

## THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED (CONCLUSION)

We conclude this series on the Trinity by considering John 20:28 and the Holy Spirit as developed by Trinitarians.

John 20:28: “Thomas answered and said unto him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” Jesus never referred to himself as God. Neither did any of his Apostles believe he was more than a man: “And the men (Apostles) marveled saying ‘What kind of *man* is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?’ (Matt. 8:27). There is never a hint in any of the Gospels that they thought of him as anyone but a man. Even after the resurrection and ascension Peter referred to him as a man (Acts 2:22). How, then, do we account for Thomas calling him “my God?” First, consider that in the Gospels the Apostles had trouble believing he was the Christ, much less believing he was God. This fact is supported in the record of the ministry of Christ and the Apostle’s attitude concerning it. Examples: The many times Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith (Matt.8:26, 14:31, 16:8). Nine apostles were a part of the “unbelieving generation” (Mark 9:19). Peter places him on the level of Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17:4). He rebuked them for their “littleness” of faith (Matt. 17:20). Peter rebukes him (Matt. 16: 22), Judas betrayed him (John 13:21-27) and all fled from the crucifixion (except John (John 19:25-27). The two on the Emmaus road thought of him as a prophet (Luke 24:19). Jesus accuses them of being “foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets had spoken” (Luke 24:25). They refused to believe that he was alive (Mark 16:11). He reproaches them for their unbelief and hardness of heart (Mark 16:14). When he tried to explain to them the Messiah would suffer, be killed and rise again (Isaiah had prophesied this in Isa. 53), he rebuked Peter by calling him “Satan” “and they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said” (Luke 18:34). If the Apostles believed Jesus was God, why did they all flee when he was arrested? They did, however, state that he was the son of God (Matt. 16:16, 17, Matt 14:33). In writing his Gospel, Mark’s first words declare Jesus as the son of God (1:1). Immediately after his conversion the apostle Paul declare Jesus to be the Christ (Acts 9:22). All the epistles refer to him as “the son of God” never as “God.”

Mary Dana in *Letters Addressed to Relatives and Friends* quotes from Michaelias. (no other name given), a Trinitarian, in his book *Concessions of Trinitarians*: “I do not affirm that Thomas passed all at once from extreme doubt to the highest degree of faith, and acknowledged Christ to be the true God. This appears to be too much for the then existing knowledge of the disciples; and we have no intimation that they recognized the divine nature of Christ before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I am therefore inclined to understand this expression which broke out in the height of his astonishment, in a figurative sense, denoting only ‘whom I shall ever reverence in the highest degree’...or a person raised from the dead might be regarded as a divinity; for the word *God* is not always used in the strict doctrinal sense.” (As we will show, based upon Old Testament examples, the word *God* can refer to one who represents God).

Jesus said to Thomas “be not unbelieving, but believing.” At that point Thomas explained “my Lord and my God” and Jesus answered “because you have seen me, have you believed?” What did Thomas believe? In the last verses of the chapter John writes: “Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” Having Thomas proclaiming Jesus to be God is to directly contradict John’s own stated purpose in writing the gospel.

At this point we need to consider an overlooked and neglected fact that the Scriptures use the word *God* with a broader meaning than we use it today. It is used of one who is representing God or of someone who has the authority of God. Consider Exodus 3:2, 6: “The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of the bush.” He said also “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” In Acts 7:30-33 Stephen states: “and after forty years had passed an angel appeared to him...there came the voice of the Lord; “I am the God of your father...and the Lord said unto him...” The angel represented God and the conversation says “God says etc...” Exodus 7:1; 4:16: God told Moses he would be “God to Pharaoh. Further: Judges 6:11-14: “then the angel came and sat under the oak...the angel of the Lord appeared to him... the Lord looked at him and said...” “the Lord said to him...” The angel is said to be Lord because the angel represented the Lord. Genesis 16:7-13 the angel that appeared to Hagar is said to be “the Lord” four times, then it is stated of Hagar “she called upon the name of the Lord who spoke to her. ‘Thou art a God who sees’ for she said, ‘have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?’” Genesis 32:24-30 Jacob states: “a man wrestled with him.” After his encounter, Jacob said “I have seen God face to face, but my life has been preserved.” Hosea 12:4, 5 states: “Yes he (Jacob) wrestled with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought His favor, he found Him at Bethel and there He spoke with us, even the LORD, the God of host, the LORD is His name.” These Scriptures show that the word “God” can refer to one, man or angel, who represents God.

Thomas was a Jew, grounded deeply in Old Testament history, grounded in the faith that God is One, Jehovah, and the resurrected Christ is the representation of the one God. We conclude this article with a quote from *One God and One Lord* by Graeser, Lynn and Schoenheit: “The context of this verse shows that its subject is the fact that Jesus is *alive*. The resurrection of Christ was such a disputed doctrine that Thomas did not believe it, and Jesus’ death would have caused Thomas to doubt that Jesus was who he said he was –the Messiah. Thomas believed that Jesus was dead. Thus, he was shocked and astonished when he saw and was confronted by Jesus himself. Thomas, upon being confronted with the living Christ, instantly believed in the resurrection. That God had raised him from the dead, and given the standard use of the word “God” in the culture as one with God’s authority, it certainly makes sense that Thomas would proclaim, ‘My Lord and my God.’”

## WHAT ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The controversy concerning the Trinity, beginning with the Council of Nicaea in 325, that produced the Nicene Creed, which we noted in the beginning of this series, continued throughout the next four centuries and produced seven Ecumenical Councils. For the most part the concern of these councils was the nature of God and Jesus, very little attention was given to the Holy Spirit. In fact, in his book *When Jesus Became God* Richard Rubenstein devotes only 7 of 231 pages to the subject of the Holy Spirit. It seems that the Council of Constantinople I, held in 381, was the first to give a lot of attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In a chapter on this council in Leo Davis' book *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, he states: "As the Trinitarian controversy continued, dangers, errors in the new theology of Christ and the Holy Spirit grew. A new chapter in Christology was being written by Apollinaris of Laodicea in Syria." Apollinaris was bishop of Laodicea from 361 to 390. Davis further states: "With Apollinaris, a new Chapter in Christology was opened, at the same time Trinitarian theology was extended to include the Holy Spirit in its speculations." Evidently the Holy Spirit had not been much of a question in the former councils. Some of the thought at this time was the Holy Spirit was thought of as an hypostasis of third rank, one of the entities which came into being through the son. Some believed that the Holy Spirit was "the noblest of creatures produced by the son at the Father's bidding. (Davis p.106). Some did not call the Spirit God, yet believed and taught that "the Spirit belonged to the essence of the son as the son belonged to the essence of the Father" (whatever that means). It was this council (council of Constantinople, 381) that "(1) Attributed the divine title "Lord" to the Holy Spirit, (2) divine function of giving life which He possesses by nature and of inspiring the prophets, (3) and origin from the Father not by creation but by procession, (4) supreme worship equal to that rendered to the Father and the Son" (Davis p 126). Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity was complete: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Since the doctrine of the Trinity is mostly concerned with the Father and the son a lot of attention is not given to Holy Spirit. It is popular in theological circles to insist the Holy Spirit is a "he" and not an "it." It is insisted that the Holy Spirit is a personality because we are not to "grieve" or "quench" the Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit must be a person separate from God and Christ and therefore God. In this case the pronoun "He" can grammatically be translated "it," as we saw, was true with the "word" (John 1:1-4). Even if the word "He" is used in the Bible this does not make him "God the Holy Spirit."

The translators bias is seen in the NASV Study Bible's *Master Outline Number Four—the Holy Spirit*: "The Holy Spirit is God, and is equal to the Father and the Son. Don't ever speak of Him as 'It' or refer to Him as 'an influence.' He is God the Holy Spirit and is set forth in the Bible as being distinct from the Father and the Son. In the Genesis account of creation, He is seen actively engaged in creation, *along with* the Father and the Son. In the Old Testament, He came upon men to empower them for service, but, when they were disobedient, He departed from them. When David sinned against the Lord, he prayed 'Do not take *thy* Holy Spirit from me' (Psalm 51:10-11). Note that the Genesis record states: 'The Spirit of God was moving upon the surface of the waters' (Gen: 1:2)." In all due respect to the Editors of the NASV, this does not suggest God's spirit was

someone separate from Him, nor does it suggest that the spirit is a separate person from God. When David sinned, he asked God to "not take Thy Holy Spirit from me." If the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and equal with God, why did David request God not remove Him from him? Why did he not request that God the Holy Spirit not remove Himself?

Luke, in writing of the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts, was not aware of the *Outline Number Four* in the NASV: "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven like as of violent, rushing wind, and **it** (the Holy Spirit) filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and **it** sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:2, 3). There is a parallel passage in the Old Testament of the power of the Holy Spirit being distributed to another, when God took of His Spirit from Moses and distributed it: "Then the Lord came down in a cloud and spoke to him; and He took the spirit which was upon him, and placed it upon the 70 elders. And it came about that when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied" (Numbers 11:17, 25). When God took of His Spirit and distributed it to the Apostles they did more than prophesy, they went out in the power of the Spirit and proclaimed the gospel of resurrection that was destined to change the world. Acts 2:17 Peter quotes from Joel 2:28 where God said "I will pour out *of* my Spirit." The footnote in Weymouth's translation reads "literally 'of' or 'from' my spirit—a share or portion." I John 4:13 states "we know we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us *of* His Spirit." If the Holy Spirit is a person how can a person be divided or portioned? Another passage that refers to the Holy Spirit as **it** is seen in I John 2:27: "And as for you, *the anointing* which you received from Him *abides in you* and you have no need for anyone to teach you, but as *His anointing* teaches you about all things, and is true and not a lie, and just as **it** has taught you, you abide in Him." The "anointing" is the giving of the Holy Spirit (Act 10:38), which we have received (Acts 2:38) and it abides in us (I Cor. 6:19), and we are taught by the Spirit (I Cor.2:13).

The Scriptures show the Holy Spirit is parallel with the *power* of God. This is seen in the following Scriptures: Luke 1:35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you (Mary) and the *power* of the Highest shall overshadow you." Romans 15:13,19: "that you may abound by the *power* of the Holy Spirit...in the *power* of signs and wonders in the *power* the of the Spirit." I Thess. 1:5: "Our Gospel came...in *power*, and in the Holy Spirit." Luke 24:49 The promise of the Holy Spirit to the disciples was spoken of as their being "endued with *power* from on High." Acts 10:38: Jesus had been "anointed with the Holy Spirit and with *power*."

The King James Version translated the word "spirit" as "ghost," thus "the Holy Ghost". To the translators, the word "ghost" meant the "presence" of someone who had died. The Holy Ghost, then, is the presence of someone. It was, therefore, the presence of Christ. Jesus told his disciples "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you" (John 14:18), and "you heard that I said 'I go away and I will come to you'" (John 14:28). Also "I will be with you, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). The best definition of the Holy Spirit's relation to the believer is John 14: 23: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode (dwelling place) with him." The Holy spirit is not God but the "presence" of God and Christ in spirit.