

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Doctrine of the Trinity

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Part 1

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The purpose of this article is to present an introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity in addition to an exegesis of a specific passage that provides key facts that must be considered in any systematic treatment of the Trinity. The first part of this article will include the definition and importance of the doctrine, the early historical development of the doctrine, and important theological concepts relating to this doctrine. The second part will undertake an exegetical analysis of a key Scripture passage on the Trinity (John 15:26–27) in order to understand its contribution to this important doctrine.

Introduction To Trinitarianism

The doctrine of the Trinity (or the Triunity) of God is a unique teaching of the Christian faith, and it is a concept that is sometimes difficult for thinking individuals to understand.

In the doctrine of the Trinity, we encounter one of the truly distinctive doctrines of Christianity. Among the religions of the world, the Christian faith is unique in making the claim that God is one and yet there are three who are God. In so doing, it presents what seems on the surface to be a self-contradictory doctrine. Furthermore, this doctrine is not overtly or explicitly stated in Scripture. Nevertheless, devout minds have been led to it as they sought to do justice to the witness of Scripture.¹

It is also true that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a product of deductive logic or philosophical reasoning. The mind of man would have never conceived of such a doctrine. "It is important to realize that the doctrine of the Trinity has not been given to the Church by speculative thought. It is not an *a priori* concept, nor in any sense derived from pure reason. This doctrine has come from the data of historical revelation. In the process of history God has revealed Himself as one God, subsisting in three Persons."²

One of the things that must be admitted initially is that an absolute understanding of the Trinity is beyond the ability of the finite mind to comprehend completely.

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 321.

² J. Oliver Buswell, "Trinity," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, 5 vols. gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 5:871.

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No man can fully explain the Trinity, though in every age scholars have propounded theories and advanced hypotheses to explore this mysterious Biblical teaching. But despite the worthy efforts of these scholars, the Trinity is still largely incomprehensible to the mind of man. Perhaps the chief reason for this is that the Trinity is a-logical, or beyond logic. It, therefore, cannot be made subject to human reason or logic. Because of this, opponents of the doctrine argue that the idea of the Trinity must be rejected as untenable. Such thinking, however, makes man's corrupted human reason the sole criterion for determining the truth of divine revelation.³

Scripture itself provides foundational elements for reasoning about complex doctrines such as the Trinity. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:8–9). Perfect understanding of many of the truths of God is beyond the capability of the human mind. Kenneth Boa aptly remarked, "since the Bible is an infinite revelation, it often brings the reader beyond the limit of his intelligence."⁴ Similarly, Erickson reminded the church that even in the glorified state, when believers will have eternal fellowship with God, they would not be able to entirely understand everything about Him.

The Trinity is incomprehensible. We cannot fully understand the mystery of the Trinity. When someday we see God, we shall see him as he is, and understand him better than we do now. Yet even then we will not totally comprehend him. Because he is the unlimited God and we are limited in our capacity to know and understand, he will always exceed our knowledge and understanding.⁵

God is the infinite Creator; humanity is, and always will be, His finite creatures. Since this is true, what should be an approach when reasoning about the doctrine of the Trinity? The following passage of Scripture reminds believers that even though many of the truths of God are beyond complete comprehension, they are given to believers in His revealed Word; therefore, it is entirely necessary to work to understand everything which is capable of comprehending: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deut 29:29). Believers must be good stewards of God's revelation, as those who watch their life and doctrine closely (1 Tim 4:16) and who correctly handle the Word of Truth (2 Tim 2:15). When examining what the Bible teaches concerning God, it becomes evident that Scripture presupposes

³ Walter Martin, *Essential Christianity* (Santa Anna: Vision House, 1975), 21.

⁴ Kenneth Boa, *Unraveling the Big Questions about God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 12.

⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 338.

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the existence of God and goes beyond that fundamental assumption to explain something about *how* He exists. Lightner provided a good summary of this point.

Holy Scripture presents God existing not only as a holy Person but also as existing in holy Trinity. The doctrine is exclusively the subject of special divine revelation in the Bible. God's revelation in nature and in humanity do not contribute to our understanding of the Trinity. Much of the written revelation of God involves mystery, yet the Trinity is no doubt the greatest mystery of all revealed truth. Though often least understood of all doctrines of the orthodox Christian faith, the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most basic of all areas of theology. Augustine, the church father, stated well the importance of this doctrine when he wrote, "In no other subject is error more dangerous or inquiry more laborious, or discovery of truth more profitable."⁶

It is clear that believers must carefully study and define the doctrine of the Trinity, in holding to what the Scriptures reveal about the Triune God. To do otherwise would result in heresy, involving serious errors of thinking with disastrous consequences for life in this present age in addition to the age to come. For instance, Chafer and Walvoord wrote: "The many indications in both the Old and New Testaments that God exists or subsists as a triune being have made the doctrine of the Trinity a central fact of all orthodox creeds from the early church until modern times. Any departure from this is considered a departure from scriptural truth. Although the word trinity does not occur in the Bible, the facts of scriptural revelation permit no other explanation."⁷ The next important task is to define the doctrine of the Trinity clearly based upon the teaching of the Scriptures, which is the topic of the following section.

General Definition Of The Doctrine Of The Trinity

The material or data for composing a definition of the Trinity comes from the pages of the Old and New Testaments, although the New Testament contains the most specific information from which a definition of the doctrine of the Trinity can be derived. "Though *trinity* is a second-century term found nowhere in the Bible, and the Scriptures present no finished trinitarian statement, the NT does contain most of the building materials for later doctrine.... The NT presents events, claims, practices, and problems from which church fathers crystallized the doctrine in succeeding centuries."⁸ Lightner

⁶ Robert P. Lightner, *The God of the Bible and Other Gods* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 90.

⁷ Lewis Sperry Chafer and John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 40.

⁸ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., "Trinity," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., gen. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:914.

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provided a concise overview of the biblical data regarding the Trinity, in addition to an outline of the dangers to be avoided in constructing a definition.

Taking all that Scripture has to say regarding the one and only true God and the three Persons of the Godhead, we find that the stress is upon unity and diversity in unity. The Bible speaks about three Persons in a similar way. Scripture ascribes deity, personality, and individuality to each. And yet the Bible also reveals that there is but one God. The ancients expressed it well when they spoke about one essence, or substance, in God who existed in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are two key truths that believers should recognize and as much as possible harmonize. The danger has always been to either fall into tri-theism—namely, a belief in three Gods—or to view the Son and Holy Spirit as being less than God. Those same dangers still exist today. Also, there is an additional error that must be avoided in our understanding of the Trinity. We must not assume that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely names or varied modes of existence for the one true God.... When theologians say that God is one and that He exists in three Persons, they must be careful not to imply that each member loses His individual identity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit remain real, individual, and true Persons, even though they are one in divine essence.... To sum up the biblical view, which avoids both of these dangers, Christians worship one God who exists in three Persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the blessed Trinity is a reminder of the supernaturalness of biblical Christianity. The doctrine defies rationalization, yet it provides for the believer the answer to the unity and diversity in the world all around us.⁹

Terms Used In Discussing The Doctrine Of The Trinity

Certain key terms permeate the discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, and they are often used both in philosophical and theological manners. It is important to have good working definitions of terms when discussing a complex doctrine like the Trinity, and so the following definitions are proposed. They were taken from the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*,¹⁰ except as otherwise noted.

Trinity: “The union of three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) in one Godhead, or the threefold personality of the one Divine Being.”

Trinitarianism: “The belief in, or doctrine of, the Trinity.”

Essence: “The inward nature, true substance, or constitution of anything.”

⁹ Lightner, *God of the Bible*, 90–91.

¹⁰ Jess Stein, ed., *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Random House, 1966).

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Substance: "The essential part or essence of a thing."

Hypostasis: "The underlying or essential part of anything as distinguished from its attributes; the substance, essence, or essential principle."

Person: "A self-conscious or rational being. In theology, any of the three hypostases in the Trinity, namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Person is, however, an imperfect expression of the truth inasmuch as the term denotes to us a separate rational and moral individual. But in the being of God there are not three individuals, but three personal self-distinctions within the one divine essence. Then again, personality in man implies independence of will, actions and feelings leading to behavior peculiar to the person. This cannot be thought of in connection with the Trinity. Each Person is self-conscious and self-directing, yet never acting independently or in opposition.... Diversity manifests itself in Persons, in characteristics, and in operations.¹¹

Subsistence: "The process of substance assuming individualization, or the quality of having timeless or abstract existence."

Ontological Trinity: "The ontological Trinity focuses on the personal operations of the Persons or the *opera ad intra* (works within), or personal properties by which the Persons are distinguished. It has to do with generation (filiation or begetting) and procession which attempts to indicate a logical order within the Trinity but does not imply in any way inequality, priority of time, or degrees of dignity. Generation and procession occur within the divine Being and carry with them no thought of subordination of essence. Thus, viewed ontologically, it may be said of the Persons of the Trinity: (1) The Father begets the Son and is He from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds, though the Father is neither begotten nor does He proceed. (2) The Son is begotten and is He from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds, but He neither begets nor proceeds. (3) The Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, but He neither begets nor is He the One from whom any proceed."¹²

Economical Trinity: "The concept of the economical Trinity concerns administration, management, actions of the Persons, or the *opera ad extra* (works outside, that is on the creation and its creatures). For the Father this includes the works of electing (1 Peter 1:2), loving the world (John 3:16), and giving good gifts (James 1:17). For the Son it emphasizes His suffering (Mark 8:31), redeeming (1 Peter 1:18), and upholding all things (Heb. 1:3).

¹¹ James D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 1300.

¹² Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor, 1987), 54.

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For the Spirit it focuses on His particular works of regenerating (Titus 3:5), energizing (Acts 1:8), and sanctifying (Gal. 5:22–23)."¹³

Constructing A Definition Of The Trinity

Many definitions or statements of the doctrine of the Trinity have been constructed. The following example is from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which defined the Trinity in these words: "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."¹⁴ This brief definition is rather cryptic because it relied heavily on several technical theological terms which are not in common use, including *generation* and *procession*. A clearer definition was given by Chafer and Walvoord.

While the doctrine of the Trinity is a central fact of Christian faith, it is also beyond human comprehension and has no parallel in human experience. It is best defined as holding that, while God is one, He exists as three persons. These persons are equal, have the same attributes, and are equally worthy of adoration, worship, and faith. Yet the doctrine of the unity of the Godhead makes clear that they are not three separate gods, like three separate human beings such as Peter, James, and John. Accordingly, the true Christian faith is not tritheism, a belief in three Gods. On the other hand, the Trinity must not be explained as three modes of existence, that is, one God manifesting Himself in three ways. The Trinity is essential to the being of God and is more than a form of divine revelation.¹⁵

This definition avoids the use of technical terms and it attempts to avoid the hazards on either side of the concept of the Trinity, that is, the tension between the oneness and the threeness of God. Ryrie did an excellent task of clarifying the problems inherent in defining the Trinity and he not only provided a good example definition, but also an explanation of each part of this definition, in addition to a Scriptural illustration of the concept of the Trinity.

A definition of the Trinity is not easy to construct. Some are done by stating several propositions. Others err on the side either of oneness or threeness. One of the best is Warfield's: There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence (B. B. Warfield, *Trinity*, The International Bible Encyclopaedia, James Orr, ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930], 5:3012).... Positively, the definition clearly asserts both oneness and

¹³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian, 1958), 27.

¹⁵ Chafer and Walvoord, *Bible Themes*, 40.

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threeness and is careful to maintain the equality and eternality of the Three. Even if the word *person* is not the best, it does guard against modalism, and, of course, the phrase “the same in substance” (or perhaps better, essence) protects against tritheism. The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three Persons. John 10:30: “I and the Father are One,” beautifully states this balance between the diversity of the Persons and the unity of the essence. “I and the Father” clearly distinguishes two Persons, and the verb, “We are,” is also plural. But, said the Lord, “We are One,” and *One* is neuter; that is, one in nature or essence, but not one Person (which would require the masculine form). Thus the Lord distinguishes Himself from the Father and yet claimed unity and equality with the Father.¹⁶

As Ryrie stated, a concise definition of the Trinity is not easy to construct, but it is possible and it is important to develop a clear Scriptural statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, as the following section will demonstrate.

Importance Of The Doctrine Of The Trinity

A correct understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is extremely important for thinking about God and conduct toward Him. Erickson provided an explanation of the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in the believer’s relationship with God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is crucial to Christianity. It is concerned with who God is, what he is like, how he works, and how he is to be approached. Moreover, the question of the deity of Jesus Christ, which has historically been a point of great tension, is very much wrapped up with one’s understanding of the Trinity. The position we take on the Trinity will have profound bearing on our Christology. The position we take on the Trinity will also answer several questions of a practical nature. Whom are we to worship—Father only, Son, Holy Spirit, or the Triune God? To whom are we to pray? Is the work of each to be considered in isolation from the work of the others, or may we think of the atoning death of Jesus as somehow the work of the Father as well? Should the Son be thought of as the Father’s equal in essence, or should he be relegated to a somewhat lesser status?¹⁷

The doctrine of the Trinity also helps in understanding that God is a deity of communion, fellowship, and community. Even before He created any other being there was communion, fellowship, and community occurring between the Persons of the Godhead. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is important because it is the basis or pattern for all true relationship and fellowship in the created world. This is true because it is an expression of the very nature of God, which has its outworking in all of His creatures.

¹⁶ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 53–54.

¹⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 322.

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The implications of the doctrine are vitally important not only for theology but for Christian experience and life. As to the Godhead, it reveals that God is the truly living One. It removes Him from any conception of stagnation or mere passivity. God in Trinity is fullness of life, living in eternal relationships, and in never-ceasing fellowship. The fellowship that constitutes the Trinity is the basis of fellowship within the human family, within the home, within society, and more especially within the Church, where the Holy Spirit is the Agent and Medium of fellowship.¹⁸

Another reason that the doctrine of the Trinity is important is because one's beliefs concerning the Trinity have implications for many other doctrines in many other fields of theology. Ryrie provided several examples of how trinitarian beliefs impact other theological concepts.

The richness of the concept of the Trinity overflows into several areas of theology. The doctrine of redemption is an obvious example, for all Persons of the Godhead are involved in that great work (John 3:6, 16; Rev. 13:8). The doctrine of revelation serves as another example, the Son and Spirit both being involved in communicating God's truth (John 1:18; 16:13). Fellowship and love within the Godhead is only possible in a trinitarian concept of God, and that fellowship is akin to the believer's fellowship with Christ (14:17)... Prayer is practiced in a trinitarian way. Though we may address any Person of the Trinity, ordinarily, according to the biblical precedent, we address the Father in the name of Christ as the Spirit directs us (John 14:14; Eph. 1:6; 2:18; 6:18).¹⁹

Historical Development Of Trinitarianism

The controversies concerning the Trinity during the early centuries of the church resulted in the emergence of systematic theology. The theological struggles of the early church produced the doctrine of the Trinity as it is essentially known today. Therefore, it is very important to understand the early history of the doctrine, because all of the crucial issues and ideas about the relations within the Godhead were formulated during those first centuries of the church's existence.

For the first two or three centuries after the death of the apostles Christian literature was mostly of a devotional nature ... given to encouraging believers in their faith and stimulating their growth in Christ. Actually it was not until doctrinal error and heresy arose that the need for theological formulations was seen. Systematic theology arose and developed in response to deviations and departures from the plain statements of Scripture.... At first there were few attempts to harmonize portions of Scripture that appeared to be in conflict. A striking exception was in the trinitarian controversy (170–

¹⁸ Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary*, 1300.

¹⁹ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 59.

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325), when the need for theological specifics and formulations was forced upon the fathers.²⁰

The earliest Christian writings emphasized the unity of God, and only gradually did church leaders feel called to write a defense of the faith to the culture of their day. In defending Christianity, they expressed themselves using the philosophical terms and concepts that were common to that culture, and this sometimes resulted in a distortion or misrepresentation of the orthodox doctrine. Lightner expressed the situation aptly.

The literature of this early period gives overwhelming evidence of belief in one God (monotheism), as opposed to the heathen belief in many gods (polytheism)... In the second century writers placed special emphasis on defending the Christian faith against the inroads of Judaism, Gnosticism, and heathenism in general. Some outstanding men among them were Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Athenagoras.... They presented a philosophical concept of Christ not at all in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. To them the Logos, or Word, of John 1:1 was not the eternally existing person of God the Son. They insisted rather than the Logos existed eternally in God only as divine reason, not as a person.²¹

Berkhof also described the inconsistency and confusion in the early church regarding the doctrine of the Trinity.

The early Church Fathers had no clear conception of the Trinity. Some of them conceived of the Logos as impersonal reason, become personal at the time of creation, while others regarded Him as personal and co-eternal with the Father, sharing the divine essence, and yet ascribed to Him a certain subordination to the Father. The Holy Spirit occupied no important place in their discussions at all. They spoke of Him primarily in connection with the work of redemption as applied to the hearts and lives of believers. Some considered Him to be subordinate, not only to the Father, but also to the Son.²²

As the church fathers expanded and revised their views on the relationship and works of the persons of the Godhead, they developed concepts and terms that could be used to describe more adequately the Triune God. "The anti-Gnostic fathers believed in one God who was not only the Creator but also the Redeemer. The law was given by him, and so was the gospel. This God was one in essence but three in subsistence. Two of the most outstanding anti-Gnostic fathers were Irenaeus (ca. 130–202) and Tertullian (ca. 160–220).

²⁰ Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 37, 66.

²² Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1937), 83.

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The latter was the first to write of the tripersonality of God and to use the term *trinity* with reference to God."²³

Erickson stated that Hippolytus and Tertullian were the first to develop an “economic” view of the Trinity. “There was little attempt to explore the eternal relations among the three; rather, there was a concentration on the ways in which the Triad were manifested in creation and redemption.”²⁴ One of the first dilemmas involved maintaining the sole rule and authority of God while also holding to a belief in the deity of Jesus Christ. Several different methods of reconciling these truths were proposed, and the ongoing struggle that was occurring in the church at that time was clearly portrayed by Lightner.

The doctrine of Christ the Logos as a separate, fully divine person distinct from the Father and the Spirit was viewed as endangering the unity of God by some. On the other hand, viewing the Logos as in some sense subordinate to the Father compromised his deity. The attempt was made to maintain the sole government of God and at the same time retain belief in the full deity of Christ. Two different schools of thought arose to which Tertullian applied the name monarchianism. Dynamic monarchianism was concerned primarily with stressing God’s unity and oneness; Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, was its most noted representative. Modalistic monarchianism was more influential; it laid more stress on the christological side of the issue, though the unity of God was still a point of interest. The three persons of the Godhead were conceived as three different modes of existence in which God manifested himself. Sabellius was the chief spokesman for modalistic monarchianism.... He said that in the Father, God revealed himself as Creator, in the Son as Redeemer, and in the Spirit as Sanctifier. Father, Son, and Spirit were therefore not three distinct persons but roles played by one person.... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were simply different modes of revelation or manifestations of the one true God. It is usually acknowledged that Sabellianism was the first major false teaching relating to the Godhead that gained a large following in the church.²⁵

The earliest struggle regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, then, involved the place or role of Christ in the Godhead. Walvoord stated, “Historically, the trinitarian doctrine turns largely on the question of whether the Son of God is eternal, whether He has the attribute of personality and the very nature of God. The problems of the doctrine of the Trinity largely arise in the studies of Christ in His incarnate state.”²⁶ He also declared, “It is safe to say that no attack on the doctrine of the Trinity can be made without attacking the person of Christ. It is also true that no attack on the person of Christ can be made without

²³ Lightner, *Evangelical Theology*, 38.

²⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 332.

²⁵ Lightner, *Evangelical Theology*, 40–41, 103.

²⁶ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 32.

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attacking the doctrine of the Trinity, as they stand and fall together."²⁷ Lightner outlined this time in church history, including the Arian heresy and the formulation of the orthodox position.

At this time the church was searching for a conception of Christ that would maintain 1) his true and full humanity, 2) his absolute deity, 3) the union of deity and humanity in one person, and 4) the necessary distinction between his deity and humanity in his person. All the christological controversies from the earliest centuries to the present stem from a failure to include all of these truths in regard to Christ. Arianism was an attempt to explain the person of Christ. Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, taught that Christ was not eternal but the first and highest creature of God, superior to man but not equal with God....

He believed Christ was of another substance from the Father. The Logos had a beginning at a point in time, having been created out of nothing before the world came into being. Athanasius, archdeacon of Alexandria, opposed Arius and Arianism. He championed the unity of God and insisted on the basis of Scripture that the Son was of the same divine essence as the Father. In 325 the Council of Nicaea convened to settle the dispute.... The final statement regarding the Father and the Son was: "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, begotten not made, being of one substance [homoousios] with the Father."²⁸

Some degree of resolution was achieved at the Council of Nicaea concerning the place of Christ in the Godhead. The next major area of controversy arose concerning the place of the Holy Spirit. Lightner described the struggles and disputes in the church concerning the Holy Spirit, which were similar to those surrounding the issue of Christ's place in the Godhead.

Soon after the Nicene Council, the Macedonian sect arose, named after Macedonius, who believed the Holy Spirit was a creature and thus not God. He was opposed by defenders of the Spirit's deity.... They defended the Spirit as fully God by appealing to the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence assigned to him in Scripture.... In 381 the second council that met at Constantinople added to the Nicene Council's brief reference to the Holy Spirit. The enlargement referred to the Spirit as "the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father, who, with the Father and Son together, is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets...." The Council of Constantinople did not state that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son but said that he proceeded from the Father. The matter of the procession of the Spirit was an attempt to describe the Spirit's precise relation to the other persons in the Godhead. That the Holy Spirit was fully divine was settled by the Constantinopolitan Creed, but a clearer statement regarding his relation to the Father was still lacking. The Western branch of the church added the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Lightner, *Evangelical Theology*, 103, 41.

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filioque (“and the Son”) phrase at the Synod of Toledo (589) to the Constantinopolitan statement. Thus the West stated that it believed the Spirit of God proceeded from, and therefore was identical to, the Father and the Son in essence.²⁹

As Lightner has stated, the “procession” of the Holy Spirit was proposed as a way of defining the Spirit’s relationship to the Father and the Son, within the sometimes obscure realm of the Ontological Trinity. Since this area is somewhat unclear and open to multiple interpretations, the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit was one of the factors that resulted in the so-called “Great Schism” between the Western Church and the Eastern Church. It was the doctrinal statement of the Western Church, however, that was affirmed as the orthodox statement of the Trinity from that point forward in history.

In his *De Trinitate* Augustine spoke for the Western branch of the church. He stressed the unity of essence and, at the same time, the trinity of persons. Each person, he said, possesses the entire essence. Other Latin theologians, such as Roscelinus and Gilbert of Poitiers, erred either on the side of God’s unity or of his tripersonality. In his *Institutes* Calvin discussed the doctrine of the Trinity at some length. In essence he defended the view set forth at Nicaea and held by the early church.³⁰

Throughout church history to the present day there have been many erroneous statements of the Trinity and many heretical views, but it is essentially the Nicene statement of the doctrine of the Trinity that stands even today as the orthodox statement concerning the Godhead.

Theological Concepts Of Trinitarianism

There are several essential concepts which must be maintained in any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. If one or more of these elements is missing or stated erroneously, then the resulting formulation could not be considered an orthodox statement of the Trinity.

The Unity Of The Godhead

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are clear that God is One, rather than many. It is a fact that monotheism is the foundation of the Hebrew-Christian tradition. Any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity must acknowledge the unity of the Godhead.

²⁹ Ibid., 103–04.

³⁰ Ibid., 41–42.

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The Distinction Of Three Members Within The Godhead

It is especially clear in the New Testament that God exists as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity must acknowledge that there are three distinct subsistences within the Godhead.

The Personality Or Personhood Of Each Of The Three Members Of The Godhead

It must be acknowledged that each member of the Godhead possesses the essential qualities of personality. Lightner defined and explained these elements.

The intellect, the emotions, and the will are the three basic elements of personality. As a self-conscious being, God possesses intellect (the ability to think rationally) and emotion (the ability to respond with feelings)... As a self-conscious being, God possesses will (the ability to act volitionally)... The Bible abounds with evidence that God possesses the constituent elements of personality; therefore, we can say on biblical ground that He is a Person, and not a force, or an "it," or even the "ground of being."³¹

Any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity must acknowledge that each member of the Godhead has the characteristics of personality or personhood.

The Deity Of Each Of The Three Persons Of The Godhead

It must be affirmed that the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Erickson stated this point in writing: "Each is qualitatively the same. The Son is divine in the same way and to the same extent as is the Father, and this is true of the Holy Spirit as well."³² Any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity must acknowledge the deity of each of the persons of the Godhead.

The Threeness And The Oneness Of God Do Not Constitute A Logical Contradiction

The finite human mind often perceives a logical contradiction in the simultaneous oneness and threeness of God. Erickson, however, stated that even the laws of logic allow for this concept.

Although the orthodox interpretation of the Trinity seems contradictory (God is one and yet three), the contradiction is not real, but only apparent. A contradiction exists if something is A and not-A at the same time and in the same respect. Modalism attempted

³¹ Lightner, *God of the Bible*, 87.

³² Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 337.

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to deal with the apparent contradiction by stating that the three modes or manifestations of God are not simultaneous; at any given time, only one is being revealed. Orthodoxy, however, insists that God is three persons at every moment of time. Maintaining his unity as well, orthodoxy deals with the problem by suggesting that the way in which God is three is in some respect different from the way in which he is one.³³

Any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity must acknowledge that it is possible for God to be One and yet Three at the same time.

The Members Of The Godhead Are Eternal

Not only is each member of the Godhead fully divine, but each member has always existed. Erickson stated this point as follows:

There have always been three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and all of them have always been divine. One or more of them did not come into being at some point in time, or at some point become divine. There has never been any alteration in the nature of the Triune God. He is and will be what he has always been.³⁴

Any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity must acknowledge that each person of the Godhead has always existed as a member of the divine Trinity.

The Existence Of Functional Subordination Within The Godhead

There are many Scriptural examples where all three persons of the Godhead defer to one another. Gruenler illustrated these relationships.

All three persons of the Triune Community are deferring to one another: the Holy Spirit to the Son, the Son to the Father, the Father to the Son's request, and Father and Son to the Spirit in honoring him as witness and truth bearer, making the circle of divine accessibility and hospitality complete. Jesus' promise that the divine Trinity is graciously at the disposal of the believing community describes both the inner relationships that denote the essential love and deference of the persons of the Trinity to one another, and the external relationship of the Triune Community to the disciples.³⁵

The three persons of the Godhead also subordinate themselves to each other to accomplish the purpose of their will, as described by Erickson.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 337–38.

³⁵ Royce G. Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 113–14.

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The function of one member of the Trinity may for a time be subordinate to one or both of the other members, but that does not mean he is in any way inferior in essence. Each of the three persons of the Trinity has had, for a period of time, a particular function unique to himself. This is to be understood as a temporary role for the purpose of accomplishing a given end, not a change in his status or essence.... The Son did not become less than the Father during his earthly incarnation, but he did subordinate himself functionally to the Father's will. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is now subordinated to the ministry of the Son (see John 14–16) as well as to the will of the Father, but this does not imply that he is less than they are.³⁶

Any orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity must acknowledge the existence of functional subordination within the Godhead.

Principles Of Interpretation

Before analyzing a specific Scripture passage to determine its implications for the Trinity, it is important to understand the principles of interpretation that must be followed when constructing a doctrine of systematic theology. Lightner commented, "Evangelical Christians believe in the doctrine of the triune God because of the teaching of Scripture as a whole and not because of one particular passage of Scripture."³⁷ No theological doctrine should be based on a single passage of Scripture in isolation from the whole counsel of God. McQuilkin remarked, "It will not do to determine the meaning of a passage independent of the rest of Scripture.... To study only one element of a revealed truth in a single passage may lead to a distortion of that truth. Inconsistencies, omissions, and wrong emphases may go undetected."³⁸ He also stated: "A good theologian is one who has taken into account all revealed truth about God and has related each part to a consistent whole.... A specific doctrine or theme must be related to all other teaching that might affect that particular doctrine. In this way, the various areas of doctrine are combined into what might be called a *systematic* theology."³⁹

As previously stated, the Scriptures do not contain an explicit trinitarian statement but instead provides many isolated foundational concepts for formulating the doctrine of the Trinity. The process of building a theological system was clearly described by Ramm.

A theological system is to be built up exegetically brick by brick. Hence the theology is no better than the exegesis that underlies it. The task of the systematic theologian is to

³⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 338.

³⁷ Lightner, *God of the Bible*, 90.

³⁸ Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 209, 219.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 220, 230, 232.

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commence with these bricks ascertained through exegesis, and build the temple of his theological system.... Every sentence has implications.... All the important references will be treated exegetically. Then the individual references will be used to forge the unified Biblical doctrine of the subject matter.... The theologian must use his texts in view of their context, and in view of their place in the Scriptures.⁴⁰

Erickson explained that the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity is a task that will put the methods and discipline of systematic theology to the test. "Since the Trinity is not explicitly taught in Scripture, we will have to put together complementary themes, draw inferences from biblical teachings, and decide on a particular type of conceptual vehicle to express our understanding.... Thus formulating a position on the Trinity is a genuine exercise in *systematic* theology."⁴¹ In the second part of this article, John 15:26–27 will be analyzed to determine which of the essential elements of the doctrine of the Trinity are supported by this passage of Scripture.

Conclusion

The first part of this article concerning the doctrine of the Trinity has identified the difficulties involved in thinking through this issue, and it has presented many of the terms which have been developed throughout church history as aids in the process of defining and describing the Trinity. It is important to be mindful of each of the theological concepts that are taught in the Scriptures, which must all be reconciled into a coherent doctrine: 1) the unity of the members of the Godhead; 2) the distinctiveness of the three members of the Godhead; 3) the fact that such unity and separateness do not constitute a logical contradiction; 4) the absolute deity, eternity, and personhood of each member of the Godhead; and, 5) the fact that there are relationships within the Godhead involving functional subordination among the members. A correct conception of the doctrine of the Trinity is extremely important for understanding the nature of God. Furthermore, beliefs concerning the Trinity will have important implications for many other areas of theology. The second part of this article will focus upon an exegetical analysis of a passage of Scripture which provides greater understanding of the relationship between the members of the Trinity.

⁴⁰ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 169, 170, 172, 178.

⁴¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 322.

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Part 2

The first part of this study examined the doctrine of the Trinity from a theological perspective. It discussed many of the concepts which form the basis for a proper biblical definition of the Trinity, as well as some principles of interpretation for using the exegesis of a specific passage to construct a doctrine of systematic theology. With the preceding concepts in mind, the purpose of this study will be to analyze a key passage of Scripture to discover its contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity. This passage states: “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26–27, NASB).

OVERVIEW OF JOHN 15:26–27 FROM A TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

The Gospel of John as a whole contains a wide variety of Scriptural evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity and it could be described as the beginning of systematic theological thought concerning the nature of the Godhead.

Through John’s Gospel runs the richest vein in the NT for the Church’s doctrine of the trinity—a wide, deep, and subtle account of divine distinction-within-unity. In John, Father, Son, and Spirit/Paraclete are clearly distinct divine persons, who play differentiated roles in the general divine enterprise of life-giving and life-disclosing. Yet their primordial and unexplained unity is revealed and exemplified by common will, work, word, and knowledge, and by reciprocal love and glorifying. The same six phenomena that distinguish the persons—especially by subordination of Son and Spirit—also unite them.... In John’s Gospel one finds “the beginning of dogmatic reflection in the strictest possible sense,” for John displays real interest in what would later be called the mystery of the holy trinity....¹

Regarding John 15:26, Van Doren declared, “This verse furnishes decisive proof of the doctrine of the Trinity. Both the essential identity and the personal distinction of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit, are clearly stated (compare also 14:16, 18, 26; 16:7, 13; 20:22).”² Lange elaborated on the importance of John 15:26 as a supporting passage for the Trinity when he said, “This is one of the principal proof-texts for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Both the essential identity and the personal distinction of the Father (παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς), of the Son (ἐγὼ πέμψω), and of the Holy Spirit (ἐλθὲν ὁ παρακλητός) are

¹ Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:917–18.

² William H. Van Doren, *Gospel of John: Expository and Homiletical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 1157.

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very clearly stated, especially when compared with 14:16, 18, 26; 20:22. Our passage is also the *locus classicus* for the technical word *procession* of the Holy Ghost.”³

In regard to the place of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead, Turner and Mantey have stated: “This is one of the most important Paraclete verses. In this one verse one may find arguments for proving that (1) the Spirit came from the Father through the Son (the view of Eastern Orthodoxy) or that (2) the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son (the Roman Catholic view). This was one of the causes for the historical split between the eastern and western churches—the Great Schism.”⁴ It appears, then, that this passage contains some of the key essentials for the doctrine of the Trinity. It will be the task of the following sections to determine how the truths revealed in John 15:26–27 contribute to this doctrine.

Contextual Outline Of John 15:26–27

It is important to understand this specific passage in light of the context and message of the Gospel of John as a whole. The Gospel of John contains much information about the relationships between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Son in John is on a mission: He does not do His own will, but that of His Father, the One who sent Him (4:34; 5:30, 38; 8:29). Though the Son has a will of His own (17:24), He subordinates it to the Father. The Spirit in John is subordinate in turn to the Son. He functions as pure agent, bestowed by Jesus (1:33; 20:22) and sent as Paraclete (14:26; 15:26; 16:13ff) to combine the functions of advocating legal assistance and comforter to the community of believers. Yet this very super- and subordination of wills that distinguishes the three also unites them. For only one divine will is expressed—that of the Father who sends the Son and (with the Son) the Spirit.... The functional subordination of Son and Spirit insures that only one message is taught.... [They] seem to function as ways of expressing distributive subordination of divine roles in life-giving and also as expressions of primordial divine in-ness or oneness (10:30, 38) of Father, Son, and Spirit.... There is little doubt that John presents a functional “hierarchy,” the Father ultimately in control. Son and Spirit seem relatively unoriginal in function. They are always sent. The Spirit never sends the Son on missions, and neither Son nor Spirit ever sends the Father.⁵

In looking at the events portrayed in the book of John, it becomes apparent that Jesus revealed Himself in “ever-widening circles (a few disciples, His mother and friends at

³ John P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: John* (1897; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 469.

⁴ George A. Turner and Julius R. Mantey, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 309.

⁵ Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, 4:917.

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Cana, to Jerusalem, 'the land of Judea,' Samaria, Galilee), but is rejected both in Jerusalem and Galilee."⁶ When He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (declaring Himself as Messiah), the Greeks were drawn to Him but the Jews rejected Him. "So He *turns*—and this is indeed a *turning point* in this Gospel—to the inner circle, and tenderly instructs the Twelve in the Upper Room."⁷

In the "Upper Room Discourse" Jesus comforted His disciples, admonished them, and explained to them what was to come. In the last section of John Chapter 15, Jesus told of the opposition and hostility of the world toward Him and toward anyone who followed Him. Bernard described the immediate context of John 15:26–27.

Verses 26–27 follow at once upon the rebuke (vv. 21–25) pronounced upon the enemies of Jesus. Their hostility was blameworthy. And in the future they will be proved in the wrong by the witness of the Spirit (v. 26) as well as by the witness of the apostles (v. 27). The rendering of ὁ παρακλητος by advocate is here demanded by the context, to which the rendering comforter would be quite foreign. Jesus had explained that the hostility of the Jews to Him was sinful, for they ought to have recognised His Divine mission in His words and works (vv. 22–24). They hated Him, not knowing Him, although they ought to have known Him. But when the Paraclete came, He would bear true testimony to Jesus, being indeed the Spirit of Truth (v. 26). The Paraclete is the Divine *advocatus* defending the Righteous One, and pleading His cause against false accusers. He is not, as at 1 Jn 2:1, represented as pleading the cause of man with God, but rather as pleading the cause of Christ with the world.⁸

The immediate context, then, of John 15:26–27 involves Jesus' response to the animosity and opposition of the world. He encouraged His closest followers with the important message of the coming of the Spirit of Truth to help them continue in His absence.

Grammatical Observations On John 15:26–27

Since John 15:26 is the key verse which contains concepts regarding the Trinity, a diagram has been constructed to show the relationships of the various parts of the sentence.

⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 441.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), 2:498.

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The main subject-verb in the clause is “He will testify,” and this indicates that the emphasis of this verse is on the work of witnessing which the Holy Spirit will accomplish when He comes. However, the subordinate clauses contain several important truths about the Holy Spirit and His relationship to God the Father and God the Son. In the following sections, specific grammatical observations will be given for each phrase of this passage in order to explore its contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity.

“When The Paraclete Comes”

One feature of this phrase is that the second aorist subjunctive indicates an undefined time reference, and its position in the sentence emphasizes the *coming* action of the Paraclete. Morris added, “We should also observe that the ‘otan which introduces the verse leaves the time indefinite, whenever.”⁹ Another feature of this phrase is the use of the noun for *Paraclete*. Bernard provided some lexical insights and explained how exclusively the Apostle John used this word.

The term παρακλητος does not occur in the Greek Bible outside the Johannine writings. On the other hand, John does not use παρακαλειν or παρακλησις, the latter word being specially Lucan and Pauline, while the former is common to most of the N. T. writers. Etymologically, παρακλητος is a passive form, and is equivalent to the Latin *advocatus*, signifying one who is “called in” to give help or advise, and being especially used of the counsel for defense. In classical writers this is always the meaning.... Although the verb παρακαλειν does not appear in John, an examination of its usage throws some additional light on the meaning of παρακλητος. παρακαλειν is to call a person to stand by one (παρα), and hence to help in various ways, e.g. (a) as a witness, to be present when a thing is done; (b) as an adviser; (c) as an advocate. The verb is specially applied to the invoking of a god, and calling him to help. It appears from these passages that παρακλητος is naturally used for a Divine helper called in, either as a witness (15:26), or as an advocate (16:8), or as an adviser (16:13).¹⁰

When discussing the use of the word *Paraclete*, it should be stated that, although the Holy Spirit is more often in mind, the word was also used in reference to Jesus.

We should note that the first mention of the Paraclete in John speaks of him as “another Paraclete” (John 14:16), with the clear implication that Jesus is also a Paraclete. Inevitably we recall 1 John 2:1, the only passage outside of John 14:16 where the term occurs: If anyone sins we have a Paraclete with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. Here Jesus is depicted as an intercessor in the court of heaven, representing the cause of his own, whereas the Holy Spirit is the Paraclete from heaven, supporting his own in the face

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 684.

¹⁰ Bernard, 496–97.

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of a hostile world. The ministries of the two Paracletes, however, are thought of not as simultaneous, but as successive. The Spirit-Paraclete takes the place of the Paraclete Jesus after Jesus' departure to the Father.¹¹

It is evident that in functioning as *Paracletes*, Jesus and the Spirit each have a different focus. They both serve as *Paracletes*, but not in the same respect. Regarding the role of the Holy Spirit, Burge stated the commonly held view of His function.

Parakletos (generally translated "Counselor" or "Comforter") should be taken as "Advocate" since it is a judicial title describing someone aiding a legal argument. The Spirit-Paraclete will not only live in the disciples, enabling them to recall the words of Jesus (14:26); now he will become a witness, supporting their trial (either literally or figuratively).¹²

One further question is, "When will the Paraclete come?" The simple answer to this question is, "When He is sent," and the sending of the Holy Spirit will be discussed in the next section.

"Whom I Will Send To You From The Father"

The first interesting feature of this phrase is the emphatic use of the pronoun ἐγώ, which underscores Christ's active role in the process of sending the Holy Spirit. Newman and Nida also demonstrated, "The locational relations in the clause 'I will send him to you from the Father' are rather complex; and since the role of Jesus as the agent is primarily causative, it may be necessary to translate this clause 'I will cause him to go from the Father and to come to you.'"¹³

The standard Greek lexicon classified the use of πέμπω in John 15:26 under "the sending of human beings and other beings of a personal character,"¹⁴ and it continued to state, "John's gospel is dominated by the thought that Jesus is sent by God from heaven" and

¹¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 73.

¹² Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 421.

¹³ Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of John* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), 497.

¹⁴ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 641.

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"Jesus, or God in His name, will send the Paraclete or Holy Spirit."¹⁵ The usage of πέμπω in this particular case, then, implies the personality of the one being sent.

Regarding the time of the sending of the Spirit, Hendriksen declared, "The sending of the Spirit was a matter of the future. Pentecost had not yet arrived. Hence, the future tense is used: 'I will send.'"¹⁶ Godet added this comment: "In saying: *whom I will send*, Jesus is necessarily thinking of His approaching reinstatement in the divine condition; and in adding: *from the Father*, He acknowledges His subordination to the Father, even when He shall have recovered that condition."¹⁷ Morris also explained the time of the Spirit's coming.

Jesus is surely saying that, when he leaves this earth to go to be with his Father, he will send the Spirit to them, the Spirit who is with the Father. There appears to be some emphasis on the fact that, even though it is Jesus who will send the Spirit, it is from the Father that he will send him. Indeed, it can be said that it is from the Father then the Spirit 'proceeds.'¹⁸

Just as the first phrase of John 15:26 emphasizes the active role of the Spirit in *coming*, this second phrase emphasizes the active role of Christ in *sending* the Spirit. Bernard introduced the different ways in which the sending of the Spirit is stated: "So also at 16:7, the promise is that Jesus will send the Paraclete; but at 14:16 He is to be given by the Father in response to the prayer of Jesus, and at 14:26 the Father is to send Him in the Name of Jesus. The Lucan doctrine is that Jesus sends the Spirit, the promise of the Father (Luke 24:49, Acts 2:33)."¹⁹ Morris also explained this issue.

Notice that whereas in 14:16 Jesus said that the Father would give the Spirit in response to His prayer, and in 14:26 that the Father would send Him in Christ's name, now Jesus says that He Himself will send Him from the Father. Notice the use of the emphatic εγω.... It is plain that the Spirit is regarded as being connected in the most intimate fashion with both the Father and the Son. The sending of the Spirit is an activity which concerns them both.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., 642.

¹⁶ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 317.

¹⁷ Frederick L. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (1893; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2:304.

¹⁸ Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 533.

¹⁹ Bernard, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 498.

²⁰ Morris, *Gospel According to John*, 684.

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The question then becomes, “Who is sending the Spirit?” Is it the Father or the Son or both of them? Is there an actual inconsistency between these seemingly contradictory statements of Scripture? Van Doren observed, “The sending by the Father in answer to the Son’s prayer, the sending by the Father in the Son’s name, and the sending by the Son Himself, are thought of as one sending.”²¹ Turner and Mantey have added:

In 14:16 Jesus will take the initiative in asking for the coming of the Paraclete but the Father sends Him; here Jesus will send Him. The significance lies not in the apparent contradiction but in the intimacy of the connection between Father and Son. Likewise in 14:26 the sender is the Father but the gift is in the name of the Son and in response to the Son’s request as in 14:15. Here, although the Paraclete proceeds from the Father, he is sent by the Son and bears witness to the Son; so the association is very intimate indeed. As in Acts, so here, the function of the Spirit is to bear witness to Christ along with the disciples (cf. Acts 1:8; 4:29–33).²²

There do appear to be several ways of viewing the sending of the Holy Spirit based on these passages, and Morris clarified the issue.

Jesus says, “I will send” him and send him “from the Father.” There is a variety of ways of looking at the sending of the Spirit, and elsewhere we find that Jesus prays to the Father that he would send the Spirit (14:16). Or it may be said that the Father sends the Spirit in Christ’s name (14:26). Again, Jesus can say simply that he will send the Spirit (16:7). From all this it seems that in some way both the Father and the Son are involved in the sending of the Spirit. We ought not to think of division or of compartmentalization within the Godhead. Clearly these various ways of putting it bring out the truth that all three persons of the Godhead take part in bringing to believers the help they need as they seek to do their service of God in this difficult world.²³

It is clear, then, that all of the Persons of the Trinity are involved in this ministry. The important truth expressed by Morris was that one must not think of any kind of division, partition, or compartmentalization within the Godhead. Even though there are several ways of stating the sending of the Spirit, they are all describing a single sending.

“The Spirit Of Truth”

Here the Holy Spirit is characterized by the quality of truth. Lange explained how this revelation is built upon a previous statement of His qualities. “He is first promised as the Spirit of faith and of the living knowledge of Christ (14:16). Here He is promised as the

²¹ Van Doren, *Gospel of John*, 1157.

²² Turner and Mantey, *John*, 309–10.

²³ Morris, *Expository Reflections*, 533.

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Spirit of steadfast testimony for Christ.”²⁴ In describing why the quality of truth is emphasized, Godet declared, “Jesus here designates the Spirit as *Spirit of truth*, in order to place Him in opposition to the falsehood of the world, to its voluntary ignorance. The Spirit will dissipate the darkness in which it tries to envelop itself.”²⁵ This sense of the true testimony to be given by the Holy Spirit is certainly evident in this phrase, but there is also something deeper that reflects the very nature or character of the Holy Spirit, as Bernard demonstrated.

In these Last Discourses, [the Spirit of truth] is but another name for the Paraclete who is to be sent after Jesus has been withdrawn from the sight of men. The spirit of truth is the Spirit which brings truth and impresses it on the conscience of the world. In this passage the leading thought is of the witness of the Spirit to Jesus, infallibly true, however perverted the opinion of the world about Him may be. The phrase [the Spirit of truth] has a double meaning. Primarily (a) it is the Spirit which brings truth and gives true testimony, but (b) this is the case because the Spirit has truth as the essential characteristic of His being. So, also, the Logos is [full of truth] (1:14), and Jesus says, later in this discourse, [“I am ... the truth”] (14:6).²⁶

Not only is the Holy Spirit the One who acts truly and testifies truly, but He is also the One who *is truth* at the essence or core of His existence. Abbott classified John 15:26 under the use of apposition to explain or define.

Apposition is a method of expressing the phrase “that is to say” without writing it, by “apposing” a second word with a case—ending to the first word with the same case-ending. This construction conduces to brevity and force, but sometimes to obscurity.... In most of the instances the writer places at or near the end of a sentence some word or clause introduced without any preparatory or connecting word.... “But when the Paraclete shall have come—the *Spirit of truth*.” Emphasis is laid on the Paraclete, or Advocate, as not being one of the ordinary kind—the kind that takes up a client’s cause, good or bad, and makes the best of it—but being “holy,” and a “*Spirit of truth*.”²⁷

The *Spirit of truth*, then, is an important expansion on the meaning of the noun *Paraclete* that is introduced in the first phrase of this verse. In effect, this allows one to place an “equals” sign between Paraclete and Spirit, so that when Paraclete is seen elsewhere in the Gospel of John it will be clear that Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit. In this regard, Erickson said, “Jesus identifies the Counselor as the Holy Spirit. Thus, when he mentions

²⁴ Lange, *John*, 468.

²⁵ Godet, *John*, 304.

²⁶ Bernard, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 499.

²⁷ Edwin A. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906), 37, 38, 40.

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the Counselor elsewhere, it is clear to whom he is referring.”²⁸ This phrase also allows us to impute the specific characteristic of “truth” to the Spirit/Paraclete, and the importance of this characteristic will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.

“Who Proceeds From The Father”

A very interesting feature of this phrase is the tense of the verb “to proceed.” This present deponent middle indicative verb is between, on the one side, the undetermined future time implied by ἔλθῃ along with the future active indicative of πέμπω, and on the other side, by the future active indicative of μαρτυρήσει. An exegesis of this passage must somehow account for this interesting change of tense.

It must be observed that the second verb differs entirely from the first; *ekporeuesthai*, to proceed from, as a river from its source, is altogether different from *to be sent*: the *ek*, out from, which is added here to *para*, from the presence of, also marks a difference. But especially does the change of tense indicate the difference of idea: *whom I will send* AND *who proceeds from*. He whom Jesus will send (historically, at a given moment) is a divine being, who emanates (essentially, eternally) from the Father. An impartial exegesis cannot, as it seems to me, deny this sense.²⁹

Godet understood the change to the present tense to imply the eternal nature of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father. On the other hand, there are some that characterize the tense of this verb as a “futuristic” present tense.

Although *ekporeuetai* could imply either an emanation from a divine source or a procession on a mission, only *ek tou patros* would be appropriate to denote an eternal procession from the being of the Father, as the creeds testify, which read to *ek tou patros ekporeuomenon*.... Following *pempsō* and preceding *martyrēsei*, the verb *ekporeuetai* should probably be taken as a futuristic (not a timeless) present.³⁰

In contrast to this, Hendriksen explained why the procession should be viewed as a timeless present: “The procession was taking place at the very moment when Jesus was speaking (if matters which in reality transcend time may be viewed from the aspect of time); hence, the present tense is used. Not improperly in such a connection this present tense has been called timeless present.”³¹

²⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 206.

²⁹ Godet, *John*, 305.

³⁰ Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 3:1203.

³¹ Hendriksen, *John*, 317.

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Most of the controversy regarding the application of John 15:26 to the Trinity, and especially concerning the place of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, is focused on this phrase. What does this verse teach concerning the relationships within the Godhead? Is the earlier *sending* to be equated with the *proceeding* here, or is something different implied by the *proceeding*? Does the present tense of *proceeds* indicate something of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Spirit (the Ontological Trinity), or is this a simple statement of the fact that the Spirit was coming to perform His ongoing work in the world (the Economical Trinity)? How is the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit to be defined, and how is this doctrine stated in the orthodox creeds of the Christian faith?

One commentator emphasized an important truth that should not be overlooked when wrestling with all of the questions regarding this passage. Pink described how these statements express the unity of the Godhead:

That the Spirit is here said to “proceed from the Father” (a statement which has split the Greek and Roman Church, into whose differences we shall not here enter) is supplementary to what the Lord had said in 14:26. There the Comforter was to be sent in Christ’s name: here He proceeds from the Father. The two statements placed side by side, bring out the unity of the Godhead. This additional word also shows that the Spirit was not exclusively subordinate to Christ, as some have argued from 14:26, “another Comforter.” The Spirit would further Christ’s interests, and be unto the disciples (only in another way) all that Christ would have been unto them had He remained on earth.³²

This is an important reminder that, whatever the implications of “proceeds from the Father,” the unity of the Godhead must hold a central place in Christian thinking.

Sending Versus Proceeding: Parallelism Or Pleonasm?

One interpretation of the *sending* (“whom I will send”) and the *proceeding* (“who proceeds”) is that these two phrases were intended as parallel thoughts that represent the same concept. This position was taken by Beasley-Murray in his analysis of John 15:26.

The clauses relating to the Paraclete, “whom I will send from the Father,” and “who proceeds from the Father,” are set in synonymous parallelism, and so express the same idea in variation. This means that the latter clause must be interpreted of the sending of the Spirit on mission to humankind, and not of the so-called “procession” of the Spirit from the Father, as many Greek Fathers maintained, and as is represented in the historic

³² Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1945), 3:37.

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creeds. The sending of the Spirit in many respects corresponds to the sending of the Son (cf. 8:42; 13:3; 17:8). The Spirit's task is to "bear witness" concerning Jesus....³³

Beasley-Murray demonstrated that if these phrases constitute synonymous parallelism, then it is an easy step to restrict their application only to the economical work of the Spirit. If these ideas are synonymous, then the procession must be interpreted in light of the sending of the Spirit to do the practical work of witnessing to the disciples and the world.

Synonymous parallelism is a commonly held view, but it is a view that is not without problems, as Godet explained: "The attempt is made to escape the charge of tautology by saying that the first clause indicates the relation of the Spirit to Christ, and the second His relation to God (Keil); as if in the latter were not already contained the *from God*, which repeated in the second clause, would form the most idle pleonasm."³⁴ Synonymous parallelism has both the flaws of logical and grammatical redundancy.

The historical facts of salvation, to the view of Jesus, rest upon eternal relations, as well with reference to Himself, the Son, as to the Spirit. They are, as it were, the reflections of the Trinitarian relations. As the incarnation of the Son rests upon His eternal generation, so the mission of the Holy Spirit is related to His eternal procession from the very centre of the divine being. The context is not in the least contradictory to this sense, as Weiss thinks; on the contrary, it demands it. What Jesus sends testifies truly for Him only so far as it comes forth from God.³⁵

Godet's argument was that these phrases do not express parallel or synonymous thoughts but that something additional is being communicated about the Spirit, especially regarding His ontological relationship to the Father. Godet would state that this additional idea is essential to the work of the Spirit, because the eternal relations in the Godhead are the foundation for His work in the world. There are essentially two views or interpretations of John 15:26 regarding the Spirit: the Economical Trinity view and the Ontological Trinity view.

Economical Trinity View

The Economical Trinity view maintains that this verse was never intended to make a statement about the eternal relations in the Godhead, but only about the coming, the sending, or the proceeding of the Spirit (variously stated) to continue the work of Christ

³³ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Word Biblical Commentary) (Waco: Word, 1987), 276.

³⁴ Godet, *John*, 304–05.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

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in the world. One account of this view was provided by Brodie, who based his argument on the increasingly active role of the Spirit in the Gospel of John.

The sense of the Spirit's involvement is heightened by the fact that, in contrast to the two earlier references to the Companion (14:16, 26), the picture of the Companion which is suggested here is quite active. These earlier references (esp. 14:16) had spoken of the Companion in a way that was rather passive, as one who was given and sent. But now (15:26) the Companion is described not only as being sent but also as "coming," and then, in a parallel phrase which puts intensified emphasis on the idea of an active role, the Companion is described simply as "proceeding" ("the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father"). The emphasis of the text then is not so much on the inner dynamics of God as on the increasing role of the Companion in the outer world, a role which consists of witnessing about Jesus.³⁶

Another statement of this view was given by Bernard, whose argument was based on the meaning of ἐκπορεύεσθαι as being synonymous with the *coming* and the *sending*.

ἐκπορεύεσθαι occurs once elsewhere in John, see at 5:29, where it is used of the dead "coming forth" out of their graves. Here it is used in the same way of the Spirit "coming forth" from God in His mission of witness. To interpret the phrase of what is called "the Eternal Procession" of the Spirit has been a habit of theologians, which has been the cause of endless disputes between East and West as to the "Procession" of the Spirit from the Son as well as from the Father. As far back as the fourth century, at all events, the clause τὸ ἐκ (not παρὰ) τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευομενον has found a place in the Creed as descriptive of the Holy Spirit, and is taken from the verse before us. But to claim that this interpretation was present to the mind of John would be to import into the Gospel the controversies and doctrines of the fourth century. ὁ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται does not refer to the mysterious relationships between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, but only to the fact that the Spirit who bears witness of Jesus Christ has come from God (cf. Rev 22:1, where in like manner the river of the water of life is described...³⁷

Additionally, Ryrie reminded readers of the change of tense from future to present in the context of John 15:26, and he believed that it is inappropriate to infer eternal relations from this tense change. "The idea of eternal procession has to lean hard on the present tense of the word *proceeds* in John 15:26, an emphasis which is in my judgment misplaced. The verse does not really seem to relate anything about the mutual eternal relationships within the Trinity but rather what the Spirit would do to continue the work of the Lord

³⁶ Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 490.

³⁷ Bernard, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 499.

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Jesus after His ascension.”³⁸ Another advocate of the Economical Trinity view is Morris, who based his argument primarily on the use of the word *para* rather than *ek* following the verb.

The Spirit’s relationship to the Father is brought out by saying that He “proceedeth from the Father...” Probably not too much emphasis should be placed on the meaning of this verb. The passage is not concerned with the eternal mutual relationships of the Persons of the Trinity, but with the work the Spirit would do in this world as a continuation of the ministry of Jesus. The particular function of the Spirit which occupies us here is that of witness, and specifically of witness to Christ. When Christ is taken from the earth, the Spirit will continually bear witness concerning Him. The passage strengthens the conviction that the word translated “Comforter” has legal significance. The Spirit, so to speak, conducts Christ’s case for Him before the world.³⁹

In another place Morris also expressed the Economical Trinity view. He warned interpreters not to misapply the verse by stretching it to cover more than a close relationship between the Father and the Holy Spirit. “Jesus is clearly speaking about the Holy Spirit’s mission in the church (I will send ...), whereas the theologians were referring to the eternal relationship between the Father and the Spirit. It was not really wise to take words that apply to one temporal activity of the Spirit and apply them to an eternal relationship. But the words certainly emphasize the close relationship between the Father and the Spirit, and that is important.”⁴⁰ Morris’ warning not to take words that apply to one temporal activity of the Spirit and apply them to an eternal relationship is valid if, indeed, the words were only meant to apply to a temporal activity. If the words were meant to tell something of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Spirit, then it would be incorrect not to apply them to that eternal relationship. In summary, the Economical Trinity view seems to be based primarily on the “synonymous parallelism” interpretation of “whom I will send” and “who proceeds from the Father.” However, this view does not adequately account for the change to present tense for the word “proceeds,” but rather minimizes its significance.

The Ontological Trinity View

The Ontological Trinity view holds to the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father, which ultimately provides the foundation for the economical work of the Spirit in the

³⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor, 1987), 54–55.

³⁹ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 683–84.

⁴⁰ Morris, *Expository Reflections*, 533–34.

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world. Hendriksen expressed this view, basing his argument on the tense change of the verb.

Here in 15:26 the emphasis is on the activity of the Son in the sending of the Spirit, and on the fact that this Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father.... The procession was taking place at the very moment when Jesus was speaking (if matters which in reality transcend time may be viewed from the aspect of time); hence, the present tense is used. Not improperly in such a connection this present tense has been called timeless present. The inter-trinitarian relationship which is indicated here—the procession of the Spirit—is eternal, that is, transcends time.⁴¹

In this regard, Cook showed how the Economical Trinity and Ontological Trinity are both referenced according to the tense of the verb. “In contrast to the [sending], which refers to an act ... (proceeds) is a present tense and may well refer to an eternal relationship (understanding this as a timeless present). If this be so, the two future verbs of the verse refer to the Spirit’s economical relationship to the Godhead, while the present verb refers to His ontological relationship.”⁴² Lange also represented this view and takes same the approach outlined by Godet that to view the *procession* as synonymous with the *sending* would form an unreasonable tautology. He stated that the economical or soteriological work of the Spirit must have an ontological or theological basis.

The noun [“proceeds”] nowhere occurs in the New Testament, and belongs to the ecclesiastical language, but it is legitimately formed from the verb ... which is here (and here alone) used of the Holy Ghost, and denotes the characteristic individuality of the person (not the essence, which is the same in all Persons) of the Holy Spirit, as Sonship or eternal generation is the propriety of the Son, unbegotten paternity the propriety of the Father. The Nicene orthodoxy refers the procession of the Spirit to the eternal, metaphysical procession from the Father. Christ speaks here no doubt mainly of the Trinity of revelation and of the historic mission of the Holy Ghost in the Christian Church and in believers. Yet it is significant that while He speaks of His sending of the Spirit in the future tense ..., He speaks of the procession of the Spirit from the Father in the present ..., as if He intended to intimate a permanent relation of the Spirit to the Father. The effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the historic manifestation of His eternal procession from the Father, and bears a similar relation to the latter as the incarnation of Christ does to the eternal generation. At all events we have a right to deduce the economical Trinity from the ontological or immanent Trinity; the former is the revelation of the latter; for God manifests Himself as He is.⁴³

⁴¹ Hendriksen, *John*, 317.

⁴² Robert W. Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 64.

⁴³ Lange, *John*, 469.

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In summary, the Ontological Trinity view adequately accounts for the change in tense of the verb “proceeds.” It also overcomes the charge of tautology in the synonymous parallelism approach and explains the difference in meaning between the phrases “whom I will send” and “who proceeds from the Father.” This view also fits the context of the verse regarding the witnessing work of the Spirit in the world, but it goes further by showing how the eternal relationships within the Godhead provide the foundation or basis for the work of the Spirit in the world.

The Doctrine Of The Procession Of The Holy Spirit

As Bernard has stated, the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit is taken from the verse before us (John 15:26). Walvoord defined this doctrine in the following words: “The doctrine of procession has to do with the being and eternity of the Holy Spirit in His relation to the Father and the Son. As a division of the doctrine of the Trinity, it affirms that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, the same in substance and essence, and equal in power, eternity, and glory. The proper statement of the doctrine is that the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son.”⁴⁴

The concept of procession cannot be easily explained, but it is a term that has been used to describe the internal relationship of the Spirit within the Godhead. Even if the term is difficult to define, it is also difficult to find a better term to describe the Spirit’s relationship.

The wide acceptance of the doctrine by theologians and church creeds is caused by specific Scriptural testimony to it. While in its precise nature the character of the procession is inscrutable, it provides a definition of the relationship of the persons of the Trinity. Important Scripture texts such as John 15:26 and Psalm 104:30 have been accepted as explicit proof. In John 15:26, the Comforter whom Christ promised to send is referred to as, “the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father.” The word for “proceedeth” ... is in the present tense in the original, which has been accepted without much opposition as indicating the eternal and continuous relation of the Spirit to the First Person.... Among the several conclusions which form a part of the doctrine of procession is the fact that the procession of the Holy Spirit is eternal. The very nature of procession points to its eternity. Procession like the eternal generation of Christ is not a matter of creation, commencement of existence, or analogous in any way to physical relationships common in the human realm. It proceeds rather from the very nature of the Godhead, being necessary to its existence. Without the Holy Spirit, the Godhead would not be what it is. The procession of the Holy Spirit cannot be compared to the incarnation, as the incarnation was not essential to deity.... In speaking of the Son, the Scriptures affirm His generation eternally (Ps. 2:7), while in speaking of the Spirit, the word *proceed* is used, as we have seen. No

⁴⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 13.

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human mind can improve on these distinctions, even if it be admitted that the terms are inadequate to comprehend all the truth which they represent.⁴⁵

Historically, much of the controversy about the doctrine of procession involved the question of whether the Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father. The earlier church creeds, particularly those of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), did not explicitly state the procession from the Son. At the Council of Toledo (589), where only the western church was represented, the phrase *filioque* (“and the Son”) was added, and this brought opposition from the Eastern Church which argued that John 15:26 only included procession from the Father. The Greek Church was right to assert this, but the task of systematic theology involves correlating all of the Scriptural evidence concerning a particular doctrine. This is exactly what the Roman church did in attributing the procession to the Son also. Regarding the church creeds that were intended to affirm the deity of the Holy Spirit, Lange remarked, “The original Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed affirms the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father not with an exclusive intent, but rather in opposition to the Pneumatomachi.”⁴⁶ The statements of the earlier creeds, then, were not intended to completely define the relationship of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, but were primarily intended to defend the deity of the Spirit. Hendriksen provided an excellent analysis of the issue of the procession of the Spirit.

Were we to say, “The fact that 15:26 states that the Son will send the Spirit proves that the Father does not send him,” we would be wrong (see 14:26).

Thus also, were we to say, “The fact that 15:26 states that the Spirit proceeds from the Father proves that he does not proceed from the Son,” we would be wrong (see Acts 5:9; Rom 8:9; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11; where the Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ). After all, is it so strange that Jesus speaking as Mediator between God and man, himself man, would during the period of humiliation speak of the Spirit as proceeding from the Father?⁴⁷

It is crucial to remember that it is the incarnate Christ who made the statement regarding the procession of the Spirit from the Father in John 15:26. Knox explained this important idea in the following words: “If our Lord had said ‘who proceeds from the Father and from me,’ He would have been speaking as God, without reference to His incarnate state, which was not His habit. The Holy Spirit does not proceed from the incarnate Christ as

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14–15.

⁴⁶ Lange, *John*, 469.

⁴⁷ Hendriksen, *John*, 317.

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such."⁴⁸ During His earthly life it was Jesus' practice to attribute things such as this to the working out of the Father's will and plan. If Jesus were to have made this statement at some time after He had returned to the Father's side, it would probably have been worded differently. Walvoord provided a helpful concluding statement regarding the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit.

While the doctrine of procession may seem somewhat of a technicality except to theologians, it has a vital bearing upon the work of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Scriptures. In the case of Christ, His eternal generation involved the work of the Son which was accomplished in time, fulfilling the purpose of redemption. As Christ became an obedient Son in doing the Father's will, so the Holy Spirit in procession became obedient to the Father and the Son. This subordination without detracting from the eternal glory and divine attributes which characterized all three Persons is taught specifically in the Scriptures (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The ministry of the Third Person is performed in His own power and gives testimony to His eternal deity and glory, but it is accomplished on behalf of the Father and the Son. Hence, the Spirit is sent into the world to reveal truth on behalf of Christ (John 16:13–15), with the special mission of making the things of Christ known and magnifying the Father and the Son. He is not seeking His own glory any more than the Son sought His own glory while in the period of humiliation... While the nature of procession is largely inscrutable, it is an expression in human words based on the Scriptural revelation of the relationship of the persons of the Trinity to each other.⁴⁹

"He Will Testify Concerning Me"

One of the questions this section must address is whether the personality or personhood of the Spirit is implied by this phrase. Regarding the emphatic position of the demonstrative pronoun "He" in this phrase, Bernard stated, "*ekeinos* calls special attention to the Spirit as the subject of the sentence, exactly as at 14:26. It is He, and none less than He, who shall bear august and true witness to the world about Christ."⁵⁰ Godet agreed when he gave the meaning as "He, that Being, and He alone."⁵¹

One of the questions that arises is, "Does the use of the masculine *ekeinos* denote the personality of the Spirit?" It is important to understand the grammatical implications of the use of this masculine pronoun in reference to the Spirit. Newman and Nida have stated, "Whereas in 14:26 the pronoun referring to the Spirit is neuter, here a masculine

⁴⁸ R. A. Knox, as quoted in Randolph V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 180.

⁴⁹ Walvoord, *Holy Spirit*, 16.

⁵⁰ Bernard, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 499.

⁵¹ Godet, *John*, 305.

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pronoun is used, indicating that the Spirit is thought of in personal terms.”⁵² Barrett also believed that the use of the masculine gender clearly implies the personality of the Spirit. “The gender changes; the occurrence in the previous clause of the neuter relative ... shows that this is not simply a matter of grammatical agreement ...; the Spirit is thought of in personal terms.”⁵³

Taking a neutral position, Morris believed that although the use of the masculine *ekeinos* does not explicitly prove the personality of the Spirit, it does imply that the Spirit is perceived in a personal way: “The masculine ... is noteworthy, for [the Spirit] is nearer than is [Helper]. It does not prove that the Spirit is personal, but it is an indication that John tended to think of the Spirit in personal terms. This, of course, accords also with the function ascribed to him here, that of bearing witness, for this is normally a personal activity.”⁵⁴

Others believe that the masculine *ekeinos* in no sense denotes the personality of the Spirit, but is simply required by the masculine antecedent of the pronoun. As previously illustrated in the sentence diagram, it appears that the logical antecedent of *ekeinos* is the masculine noun *paraklatos*. Cook stated, “It is true that the demonstrative pronoun *ekeinos* (that person, or He) is used throughout these passages in the masculine gender, but its antecedent is not *pneuma* but *paraklaton* (Helper).”⁵⁵ Wallace’s comments clearly explain this view.

The use of ἐκεῖνος here is frequently regarded by students of the NT to be an affirmation of the personality of the Spirit. Such an approach is based on the assumption that the antecedent of ἐκεῖνος is πνεῦμα.... But this is erroneous. In all these Johannine passages, πνεῦμα is appositional to a masculine noun. The gender of ἐκεῖνος thus has nothing to do with the natural gender of πνεῦμα. The antecedent of ἐκεῖνος, in each case, is παράκλητος, not πνεῦμα.... Thus, since παράκλητος is masculine, so is the pronoun. Although one might argue that the Spirit’s personality is in view in these passages, the view must be based on the nature of a παράκλητος and the things said about the Comforter, not on any supposed grammatical subtleties.⁵⁶

In light of this, the nature and work of the Spirit must be examined for the evidence of His personality. Bernard stated that since it is not known how the early church

⁵² Newman and Nida, *John*, 497.

⁵³ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 482.

⁵⁴ Morris, *Gospel According to John*, 683.

⁵⁵ Cook, *Theology of John*, 62.

⁵⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 331–32.

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understood the idea of personality it cannot be stated with certainty that this is implied, but the verse does show that the Spirit was more than an impersonal force. "However little modern conceptions of personality and of what it implies were present to the mind of the first century, the repeated application of ἐκεῖνος to the Spirit in these chapters (16:8, 13, 14; 14:26) shows that for John [the Spirit of truth] meant more than a mere tendency or influence."⁵⁷ Lange commented, "His testimony is personal, and distinguished from the personal testimony of the disciples."⁵⁸ Van Doren also added, "He is sent, and cometh, and witnesseth, which things are proper to a person only. His witness concerning the Son is the witness of the Father Himself."⁵⁹ Swete also gave an extremely personal description of the work of the Spirit in John 15:26.

The Incarnate will not leave Himself without witness in the world. The testimony of His words and works, which the world has rejected, will after His departure be carried forward by other witnesses. First and chief among these will be the coming Paraclete, who, as the Spirit of Truth, cannot but bear witness to the Truth. Hitherto the Lord has spoken of the other Paraclete only as the Teacher of the Church; He cannot teach the world while it continues to be such, for the world is not susceptible of spiritual teaching. But the Spirit may bear witness where He cannot teach as yet; and this He will do. The world had succeeded in silencing the voice of Jesus, and another generation might easily forget His teaching. But the Witness who was coming would not let the world forget, and no opposition could altogether silence Him.⁶⁰

Hendriksen expressed a similar thought as he described the very personal impact that the Spirit would have in transforming the lives of individuals such as the persecutor Saul into passionate missionaries for Christ.

The Holy Spirit is here called the Spirit of truth, just as in 14:17. That Spirit will testify (see 1:7, 8). In the midst of the wicked world he will testify against the world (16:8, 9). In the midst of mankind he will bear witness concerning mankind's need. In the midst of the Church he will comfort the Church. The sphere of his testimony must not be restricted. Whenever a true servant of God bears witness against the world, this witness is the work of the Spirit. Whenever a simple believer, by word and example, draws others to Christ, this too is the work of the Spirit. That Spirit always testifies in connection with the Word, the Word of Christ (14:26; 16:14, 15). By and large, the world that is openly hostile to Christ will not receive him (14:17). Nevertheless, there are exceptions. From among those who today are openly hostile some will be drawn. They will be transferred from the kingdom

⁵⁷ Bernard, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 500.

⁵⁸ Lange, *John*, 469.

⁵⁹ Van Doren, *Gospel of John*, 1157.

⁶⁰ Henry B. Swete, *The Last Discourse and Prayer of Our Lord: A Study of St. John XIV.–XVII* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 105–06.

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of darkness to that of everlasting light. Was there ever a fiercer persecutor than Saul (or Paul) of Tarsus? The Spirit was going to change him (and others like him) to become a zealous missionary for Christ!⁶¹

Beyond any specific grammatical evidence, then, the personality of the Spirit can be clearly seen in His character and in His activities.

"And You Also Must Testify Because You Have Been With Me From The Beginning"

One of the prevalent features of John 15:26–27 is the emphatic use of pronouns to call attention to the activity of the ones to whom they refer. Regarding the phrase currently under consideration, Burge commented, "*You* is emphatic in Greek here, underscoring that we are not permitted a passive role. The disciples are witnesses and the Spirit will bear witness; the disciples possess the historical record of Jesus' words and work (*you have been with me from the beginning*, 15:27b), and they now will be empowered as they deliver that message to the world."⁶² On a similar note Godet remarked that the Greek therefore signifies: " 'And you also, *you* will have your special part in this testimony' ... and the more, since the particle ... indicates a marked graduation (cf. 6:51)"⁶³ It is clear that an intimate partnership is intended between the disciples and the Holy Spirit to bring the message of Jesus to the world.

Beasley-Murray described the close working relationship that is to exist between the human witnesses and the heavenly Witness.

The witness of the Spirit, conjoined with that of the disciples, is to bring to light the truth of the revelation of Jesus in his word and deed, and death and resurrection. Clearly this witness of the Paraclete is not a phenomenon apart from that of the disciples, but inseparably associated with it. The Spirit thus illuminates the hearers' minds as to the reality of that which is proclaimed by the disciples and brings its truth to bear on their consciences (cf. 16:8–11)... The disciples will be capable of doing this because they have accompanied Jesus "from the beginning," i.e., from the outset of the ministry of Jesus to its close.⁶⁴

Bernard explained that "the qualification for 'witness' is personal intimacy.... 'Ye are with me from the beginning,' Jesus said, using the present tense here. The Twelve had

⁶¹ Hendriksen, *John*, 317–18.

⁶² Burge, *John*, 421.

⁶³ Godet, *John*, 306, 305.

⁶⁴ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 277.

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been chosen, and they continued to be in close fellowship with Him.”⁶⁵ This close association with Christ was the basis for their authority. “The authority of the apostles lay chiefly in the fact that they had been with Jesus some three years and remembered his words and deeds. This human or natural authority of an eyewitness was tremendously enforced and amplified by the incursion of the Holy Spirit which revived their memory (14:26), clarified the Scriptures (Acts 2:17–31) and enabled them to press home their relevance with telling effect (Acts 2:36; 3:25, 26; 4:10–12).”⁶⁶

Godet provided a remarkable summary of the partnership that is designed for the disciples and the Holy Spirit to bring the message of Jesus to the world.

The apostles possess a treasure which is peculiar to them, and which the Spirit could not communicate to them—the historical knowledge of the ministry of Jesus from its beginning to its end. The Spirit does not teach the facts of history; He reveals their meaning. But this historical testimony of the apostles would, without the Spirit, be only a frigid narrative incapable of creating life. It is the Spirit which brings the vivifying breath to the testimony. By making the light of the divine thought fall upon the facts, He makes them a power which lays hold upon souls. Without the facts, the Spirit would be only an empty exaltation devoid of contents, of substance; without the Spirit the narrative of the facts would remain dead and unfruitful. The apostolic testimony and the testimony of the Spirit unite, therefore, in one and the same act, but they do so while bringing to it, each of them, a necessary element, the one, the historical narration, the other, the inward evidence. This relation is still reproduced at the present day in every living sermon drawn from the Scriptures. Peter, in like manner, distinguishes these two testimonies in Acts 5:32: “And we are witnesses of these things, as well as the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.” We understand, after this, why, when the apostles wished to fill the place of Judas, they chose two men who had accompanied Jesus from the baptism of John even to His resurrection (Acts 1:21, 22).⁶⁷

INTERPRETIVE CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE TRINITY

Based on this study of John 15:26–27, several conclusions regarding the doctrine of the Trinity can be stated. Of the theological concepts that must be included in any orthodox definition of the Trinity, several points of support can be gained from this passage.

Regarding the unity of the Godhead, a comparison of the larger context demonstrates that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all expressing a unified will and they are all intimately involved in accomplishing a unified purpose. Also, as Morris has stated

⁶⁵ Bernard, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 500.

⁶⁶ Turner and Mantey, *John*, 310.

⁶⁷ Godet, *John*, 305–06.

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regarding the sending of the Spirit, “We ought not to think of division or compartmentalization within the Godhead.”⁶⁸ It is clear that the unity of the Godhead is being expressed.

Regarding the distinction of the three members of the Godhead, this passage clearly identifies all three members and distinctly references the roles of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Cook affirmed, “The Holy Spirit is a distinct member of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit is not merely another manifestation of Christ (John 14:26; 15:26)... The relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son is especially noteworthy in John 15:26.”⁶⁹

Regarding the personality of the members of the Godhead, this passage clearly portrays the work of the Spirit as the work of a person rather than that of an impersonal force. The use of *pempo*, which refers to sending beings of a personal character, and the choice of the masculine *parakletos* to stand in apposition to the neuter *pneuma*, lends further support to the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Regarding the deity of the persons of the Godhead, the Spirit is designated as the Spirit of truth just as Jesus earlier said of Himself that He is truth. Moreover, the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit clearly affirms His deity as the third Person of the Godhead who is identical in essence, power, and glory to the Father and the Son.

Regarding the eternity of the persons of the Godhead, the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit establishes His eternity, based on the Ontological Trinity view of the phrase “who proceeds from the Father.”

Regarding the existence of functional subordination within the Godhead, the Spirit was clearly portrayed as submitting to Christ’s sending Him into the world. Erickson provided a detailed explanation of the relationships within the Godhead.

Here something of the inner relationships within the Trinity is revealed... In 15:26 he refers to “the Counselor ... whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” In 16:7 he says, “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” Not only does Jesus say that the Father will send the Spirit, but that he also will send the Spirit. The Spirit whom Jesus sends goes out from the Father. The Father sends the Spirit in Jesus’ name. Jesus sends the Spirit, who goes out from the Father. The Spirit will testify about Jesus and will remind them of everything Jesus has said to them. Jesus also says that the Spirit will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears (16:13). Yet Jesus’ words of which presumably the Spirit will remind them

⁶⁸ Morris, *Expository Reflections*, 533.

⁶⁹ Cook, *Theology of John*, 64.

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are not his own words. Rather, they belong to the Father who sent him (14:24). Conversely, however, everything that belongs to the Father is his (16:15). When looked at in light of these several considerations, John seems to be affirming or at least assuming or implying a number of tenets. The sending of the Spirit is by both the Father and the Son, or at least can be described in either of these fashions. Even when referred to as the agency of one of these persons, there is reference or at least allusion to the other. There evidently is a close relationship between the actions of the Father and the Son, and presumably also between them as persons. Further, the ministry of the Spirit is not independent of the other persons. It involves bringing to remembrance the teaching that Jesus has given. Yet in a sense these are not just Jesus' words, for he has received them from the Father. And one may deduce that this is why both the Father and the Son will make their home with the one who obeys these teachings, for they are the teachings of both the Father and Son. It is notable that the Spirit also will be in the believers (14:17), and it may be inferred that this is because the teachings that they obey are also his as the end point of the transmission process. Further, the designation of the Spirit as "another ... Counselor" (14:16) suggests a commonality of ministry of the Spirit and of the Son. This also is implied in the fact that the Spirit can come to begin his ministry in the fullest sense only if and when the Son goes away (16:7).⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

John 15:26–27 provides many valuable pieces of Scriptural evidence supporting the doctrine of the Trinity. This data includes an emphasis on the unity of the Godhead; the distinctiveness of the three members of the Trinity; the functional subordination of the members of the Godhead; and especially the personality, deity, and eternity of the Holy Spirit. John 15:26–27 substantiates many of the essential concepts that must be considered when constructing an orthodox definition of the doctrine of the Trinity.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰ Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 206–07.

⁷¹ Lewis, S. (2008). "The Doctrine Of The Trinity — Part I". *Journal of Dispensational Theology Volume 12*, 12(35), 29–48. Lewis, S. (2008). "The Doctrine Of The Trinity — Part II". *Journal of Dispensational Theology Volume 12*, 12(36), 31–60.