



The Trinitarian Controversy

Part 1

Early Adventist Pioneer Evidences for the Rejection of the Trinity

- No biblical evidence for three persons in one Godhead
 - ▣ Rationalists (How could 3 be 1)
- Made the Father and Son identical (Creator-Creature)
- Taught the existence of three Gods
- Diminished the value of the atonement
 - ▣ Result of Anti-Trinitarian view
- Christ is called “Son of God” and “the beginning of the creation of God”
- Holy Spirit not properly considered a person

Nothing New



That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. (Ecc 1:9 NKJV)

Trinity with Paul

“The grace of the Lord **Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the communion of the **Holy Spirit** *be* with you all. Amen.” (2 Cor. 13:14 NKJV)

Stated but Not Explained

- 2 Cor. 13:14 is a single prayer.
- The Three are mentioned as Persons with distinct functions within their natures.
- God provides love.
- Christ provides grace.
- The Holy Spirit provides communion.
- The three functions are indivisible.
- The nature of relationship between the Three is not explained.

Starting Point - Matthew



"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"
(Mat 28:19 NKJV).

Stated but Not Explained

- Matt 28:19 is a unified baptismal formula given directly by Jesus.
- It mentions the Three as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Eternal Roles—not God, Christ, the Holy Spirit).
- Three are indivisible because the formula is used for one baptism (e.g. there are no separate baptisms for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit).
- The relationship between the Three is not explained in terms of their nature.

Greek Mindset vs. Hebrew Mindset

- The Greek mindset subordinates.
 - Origin of Trinitarian Controversy
- The Hebrew mindset coordinates.

Greek vs. Hebrew

Coordinated Thinking (Bible)

- The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. (Psa. 23:1-2 NKJ)

Temporal/Conditional Subordination

Subordinated Thinking (Greeks)

- I shall not want *because* the LORD *is* my shepherd. *After* He leads me beside the still waters, He makes me to lie down in green pastures.
- I shall not want *if* the LORD *is* my shepherd. *As often as* He leads me beside the still waters, He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

The Greek Logic of Subordination

- Subordination: If there are two things, one is prior to the other in importance, logic, or sequence.
- The **Greek mindset of Gentile Christianity** felt compelled to explain the nature of the relationship between God and Christ in terms of such subordination. (3 in 1; 1 in 3)
- The identity of the Holy Spirit did not enter into the debate until the fourth century.

The Orthodox Position

- To leave the nature of the relationship unexplained.
- To preserve the unsubordinated, coordinated thinking of the Bible on the matter.
- To limit the definition of the relationship to what it is not.
 - *Unsubordinated* (=equal)
 - *Uncreated* (=fully divine)

First Type of Subordination: Negation of the Inferior

- Basic idea: Jesus is inferior to God, therefore not God.
- Gnosticism and Monarchialism (Modalism)
- Both are from the 2nd Century A.D.

Gnosticism

- Earthly Jesus was an illusion that God created for redemption.
- The physical is evil.
- The spiritual is good.
- God is spiritual.
- Human Jesus was a false appearance effected by God—an Allusion

Monarchialism (Modalism)

- Idea: There is only one God, therefore Jesus is a manifestation of God.
- God manifests himself in different forms or modalities.
- Jesus is one of many modalities of God's self-manifestation.

Second Type of Subordination: Lower Status of the Inferior

- Basic idea: Jesus is inferior to God, therefore less than God.
- Adoptionism and Arianism
- Both recognize the separate individuality of Jesus but only as a less than fully divine being.

Adoptionism

- Jesus was a human being who was adopted by God as a Son because of his perfect obedience.
- Ebionites of the 2nd Century A.D.
- Jesus is an example of how one can become a child of God through obedience.

Arianism

- Jesus is a created being, perhaps the first one that God created, but not eternal.
 - ▣ Jehovah Witness's View

- Arius of Alexandria in the 4th century.

Conclusions

- When it comes to the nature of relationship between God and Christ, there are only two possible modes of subordination.
 1. Christ as a mere manifestation of God.
 2. Christ as a less than fully divine being.
- The need to explain the nature of relationship between two things through subordination is a peculiar intellectual habit of the Greek mind, hence something foreign to the Bible, therefore pagan.
- The biblical teaching on the Trinity bears no relation to the Greek modes of subordination.

Subordination = Explanation

- The Trinitarian position offers no explanation as to the relationship of the Three.
 - ▣ Affirming the equality does not explain how they are equal.

- Anti-Trinitarian positions offer fancy explanations about the relationship of the Three.
 - ▣ Yet all of their explanations can be boiled down to **only two basic forms** of subordination
 - ▣ Monarchialism/Modalism
 - ▣ Adoptionism/Arianism

Secret Things

"The secret *things belong* to the LORD our God, but those *things which are revealed belong* to us and to our children forever
(Deut. 29:29 NKJ)

The Nature of the Trinity

Subordination = Speculation

- The Bible offers no explanation on the nature of the relationship between the Three.
- The Trinity is one of those “secret things that belong to the LORD.”
- All forms of anti-Trinitarian argument posit some type of subordination in an attempt to explain the nature of the relationship. All such attempts are mere speculations.

Problem Texts on the Trinity

- John 3:16 – God’s “begotten Son”
 - *monogenes*—“single of its kind;” “only” (Heb 11:17)
- Colossians 1:15,18 – Christ is “the firstborn” over creation—**Pre-eminent**
 - First born from the dead (Lazarus; Jarius’ daughter)
 - Psalms 29:27; 1 Chron. 26:10
- Hebrews 1:5,6; 5:5-10 – “Begotten Son” and “Firstborn”
- John 17:3 – Father as “only true God” and Jesus Christ whom You sent – **Roles**

Problem Texts on the Trinity

- 1 Corinthians 8:6 – “One God, the Father”
 - of Whom and through Whom are all things
- 1 Timothy 2:5,6 – “the Man Christ Jesus”
- 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 – “Subordination” of Christ to the Father
- Revelation 3:14 – Christ is “the Beginning of the creation of God”
 - Origin
 - God created all things through Jesus Christ
 - Col. 1:16; Eph. 3: 9; Heb. 1:2



The Trinitarian Controversy

Part 2

Equality in Nature with Functional Roles

- The Bible offers many models and explanations about the *functions/roles* of the Three. (Headship/Submission; 1 Cor. 11:3)
- All such Scriptural teachings on the Trinity are:
 - ▣ Concrete language describing their functions in the plan of salvation.
 - ▣ Silent on the nature of their relationship in terms of their divine nature.

Problem Texts on the Trinity

- Proverbs 8:22 – “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way. . .” **Implies Jesus created?**
- Wisdom was brought forth before waters/mtns v.24-25
- I was there at creation v. 27
- I was established (installed) from everlasting v. 23
- I was a master craftsman with Him v. 30
 - Divine playing in creation process
- My delight was with sons of men
 - Wisdom = Mediator (Creator/creation; God/Humanity)

Eternal Word/Mediator

□ *“The Word existed as a divine being, even as the eternal Son of God, in union and oneness with His Father. From everlasting He was the Mediator of the covenant.”*

□ *Evangelism, p. 615.*

□ Christ never has changed His position, or role, or office in relation the Father.

Mediator from Everlasting

- Christ was appointed to the office of Mediator from the creation of God, **set up from everlasting** to be our substitute and surety.
 - *Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 250.*

True Position of Son of God

□ There had been no change in the position or authority of Christ. Lucifer's envy and misrepresentation and his claims to equality with Christ had made necessary a statement of the true position of the Son of God; but this had been the same from the beginning. Many of the angels were, however, blinded by Lucifer's deceptions.

□ *Patriarch and Prophets*, p. 38.

Title: Son of God

- “In His incarnation He gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God . . . While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense.”
 - ▣ *Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 226.*

- “He was equal with God, infinite and omnipotent . . . He is the eternal, self-existent Son.”
 - ▣ *Evangelism, p. 615.*

From Times Eternal

Equality with Headship & Submission

- The terms of this oneness between God and man in the great covenant of redemption were arranged with Christ **from all eternity**. The covenant of grace was revealed to the patriarchs . . . Paul speaks of the gospel, the preaching of Jesus Christ, as "the revelation of the mystery, which hath been kept in silence through **times eternal**, but now is manifested . . ." (Romans 16:25, 26, R.V.).
- White, *Amazing Grace*, p. 129. See also *Signs of the Times*, August 24, 1891 par. 10.

Equal—Invested with Authority

“Satan in Heaven, before his rebellion, was a high and exalted angel, next in honor to God's dear Son. . . . A special light beamed in his countenance, and shone around him brighter and more beautiful than around the other angels; yet Jesus, God's dear Son, had the preeminence over all the angelic host. He was one with the Father before the angels were created. Satan was envious of Christ, and gradually assumed command which devolved on Christ alone.

Equal—Invested with Authority

The great Creator assembled the heavenly host, that he might in the presence of all the angels confer special honor upon his Son. The Son was seated on the throne with the Father, and the heavenly throng of holy angels was gathered around them. The Father then made known that it was ordained by himself that Christ, his Son, should be **equal with himself;**

Equal—Invested with Authority

so that wherever was the presence of his Son, it was as his own presence. The word of the Son was to be obeyed as readily as the word of the Father. **His Son he had invested with authority** to command the heavenly host. Especially was his Son to work in union with himself in the anticipated creation of the earth and every living thing that should exist upon the earth. His Son would carry out his will and his purposes, but would do nothing of himself alone. . . .

Equal—Invested with Authority

There was contention among the angels. Satan and his sympathizers were striving to reform the government of God. They were discontented and unhappy because they could not look into his unsearchable wisdom and ascertain his purposes in exalting his Son Jesus, and **endowing him with such unlimited power and command**. They rebelled against the authority of the Son.”

- White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 1, p. 17-22.

Son Obtains Permission

Soon I saw Him approach the exceeding bright light which enshrouded the Father. Said my accompanying angel, "He is in close converse with His Father." The anxiety of the angels seemed to be intense while Jesus was communing with His Father. Three times He was shut in by the glorious light about the Father, and the third time He came from the Father we could see His person.

Son Obtains Permission

His countenance was calm, free from all perplexity and trouble, and shone with a loveliness which words cannot describe. He then made known to the angelic choir that a way of escape had been made for lost man; that He had been pleading with His Father, and had **obtained permission** to give His own life as a ransom for the race.

- White, *Early Writings*, p. 126.

God, the Head of Christ

- Seated at God's right hand

- ▣ (Acts 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22)

- High Priest, intercedes before the Father

- ▣ (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).

Supreme Authority

- The supreme authority always belongs to the Father.
- *“The Son of God was next in authority to the great Lawgiver.”* White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 2, p. 9.

Elder Brother

- Christ will be one with His brethren,
 - ▣ our Elder Brother (Heb 2:11-13)

To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature. . . . God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. . . .

Encumbered with Human Nature

The I AM is the Daysman between God and humanity, laying His hand upon both. He who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," is not ashamed to call us brethren. Hebrews 7:26; 2:11. In Christ the family of earth and the family of heaven are bound together. Christ glorified is our brother. Heaven is enshrined in humanity, and humanity is enfolded in the bosom of Infinite Love. {DA 25.3}

1 Corinthians 15:28

- “the Son Himself will also be subject to Him [the Father]
- Greek,
- *hypotassō*: to subject, to subordinate, put in subjection, be subject to, submit to.

Why the Problem?

- The opponents of the Trinity read the verses as if they were explanations about the *nature* of divinity, and w/o functional roles.
- The opponents of the Trinity read the Bible from a male-dominant, colonial perspective:
 - Someone who has a subordinate role has an inferior nature.

The Basic Point of the “Problem Texts”

- Christ is the highest authority in the universe.
- Christ is the most perfect representation of God.
- Japan/Emperor
- Chief Justice
 - To be highest authority must subordinate
 - Confer Authority

Christ the Highest Authority

And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron *was*. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but *it was* He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." (Heb. 5:4-5 NKJV)

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11 NKJV)

Christ the Perfect Representation of God

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*. (John 1:18 NKJV)

- No one knows the Father except the Son (Mt 11:27)
- Only know the Father thru the Son
- Discover Love Thru Christ (Cross)

- Outsider/Insider

The Trinity

What Difference Does It Make?

- Touches on one of the most fundamental premises of Christian faith: Christ the Son of God.
- Affects our assurance of salvation and ability to access the throne of God.
- Settles the three central issues of the Great Controversy: The love of God, the role of Christ, and the Law of God.
 - Arbitrary/Sacrificing; Mediator; Law = God



The Trinitarian Controversy

Part 3

Personhood of the Holy Spirit

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. John 15:26

- He is a Helper, a Person
- Come from the presence of God
- Is sent by Christ
- Testifies of Christ
- Not an impersonal power—He testifies

Spirit of God

- For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the **Spirit of God**.
1 Cor 2:12
- Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but **the Spirit who is from God**, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.
1 Cor 2:11
- **The Spirit of God is the Spirit from God**

The Holy Spirit

- Not an attribute or quality of God or Christ
- A person who comes from God
- Sent by Christ
- Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, **whom you have from God**, and you are not your own. 1 Cor 6:19

Test of Person— Feelings/Communication

Person n. 1) a human being. 2) corporation treated as having the rights and obligations of a person. Counties and cities can be treated as a person in the same manner as corporation. However, corporations, counties, and cities cannot have the emotions of humans such as malice, and therefore are not liable for punitive damages. (A legal definition of a person).

The Holy Spirit Speaks

The Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David Acts 1:16

The Spirit said to Philip Acts 10:19

The Holy Spirit said [to the disciples in Antioch] Acts 13:2

The Holy Spirit spoke rightly Acts 28:25

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Rev 22:17

The Holy Spirit Teaches

“For the Holy Spirit will teach in that very hour what you ought to say.”

Luke 12:12

The Holy Spirit Hears, Speaks & Guides

However, when He the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on **His own authority**, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. **John 16:13**

- He hears the truth from the Father and the Son
 - Implies a conversation
- Submissive to the authority Father & Son

The Holy Spirit has Feelings

The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Rom 8:26

And do not grieve (*lupeite*=make sad) the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Eph 4:30

For if I make you sorrowful (*lupo*), then who is he makes me glad but the one is made sorrowful by me?

2 Cor 2:2

The Holy Spirit Has a Mind

- Now He [God] who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He [Spirit] makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. Rom 8:27
- For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 1 Cor 2:10
- The Spirit and God Search Each Other's Thoughts

Conclusion

- The Holy Spirit talks, teaches, thinks, has tender feelings, and acts not on His own will (searching out the depth of God).
- The Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal power or influence like electricity or gravity.

Anti-Trinitarian Fallacy

- The opponents of the Trinity argue that the Spirit of God is the same as God and the Spirit of Christ the same as Christ.
- This position is false because some of the roles of the Holy Spirit, God, and Christ like death and intercession are not interchangeable.

Some Redemptive Roles are Not Interchangeable

- There is no Scripture that says the Holy Spirit died for our sins. The Holy Spirit and Christ are not interchangeable.
- There is no Scripture that says that Christ prays to the Holy Spirit or intercedes for us before the Holy Spirit. Therefore the Holy Spirit is not interchangeable with God.

Some Redemptive Roles are Not Interchangeable

- There is not Scripture that says that God called the Holy Spirit “my beloved Son.” The Holy Spirit is not interchangeable with Christ.
- The Three each play overlapping, but unique and different, roles in the plan of salvation.

The Spirit, God, And Christ are Not Convertible Concepts

- Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 2 Cor 3:17
- God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:24

The Spirit, God, And Christ are Not Convertible Concepts

- If the Three were truly interchangeable, these statements should be convertible, so that one can say “The Spirit is the Lord” and “The Spirit is God the Father.” The Bible offers no such statement. It is clear that God is Spirit, the Lord is Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is Spirit. **The Three are all spiritual beings with unique identities that are not interchangeable.**

Conclusion

There is one body and **one Spirit**, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; **one Lord**, one faith, one baptism; **One God and Father** of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. **Eph 4:4-6**

- **The Personhood of Each is affirmed.**
 - **The Spirit calls us in one hope**
 - **Faith in Jesus Christ & baptized into Christ**
 - **God is the Father, above all, through all, and in us all**

Conclusion

- The individuality of each is affirmed.
 - The Three are each called One.
- The nature of the relationship between the Three is not explained