

Chapter 9 THE TRIUNE GOD

1. The being of God

1.1 God is Spirit. To us He exists invisibly. The Holy Spirit is of one and the same essence, majesty and glory as the Father and the Son, true and eternal God.

1.2 The divinity of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not just a power, but is a Person (*cf.*: John 13:16; Eph. 4:30; Rev. 22:17).

On grounds of Scripture, the creeds make the distinct pronouncement that the Holy Spirit is a Person.

- In the being of God He has an own, independent mode of existence and action.
- He has His own distinct attributes.
- He does works which can be done by only a personal being.
- Christ refers to Him as another Comforter (John 14:15).
- In all respects He is Someone who stands over against man and is to be addressed by man, as “Thou”.

He is a Person, but in order the third Person of the Trinity (*cf.*: Acts 5:3-4; Mark 3:28-29; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:13-14; BC, Art. 11; HC 2:4:20:53:a-e).

- Here, the concept order does not indicate a value judgement or in an order of importance; He is no less God because He is the third Person.
- None of the three Persons of the Trinity is subordinate to the other — in His relation to the Others, each one does however come into His own right.

Scripture says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, not the opposite (*cf.*: John 15:26; 1 Cor. 2:1; Phil. 1:19). His work does not precede that of the Father and the Son but follows thereupon, furthers it (*cf.*: John 16:14).

The great work of the Holy Spirit in relation to our redemption and eternal salvation is to make our own; the merciful benefits which Christ achieved for us, namely His payment of our debt of sin, the redemption from perdition, the attainment of life everlasting, *etc.* The entire suffering and death of Christ would mean nothing to us if the Holy Spirit did not let us share in it.

Let us look at a couple of the Holy Spirit’s activities with reference to the worship service you have just attended:

It is the Holy Spirit who:

- makes the proclaimed Word God’s Word and, clothed in the Word, lets Jesus Christ appear to the congregation;
- called the congregation together to listen to God’s Word;
- unveiled or revealed the message of the Word in the hearts of the congregation by illuminating it;
- grants faith to them who are elected to eternal life by the Father; and
- unlocks and opens up all the truths in the preaching, *etc.*

What other works of the Holy Spirit in relation to your personal life as one of the faithful can you gather from Scripture? Bring the Scripture references along next time.

1.3 He is omnipresent although invisible.

1.4 No human mind can grasp the greatness of God, because the greatness of God exceeds the comprehension of even the cleverest human being. It is written in 1 Kings 8:27 that the heavens of heaven cannot contain God. Thus not even the whole of creation is big enough

to house the Being of God.

2. The Names of God

Because God is too great to be comprehended by anyone's mind, He reveals Himself to us by different Names. Each one of these Names describes something of His Being, so that the sum total of all the Names may give us an idea of Who the Lord is.

Especially three Divine names occur in different forms and combinations: *'el*, *'elohim* and *Yahweh/YHWH*.

2.1 LORD / Lord

The Hebrew Divine name *YHWH (YaHWeH)* is translated with the word *LORD*. This Name describes YHWH in His existence, because the word means: to exist in eternity. With this Name the LORD proclaims Himself as God of the Covenant — God who concludes a covenant with His elect then stays with it eternally.

Exodus 3:14: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."

Strictly speaking this is surely the most important Name of God. Think for instance, of what the Lord told Moses:

Exodus 3:15: "And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this *is* my name for ever, and this *is* my memorial unto all generations."

This Name of God brings Him in a close and personal relationship with people. He used this name when He spoke with the patriarchs.

Compare with this the following Bible passages:

Genesis 12:8: "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, *having* Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD."

Genesis 13:4: "Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD."

Genesis 26:25: "And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well."

The ancient Hebrews had such reverence for this Name that they believed that someone who wrongly used this Name, would –by virtue of the third commandment– be punished by God with eternal death. Therefore they wrote the vowel signs of Adonai instead — with the purpose of course that Adonai would be read in stead of Yahweh. Adonai means my Lord.

Based on a misunderstanding some people read it as Jehova. This form of the Divine name is of course well suited to the sounds of black languages, and therefore it is indeed also used in Bible translations.

2.2 God: 'el

This Divine name occurs in the Bible 3 549 times. This word names God as Creator and Disposer of heaven and earth.

Genesis 1:1-20: "1In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

3And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. 4And God saw the light, that *it was* good: and God divided the light from the darkness. 5And God called the light Day, and the

darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

⁶And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. ⁷And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* above the firmament: and it was so. ⁸And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

⁹And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry *land* appear: and it was so. ¹⁰And God called the dry *land* Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that *it was* good. ¹¹And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. ¹²And the earth brought forth grass, *and* herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed *was* in itself, after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good. ¹³And the evening and the morning were the third day.

¹⁴And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: ¹⁵And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. ¹⁶And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *he made* the stars also. ¹⁷And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that *it was* good. ¹⁹And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.”

2.3 Lord: ‘Elohim

This name is the plural of the Name ‘El. It undoubtedly supposes the Tri-unity of God. The plural further emphasises the Divinity of God as opposed to for instance, the nature of man.

Compare Numbers 23:19 here: “God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it*? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”

The Name God/Elohim also frequently appears directly next to the Name YHWH: Yahweh Elohim

These words are also used to name God as Creator and Disposer of heaven and earth.

Genesis 2:4-9: ⁴“These *are* the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and *there was* not a man to till the ground. ⁶But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. ⁷And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

⁸And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

Genesis 2:15-19: ¹⁵“And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: ¹⁷But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

¹⁸And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an

help meet for him. ¹⁹And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof.”

2.4 'Eloah

This name is also a singular form of the plural 'Elohim. It means the same as the Name 'El. This name is mostly found in poetry or Bible passages written in poetic form. A good example is the book Job.

In this regard, compare:

Deuteronomy 32:15: “But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered *with fatness*; then he forsook God *which* made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.”

Deuteronomy 32:17: “They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new *gods that* came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.”

2.5 LORD/ADONAI

This means *Owner* or *Possessor* and indicates God's majesty. The plural form of the Name is a grammatical construct which points to God's majesty and therefore we must not replace the plural with the singular. Thus, in Afrikaans it is *Here* ('*Lords*') and not *Heer* (*Lord*).

2.6 Lord Almighty/El Shaddai

This speaks of God's omnipotent power. Hereby God revealed Himself as the almighty God who places His omnipotence in the service of the covenant of grace.

Exodus 6:4 (2): “And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers.”

2.7 LORD of Hosts

This is an extensive name which identifies the wisdom of God's governance. The Name often (×251) appears in the Old Testament.

1 Samuel 1:3: “And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, *were* there.”

1 Samuel 1:11: “And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.”

1 Samuel 4:4: “So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth *between* the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, *were* there with the ark of the covenant of God.”

2 Samuel 7:8: “Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the shepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel”

1 Kings 18:15: “And Elijah said, *As* the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day.”

2.8 Father

The Name appoints God the Sustainer and Provider of all of creation. Furthermore He is also truly the Father of Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ also truly our Father: Jesus Christ dies exactly so that we may become God's children and He our Father.

2.9 Jesus

Jesus means *YHWH redeems*. Thus: God, our Redeemer. Jesus is the second Person of the Godhead. Take note that our Apostle's Creed confesses also Jesus as God who with the Second Advent will come to judge the quick and the dead.

2.10 Christ/Messiah

Christ is a Greek word and *Messiah* a Hebrew word, which both mean: *Anointed*. The Name looks to the official anointing of Jesus as our Mediator. At His baptism, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit which descended on Him as a dove. The office bearers of the Old Testament were anointed with oil. The oil was the symbol of the Holy Spirit — therefore Jesus was not anointed with a symbol, but with the reality — the Holy Spirit Himself.

John 1:14 (42): “He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”

John 4:25: “The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.”

2.11 Holy Spirit

God, who comforts us and causes us to believe. God the Holy Spirit leads us to discern and overcome evil. He teaches us what to pray.

2.12 Kurios

In the Greek New Testament this name is used for the Lord. It indicates the eternal kingship of God. It also shows Him to be the Victor who defeated His enemies.

Acts 9:5: “And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

Acts 9:13: “Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem”

Revelation 19:16: “And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

Revelation 22:20-21: “²⁰He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly.

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. ²¹The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.”

2.13 Lord Eternal / Everlasting God: ‘El Olam

This Divine name appears in Genesis 21:33: “And *Abraham* planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.”

2.14 The God of Israel is God: El-Elohê-Israel

This Name for God appears in Genesis 33:20: “And he erected there an altar, and called it Elelohe-Israel.”

2.15 LORD God of Israel: Yahweh Eloheh Yisrael

This Divine name appears in Deborah's song in Judges 5:3: “Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, *even* I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing *praise* to the LORD God of Israel.”

Isaiah 17:6: “Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two *or* three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four *or* five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel.”

Zephaniah 2:9: “Therefore *as* I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely

Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, *even* the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them.”

2.16 The Holy of Israel: Qedos Yisrael

Psalm 89:17: “For thou *art* the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted.”

Isaiah 17:7: “At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.”

2.17 The Ancient of Days: Attiq Yomin

Daniel 7:9: “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was* white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne *was like* the fiery flame, *and* his wheels *as* burning fire.”

Daniel 7:13: “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.”

Daniel 7:22: “Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.”

2.18 The Lord provides: Jahwê-Jireh

In Genesis 22 the Angel of the Lord (Jesus Christ!) provides a ram to be sacrificed in Isaac’s stead. Abraham then names the place: *The Lord provides*.

3. What we believe of God

3.1 God’s existence cannot scientifically be proven. We believe in God and in His existence.

3.2 God goes out above sin. Unlike us God is not bound by sin or the power thereof. God uses sin in the service of His honour.

3.3 God is good, eternal, unchanging (immutable), endless, independent (Acts 17:24-25); invisibly wise (1 Cor. 1:23-25).

3.4 God is one Being, but exists in three Persons

- God the Father — our Creator by His omnipotence and strength
- God the Son — our Redeemer by His blood
- God the Holy Spirit — our Sanctifier by His indwelling in us (BC, Art. 9)

4. The counsel of God

4.1 The council of God is His decision on everything that happened (past), happens (present) and will happen (future).

4.2 The council of God is the relationship between God and His creation, because everything that happens in heaven and on earth, happens as God planned it to happen.

4.3 The council of God supposes the Trinity.

4.4 The council of God is:

free — because God decides as He wills;
wise — because it contains no mistakes or foolishness;
eternal — because it exists since from before creation –from eternity– (Eph. 1:4);
Unchangeable — God never changes His council.
God proclaims His council to us.

4.5 Election is part of God’s council. We are elected since before the foundation of the earth (Eph. 1:4; Matt. 13:11; Rom. 9:16 *ff.*).

4.6 The contents of God’s council:

- Creation
- Fall — achievement of death
- Redemption — achievement of eternal life and the coming of His kingdom

4.7 The ultimate object of God’s council is the over-throwing of evil and the erection of His eternal kingdom. Stated differently: the redemption of the elect and the casting out of the godless into eternal hell.

5. Relationship between man and God

5.1 Man must humble himself before God. This means that before God he confesses that he is an unworthy sinner, but none-the-less pleads with God on grounds of the promises of the Gospel.

5.2 You/I may plead on grounds of the promises of the Gospel because God is our Father and because He is God of the covenant of grace.

5.3 Question 26 of the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that the eternal Father of the Lord Jesus, for the sake of His Son, is also my God and Father.

5.4 What does “Creator of heaven and earth” mean? That the Father created heaven and earth from nothing. He also created all creatures and He sustains and rules everything through His eternal council and providence (Heb. 11:3; HC 2:2:9:26:a-g).

5.5 God does the above things, so that man can worship Him as God (BC, Art. 12).