

God is One

The Form of His Substance

T*he LORD He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else” (Deut. 4:39). “The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deut. 6:4). At first sight it may appear that there is very little difference between the statements of these two verses; in point of fact a most important distinction is to be observed. The former is a declaration of the UNIQUENESS of God, the latter of the UNITY of God. Now obviously the former depends upon the latter, for if God is not one, then it cannot be said that “there is one God”. So when the Lord Jesus cited the passage in Deuteronomy ch. 6 as the first of all the commandments, it elicited the reply from His questioner, “Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but He” (Mark 12:32). Thus it is indeed that He rightly claims the undivided love and loyalty of the whole man.*

But while the truth of the UNIQUENESS of God excludes all outward rivals, that of the UNITY of God suggests an inward plurality. It is impossible to

conceive of the unity of that which is simple and singular; unity pertains only to that which is composite and plural. For example, we do not speak of the unity of an individual but of the unity of a company. Unity is the oneness that results from harmony existing between constituent parts – it necessarily presupposes plurality.

Hence the truth of the unity of God is not only necessary to that of the uniqueness of God, which presents Him as the one, great, incomparable **“I AM”**, above and infinitely beyond all rivals, but it also demands the recognition of an internal plurality, a plurality which in no wise compromises the truth that **“there is one God”**, forasmuch as it is a PLURALITY IN UNITY. It is just this fact – plurality in unity – that the Scriptures teach.

Within the undivided and indivisible essence of the one, true God certain very real distinctions appear. Although these are observable in the Old Testament, they are to be seen more clearly in the New, where we have presented to us for our faith and confession, the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (See e.g. Matt. 28:19). These three distinctions are commonly (though they should be guardedly) spoken of as Persons. There are three Persons possessed of the one divine Substance, Each being absolutely and eternally God: the Father is God (2Pet. 1:17), the Son is God (John 1:1), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3,4); yet there are not three Gods, but one God (Deut. 4:39), for God is one.

Here is a matter that transcends human reason, yet as something plainly revealed in the Word of God it demands our wholehearted acceptance. Why should we be surprised if the unfolding of the mysteries of the August Being of the infinite and eternal God presents difficulties to our poor minds? If finite minds could fully comprehend Him, He could not be God, for He could not then be infinite. It is arrogance of the most astounding sort to suppose that because

we with our tiny minds cannot grasp a matter, that it cannot be true, the more particularly when it is written clearly upon the page of Holy Scripture.

The term “Trinity”, it is acknowledged, is not found in Scripture; but if the word is not found there, then most certainly the truth is. The Scriptural term will be found in Col. 2:9 where we read of Christ, **“in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”**. “Godhead” is from the Greek *“theotēs”* and signifies the Three Persons in the one, true God. The **“fulness of the Godhead”** indicates the full, true Essence of Deity, which is shared by these Three Persons. Here the remarkable fact is stated that the full Divine Nature of the Son, that which He possesses in common with the Father and the Spirit, still belongs to Him in unrestricted measure, even though in Manhood He took a physical body. He is none less God for becoming Man. **“All the fulness of the Godhead”** without qualification resides in Him.

Now although the revelation of God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit awaited the incarnation of the Son, as the Man Christ Jesus, before that revelation could assume real clarity, yet in the Old Testament, indications are given of the truth of plurality within the Divine Unity, and of distinctions between Divine Persons. In the verse quoted from Deuteronomy ch. 6 it is to be remarked that the word “God” in the Hebrew text is *“Elohim”*, a plural noun. Thus the verse reads, **“The LORD (Jehovah, singular) our God (Elohim, plural) is one LORD (Jehovah, singular)”**, suggesting that the Divine Unity is a plurality in unity. In the Hebrew language there are three numbers: singular (one), dual (two), and plural (three or more). The same plural noun *“Elohim”* is joined in Genesis 1:1 to a singular verb, “created”: **“In the beginning God (Elohim plural) created (singular) the heaven and the earth”**, while in the following verse one of the Divine Persons is explicitly mentioned; **“The Spirit of God”**. Moving down the chapter, in v26, we read that God said, **“Let US (plural) make man in**

OUR (plural) image (singular), after OUR (plural) likeness (singular)”. Here plainly is a plurality of Persons possessed of the one Divine Likeness. The suggestion that God uses the “royal plural” might bear weight if it was His habit, but see even v29, **“Behold, I... (singular)”**. Viewing the results of the fall of man, the LORD God said, **“Behold, the man is become as ONE OF US”** (Gen. 3:22); while in determining to disperse the race at Babel He declared, **“Go to, let US go down, and there confound their language”** (Gen. 11:7). How significant also are the words of the Lord recorded in Isaiah 6:8, **“Whom shall I (singular) send, and who will go for US (plural)?”** Note that in Genesis 1:26 it is Elohim who speaks, in Genesis 11:7 it is Jehovah, and in Isaiah 6:8, Adonai. Thus plurality in unity is associated with the well-known titles Elohim (God) and Adonai (Lord), as well as with His name Jehovah.

In Zechariah 2:8 the **“LORD (Jehovah) of hosts”** declares, **“After the glory hath He sent Me unto the nations which spoiled you”**. In verses 10-11 He states, **“Lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD ... and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent Me unto thee”**. Here we have the amazing thought of Jehovah of hosts, title of absolute sovereignty, being sent to earth, and coming to earth to dwell amongst Israel. Who can be conceived of as sending Jehovah of hosts? The answer in the passage is Jehovah of hosts! Here beyond all possibility of mistake are two Divine Persons, One who sends, and One who comes, Both alike Jehovah of hosts. The reference is, of course, to the Father sending the Son at His second advent, as spoken of in Zechariah 14:1-5; Luke 21:27,28; Revelation 19:11-16 etc.

In Psalm 45:6,7 we read, **“Thy throne, O God (Elohim), is for ever and ever: the sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness: therefore God, Thy God (Elohim), hath anointed Thee with the**

oil of gladness above Thy fellows". Here one Divine Person, the Son as Hebrews 1:8 explains, is anointed by another Divine Person, the Father.

Psalms 110:1 declares, "***The LORD*** (Jehovah) ***said unto my Lord*** (Adon), ***Sit Thou at My right hand.***" The One addressed is called in v5, "***The Lord*** (Adonai) ***at Thy right hand***", verse 7 fixing the reference to Him whose experiences here below fit Him to be "***priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec***". While "*Adon*" is not necessarily a Divine title, a name of God, "*Adonai*" (a plural form) always is, so that in this Psalm again two Divine Persons are to be distinguished.

With regard to the use of the plural noun "*Elohim*" with the singular verb "created" in Genesis 1:1, we might note that "Creator" in Eccl. 12:1 is also a plural noun, for creation is attributed in Scripture to the Father (Acts 17:24-26; 1Cor. 8:6), the Son (John 1:3; Col. 1:16) and the Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4).

Turning briefly to the New Testament, we see in the Epistles to the Thessalonians some striking testimonies to the Divine Unity that embraces the Father and the Son. In 1Thess. 3:11 we find "***God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ***" as the plural subject of the singular verb "direct". Similarly in 2Thess. 2:16,17 "***Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father***" forms the plural subject of the singular verbs "comfort" and "stablish". Other passages in these Epistles where this unity is assumed are 1Thess. 1:1 and 2Thess. 1:2, where Father and Son are the joint-sphere of the believer's spiritual standing, and joint-source of the believer's spiritual support. In 1Thess. 1:1, one preposition "in", and in 2Thess. 1:2, one preposition "from", governs the two Persons. In 2Thess. 1:12, "God and the Lord Jesus Christ" are the one fount of divine grace. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed this unity. In John 14:23 He linked the Father with Himself as He said, "***WE will come unto***

him, and make OUR abode with him". For a created being to identify himself in this way with God would be unparalleled blasphemy, but these sublime words convey an unforced consciousness of Personal equality with the Father and afford us a witness which is all the more powerful for its artlessness and simplicity. We see, too, how this consciousness could be maintained in the very presence of God in John 17:11,21,22.

Matthew 28:19 reminds us of the significance of the phrase "***baptism unto*** (Greek, *eis*)". It indicates public confession or identification. Christian baptism is distinctively the public confession of "***the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost***". We have not three names here, but ONE name, yet of THREE Persons. God the Father could not include with Himself in His unique, glorious, divine Name, a created being and a mere influence! Sharing the glories of His name are the Son and the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as They share also His Divine Nature. And this, in fact, is the peculiar and fundamental truth of this present age, the basis of "***the gospel of God concerning His Son***", as of all that is now revealed to us. That which we should surely believe, the essential unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Godhead, alike God in the absolute sense, yet ONE God in perfect UNITY, we confess by being baptized "***unto THE name***".

We would assert then, of God, as to the form of His substance as made known by divine revelation, that it is a plurality in unity, that He is tripersonal and triune. That the Son and the Holy Spirit are Both Divine Persons may in addition be established separately, but not within the compass of this present article.