



Father, Son and Holy Spirit: An Examination of 2 Corinthians 13:14

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Does Paul's benediction to the church in Corinth constitute proof of the Trinity's existence? Some would say it does because it lists God (the Father), Jesus and the Holy Spirit:

2 Corinthians 13:14 (NASB) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. (emphasis added)

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

As we saw in [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) of this series, in order for a passage to qualify as a proof text for the doctrine of Trinity (or any other doctrine for that matter), it must convey truths related to the doctrine. According to the [Athanasian Creed](#),^[1] the doctrine of the [Trinity](#) states that the Father, Son and Spirit are:

- three distinct persons that share the same God-substance (con-substantial)
- each person is fully God, yet there is one God, not three
- each person shares the divine attributes, and they are equally worthy of worship (co-equal)
- each person is eternal and uncreated (co-eternal)

It does not take long to realize that this verse does not qualify as proof for the fourth century doctrine because it does not contain any reference to [the core principles](#). There is no hint that the three equally share in the divine attributes or [worship](#). Not one word points to them being uncreated or that they are each God. In fact, there is only person identified as "God" in the passage. Neither the Holy Spirit or Jesus are included in this category. Instead, Jesus is designated as [Lord](#) and [Christ](#) (anointed one), neither of which are titles indicative of deity.

Not only does Paul's benediction not support the doctrine of a triune God, such an interpretation is contrary to what Paul actually taught. In the greeting in the same letter, Paul writes:

*2 Corinthians 1:3 (NASB) Blessed be **the God** and Father of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort (emphasis added)*

Paul clearly states that [Jesus has a God](#): the God...of our Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Paul states his theology rather emphatically in a previous letter to the same church:

*1 Corinthians 8:4-6 (NASB) Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is **no God but one**.⁵ For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (emphasis added)*

Paul believes that [God the Father is the one true God](#) while Jesus is the Lord and Christ. The absence of any mention of the Holy Spirit in this declarative statement is rather glaring. So what does Paul believe about the so called third member of the Trinity? He believes that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God:

1 Corinthians 12:2-3 (NASB) You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.³ Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (emphasis added)

Paul employs a literary device known as a *synonymous parallelism*^[2] where one phrase is repeated using similar words:

If someone curses Jesus, it's not the Spirit of God
If someone says Jesus is Lord, it's the Holy Spirit

Spirit of God and *Holy Spirit* are synonymous. Paul's letter to the Ephesians supports this understanding as well:

Ephesians 4:30 (NASB) Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (emphasis added)

Notice that the text does not say do not grieve "God the Holy Spirit," but rather the "Holy Spirit of God." Paul confirms that the Holy Spirit is God's Spirit in his letter to the Thessalonians:

*1 Thessalonians 4:8 (NASB) So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the **God** who gives His Holy Spirit to you. (emphasis added)*

Paul is not alone in his understanding about the Spirit of God being the Holy Spirit. When Matthew and Mark recorded Jesus' teaching about the coming persecution, they used the terms *Holy Spirit* and *Spirit of your Father* interchangeably:

Mark 13:11 (NASB) "When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. (emphasis added)

Matthew 10:19 (NASB) "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say."²⁰ "For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (emphasis added)

These inspired writers demonstrate that the *Holy Spirit*, the *Spirit of your Father*, the *Spirit of God*, the *Holy Spirit of God*, and *His Holy Spirit* are all synonymous.^[3] Can two members of the so called "Godhead" be called the Holy Spirit? Not according to the doctrine of the Trinity. It states that we are not to "confound the persons" of the Godhead as they are separate and distinct. The Father is not the Son, nor is He the Spirit; the Son is not the Father or

the Spirit; the Spirit is neither the Father or the Son. Scripture, however, teaches that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and not a separate person from God, just as your spirit is [not a separate person](#) from you. Thus, there is no third member; there is no Trinity.

Some might argue that the Holy Spirit must be a person because you can't have fellowship with a non-person.

2 Corinthians 13:14 (NASB) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. (emphasis added)

But what does it mean to have “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit?” Let’s look at other passages to see how the phrase is used elsewhere.

Philippians 2:1-2 (NASB) Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (emphasis added)

The word *fellowship* in the Greek is *koinônia*, and it is the same word Paul used in 2 Corinthians 13:14. It means *fellowship, sharing, participation* and contribution. Paul wants believers to share the love, unity, affection and compassion that is the fruit of a Spirit-filled life. This is something we should strive to do as we have all been made to drink of the same Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13 (NASB) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (emphasis added)

Therefore, the benediction that Paul speaks over believers in Corinth is that they might experience the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God and Spirit-breathed communion as partakers of the same Spirit.

In conclusion, we discovered that 2 Corinthians 13:14 fails to offer proof of the Trinity because it does not address any of the doctrine’s key elements. In addition, we learned that Paul believes that the Father is the one God, in direct opposition to the fourth century dogma[4]. We also learned that the Holy Spirit is not a [separate person](#), but the Spirit of God the Father.

Some may find it hard to accept that the three texts we’ve examined in this series, [Matthew 28:19](#), [Matthew 3:16-17](#) and 2 Corinthians 13:14, do not teach us about a triune God. But well respected scholars readily admit that the doctrine of the Trinity is simply not taught anywhere in Scripture. Indeed, The Oxford Companion to the Bible attests to the fact that the doctrine is a [post-Biblical development](#):

Because the Trinity is such an important part of later Christian doctrine, it is striking that the term does not appear in the New Testament. Likewise, the developed concept of three coequal partners in the Godhead found in later creedal formulations cannot be clearly detected within the confines of the canon.” ...”While the New Testament writers say a great deal about God, Jesus and the Spirit of each, no New Testament writer expounds on the relationship among the three in detail that later Christian writers do.”[5] (emphasis added)

The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary concurs:

The formal doctrine of the Trinity as it was defined by the great church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries is not to be found in the NT. (emphasis added)[6]

A doctrine that is not taught in Scripture but that developed centuries later should not take precedence over the doctrines that are found in Scripture. The Bible teaches that [God the Father sent Jesus](#), who is the Christ, to redeem a people for Himself, in order that we might be born of the Spirit and live forever in the coming kingdom.

[1] Athanasian Creed (ca. 500 AD) *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed 5-19-20, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02033b.htm>

[2] Psalm 24:1 is another example of a synonymous parallelism.

[3] The Old Testament affirms this truth as well: Isaiah 63:10 (NASB) But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; Therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them. (emphasis added)

[4] The Council of Constantinople in 381 AD was the first to declare the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were each "God." Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity was born.

[5] "Trinity" *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Bruce M. Metzger, ed. (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 782-783

[6] "Trinity," *The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, Paul Achtemeier, ed., (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1996)