

THE TESTIMONY OF THE TRINITY

by J. K. POPHAM

"For there are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these Three are One." (1 John 5:7)

There is but one only true God, and the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost are that one God. Every true Christian is a Trinitarian; every child of God, sooner or later, enters by faith into the doctrine of the Trinity; not to comprehend it, but believe it; to believe that this one glorious God is eternal, self-existent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinitely just, holy, and good. The Trinity is a glorious mystery, not to be understood or comprehended, as I have said, but believed. The Trinity eternally had communion. The uni-personal God, only one Person, no Trinity, is, to a gracious mind reflecting on the subject, an impossible thing. For a moment reflect. Eternally alone, eternally silent, eternally without communion, no creatures made, no Fellow with Himself, what an awful thought! Unitarianism is the utmost blank, and the most terrible conception imaginable. But the Trinity in Unity, the Father un-begotten, the Son begotten, the Spirit proceeding from Them both, Three Persons equal in essence, power, and glory, but distinct in Personality, distinct, but not different, having eternal communion; this received by faith is a glorious truth to a soul. On this eternal communion between the Three Persons in the Godhead, is built the communion of the saints; communion of saints follows. Think for a moment what it would be if we had no fellowship of any kind with one another, or any creature. What a blank this world would be! What a blank would the house be, no fellowship, no interchange of any sort of thought, or plan, or love, or wish, or design, always in yourself! It is a great thing if we are enabled to believe with a God-given faith in the Trinity. It has been well said, "Salvation is built on distinctions in the Trinity;" distinctions, not differences. The distinct love of the glorious Person of the eternal Father, fixed eternally on His Son, who was set up in the counsel of peace to become Incarnate, to be the Head of the Church, the Husband of a chosen wife. The love of the eternal Son fixed on His own, and manifested in the covenant, the covenant which is ordered in all things and sure; and in the Incarnation of that divine Person in the fullness of time. And the love of the eternal Spirit in undertaking, in the covenant, to fill the Man Christ Jesus with Himself, with all His immeasurable gifts and graces. What a blessing it is to us who are favoured to believe and receive the doctrine of the Trinity!

There was eternal communion between these Three Persons. What a favour that they entered into a covenant, the counsel of peace! (Zech. 6:12,13). And there were, and must have been, Three Persons there. This counsel of peace is the covenant of divine grace: "*Whereof,*" says Paul, "*the Holy Ghost also is a Witness to us; for after that He had said before, this is the covenant that I will make.*" There are properties, qualities, in a person, and they belong to the Trinity. Personal properties are ascribed to each Person in the divine Trinity: "I," "Thou," "Me." "I am thy God." "*I AM THAT I AM*" (Ex. 3:14). This is said by God the Father, and it is said by God the Son. And the Holy Ghost says, "*Separate unto Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*" (Acts 13:2). The Son says to His Father, "*Thou in Me.*" The Father says of His Son, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt. 3:17). And the beloved Son says, "*I do always those things that please Him*" (John 8:29). Thus God speaks of Himself as Three

Persons. This is the ground of our belief in the Trinity, that the holy Scripture does reveal this Trinity; and Jehovah does by those properties which are claimed and used by each Person, reveal Himself as Three in One. This union and communion God has; and has made it manifest that this is the pattern of the union and the communion which His people have with Himself and with each other. This Three-in-One God we believe in. This is the eternal destruction of Unitarianism, of Aryanism, and all isms that deny the Trinity and the eternal equality of each Person in the Godhead. The Unitarian, dying as such, stands in his guilt and death, as having done the highest dishonour that could possibly be done to almighty God.

I hope that this subject may not appear to you a mere speculation. It is not a speculation, it is a revelation. God has given in His holy Word a revelation of Himself, think of it; and on this revelation we stand. From this revelation of God we conclude that everything that proceeds from Him is mysterious, glorious, just, holy, and good. All the attributes of Deity we see in the Scriptures revealed, and they show this great God subsisting in Three Persons. My friends, look at this subject; God give us grace to meditate on this mighty theme, one only true God, subsisting in Three Persons. The Father, the true, proper Name ascribed in the Scriptures to the First Person in the Trinity. The eternal Son; not a Son by office, but by a mysterious, incomprehensible, yet revealed generation, revealed. God had a Son eternally. If He had not, what shall we say to the scripture which declares that "*when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law?*" (Gal. 4:4). His Son before Incarnate, His Son sent to be Incarnate; therefore His Son by nature, not office. And the eternal Spirit who, as Christ says, proceeds from the Father and Himself, equal with Them. The Spirit Himself says, "*Separate unto Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*" (Acts 13:2). No emanation speaks as a person; the Holy Ghost is the Person there speaking.

Has this aught to do with us? Yes, if we are the true people of God; and eternity itself will not be too long for exploring the wonder that this eternal God in Three Persons did eternally interest Himself in men, who should prove themselves to be exceedingly wicked, vile, and unworthy; interest Himself so as to take counsel respecting them. Not only did God say, "*Let Us make man*" (Gen. 1:26), but when man was made by and as the result of a counsel, He said then to His Son, "*You My Son shall go and redeem those whom I have chosen.*" God did interest Himself in eternity in men; He does not begin to do so when men are born, He did not begin to interest Himself when the world was created and man was made. No; eternally. Therefore He said, "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love*" (Jer. 31:3); and Christ obtained "*eternal redemption*" (Heb. 9:12), and the Spirit "*worketh all things after the counsel of His own will*" (Eph. 1:11) in eternity. O sinner, if you are interested in this, you will find eternity not too long to explore the mystery of the Trinity in Their taking an interest in you, caring for you. And it will, as you are led into it, in this life, give a solidity and a solemnity to your religion. It will teach you that you have a bottom, a ground, the Rock of Ages, that salvation is not something that begins and ends in a few days; it is eternal.

These Three speak. They bear witness, think of it. May I again refer to the truth I have just uttered, that these Persons, one God, had communion eternally. And when the fall ruined us, then They began to bear witness to what had taken place in eternity. To this truth you find Christ speaking, where He says that He came not to say His own words, not to do His own works, but to utter the words which His Father had uttered, and He had heard uttered, there was

communion; and to do the works which He had seen His Father do in eternity. Now Christ came to speak and to do what had been transacted and agreed upon in eternity, in the counsel of peace (John 5:19; 8:26; 17:8). They were all there, and we were there in this counsel, in the mind of God, as many of us as are chosen to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. And Christ said to His Father in the Spirit of prophecy by the psalmist, "*Lo, I come, in the volume of the Book it is written of Me: I delight to do Thy will, O my God, yea, Thy law is within My heart*" (Ps. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7). These Three are One; One in essence, Three Persons; One in every perfection and attribute of Deity subsisting, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Now, in the next place, let us notice a little concerning the witness that these Three bear in heaven. They bear witness. And I take it that the witness is contained in this Book from Genesis to Revelation. There is the witness. You will find, as you are led into the subject, that all that the Trinity has said concerning Himself, His creation, His second creation, concerning earth and hell and heaven, in this Book, is infallible. And further, you will find, as you may be the Lord's and under His teaching, some witness in your own hearts; and the greatest, the sweetest, the most powerful proof of the inspiration of the Scripture will be found in every heart that has received the word of God with power. As it was said to the Thessalonians, "*Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance*" (1 Thess. 1:5); so each blessed, favoured Thessalonian child of God could have said to any Unitarian, to any free-willer, to any who would bring any human merit of good works, "Now we know it is untrue, because we were idolaters, we were full of wickedness, and the apostle Paul came and preached, and his word had such effect upon us, it entered so powerfully, it was so wonderful to us, that it turned our idols out, it broke them, it made them no more than Dagon, head and hands cut off; and we saw by faith the great God, of whom until then we were quite ignorant. We saw Him, and His gospel came to us, and delivered us from our transgressions. We know we did nothing to merit it, we know we did not want it, but it came with power and light and love and glory, so that we were turned." Then says Paul, "*Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come*" (1 Thess. 1:9,10). Be that religion mine and yours.

Let us look a little at the testimony, the witness that the Father bears. He says of Himself, "*I AM THAT I AM*" (Ex. 3:14). Moses, full of fear as to the mission on which he was to be sent, as to the success of it, if he went as God's messenger, said to God, "When they shall say to me, 'Who sent you? What is His Name?' What shall I say to them?" And the Almighty said, "*I AM THAT I AM*. No beginning, an eternal now is Mine, I am incapable of extension, of increase of any sort. *I AM THAT I AM*." This witness is true, and it belongs also to the Lord Jesus. To His enemies who were bickering and striving against Him, and contradicting Him, He said, "*Before Abraham was I AM*" (John 8:58). This is His witness, and it is true. They understood His words to mean He was God, and they sought to stone Him. "*Thou art not yet 50 years old,*" they said, "*and hast Thou seen Abraham?*" Said He, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was I AM.*" Of this glorious Person the Father bears this testimony, "*By whom He made the worlds; who being the Brightness of His glory and the express Image of His Person, and upholding all things by the word of His power*" (Heb. 1:2,3). This is the Scripture, do you receive it? Has it any place in you? What a mercy if it has! When Christ was born, a mighty multitude of the heavenly host sang, "*Glory to God in the highest*" (Luke 2:14)! And what said His Father, by Isaiah, to the church concerning Him? "Behold your God" Jesus Christ, "*see Him your God*" (Isa. 35:4). By

the same prophet says the Father, "*Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth. I have put My Spirit upon Him*" (Isa. 42:1), the Trinity in one short verse. The same blessed doctrine you have by Paul: "*For through Him*" *the Son Jesus Christ,*" *we both,*" Jew and Gentile, "*have access by one Spirit unto the Father*" (Eph. 2:18). And what is called the benediction, with which we ordinarily close services, contains the same truth: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all." Here is the Trinity. There is a witness borne in the holy Scripture to this divine doctrine, this wonderful doctrine, mysterious, yet blessed; mysterious, yet condescending to sinners, mysterious, yet full of needed grace, full of needed mercy, full of eternal redemption.

Let us look at the witness of the Father concerning the great work of His dearly beloved Son Incarnate. What is said of Him in Isaiah, that prophet so favoured to preach the gospel? This: "*The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" (Isa. 53:6). That is the Father's witness concerning Christ. Said John, "*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God*" (1 John 5:1). What must you believe of Him? That He became Man, that in His sacred Manhood the fullness of the Godhead dwells, that "*it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell*" (Col. 1:19), and that on that Man Jesus Christ, true almighty God, the Father was pleased to lay the iniquities of the whole church, impute them to Him; so that the whole weight of responsibility of the church's deliverance from her sins, and from the deserved curse of the law, rested on Him. There He stood, an innocent, pure Man, without sin; and there came to Him His Father, and with His own divine hand, took the sin of the church from her, and laid it on Him. God eternally did this; for He chose His church in Christ before the world began, that she "*should be holy and without blame before Him in love*" (Eph. 1:4). Redemption's scheme is here, the manner of it is here, and the great Worker and Author of it is here. The scheme is here, in the transference from the church to her Surety of all her sins. The Father is here, laying on His Son iniquity. O the infinite love of the Father in eternally communing with His on respecting this great, this important matter. And if we are born again, what is our inquiry? What is our desire? What is our great aim? Why, to know if God in that wondrous transaction had us, our very selves, our own sins, before Him, and took them from us, and laid them on Christ. That is the question. It will move your heart, affect your spirit, it will bring you to your knees, it will cause cries to ascend to heaven out of your soul, "Did the Lord Jesus receive from His Father my sins, in order to make a proper atonement for them?"

Hear the witness of the Son to the same point, in respect of redemption: "Lo I come, I, Thy Son, Thine only begotten Son, I come, in the volume of the Book, in the Psalms, in the Pentateuch, in the Prophets, it is written of Me: I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law unsullied, Thy law rigid, Thy law abating nothing, claiming all most righteously, is within My heart." This is the Son, this is His witness; He came.

Now what is the witness of the Spirit? What does He do? We read that when Christ was coming up out of Jordan's water, where He had been baptized, the heavens opened, and He saw the Spirit descending on Him like a dove, and He heard a voice, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (I believe, if God gave some of you to see the Trinity in that water, in that ordinance, you would like to be in it yourselves). When God the Father was pleased to send His Son into the world, what did the Spirit do? He overshadowed the virgin Mary, and formed His human nature, dwelt in Him, and filled Him with grace from His birth. For the Father gave Him

not the Spirit by measure: "*For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him*" (John 3:34). And the Spirit was with Christ, as you read in Isaiah. "*The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him; the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord*" (Isa. 11:2).

These testimonies concerning our redemption came from heaven, from the Three Persons, from that one God; each Person speaking, each working. The whole of redemption centres in the Lord Jesus; and if it centres there, where do your affections centre? The Unitarian's God is no God for a sinner sensible of his sins. For if there be only one Person in the Deity, and He in heaven always alone, the Lord Jesus is not God. The blasphemy is apparent to all who believe in the Word of God really. Here is the centre, here is the Person who speaks, "I come to do Thy will." Here is the God who sends Him: "*This is My beloved Son,*" He says. And here is the Spirit, who comes upon Him to anoint Him, who did anoint Him according to that testimony. The witness of the Spirit may be summed up in a word, namely, in the entire Bible. He wrote it by inspired men. All that is said of the Father is by the Spirit. All that is revealed of the Son is by the Spirit. He does not always say, "Now I, the Holy Ghost have done this;" but it is He that speaks all through the Scripture. When the covenant is made, He speaks. Paul writes respecting that covenant, "*Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a Witness to us; for after that He had said before, this is the covenant that I will make.*" "There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost." The Word is the Son of God; as you read, "*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). And in the same chapter the Word is called the Son: "*No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him*" (John 1:18). My brethren, this is a foundation for us, God build us on it! Infallibility is in every word of God, in every testimony that God bears.

Now let us look a little at the witness that the Trinity bears in the hearts of His people. There it is according to Scripture; a Three-fold testimony is borne in the hearts of the children of God. The Father speaks. He speaks of the covenant, and in the covenant: "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love*" (Jer. 31:3). A great word for the Father to speak, and to speak to a son. It is not a general voice, not a general sound without any distinctness in it; but it is the living word of the living God in a living soul. Perhaps you covet it, perhaps you have never heard it, perhaps your hearts ache that you may hear it, and are saying, "O, if the Lord would but speak it!" If you belong to Him, and He gives to you the Spirit of power to pray and to inquire at His footstool, the day will come when, if not that particular scripture, yet the substance of it, will be spoken into your heart, and you will say, "Now I have the testimony of God the Father in my soul." Yea, He may say to you what He said when Christ was transfigured (Matt. 17:5): "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.*" "Hear Him as the Redeemer, hear Him as He comes to save the lost, hear Him as He utters the words which He heard Me utter in eternity, hear Him as He comes to obey Me, He being My Servant in the covenant. Behold My Servant, Mine Elect, behold Him as coming not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a Ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). That spoken home will melt your heart, will relieve your conscience, will comfort your mind, will enlighten your understanding, will hold you entirely, be, as it were, a most blessed, welcome force, and compel you to come in. That will do the wonder that you want to be done in your soul. "*This is My beloved Son.*" You will wish to love

Him too. Is He not worthy of the affection of a sinner, He on whom all the love of the Father is set?

What says Christ concerning this testimony in the hearts of sinners? "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee." "They have known it, it is not a guess with them as to who I am; they know who I am, for they have received My words." And being concerned for them and their establishment and enlargement and union with Himself, He says to His Father, "*I have declared unto them Thy Name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me, maybe in them, and I in them.*" (John 17:26). Did you ever behold the Son? Were you ever pleased with Him? The Father's testimony concerning Him, has it ever come into your soul? Take Christ's own word concerning His blessed work when in Gethsemane's Garden, sweating blood at every pore, through the agony of His sin-oppressed soul; what did He say to His Father? "*O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt*" (Matt. 26:39). The whole of salvation is in this Person and His work. And this is the testimony that every child of God wants to receive into his own soul. He wants to know what Paul knew, and to say with him of Christ, "*Who loved me, and gave Himself for me*" (Gal. 2:20). Now the ability of the Lord Jesus Christ to save, is spoken of in the Scripture. He Himself speaks it thus, "*Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matt. 11:28). "I am able for it." He does not speak, as the critic would tell you, ignorantly; He speaks with perfect knowledge of Himself and of what He is able to do. Do you need rest from guilt? He can give it you. Do you need rest from corruption? He can bless you with it. Do you need rest from some heavy sorrow? He can give it you. Do you need rest for your mind and for your soul and for your love? He is the centre, One in whom you can rest, to whom you can look, on whom you can lean. Says Jesus, "Come unto Me, I can do it all, I will do it all, I will give you rest." Whatever that "all" means in your mind, whatever application of it you may have in your thoughts, "Now I need rest for my conscience, rest for my heart, rest in my circumstances, and rest in the will of God respecting them;" He is able to do it all. He says so: "*All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth*" (Matt. 28:18). Power is in His blood, power is in His righteousness, power is in His intercession, power is in His gospel, the glorious gospel, of which the apostle says, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*" why? "*For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith*" (Rom. 1:16,17) and this is power. Though it be foolishness to the Greek, though it be a stumbling-block to the Jew, the cross of Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

And the testimony of the Spirit, what is that? Does He bear any witness in the children of God? O yes, He does. As the Father reveals the Son, so does the Spirit; yea, the Father reveals Him by the Spirit. "*Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto Me*" (John 6:45). Then says the Spirit in the conscience to one thus taught, "You are a child of God." "*The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*" (Rom. 8:16).

This Three-fold testimony will be a solid ground for your comfort when you receive it, O troubled child of God. It will be stronger than your sins, stronger than your afflictions, stronger than your doubts and all temptations, in their testimony against you; it will be a solid ground for your comfort. A source of peace and good it will be to you when you receive it. No man under

the law was to be condemned, unless two or three witnesses bore testimony to the crime with which he was charged. Now here we have the Three-fold record or testimony, and let any man who will dare to do it, say God is not true, we who fear His blessed Name have this Three-fold record on which to rest. Let God be true, and every man a liar.

And see, dear friends, these two places, so to speak, where the witness is. First, the Word of God, the infallible Word. May we think more and more of that. Notwithstanding all the daring of the critics all their contradictions of God's blessed Word, all their cutting of it to pieces, may we hang to this, believe this, the holy, infallible Word of the living God. Then in the next place, here in the heart and conscience. O what a place for God to put His Word in, and He is in His Word! What a blessing it is for the eternal Spirit to come, and bring the love of the Father and the blood of the Son, and seal the sinner with His own divine seal unto the day of redemption. "There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost."

I conclude with one other word. There is a book in heaven, it is called "*the Lamb's book of life*" (Rev. 21:27). In that book are names; God wrote them, and they will never be erased. If our names are there, what blessed people we are! We are the children of God; "*and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*" (Rom. 8:16,17). But then it is disputed. Who disputes it? Who disputes it in your case? Your conscience does. But when that conscience is purged by the blood of Christ, the dispute is ended. Nay, the devil disputes it in court. When Joshua was before the Lord in filthy garments, then there was a dispute. Who ended it? Christ did; He said, "*The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire*" (Zech. 3:2). That will end it. At the day of judgment this book will be brought and opened. Other books there are, and they will be opened; but all who are written in the Lamb's book of life will receive a welcome into glory. Yes, they will be welcomed. "Come," will the dear Redeemer say to them, "*ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matt. 25:34). Then the Trinity, who has been believed in, will be seen as never before. Then they will find their souls happy in and with this blessed Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then will they be satiated with His love, with the Fountains of waters to which they are led by the Lamb, the emanations of God, the effulgence of His glory, the brightness of Himself, as seeable by creatures of glory. Then will the soul be satisfied, and our whole being will be glorified. Here we are poor, dead things, poor, helpless, miserable creatures often, full of failures, marred by failings, often covered by guilt, troubled by many things, especially by indwelling sin. But O, if there, once there, no more going out: "*Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out*" (Rev. 3:12).

Now I have brought, in a very feeble way, the wonderful doctrine of the Trinity before you, the revealed foundation of true worship, the revealed foundation of true religion, the revealed foundation of a living hope, the revealed Object of a true faith, and the great and last end of all living desires. And may the Holy Ghost make this doctrine spirit and life and substance and peace and mercy in us. Amen