

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine the doctrine of the Trinity. We are following the outline in Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*,¹ which states that to firmly establish the doctrine of the Trinity, we must establish three things: First, that God exists in three persons; second, that each person is fully God; and third, that there is one God. We have shown that God exists in three persons, we assumed God the Father is truly God, and we have shown that the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is fully God. So, Dr. Spencer, I assume we are going to discuss the deity of the Holy Spirit today, correct?

Dr. Spencer: That is correct. We spent quite a bit of time on the deity of Jesus Christ because that is the teaching that is most often denied. I think it is the hardest for people to accept for two reasons: first, the idea that God exists in more than one person, and second, the idea that Jesus Christ can be fully God and fully man, which is something we will deal with a greater length later.

Marc Roby: And, although those may both be difficult for us to grasp, they are both presented as truths in the Word of God, so to not accept the Trinity or the dual nature of Christ is to not believe God.

Dr. Spencer: That's true. The main objection people usually have to either of these doctrines is that they seem counter to human reason. But neither one of them is a logical contradiction and, as you pointed out, they are both taught in the Bible.

As Christians, the Bible must be our ultimate standard for truth, which means we must acknowledge both of these doctrines to be true. The reason these seem counter to human reason is that they are both speaking about something that is unique. There are no other tri-personal beings outside of God, and Jesus Christ is the only God-man. The fact that they are unique is a challenge to us because we are used to putting things we learn about in classes, like all animals, or plants, or natural inanimate objects, or man-made objects and so on. But there is only one true and living God, and he is triune. And there is only one Savior and Lord, and he is the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Marc Roby: It does make sense that we spent so much time on the deity of Christ, and I look forward to looking at his dual nature in more depth later. But, it sounds like we are ready to begin to look now at the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Spencer: We are. Once someone accepts that God exists in more than one person by agreeing that Jesus Christ is also truly God, there isn't usually much of a problem with the deity of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, we need to show that the deity of the Holy Spirit is taught in the Bible.

Marc Roby: Very well. Where do you want to begin?

¹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, pg. 231

Dr. Spencer: I'm going to partially follow the outline of evidence given by Berkhof in his *Systematic Theology*.² Let's look first at Exodus 17. We read in that chapter about the Israelites complaining to Moses in the desert that they did not have water to drink. So Moses was told by God to strike a rock with his staff and water would come out. Moses did that, and then we read in Verse 7, that "he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'"³

Now we need to turn to Psalm 95, where the psalmist refers to this incident and says, in Verses 3 and 7-11, "the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. ... Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

Now jump forward to Hebrew 3:7-11, where the writer quotes the passage I just read from Psalm 95, but begins, in Verse 7, by saying, "the Holy Spirit says". In other words, what Jehovah is reported as having said in Psalm 95 is ascribed to the Holy Spirit by the writer of Hebrews.

Marc Roby: That's pretty convincing evidence that the Holy Spirit is God. And it makes me think of the story in Acts Chapter 5, where we see that what is said to the Holy Spirit is said to God.

Dr. Spencer: That is a great story. Ananias was one of the early members of the church in Jerusalem. He and his wife sold some property and gave the money to the leaders. In doing so, they claimed to give *all* of the money, I'm sure so that people would be impressed with their spirituality, and yet they withheld some of the money for themselves.

Marc Roby: And I've always been particularly struck by what Peter says to him in Acts 5:3-4. Peter says, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

Dr. Spencer: That is a great passage. Peter states that Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit and then says that he lied to God, which equates the Holy Spirit with God.

There is also a clear implication of the deity of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 3:16, where Paul asks the rhetorical question, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that

² Berkhof, Louis, *Systematic Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1938, pp 97-98 (This can be purchased as a combination of his *Systematic Theology* and *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology* in one text from Eerdmans, 1996)

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God's Spirit lives in you?" If you think about this statement for a minute, you realize that "God's temple" is the place where God dwells, and yet we are told that God's Spirit lives there. We must ask why it says "God's Spirit" rather than just God. There is a figure of speech called a synecdoche in which a part of something is used to refer to the whole, but that cannot be what is meant here.

Marc Roby: Why do you say that?

Dr. Spencer: Because Jesus tells us in John 4:24 that "God is spirit", and the 19th-century theologian William Shedd commented on the significance of the fact that no article is used in this statement; notice that it says "God is spirit" not "God is *a* spirit". And our translation properly reflects the original Greek. He wrote that the "omission of the article, implies that God is spirit in the highest sense. He is not a spirit, but spirit itself, absolutely."⁴

Marc Roby: That is very interesting, and it does imply that the reference to "God's spirit" is more significant than it might appear at first blush.

Dr. Spencer: It is very significant. It is clearly referring to a person distinct from God, and yet in some sense equal to God. The only way to make sense of this statement is to realize that God is triune. We should also take note of the fact that we have learned from 1 Corinthians 3:16 that the Holy Spirit is called God's Spirit.

Marc Roby: That reminds me of Romans 8:9, which says, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." This verse calls the Holy Spirit both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.

Dr. Spencer: That's right, and we are also told that the Holy Spirit is sent by both the Father and by Christ. In John 14:26 Jesus tells his disciples that "the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." But then in John 15:26 Jesus says, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me." Therefore, the Holy Spirit is sent by both the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of truth.

Marc Roby: And yet Jesus Christ said, in John 14:6, that *he* is "the way and the truth and the life."

Dr. Spencer: All of these verses fit together perfectly when you think of them in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity, but it is all complete confusion when you deny this doctrine.

Marc Roby: In fact, many passages in Scripture are wildly confusing, contradictory, or downright unintelligible if you deny the Doctrine of the Trinity.

⁴ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888, pg. 151

Dr. Spencer: I agree completely. But, getting back to our specifically proving the deity of the Holy Spirit, we have shown that he is equal to God and is called the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ because he is sent by both of them. Now we want to move on to show that God's incommunicable attributes are ascribed to him.

Marc Roby: Alright, please proceed.

Dr. Spencer: In Psalm 139 the psalmist is reflecting on the greatness of God, saying in Verse 4, "Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD." And then, in Verses 7 through 10, we read, "Where can I go from your Spirit?" Notice that he begins by saying "your Spirit" here, not where can I go from *you*. He then continues, "Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." In other words, there is nowhere the psalmist can go to escape the Spirit of God because the Holy Spirit is omnipresent, meaning that he is everywhere all the time.

Marc Roby: And that is certainly an attribute that only belongs to God.

Dr. Spencer: Another interesting example is found in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11. Paul writes that "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." Now, since God is omniscient, which he means that he knows everything, and the Spirit of God knows his thoughts, we can conclude that the Spirit of God is omniscient. And we again have to note the difference between men and God. Paul says that the spirit of man, which is within him, knows his thoughts, which is true because our spirit is only a part of what we are. But remember that God *is* spirit in an absolute sense, he has no physical body and brain, just spirit. And the verse doesn't talk about the Spirit of God being within him as it does for the spirit of man. That is because the Spirit of God is a separate person, who is omniscient, just like God the Father.

Marc Roby: We now know that the Holy Spirit is omnipresent and omniscient. What other divine attributes are we told about?

Dr. Spencer: In Hebrews 9 we are told, rather incidentally, about the Holy Spirit being eternal. The writer speaks about the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament and says that they only made people outwardly clean, in contrast the sacrifice of Christ, which cleanses us inwardly. In Verse 14 of Hebrews 9 we read, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" Notice what he said in the middle of that verse, he said that Christ offered himself "through the *eternal* Spirit".

Marc Roby: Alright, so the Holy Spirit is omnipresent, omniscient and eternal. What else are we told?

Dr. Spencer: There are very strong hints that the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of the universe. We saw earlier that all things were made by Jesus Christ, but remember that in Genesis

1:2 we are told that “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” And then in Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let us make man in our image”, using the plural.

It might also be that Job hints at the Holy Spirit’s involvement in creation. In Job Chapter 26 he is speaking about God’s work of creation and in our Bibles Verse 13 says, “By his breath the skies became fair; his hand pierced the gliding serpent.” The word translated here as “breath” can also be translated as spirit, which is what’s done, for example, in the King James version. Job certainly speaks of the Holy Spirit being the one who gives life, in Job 33:4 we read that Job said, “The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

Marc Roby: OK, I’m still keeping score. We now know that the Bible teaches us the Holy Spirit is omnipresent, omniscient, eternal and involved in creation. What else?

Dr. Spencer: Although all persons of the Trinity are involved in all of God’s actions because God is one being, the Bible presents the different persons as having certain roles within the Trinity and the peculiar role of the Holy Spirit is that of regeneration, or new birth. We’ve looked at John Chapter 3 before, where Jesus tells Nicodemus that we must be born again. But let’s look at that again. In John 3:5-6 we read that Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” Notice again the way this is worded. Jesus says that “the Spirit gives birth to spirit”, he speaks of the Spirit as a separate person, and one of the actions that this person is responsible for is new birth. We are told the same thing in Titus 3:5, where Paul wrote that God “saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit”.

Marc Roby: Praise God for his Holy Spirit and the work of regeneration!

Dr. Spencer: Indeed, we should praise God. It is the only way of salvation. And if we have been saved, there is more of the Holy Spirit’s work to look forward to. In Romans 8:11 Paul wrote that “if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” This is speaking about the completion of our salvation.

As Rev. P.G. Mathew explains in his commentary on the Book of Romans, “Salvation comes in installments. Now we are saved in our spirits and our eyes are opened. We love and serve God. We delight in his word and in praying to God. But we do not yet have salvation in its fullness. There will be a time when we receive [the] fullness of salvation accomplished by Christ through his death on the cross. The resurrection of the dead is our future salvation.”⁵

Marc Roby: It has been said that there are three tenses to our salvation; we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.

Dr. Spencer: That is exactly what the Bible teaches. We have *been* saved in the sense that, if we have repented of our sins and trusted in Jesus Christ, we have been justified in God’s sight. We are what the New Testament refers to as “in Christ”. Our sins are covered and, as it says in

⁵P.G. Mathew, *Romans: The Gospel Freedom* (Volume 1), Grace and Glory Ministries, pg. 511

Romans 8:1-2, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

In addition, we can say that we are *being* saved in the sense that we are working out our salvation, this is the process of sanctification. And, finally, we can say that we *will be* saved in the sense that when we die our spirits will be perfected and then, when Jesus Christ comes again, we will receive our resurrection bodies, which we are told in Philippians 3:21 will be like Jesus Christ’s “glorious body”.

Marc Roby: What a glorious salvation God has planned.

Dr. Spencer: It is glorious indeed. And all three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved. As we will see more later when we get deeper into systematic theology, God the Father planned our redemption, God the Son, meaning Jesus Christ, accomplished our redemption by his life, death and resurrection, and God the Holy Spirit applies that redemption to us individually by causing us to be born again, indwelling us and leading us through this life, and then raising us up on the day of our resurrection. Finally, just as we noted when we were discussing the deity of Jesus Christ, let me close by pointing out that the Holy Spirit is listed as equal with God the Father and God the Son in verses like Matthew 28:19, where we are commanded by Christ to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Marc Roby: Alright, I think we have made a solid case for the deity of the Holy Spirit. We have now demonstrated that God exists in three persons and that each of those persons is fully God, so all that we have left to show is that there is only one God.

Dr. Spencer: I think we had better wait until our next session to start that.

Marc Roby: I agree. So let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We hope to hear from you.