

The Holy Spirit – Apologetic Issues

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Main Point: Discussing the doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Objective: The personhood of the Holy Spirit is regarded by some as unclear and thus, somewhat controversial. In this session, examine some of the arguments and issues at stake regarding the Holy Spirit and God's triune nature.

Agenda: We will look at the best counter arguments, the best objectives, to the trinity of God, the divinity and personhood of the HS.

Recommended Reading (Books):

- The Trinity: What Has God Revealed? Objections Answered by Glyn Parfitt (not yet available in North America)
- The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, John W. Reeve

I. The Bible

a. *Objection:* Trinity is confusing and difficult to understand

b. *Response:*

i. Job 11:7-8

1. Summary of the whole book of Job

ii. Ps 145:3

1. There are limits to both human apprehension and human language; there is an infinity beyond.

2. List of confusing and difficult things to understand:

a. God became a man

i. ST July 30, 1896

1. "In contemplating the incarnation of Christ in humanity, we stand baffled before an unfathomable mystery, that the human mind cannot comprehend. The more we reflect upon it, the more amazing does it appear."

b. God became a man, and died

c. Jesus was 100% God and 100% man

d. Jesus retains humane nature

e. The Godhead was "sundered"

f. The mechanism of inspiration of the Bible

3. If you have affirmed the Bible, you have already affirmed many concepts that are difficult and confusing to understand.

iii. *Objection:* Trinity is illogical and irrational

iv. *Response:*

1. Contradiction occurs only when two opposing things are affirmed in the same way and at the same time. The Trinity is not three Gods and one God, which would be a contradiction, but rather three persons and one God. The triune nature of God is admittedly mysterious, but it does not necessarily follow that it is inherently contradictory and thus illogical and irrational.
2. Faith goes beyond knowledge (human logic) but not against it. It surpasses knowledge, but it does not contradict or oppose.
3. We often call things contradictions
 - a. Contradiction is the violation of logic that a thing cannot be true and false in the same way at the same time. (A)

v. *Objection: "Adventists are Tri-Theists"*

vi. *Response:*

1. We believe in one God not three
 - a. Modalism: one god in different modes (positions)
 - b. Tri-theism: not one god but three distinct gods (polytheistic)
 - c. Bible Christianity affirms in the middle: one God, three Persons

vii. *Objection: Adventists are Modalists*

viii. *Response:*

1. We believe in three distinct persons, not one.
 - a. TMK 338 – "Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed... In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father"
 - i. Even if God the Father had come and Christ had stayed in heaven, not one dot or tittle of the NT would be changed.
 - ii. Interchangeability of Their love for humanity, but not modalism.
 - iii. Suggests collaboration/unity.

ix. *Objection: Isaiah 43:9-10; 45:21*

1. There is only one God, and that is God the Father.

x. *Response:*

1. Pretends that the NT has not been written

- a. Passages are statements against idolatry
2. These verses prove too much for non-Trinitarians, says *more than they want it to say.*
 - a. Jehovah's Witnesses
 - i. Believe Jesus is a god (created), but God the Father was God always. So that means that, ultimately, they end up believing in multiple distinct gods.
- xi. *Objection:* What is God's gender?
- xii. *Response:*
 1. Male and female created in the image of God (Genesis)
 2. God shows maternal and paternal love in Scripture
 - a. Matthew 23 – Jesus uses feminine association
 - b. OT reference: "Can a women forget her suckling child?"
- xiii. *Objection:* Christ is the literal Son of God
 1. Takes the phraseology literally: Jesus is God the Father's literal (created) Son
 2. Believing in a role-playing God (Three Persons just decide who would "play" which "role".)
- xiv. *Response:*
 1. Scripture affirms the eternal nature of the Son
 - a. EGW uses phrase "the eternal Son"
 2. "Son" communicates same kind, different person
 - a. When the Bible says Jesus is the Son of God, He is the same *kind* of Being but Son-ship also says He is not Him (son is not the father; father is not the son)
 - b. Jn 5:17-18 – Jews angry b/c Jesus made Himself equal to God
 3. "Son" is a relational, not a chronological term
 - a. Example: If you had a son when you were 20 yrs old...
 - i. 20-yrs-old = newborn – total dependency of the child on the parent
 - ii. 30 = 10 – dependency is decreasing, independence is increasing
 - iii. 40 = 20 – decreased dependency
 - iv. 80 = 60 – almost peers b/c difference decreases
 - b. Parents are given the privilege of raising our brothers and sisters in Christ; God's own sons and daughters
 - i. Relationship, connection, not chronology
 4. Jesus is the Son, yes, but He was not created

- a. Is. – “Unto us a child is born, a son is given... mighty God, everlasting Father”
 - i. The child was *born* in Bethlehem but the Son of God was *given*.
- b. How can a created son be called everlasting Father
 - i. Be careful b/c a “solution” that may seem logical may cause serious problems
- c. *Objection:* Jesus is the “Firstborn”
- d. *Response:*
 - i. “Firstborn” does not mean born first, but rather preeminence (Col. 1:18)
 - ii. David and Ephraim were called “first born” (Ps 89:27; Jeremiah 31:9)
 - iii. Michelle Obama is the “first lady”
 - iv. “First” can be chronological or preeminence/prominence
- e. *Objection:* Christ is the begotten Son
- f. *Response:*
 - i. The Greek word for “begotten” is *monogenes*, and comes from *monos*, meaning ‘only’, and *genos*, meaning ‘kind’. The word, therefore means ‘only one of its kind’ or ‘unique’.
 - ii. Fairly certain, Matthew is the only one to use the word “begotten” Son; Mark, Luke, and John use “only” Son
- g. *Objection:* “My Father is Greater than I” (John 14:28)
- h. *Response:*
 - i. Primarily spoken of submission during incarnation
 - ii. Trinity does possess a functional hierarchy within the context of an essential, consubstantial equality.
 - 1. Consubstantial = same substance
 - 2. Hierarchy does not imply inferiority (worth less, etc.)
 - 3. “All of co-eternal, co-equal and thus fully God, but there is a hierarchy within the Godhead. The Father is supreme above all, the Son is the Word that became a man, the Spirit...” (A) There is an order within the Godhead.
 - 4. Taxis = an ordering
 - 5. Equality among the Godhead:
 - a. John 10:30-33 – “I and my Father are one.”
 - iii. Functional hierarchy among equals does not entail essential inferiority (ie: husband and wife)
- i. *Objection:* We’re not told to pray to the Spirit (nor worship the Spirit)
- j. *Response:*
 - i. True
 - ii. But neither are we told to pray to Jesus
 - 1. Jesus’ exact instructions on prayer is to address the Father in Jesus’ name. “Our Father...”

- iii. Merely a function of the HS's role within the Godhead
 - k. *Objection:* The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God/Christ
 - l. *Response:*
 - i. Scripture also refers to Jesus as the Son "of God." Yet that phrase does not negate His divinity, or His individuality
 - ii. "...of God" often means that something came from God, as in Luke 3:6; Rm 1:17; 3:21-22; 2 Cor. 4:7 The Holy Spirit, did, according to Jesus come "from" the Father (Jn 15:26)
 - 1. "of" = possession
 - 2. original Greek "of" is the genitive case = possession or "coming from"
 - a. ie: "Lawrence of Arabia"
 - m. *Objection:* What about 1 John 5:7?
 - n. *Response:*
 - i. Don't use it
 - 1. Many translations do not include this verse
 - 2. This verse is not in the earliest Greek manuscripts we have
 - 3. Early Church Father quotes this verse in Latin, not Greek
 - ii. Most Jehovah's Witnesses and non-Trinitarian Adventists will expect you to go directly to 1 John 5:7. Don't play into their hand. Give your case from all of the other passages.
- II. The Spirit of Prophecy
- a. *Objection:* Ellen White never used the word Trinity
 - b. *Responses:*
 - i. Neither does the Bible
 - ii. The word "trinity" has several potential definitions
 - 1. Early Adventist pioneers did not reject the concept of the Trinity, but how it is used.
 - c. *Objection:* Ellen White's writings have been tampered with
 - d. *Responses:*
 - i. No they haven't. There is no conspiracy.
 - e. *Objection:* The "divested" statement
 - i. 14MR 23 (1895)
 - 1. "Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally; therefore it was altogether for their advantage that He should leave them, go to His father, and send the Holy Spirit to be His successor on earth.
The Holy Spirit is Himself divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof. He would represent Himself as present in all places by His Holy Spirit, as the Omnipresent."
 - ii. They say: the HS is Himself (Jesus) but without the personality of humanity
 - 1. Why?

- a. *Divested* is usually opposite is *invested*
 - b. If the HS was never a man, how could He be “divested” of what He never was? Therefore, HS has to be Jesus.
- f. *Response:*
- i. *Divested* can mean “devoid” or “without”
 - ii. EGW re-wrote this statement in *Desire of Ages*:
 1. DA 669 – “The Holy Spirit is Christ’s representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth.”
- g. Spirit of Prophecy passages R & A felt impressed to share:
- i. ST 11.27.93
 1. “The Jews had never before heard such words from human lips, and a convicting influence attended them; for it seemed that divinity flashed through humanity as Jesus said, “I and My Father are One.” The words of Christ were full of deep meaning as He put forth the claim **that He and the Father were of one substance, possessing the same attributes.**”
 2. “one substance” = word/phrase argued over in the Council of Nicea
 - ii. ST 8.29.00
 1. “Christ is the pre-existent, self-existent Son of God.... In speaking of his pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.”
 - iii. GCB, 3.4.95
 1. “God will inspire his loyal and true children with his Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the representative of God, and will be the mighty working agent in our world to bind the loyal and true into bundles for the Lord’s garner. Satan is also with intense activity gathering together in bundles his tares from among the wheat.”
 - iv. 7BC 959
 1. “When you gave yourself to Christ, you made a pledge in the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the three great personal Dignitaries of heaven. “Hold fast” to this pledge.”
 - a. By Baptism you made a pledge to God, be true to your baptismal vows. “hold fast”

- III. History
 - a. What about the church councils?
 - i. Council of Nicea, AD 325
 - ii. Council of Constantinople, AD 381
 - b. We arrive at truth not by a negation of Catholic teachings but by the Bible (Asscherick)
 - c. Sketch of Early Christendom
 - i. From apostles generation onward, persecution and no time to convene to articulate. Difficult to communicate to scattered brethren to settle issues.
 - ii. Church had to face certain heresies, such as key point: how do we harmonize the concept that God is One yet Plural, especially in the Person of Jesus (both God and man).
 - 1. Emperor Constantine, AD 312, Christianity brought to prominence in Roman Empire
 - 2. Arius (AD 250-336), a bishop, proposed this perspective: Jesus is a subordinate entity to God the Father that did not always exist but was created
 - 3. Jesus fully human not divine
 - a. Jesus became Christ because he was a perfectly obedient human
 - 4. Other extreme: fully divine and not human
 - a. Jesus not human just an illusion because God cannot become a man
 - 5. Gospel spreading fastest by Greek-speaking people so it came into conflict with Greek/Hellenistic philosophies and thought.
 - iii. We don't trace the concepts solely to the council
 - 1. Trace triune nature of God to the apostles and earliest church fathers *before* the councils.
 - 2. The councils were convened to face issues and developed creeds for documentation and clarity, but doctrines were not necessarily "created" at the council.
 - iv. Early church fathers affirm doctrine of triune nature of God long before the councils
 - 1. Catholic church does not even exist in AD 325, not until 6th century but does not mature until the 11th century (Asscherick)
 - d. What about the pioneers of Adventism?
 - i. Dr. Fred Bischoff, Adventist Pioneer Library
 - 1. Started late '80s
 - ii. Early Pioneers
 - 1. Bible & history students
 - 2. Pioneers had no creed but the Scriptures
 - 3. Came out of Millerite movement

- a. Statements taken literally unless clearly symbolic (context)
- 4. Written words are not inspired
- iii. EGW's statements of re-reading the pioneers's writings are clustered around 1905
 - 1. What issues arose around 1905?
 - a. Foundations of church were being shaken
 - b. John Harvey Kellogg, The Living Temple (1903)
 - i. Points he made about nature of God and issues of how we can understand temple of God and God dwelling in us (ideas of pantheism)
 - ii. EGW says these are spiritualistic statements
 - 1. Pantheist ideas began to circulate even during the time of Millerite movement
 - 2. Desire of Ages published in 1898, clarifies the nature of Christ... DA 530 – "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. "He that hath the Son hath life." 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life."
 - iv. EGW became more explicit leading into 1900s
 - 1. Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 8, Page 279. "The highest intellect may tax itself until it is wearied out in conjectures regarding the nature of God; but the effort will be fruitless. This problem has not been given us to solve. No human mind can comprehend God. Let not finite man attempt to interpret Him. Let none indulge in speculation regarding His nature."
 - a. Don't enter into controversy or speculation around things that are not revealed about God and His nature
 - 2. EV 614.2 "God cannot be compared with the things His hands have made."
 - a. The nature of God's character (essential to study)
 - b. The nature of God's being (not-essential)
 - v. Much of what the pioneer's rejected about the "Trinity" we would also reject
 - 1. Destroys relationship between the Godhead, undermines Personhood of God, demeans God
 - vi. The prophets themselves did not always know or understand what they wrote.
 - 1. ie: Daniel
 - 2. EGW is a person like us and grew and learned

- a. She did not take sides on many issues for awhile, observing the sides and what spirit is in the people
- vii. What the devil is after is the attack the character of God, and if he can get us confused and in speculation about His being ... when you destroy the individual Personalities of the Godhead, you destroy Agape.” (Dr. Bischoff)
 - 1. The omega apostasy could be the opposite of what “they” believe. Not the doctrines but the attack of the doctrines.
- IV. Parfitt’s Percentages (combining Bible and Spirit of Prophecy)
 - i. The eternal preexistence of Christ – **99.99977%**
 - ii. The personhood of the Holy Spirit – **99.99976%**
 - iii. The distinctness of the Holy Spirit – **99.99923%**
 - iv. The deity of the Holy Spirit – **99.9879%**
- V. “Privileged to Co-operate” – HM 12.1.94
 - i. “But he broke the fetters of the tomb, and proclaimed over Joseph’s rent sepulcher, “I am the resurrection and the life.” He then ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. **To supply the place of his presence, he sent his representative, the Holy Spirit**, to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. Through this agency man was to be sanctified, **to be privileged to co-operate with God for the recovery of the lost and perishing race.**”