Institutes*, and Edwards' *The Freedom of the Will* all follow in the footsteps of Augustine regarding this controversial matter.

In simple terms, the issue usually comes down to this: does faith precede regeneration, or does regeneration effectually precede faith? Do we choose Christ, or does He choose us? Orthodox Christianity has argued from Scripture that Christ must choose, for man is not free to do so. And so we have another indication that God's freedom far surpasses our own.

The Bondage of God's Will

I am Reformed, and I serve as editor of this Reformed magazine called [The Talmid](#). We who are Reformed seem almost to have an obsession, albeit a healthy one, with the sovereignty of God. We will affirm that He is sovereign over His creation, ordaining the fall of every sparrow; that His power is greater than the devil's, and indeed the devil serves at God's pleasure; that He alone decrees where each of us will spend eternity; and that He brings to pass whatsoever He wills. If the Scholastics had argued in our presence over how many angels could pirouette atop a pin's head, we would have called out, "However many God wants to do so."

But as hard as it is to admit it, even we Reformed folk have our limitations. We will go only so far, and so we affirm that there is one thing over which God's sovereignty does not extend—that divine sovereignty, too, goes only so far. It is a scary thing to speak of the bondage of God's will. But I pray we will see that it is far scarier not to.

Our Arminian brothers draw that line of limitation at the will of man. If they're careful, they'll acknowledge that this limitation on God's will is itself God's

will; that is, it's not that God hasn't the power to rule over the wills of men, but that He has decided not to. He graciously restrains Himself from the full exercise of His power so that we might be "free." We graciously disagree, thanking Him for the grace of the imposition of His will in changing our wills. We argue that the only thing over which God's sovereignty does not extend is God.

The old brain teaser, "Can God make a rock so big that He could not move it?" finds its answer in our understanding of the limits of God's limitless power. You see the dilemma inherent in the question. If God could not make such a rock, it would seem there would be something He could not do—make such a rock. But if He could make such a rock, there still would be something He could not do—move such a rock. So what's the answer? The truth is found in another question: Why would He want to make such a rock? And that leads us to the bondage of God's will.

Judy Rogers, a musician who has made wonderful recordings for children on the themes of Proverbs, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the Westminster Catechism, sings it this way: "Is there anyone who could ever do, anything that He wants to do? Yes, God can, God can, do all His holy will." That last phrase, "God can do all His holy will," is how the catechism carefully and succinctly describes the omnipotence of God. All that He wills He can do. Nothing can frustrate His will. But the statement doesn't address the possibility of God acting *against* His will. To understand why, it helps to understand the greatest work of Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will*.

In that brilliant essay, Edwards argues that all men have the freedom to do whatever they please, given their choices, and that all men are bound to do whatever they please, given their choices. Men choose, but their choices are determined by their desires. I, for instance, choose french fries over a salad, not because the fries force me to, but because I want to. (I believe my good friend Pastor Gary would agree) And when I choose the salad, it is still because I want to, my desire for more comfortable pants outweighing my desire for more happy tastebuds. Augustine made essentially the same point when he distinguished between freedom and ability. We have the freedom to choose one thing or another, but the ability to choose only what we want. The other articles in this issue explore this truth, but here I argue that this truth is not limited to man. It applies to all choices made by all beings, including God.

There is, of course, an important distinction to be made.

Natural man always will choose what is wicked, for that is his nature. It takes the sovereign, efficacious work of the Spirit to empower us to repent and believe. God, on the other hand, always will choose what is holy, because that is His nature, and there is no god above God to change His will.

We need to be sure we understand this. To say that God is bound is to tread on dangerous ground. Yet we know that He cannot sin, He cannot lie, He cannot break His covenant. If He could do those things, we would be worshiping a capricious God. We would have no way of knowing that, when we stand before Him and plead the blood of Christ, He might not say, “April Fool! Straight to hell with you.” On the other hand, though, we do not want to affirm that there is some moral standard transcendent over God to which He is accountable.

So how can we be sure that God will not lie? Because we understand that the only thing binding God is God. There is no standard above God, but God is Himself the standard. He answers to no higher law; rather, He alone is autonomous, a law unto Himself. He does what He does (and can do no other) because He is what He is (and can be no other). His being and His doing cannot be divided, for as Moses tells us, ‘**“The LORD is one”**’ ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)). God cannot sin, not because He is not a moral agent but because He is a moral agent. Like us, He makes choices. Like us, He makes choices consistent with His character. Unlike us, His character is all good. And in His goodness, He has not left us to grope our way toward this truth with our own minds, but has told us so, saying, **“it is impossible for God to lie”** ([Hebrews 6:18](#)). (And by the way, in [verse 13](#) of that chapter He reminds us that there is indeed no standard above Him to which He is beholden, saying, **“He could swear by no one greater.”**)

But there is still more. God not only cannot lie, He cannot die. He cannot cease to be. He cannot create another God. He cannot make a rock so big He couldn’t move it, and He cannot make a square circle. All of God’s attributes bind Him, and He is as logical as He is moral. As with morality, God cannot disregard logic willy-nilly. If He could, then Jesus’ statement **“I am the way, the truth and the life”** also could mean, at the same time and in the same

relationship, **“I am the wrong way, the lie, and the death.”** And as with morality, the reason is not because there is a standard of truth that is transcendent over God. He doesn’t have to check Himself to make sure He obeys the logic police. As with issues of morality, the standard is still the character of God. He must be logical because, well, because He is logical.

So is He still omnipotent? **Richard Swinburne**, in his book *The Coherence of Theism*, argues, “A logically impossible action is not an action. It is what is described by a form of words which purport to describe an action, but do not describe anything which is coherent to suppose could be done. It is no objection to A’s omnipotence that he cannot make a square circle. This is because ‘making square circle’ does not describe anything which is coherent to suppose could be done.” To put it more plainly, it is hardly sensible to say that God is not all-powerful because He is unable to do that which He doesn’t want to do. Remember that it’s not that He doesn’t want to do it because He can’t, but that He can’t because He doesn’t want to. It’s not as though God is in heaven just itching to tell a lie, or make that big rock, but He can’t.

Why does this matter? From a selfish standpoint, it helps us know that God is trustworthy. To imagine the universe of a capricious God is a true terror. But the ultimate reason for understanding these things of God is the same reason we seek to know anything about God—so that we might worship Him aright, so that our tongues might be loosed in praise to this God whose tongue will speak no lie, so that our hands would go and serve these hands that will make no square circle, so that our hearts will rejoice in Him whose heart is pure and holy, so that we will know that He is so mighty that He can’t even be beaten by Himself. God can do whatever He wants, and thus is omnipotent. And God can do nothing He doesn’t want to do, and so He is bound.

An Uncertain Future?

Despite the new millennium that we find ourselves in, some sins and some theologies are as old—or almost as old—as creation. Among those sins and theologies is idolatry, the violation of the first and second commandments.

Idolatry, according to **J.C. Ryle**, is “worship in which

the honour due to God in Trinity, and to Him only, is given to some of His creatures, or to some invention of His creatures.” Notice that idolatry is genuine worship; it is the worship due to God given to another. But idolatry, while genuine worship, is not genuine godliness. Because it is worship, it has an appearance of godliness, but it is not genuine godliness. It is an ersatz godliness, a substitute, a sometimes clever counterfeit godliness.

Because it is religious, idolatry is the besetting sin of all societies. This was true even for ancient Israel. Idolatry was the reason for Israel’s defeats, tribulations, captivities, and finally its complete destruction. The New Testament contains many warnings against idolatry in the churches, yet modern churchgoers, influenced by the scientific superstition of evolution and the doctrine of inevitable progress, think of idolatry as a sin that only savages commit. Perhaps they might allow that a man who overvalues his job or his family is guilty of “spiritual idolatry,” but real idolatry is not a sin to which civilized people are prone.

Because modern churchgoers are oblivious to idolatry, it flourishes in Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches two thousand years after the coming of Christ. The idolatry of Roman and Orthodox churches is blatant—the icons, the statues, the relics of the saints in every Roman Catholic church, the prayers to Mary and the saints, and the Mass itself, in which wafer and wine are adored and worshiped as God. **But the idolatry of Protestant churches, though it may be less blatant, is no less real.** Many of Protestantism’s idols are not things made with human hands but things made with human minds. They are no less idols because they are intangible; they are no less real because they are invisible. And all of them, being less than God, limit God’s sovereignty in significant ways.

One of the idols of modern churchgoers is the “open god.” The word “open” is intended to convey that God is very like us—growing and changing, somewhat unpredictable, ignorant of the future, susceptible to outside influences, and certainly not self-sufficient. This is in contrast to the historical understanding of God as self-sufficient and in need of nothing; a definite, predictable, and unchanging God.

This new conception of “god” is set forth in several books by professed evangelical **Clark Pinnock** and his friends: *Grace Unlimited* (1975), an attack on the doctrine of Christ’s efficacious and definite atonement, published by Bethany Fellowship; *A Wideness in God’s Mercy* (1992), an attack on the idea of hell and eternal punishment, published by Zondervan; *The Openness of God* (1994), an attack on God’s omniscience and omnipotence, published jointly by Inter-Varsity Press and Paternoster Press; *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (1996), a rejection of God’s law and of legal justification, published jointly by Inter-Varsity and Paternoster; and *Flame of Love* (1996), a screed lauding the “good news” of irrational religion, published by InterVarsity.

In all these books, **Pinnock** and his collaborators are quite intentionally perverting the Gospel that belongs to Jesus Christ. One of his collaborators, fellow Canadian **Robert Brow**, reports that “Clark Pinnock’s method, as is mine, is that theology begins with a hunch, a feel for, an experience of God’s love.” Pinnock, who inexplicably remains a member in good standing of the Evangelical Theological Society, “has long abandoned a proof text method of theologizing,” Brow adds. That is, Pinnock has abandoned the idea that a creature must rely on the Bible alone for information about God; the creature can and should rely on hunches, feelings, and experience. If you ask a person, “Where do you get your information about God?” and he replies, “I begin with hunches, feelings, or experience,” you know you probably are not talking to a Christian. A Christian gets his information from the Bible. **That is one of the implications of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*.** The *Openness of God* theologians have spent the past 30 years working out the logical implications of their Arminian views. They have taken pains to elaborate those implications in various directions: the nature of God, the meaning of the Atonement, the work of the Holy Spirit. Now their theology is becoming influential in churches that identify themselves as evangelical, because those churches accept the Arminian premises on which the *Openness of God* theology is based, and from which it is derived.

For instance, it follows inexorably from those premises that if Christ died for all the sins of all men, then no man will be damned. Some Arminians might be reluctant to draw that conclusion, but they are inconsistent. And if no man is damned, then the notions of hell and

eternal punishment disappear.

Furthermore, it follows from the notion that men have free wills that God must be ignorant of the future, for if He were not, He would know what men will do, and they therefore would have to do those things. In that case, men's wills would not be free. Therefore, God cannot know the future actions of His rational creatures, for they have free will. **The omniscience of God also has disappeared from the "new theology".**

Finally, if men have free wills, then God cannot be omnipotent, for His power is limited by men's wills. If God is both ignorant and weak, then He, like us, is involved in a cosmic struggle. We can have no confidence in the prophecies of Scripture, the promises of God, or the providence of God.

In 1999, the Baptist General Conference was embroiled in a controversy about the ignorance of God. **Gregory Boyd**, professor at Bethel College in Minnesota and pastor of the three thousand-member Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, teaches that God does not and cannot know the future decisions of His creatures. God, like His creatures, is engaged in warfare with evil—with lesser powers that often thwart His will. God does not know the future. After some debate, the 1999 annual meeting of the Baptist General Conference defeated a proposed amendment to its statement of faith that would have made it clear that God "foreknows infallibly all that shall come to pass." **So the denomination accepts by default the idol of the "open god."**

This trendy theology is as old as the hills, for the idea of a weak and ignorant god is nothing new. Pagan gods, made in the images of men, are typically weak and ignorant; both Plato's Demiurge and Aristotle's Unmoved Mover are both weak and ignorant. More recently, the influential psychologist William James proposed belief in a finite god who was engaged in a struggle for good, and the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead suggested that God was in process of becoming, much as men are. Joseph Smith, of course, proposed such an idea in the early nineteenth century, and his idea created a large, wealthy, and powerful church in the twentieth century—the Latter-day Saints. **C.S. Lewis** and **Madeleine L'Engle** may have introduced pagan ideas into

the churches through their fiction. Now the evangelicals are becoming pagans, too.

The God of Scripture is unique: God alone is almighty, omniscient, immense, and sovereign. God alone is a Trinity. God alone is Creator. God alone is Master of the Universe. God alone is Judge. **There is none like Him.**

"Behold the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales.... All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?... It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in ..." ([Isaiah 40:15–22](#)).

"I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God" ([Isa. 44:6b](#)).

"I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things" ([Isa. 45:6b–7, KJV](#)).

"For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." ... Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" ([Isa. 46:9b–11](#)).

When men deny God's attributes, they are fashioning an idol, just as surely as the carpenter who carves a wooden statue or the tinsmith who molds a tin god. In making their intangible idols, men may use the same words as the Bible. They may speak of Christ, justification, the Holy Spirit, the church, faith, and sin, but the meanings of the words have been changed. In this way, the *Openness of God* theology mimics its influential anti-Christian predecessors—Roman Catholic, modernist, and neo-orthodox theologies—and deceives many into thinking that it is just another expression of Christianity.

But the ignorant, weak, "open god" is clearly not the

God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Isaiah, and Jesus. The “open god” is an idol crafted by men from the imaginations of their own hearts—from their hunches, feelings, and experiences. **It, and the men who have made it, thinking themselves to be wise, have become fools. Unless they repent, their doom awaits.**

CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

Scan through the book of Acts today in a single sitting. Note the major characters, major scenes and major events. Think about what message Luke was trying to convey as he wrote. Then try to apply that meaning to the church in the new century. Ask God to give you eyes to see how Christ is building His church today.

(Doctrine in Capsule)

“What is the Godhead?”

The term “**Godhead**” is found three times in the King James Version: [Acts 17:29](#); [Romans 1:20](#); [Colossians 2:9](#). Three different Greek words are used, but each one means “divinity.” It is important for us to understand from the outset that God exists in three Persons. The concept of the Godhead is that God is one yet God is three. How can this be?

While the word “**trinity**” is not found in the Scriptures, the concept is found there from beginning to end. There is no question about it—the doctrine of the Trinity is divinely revealed biblical truth: our one God exists in three Persons. That is not to say that the authors of Scripture understood it clearly. When Peter, John, and the other disciples first saw Jesus they did not say, “Oh look, there goes God in flesh, the second Person of the holy Trinity.” Yet as they heard Him claim to be the revelation of the Father with the prerogatives of deity, and as they watched Him perform the supernatural works of deity, they came to the convinced persuasion that He was God the Son.

Additionally, they probably gave very little thought at first to the Holy Spirit being the third Person of the eternal Godhead. But when the events of the day of Pentecost had ended, it was obvious to them that the power they had witnessed working in them and

through them was not their own. It was the power of God. The Spirit who indwelt them was none other than God Himself. So then, led by that same divine Spirit, they revealed to us in their writings the Trinity of the eternal God.

Explanation of the triune Godhead

What then does it mean that God exists as the Trinity? It is a basic principle of our biblical faith that there is only one God. **“Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”** ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)). The unity of the Godhead cannot be questioned. God does not consist of parts. He is one. But Scripture reveals that there are, in that one divine essence, three eternal distinctions. Those distinctions seem best described as *Persons*, known as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three have identical attributes, however, and therefore they are one—not merely one in mind and purpose, but one in substance. To possess all the same attributes is to be one in essential nature. The three Persons of the Godhead possess identical attributes. They are one in substance and one in essence, and therefore they are one God.

Evidence for the Triune Godhead

While the primary emphasis of the Old Testament is on the unity of God, the indications of His triune nature are clearly seen even there. We need not read very far to find the first one: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”** ([Genesis 1:1](#)). *Elohim*, the Hebrew name for God in this verse, is plural. That may not prove the Trinity, but it definitely points to more than one Person in the Godhead. There was no other logical reason to choose a plural name. As such, we are not surprised, then, to hear Him say a short time later, **“Let us make man in our image”** ([Genesis 1:26](#), emphasis added). The plural pronouns could not refer to angels because they were never associated with God in His creative activity. Consequently, more than one divine Person was clearly involved. The plural pronouns make no sense otherwise ([Genesis 3:22](#); [Genesis 11:7](#)). John reiterates this truth when, speaking of Jesus, he declares, **“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made”** ([John 1:3](#)). Clearly, Jesus was present and involved in the act of creation, yet [Genesis 1:1](#) says that **“God created the heavens and the earth.”**

The undeniable biblical testimony to the Trinity is simply that all three Persons are referred to as divine. First,

the Father is called God. He is referred to as “**God the Father**” ([Galatians 1:1](#)), “**God our Father**” ([Galatians 1:3](#); [Ephesians 1:2](#)), and “**the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**” ([Ephesians 1:3](#)). His deity is unquestioned. But the Son is likewise referred to as God. He possesses the attributes of deity such as eternity, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. He bears the names of deity such as Jehovah, Lord, Immanuel, and the Word. He even permitted Thomas to call Him “**my Lord and my God**” ([John 20:28](#)). He exercises the prerogatives of deity such as forgiving sins, raising the dead, and judging all men. And He accepts worship reserved only for God.

Jesus claimed that He deserved the very same reverence that was reserved for God the Father. He was not a liar or a lunatic, so He must have been who He claimed to be—God the Son, equal with the Father and worthy of the same honor as the Father. The Father Himself addressed His Son as God: “**But about the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever’**” ([Hebrews 1:8](#)). Paul further explains that “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” ([Colossians 2:9](#)). The Greek word translated “**godhead**” is *theotes* which means “**divinity**,” so the totality of divinity (God) is in Jesus. The prologue to John’s gospel tells us one reason Christ came to earth: to make the Father known, to reveal God to men ([John 1:18](#)). We can know more of what God is like by examining the Person of Jesus Christ. He was God in flesh. As we explore Scripture and seek to discover who God is, we cannot neglect the earthly life of Jesus Christ. He is God the Son.

But the Holy Spirit is also part of the Godhead. His name is “**the Spirit of God**” ([Genesis 1:2](#)). He, too, possesses the attributes of deity and performs the works of deity. While He is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father ([John 15:26](#)), He is at the same time called “**the Spirit of Christ**” ([Romans 8:9](#)). He is coequal with both the Father and the Son. The Apostle Peter clearly viewed Him as God when he said to Ananias, “**Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? . . . You have not lied to men, but to God**” ([Acts 5:3-4](#)). If the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all bear the names of God, possess the attributes of God, and perform the works of God, then there is no alternative but to acknowledge

that our one God exists in three Persons.

The Ministry of the Triune Godhead

Scripture links these three Persons of the Godhead together so closely in so many divine activities that it would be foolish to deny that any one of them is God. Observe some of those activities:

- **Creating the World.** All three were involved in creation: the Father ([Genesis 1:1](#)); the Son ([John 1:3, 10](#); [Colossians 1:16](#)); and the Spirit ([Genesis 1:2](#), [Psalm 104:30](#)). If all three created, then God the Creator must exist in three Persons.
- **Sending the Son.** All three members of the Trinity were active in the incarnation. When Mary questioned the angel about the possibility of a virgin birth, the angel answered her, “**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God**” ([Luke 1:35](#)). The power of the Father, ministered through the agency of the Spirit, resulted in the birth of the Son into the world. This close association in the birth of the Savior is further indication of their oneness.
- **Identifying the Messiah.** At precisely the proper moment, Jesus Christ was revealed to Israel as her Messiah. John the Baptist was the chosen instrument and the act of baptism was the chosen means ([Matthew 3:16-17](#)). As the Spirit came upon the Son, the Father’s voice was heard from heaven expressing His approval. It was another powerful testimony to the eternal triune Godhead.
- **Providing Redemption.** Two central passages bring the three members of the Godhead together in providing for man’s eternal salvation. “**How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!**” ([Hebrews 9:14](#)). It was the offering of the Son to the Father by the power of the Spirit. The Apostle Peter taught, furthermore, that God the Father chose us to salvation, God the Son paid for it by shedding His blood, and God the Spirit set us apart unto the obedience of faith ([1 Peter 1:1-2](#)). Without each Person of the Godhead doing His part, we would remain in our sins.

• Proclaiming Salvation. In the early years of the church, God did some spectacular things to verify the gospel message which the apostles were preaching. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, “**How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will**” ([Hebrews 2:3-4](#)). It was the same message that was first spoken by the Son Himself. When the apostles proclaimed it, the Father bore witness to its truthfulness by bestowing miraculous gifts through the Spirit. It was not only a powerful witness to the truth of the message, but another demonstration of the triune God at work.

• Sending the Spirit. The three Persons of the Trinity are so interwoven in sending the Spirit into the world that it is difficult to distinguish between them. In one passage it is stated that the Father would send the Spirit in Christ’s name and that He would testify concerning Christ ([John 14:26](#)). In another it is said that the Son would send Him from the Father ([John 15:26](#)). In yet another, the Father sends Him and calls Him the Spirit of His Son ([Galatians 4:6](#)). What a picture of unity—such perfect unity that the actions of one are considered to be the actions of the other. The Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. But all three are vitally involved in His coming.

• Indwelling Believers. Jesus taught His disciples that both He and His Father would make their home with them ([John 14:23](#)). But their indwelling would be in the Person of the Comforter, the Spirit of truth ([John 14:16-17](#)). As the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, His indwelling is the indwelling of the Godhead. That would not be possible unless the three are one.

• Baptizing Believers. In our Lord’s commission to His disciples He said, “**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**” ([Matthew 28:19](#)). The unity of the Godhead is declared by combining them in one “name” (singular). Yet the distinctiveness of the Persons is maintained by listing them separately. It

is another link in the long chain of evidence that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one God.

• Entering God’s Presence. All three members of the Godhead are intimately involved in the believer’s access into the presence of God. Speaking of Christ, the Apostle Paul taught, “**For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit**” ([Ephesians 2:18](#)). Both Jews and Gentiles can approach the Father through the merits of the Son with the help of the Spirit.

• Blessing Believers. In Paul’s final remarks to the Corinthian Christians, he linked the three members of the Godhead together in a beautiful benediction: “**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all**” ([2 Corinthians 13:14](#)). Unless the three are one, eternally and equally supreme, there would be little reason to put them together on an equal basis like this in a divine blessing. The apostle certainly considered them to be one.

The reality of the triune Godhead cannot be denied. Those outside of Christ may object to it, but their objections arise primarily because they seek to understand the Creator in terms of the creature, to see God as merely a bigger and better version of man when in reality He is a totally different kind of being, an infinite being whom our finite minds cannot fully comprehend. We believe in the Godhead not because we understand it, but because God has revealed it. It is not incidental or unimportant. It is the very essence of His being, the way He is. And it is necessary for us to know it if we hope to grow in our understanding of His nature and perfections.



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