

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

LESSON
ONE

In the Trinity
Discussion Forum



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We Believe in the Holy Spirit

Lesson One: In the Trinity

Discussion Forum

With

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Dr. Gregg R. Allison
Dr. Uche Anizor
Pastor Pierre Bitar
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Dr. Ramesh Richard
Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

Question 1:

How does the New Testament's revelation of the Holy Spirit help us recognize Old Testament clues about the Trinity?

Dr. J. Scott Horrell

Really, in the Old Testament you have this, many times, this sense of God distinct from God. You have the *dabar*, the Word of God that goes forth and creates. You have the angel of the Lord who speaks as God sometimes, and other times — it's not clear at all — but frequently distinct from God. You have the Spirit of God who goes forth... But all of these are subtle kinds of influences that, when we go to the New Testament and we have the full revelation of Jesus Christ, begin to inform how then we read the Old Testament. Luke 24, I think, is remarkable. Jesus is talking with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus and he opens up the Scriptures, their hearts burn within them as he explains to them what is taught of him, said of him in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms... Now we see more clearly than ever, if that's true of the Son, it's also true of the Holy Spirit — not as clearly because the New Testament is especially unfolding who is our Savior as now the eternal Son of God — but that's also true of the Holy Spirit as we see more and more a distinction of the Spirit in the New Testament. So, we have a canonical lens to understand not only the Father now, and the Son, but also the Holy Spirit. So, I take it that the Trinity — because it's the same God of the Old Testament as in the New Testament — is in fact the bedrock of all the Bible. And the Old Testament's under sand, under dirt a lot of times, and occasionally will come to the surface, but it is the New Testament that sheds light on the Old Testament as to how we might understand phrases like, "Let *us* create man in our own image." Now, was Moses thinking Trinity when he wrote passages like that? Almost certainly not. But at the same time, the Holy Spirit is the coauthor of Scripture, and so these subtleties in the Old Testament that speak of this ambiguous plurality in the one God are unfolded marvelously as we come into the New Testament; and so, the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Prof. Mumo Kisau

In the Bible, we read in Genesis 1 that, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”... And then quickly we find in verse 2, “The earth was void and formless ... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the deep.” So, we’re introduced to God, if you will — I could say, if I’m allowed to say — God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. And in verse 3, God said, God spoke, and this is God the Word... We come to John 1 and we read in John 1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... everything was made through him and without him nothing was made that which was made.” So, here we’re introduced to the Word again... And then we go quickly to chapters 14, 15 and 16, and Jesus himself then begins to talk about God the Holy Spirit. And he then begins to talk about “I and the Father are one.” So, we’re introduced to the Father, we’re introduced to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 28 ... it says that “then go ye to the whole world and there baptize...” You make all the world my disciples, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” And therefore, you can see the combination, and all of the Old Testament is colored with the Holy Spirit... And, this you find in Isaiah, he’s talking about the Son; the Son is born. Who is this Son? It’s the Word that becomes flesh, and therefore, both the Old Testament and New Testament they have the unity of talking about the Trinity, talking about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Danny Akin

You know, when you come to the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is mentioned, but not a lot. There are particular places where his ministry is emphasized, especially in the book of Genesis, but it’s not like what you have in the New Testament... We need to acknowledge that the understanding of the triune God takes place through what we call “progressive revelation,” where God, throughout the canon of Scripture and moving into the New Testament, is progressively revealing more and more about who he is and how he functions, so that when you see, for example, the phrase in the Old Testament, “the Spirit of God,” there’s no reason to try to make some type of radical disconnect between, say, God the Father. When you speak of the Spirit of God you’re speaking of God. Now, yes, you’re speaking of the third person of the triune God that we come to know more *fully* in light of New Testament revelation, but you’re still talking just as much about God when you speak of him as the Spirit of God in the Old Testament as you are if you’re talking about the Father, or the Son, or as it is more fully revealed in the New Testament in triune passages like Matthew 28, the Great Commission text, or take Ephesians 4 in the first 6 verses. There are a number of places — the end of 2 Corinthians 13 — where you have all three brought together in a very clear “package.” That’s maybe not the best word, but it’ll work. But in the Old Testament it’s revealed in a different kind of a way.

Question 2:

How can we demonstrate the divinity of the Holy Spirit from Scripture?

Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail (translation)

Actually, there's more than one way to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is God, or as theologians say, to demonstrate the divinity of the Holy Spirit. First of all, we see the divinity of the Holy Spirit in creation, his role in creation. In Genesis 1:1-2:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1-2, ESV).

There are two things here: First, the Scripture does not tell us that God created the Holy Spirit. He is not created. He is the Creator. He is God. This is the first thing. The second thing is that the Spirit of God participated in the process of creation — not just that he is not created, but also he participated in the process of creation because he is God, and therefore, he is the Creator. In the expression “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters,” we see here the image of a bird who hovers over the nest of his chicks. It's like he's embracing his nest and giving life. So, the image here is that the Spirit of God is the one who gives life to the world. He is the Creator, and therefore, we see here the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Also, there's a second way that shows us his divinity: his role in revelation... He reveals himself through the Son and also through the Holy Spirit. I'd like to read from 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10, and 11:

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” — these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-11, ESV).

The words here are clear. In order for the Holy Spirit to reveal God, he has to be equal to God; he has to know God's thoughts. It's impossible for an angel or any creature to reveal the Creator because he cannot search the depths of God. But, as the spirit of man knows all of man's depths, the Spirit of God knows everything in God's depths, and this demonstrates to us the divinity of the Holy Spirit... Also, we can demonstrate the divinity of the Holy Spirit through his role in the general resurrection. He is going to have a role in the resurrection of our bodies. And this is what we read about in Romans 8:11:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your

mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you (Romans 8:11, ESV).

So, God the Father will raise our bodies in the resurrection day through his Spirit who dwells in us. If the Spirit of God is not God, how will he be able to raise the dead?

Dr. J. Scott Horrell

Typically in the Old Testament, the Hebrew term “*ruach*,” for “spirit,” can be used in a lot of different ways, but when related to God it’s usually the Spirit, the finger of God, the power of God active in a particular place... But as we walk through the Scriptures, sometimes, like in Isaiah 40, you have this creation going on and then, “Who has advised the Spirit of God — the Spirit of the Lord?” It’s as though the Spirit of the Lord and God are one in the same. Other times we see the Spirit can be grieved, as God gives the Spirit to Israel and Isaiah 63:10, there you have the Holy Spirit grieving over Israel which has turned against Yahweh, the Lord... We come into the New Testament and there’s more evidence, of course, of the blessed Spirit’s deity. Certainly, one of those would be as we see the Great Commission: “Go, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name” — the sacred name, singular — “of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”... But I would say, overall, the deity of the Holy Spirit comes to us through the indirect evidence. He shares the titles of God, some forty titles for the Holy Spirit: he’s the Spirit of Yahweh, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of the Son, the Spirit of Christ, as well as the Holy Spirit. So, you’ve got the titles, you’ve got the attributes, you’ve got the works of the Holy Spirit. And so, many of these coalesce — I think Calvin said all of these attributes ascribed to God are ascribed to the Spirit, so the Spirit must be God.

Dr. Glenn R. Kreider

The New Testament doesn’t spend a great deal of time explicitly addressing the question of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, unlike the divinity, the deity, of the Son where there’s a great deal of attention to that he is the Creator, that he is sent from the Father, etc. The Holy Spirit doesn’t get that same kind of attention. But I think there is a compelling case to be made from the way the three persons of the Godhead are mentioned, the way they appear together in the baptism of Jesus, in the presentation at the temple, those kind of events. But primarily, it’s because of the way Jesus talks about the Spirit that in the Upper Room Discourse he says, “I will ask the Father; he will send another Comforter who will be” — who you already know because he is like me — “he will be with you. He will be in you.” But the central, the pivotal text is in Acts 5 where, in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, when they lied to the apostles and claimed that they had received a certain sum of money for their house, for their property, and they had received much more than that. When Peter rebukes them Peter says, “You have lied to the Holy Spirit.” And then a little bit later in the same discourse, “You have not lied to man; you have lied to God.” So, to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God.

Question 3:

How do the attributes of the Holy Spirit demonstrate his divinity?

Pastor Pierre Bitar (translation)

I think we can demonstrate the divinity of the Holy Spirit through His attributes... It is written that he is omnipotent. It is written that, "When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground." It is written that he is omnipresent. David said, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me." So, he is omnipresent and also omniscient. It is written in Corinthians, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." Then he says, "These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit," the Holy Spirit. So, the Holy Spirit takes that which is of God, that which is in God's heart, and gives it and declares it to us.

Dr. Danny Akin

The Holy Spirit is God based upon the clear testimony and witness of Scripture, but specifically we know this to be so because he is given the names of God; he is given the attributes of God, or the attributes of God are ascribed to him. I can take you to passages where the Holy Spirit is referred to as being omnipotent, being omniscient, and in particular being omnipresent... No human is ever described as being omnipotent. We're strong but we're not completely strong. We have presence, but it's located, it's very specific. We have knowledge, but it's a joke to think we have anything close to being omniscient. But the Spirit is said to be all powerful, all knowing, everywhere present. He is also ascribed as being unchanging. He is also ascribed as being eternal. In fact, he is the *eternal* Spirit. Well, just that one attribute alone would give clear indication that when we talk about the Spirit, we're talking about God who has always been, is today, and will always be.

Pastor Rasmy Abraham (translation)

The Holy Spirit has the same attributes as God. The first attribute is that he is eternal; he has always existed... In Hebrews 9:14 it says: "Christ ... through the *eternal Spirit* offered himself without blemish to God." And then, in John 14:16, he is everlasting: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you *forever*." He is omnipresent in Psalm 139:7: "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?" He knows the future in John 16:13: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth ... and he will declare to you the things that are to come." Then he is the life giver. It says in John 6:63: "It is the Spirit who gives life." He is omniscient in 1 Corinthians 2:10: "[T]hese things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." Then he is holy. And the attribute of holiness and the word "holy" cannot refer to anyone but God in Luke 1:35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." And similarly, in Ephesians 1:13: "In

him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”

Question 4:

How do the works of the Holy Spirit demonstrate his divinity?

Dr. Uche Anizor

The works of the Holy Spirit are probably the primary way we understand who the Holy Spirit is. So, one of the main arguments back in the early church regarding the Spirit’s deity was that the Spirit does the very things that only God does, and if that’s the case — that the Spirit does what only God does — then we have to surmise that the Spirit *is* God. So, for instance, when we read in the New Testament that, in Romans 8, it speaks about, “the Spirit of him ... who raised Christ from the dead” is living in us, and the same Spirit will “give life to [our] mortal bodies.” And so, what we get there is that the Spirit is the agent of resurrection life, of new life. And who is the one who brings new life, who brings life at all? It’s God himself. And so, this is Paul *implicitly* saying that the Spirit is God the Almighty himself, the life giver. And we also read throughout the New Testament ... that the Spirit is the one who sanctifies. And when you read the Old Testament, and you ask yourself the question, “Who is it that makes God’s people holy?” And the answer is straightforward: It’s God himself who makes his people holy. And so, when sanctification is tied to the Spirit, explicitly in the New Testament, what the New Testament is saying is that the Spirit is Yahweh himself, is God, the same God you encounter in the Old Testament.

Yohanes Praptowarso, Ph.D. (translation)

The Holy Spirit’s work shows his divinity, or his lordship, starting with ... Genesis 1:2, where the Holy Spirit joined in the work of creating the universe, and [later] in restoring the world — repairing it as well as creating it. And this is evidence that the Holy Spirit is God because he joined in God’s work of creation, as well as in the creation of mankind in Genesis 2:7 and following ... The Holy Spirit also inspired, from among the believers, people to become witnesses — Acts 1:8 — so that every person can witness the Lord’s gospel and can come to believe and be born anew — John 3:3-5. The Holy Spirit enables a person, moves one’s heart to become certain that Jesus is Lord and Savior, and this becomes part of the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s divinity.

Dr. Mike Fabarez

The works of the Spirit from beginning to end in the Bible clearly reflect his divinity, that he is indeed God and equal with God, coequal with God. We see that from the very beginning in that he is an agent of creation. Much like Christ is described as an agent of creation, the Spirit is described that way in the second verse of the Bible, clarified in the book of Job, that he is actually the one giving life to people. Well, there’s only one Creator. That Creator exists in three persons, and all three persons of the Godhead are described as having a hand in that creation. There’s mystery in that,

but there's clearly divinity in that. Being the one who is the one who is described as overseeing the writing of Scripture, as 2 Peter 1:21 says, he was the one who moved these authors along to write this book that is described as perfect, with not one jot or tittle ever being removed from the text till it's all fulfilled. Only God can do that. In Isaiah it speaks of the God who can see the end from beginning and that it's recorded and revealed to his prophets. Well, the Spirit of God is the agent of that, and clearly this is an act of divinity. There are many things throughout the Scripture that describe it, but certainly creation and the oversight and production of the Scripture are two very clear ways that we see the divinity of the Spirit.

Question 5:

What kinds of things did the Spirit of the Lord do in the Old Testament that demonstrated his divinity?

Dr. Gregg R. Allison

What did the Holy Spirit do, before Christ, in Old Testament times that would indicate that he is God? We begin with Genesis 1:2 in which we find the Spirit of the Lord hovering over the face of the deep. So, as God creates the heavens and the earth and the earth is formless and void, a watery situation, the Spirit is hovering like a dove. The idea here, I think, is protecting and preparing this watery substance for God's future work, constructing a world which would be hospitable for you and me, and so the Spirit is engaged in creation, which is obviously a divine work. Secondly, we see the Spirit work in specific leaders in the people of God, in the people of Israel. The Spirit would stir up judges, would come upon kings, would speak through prophets, indicating that he is God who is going to liberate his people through judges, who will rule his people through kings, who will speak to his people through prophets. These are all divine activities, and the Spirit is engaged in them. Thirdly, we see the Holy Spirit in prophetic literature pointing out that he will be the one who anoints Messiah, who will become, not only a Savior to the people of Israel, but to the Gentile nations as well. So, the Spirit connected with the Messiah, the Spirit is going to accompany the Messiah in terms of his work of salvation. Salvation is also a divine work. So, we see the Spirit as Creator, as the one who comes upon and leads and empowers judges and kings and prophets, and the one who will be associated with the Messiah, who will bring salvation to the world.

Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail (translation)

The Holy Spirit existed and was active in the Old Testament... The Holy Spirit gave gifts to his servants in the Old Testament in a similar way to the gifts he gave in the New Testament. For example, to the people who established the tabernacle, he gave them wisdom to know how to establish it. This tabernacle resembles the presence of our Lord on earth. So, he has infinite wisdom and can give wisdom to his servants. We see also, in the book of Judges, how he gave power to the judges, and also to the kings, to accomplish their roles to shepherd and protect the people. We also see some other activities of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 63, we read about

the role of the Holy Spirit. Here, the prophet is referring to the exodus and says in verse 10:

But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit (Isaiah 63:10, ESV).

So, they grieved his Holy Spirit. We read the same words in the epistle to the Ephesians 4:

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30, ESV).

This emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is a person, and affirms that he is the person of God who grieves when his people rebel against him. In the same context, again in Isaiah 63, it says:

He ... put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit (Isaiah 63:11, ESV).

God put in the midst of the people his Holy Spirit. This Spirit resembles the presence of God. He is not an angel, but God himself dwells in the midst of his people. This reminds us of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament; it has its parallel in the Old Testament. So, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the people proves that this is God.

Question 6:

How does Scripture teach us that God's Spirit is a person rather than an impersonal force?

Dr. Ramesh Richard

We know the Spirit of God is definitely seen as a person by his character, his works, his attributes, and by the use of pronouns in the New Testament. And then, reading backward into the Old Testament, which sets the context for the Spirit of God, there is no question that God as a person, as he represents himself, has to be a person in relationship to the human race... God is not simply an idea, is not a principle, is just not a thought or a concept. Then of course is the whole expectation that there needs to be a personal relationship with God from the very first commandment. It says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." It cannot be a referent to a "thing" that you love with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, that when you love God for who he is, you just love him like a person. How do you love a person? You love him with words. You love him with deeds. You love him with gifts. And so, when we speak about the Spirit of God, if it is just an impersonal force, you can't love an impersonal force. You may obey it. You may submit to it. You may salute it, but you can't love an impersonal force. You love a person. So, one of the ways to read it is through the theology of both the Old Testament, reading back from the New Testament, where it's clearly a person. And then, of course, there are intimations of the Spirit of God doing personal things. For example, in the Major

Prophets, when he says, “The Spirit of God is upon me,” it’s again not just an impersonal force which is anointing him and leading him, but all the personal endowments of a personal Spirit whom God has given to the prophet.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

Not every passage that talks about the Spirit of God identifies the Spirit as a distinct person. But you do have explicitly Trinitarian passages, for instance, Matthew 28, baptizing “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And then you have other passages, like in 2 Corinthians 13 and so on, that mention the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Also, in John 14–16, we read about the Spirit doing things that only a person would do. For example, Jesus says that he will send another advocate like himself — the Holy Spirit — and the Spirit goes on to prosecute the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment, just like Jesus did, the Spirit is a witness just like we are witnesses, and so on. So, the Spirit is identified as a distinct person in a number of passages.

Rev. Mike Osborne

The Bible over and over again refers to the Holy Spirit in personal terms. Like, to be a person doesn’t mean you have a body; it means you have personal qualities, attributes and so on. For example, the Bible speaks so clearly that the Holy Spirit searches hearts. The Holy Spirit imparts gifts. The Holy Spirit teaches. I mean, read through the Gospel of John, and over and over again Jesus is telling us what the Holy Spirit does... He’s teaching. He’s revealing all truth. He’s guiding. He’s comforting. He’s leading. You know, all of those things are things that persons do. Furthermore, later in the New Testament the apostles teach us that the Holy Spirit has emotions. He is grieved, Paul says in Ephesians. In 1 Thessalonians he says, don’t quench the Holy Spirit’s fire, or don’t put out the fire. So, all of these are things that only persons can do. The Holy Spirit is not a force. He is not an “it.” He is a “he.”

Question 7:

How do Jesus’ words in the Farewell Discourse in John 14–16 point to the deity and distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit?

Dr. Mike Fabarez

In Christ’s Farewell Discourse, or the Upper Room Discourse, there in John 14–16, Jesus says so many things about the Spirit that clarify exactly who we’re speaking of. The personhood of the Spirit is so clear, starting in chapter 14 where he speaks to the Father about sending another. And when there’s so much confusion about the personhood of the Spirit, here’s a clear text that shows us that God is not modalistic, that he’s not just wearing different hats at different times. Jesus is speaking to the second party, the Father — a different person — who then is being asked to send a third person, the person of the Spirit. So, that’s a great distinction that allows us to know that when we’re talking about the Holy Spirit we’re talking about an independent person, although of course, in the doctrine of the Trinity they are

ontologically *one* God. Later in chapter 16 there are so many verbs that are appended to the Spirit that are helpful: the idea that the Spirit is going to *declare*. He's going to *convict*. He's going to *hear*. He's going to *speak*. When you look at all these verbs connected to the description of the Spirit, we see we're not talking of an impersonal force. We're not talking of something other than an actual *bona fide* person with an intellect, emotion and will.

Dr. Joseph D. Fantin

The deity and distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit is one of the more difficult things, I think, to get out of the New Testament. It's clearly there but not nearly as developed as we might like it... John 14, though, does have some important information to contribute to this whole idea. In 14:16, Jesus talks about how he's going to leave, and he's going to send somebody else to help the disciples. Now, you don't want to send somebody who's not sufficient, so it's somebody who's going to be replacing Jesus, in a sense, and his presence has to be seen in somewhat of a similar manner to Jesus himself. So, to me, I think that's one strong evidence that you already have at this point in Jesus' lifetime, and in Johannine writing, this idea that the Holy Spirit is distinct and, like I say, he's got to be on some level with Jesus to be able to take his place. I couldn't do that. You couldn't do that. The greatest Christian workers couldn't do that. But yet the Holy Spirit can.

Dr. Glenn R. Kreider

In the last day he has with his disciples before his crucifixion, in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus is talking with his disciples about what is to follow, what is to come. He's told them multiple times, over and over again — they still don't believe him — that he's on his way to die and will be raised again. In John's gospel, as he records that discourse — the only one of the Gospels who tells us that story — Jesus tells his disciples the shocking news, shocking to them, that he is leaving. That's not the most shocking thing. He tells them that they should be glad that he is leaving; it's good that he is leaving, because if he leaves then he will go to the Father and the Father will send the Spirit. And we could talk about the language he uses there, the specific words he uses, which are important, as he refers to the Spirit as “another of the same kind” — *allos not heteros*. But I think the strongest argument out of that discourse is that Jesus, who is well known to his disciples as God — he is the way, the truth and the life; he says in the discourse too that “I and the Father are one” — that he promises them that when he goes to the Father, then the Father will send another one like him. “You already know him,” he says, “because I've been with you.” Of course the disciples are confused. They don't even know who the Father is. Philip asks that question. But as we read now in the light of, after the coming of the Spirit, and understand, as they did beginning on the day of Pentecost, that the Spirit, who was sent from the Father because of the Son, is God like the Father and the Son is — exactly the argument that Peter makes, then, on the day of Pentecost when he says that “this Jesus whom you crucified has now ascended to the Father and has poured out the Holy Spirit which you now see and hear.”

Question 8:**How are the Trinitarian formulas in the New Testament helpful to our understanding of pneumatology?****Dr. Steve McKinion**

There are a number of important Trinitarian formulas in the New Testament, in the Gospels as well as in the epistles, and they help us to see how these New Testament writers, the apostles, understood the work of God in Christ, beginning with the Gospels, for example. In the Gospels, the Trinitarian formulas appear at Jesus' baptism most clearly where the Father is speaking. He says, "This is my son in whom I'm well pleased," and then the Spirit descends on him in his baptism — very much formulaic in the way that the gospel writer presents this. At the end of Matthew, there is the command from Jesus to go and to make disciples of all nations, and he tells them that they're to baptize "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" — very formulaic. Paul in his epistles does the same thing where he's regularly talking about God and the Son and the Spirit, always in formulaic terms. What these formulas enable us to do as Christians, and as theologians, is to understand that the apostles are preaching to us the work of God that is triune, that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are all at work in salvation just as the Father and the Son and the Spirit were all at work in creation. What this tells us about the Spirit, then, is that he has a very important role in God's work, in the economy of God... So, when the formulas in the New Testament are applied to God's work in these various ways, the Spirit is always associated and included with this, which helps us to see that when God works, he works by means of his Spirit's activity in the lives of the individuals that he's working in.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

The Trinitarian formulas of the New Testament help us to understand that the Holy Spirit is fully divine and fully personal. To take two examples, in the Great Commission, Jesus commands us to baptize people "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" — one name: Father, Son and Spirit. So, we have one God, three persons. And Jesus is really echoing or alluding to the blessing that Aaron and his sons as priests were to give, were to place upon Israel in the Old Testament, that blessing that we know so well: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you his peace." And then the comment in Numbers 6 is, "Thus they will put my name on my people." Well, we're putting the name of God, making the claim that we now belong to him in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So, we see the Spirit as fully divine, equal with the Father and the Son, and fully personal, no less than the Father and the Son. Or if we take Paul's benediction at the end of 2 Corinthians 13: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit..." again there's a blessing in the name of the triune God, grace extended to us through the sacrifice of the Son ... motivated by the love of God the Father and then applied to us by the Holy Spirit as he has fellowship with us and communes with us.

He brings home to our hearts what the Son has accomplished for us in grace, which is what the Father has purposed for us in love.

Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail (translation)

In several places in the New Testament, the Scripture talks about the Trinity in one phrase. For example, in the last commission of Jesus Christ, which he gave to his disciples, which we call the Great Commission in Matthew 28, he says:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV).

“Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” — the mention of the Holy Spirit in here assures us that he is equal to the Father and equal to the Son, or otherwise our glorious Lord would not have told us to baptize people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It’s not possible that we are going to baptize people in the name of an angel or in the name of a creature. So, this verse mentions the Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and that each one of them is God and he is one God. The same fact, we find it, in the apostolic benediction, which is written at the end of 2 Corinthians 13, which says:

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, ESV).

Again we see the Scripture puts the Holy Spirit on the same level with the Father and on the same level with the Son, and when he wanted to bless his people, he blessed them in the name of the three of them: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All this assures to us the person of the Holy Spirit and also assures to us the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and he is completely equal to God the Father and to God the Son.

Question 9:

How does the ontological Trinity differ from the economic Trinity?

Dr. P. J. Buys

All three persons in the Trinity are coeternal, coequal, co-powerful in their being — that means their ontology. They are one. But there is apparent separation of some “functions,” that means the work, or the economy of the three persons among the members of the Godhead. For example, the Father chooses who he will save — who will be saved — the Son redeems them, and the Holy Spirit seals them.

Dr. Dinorah Méndez (translation)

In light of the teaching that God is one, and that all three persons are divine, the only explanation that could emerge is the doctrine of the Trinity. So, theologians throughout history have handled this using two terms: the “ontological” Trinity, which is a very philosophical term that has to do with the essence of God — God in essence is three persons — and the “economic” Trinity, that has to do with its function and the idea that these three persons have had three distinct principal functions. Not that they didn’t all participate, for example, in creation. All three participated. In salvation, all three persons are involved. In the Christian life, the three persons are active, but each with a different function. Now, there are people who favor only the economic, or *functional*, Trinity, and they think, “Well, God is one, but he functions in different ways.” And this can lead us to deviate from the biblical teaching, because the Bible doesn’t talk about God’s “modes of operation,” but it speaks of three distinct persons — the ontological Trinity, the Trinity in essence. The three persons exist in reality. They’re not just operating modes of one God, but they’re three persons, and of course, each one has his functions. So, we must always affirm these two things in a balanced way — what we might call the *essential* Trinity, instead of “ontological,” so we don’t sound too technical, and the *functional* Trinity, rather than saying the “economic” Trinity, which is sometimes not a very clear term. So, I prefer to use “Trinity in essence” and “Trinity in function,” and to affirm the two things in a balanced way.

Dr. Bruce Little

One might ask the question, well why do we talk about ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity? There’s only one Trinity. How should we talk about it in two different ways? Well, we need to talk about it in two different ways simply because we have a couple of statements by Jesus that raise some questions. For example, Jesus says in John chapter 10:30, “I and the Father are one.” Now, they clearly understood what Jesus was saying, for, in fact, they take up stones to stone him. And when he says, “Why?” They said, “Because you, being a man, make yourself God.” So they clearly understood. Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” But now later, and I believe it’s in John 14:28, Jesus says, “The Father is greater than I.” Now, that’s perplexing, and the way we talk about that is, we talk about the first statement as referencing the ontological Trinity and the second what we call the economic or the functional Trinity. So, when we look at the Trinity, we have a word. We use “God,” and we have to use it two different ways. There’s the concept of God when we talk about persons, and there’s a sense of God-ness when we talk about his nature. So, the ontological Trinity is focusing on the nature of God, his essence, or as the folks in Nicea said, his “*ousia*,” so that there is only one nature, and the Father and the Word and the Spirit all share the same nature. So we say, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. That’s ontological. It has to do with the nature of being. Now, the economic Trinity has to do with function and resides in the person, so you can have the same nature, but the different persons function differently. Now, I would argue they function differently based upon the properties that they have. So, the Son can say, “the Father is greater than I” only in function, in that the Father sends the Son. So, that makes, in that sense, functionally, the Father greater than the Son. And when

we do this, then you see we set a pattern for all of reality. Where we make a distinction within the Trinity, we differentiate between the persons. Now, if they were all God, and they didn't have persons and different functions, we'd have no way to distinguish them. They would just kind of be a glob, but no person. And you see that becomes a wonderful pattern for all of creation. You and I are human beings, so we share the same ontological oneness, but we're different because we're different persons, and so we function differently, and we can distinguish one as distinguished one from another. So, this idea of ontological Trinity and economic Trinity is very important as it helps us to understand how could Jesus say in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one," and then in John 14:28, "The Father is greater than I." It's wonderfully explained just by understanding the difference between economic Trinity and ontological Trinity.

Dr. John McKinley

So, the economic Trinity is God at work, it is God's involvement in the creation, and it's a term that is trying to explain what we know of God based on things that he does. So, we know that there are three who are God because in creation we have the Father who sends the Son and the Son who sends the Spirit, and they are at work in these different ways in our lives and in creation. But we also have revelation of God in himself, in a sense, God at home, God as he was and always will be if there had never been creation. And so the ontological Trinity is the same God at work in creation, but God in an inner life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relating to each other eternally. And the manifestation of God at work, the economic Trinity, is a reflection of God as he is eternally. So, even though we can't chase God down or reach back into history before the universe, we can still know what God always has been and what God always will be apart from relation to us, because there is a consistency between who he is with what he does. So, we only have God as what he does. He speaks to us, he interacts with us, but he is the same God as he always is, so economic Trinity gives us the ontological Trinity, and we know God in himself. We have true knowledge of God. We're not ultimately at a distance from him, because he is true in who he is based on the things that he does.

Question 10:

How should we acknowledge and respond to the divinity of the Holy Spirit in our worship and prayers?

Dr. Uche Anizor

The proper response to the Spirit in our worship is a tricky matter. On the one hand, we affirm that the Spirit is God and so deserving of worship. One of the creeds says that he is to be worshiped together with the Father and the Son. And so, clearly ... it's appropriate to worship the Spirit. However, when you read Scripture, we find that the Spirit is always pointing away from himself. Right? So, Jesus says that the Spirit is going to reveal things that Jesus said. He's going to point you to Jesus, so that the Spirit is, so to speak, self-effacing. And so, what do we do with that? On the one

hand, he's God, to be worshiped, and it's proper to worship him. On the other hand, he's always pointing away from himself. I would say that our worship should primarily focus on the ordering of the gospel: the Father sending the Son and the Spirit pointing us back to the Son who points us back to the Father. But on the other hand, it's very appropriate for us, especially in particular seasons of the Christian life, to be reminded that the Spirit is God, and so to direct ourselves in our worship services and our own lives, to actually pray and sing songs to the Spirit just by way of a reminder that the Spirit is not just some impersonal force or some third other, but that the Spirit is God himself, worthy of worship.

Dr. Alan Hultberg

Of course, the Holy Spirit is equally divine as the Father and the Son. And in fact, the Holy Spirit is the presence of God in our lives. Our interaction with God happens through the Holy Spirit. And so, I believe it's appropriate to render worship to the Holy Spirit, to render... to perhaps even address our prayers to the Holy Spirit, though, of course, the biblical model is that we pray to God, to God the Father, in the power of the Spirit, with the assistance of the Spirit, and through the authority or the person of the Son, through the Lord Jesus. But the Spirit is God, and it's not inappropriate to worship the Spirit or to address prayers to the Spirit, it seems to me.

Question 11:

If the Father has authority over the Son and Spirit, does that mean he always gets his way when they disagree?

Dr. Danny Akin

You know, one of the interesting challenges of Christians is to understand the inner working relationship of the triune God, and there are some things we do know and some things we don't know. Let me share very quickly what we do know. We do know that whatever it is that makes God, God, the Father is all of that, the Son is all of that, and the Spirit is all of that. We also know that the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. There's one God, yet they exist in some type of mysterious unity as one God, three persons. Alright. It is also clear in the New Testament particularly, that the Son gladly and joyfully submits to the Father, and that the Spirit gladly and joyfully submits both to the Father and to the Son. So, then a question I guess could be raised theoretically, well, what happens when the Father, the Son and the Spirit are communing with one another and they have a disagreement? I guess the Father always gets his way since he is the one to whom both of them give authority and acknowledge authority and give submission. Well, that's wrong thinking because there's no sense in which the Bible ever even remotely intimates that there's a disagreement between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. They are always of one mind. They are always of one will. They are always united in any and every issue including redemption. You think of the doctrine of salvation, and it is the Father who initiated salvation, it is the Son who accomplished our salvation, and it is the Spirit who applies our salvation, and they work in an

absolute perfect unity and harmony, not just in that area, but they operate in that way in *every* area. So, any idea that there's ever a disagreement among the triune God is a ... creation of man's imagination. It is nothing that you can find in God's revealed Word.

Dr. Tim Foster

As St. Augustine said the rule of the catholic faith is this: when the Scriptures say of the Son that he is less than the Father, the Scriptures mean in respect to the assumption of humanity — that is, the economic Trinity — but when the Scriptures point out that he is equal, they are understood in respect to his deity — that is, the ontological Trinity. So, what Augustine is saying is, any sense of subordination of the Son to the Father is only the case when Jesus, when the second person of the Trinity, has become human, but when it's speaking about the equality, well, that's true of God ontologically... So, when we see God the Father exercising authority over God the Son, that is the economic Trinity at work. That is God the Son obeying and submitting himself to the authority of God the Father. But in eternity, in the ontological Trinity, no such subordination exists, at least not according to Augustine. Then there's the question of the will. It's very important, lest we fall into heresy, that we recognize that each member of the Godhead has his own will. To say that there's only one will within the Godhead is heresy. But, the will of each person in the Godhead is perfectly in accord with the other; such is the nature of God in his oneness, because always when we're talking about the Trinity, we're trying to protect the oneness of God and the distinctions of the person. In order to protect the distinctions of the persons, we want to say they each have their own will. But in order to protect the oneness of God, we want to say that the will of the Son is the same as the will of the Father is the same as the will of the Spirit. And so, there can never be a time when the Father wills one thing, the Son another and the Spirit another, and the Son and the Spirit have to come in line begrudgingly with the Father. That's not the nature of a monotheistic God.

Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

Perhaps you've heard the question, if the Father has authority over the Son and the Spirit, does he always get his way when they disagree? Now, you'll notice that in that question there is the assumption that on occasion they will disagree. Now, that's an assumption we need to contest at the outset. We believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are infinite and *equal* in their knowledge, in their wisdom, in their power, in their intrinsic goodness, and so if they're playing equally at that level, so to speak, it's inconceivable that there would be any disagreement, because the disagreement would imply that one of the members had an inferior grasp of the situation and the obligations of the infinite Holy God. This is not going to happen! And so, the need for authority, which we recognize in human relations due to asymmetrical competence and goodness, certainly does not apply to the Holy Trinity who exists in this amazing infinite and eternal harmony because they are, in the fullest sense, on the same page. Now, we do know that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, fully human, feeling our frailty, has to submit to the Father's will and say, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." But be assured, that is not due to the

limitations of the divinity of the Son or his inferiority in relationship to the Father in their eternal relationships, but indicative of what it's like to be a human being struggling in our finitude and our limitations with the call of God upon our lives.

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