

THREE-ONENESS OF GOD.

*The Scriptural doctrine of God's existing
as One and Three, presented for the
consideration of brethren.*

BY SAMUEL TROTT

Pastor of the Welsh Tract Church.

New Castle County, Delaware.

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That God is ONE appears manifest from every page of God's revelation; but I shall here content myself with quoting some of the those texts in which He has more positively taught that He is to be acknowledged and worshipped as one and only as one God. The 1st command in the Decalogue is in point. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Ex.20:3. Thus Moses on another occasion: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." Deut.6:4. Hear God also by the prophet saying, "Is there a god besides me? yea there is no god, I know not any." Isa.44:8. Again, Isa.45:22 - "For I am God and there is none else." In Isa.46:9, He says: "For I am God and there is none else; I am God and there is none like me." When we pass to the New Testament, we find Jesus teaching the same thing as taught by Moses, with His declaration prefixed that it is the first of all the commandments, "And Jesus answered him, the first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord." Mark 12:29. Paul's testimony is, I Cor.8:6 - "But to us there is but one God, &c."

Here in conclusion of my proofs on the point of God's unity, I would remark that although the doctrine of God's existing as three is, as I shall show, fully revealed in the Scriptures, yet there is nothing like the positive declarations which we find on this point, found on the other. Surely, as the Master says; the first of all the commandments is this; so it is carried out through, the law, the prophets and the New Testament. And certainly it cannot be without a special design. What then are we to learn from it but this, that the point of the first importance in the doctrine of God, is His unity? Hence the system which implies directly or indirectly God's existing as three beings or gods, or parts of God, is a greater

departure from the scriptural doctrine of God, than is that which obscures or denies His essential existence as Three in One.

That God exists in plurality, and that His plurality is limited to three, I will now show from several texts of scripture.

1st. That He has revealed Himself in plurality. The first name by which God declared Himself {as in Gen.1:1, "In the beginning God created, &c."} is in the original plural, Elohim, but in this, as in most instances, it is connected with a verb singular, though there are exceptions to this, thus showing that this plurality exists in unity. In ver.26 of this same chapter, God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness;" and in verse 27, it is said, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, &c." Thus we have God again presented to view both in plurality and in unity. In Gen.3:22, "The Lord God said, Behold man is become as one of us." In Gen.11:7, God says: "Go to let us go down and there confound their language." Isaiah says: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord God saying whom shall I send and who shall go for us." {Isa.6:8} Unity and plurality again united. In Dan.4:17, we read: This matter is by decree of the Watchers and the demand by the word of the Holy Ones. These Watchers cannot be angels, for it is not for them to decree concerning the affairs of kings and men. Christ in the figure of Wisdom says, "By me kings reign," &c. Prov.8:15. Hear Daniel also further in that same verse, "To the intent that the living may know, that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men."

2nd. I will now show this plurality to be declared in the scriptures to be Three. In Isaiah, chapter 48, we hear Him who in verse 12 and 13 says, "I am He, I am the first, I also am the last. Mine hand hath also laid the foundations of the earth," &c., in verse 16, saying, "Come ye near to me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I; and now the Lord God and His Spirit hath sent me." Who can this be that declareth all these things of Himself, but He whom He declares Himself to be, in verse 17, The Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel - the Lord thy God. And yet this glorious One says, "Now the Lord God and His Spirit hath sent me." Here then are Three clearly brought to view acting distinct parts in accomplishing the work of redemption. The Lord God, as Father,

and His Spirit, the Holy Ghost, as uniting in sending the Redeemer; and the Lord thy Redeemer, as being sent, and who in equality with the Father declares, I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth, &c. Passing on to the New Testament, at the baptism of Jesus, the Saviour, we have the same Three presented to view as sustaining their respective stations in the great plan of redemption. We see Him, who was made of a woman, and made under the law, to redeem, &c.; and who was therefore the LORD THY REDEEMER, being baptized; and the Spirit, whose office it is to testify of Christ {John 15:26} so designating, by a visible appearance, Jesus, as the Messiah, that John could unhesitatingly bear witness of Him as being the Son of God. {See John 1:33,34.} "And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him." And also the Father was manifest as approving of the work the Son was engaging in, "And, lo, a voice from heaven saying, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Mt.3:16 & 17. Again the Three are declared as equal in authority, and equally objects of the believer's trust, in the instituted form of baptism: Baptizing them in the name - not names - of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Mt.28:19. They are also revealed as being equally the object of worship, and the source of blessing; in the form of blessing. II Cor.13:14. {"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."} Again the Three are declared as sustaining their several stations in the plan of salvation, in Eph.2:18 {"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."}; in effect, in II Thes.2:13 {"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."}; and fully in I Pet.1:2. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." And in the text which has been so often referred to in this controversy, I John 5:7. Three are declared by distinct names, and as bearing testimony in heaven, not that they bear one testimony; but there are Three that bear record, it is therefore a threefold testimony, though the Three are declared to be ONE. There are many other texts in which each of

the Three is declared by one or other of His peculiar names, and as sustaining His peculiar relation and performing His peculiar part in the plan of salvation; and there are other texts also in which the Three are presented to view at once, each at the same time sustaining a distinct relation as in John 14:26 - "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, &c.," says Christ to His disciples. So that the Three must be something more than merely three names or three manifestations which He has made of Himself. God must be so Three that He can be distinctly manifested as Father, Son and Spirit, in the peculiar relations and stations of each, in the plan of salvation, at the same time. See also John 15:26, where the order is somewhat reversed.

I now pass to show from the scriptures, that whilst, as has been shown, God has so revealed Himself as three, as that He is manifested as sustaining three distinct relations, &c., at the same time, that on the other hand, He is so revealed to be One, that when spoken of as God, even in reference to the distinct relations He sustains as three, He speaks and is spoken of as absolutely God, as the one Lord God, as He whose name alone is Jehovah. I here declare, and who will make me a liar, on this point, that God is nowhere spoken of in the scriptures in a way to justify expressions like this, God in the first person, God in the second person, &c., or God in the person of the Father, God in the person of the Son, &c., or that which such expressions imply, namely: God in the first order or relation, and God in the second order or relation, &c. Expressions calculated to present God to view thus in different grades, are evidently the offsprings of an overheated zeal to support a system. And as God said to Job, so it may be said to such zealots: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel with words without knowledge?" I shall on this head confine myself to proofs to show that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each in His distinct relation, is declared absolutely and equally as God, the one God, &c. Referring to the text before quoted, I Cor.8:6, Paul says: "But to us there is but one God, the Father." - The Father then as distinct from the Lord Jesus Christ, is absolutely the one God. {See the whole text.} But Thomas addressed Christ as His Lord and his God, and no doubt Thomas had then true faith in exercise. John 20:28. And Paul says of Christ: "Who is over all God blessed forever.

Amen" {Rom.9:5}. If Christ is over all God blessed, then He must be the Most High God. And therefore the only God.

When we look into the Old Testament, we find many instances in which God is declared by one or another of His names, as, God Almighty, LORD or Jehovah, &c., &c., in which it might be presumption in us to undertake to decide whether it is as the Father, as the Son, or as the Holy Spirit, He is therein declared. It is evidently enough for us in such cases, to know that it is God, our God, the God of the Scriptures who is revealed as therein speaking or acting. In other instances by a reference to the clearer light of the New Testament, we may clearly discover, whether as Father, or as Son, or as Holy Ghost, it is that God speaks, or is declared. Thus we know from the New Testament that Christ is the Lord that hath shown us light, for He came a light into the world, &c., and this is the true light. &c. We are told, Ps.118:27, that, "God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light." God then is Christ. And so John bears testimony, John 1:1-4. We know from the New Testament that Christ Jesus is the only Saviour, - "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12. We know also that we have redemption through His blood, {Eph.1:7, Col.1:14} and therefore that He is the Redeemer of Israel. And the disciples were not deceived, when they trusted that Jesus of Nazareth had been He which should have redeemed Israel. Luke 24:19-23. But on turning to Isa. 47:4, we read: "As for our Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts {Jehovah Sabaoth, in the original} is His name, the Holy One of Israel." Hence the name Jehovah Sabaoth, or Lord of Host is here clearly given to the Redeemer as such. He "whose name alone is JEHOVAH is the Most High over all the earth." Ps.83:18. Is not then Christ in His distinct relation as Redeemer, the Most High and He whose name alone is Jehovah, and therefore distinctly the one Lord God? As to the name, Holy One of Israel, it as peculiarly belongs to Christ as the Messiah, as does the name Redeemer, and so I understand it wherever found. All the holiness of national Israel and of their multiplied rites, &c., was centered in Christ, as He was shadowed forth in them. And all the holiness of spiritual Israel is found in Him, as made unto them sanctification, holiness, &c. I Cor.1:30. - That the Father also in His distinct relation, as calling

Christ, upholding Him, giving Him for a covenant of the people, &c., is He whose name alone is Jehovah, I will now show from one text. After declaring Himself as He that created the heavens, &c., and then saying to Him whose office it is to be a light to the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners, I the Lord {Jehovah} have called thee, &c. He then goes on to say, "I am the Lord {Jehovah} that is my name and my glory will I not give to another nor my praise to graven images." Isa.42:5-8. Now looking to Isaiah chapter 43, we shall see that He who addresses Israel and says thou art mine, I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, and repeatedly in the same connection declares Himself their Saviour, their Holy One, their King, &c. {see verses 3-14, 15} as confidently and absolutely declares, as did the Father in the preceding chapter, that He is Jehovah. He says verse 3: "I am the Lord thy God," and in verse 11: "I am the Lord and besides me there is no Saviour." In both of these instances, instead of Lord it is in the original Jehovah. And in verse 12, he says to His Israel, "Therefore ye are my witnesses saith the Lord that I am God." And will not His people with Thomas bear witness, that He is the Lord their God? And can any doubt from these scriptures, as thus compared, that the Father and the Son whilst distinct, as manifested in their separate relations in the economy of salvation, are each absolutely the one Jehovah, the one self-existent, independent God in all His divine attributes? It will be discovered by those who examine the scriptures, that I have selected but few among the many proofs in point.

As to the Holy Ghost's being in His distinct relation absolutely God, we have also proofs in point. Thus by comparing II Pet.1:21, with II Tim.3:16; and Acts, chapter 5, verse 3 with verse 4, we shall find that He who in the one instance in each verse is said to be the Holy Ghost is in the parallel text declared absolutely to be God. Christ informs us, John 6:63, that it is the Spirit that quickeneth, yet Paul tells the Ephesian brethren, that, "God who is rich in mercy, &c. hath quickened us together with Christ." - Eph.2:4,5. In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established, we are told. Hence the above establish the fact that the Holy Ghost is God, the One God. I would suggest for the consideration of brethren, whether, from the declaration of Peter,

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," {II Pet.1:21} we are not authorized to understand, when the prophets speak of God speaking to them, that the Holy Ghost, in His distinct office is intended? Thus when Isaiah says, "the Lord spake to me with a strong hand and instructed me," are we not to understand that the Holy Ghost was He who thus spake to him with a strong hand, or in him, as he speaks to the saints in the these ways and instructs them? For, I presume God spake not audibly to the prophets. And whether, among many other texts, we are not to understand, in the text Amos 6:8, which is rather a remarkable one, the Lord, the God of Hosts, which saith, The Lord God hath sworn by Himself, is the Holy Ghost in His distinct office.

What, then, is the sum of this scripture testimony, concerning God as being one and three? It is, as I receive it, this:

1st. That the Lord our God is ONE Lord. ONE JEHOVAH - that besides Him we are to have no other as the object of our worship and trust.

2nd. That this one Jehovah, exists as THREE, and so exists as THREE, that in all His divine majesty and perfections, He as the Father remains the invisible God, high seated on His throne, rolling on His eternal purpose, maintaining the honors of His throne, demanding and accepting satisfaction for His transgressed law, &c. At the same time the Son, as appointed heir of all things, be made a High Priest, offer Himself in sacrifice, and having purged away the sins of His people, enter into glory as their Intercessor and Forerunner. And, also at the same time, as the Holy Ghost be a distinct Witness, through the Apostles and in the hearts of God's children, of the completion and perfection of the work of Christ and of the acceptance of His offering and intercession for His people by the Father.

And 3rd. That whilst He is thus three, these three are so absolutely ONE, that each is the one Jehovah, acting in His distinct relation, in all the fulness of the Godhead; so that whether it is the Father, predestinating, and loving; the Son, redeeming, interceding and governing, or the Holy Ghost, quickening, comforting and guiding, whatever part or point of the believer's

salvation we contemplate, we are constrained to say it is God's act, and God's perfection is in it.

Should I be asked what I mean by God's existing as three; I answer, my meaning is that He as absolutely, eternally, and essentially exists as three, as He exists as God. I feel authorized so to understand it, first: from this consideration, God has manifested Himself in the scriptures as three and I cannot conceive that in making a revelation of Himself, He would declare Himself as existing as three and one unless He so existed; so I must believe He eternally existed, as essentially three, as one. Secondly: I am confirmed in this, by His declaring Himself to be, I AM THAT I AM, - not I Am, what I eternally was not. How He exists as ONE, or how He exists as three, He has not told me. I can no more comprehend how He eternally exists of Himself, that I can how He exists as three or as three and one. It is enough for me to know that He so exists, and therefore that every part of salvation is His work, and bears His mark of perfection. But I will add, that I can no more believe that God in order to exist as three, was under the necessity of begetting and breathing Himself into existence as such, that I can, that He begat or breathed His essence into being.

Again, should I be asked: Are the Three, three persons? I answer, not in a proper sense, and I think to use a word in an indefinite and improper sense, tends to confuse and darken counsel. An undefined term can be of no use, it may do hurt.

I am authorized to speak of the Father as a person, not only because He is God, but also because as God, the scriptures speak of His person, in Heb.1:3, the Son is said to be the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person. But I understand the term person here, not to have reference to the Father in His distinct relation, as such in the Godhead, as the attachment to a system has led some to represent it; but to Him as the invisible God, it being evidently a parallel passage with Col.1:15, where Christ is said to be the image of the invisible God. I am also authorized to speak of the Son as a person, because He is God, and also because He stands in personal relation to His church as Her Husband, Head and King. And in speaking of Him as a person, I am led to contemplate Him as having some things peculiar embraced in His person, which do not belong to the Father or Holy

Spirit as such. For He is revealed as God and man, and having in Him that life which is the light of men, all in one person. In like manner the Holy Ghost is declared to be God and as exercising the attributes of a person as in I Cor.12:11 - "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." That is, I am authorized to speak of each, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, individually as manifested, and as acting, as God and therefore as a person. But I am thereby no more warranted to say they are three persons, that I am to say they are three Gods. That I may not however appear to make a greater difference, than what really exists, between what I understand to be the scriptural view of the subject, and the system of men. I will add further; that what many mean by the terms three persons, namely: that the relations and distinctions, which the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost sustain each toward the other, are of a personal nature, I believe to be a scriptural idea, revealed by the use of the personal pronouns distinctly applied to each, and in other scriptural declarations. And for this I contend in opposition to the notion that the Three are only three offices or manifestations of God. And when persons in using these terms, are careful to explain that they do not use them in the full import of the terms I do not feel so much opposition to their using them, though for reasons before assigned, I do not use them. - But when without any reserve or explanation persons say absolutely that there are three persons in the Godhead, or like Elder Osbourn say there are three proper and distinct persons, my mind revolts at it as absurd in itself, and as calculated to beguile the inexperienced into a notion of three gods or something like it. And when Eld. O. or others assume to prescribe to us that we must conform to them in the use of these terms, or be denounced as heretics, I certainly shall resist it, as being, so far as it goes, the very spirit of popery; the terms not being sanctioned by scripture authority.

I now appeal to my brethren, Does not the revelation which infinite Wisdom and Love has given us of God in the scriptures, possess in and of itself a godlike glory, beauty, simplicity, and adaptation to our cases, which the explanations and sophistry of the schools with their undefined, but consecrated forms of expression only tend to mar and confuse? Such as their explaining

God's existence as three, by their first, second, and third persons, one begetting, another begotten, and the third breathed forth, and the Godhead of the Son as begotten, thus, that He is very God of very God, begotten - not created, begotten, unbegotten, &c. Whoever may undertake to study the system of men on this subject, with the idea of comprehending the being of God within a human system, will find such study producing a very different feeling from a suitable reverence of the greatness of God, they will find it to be a leaning to their own understandings, and producing disappointed feelings, at the incapacity of their reasoning powers to grasp and arrange the subject without confusion, and a consequent bitterness of feeling, toward those who discover the weakness of their system and reject it.

On the other hand when we go as little children, to the scriptures to receive the revelation which God has been pleased to give of Himself, and to receive it just as He has given it, we are filled with reverence and awe at the greatness, the glorious majesty, and incomprehensibility of Him whom the Son has declared; and are humble before Him under a sense of how little we know or can know of God. Should reason under these circumstances attempt to approach the subject, she is confounded at once, driven back abashed, and gives place to faith whose province alone it is to apprehend the revelation of God. And she as she takes hold of this subject, is still knowing that it is the being of God, she is embracing in her arms, the great I AM THAT I AM. Yet faith apprehends all in the revelation, that we need to know, to inspire us with fear, reverence and love of God; with unreserved and childlike trust and confidence in Him, and with boldness of approach to Him, and pleading with Him in all our straits. This revelation corresponds with our experience. Our experience taught us nothing of first, second and third persons in God, of eternal generation of a begotten or breathed forth God; nor of the pre-existent soul of Christ, &c. But when our hearts were opened to understand the law, we felt that it was the law of God our Creator, which we had transgressed, that against Him and Him only we had sinned. When the plan of salvation was revealed to our souls, it appeared all of God; God in the riches of His love, and in His wisdom and power to save, was manifested to us; and with

confidence we trusted in His salvation. In our after experience, when a promise has been peculiarly applied to our case or a scripture has been opened by the Holy Ghost to our understanding, we have been ready to say with Isaiah: "The Lord spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me." Isa.8:11.

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Samuel Trott.

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